UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS

The Disengagement of African American Male Students in Public Schools:

The Perceptions of White Female Teachers

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Leadership for Educational Justice

By

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THE DISENGAGEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

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Dedication

I lovingly dedicate my work to my brother, [REDACTED] and my stepfather, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], you had such a difficult life, but you always remained positive even up to the night you left us. Whether you knew it or not, you were an inspiration to me. Heaven gained a great person and drummer in December 2011. You are sorely missed.

[REDACTED] I considered you to be my real Dad since 1978 when you married my Mom. You accepted all of us and treated us like we were your own kids. You were always there for me and [REDACTED], and most importantly, you loved my Mom. Thank you for your unconditional love and faith in me. We miss you so much.

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Abstract

Historically, African Americans have fallen well behind their White peers when it comes to academic achievement, and this persists today. This phenomenological qualitative study examined the perceptions of White female teachers and the academic engagement of their African American male students in an effort to determine if teachers' perceptions influence students' classroom performance. This study's ten participants were teachers from two school districts in Southern California. I conducted interviews with each participant using open-ended questions, and their personal narratives yielded results which indicate that their perceptions of the African American males they are responsible for educating do impact their students' learning, thus resulting in African American male students' loss of interest in academics. These results indicate that White female teachers would benefit strongly from multicultural education that could help them relate to their African American students and teach from a culturally responsible pedagogical stance.

Key words: disengagement, African American boys, White female teachers, poverty, cultural mismatch

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Chapter One

My Positionality

I was born on the outskirts of Washington D.C. in 1966, a time in history that would later become known as the Civil Rights era. I was the oldest of four children: I had one younger brother and two younger sisters. From kindergarten through eighth grade, I attended Catholic school. Each grade level had approximately 60 students, and the average number of African American students per grade level was four; the majority of the rest were White students.

I don't remember being in contact with any African American kids until I went to school in kindergarten. We lived in neighborhoods where some African Americans lived, and we shopped at the same stores, but I do not recall having any African American acquaintances. I do remember being afraid of African American people - males and females alike. I felt they were intimidating and too loud, but I believe it was the media's negative portrayal of African Americans that ignited and then fed this fear.

As an adolescent and then young teenager, I began to hang around and play with kids from our neighborhood. I remember one child from the neighborhood who was African American. She was a couple of years younger than me, and we all played together. One hot afternoon, my sisters and I invited her inside to cool off and have a glass of water with us. After she left, our grandmother, who was babysitting us, warned us to never allow, "...that nigger to drink from our glasses again." This was the first time I recall realizing that someone I loved and trusted was racist. Sadly, that opened the door for me to display and act upon any fears or misgivings I had about African American people.

A couple of weeks later, my African American friend and I got into an argument, and we each stayed on different sides of the apartment complex across the street from us with our own

group of siblings and friends. When she and her mostly African American group started dancing and moving across the complex, I thought I was hilariously clever when I hollered out, “Look everyone, it’s Soul Train.” I got the laughs I was looking for, but I also felt a sense of silent shame.

A couple times during my childhood, I was victimized by African American people. Once, an African American male drunk driver crashed into our parked car in front of our house as we were getting ready to pull out, and then he took off. Of course, I heard the “n” word fly a few times from my dad’s mouth, and it was planted further into my mind that African American people can hurt us even by way of a traffic accident where no one got hurt except the driver of the other car. Another time, it was my first night of my first job at Baskin Robbins, and I was 14 years old. An African American man came into the store with a note, handed it to me, and said, “This is the ice cream I want,” but when I looked at the note, it read, “Give me all your money, or I’ll have to kill you.” After spending nearly so many years watching crime shows and the news on TV, the actions of these two individuals only intensified my unease around and fear of African American men.

As a teenager, I was very independent and was riding two city buses to work after school and then home some days. Most of the bus passengers were African American, which intimidated me some, but the desire to gain even more independence overrode any qualms I may have had. I just always sat near the driver, and I was fine.

In grades nine through twelve, I attended public school and ended up making friends with a couple of different African American girls. I thought they were decent girls, and I really enjoyed hanging around them. They were funny and smart, and some of the negative stereotypes I had about African American people began to vanish.

Flash forward several years. I am living in California in the Inland Empire, I am a new mom, and I just landed a job at a local police department as a dispatcher. It did not take long for me to learn the layout of the city, to learn the various laws and their codes, and to learn just how racist police officers and civilian staff were. The officers policed a city that had a rather high gang population comprised of African Americans and Hispanics, and, not surprisingly the police force was mostly White. I heard every derogatory name one could ever think of directed towards suspects and even to innocent bystanders and victims.

At first, the officers' treatment of minorities appalled me, but their hostility towards people of color was so blatant and rampant that I was drawn right into the shameful behavior, and I began to look down on these marginalized men and women as well. Whether they had committed a crime or not, I trusted no African Americans and no Hispanics. I was hyper vigilant when I was not at work keeping way too close an eye on anyone who didn't look like me. I used the "n" word a little too easily, mostly behind their backs or in my mind. I found that I used it most when I was driving, and another driver cut me off or committed some other perceived driving offense, I'd instantly say the "n" word out loud if I was by myself in the car, or in my head if someone else was in the car. I knew that my actions were inappropriate, but I felt justified, nonetheless. It didn't help that there were shows like *NYPD Blue* and *Cops* on television at the time. Those shows solidified what I already knew: African Americans and Hispanics were bad people.

I left the city and ended up working as a secretary at a middle school while simultaneously taking classes to become a teacher. I had never worked around or with kids before. The school district is in a city with a high Hispanic population. I remember one of the first issues I complained about was Spanish speaking parents either calling or coming into the

school office and assuming I could speak Spanish. I never said it to them directly, but I would comment to coworkers that if these parents live in the United States, then they should learn how to speak English! How woefully ignorant I still was.

As time went on, I began to get to know the students, especially the more challenging ones because they were frequently sent to the office with a referral. I spent hours talking to them, learning about them and their families, and eventually wanting to learn about the underlying issues that always landed them in the office. My heart finally started to soften from when it had turned to stone during my police dispatcher days. These were kids in front of me, from families who mostly only wanted what was best for their kids. Numerous times during my five years as a school secretary, I was told by different people that I should consider becoming a school counselor instead of a teacher. This, however, was when the economy took a downward turn, and it didn't seem as if schools were hiring counselors, so I ended up in the classroom.

It was around this time that I sent my young daughter into a grocery store late one night for milk while I waited outside parked right in front of the store. The parking lot was virtually empty. From my rearview mirror, I saw two African American teenagers approaching my car. The closer they came, the more nervous I felt. I couldn't pull away from the curb, because I needed to be there for when my daughter came out. As they reached the back of the car, one walked up to the driver side door, and the other walked up to and was standing at the passenger side door, where no one was sitting. At this point, I honestly felt this was not going to end well. I rolled my window down and treated him like I did my students, "Hi sweetie, can I help you with something?" He got this odd look on his face, made eye contact with his friend over the car, shook his head as if to say no to him and then asked me what time it was. With a hesitant smile, I told him the time. He thanked me, and they both walked off as I breathed a huge sigh of relief. I

do not know if their true intent was malicious, but I strongly believe that my treating them just like I would treat any other teenagers made an impact on the outcome for all of us that night.

When I began to teach in 2005, I was still in the process of obtaining my teaching credential. I was teaching students of varying ethnicities: Hmong, African American, Hispanic, and White. I felt comfortable around most of my students, but the ones who gave me cause for concern were my African American male students. I didn't understand their sagging pants, their being okay with calling each other "nigga" and even letting people of other races say it around them. I didn't understand their lack of motivation and I-don't-care attitude. I knew they made me uncomfortable because I was not able to fit them into my idea of a well-behaved student. The easiest thing for me to do was to write a referral removing them from my classroom. I reasoned that I could let someone else deal with them so I could teach the rest of my students. It never occurred to me that when they were not in the room, they were not learning.

Meanwhile, even though I was a teacher, I still had the horrible feeling of hatred towards anyone who upset me; I'd think to myself (or say it out loud if I was alone) that they were the "n" word. It felt powerful, especially if that person was White, because what better way to insult someone than to call them the most derogatory word used for hatred of African American people? I did feel a little ashamed of this behavior, but I justified it by telling myself that I would never think of my students this way.

In 2010, I was taking college courses to obtain my administrative credential. I ended up in a class taught by a young African American lady who was in her final year of her doctoral program. The class addressed pluralism in education, and it took me all of two sessions to decide I did not like the class or the instructor. She told us all that White people are privileged and that we are responsible for the oppression of people of color. Of course, I held the stance of many

other White people: I never owned slaves, and I certainly was not privileged. I grew up in a house where the electricity was turned off for lack of payment occasionally, or maybe the car would be broken down and we couldn't go anywhere for a couple weekends. I grew up in a house where abuse had taken place, and where I was victimized. No one could tell me I was privileged!

Thankfully, unlike a couple of my peers, I stuck with the class and I opened my mind. After remaining stubborn for a few class periods, I began to understand what she was talking about. Then she had us do something that no one had ever asked me to do before. She asked us to write an autoethnography. It was a painstaking and brutally honest exercise in which I learned a lot about myself, most of which was nothing to be proud of. It was that exercise, and tearfully reading it in front of the class and that wonderful instructor, that changed my way of thinking. No longer was anyone thought of as the “n” word to me: bad drivers, true criminals, no one. In fact, her class, combined with the courses of the first term of my doctoral program, convinced me that it was my duty to stand up strongly against racism and mistreatment of others of any kind. I lost a few “friends” along this long journey of mine when I called them out on their racism or ideologies, but it has been well worth the effort.

Introduction

Since the dawning of the United States, education for African Americans has been a tumultuous endeavor. Although the federal government helped build public schools with the Land Ordinance Act of 1785, the Northwest Ordinances of 1787, and the Morrill Act of 1862, African Americans were legally prohibited from attending school in the South (McGuinn, 2006). Legislation in most southern states from 1800-1835 criminalized the teaching of reading and writing to children of slavery (Ladson-Billings, 2012). During and after the Reconstruction,

state-funded schools only allowed Whites to attend (Jones, 2012). It was not until *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that the federal government intervened in efforts to desegregate White-only schools. This was only the first step in transforming public education from a Whites-only institution to the legally integrated, but still flawed institution we have today. Unfortunately, African Americans have yet to fully recover from the centuries-old obstruction of their education and find themselves continuously behind their White American counterparts.

Statistics

Some sobering statistics from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) demonstrate this issue. While there are numerous ethnicities and subgroups that could be part of the discussion, I chose to focus this study only on African American and White students. Last school year, 2017-2018, only 22% of African Americans in grades three through eight and eleventh grade met their grade-level standards in English language arts (ELA), while nearly 44% did not meet or even nearly meet standards. Conversely, 33% of White students met their ELA standards, and only 16% did not meet or nearly meet standards. Sadly, math standards were even harder to reach, 13% of African Americans met their math standards last year, while 55% did not meet or nearly meet standards. Almost 26% of White students reached their math standards, while 22% did not meet or nearly meet standards.

2017-2018 CAASPP ELA and Math Scores				
Ethnicity	2017-2018 CAASPP ELA Met Standards	2017-2018 CAASPP ELA Did Not Meet Standards	2017-2018 CAASPP Math Met Standards	2017-2018 CAASPP Math Did Not Meet Standards
African American	22%	44%	13%	55%
White	33%	16%	26%	22%

(Retrieved from CAASPP)

Figure 1. This figure compares the percentage of White and African American students' performance on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP).

As White students claimed higher success at the top of the academic charts, African American students found themselves claiming higher absenteeism rates and more referrals for school discipline. In the 2017/2018 school year in California, African American students had a chronic absenteeism rate of over 20%, but their White counterparts only had a 10% rate.

As for school discipline, African Americans were suspended at a rate of 9% last year, but their White peers were only suspended at a 3% rate. In other words, one out of every twenty White students were suspended, but alarmingly, one out of every six African American students were suspended. Expulsions were also disproportionate; African American students were expelled at quadruple the rate of White students (California Department of Education).

Absenteeism and Suspension Rates (CA)		
Ethnicity	2017-2018 Chronic Absenteeism	2017-2018 Suspension Rates
African American	20%	9%
White	10%	3%

(Retrieved from CDE)

Figure 2. Comparison of absenteeism and suspension rates between African Americans and

Whites.

African American boys achieve lower levels of success in education than their White peers. Howard (2013) reported these statistics:

- African American males with no learning disabilities have lower reading scores in fourth, eighth, and 12 grades, and lower grade-level proficiency than White males with disabilities.
- Eighth grade reading scores for African American boys are equivalent to the reading scores for Asian and White fourth-grade boys.
- African American boys are the most likely of all races to be retained in grades kindergarten through eighth.
- African American boys are three times more likely than their Latino/Asian peers to be suspended from school.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported that in the 2015-2016 school year, 88% of Whites graduated high school, while only 76% of their African American counterparts did.

Background

Howard (2016) concluded that there are three statistics-based realities in our public-school system: 1) student diversity is at an all-time high and is continually growing 2) teachers in the U.S. are mostly White, and 3) disparities in educational statistics are all related to race. Some researchers have suggested that White female teachers of African American male students lack empathy and an understanding of African American culture, which has resulted in not only a disproportionate amount of office referrals (Hotchkins, 2016; O'Connor, Hill & Robinson, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011) but has also contributed to their academic problems and failures (Bryan, Day-

Vines, Griffin, Moore-Thomas, 2012; Howard, 2013).

Tyrone Howard (2014) wrote that for many students, academic success, or lack thereof, has depended mostly on teachers' opinions of and belief in their students' ability to achieve. He reported on a study conducted by McKown and Weinstein in 2008; they determined that some teachers prefer White and Asian students over their African American and Latino counterparts. This example of racial preference is only one reason such significant disparities between racial groups and their academic success have existed.

Ethnicity	Students	Teachers
African American	5.8%	.04% (Female)
White	24.1 %	62% (Female)

(Retrieved from CDE)

Figure 3. The comparison shows that 62% of teachers were White females, while African American students comprised not even 6% of the entire student population in CA.

This means that African Americans have remained woefully underserved by teachers to whom they can culturally relate. Howard (2016) posed the question, “Is there a causal relationship between the over-representation of White teachers in our classrooms and the underserving of children of color in our nation’s schools?” (p. 7).

Given that the majority of the nation's teachers have been White females who are not culturally responsive (Matias, 2013; Warren, 2013), it is no surprise that many African American boys have struggled in school. Milner (2007, in Harper and Davis, 2012) wrote that teachers have viewed African American male students negatively and that their views have tended to be without any basis.

Disengagement

As stated earlier, some researchers have suggested that White female teachers of African American male students lack empathy for and understanding of African American culture, which has resulted in a disproportionate number of office referrals for African American boys (O'Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011). These dysfunctional teacher/student relationships have resulted in African American boys being repeatedly ousted from the classroom, effectively giving them a reason to give up on school. With the odds stacked against African American male students before they even walk through the classroom door, they eventually have no option but to disengage from this institution that systemically oppresses them.

Graves and Howes (2011) reported findings that African Americans were expelled from preschool at twice the rate of Hispanics and Whites; Welch and Payne's (2012) research corroborated this possibility with the conclusion that school administrators were more likely to use harsher disciplinary measures on African Americans. Such disciplinary measures included in-school suspension, off-campus suspension, and expulsion from school.

Welch and Payne (2012) found that when these types of disciplinary measures were imposed upon students, students become disengaged; they were at a much higher risk of falling behind in school, acting out and misbehaving, losing interest in their academics, and ultimately dropping out. If students were disciplined using exclusionary measures as early as preschool, their chance for success plummeted.

Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, and Salovey (2012) found that even at the beginning of a child's educational career, the emotional bond with the teacher had a direct impact on that child's engagement and academic success. Wang and Degol (2014) wrote that student engagement occurs when "motivation to pursue a goal or succeed at an academic task is put into action

deliberately...” (p. 138). Wigfield et al. (2014) expounded on this by stating that “Motivation is most directly observable in the level of energy in individuals’ behaviors, as well as in the intensity of their engagement” (p. 657). If motivation is linked to school engagement, what happens to students who lose their motivation?

Problem Statement

In this study, I explored why African American male students disengage from learning. When African American students feel that their teachers have supported their academic efforts, they are less likely to become disengaged, and more likely to stay in school (Fine, 1991). However, authors Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) drew on personal experiences, observations, and eventually beliefs to reach the conclusion that African American students disengage from school due to the belief that school is not worth the effort:

These qualified beliefs... result in academic disengagement, low motivation, and a sense of hopelessness that appear specific to Blacks or marginalized groups. Hence, although Black students certainly have the ability to do well in school, too many of them do not exert the effort necessary to achieve at high levels. Some of these students, specifically if discouraged, believe that hard work is a waste of time and energy given the reality of social injustices (p. 221).

These two reports vary, then, in reasons why African American students became disengaged. One report suggests that disengagement is based on teacher attitudes and perceptions of African Americans. The second report suggests that disengagement occurs because of African Americans’ negative perceptions of education and its worth.

Christenson & Reschly (2012) observed that "Student engagement is the glue, or mediator, that links important contexts—home, school, peers, and community— to students and,

in turn, to outcomes of interest" (p. 3). For African American male students to become and stay engaged with their learning, they need positive relationships with their teachers.

By studying teachers' perceptions about the disengagement of African American male students with their education, I hoped to gain some insight into how teachers view these students and their learning. I also explored factors that teachers believed contributed to student disengagement.

Conceptual Framework

African Americans fought for the right to be educated both before and after their emancipation, and they have faced multiple barriers throughout this fight. One barrier was eugenics. In the late 1800s, biologist Frances Galton coined the term "eugenics," which means "the conditions under which men of a high type are produced" (Galton, 1883, p. 44). According to Stoskopf (2002), eugenics arose from the belief that marginalized groups had "a disproportionate number of defective traits" (p. 127). African Americans were one of these marginalized groups.

In the early 1900s, Eugenics perpetuated the already widespread negative perceptions that White people in the United States held of African Americans (Stoskopf, 2002). They believed that African Americans were inferior to Whites, which made it more difficult for African Americans to receive an equitable education. Not only was the eugenics movement responsible for contributing to society's prejudice against African Americans, but it led to the creation of standardized tests that were specifically intended to separate those of below standard intelligence from those of above standard intelligence (Stoskopf). Nearly a century later, African Americans are still systemically victimized by the very institution that was supposed to help them.

Figure 4. African American male disengagement in school. This is a brief glimpse of African Americans' struggle to access education throughout United States history.

Research Questions

1. What contributes to African American male students' disengagement from school?
2. How does this disengagement impact their educational experiences in the K-12 public school system?
3. Do the perceptions of White female teachers influence the disengagement of African American boys?

Chapter Two

Literature Review

... let the ears of a guilty people tingle with truth, and seventy millions sigh for the righteousness which exalteth nations, in this drear day when human brotherhood is mockery and a snare... Thus in Thy good time may infinite reason turn the tangle straight, and these crooked marks on a fragile leaf be not indeed. (Du Bois, 1903, p. 165)

Historical Context

In order to understand the plight of African American men, it is necessary to begin with when they were first forcefully brought to North America centuries ago. The concept of race in North America came about shortly after European settlement when White landowners needed cheap labor (Malcomson, 2000; Omi & Winant, 2015). As the Europeans attempted to conquer America, they realized other people looked different than them, and they exploited these people for their gain. Omi and Winant wrote, "... it was also the advent of a consolidated social structure of exploitation, appropriation, domination, and signification...it was the inauguration of racialization on a world-historical scale" (p. 114).

Along the same lines, anthropology - the study of humans - was mostly focused on (White) people in Europe upon its inception. Thus, people of color were seen as objects of scientific investigation. As such, they were displayed in World Fairs as exhibitions (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 117). This racialization oppressed people of color and has continued to do so ever since.

Scientists of that time period attempted to understand and explain the genetic variances in people's skin colors. They eventually discovered that human beings are genetically 99.9% the same. They realized that the different races had nothing to do with genetic biology; it was how Europeans established their superiority over other races whom they perceived to be inferior. With this construct in place, Europeans were able to justify taking land away from Native

Americans, taking wealth away from Asians, and instituting and maintaining the enslavement of Africans (Goodman, 2008, p. 5).

After they were stolen from Africa and brought to the colonies, slaves were sold to White property owners to work in cotton and tobacco fields (Wax, 1973). White people justified slavery using beliefs about the physical and mental attributes of African Americans (Drake, 1980).

Ladson-Billings (2012) listed the following beliefs of the time:

1. Members of certain groups, such as African Americans, were thought to be inferior based on the color of their skin and the fact that their skin color did not match that of the dominant group.
2. The mindset that all people were not created equal enabled members of the (White) dominant group to look down upon and mistreat others.
3. The notion that a person's physical appearance was a result of his or her inner being - which included intelligence, or lack thereof, behavior, and morality - was applied to whole populations, such as African Americans.
4. White people believed that both inner and outer characteristics were genetically inherited.
5. White people believed that inferior groups were created by God and would remain inferior as per God's will (p. 117).

These ideas of race gave Whites the freedom to oppress African Americans morally and legally. African Americans were not allowed to learn to read or write for fear they would become smart enough to understand that what was being perpetrated against them was wrong. This was enforced through legislation passed in most of the Southern states from 1800-1835, which stated that it was a crime to teach children of slavery to read or write (Ladson-Billings, 2012). Some

people born into slavery chose to rebel against their owners and were killed for it. In 1865, when President Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery, the South wanted nothing to do with the new law. As per this law, property owners were required to compensate employees who had previously worked for free.

The South rebelled in ways that made the plight of some former slaves worse than when they were enslaved. From 1889 to 1929, an African American male was either burned alive or lynched on one out of every four days. Often it was a spectacle for White families, including kids, to go out and watch the lynching for entertainment (Wilkerson, 2010). There was no judge or jury when it came time for vigilante justice, which is what lynchings were, so African Americans were often killed for no reason. There was no one to protect them in the South. Jim Crow laws, which were upheld in the Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), made it easy to oppress African Americans without fear of repercussions. They could stay in the south and fight back, or they could hope for a better life elsewhere in the nation.

During the early to the middle part of the 20th century, nearly six million African Americans fled the South in search of a safer and better place to live (Wilkerson, 2010). Although the rest of the country was not as dangerous as the South was, there was still significant discrimination. Between 1880 and 1920, Whites believed that African Americans were neither fit for nor deserving of a place in society, therefore, African Americans were kept separated from Whites (Brown & Donnor, 2011). This greatly impacted African Americans' access to education in the late 1800s.

Educational Background

The picture of several dozen boys and girls in a schoolroom engaged in study made a deep impression upon me, and I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study

in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise. (Washington, 1901, p. 4)

Beginning in the early 1800s, legislation in most Southern states criminalized the teaching of reading and writing to children of slavery (Ladson-Billings, 2012; McGuinn, 2006). During and after the Reconstruction, state-funded schools only allowed Whites to attend (Jones, 2012). However, after the abolition of slavery, many former slaves educated themselves and became people who gave back to society: W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, and George Washington Carver, to list a few examples. Because so many former slaves wanted an education, African American colleges such as Atlanta University, Spelman College, and Bethune-Cookman were founded (Ladson-Billings, 2012).

Even though African American colleges were becoming a reality, quality public grade schools for African Americans were still nonexistent. As mentioned above, the eugenics movement had a detrimental effect. Sir Francis Galton was an anthropologist and eugenicist from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. He believed that Whites were the superior race and that other races, such as African Americans, had many deficiencies (Noguera, 2012; Stoskopf, 2002).

Because of certain prominent eugenicists' points of view and the fact that the South was still reeling from Abolition, the idea of building upon a superior race became increasingly popular. Calvin Coolidge, another eugenicist (Stoskopf, 1999), was vice-president in 1921 when he wrote a piece for *Good Housekeeping* which stated that races do not mix well with others; if they tried to, then deterioration would occur on both sides. In order to maintain a "quality of mind and body," he opined that ethnic law should be observed (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 116).

Building on Galton's work, education researcher and fellow eugenicist, Lewis Terman, advocated intelligence testing in schools and other institutions for the purpose of separating Whites, who were perceived to be the most intelligent, from African Americans, Mexican

Americans, and Native Americans, who were perceived to possess little to no intelligence (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 116). Terman created the Stanford-Binet Intelligence test, which continues to be used in schools today. He administered the assessment to African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans and then concluded in 1916 that border-line deficiency was common in the three groups. Because their “dullness” was perceived to be “inherent in the family stocks from which they come,” Terman recommended that children in these groups should be in separate classes, and he suggested that while they cannot think abstractly, they can “often be made into efficient workers.” He also wrote that “...from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding” (p. 116).

Meanwhile, schools for African Americans in the early 1930s taught African Americans that they were inferior through the use of biased textbooks and the attitudes of biased White teachers (p. 7). Woodson wrote:

...to handicap a student by teaching him that his African American face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime.
(1933/2010, p. 8)

He opined that if teachers and the curricula weren't explicitly sending the message that African Americans were inferior, the hate, the lynchings, and the oppression still prevalent today would not exist.

African Americans' scientific contributions to the world were often omitted from history lessons. Students never learned that African peoples knew how to make poisons for arrowheads, refine natural metals for use in industry, and used chemistry in the Egyptian

embalming process (Woodson, 1933/2010). African languages and African American vernacular were looked upon with disdain. African Americans were neither included in literature books, nor recognized for their crafts. History classes perpetuated negative views of African Americans, teaching that they were only suitable for physical labor and that they lacked reasoning and cognitive abilities. The fact that African peoples had their own kingdoms, that they were the first to domesticate farm animals, and they were the first to produce string instruments was never mentioned in textbooks, nor was it taught by teachers.

Woodson (1933/2010) posited that education - the one thing that African Americans should be able to rely on to advance them in society - was “almost entirely in the hands of those who have enslaved them and now segregate them” (Woodson, 1933/2010, p. 20).

After grade school, some African Americans attended industrial institutes to attain knowledge and experience to be able to work in factories. However, because they did not have the opportunity to get hands on experience, their training for such jobs was essentially a waste of time (Woodson, 1933/2010). They had no problem learning, but what they did struggle with was how to apply what they learned in a working environment because they never got the chance.

In addition, African American success in such disciplines as philosophy, politics, and literature was also moot. Knowledge of these subjects did not benefit them in the workforce because they were destined for employment in the lower-paying jobs. Worse still, African Americans became educated enough to know that society’s treatment of them was not going to improve (Woodson, 1933/2010). In fact, Woodson wrote that not long before his book was written, there was a measure introduced to have the United States Constitution printed in history books, but it never happened. Someone had suggested that if African Americans learned what was in the Constitution, they would be armed with enough knowledge to fight for their rights,

which would not bode well for the Whites.

African Americans learned rather quickly to avoid fields in which they had no chance of prospering. This was particularly difficult on young African American men who were strongly discouraged from entering certain professions. This resulted in several African American institutes closing their doors as African Americans realized that even though they could get an education, doors would continue to slam shut when it came to seeking employment (Woodson, 1933/2010). “The greatest indictment of such education as Negroes have received, however, is that they have thereby learned little as to making a living, the first essential in civilization” (p. 31).

Woodson (1933/2010) claimed that many African Americans lacked the education to understand that there was a better life available to them; there was no way for them to comprehend the plight of their race and plan for a better future. He believed that if African Americans were able to essentially forget all the “mis-education” (p. 34) taught to them in school about themselves, they “would fall in love with” their “own people and begin to sacrifice for their uplift” (p. 34); they would be able to start solving the problems their race endured.

While there were people such as Galton, Coolidge, Terman, and all the educators of African Americans advocating that Whites were the superior race, African Americans were fighting to receive an education equitable to the education White students were receiving. It was not until the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) that education for African Americans slowly started to change.

Educational Policy

The federal government’s role in education was minimal up to this point, but *Brown* (1954) turned that around. It ruled that schools can no longer segregate; this was to ensure equal

opportunities for all students. However, this was not enforced for over a decade. The *Brown II* decision a year later set no timeline for states to comply and called for desegregation "with all deliberate speed." It then took over 14 years and five stages for full compliance: absolute defiance, token compliance, modest integration, massive integration, and resegregation. Some states had no problem complying, but many refused. It was not until these states were threatened with sanctions that they started responding (McGuinn, 2006; Wilkinson III, 1978).

Many were hopeful that with the decision in *Brown* (1954) schools would be mandated to offer equal access to resources for everyone. However, when challenged regarding funding inequalities in *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* (1973), the Supreme Court ruled that these inequalities were constitutional, thus allowing them to persist (Lucas, 2008).

In the 1950s, the government passed the National Education Defense Act (NDEA) in response to the Soviet Union launching Sputnik. Fear that the Soviet Union was ahead of the United States in technology, the NDEA provided funding to schools to improve math, science, and foreign-language programs (McGuinn, 2006).

In the 1960s, Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) declared "war on poverty;" he believed that a good education would help poor people fight their way out. This was around the time that the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed which outlawed segregation and discrimination against African Americans. LBJ realized that for all students to have equal opportunities, government funding had to be allocated to schools with people living in poverty. The Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965 was passed mostly with democratic support. This was the first federal act that dealt directly with providing funding to schools to focus on students living in poverty. As such, it was the first time that the federal government's role became supervisory to allocate and monitor school funding (McGuinn, 2006).

The ESEA was a policy regime built on equity. The Title I program originated from the ESEA; most of the 1.3 billion dollars earmarked for ESEA was allocated to Title I. However, because politics got in the way, 94% of all school districts received funds, whether they needed them or not, which detracted from the purpose of spending on students in poor communities. While the intentions behind ESEA were well-meaning, the Act did not have procedures in place for regulation, so the states and local education authorities (LEA) used the money how they saw fit, often failing to maintain focus on disadvantaged students (McGuinn, 2006; Kantor, 1991).

In 1968, the ESEA was amended to provide aid for students in rural areas, to prevent students from dropping out, and for bilingual programs. Several more disadvantaged groups of students were added to ESEA, including special education students. Special education students were first provided for under Title VI – born under ESEA in 1966. Title VI later branched off on its own and became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 (McGuinn, 2006). The bill was reauthorized in 1978 when it was voted in by both parties (Kantor 1991).

Democrats and educational groups such as the National Education Association (NEA), the National Welfare Rights Organization, and the National Advisory Council for the Education of Disadvantaged Children all welcomed the federal government's role in education after the passage of the ESEA. They realized that the government would provide funding for disadvantaged students, and they welcomed their involvement in education because of this. Republicans opposed government involvement, believing education should be the responsibility of the states and LEAs (McGuinn, 2006).

In keeping with LBJ's contributions to education, President Carter established the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) in 1979. However, even with all the positives that came with ESEA – providing funding for disadvantaged students, for example – conservative Republicans

became increasingly opposed to government intrusion into education, seizing upon reports that ESEA was failing to meet its goals. In a move to gain the vote of conservative Republicans in the 1980 election, Reagan based his platform on reducing the role of government in education, eliminating the USDE that Carter established, and promoting school choice via vouchers; Reagan defeated Carter (McGuinn, 2006).

President Reagan, with his program of the “New Federalism”, was able to pass the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) in 1981. This act called for decreased funding and allowing states more control in how they spend federal dollars. It was Reagan’s goal to remove the government from schools altogether and to allow parents the choice of where to send their children to school (McGuinn, 2006).

In 1981, Terrence Bell, former Secretary of Education at the USDE, created the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) and instructed the group to provide a report about America’s quality of education. As a result, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was produced in April 1983. This report enflamed U.S. citizens with its statements regarding the mediocrity of American’s schools. Any confidence Americans had in education before was nearly obliterated after this report. It was filled with propaganda and produced no sources or evidence for its findings. Because there was no longitudinal data, there was no way to know if the data was better or worse than other years (Gardner, NCEE, 1983; McGuinn, 2006).

In answer to the *Nation at Risk* report, the *Sandia* report was published in 1993 and negated nearly everything in the NCEE’s report. The report was filled with verifiable statistics that highlighted numerous areas in education including the facts that: more people were going to college in the U.S., more money was spent on education in the U.S. than in other countries, and

the high school completion rates were increasing. In addition, the report found that while the *Nation at Risk* report indicated that test scores were decreasing, it failed to disaggregate the data and acknowledge that individual subgroups were increasing tremendously. It also did not consider that more people were testing now; people now had the opportunities to test who did not have them before. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that subgroups' achievement levels were increasing, the *Sandia* report indicated that there were still huge achievement gaps between Whites and other subgroups (Gardner, NCEE, 1983; Sandia, 1993; McGuinn, 2006).

Because of the *Nation at Risk* report and other problems seen within education, there was bipartisan desire to see increased federal involvement and spending in the 80's to improve the quality of education. The equity education regime reached its end as the accountability regime took over. Prior to George W. H. Bush's election into the White House in 1988, Democrats were pro-government involvement in the schools, especially for the increase in federal spending on education. Some moderate Republicans also wanted increased involvement so that states could begin school reforms. However, other Republicans still did not want the federal government involved. Many Republicans were split on this issue.

Bush considered himself to be the "education president" as it was apparent to much of America that education was high on his list of concerns. When Bush took office, he decided the USDE would not be eliminated, and he wanted to federally influence states to improve academically based on standards and tests. Unlike Reagan with the vouchers, Bush was pro public school choice and school deregulation (McGuinn, 2006).

In an effort to appease both parties, Bush did advise that while the government was needed for items mentioned above, he did not want them to micromanage as far as curriculum and other state and LEA issues. Bush faced a few obstacles. First, because of the recession,

federal money for education was limited. Second, the Democrats – who controlled Congress – would oppose education proposals that would alienate big educational allies such as teachers unions. Third, Bush’s focus on education would be derailed by the Persian Gulf War (McGuinn, 2006).

In April 1989, Bush proposed the Educational Excellence Act of 1989 (EEA). The act would allocate over 400 million dollars to rewarding excellent teachers and schools, drug prevention programs, increasing the option of parents choosing different public schools, and giving teachers alternate credential programs to choose from. Of course, this would all come with a price – more federal involvement in schools. This initiative failed due in large part to Democrats who wanted the increased spending, but who believed not enough was allocated. Republicans also were not receptive to the initiative, citing that it did nothing to provide for private school vouchers and tuition tax credits (McGuinn, 2006).

Alternately, the House and Senate, both controlled by Democrats, passed bills that differed greatly from Bush’s initial proposal. The new bills provided for the establishment and funding of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Conservative Republicans disliked this and considered it an intrusion into teacher licensing (McGuinn).

Still considering himself to be the “education president”, Bush set up a meeting of governors in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1989. What came out of the meeting was Bush’s commitment to release more power back to the states and LEAs to use funds at their discretion if the states and LEAs committed to meeting performance standards. Unfortunately, the role of the federal government in this commitment had yet to be established. The six goals that came from the summit were announced in Bush’s 1990 State of the Union address. The goals were: all children would start school ready to learn; high school graduation rates would increase to 90%;

students in fourth, eighth, and 12th grades would be competent in English, math, science, foreign language, social studies, and the arts; schools would be alcohol-, drug-, violence-, and gun-free; U.S. students would be superior to the rest of the world in math and science; and every adult would be literate. Basically, Bush's ideas were that if states and LEAs wanted federal money, they had to produce positive outcomes of achievement (McGuinn, 2006).

With Bush's term nearing its end in 1992, he worried about getting reelected and needed to come up with something that would keep him in office. The public did not believe he had done enough for education during his first term. In 1991, Bush rolled out his America 2000 education plan which wanted national standards, testing, and private school vouchers. The plan also called for detailed standards in core subjects; American Achievement Tests; report card publications for schools, districts, and states; merit pay, and school vouchers. Neither party was enthusiastic about this plan. Republicans, again, were concerned about government involvement in education, and Democrats were afraid it would impose unfair accountability measures (McGuinn, 2006).

Bush believed his ideas for school vouchers would help gain conservative support, but Democrats opposed the vouchers on the belief they would take away from public schools' federal funding and cause resegregation. In addition, the Republicans did not believe that more money was needed to improve schools, while Democrats insisted it was. America 2000 was shot down (McGuinn, 2006).

During the 1992 presidential campaign, Clinton used education and the New Democrats to win the presidency. Bush's campaign fell short based largely on the fact that it was focused on school vouchers. For the first two years of Clinton's presidency, Democrats were in control of the White House. As such, they were interested in expanding previous federal programs and

establishing new ones. Clinton took Bush's America 2000 and revised it into Goals 2000. Goals 2000 called for creating voluntary national standards and assessments outlined in America 2000. Differences between America 2000 and Goals 2000 included the fact that Clinton's Goals 2000 gave states the power to create their own standards, but in order to receive funding, they had to present the standards to the USDE for approval; additionally, Clinton's plan centered on public school choice, whereas Bush's centered on private school choice and vouchers (McGuinn, 2006).

Heise (1994) noted potential problems with Goals 2000: The act would create national standards, thus taking away states' power to create their own standards and assessments, SAT scores would be used to prove schools are failing, and the U.S. was already spending much more than other countries but not getting any more efficient. Although these concerns were real, most were addressed before the bill was enacted.

Republican moderates were in favor of the plan because it focused on standards and accountability, while conservative Republicans, again, opposed the expansion of the federal government in schools. Democrats were under the impression that massive amounts of funding would be allocated and were disappointed to discover this was not the case. They opposed the plan just as the conservative Republicans had. In the end, Goals 2000 was passed in 1994, after some revisions stating that state and LEA control over curriculum will not be restricted and national standards were voluntary (Schwartz & Robinson; McGuinn, 2006).

Running for president in 2000 were George W. Bush and Al Gore. Both declared themselves as education candidates. Both candidates wanted the government to play a stronger role in education by creating higher academic standards, increasing funding, providing more support for charter schools, and increasing the government's ability to hold schools accountable for student achievement via assessments. Bush won the election and maintained that education

was one of his highest priorities. On his second day in office, Bush sent a proposal for No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Bush's proposal was strategic for two reasons: he only sent an outline, so it wasn't mired down in details, and he kept both parties in mind when drafting it (McGuinn, 2006).

When NCLB was passed in 2001, it had a number of provisions: Schools were required to begin testing their students annually by school year 2005-2006, states and districts were required to demonstrate academic proficiency gradually, with 100% of students reaching proficiency by 2014, and if schools failed to meet proficiency, corrective action was taken. Additionally, schools and districts had to produce an annual report card indicating achievements on assessments; all teachers needed to be highly qualified, districts were required to implement the Reading First program in grades K-3, and NCLB provided aid for states to support charter schools (McGuinn, 2006).

The passage of NCLB was instrumental in raising achievement. Although some schools already had accountability systems in place, NCLB ensured that schools were held accountable, in that it provided incentives for achievement and required schools to produce annual report cards. In spite of all of this, achievement gaps between Whites and minority groups still remained perplexingly wide (McGuinn, 2006).

In 2013-2014, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was enacted. This law took away most categorical programs in schools and instead provided funding to be allocated and managed at the local level. The program requires input from all stakeholders in a district: parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and the community. The sole purpose of the LCFF was to target three specific groups of students that had historically been achieving at much lower levels than the rest of their peers. The groups targeted are low-income students, foster children, and

English learners. The Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) is an annual in-depth report required of all districts receiving funding. It reports on district goals and enumerates exactly how the funds will be used (Marsh, 2018).

Poverty

Noguera (2011), an expert on poverty and education, stated, “Making bold assertions that all children can achieve while doing nothing to address the challenges they face is neither fair nor sound public policy” (p. 8). Noguera asserted that poverty in urban neighborhoods affects academic performance in three ways:

1. There is a lack of academic and social support outside of school in areas of extreme poverty. Lareau (2002) supported this when she wrote that middle-class parents were able to provide activities to support and enhance learning for their children such as tutoring, camp, and homework support. Parents in low socioeconomic households are less able to provide such things.

2. Students living in poverty face many environmental challenges. Due to a lack of quality healthcare, these students have a lower quality of life and more health problems than middle-class children, which impacts them academically and developmentally. Also, children living in poverty witness more violence than those from middle-class families and are subjected to less healthy people in their lives, higher levels of stress, and higher incidents of interactions with people who struggle with psychological and emotional issues.

3. Schools in communities of people living in poverty lack the resources to adequately care for and educate students who come to them with so many needs. These schools are overwhelmed when district administrators and politicians do not acknowledge the obstacles they face.

Children living in poverty experience less success than their better-off peers when it comes to their education (Noguera, 2012; Williams & Noguera, 2010). Numerous economic factors contribute to this lack of success. A lack of proper nutrition in a young child's life can lead to slower development of language and increased behavior problems later on (Coles, 2008/2009).

Children from low-income families tend to lack medical insurance and do not seek medical attention when needed. This results in more frequent childhood illnesses, which can lead to chronic absenteeism and the loss of educational content during absences (Berliner, 2009).

Berliner (2009) also wrote that children living in poverty were at a much higher risk of lead and mercury poisoning when living in high pollution areas. Lead and mercury poisoning negatively impact a child's growth, behavior, well-being, and learning.

Neuman & Celano (2001) posited that a lack of resources such as books impact children of poverty. Young children need to have access to books, and ideally, an adult can read those books to them in order to build vocabulary. Not having access to books during the first few years of their lives contributes to students starting preschool or kindergarten already behind their peers.

Educational outcome disparities that stem from race and class backgrounds can be attributed to "unequal access to early childhood education..., inequities in school funding,... and differences in the amount of support well-educated, affluent parents can provide to their children versus poorer, less-educated parents" (Noguera, 2012, p. 1). Moreover, school funding is distributed based on property taxes. The more affluent a neighborhood is, the more resources that school/district receives, and of course, the less money a neighborhood brings in with taxes, the less money the schools make. In these cases, those who do not need more get more, and those who do need more get less. When policymakers attempt to provide equal opportunities for all

children, they neglect the fact that not all children start on equal footing (Noguera, p. 5). What impoverished students need are not equal resources, but equitable resources.

Educators had varying views of what was best for children living in poverty. One side said that social issues such as health and nutrition, a stable home, and preparation for school need to be addressed first before children are ready to learn. The other side believed that schools in poor neighborhoods should focus only on educating students and not let poverty be the reason for school failure (Noguera, 2010).

Noguera (2010) further posited that education policymakers had repeatedly chosen to ignore the fact that poverty indeed affected children's education, and instead focused on everything else that may have improved their academic success, such as setting higher academic expectations, creating charter schools, and implementing merit pay for teachers. He believed that when the social concerns for families of poverty are decreased and eventually eradicated, students will be better prepared for school and attain better academic success than in the past.

General Perceptions of African Americans

In the United States, African American males have been either loved or hated, feared or admired. Tyrone Howard (2013) called it a paradox. He wrote that they are generally perceived in one of two ways: negatively or positively. Those who have negative feelings and beliefs toward African Americans perceive them as troublemakers prone to violence. This population considers African American males to be unwelcome in certain parts of society on account of the way they talk and dress. Conversely, African American males who achieve highly in sports or in the music industry are revered.

Ladson-Billings (2011) wrote:

We see African American males as "problems" that our society must find ways to

eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root cause of most problems in school and society. We seem to hate their dress, their language, and their effect. We hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. While society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots—music, basketball, football, crack—we seem less comfortable with them than in places like the National Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club (p. 9).

African American boys have constantly received mixed messages in school and out.

Brown and Donnor (2011) posited that ignorant postulates regarding African Americans have continued to perpetuate the stereotypes that keep them oppressed. One such claim is that African Americans have created their own problems by subsisting in a subculture of apathy and disrespect.

Another claim is that African American males are irresponsible, destructive, oversexed, agnostic, unhealthy, and adverse to school and work. The final and most dangerous claim is that race and racism no longer exist and therefore no longer contribute to African American males' lived experiences (Brown & Donnor, 2011). As far as these claims are concerned, the current administration has taken our country backward. Goldstein and Hall (2017) wrote that "Trump's calls to 'Make America Great Again' by returning to an intensified law and order timeframe of Jim. Crow racism is passed off as nostalgia" (p. 403). The voters who elected Trump were wooed by his barely veiled promises that White people will remain in power, thereby further oppressing marginalized peoples.

The concept of social imagery, which is the way that attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions contribute to the understanding of how certain groups are understood, can help explain how negative beliefs about marginalized groups in the United States have been formed and

perpetuated. Howard, Flenbaugh, and Terry, Sr. (2012) wrote that social imagery perpetuated "...social domination, economic exploitation, and political disenfranchisement..." (p. 85) of members of the African American community. Harper and Davis III (2012) concurred and added that society generally associated African American males with drugs and crime, low achievement in school, and athletics. Tyrone Howard (2013) wrote:

Frequently labeled as problems, prone to violence, invoking fear in many, and deemed as undesirable in certain circles, the view of Black males is diverse and extreme on many levels. Loathed in various environments, applauded in others, perhaps no other group of people are emulated yet despised simultaneously to the extent that Black men are today. (p. 55).

Because society has generalized African American males in such harmful ways, it has only added to the oppression these men face. As Howard (2013) stated above, many people fear African American men based on society's image of them. Whites rarely question why an African American male is being arrested and irrationally believe that such detainees deserve punitive consequences.

Brown and Donnor (2011) referred to African American males as an "endangered species" (p. 20) given their rates of incarceration, illness, and violent deaths. Gibbs (1988) explained that African American males could be referred to as an endangered species because they have been "miseducated by the educational system, mishandled by the criminal justice system, mislabeled by the mental health system, and mistreated by the social welfare system" (p. 1-2). All of these are troublesome, but "miseducation by the educational system" started centuries ago and continues today.

Teacher Perceptions of African Americans

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) conducted an experiment in 1965 to determine if teacher expectations affected student performance. The researchers told the teacher that certain students performed well on a fictional test, but the researchers did not tell the teacher that the test was fictional. At the end of the year, as suspected, those students whom the teacher perceived as having higher intelligence based on their “performance” on the fictional test had more success in her class than the other students. Rosenthal and Jacobson used this study to demonstrate the self-fulfilling prophecy, otherwise known as the Pygmalion effect.

Conversely, Babad, Inbar, and Rosenthal (1982) reported that the opposite held true as well. If teachers believe for whatever reason that some students were not as capable as others in the classroom, teachers tend to expect less of them.

Rist (1970) expounded on Rosenthal and Jacobson’s work when he wrote that the Pygmalion effect can start as early as kindergarten and quickly become the self-fulfilling prophecy when students start to internalize their teachers’ negative attitudes. This undoubtedly affects school experiences and outcomes.

Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, and Salovey (2012) reported that at the beginning of a child’s educational career, the emotional bond that is forged with the teacher has a direct impact on that child’s engagement and academic success. As Gilliam (2014) claimed, many African American males experience racism and discrimination starting as early as three or four years old in preschool. African American boys face suspension or expulsion from preschool disproportionately to girls and children from other races. Gilliam wrote, “Preschool expulsions and suspensions are not child behaviors; they are adult decisions” (p. 1). He attributed this to the fact that boys and children from low-income families are seen as more troublesome.

Furthermore, preschools in low-income neighborhoods do not have equitable resources when it comes to caring for and educating African American boys.

Teachers perceive African American boys as lazy, nonthinkers, hostile in class, and having discipline problems. According to Howard (2013), these teacher beliefs have resulted in African American males disengaging from their academics. He wrote that African Americans are "...viewed as the worse behaved, the least talented, and the most dangerous group of students on the school grounds" (p. 70). This has severely affected their ability to achieve academically, emotionally, and socially. Because African American males have often been negatively labeled by educators and made victims of institutionalized microaggressions, they are left out of opportunities designed to help students with the most significant academic needs (Howard).

Noguera (2012) concurred when he wrote that African American males' failures occur because teachers may have lower expectations of poor and/or minority students. This results in the tracking of students: placing them in specific learning groups based on perceived ability levels. However, tracking students based on prior academic achievement prevents these students from reaching their full potential (O'Connor, Hill, and Robinson, 2009).

Tyrone Howard (2014) posited that for many students, their academic success or lack thereof depends mainly on the opinions their teachers hold of them and teachers' beliefs in their students' abilities. Howard reported on a study conducted by McKown and Weinstein in 2008 where they determined that teachers preferred White and Asian students over their African American and Latino counterparts. This racial preference is one reason there are such significant disparities between racial groups and their academic success. If teachers prefer White and Asian students, the messages that African Americans and Latinos receive can only be negative.

Ladson-Billings (2013) discussed the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-

Billings, 1995) when she stated that it relates to the success of African American boys in the classroom based on the following: “Focus on student learning, development of cultural competence, and promotion of sociopolitical consciousness” (p. 118). She posited that what is key to this is teachers who know they can teach in a diverse classroom and believe their African American male students to be academically capable.

Disengagement

Wang and Degol (2014) wrote that student engagement occurs when “motivation to pursue a goal or succeed at an academic task is put into action deliberately...” (p. 138).

Wigfield et al. (2014) expounded on this when stating that “Motivation is most directly observable in the level of energy in individuals’ behaviors, as well as in the intensity of their engagement” (p. 657). If motivation is linked to school engagement, what happens to students who lose their motivation, or, worse yet, never had any?

Howard (2013) listed several problems in classrooms and schools that negatively impacts African American males:

- Lack of racial awareness
- Cultural ignorance among school personnel
- Apathetic teacher attitudes
- Lack of quality instruction

Although one-third of African American children attend middle-class schools, their performance still falls behind their White peers, suggesting that race and racism are present at these schools as well (p. 62).

Just as Gilliam (2014) acknowledged above, Graves and Howes (2011) reported findings that African Americans were expelled from preschool at twice the rate of Hispanics and Whites.

Welch and Payne's (2012) research substantiated this by concluding that schools are more likely to use harsher disciplinary measures based upon the racial population of the school. These disciplinary measures include in-school suspension, off-campus suspension, and expulsion from school.

Welch and Payne (2012) further posited that when these types of disciplinary measures are imposed upon students, students become disengaged; they are at a much higher risk of falling behind in school, acting out and misbehaving, losing interest in their academics, and ultimately dropping out. If students are disciplined using exclusionary measures as early as preschool, before they even get the chance to forge vital bonds with their teachers, then their chance for success plummets.

Another reason African American males become disengaged is that they start school already academically behind their White counterparts. By first grade, children should be expected to know about 20,000 words (Moats, 2001). Children from households with low socioeconomic status start school knowing 50% less words than their middle-class peers (Hart and Risley, 1995). At this rate, unfortunately, it is easy to see why so many African American male students are starting school on an uneven playing field.

Some African American males become disengaged because they come from impoverished neighborhoods. Twenty-one percent of African Americans live in poverty (Federal Safety Net, 2017). The communities they live in see their share of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, single-family homes, and mothers working two to three jobs to make ends meet. It may not be anything from school that causes African American males to become disengaged; the overwhelming struggles at home may prevent them from focusing on their education.

On the other hand, some researchers suggest that White female teachers of African American male students lack empathy and understanding of African American culture, which results in a disproportionate amount of office referrals for African American boys (O'Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011). Howard (2016) posed the question, "Is there a causal relationship between the over-representation of White teachers in our classrooms and the underserving of children of color in our nation's schools?" (p. 7). Given that the majority of the nation's teachers are White females who cannot be culturally responsive teachers (Matias, 2013; Warren, 2013), it is no surprise that many African American boys struggle in school.

Milner IV (2007) wrote that teachers view African American male students negatively and that their views tend to be without any basis. These dysfunctional teacher/student relationships result in African American boys being repeatedly ousted from the classroom, effectively giving them a reason to give up on school. With the odds stacked against these students before they even walk through the classroom door, they eventually have no option but to disengage from an entire institution that systemically oppresses them.

(Bingham and Okagaki, 2012) suggested that African American students became disengaged due to a cultural mismatch. They wrote:

When children from ethnic minority cultures begin school, for example, they may find it difficult to decode the cues that are presented in the classroom and actively engage in the teaching and learning process. They may experience failure. They may perceive their own cultural practices to be devalued in the school context. Ultimately, the enactment of this process is hypothesized to lead to a lack of engagement in school (p. 67).

Achievement gap

Authors O'Connor, Hill, and Robinson (2009) posited that African Americans and

Whites enter school similarly prepared and equivalent to each other. However, as African Americans progress through school, they start falling behind. The authors found that by the end of the first grade, African Americans were behind their White peers in reasoning, math, and verbal performance (p. 6). Contrary to their position that African Americans and Whites start school similarly prepared, Fryer and Levitt (2004) stated that the achievement gap starts before African Americans even begin kindergarten and widens from there.

Howard (2013) suggested structural explanations for African American males' lack of academic achievement:

- Through institutional racism and discrimination – males have difficulty fitting in at school due to inferior schooling, poverty and for some drugs, crime, and violence,
- African American boys act and think differently than their peers of other ethnicities due to cultural norms, so they may not engage in their academics so as not to be looked down on by their peers. This is what is known as oppositional theory (p. 65).
- African American boys from lower-income homes can see that their families struggle with employment, meaning that they do not make enough money to support their families, or they are not employed at all. Because of this, they may not see the need for engaging with their education if they are going to end up the same way.

One potential reason for the achievement gap is that African American boys are disciplined in school far more frequently and harshly than their White peers (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Rocque, 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). School discipline often

results in lack of recess, loss of privileges, or even suspension or expulsion, some as early in their educational career as preschool (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016).

Hanushek and Rivkin (2009) wrote:

The differences in measured skills between Blacks and Whites are enormous. By age 17, the average Black student is performing at around the 20th percentile of the White distribution. This leads directly to significant differences in college attendance and completion and ultimately to substantial Black-White differences in lifetime earnings and occupational prestige. (p. 386)

Some researchers believe that a significant contributing factor leading to African American boys' lack of success in the classroom is that White teachers know very little about African American culture, which hinders these students from performing well academically (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008; Thomas and Stevenson, 2009). It also results in an excessive number of referrals for discipline (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). As stated in other parts of this literature review, discipline referrals have detrimental effects on African American boys and contribute to the achievement gap. This is important because White female teachers are not familiar with how African American kids act and interact. Their intense emotions and loud excitement might be mistaken for hostility, which immediately puts White teachers on the defense (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

Author Ferguson (2003) posited that teachers are quick to brush off the untapped potential of African American students based solely on either past or present performance. He wrote:

Because potential is unobserved, racial bias of this type is virtually impossible to gauge with any reliability. Still, it seems especially likely that teachers underestimate the

potential of students whose current performance is poor, including disproportionate numbers of African Americans. Similarly, African Americans are underrepresented among students with the very highest scores, and potential for greater African American representation at the top of the distribution is unproven. Thus, at both the top and bottom of the test score distribution, stereotypes of African American intellectual inferiority are reinforced by past and present disparities in performance and probably cause teachers to underestimate African Americans' potential more than Whites'. If they expect that African American children have less potential, teachers probably search with less conviction than they should for ways of helping African American children to improve and miss opportunities to reduce the African American-White test score gap (p. 494).

This is a powerful testament to the fact that teachers can help narrow the achievement gap, but they are prevented from doing so by their inability to envision success for their African American males.

Family structure

Jenkins (2006) posited that African American males students' family units contribute significantly to their level of academic success. Boyd and Allen (1995) wrote that African Americans' family structures were fractured from their inception in the United States. They reported that slave owners immediately separated babies from their mothers for the mothers to continue working. Schneider and Schneider (2001) expounded on this when they reported that this was purposely done to prevent babies and mothers from bonding since this bond would make it difficult for the mother to perform her duties. In addition, slaves could not legally get married since it was illegal for slaves to enter into any contracts. Even worse, it was typical for slave owners to break families apart and put them with slaves from other families for breeding

purposes (Schneider & Schneider). So, the foundation on which African Americans should have been able to build their families was not stable.

The Moynihan Report of 1965 was published to bring awareness to American poverty and promote social policies to benefit families in poverty. Moynihan believed that because African American boys did not have a strong male presence as they were growing up, their ability to develop and achieve was negatively impacted. His suggestion was for African American boys to find strong male influences outside of the home, and posited that the military was ideal for this. The military would get young males away from female-led households and into a predominately male environment that had predictable expectations, disciplines, and rewards.

Heiss, J. (1996) conducted a study to determine if the family structure had any significant impact on student academic achievement. Even allowing for only African Americans, Heiss concluded that his study did not support the theory that students' success or lack of success in school is tied to family structure.

Conversely, Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) also sought to determine if factors such as father's education level and family structure impacted African Americans' success in school and found that indeed they did. They also found that two-parent homes contributed to children's success in school; however, African Americans from families run singlehandedly by mothers could be just as successful if the boys found a male mentor outside the home, such as a coach, a youth pastor, or a teacher. Finally, Hines and Holcomb discovered that contrary to what they expected, African American boys with fathers in the home who had high expectations for their sons did not fare as well in school. The authors posited that this might be because their sons perceived the fathers' expectations to be negative.

Battle and Scott (2000) found that what impacted academic achievement for African American males more than living in a single-parent household was living in a home where lack of income is a major factor. On the other hand, Mandara and Murray (2000) reported from their study that African American boys whose fathers are in the home fare better than homes with no fathers. However, the latter authors did find that African American boys' perceptions of positive family environments were related to family income.

Chapter Three

Method

Introduction

In this section, I discuss my research methods. I start by outlining and justifying my research design. I then list the criteria required for each of my participants. After that, I explain how I selected my participants and then provide anonymous descriptions of said participants. I then list my interview questions and share information about the interviews, such as where they took place. Finally, the chapter concludes with my analysis.

Research Design

I conducted this study in order to gain insight into the beliefs of White female teachers as they shared their perceptions of African American male students in their classrooms. As such, I chose to conduct a qualitative study using open-ended questions to interview my participants. Authors Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) differentiated between quantitative and qualitative research when they stated that qualitative research described “in detail all of what goes on in a particular activity or situation rather than on comparing the effects of a particular treatment” (p. 430). Because I was interested in teachers’ perceptions of African American male students in their classrooms, qualitative research was most appropriate.

One can approach qualitative research in a variety of ways (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). One such approach is phenomenology which deals with reactions to and perceptions of certain situations and phenomenon. As Yüksel and Yildirim (2015) stated, “The general purpose of the phenomenological study is to understand and describe a specific phenomenon in-depth and reach at the essence of participants’ lived experience of the phenomenon” (p. 3). In speaking with White female teachers, I hoped to learn about their experiences teaching African American male

students and their perceptions of these students' engagement or disengagement in the classroom.

An appropriate vehicle with which to conduct a phenomenological study is one-to-one interviews. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated that interviews serve three purposes for researchers: The participants impart detailed narratives, they describe their experiences, and they are given the opportunity to reflect on and share their thoughts about their experiences. Seidman (2019) stated:

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience... At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth (p 9).

For this study, I asked participants to share their experiences educating African American males in their classrooms. Individually interviewing each of the teachers allowed me enough time to get to know each participant in ways that were relevant to the study and allowed me to invite the participants to share openly. Not only did these interviews benefit the research, but they also proved to be beneficial to the participants. McVee (2004) wrote, "... individuals can be transformed by stories... stories can be a means for teachers to express beliefs about theory, practice, and curriculum" (p. 881). By sharing their classroom experiences, the participants reflected on past practices and perhaps, if deemed necessary, they changed their teaching style to benefit all students.

Participant Criteria

In order for this research to be conducted with fidelity, certain criteria had to be met. Because the study was about White female teachers' perceptions of African American male

students in their classrooms, I only recruited White female teachers. Next, the teachers needed to possess at least five years of experience teaching African American males so that they had amassed enough data throughout their tenure to share with me. The participants also had to be teaching or have taught African American males in eighth through tenth grade. This enabled the participants to share about students who had for the most part outgrown their early adolescent immaturity. Finally, I wanted to interview teachers who taught in districts with 80% of students on free or reduced lunch since my educational experience has solely been with this demographic.

I purposely selected 10 White female teachers by different means; purposive in that all the teachers needed to have taught for at least five years, they had to be teaching or have taught in eighth, ninth, or 10th grade, and they had to be teaching or have taught African American male students in their classrooms. According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2015), purposive sampling is conducted in qualitative research when the researcher knows what qualifications her participants need to possess. In this case, the seasoned teacher participants that I sought were able to share their experiences as teachers of African American male students in grades eight through ten.

Participant Selection

Three of the participants were from a large suburban school district in Southern California. The district has a student population of more than 32,000 students, seven percent of whom identify as African American males. I sent five emails out to female teachers in each of the six middle schools and four high schools in the district soliciting White female teachers to participate in the study. This district included teacher email addresses on its website. Of the 50 emails sent, 12 responded. Three of the respondents stated they were African American females who graciously made themselves available to me should I have any questions of them and their

experiences. Three more respondents advised they were of Mexican descent but wanted to participate anyway. I thanked them but respectfully informed them they did not meet the study's criteria. Six White female teachers responded, all of whom were interested and met the criteria, however, when attempting to set up the interviews, one had changed her mind, and I was unable to get two others to commit to an interview. That left me with three White female teachers from this district.

Because my study called for at least ten White female teachers, and the initial district had only yielded three participants, I turned to my own district to seek more. Of the nine teachers I asked to participate, seven of those teachers met the criteria and agreed to an interview. This school district has approximately 4,500 students, eight percent of whom identified as African American.

Participants

The participants of the study were ten White female teachers from two local public-school districts with at least 80% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. The teachers ranged in age from 28 to 62 years old. Their range of teaching experience was five years to 38 years, with a combined total of 143 years of teaching experience. See Table 1 below.

Table 1

Teacher Participant Demographics

Teacher	Age	Years Teaching Experience	Grade Level/s Taught
Michelle	28	5	8 th
Cassandra	29	6	10 th
Roxanne	31	7	8 th , 9 th
Rebecca	31	6	8 th
Marie	34	9	10 th , 11 th
Lee	38	13	8 th , 5 th
Roberta	39	13	9 th
Johanna	44	19	10 th
Lucy	51	27	9 th , 10 th , 11 th
Christine	62	38	8 th , 9 th
Total – 10 teachers	Average age – 38.7	Total of teaching years - 143	Range of grade levels taught – 5 th -10 th

Note. Table includes teachers' ages, number of years taught, and grade level/s taught.

Interviews

The interviews lasted an average of one hour, with the shortest being 45 minutes, and the longest being one hour and 50 minutes. The interviews I conducted with the three teachers from the first district were conducted in various locations on weekends; one of them took place at a quiet restaurant seated separately from the rest of the patrons, and the other two took place in the participants' homes. The seven interviews from the second district were all conducted in the teachers' classrooms after work.

I asked each participant 10 questions that would give me insight into their perceptions of African Americans boys' disengagement in their classes (See Appendix A). I first wanted to determine the teachers' ideas of what student engagement in their classrooms looks like, and what a successful classroom looks like. This was necessary because I needed them to keep their ideas in mind when I later asked them questions about student academic performance and behavior in their classes.

I then informed my participants that data has shown that African American students were behind their White peers in academic achievement (CAASPP, 2019), and I asked the teachers to posit why they think that might be. I also wanted to know their thoughts about why African Americans start their educational career in preschool or kindergarten already behind their White peers (Evans, 2005). My reasoning was to see if the teachers provided different ideas about why African Americans started their schooling already behind, than the ideas they later provided to explain current, overall achievement gap.

I wanted the teachers to share their perceptions of disruptive students. I first asked if they could tell me which was more disruptive, boys or girls and why they thought that was. That question led into which ethnicity was most disruptive, and again, why they thought that was.

Lastly, I asked the teachers which ethnicity or ethnicities of students are most likely to succeed in school and beyond. These questions were designed to help me gain an understanding of the participants' perceptions of African American boys.

Analysis

I used a general inductive approach to analyze my data. Thomas (2006) wrote "The inductive approach is a systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data in which the analysis is likely to be guided by specific evaluation objectives" (p. 238). My objectives were to determine teacher perceptions of African American males in their classrooms. When analyzing the data, it was important to keep in mind what my study objectives were and to relate them to the original research questions in Chapter One.

Thomas (2006) wrote about inductive analysis: "Inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher" (p. 238). I was the sole evaluator and researcher for this study, and as such, it was my job to conduct the interviews, transcribe them, code them, and develop themes.

After audio recording each of the interviews with participants' permission, I coded the interviews using a combination of manual coding and coding software (HyperRESEARCH, Version 4.0.1). Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) defined coding as "The specification of categories in content analysis research." They advised, "It may be done ahead of time or emerge from familiarity with the raw data" (p. G-1). In other words, coding is the process of assigning relevant parts of all the text to categories that emerge as each interview is evaluated.

I examined the raw data by carefully reading the transcripts of each of the interviews, then I reviewed the codes that I created, and finally I combined and eliminated some codes as

needed. This was necessary because I found that some codes were redundant, such as teacher assumptions and teacher stereotypes. After reviewing the text in these two categories, I decided to combine them. At least two codes were eliminated. The college code was eliminated because it only contained one reference from an interview which ended up not relating to the study. The incentive code was eliminated for nearly the same reasons. The ten interviews initially yielded 41 codes. After combining and eliminating codes, I ended up with 34.

Table 2

Coding categories for behavior

Codes	Text Samples
Boys behavior	“aggressive”
	“disrespectful to teachers”
Girls behavior	“emotional”
	“catty”
Handling disruptive behavior	“lose recess”
	“parent phone call”
Behavior and discipline – causes	“no father in the home”
	“seeking attention”
Disruptive by ethnicity	“African Americans – no responsibility”
	“Whites – sense of entitlement”

The above chart enumerates just five codes gleaned from the data I collected and their corresponding teacher responses.

Simultaneously focusing on the data I collected and my research questions from Chapter One, I found five themes that emerged from my analysis:

- Poverty
- Absent fathers
- Lack of vocabulary
- Teachers' negative perceptions about African Americans
- Cultural mismatch between teachers and their African American male students

In Chapter Four, I will report my findings, and in Chapter Five, I will discuss how the data formulated the themes and how the themes address my research questions.

Chapter Four

Results

In this chapter, I present results from the data collected in Chapter Three. To best understand the results, I delineated each of the questions and their corresponding responses. A discussion of the results will follow in Chapter Five.

Question 1: How do you define student engagement?

The teachers were consistent with their definitions of student engagement. They agreed that students are engaged when they are paying attention, actively participating by asking and answering questions, are focused on the teacher, and are on task. Rebecca stated that student engagement means that,

Students (are) thinking about and at least mentally working with, not necessarily writing anything or producing anything yet... they are actively thinking about or processing what's in the lesson. If we're talking about triangles, they could be thinking about what they already know about triangles; they could be um listening to me talk about triangles and in their minds trying to connect it to something they already know. They could be writing or taking notes on it.

Roxanne agreed when she spoke about the learning process, "Student engagement is that students are not only getting what they need but they're involved with the learning process, they're not checked out. They're participating, they're completing the assignment, but they're doing so by answering questions and asking opinions."

Cassandra was the first to mention that learning should be fun:

At first you have to provide an education that is interesting, that is at grade level, that is according to their mental development, that has common sense, that is fun. As much as

you can, have their hands involved. As much as you can. I teach my children with music, songs, dances, and with costumes. Geography, I have the map of the world on the wall and, from day one, I teach them to sing songs from different parts of the world in that language. And math, don't be afraid, if you have five minutes left don't be afraid to teach them something that is too high for them.

Micky, too, spoke about enjoying the lessons, "Having all the kids actively participating in the activities we're doing, enthusiastically. You can have all your kids doing the assignment, but there's a cherry on top if they actually do it and are having a good time."

Two teachers reported that engagement in the classroom includes student collaboration. Christine said, "They could be talking to their classmate about the work, like, I don't understand this. Will you explain this to me? That's how I would define engagement. Their minds are engaged with the content." Johanna said, "Student engagement is reflected in the noise levels. If they're really getting into it, they're talking to their small groups about it... The noise level should reflect teamwork."

Roberta put it plain and simple, "I define student engagement by one, if they're participating in class and two, if they pass the assessment." Another succinct response; this one from Lee, "Student engagement is when all students are on task and are paying attention to the lesson." Finally, Lucy shared, "Student engagement is when most, ideally all, students are focusing on the lesson and the teacher and are wanting to learn what is being taught."

Although the teachers were only asked to define student engagement, one shared her opinion about what constitutes a lack of student engagement. Marie stated, "You can tell by looking at them if they're engaged. If their eyes are glazed over, they're not engaged. If they're staring at their phones, they're not engaged, although that wasn't a problem several years ago."

Question 2: How do you know when your students are engaged?

This question is similar to the first; however, I wanted to know how the participants could tell when their students were engaged as opposed to a generic definition of student engagement as solicited in question one. Their answers were different than their answers to the first question. Micky said she knows her students are engaged, "...if they ask questions, if they are taking notes and working on problems, if they know the content, either with me or with a classmate. If they're looking confused trying to figure things out." She clarified that the look of confusion is a good thing, because the student is trying to understand the content.

Lucy explained how she can tell when her students are engaged, but then cautioned that sometimes, even if a student appeared to be disengaged, it did not mean that he is:

I watch for their reactions, but I also watch to see what they're doing. Because they may not be looking at you necessarily, but they're hearing you and doing what they're doing, so you have to watch their behavior. For example I had a kid in 9th grade years ago that people would often comment to me, he's not paying attention because he's doodling on his paper, but if you ask him a question, he's heard every word you've said, so you have to know that about the kid, to know that he was listening and that he was engaged in the lesson.

Rebecca excitedly shared about project-based learning, "... I sort of knew of it but didn't know what it was termed. You give the students open ended questions, they research, and they come up with answers; they basically teach themselves with teamwork. It's a wonderful way to learn."

Roxanne can see student engagement when she's, "... walking around and you hear their conversations and questions, you're like YES!" Lee reports that she knows her students are

engaged when,

...they're getting what you're teaching them and they're showing it in whatever the outcome is. Like when you're giving a test, say I give mastery tests in my reading class, and I can see that my students are making progress, then to me they've been engaged in the classroom or they wouldn't be doing better.

Marie not only talked about in-classroom behavior, she spoke of what students can do before they even step foot on campus that will help them succeed:

I know my students are engaged when they are eager to answer questions. Also, when they are eager to ask questions themselves. They don't have eyes wandering all over the classroom, just on the board and their papers. The students that come to school organized and prepared, are often the students who are engaged.

Johanna advised she knows that her students are engaged when, "...their eyes are on me, they're taking notes, asking questions or even sharing relevant stories. When they are working collaboratively, I know they're engaged because they are all interacting with each other in their groups."

Question 3: What is your idea of a successfully run classroom?

The teachers had varying ideas of what a successfully run classroom looks like. Roberta discussed growth in the classroom:

My idea of a successfully run classroom is one where kids make growth, they may not make all the same growth; it will be individual to students. Where the kids are not only engaged, but they're happy coming to school; they feel safe coming to school. And they're able to interact with peers and make long friendships with each other. If they can do that then I think you've got a good classroom.

Cassandra's thoughts were along the same lines:

A successfully run classroom is one where there is achievement, grades, growth, if there is no growth something is wrong. I know that not everything is a test, the state testing, not everything goes to the test. Kids find it important, parents find it important, teachers find it important, but I think you've really got to know your students and know their achievements in so many different aspects. But that growth has got to be there. If there is no growth you've got to look at yourself and ask what am I doing wrong? Why aren't I reaching these kids? And you're not going to reach every single one, but you better see growth in the majority of your students and ask what you can do for those ones who aren't demonstrating growth.

Marie also referenced academic achievement when she said that, "A successfully run classroom has students who are engaged, prepared and ready to learn. If a classroom is run successfully, it will show on their test scores."

Other teachers reported that it all has to do with rules and procedures. Lucy puts discipline above everything else, "First is discipline. There cannot be any instruction, any knowledge without discipline. First discipline, second rules. And I don't write the rules, the children tell me what to write. It's better buy-in that way." Christine talked more about procedures when she said:

My idea of a successfully run classroom is one that has rules and procedures in place.

Where students know what to expect from the minute they walk in the door until the last minute of class. The students are engaged in their classwork and most turn in their homework.

While Lee reported, "The students are quiet; they're listening to the teacher as she is presenting a

lesson, 'I'm telling you what we're going to do, and then we're trying it together, and then we're trying it on our own,' and they have some kind of process in place." Johanna also referred to procedures, "It's having consistent procedures and consistent discipline and having a really solid routine and just having some variation within that routine."

Micky said that her classroom is successful when she...

... teaches from my heart. I lot of the teaching I do is from teachable moments. I have to think on my feet because things change from one minute to the next. I'm making lesson plans... and by Monday within the first hour it's all changed. Because you have to do whatever happens with the kids, but you still have to get them to learn. Like my students tell me, you're full of stories, but they love the stories. How else to get them to remember?

Rebecca reported that, "In order to have a successful classroom, students need to follow routines that have been practiced from day one. This ensures that everything runs smoothly." Lastly, Roxanne had this to say, "I think making it clear to kids that we care about them, that we expect them to work hard, that we expect them to do their best, and that we're going to call them on it when they don't."

Question 4: Data shows that African American students are behind their peers in academic achievement. To what do you attribute this gap?

The teacher participants had interesting reactions to this question. Some teachers were hesitant to acknowledge that there is indeed an achievement gap, while others were excited to share their opinions on why they think it exists.

Because of the numerous responses given describing a multitude of reasons that African American students are academically behind their peers, the data for this question is organized

with subheadings.

Vocabulary. A few teachers spoke about African Americans' lack of basic and academic vocabulary. Christine spoke of standardized testing: "I look at the materials, and I look at the words. The test is so largely a test of vocabulary and logic and, as my students would say, That's White people stuff."

Rebecca referred to "Standard English Learners" (SEL) when talking about African Americans' vernacular: "Standard English learners in general, they're going to struggle in school when they didn't grow up speaking the same language. It's like they did, but they didn't, which is what the whole Ebonics thing is about." According to this teacher, African Americans are considered SEL when their academic speech and vocabulary are impacted by the language used in some parts of the African American culture.

Lee referenced the music they listened to as, "... having nowhere near the type of vocabulary needed to succeed in school." Roberta moved from the topic of vocabulary to parenting to hygiene. It seemed that the more she spoke about African American families, the more riled she became: "They come with no vocabulary at all. No attention. I don't blame the mothers, I don't. I don't know how I would perform in their shoes, having to earn bread for my children. And the way they dress, and the way they bring their jacket, (their clothes are) dirty dirty dirty dirty!" She moved from sympathy to finding fault.

Micky simply said, "They're not just blowing stuff off, they don't hear adults in their life talk like that except for their teachers. Or maybe a few educated relatives, they don't hear people talking like that that much".

Lack of parental involvement. For the purposes of this section, caretakers are also considered parents. Lee reported, "... here the parents that get involved, they come to Open

House and parent nights. They are mostly White, Asian, Indian, they're all there. Some Hispanics will come, very few Blacks." Marie concurred almost angrily, "And I'm sorry to say Black people are worst. They're not showing up or wanting to get involved. Not even half of my classes' parents will turn up for Open House." Roberta is of the same mind, "... their parents rarely show up for conferences or to any school functions for that matter. It's like they don't care."

Lucy shared that it is not necessarily the parents' fault:

Even then, many Black kids are being raised by their grandparents or other relatives because their own parents are either in jail or are off doing drugs somewhere. I think that the parents don't necessarily want to have things this way, but they don't know how to get out of the situation they found themselves in.

Johanna compared what can happen when there is parent involvement and support to when there is not:

I had a child from Vietnam, she did not know one word in English. You should see in June, beautiful penmanship, reading, and understanding what she was reading because she had a lot of support at home. If there's no support at home, it doesn't matter how good the teacher is.

Socioeconomics. Marie also attributes African American struggles in school to being from the "ghetto" or from a "poor background":

Have you ever listened to a kid from the ghetto or poor background tell a story? They'll come in my classroom all fired up about something and they'll say R--- got suspended, and I'll say what happened, and they'll start in the middle of the story, they've got no clue. So, I have to ask them questions about the background like what happened before

that, like how did the whole thing start, because they'll start in the middle of the story. They don't realize that they have to back up and tell the whole story. They're so confounded."

Lucy, who spoke about socioeconomics, said this about parents meeting with teachers: "They can't because they're single parents, and a lot of times socioeconomics come into play, and unfortunately, a good percentage of that is Black."

Rebecca spoke of the necessity of two people working just to get by:

It takes two people to pay a mortgage and that's really hard, or it takes two people to make ends meet. And then you work all day, you come home tired and you want to give to everybody equally, there's a point where you say I can't. I think that's what happens.

The parents come home so tired, and they have several children and they all want their attention and they need to be fed.

Roxanne concurred: "I think that both parents working is a necessary evil in our society, I don't think it's a good thing. But being able to do otherwise doesn't exist."

Christine stated:

...(we teachers) don't know what it's like to grow up with parents on welfare or with you know parents struggling to put food on the table. Many of us grew up with not enough to pay for music lessons or dance lessons, but we didn't have parents that struggled to put food on the table or work three jobs. We didn't grow up with that kind of situation.

Roberta mentions several reasons African Americans are behind their peers academically, with socioeconomics being her main point:

No support at home, zero, zero support at home. Many times, I check their backpacks, and all the papers are crumbled, the homework crumbled, pieces of bread, pieces of

candy attached to papers. No care at home. I don't blame the mothers. Some mothers need to work at night. Some mothers are dealing with their own loss that they have no husband. Some mothers have many, many children that they can hardly provide for them. It's difficult, but yes, in my experience, more than any other race, Black Americans. In my experience, the children that need more help are indeed the Black Americans.

Cassandra compared a child from a middle-income family to a child living in poverty: It's parental involvement again. And I know it's hard, I understand that it's hard, but I mean they didn't have to worry about were they going to be able to pay the rent, were they going to have food on the table, but that becomes very difficult, if that is something you have to worry about.

Micky simply questioned, "How can you worry about if their homework is done when you have to get something on the table?"

Disconnect between student and teacher. Some teachers acknowledge the disconnect between the African American culture and their own lives. Johanna put it this way, "Possibly one of the big reasons is a disconnect between the students' daily lives and what they're being asked to study in school. It's a gap between the students' real lives and what we're asking them to learn."

Christine stated "... that just the everyday reality of the kids is so disconnected from the world their teachers live in. It's a big turnoff to them." And Micky showed her frustration when she exclaimed, "I love having Black students, but I do feel a disconnect, and I do feel I kind of... I worry about it like ugh how do I connect with these kids."

Cassandra reported that, "these older baby boomer teachers were trying to make cultural connections with the kids that the kids just didn't get, and it was because the teachers were

outdated and not in touch with the contemporary world.”

When it comes to connecting with students, Micky referred to the shortage of teachers of color when she said that, “college has become so expensive, that fewer minorities are attending. This leads to fewer teachers of color in the classrooms to whom students of color can relate.”

Parent and student attitudes. Parent and student attitudes toward school also make a difference. Micky stated, “... I attribute the gap to how African American kids may feel, socially, at school. They may have learned, from their parents, that not everyone is accepting of African American people.” While Lee reported, “They see that their parents are uneducated, often working menial jobs or are on public assistance, and they figure that that is either okay, or that is just going to be their lot in life.”

Roberta opined:

You have kids who their parents got expelled from school, or their parents hated school or flunked out or dropped out of school. What kind of relationship do the kids have with school? You know their whole life their relatives have told them that school is not worth that much, or it’s not that important, or it’s for White people.

Marie believes African Americans are behind their peers due to “the lack of desire to learn. If a child is not reading at home or being pushed to do their homework, because they don’t understand the bigger picture is their success, they will have no desire to learn.”

Absent family members. Teachers believe that when there is only one adult in the home, African American students struggle to become successful. Rebecca stated, “If you look at it, it’s terrible, well it’s not terrible to say, if you look at the homes, even impoverished Hispanics generally have a father in the home.” Cassandra reported:

So if you only got just your mom or just your dad or just your grandma and you don’t

have another parent or grandparent or adult around, um, and that one adult has to work lots of hours to support the family um you know you're not going to get read to as much. You're not going to get taken to the library as much. You're not going to get taken to concerts in the park or you know the children's museum as much as a kid who does have a two-parent or two-adult. It has a lot to do with poverty. If you have a single parent, you just don't have that much of a chance to get those opportunities.

Johanna shared her opinion about why there are absentee parents, "... I think so many Blacks have absentee parents because of the laws in our country that have demonized crack cocaine over other drugs. There are so many in prison that should not have gone ever."

Roxanne specifically mentions the absentee father:

I read an article years ago, and I don't know if it's gotten any better, that 75 percent of Blacks are born out of wedlock. And I know you don't have to be married, but there has to be a male presence that takes an interest and takes care of that child. And there is proof that that makes a difference. They're behind the eight ball, especially if the man is not in the house, and like I said, usually he's not.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Two teachers referred directly to Maslow, while others had his theory in mind when responding to the question of why African American students lag behind their peers academically. Micky reported, "So if you're not good at code switching, you can either be good with your family and friends or you can be good in school. Given Maslow's hierarchy, most people end up choosing for survival and their mental health." She went on to clarify that a student struggling in school, but not knowing how to adjust, will find it easier, for mere survival reasons, to do better at home because that is the only place he feels he belongs.

Lucy had this to say:

So anyway the students feel stress and insecurity, you know Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If they got to school on time, they might have had a school breakfast, but what about the students who arrive late? And who knows if they even slept last night.

Christine questioned, "How can a child want to learn about math when they're not sure if there's going to be anything to eat that night or if their mom or whoever is going to be incapacitated because of drugs or illness?" Lee had this to say, "... so the kid is just up in the air not knowing what's going on in their lives. And it's hard to focus, and if you're hungry, tired, don't have your own bed, all of that comes into it."

Lucy reported that, "There are some teachers that will say that people in poverty areas learn slower and they can't learn as good, and they are too worried about where their next meal is going to come from so they can't learn."

Health. Johanna suggested that African Americans' poor nutrition could also cause students to become disengaged with their learning, "If you're poor and you're struggling to put food on the table, are you going to buy fruits and vegetables or are you going to maximize your calories with the money you have?" Rebecca advised that she has, "kids who I know I'm fairly sure they've got some illnesses that are chronic and untreated from the way they behave in class, their facial expressions, their personal appearance."

Structure of home life. Some teachers opined that family life negatively affects African Americans' academic achievement. Lee reported:

I don't think their family structures are set up in a way that's conducive to learning. A lot of times they tend to blame, it's always someone else's fault. But they don't read as much to their kid, and they don't tend to spend as much time with them if that makes sense.

I've seen some who do, but in my experience a lot of times it's all about hanging out with

the homies over here and not so much about what do I need to do with my kid. I hate to say it, it's just the way their culture is. I have had some very nice African American families, but they're structurally very different from others. They don't have the role models, and I think that role models have a huge part to play. You have parents who aren't making the right choices; kids will tend to follow that.

Lucy spoke of abuse, "We didn't grow up with parents who swore, or cussed, or hit us," intimating that African American children are raised in households where this is common. Micky stated that she, "partly believes it has much to do with the students' home life. Some teachers, when not receiving homework all year, believe that that child may come from a home that is not so disciplined and structured."

Marie's response was brash, "Black parents seem preoccupied with everything else except their child's education, that is if there are even two parents in the house." She then offered some advice to the moms, "And I'm sorry ladies, get on the pill. Leave your legs closed." This was more of an afterthought when she stated that African American families typically had several children.

Miscellaneous. Rebecca mentioned students with special needs, "It's hard when we've got kids with special needs who are mainstreamed who don't have enough help." In addition to other things, Christine blamed video games, "I think video games are part of the problem, excessive screen time is part of the problem, you get used to instant feedback all the time." And finally, Cassandra blamed "learned helplessness." She stated: "If you are struggling, you don't understand something, if you're having trouble, ask questions. Ask your teachers. Ask somebody, but these kids don't do that. It's learned helplessness."

Question 5: Research also shows that African American students start their school education in kindergarten already academically behind their peers. To what do you attribute this?

Many of the answers for this question were the same as the answers for question four. Lack of vocabulary and poverty in the homes were two of the main points. Although academic language is not typically acquired before kids start school, the expectation of students being able to communicate at a five-year-old level does exist. Micky spoke of African American parents not talking to their kids:

Here's what I see, those kids usually come and they don't have as big of a vocabulary, and I don't think the parents in that culture talk to their kids as much as other cultures. They tend to just, like in the store, watch in the store, in other cultures parents will talk to their kids like, which one is bigger, but a lot of times Black parents are usually on their phones or talking with the person with them and the kids are just hanging out of the cart.

Christine also spoke of vocabulary:

The vocabulary in the beginning when they're young like that, that's what sets them apart, because they don't even have the ability to understand much. If they don't have the same vocabulary as the other kids, they won't learn on the same level as the other kids.

Roberta blamed a lack of attention at home for why a student does not have grade level vocabulary when starting kindergarten:

No attention at any level, any level. Not the way they eat, not the way they dress, not the way they perform, not the way they speak. No attention and you can see it. Many times, they come into kindergarten and they don't have vocabulary. And the vocabulary they do

have is filled with bad words. And I have respect for Ebonics, for the language, but there are so many mistakes.

Roxanne put it succinctly, "...because they don't have the early childhood education."

While Lee blamed media, "Students come to kindergarten having gotten all their vocabulary from television or YouTube since parents and caretakers use those as a babysitter."

Cassandra spoke regarding historically lower expectations for African Americans:

I'm just thinking that there's a possibility that unconsciously and unintentionally as kids start in school when they're younger there might be a lower expectation, but I really couldn't say if I have any idea why. But I do think there's a possibility that... that going way back historically that African Americans were thought to be less intelligent, and therefore expectations were lower.

Johanna shared her thoughts about daycare when she said, "Unless you have some really wonderful wonderful, wonderful daycare workers, they're not getting the attention they deserve. No matter what race they are, it's just a fact of life right now."

Question 6: What steps do you take in your classroom to ensure that African American males succeed at the same rate as their non-African American peers?

Some teachers named strategies they use to ensure that African American males succeed in their classroom. Rebecca advised that, "I pay attention to them, I listen to them, I talk to their parents. You know I go to their basketball games." Christine also reported getting to know the parents, "The first thing I do is I try and um get to know their parents and getting background info, and then I do a lot of observing."

Cassandra advised that students need to like what they are doing:

I want to see what they like, because let's face it, all kids have things they don't like. The

biggest thing for my kids is writing. So, it's just one of those things. So, what I end up doing is I pair something that they do like with something they don't like to try and build that... and then I also try to scaffold in experiences which would help to raise that bar. Because a lot of times it's lack of experience. If they never experienced it, they don't have any experience to draw from to then participate in or add to the lesson. So, I try to bring those experiences to them.

Praise is a strategy used by Roxanne:

I think praising their real accomplishments like winning a basketball game or getting a good score on a test. I'm not talking about little things but when you recognize real achievement, real hard work they love that. Any student loves that. That's the most important thing. When they know you care, they will work in your class. And then if they don't, you know something is wrong or something is going on.

Micky responded, "Just making it clear to kids that we care about them, that we expect them to work hard, that we expect them to do their best, and that we're going to call them on it when they don't."

Other teachers were proud to state they see no color in the classroom... that all students are the same. For example, Marie said, "I treat them like everybody else. I don't look at their ethnicity." Johanna reported, "I don't take any extra steps specifically for my Black students. I teach all of my students equally." Lucy said, "I don't really differentiate between my African American students and my other students. I don't see color when I'm teaching. I just give extra attention to whomever needs it regardless of what race they are."

Lee also stated that she doesn't see color:

I don't see color. I have a hard time with people asking me how many (different

ethnicities) do I have of this and that. If it weren't for me having to keep data, I wouldn't know. I literally have to go look in their files to figure it out, because looking at kids, you can't tell what race they are. I don't see color. I treat all my kids the same.

Roberta reportedly leaves culture out of the classroom:

Like eye contact with Asians. So, you learn all that, but you know, when you're in the classroom, I don't do that. They're all the same. They're all children. This one needs more than this one. I go by their learning ability. I honestly don't treat them any differently.

Question 7: How do you handle disruptive students?

There were a wide variety of answers to this question. Some teachers take a more comprehensive approach and get to know their students to better understand where the disruptive behavior might be coming from. Cassandra offered the following:

That would depend on the student and why they're doing it. Oftentimes they're doing it to get attention, but sometimes they do it because they don't really understand the task they've been given. You really have to take the time to know what is causing the underlying (issue)... and you may not know that the first time, it may take a few times of watching and asking questions and learning that child, but you need to know the cause so you can fix the behavior.

Rebecca is another teacher also believes that getting to know the students is instrumental in helping them with their disruptive behavior:

I would first check their records so I can see if there's a history of that but also to get more information about home life and also look at their work in class. It could simply be a case of where they're struggling because they don't understand what you're teaching,

and you need to back up then and help them to master the skill. If it's an issue of them wanting attention, then it becomes more about teaching them better ways to get the attention.

Johanna reported that she tries, "to find some kind of connection with the kid that has nothing to do with school. A lot of times that really helps their behavior, because if they have this connection with you, they feel more willing to please." While Roxanne advised she tries to build students' self-esteem. When her students are disruptive, she takes them outside and tells them:

You are so beautiful. I can see in your eyes you are so intelligent. You don't need to behave this way. In fact, I need your help. Do you think you could help me? You wouldn't believe how much this minimizes disruptions in the classroom. And I ask the Lord please help me so I don't use my anger to respond to a situation, because I will get nothing; teacher anger has no place in discipline. Now this is how I handle mild disruptions in class, but if a student's behavior is physical, such as throwing things in the classroom, I call the office right away.

Christine specifically referred to students with attention deficit hyper disorder (ADHD): If you have a student with ADHD, so you're constantly sort of like this at them (making a downward hand motion that indicates the child should settle down). You can't keep taking that child outside to talk and then bring him back in. You need to teach. You've got to handle it though so other kids don't ask why can he get away with it and I can't? You have to pick your battles, especially with the ADHD, you've got to pick your battles. Kids are smart, they will press your buttons, but you've got to draw a line, and I try to be fair with everybody.

Micky spoke about parents being a good ally when it comes to disruptive students:

For me, you always have the verbal warnings; if you get a chance, it's always better to pull a kid aside than to talk to them in front of their peers. But then the next thing out there is to get in touch with the parents as soon as possible, because the parent can be your ally. Not all parents, but a lot of parents can be your ally. If you establish a rapport with the parent, it can work wonders with the kid. And, so I have some parents that are in my contacts and I talk to them or text them all the time.

Lucy clearly delineated her progressive discipline plan:

We start with the checkmarks on the board, and one was a warning, and two you got sentences to write, and three you got detention and a call home, and four you got a referral, and after that it was straight referrals. If you got one referral you got one all the time because if you're a constant pain in my butt, you're going to get referrals until you get the point.

These next two teachers responded in an almost defeated way. Marie said this:

A lot of the behavior comes in the form of defiance. I refuse to do my work, you can't make me do that, school sucks... that type of thing. I usually talk to the student first to try to figure out where the behavior and attitude are coming from. If things don't improve, I contact parents. Sometimes kids are so disruptive that I can't get any teaching done. It becomes a case of do I sacrifice my entire class's education for one student? Sad to say that student has to become a nonissue for me so that everyone else can learn.

The second defeated-sounding teacher, Lee, reported:

I will say one thing, if the kid is really super, duper bad, and I try, and I try, and I try, and I try, then when it gets to the point I tell the kids, When you're sitting in the far back

corner, I've given up on you. That's the corner for administration to come in and talk to you, because I'm not going to let one kid cut it short for everybody. I've got to teach them all. You want so to sit in here and show off, I don't have time for that.

Surprisingly, only one teacher talked about Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Roberta said:

I've learned a lot since I'm in charge of it (PBIS). The process with that is the whole school has to have buy-in, they have to be included in the process. At our site, we all sit in on the meetings and we all decide what needs to happen. There are very few referrals at our site because sending kids to the office does not help, and so we are finding more ways to address behaviors and how to help these kids learn the social skills they need.

When I started first started there, it was common practice to send the kid to the office. If the kid was not doing what he should be or was causing harm or was out of control, we were okay with just calling and sending him home. Well, I disagree with that; all that does is teaches the child if I do this then I get to go home.

Question 8: In your opinion, who are more disruptive - boys or girls?

Most of the teachers commented about both boys' and girls' behavior, however, the majority of the teachers agreed that boys tend to be more disruptive.

Boys. Rebecca posited, "Boys I think are more aggressive in body language and disrespectful in the classroom towards each other."

"Girls don't challenge teachers as much as boys will," stated Cassandra.

Micky said, "Boys; they both instigate, and then one will say, 'he called me a (racial epithet)' and the other says, 'well, he called me a (a different racial epithet).' It's all this name calling. It's only the boys."

Lee reported, “Boys are much more disruptive as far as classroom behavior goes. Girls’ poor behavior usually manifests outside of the classroom.”

Christine agreed when she said, “Boys typically, I mean, they just are, but I think that’s just because boys tend to be a bit rambunctious.”

Lucy acknowledged, “From my experience, it’s boys. Boys tend to be more impulsive and hyper. They also are the majority of students who disrupt the class.”

And Johanna said, “Boys. On one occasion I had 19 girls and 12 boys, and I had a very difficult class. And later on, I discovered that I had eight, eight! boys with disturbing psychological problems.”

Girls. These three statements are from teachers who believe girls are more disruptive. Roberta opined, “I don’t know if you’d be surprised, but I’d say girls. Girls are gossiping and social and emotional, it’s just the age. Kids go through a lot of changes from middle school to high school.”

Roxanne said, “I would say the girls are more disruptive at this level. The girls are more chaotic. There is always drama and there’s anger and there’s crying.”

Finally, Marie reported, “Girls, because there are often fights, especially between the girls. They can get vicious. When that happens, it’s usually an automatic suspension, same for the boys.”

Question 9: Are there students from one or more specific ethnic backgrounds who are more disruptive than others? If so, who, and why do you think that is?

The teachers referred to children of three specific ethnic groups when responding to this question: African Americans, Hispanics, and White students, with African American students being the worst offenders, followed by Hispanic students, and then White students. Most

teachers referred only to African American students as being the most disruptive, while only one teacher referred to Whites as being most disruptive. The remaining three teachers spoke of at least two ethnic groups whose students were most disruptive.

African American students. These teachers only reported African Americans as being the ones to be most disruptive.

Lee:

From my experience, African Americans are the most disruptive. Someone once said, students who are loved at home come to school to learn and they make our job easier; students who are not loved at home come to school to be loved, and they make our job harder, but they also make our job more important... A lot of these kids are more likely to be in foster care, and I have foster kids in my class, and boy are they messed up! My brother and wife adopted foster kids. There's a lot of those nasty behaviors. Like when they're in class and you finally get to the part they didn't understand, and they're like, Oh, that's what you meant. You're like, Yeah, you couldn't have specifically shown me where you got lost or told me where you got lost because we just wasted a lot of time. But no, they'll act out, wait until your back is turned, and throw a paper airplane, or they'll stick their gum under their desk. They'll do like idiotic bullshit.

Roberta:

I would have to say that in all the years I've been teaching, my African American kids get in the most trouble. The problem is in this country, and it shocked me, the highest number of students who are suspended or expelled are four and five years old, and most of them are African American. They're babies. They don't have social skills, and they don't have someone to teach them social skills. You teach them how to access social

skills, their behaviors will go away.

Christine:

Blacks, but it does depend on the home environment. For instance, this school year a student destroyed the headphones they use in the computer lab. He wrapped the cord tightly, intentionally. He was manipulative, destroying everything. Then one day at the end of the school year, finally, I said, I know that you did this and this and this and this. Why? And he said, because my brothers treat me badly at home. On another occasion, a Black student destroyed headphones by cutting it in half. I said, what happened with this? I sent a note to the mother which read, Dear mother, will you be so kind as to pay for this or buy a new one, because we don't have enough; he won't have any to use. And when the child came to class the next day, and I asked him about the note, and he said, my mother ripped it up and threw it in the trash. That's where these kids get their behaviors from. I'm telling you, I'm telling you I don't remember in all my years that I had a positive response from a Black parent, period. And you are interviewing a teacher with so many years of experience. Very sad. And the students, I mean if you don't get attention at home, you've got to get attention somewhere, and negative attention is better than no attention at all.

Marie:

I believe it's Black students, but it's especially hard when there's no discipline at the site you're at, and you know why that is don't you? It's because of the feds. You know what happened years ago. We had gotten on the feds' radar because they said we were suspending and expelling too many Browns and Blacks. It was like look at our population, but it didn't matter. That's why they're gun shy. But that is my

experience.

Johanna:

Typically, it's Black boys. I think discipline is related to poverty and color.

I'm sure it is. If you look at it, it's terrible, well it's not terrible to say, if you look at the homes, even impoverished Hispanics generally have a father in the home. I hate...it sounds so stereotypical, but it just is. But I think that's the way their culture is. Fathers are not in the home, and that affects the boys' behavior.

Roxanne:

It's the Black community that has the behavior issues, and it's because of the incarcerations rates. It's because they've been taught that they don't have to be responsible. And it perpetuates itself. And too, you have to wonder what's being said by the male influence to their mother, and are the kids seeing their mother being beaten or are they being abused? I've had to make several CPS (Child Protection Services) reports over the years.

White students. Lucy was the only teacher who reported that White students were the most disruptive of all ethnicities:

I have the most problems with the White kids. I think there's still a certain amount of, what's the word I'm searching for here... entitlement. I can do what I want, you can't tell me what to do, you know kind of thing. When I think about my classes, and they're pretty well mixed racially, a lot of times the kids causing the most problems are White. My dad is going to get you fired, or something.

More than one ethnic group discussed.

Micky:

It's Hispanics and African Americans. Some Whites but not nearly as many, and I often used to wonder whether or not it was me. Whether I was seeing it wrong, but when other White kids would jump in and try and help, it was obviously not me. So, it was those kids.

Rebecca:

I don't know that it's so much an ethnicity thing, it is but it isn't. I think a lot of it has to do with that they're just brought up differently. I've had students from all ethnic backgrounds disrupt the class. I will say, a majority of them are African American. I've also seen a high number of poor Caucasian students disrupt the classroom as well. Not having everything you need to succeed at home almost guarantees that that student won't succeed in school either.

Cassandra:

In many cases it's Black Americans, and in many other cases it's Latin Americans, because their parents go back to the same home structure. The parents need to work and earn the bread. There's no father or father figure, then the children grow with other adults who abuse them. And the children misbehave as an escape. Everything is a chain, a vicious circle.

Question 10: Which ethnicity/ies of students are most likely to succeed, and why do you think that is?

This question elicited a variety of responses. Some teachers named just one ethnic group as being the most likely to succeed, others named more than one, and one teacher comfortably shared whom she thought would be the least likely to succeed.

Asian students. Roxanne reported, "Any of your Asians; I think they just hold their kids

more accountable. Those kids are better behaved, they're just higher academically, but I also see that in a lot of Caucasian households. Actually, across all of them, typically the kids who do the best are the kids whose parents read to them, they ask them how their day was, they take them places regularly. But, the Asian population, those kids are usually at the top. The parents are very proud of their children. They see in their child a mirror of themselves. They didn't have the opportunities to succeed, so they want their children to succeed and they provide a lot of support.

Christine stated:

I think Asian students are more likely to succeed because it's ingrained in them from the start that education is extremely important. Their parents often have them involved at a young age, not just with learning, but cultural things also so that their child is well-rounded. And their families are usually intact. Most often, they come from two-parent households... and their parents are much more involved in their education than parents from some of the other ethnicities.

Marie also referred to Asian students:

To me it is for the most part any ethnic groups of Asian origin have always been... it's proven in our scores and everything that they're more successful. I know again there's a cultural thing and there's a family expectation to do well in school and to behave, because they're also well-behaved kids. We had in the past, not so much now, but we still have a very, strong Hmong base. It's wonderful because Hmong means mountain people and they don't have a country and they have all these wonderful stories. And um but also I have Filipino kids in my classroom, but as far as the Asians in general, they seem to do better for whatever reason.

Cassandra also agreed that Asians are most likely to succeed, “I think Asians, because it’s what is expected of them. The children are so polite, they do their work, they’re a teacher’s dream. I just wish they’d speak more in class. It’s difficult to know what they’re thinking sometimes.”

African American students. Lee reported:

This might surprise you, but I think African Americans could be most successful. They have had a lot of struggles, but then there was the civil rights movement and all this. We have shown that in the areas of science and engineering African Americans have been very successful.

White students. Micky stated, “Caucasian students from good backgrounds, again from my experience. Their parents are much more involved in their child's studies. They attend board meetings, school events and are very informed with what is going on.”

Lucy opined, “I think White kids are most likely to succeed in life. I hate to say, but they seem to have more advantages than other (ethnic) groups do.”

Hispanic students. Rebecca reported, “Mexican American students have proven to succeed. Their parents come from Mexico for the American dream, and their kids feel obligated to be successful.”

More than one ethnicity named. These teachers named students from at least to ethnicities who were likely to succeed. Roberta said:

I see growing expectations of Hispanics. I think it’s basically the need to prove themselves. And their parents are seeing how important school is. If you really want to get into the obvious it will be the Asians, the Indians, and that’s all because of the parents. They’re always going to be successful. It’s a cultural thing, and that is passed

down. That's going to be your top, but in general with the community we work in, I think that you're going to get a lot more Hispanics becoming successful, because there is that push.

And Johanna stated, "I think it's a toss-up between White kids and Asian kids. They both do well in school, although White kids tend to get in more trouble than Asian kids. But, again, it depends on the home environment."

Although I did not pose the question to the participants regarding ethnicities least likely to succeed, Marie felt obligated to share anyway:

If I had to say who was the least likely to succeed, I would say Black students. If the messages they are getting at home is that education isn't important, or that their parents don't have time for them to teach them, then they come to school with that attitude. There's no reason for me to learn, and if my own family doesn't think I need to learn, why would my teachers want to help me? What good is it for anyway?

Conclusion

This chapter served to inform the reader about the findings of the study. The participants were eager to share their perceptions and opinions on numerous topics. Discussion regarding the findings and whether or not they address the research questions will take place in Chapter 5. In addition, Chapter 5 will also include discussion regarding the literature and its relevancy to the findings.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The focus of my dissertation was White teachers' perceptions of the African American male students they educate in their classes. Specifically, I was interested in the teachers' thoughts about why so many African American males become disengaged in class (Allen, 2017). By giving teachers a forum to share their perspectives, I was able to answer my research questions.

Themes

As stated in previous chapters, five themes emerged from the analysis:

- Poverty
- Absent family members, especially fathers
- Lack of vocabulary and starting school already academically behind their White peers
- Teachers' negative perceptions about African Americans.
- Cultural mismatch between teachers and their African American male students

Poverty. Although the term poverty or references to poverty were not mentioned in any of the questions posed to my participants, many of them referred to poverty in their responses. This was especially the case in their responses to my questions regarding why there is an achievement gap between White students and African American students (Carter & Welner, 2013) and why African American boys tend to be the most disruptive in school (Busby, Lambert, & Ialongo, 2013).

Students living in low socioeconomic households become disengaged from their studies because they come to school hungry or worried about whether or not there will be food on the table at night. Christine expressed the challenge clearly when she said, "...it's hard to focus, and if you're hungry, tired, don't have your own bed, all of that comes into it." Johanna

acknowledged that students from impoverished homes do not eat as healthily as their middle-class peers, because healthy food is more expensive. Micky opined that it is difficult to focus on homework when one is concerned about whether there will food on the table.

Students are also impacted if they have parents who have to work two or three jobs just to provide for their families; this is especially true of students who live in single-parent homes. Cassandra opined that when adults are not available in the home - either mentally, because they are so tired from working, or physically, because they are working – it places students' education at risk. Their parents are not able to take them to the zoo, the park, museums, or local libraries. They do not read to or talk to their children, which prevents them from learning the vocabulary necessary to prepare for preschool or kindergarten. They are not able to attend school functions or parent/teacher/student conferences.

Jensen (2009) wrote that children who grow up in poverty-stricken households are likely to suffer from chronic stress disorder. This manifests in the classroom when students will display impulsive behavior such as speaking out of turn, getting up without permission, and forgetting or not demonstrating the knowledge of what should be done next. Middle-class teachers who have never experienced poverty most likely will not recognize the behavior as coming from a place of despair, but rather, they may assume that the student is being willfully defiant.

Jensen (2009) wrote of four risk factors that affect children living in poverty:

- Emotional and social challenges
- Acute and chronic stressors
- Cognitive lags
- Health and safety issues

As soon as children are born, they need to form healthy attachments to their parents. If this is hindered in any way, it negatively impacts future relationships with teachers and peers (Szewczyk-Sokolowski, Bost, and Wainwright, 2005). Children born into poverty are at a risk of being raised by parents or caretakers who keep them at an emotional distance. Evans (2004) wrote that caregivers from low-income homes “tend to be overworked, overstressed, and authoritarian with children, using the same harsh disciplinary strategies used by their own parents. They often lack warmth and sensitivity.” When infants do not bond with a warm, loving caregiver, it diminishes their abilities to form healthy bonds later in life.

Depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of powerlessness afflict parents of low-income households. This often trickles down to their children causing the children to suffer neglect and negativity at the hands of their parents (Jensen, 2009). In addition, researchers Keegan-Eamon and Zuehl (2001) discovered that single mothers in impoverished homes are so stressed that they often take it out in the form of physical aggression towards their children. Emery and Laumann-Billings (1998) reported that children living in poor households suffer from household violence, all types of disruptions to their lives, and separation from adults more often than their middle class peers.

Jensen (2009) wrote that children from unstable, insecure homes lack the ability to successfully forge positive peer relationships in school. This makes it less likely for them to take risks with their learning, to persist when they are struggling with content, and to collaborate with their peers.

Jensen (2009) listed behaviors that children living in poverty often display at school:

- “Acting-out” behaviors
- Impatience and impulsivity

- Gaps in politeness and social graces
- A more limited range of behavioral responses
- Inappropriate emotional responses
- Less empathy for others' misfortunes (p. 19).

He advises that instead of teachers being surprised by these behaviors and admonishing students who behave in these ways, teachers need to expect that low-income children will demonstrate the behaviors. Teachers must decide to teach and model correct behavior. Teachers need to understand that these students are not purposely acting out to get a rise out of them; rather, they act in these ways because they were never taught the concepts of cooperation, patience, embarrassment, empathy, gratitude, and forgiveness. These are all vital for a successfully run classroom (Jensen, 2009, p. 19).

Jensen (2009) further wrote that students living in poverty suffer from all sorts of stress, but persistent chronic stress severely impacts a child's well-being. In all facets of their lives – physical, psychological, emotional, and cognitive – children of sustained poverty constantly struggle with poor peer relationships, constant discipline and reprimands due to their behavior and academic problems. Bradley and Corwyn (2002) supported this when they wrote that children living in stressful homes carry that stress with them to school, where it takes on the form of disruptive behavior and the inability to develop socially and academically.

Researchers Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, and Pollak (2015) reported on a study conducted to determine if poverty had a physiological impact on children's brains. The findings suggested that it does. A summary of the study is below:

This study tests whether structural brain development may mediate the relationship between childhood poverty and impaired academic performance. Magnetic resonance

imaging brain scans of 389 economically diverse and typically developing children aged 4 to 22 years were analyzed. Children from families with limited financial resources displayed systematic structural differences in the frontal lobe, temporal lobe, and hippocampus. Developmental differences in the frontal and temporal lobes may explain as much as 20% of low-income children's achievement deficits. (p. 823).

Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, and Pollak (2015) suggested that policies and reforms for poverty and education need to be examined and updated to address the detrimental income inequality. It is not enough to just send the children of poverty to preschool; rather, efforts should be made to improve the environments in which the children live.

Jensen (2009) recommends that schools also should consider changing their environments to reduce stress for students. These recommendations include changing the bell system from bells to songs for transitions, minimize homework or incorporate time into the school day for it, include more physical activities and games into instructional time, and include creative projects for students that coincide with their learning.

All hope need not be lost according to Milne and Plourde (2006). They wrote of a teacher who mostly taught low socioeconomic students. She was happy to report that several of them achieved prominent levels of academic success; this was attributed to the fact that in spite of living in poverty, their parents emphasized the importance of education. They had their children reading and studying every night and limited and monitored screen time. Some schools in low-income districts do offer parenting classes in an effort to teach parents how to help their children succeed in school. More schools need to offer such classes. Better yet, to achieve high attendance rates at these classes, I would recommend offering transportation to and from the classes, babysitting services at the site, and a meal for families who attend.

Jensen (2009) wrote that schools that take a holistic approach to educate children living in poverty provide health and medical services, an enriching and challenging curriculum, ways in which to teach children better coping skills, and the means to enable students to develop and maintain healthy relationships with staff and peers (p. 44).

Absent family members. Most teachers posited that African American families often have absent parents, specifically fathers. This negatively impacts their children, particularly African American boys (McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013). Reasons given for absent parents/fathers include drug addiction, incarceration, and apathy.

Lucy attributed a lack of parent involvement to the fact that “their own parents are either in jail or are off doing drugs somewhere.” Roxanne opined “Blacks have absentee parents because of the laws in our country that have demonized crack cocaine over other drugs. There are so many in prison that should not have gone ever.” And Roberta stated: “... their parents rarely show up for conferences or to any school functions for that matter. It’s like they don’t care.”

Lack of vocabulary. Children from low-income homes typically have limited vocabulary; this is because their caregivers speak using shorter and simpler sentences. In addition, these children are often just given commands; there is a lot less dialogue between child and caregiver in these homes (Weizman and Snow, 2001). As a result, instead of knowing about 13,000 words by the time they start kindergarten, as typical children do, children living in poverty start school woefully behind their peers from middle-class homes (Beck, & McKeown, 2007; Huttenlocher, 1998).

Several researchers have suggested that African Americans’ dialect differs from White people’s and that African American English (AAE) is often viewed as deficient (Bailey, 2001;

Labov, 2001; & Zeigler, 2001); school districts are therefore quick to refer African American children to special needs and intervention classes, because they are presumed to be “suffering from a linguistic affliction rather than the fact that they were employing different speech norms that have been the inevitable by-product of slavery and racial segregation” (Baugh, 2001).

Linguist John Baugh (2008) explained that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a variety of standard English that developed when African Americans needed to communicate with each other and Europeans in the days before the United States became a nation. He gave an example of what it might sound like in the classroom: “She be done did her homework” as opposed to “She has already completed her homework.” (p. 102).

Delpit (1986), an African American educator, posits that some students who speak a different language or dialect may very well be competent in Standard English but choose instead to revert back to the language of their community since they identify with them more. Delpit advises that teachers should embrace the linguistic forms that students bring into the classroom and not denigrate the students for their use of these forms. Students will learn Standard English when they know they are respected for what they can offer and when they are not under the threat of correction as they try to learn it. In addition, teachers can refrain from stereotyping students with differing language patterns by learning from their students and their students’ cultures.

Krashen’s (1982) work focused on second language acquisition for students and opined that students pick up a language more easily if they are immersed in that language but are not being forced on a conscious level to learn the nuances of that language. He then added that this is not necessarily true of all people; some people did not technically acquire the new language through immersion. He attributed this to students’ lack of motivation, overanxiety, or the stress

of having to learn a new language.

Delpit (1986) is an advocate for a writing process that focuses on skills and not just creative processes. She posits that when it comes to writing, White teachers instruct their students to let the thought processes flow and not worry about the technical aspects of writing; they are more concerned with writing fluency. Delpit believes that African American students already have creative writing fluency as evidenced in their writing of rap songs and their ability to create and maintain dialogue that is different than the standard English that White teachers and students use. She strongly believes that African American students lack the technical skills that would prevent them from succeeding in college and beyond and that it is incumbent upon teachers of all races to acknowledge this deficiency in the curriculum and teach African American students technical writing skills.

Students who are learning how to read - who can recognize the words, but perhaps struggle with the Standard English pronunciation - should not be repeatedly interrupted until they pronounce things correctly. It is important to keep the focus on reading and reading comprehension. Repeated corrections by the teacher will only serve to deter students from trying to read (Berdan, 1980).

Teachers' negative perceptions about African Americans. Although I expected perhaps a couple of teachers to voice negativity towards African Americans (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013), I was disheartened to hear how many had such negative opinions. The following aspersions were culled from participant responses discussed in Chapter 4.

When speaking about socioeconomics:

Marie: Have you ever listened to a kid from the ghetto or poor background tell a story?

When speaking about lack of vocabulary:

Roberta went off on a tangent that eventually had nothing to do with vocabulary:

And the way they dress, and the way they bring their jacket, dirty dirty dirty dirty!

Micky: Black parents are usually on their phones or talking with the person with them and the kids are just hanging out of the cart.

Roberta: And the vocabulary they do have is filled with bad words.

When speaking about lack of parental involvement:

Marie: And I'm sorry to say Black people are the worst.

Roberta: Their parents rarely show up for conferences or to any school functions for that matter. It's like they don't care.

Lucy: Their own parents are either in jail or are off doing drugs somewhere.

When speaking about the structure of home life:

Marie: Black parents seem preoccupied with everything else except their child's education, that is if there are even two parents in the house. And I'm sorry ladies, get on the pill. Leave your legs closed.

When speaking of how to handle disruptive students:

Lucy: If you got one referral you got one all the time because if you're a constant pain in my butt, you're going to get referrals until you get the point. Lee: When you're sitting in the far back corner, I've given up on you. That's the corner for administration to come in and talk to you, because I'm not going to let one kid cut it short for everybody.

When speaking about African Americans being the most disruptive:

Lee: A lot of these kids are more likely to be in foster care, and I have foster kids

in my class, and boy are they messed up. There's a lot of those nasty behaviors. They'll do like idiotic bullshit.

Christine: I'm telling you I don't remember in all my years that I had a positive response from a Black parent, period.

When speaking about absent fathers:

Roxanne: They're behind the eight ball, especially if the man is not in the house, and like I said, usually he's not.

Rebecca: If you look at it, it's terrible, well it's not terrible to say, if you look at the homes, even impoverished Hispanics generally have a father in the home.

Although most teachers would not voice these things aloud, at least not to their students and their students' families, children are very astute; they can pick up on their teachers' implicit biases, and that has detrimental effects on their education (Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne, & Sibley, 2016).

Cultural mismatch between teachers and their African American male students.

To my surprise, some teachers actually acknowledged that they are not in tune with African American culture, and acknowledged that this could be impacting achievement for these students in their classroom (Kozlowski, 2015). Johanna stated "Possibly one of the big reasons is a disconnect between the students' daily lives and what they're being asked to study in school. It's a gap between the students' real lives and what we're asking them to learn." Christine advised that African American boys' reality is so different from teachers' reality and that it is a "big turnoff to them."

Micky said that she loves having African American students in her class, but that she does feel the disconnect. She lamented, "I worry about it; like ugh how do I connect with these

kids?” She was also the only teacher to mention the cost of college and lack of African American teachers in the classroom. She said, “College has become so expensive, that fewer minorities are attending. This leads to fewer teachers of color in the classrooms to whom students of color can relate.”

Delpit (1986) reported on the decline of minority teachers and wrote that there are many reasons for this: more opportunities in other careers, low salaries, unseemly working conditions, and the fact that teachers are not held in such high esteem as they used to be (p. 106).

Dee (2004) conducted an experiment to determine if the ethnicity of teachers impacted students of the same and different ethnicities. He found that in larger classrooms, students achieved higher test scores when their teacher was the same race as they were. For example, African American students scored better when their teachers were African American, and White students scored better when their teachers were White. However, he reported that in classes with a smaller number of students, students achieved higher scores regardless of the race of their teacher. This was attributed to the fact that teachers had more time to get to know their students and to build trusting relationships with them.

Not only do White teachers need to build trust with their African American male students, but it is imperative to establish a rapport with their parents. African American parents may be distrustful of White educators based on past experiences involving their children and White teachers, or even based on the school experiences of the African American parents themselves. They are aware that too often African American children - boys in particular - are referred for discipline and for special education more often than their White peers (Tatum, 2008). So, when their child's White teacher approaches them with what they perceive to be negative news, they tend to question the motives and abilities of the White teacher.

Tatum (2008) recommends that White teachers are honest with their African American students' parents. These teachers may want to acknowledge that their motives might seem suspect but then give informed reasons why they are not. Tatum also recommends that should a White teacher be questioned about their actions or motives, they should refrain from taking offense and instead ask African American parents what it was that made them question the teacher. Open dialogue between White teachers and their African American students' parents creates trust and ensures that both parties have the student's best educational interests in mind.

Interestingly, a few teachers mentioned they don't see color in the classroom, meaning that they do not treat African American students any differently than anyone else. While on the surface this may seem appropriate, it is in fact doing a disservice to African American students. Wang, Castro, and Cunningham (2014) posit that teachers who maintain this ideology believe that all students have the ability to succeed based solely on their ability, and that race has no effect whatsoever (p. 213). Neville, Yeung, Spanierman, Todd, and Reed (2011) wrote that when racial color-blindness is instituted in the classroom, whether implicitly or explicitly, the teacher is more apt to teach from a culturally insensitive position.

Sue (2013) substantiated that "for Whites, to acknowledge or see race is to risk the possibility of being perceived as racist, so great effort is expended to avoid talking about race in order to appear fair and unprejudiced" (p. 666). It seemed that when I was interviewing my participants, many of them wanted to convince me they held no racist views by insisting they do not see color in the classroom. They were not aware that by viewing all students as being the same, they were doing a disservice to their African American students.

Summary

My research involved interviewing ten White female teachers to learn their perceptions of

African American male students in their classrooms. I intended to determine if those perceptions influenced African American students and their disengagement from their education. The following three research questions guided my study:

Research Question 1 - How does the disengagement of African American boys impact their educational experiences in the K-12 public school system?

When African American boys become disengaged in school, they become disruptive in the classroom, which impacts not only their learning, but everyone else's also. This results in an excessive number of referrals for discipline, since research shows African American boys are disciplined at a much higher rate than any other demographic. Research also shows that referrals for discipline lead to African American boys' disengagement from school. This is a vicious cycle.

Some teachers are quick to blame students for their perceived poor behavior, when in reality, it is the teachers who are culpable. Pollock (2008) gave an example of some teachers she knew lamenting the fact that the majority of students who cut classes and wandered the school's hallways were African American. These teachers tended to blame everyone but themselves. It was the students' delinquency, the parent's negative attitudes about school, or administrators and security guards who were not doing their jobs properly. In reality, it was the teachers' actions that caused the African American students to be anywhere but in class. Whether the teachers explicitly sent them out of class or the teachers' perceived (real?) negative attitudes towards their African American students (p. 26). Pollock posited that these teachers missed important opportunities to explore their relationships and attitudes towards their African American students.

Diamond (2008) concurred when he wrote that teachers of African American students frequently blame students' academic failures on families whom they believe do not put enough

emphasis into the importance of school. Instead, teachers need to take responsibility for their teaching and question themselves when students of any race are not successful in their classroom.

Research Question 2 - Do the perceptions of White female teachers influence the disengagement of African American boys?

I can answer this with a resounding yes. Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge (2015) are among many researchers who argue that, whether meaning to or not, White female teachers' opinions of their African American male students lead to students' disengagement. This disengagement results in lower comprehension of the curriculum, lower grades, lower self-esteem and eventual failing or dropping out of school. This in turn impacts not only the student and his future family, but also society as a whole.

Research Question 3 - What contributes to some African American male students' disengagement from school?

As the participants of this study have shared, numerous factors contribute to some African American male students' disengagement from school. These include poverty, absent parents/fathers from the home, the fact that the students start school already behind their peers due to lack of vocabulary, the cultural disconnect between White teachers and African American male students, and White teachers' perceptions of their African American students.

What teachers did not report, but became evident from the study, was that teachers' opinions of and biases toward African American males detrimentally impact their academic engagement.

Limitations

Although I made conscious efforts to conduct a study with no foreseeable issues,

limitations still existed. First, the participants were from two local school districts whose demographics are not representative of school districts around the country. Second, some of the participants were known to the researcher which might have influenced their answers. Third, a sample size of more than ten teachers would provide a better view of their perceptions of African American male students' disengagement in school.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Noguera (2008) wrote that students who receive the most frequent and severe punishments in schools “are students who have learning disabilities, are from single-parent households, are in foster care, are homeless, or qualify for free or reduce-priced lunch. In many schools these students are disproportionately students of color.” (p. 132). Students who act out because their needs are not being met, are the students targeted for their poor behavior. Noguera reported that discipline in schools is usually punitive and relies on humiliation and exclusion. The disruptive child is often admonished in front of his peers and is then either sent out of the classroom or forbidden to participate in recess or particular activities.

Noguera (2008) also wrote that when teachers handle disruptive students in these ways, students lose interest in school and end up becoming even more disruptive. Noguera believes that teachers need to analyze why the majority of the students with behavior problems are minorities, and instead of taking the knee-jerk reaction of imposing punitive disciplinary action, teachers should be taking the opportunity to explore why the student is acting that way, what needs are not being met, and what the best course of action is to ensure that said student is learning.

Lindsey and Lindsey (2016) wrote that “Cultural proficiency is about serving the needs of all students, with a laser-like focus on historically underserved students” (p. 50). These authors advised that when schools and staff either do not acknowledge or refuse to acknowledge

the barriers that exist between educators and students and families from other cultures, then students from those cultures will not benefit from the same educational opportunities as their White peers.

Figure 5 shows what authors Terrell and Lindsey (2009) referred to as the Cultural Proficiency Continuum. Cultural Destructiveness, the column to the far left, indicates the worst possible place in which a school district wants to find themselves. Educators that fall within this column are dangerous for students of other cultures. They believe that references to other cultures do not belong in anything related to education. When students do not see themselves and their culture reflected in classroom learning, they tend to lose interest and become disengaged with their learning (Lew & Nelson, 2016). Cultural Proficiency, on the opposite end of the spectrum, is what all districts and educators should aspire to.

THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY CONTINUUM: DEPICTING UNHEALTHY AND HEALTHY PRACTICES					
Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindness	Cultural Precompetence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
COMPLIANCE-BASED TOLERANCE FOR DIVERSITY			TRANSFORMATION FOR EQUITY		
Cultural destructiveness: Seeking to eliminate references to the culture of “others” in all aspects of the school and in relationships with their communities.	Cultural incapacity: Trivializing “other” communities and seeking to make them appear to be wrong.	Cultural blindness: Pretending not to see or acknowledge the status and culture of marginalized communities and choosing to ignore the experiences of such groups within the school and community.	Cultural precompetence: Increasingly aware of what you and the school don’t know about working with marginalized communities. It is at this key level of development that you and the school can move in a positive, constructive direction, or you can vacillate, stop, and possibly regress.	Cultural competence: Manifesting your personal values and behaviors and the school’s policies and practices in a manner that is inclusive with marginalized cultures and communities that are new or different from you and the school.	Cultural proficiency: Advocating for lifelong learning in order to be increasingly effective in serving the educational needs of the cultural groups served by the school. Holding the vision that you and the school are instruments for creating a socially just democracy.

Figure 5. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum.

Source: Terrell and Lindsey, 2009.

Jenkins (2018) wrote that for educators to become culturally proficient and responsive, they need to recognize their role in the classroom, understand the differences between their culture and their students’ cultures, and develop cultural consciousness by getting to know their students and the cultures from which they come.

Ferguson (2008) reported on a study conducted to determine the best way to reach students of all colors in the classroom. He identified four categories of teaching styles used in classrooms: high help, high perfectionism; high help, low perfectionism; low help, high perfectionism; and low help, low perfectionism (p. 78). Three of the above impact minority

students. Low help, high perfectionism, which is the teaching style found in classrooms mostly comprised of minorities, creates an atmosphere of misbehavior and feelings of worthlessness. This is because the teacher delivers the instruction, offers little to no help on subsequent work, and then expects students to achieve well. Low help, low perfectionism is the worse teaching style there is, because the teachers rarely help the students with their work, nor do they expect much from their students.

Ferguson (2008) advised that high help, high perfectionism is the teaching style that works best, especially for students of color. Teachers deliver instruction and make it known that they are more than happy to assist their students when they struggle with the content. In addition, these teachers encourage their lower achieving students to participate and answer questions, allowing extra time for the students to formulate their thoughts with no pressure from the teacher or the rest of the class. Finally, teachers with this teaching style expect nothing but the best from all of their students, again, by reinforcing the idea that they are there to provide help and support in any way necessary to help their students succeed.

Hawley (2008) recommends that school staffs work together to create school-wide reforms that address student diversity so that all students have the opportunity to learn and so that all students and staff learn to value the diversity that students have to offer. He warns that not everyone will be on board at first, but that they most likely will come around when evidence is gathered in the form of confidential student surveys and from various data that demonstrate racial disparity in areas such as academics and discipline (p. 50).

When teachers take the time to get to know their students and their students' home lives, families, and culture, students have a much better chance of success (Garcia, 2008; Wyman & Kashatok, 2008). Garcia reported on a school where teachers sent home teacher/parent journals

on a weekly basis. This gave the teacher and the parents the opportunity to remain in constant contact, and it became something the parents started looking forward to. Teachers from another site made frequent home visits in efforts to connect with the families and the communities in which they lived. Making the extra effort to reach out to school families helps build trust between schools and families and creates a school environment that is enjoyable for all.

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Appendix A

Interview questions

Question 1: How do you define student engagement?

Question 2: How do you know when your students are engaged in the classroom?

Question 3: What is your idea of a successfully run classroom?

Question 4: Data shows that African American students are behind their peers in academic achievement. To what do you attribute this gap?

Question 5: Research also shows that African American students start their school education already academically behind their peers. To what do you attribute this?

Question 6: What steps do you take in your classroom to ensure that African American males succeed at the same rate as their non-African American peers?

Question 7: How do you handle disruptive students?

Question 8: In your opinion, who are more disruptive - boys or girls?

Question 9: Are there students from one or more specific ethnic backgrounds who are more disruptive than others? If so, who, and why do you think that is?

Question 10: Which ethnicity/ies of students are most likely to succeed, and why do you think that is?