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Voices from the Middle: Examining the Lived Schooling Experiences of Black Males in a Predominantly White Middle School

Donham Douglas Kauffman, Jr.
University of South Carolina

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by

Donham Douglas Kauffman, Jr.

Bachelor of Arts
University of South Carolina, 1993

Master of Arts in Teaching
The Citadel, 1995

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Accepted by:

Nathaniel Bryan, Major Professor

Aisha Haynes, Committee Member

Rhonda Jefferies, Committee Member

Yasha Becton, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Dedication

This research and all that has led up to its creation would not have been possible without the support of numerous professors, colleagues, and most importantly my wife, Jennifer Kauffman, who has been my constant editor and cheerleader and for whom I am eternally grateful.

Abstract

Being labelled as qualifying for special assistance simply by being a Black male is common, as with five Black males at my professional educational institution. This study elicits the voices of these Black males in such areas as their personal perception of academic achievement, school improvement needs, and staff misunderstandings of Black males. Because this research elicits voices of Black males missing from the current research literature (Howard, 2014), the participant researcher decided to use these ethnographic accounts to glimpse into the minds and schooling experiences of these students. This study should advance the research literature on Black male students and benefit the faculty and staff members who work with them.

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Research Review

Introduction

Imagine walking into a new middle school on the first day of school. As a Black male student, you look around at your nearly 300 slightly scared student fellows all waiting for class rolls to be read to meet their new teachers and fellow classmates. You see only five other students who are Black and male. Of these five faces, none of them came from your elementary school and the only knowledge you have of these students comes from having played with and against each other in AAU Basketball. Then add to this situation the fact that as these five Black male students examine the schooling environment they only see a predominance of White teachers, administrators, including the participant researcher, and students. The teacher demographics correlate to the national data, which suggest that 76% of teachers are female, and 80% are also White. (US Department of Education, 2016).

As the school year begins, you realize that these well-meaning White professionals have also labeled all five of you based on state testing scores and past educational and behavioral performance. They further label you as those who need both academic and social guidance and qualify for "special assistance." The aforementioned scenario describes the schooling experiences of Jay, Taye, Ike, Case, and Hank at a predominantly White middle school in South Carolina.

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The schooling experiences of these five Black males are consistent with other studies (Bryan, 2017; Hotchkins, 2016; Howard, 2014) on Black male students in K–12 schools that document their experiences in predominantly White schooling environments. Similar to the experiences of the five Black males in my study, Black males are often stereotyped and described as "unintelligent," "lazy," and "disciplinary problems"—at the least (Howard, 2014). As a result, they are disproportionately targeted for suspension and expulsion from school, which pushes them out of school into the juvenile justice system. Scholars refer to this phenomenon as the *school-to-prison pipeline* (Bryan, 2017; Schott Foundation, 2015; Sykes, Piquero, Gioviano & Pittman, 2015). In response to this brief discursive background, this study seeks to elicit the voices of five Black male sixth-graders to investigate their perception of their schooling experiences at a predominately White middle school.

Problem of Practice

There are several problems inherent in both the practice and educational literature on Black male students in middle school settings in the United States. At my school, Blue Ridge middle school, only 3% of students self-identify as both Black and male. They are not often provided opportunities to share their experiences about school and the schooling process; they need a voice. Similarly, these students continue to perform disproportionally "lower" than their White counterparts and continue to have a disproportionate number of behavioral referrals. These disparaging outcomes align with research studies that have suggested that Black males underperform in many content areas, and as previously suggested, are disproportionately suspended and expelled in comparison to their White male counterparts (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Howard, 2014;

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Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz & Watson, 2014) and struggle with the transition from elementary to middle school (Akos, Rose & Orthner, 2015). However, few scholars have explored the institutional factors, as articulated by Black male students, which perpetuate such outcomes regarding Black males. These factors include culturally unresponsive teachers and schooling practices that became responsible for these outcomes among Black males (Bryan, 2017).

The staff and faculty members at my school see Black males from deficit-based instead of strength-based perspectives as demonstrated by their acceptance of Payne's (2005) work during a recent professional development. They focus on student weaknesses and perceived inabilities instead of their strengths and abilities in classrooms. These teachers also ignore institutional factors that perpetuate academic and behavioral issues among Black male students.

Most of the studies on Black male students have focused on those in high school (Douglas, 2016; Harper, 2015; Howard, 2016; Jackson et al., 2014; Warren, 2016). Therefore, undertheorized in the extant literature are studies eliciting the voices and schooling experiences of Black males in middle school settings, particularly those in sixth grade, which is a transition year from elementary to middle school.

Finally, given the complexity of the sixth-grade year and a growing body in the literature on transition years in both middle and high schools (Akos et al., 2015; Duchesne, Ratelle & Roy, 2012; Goldstein, Boxer & Rudolph, 2015), few studies have been conducted on the transitional experiences of Black males from elementary to middle school or explored the transitional experiences of Black male students from elementary school to high school.

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the research is to elicit the voices of five Black male sixth graders regarding their schooling experiences at a predominantly White middle school and to lay the foundation to help a predominantly White teaching and administration staff to think about ways to work against the intergenerational legacies of negative views of Black male students and thus better support them in a middle school environment.

Research Question

The following research question has been advanced for this study:

1. What are the perceptions of Black male sixth graders regarding their schooling experiences at a predominantly White middle school?

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is twofold. First, this research builds on other research studies on Black males that have elicited their voices in secondary schools (Douglas, 2016; Harper, 2015; Howard, 2014; Jackson et al., 2014; Warren, 2016). Because most of the current research in this area has been done in high school and university settings (Douglas, 2016; Harper, 2015; Howard, 2014; Jackson et al., 2014; Warren, 2016), it is important to add a middle school perspective to this area of research. Second, this research builds upon other research studies that have problematized the schooling experiences of Black children in predominantly White schooling spaces (Bryan, 2017; Hope, Skoog & Jagers, 2015; Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015).

Rationale

The rationale for this ethnographic research is based on the need to better understand what Black male sixth-grade students experience in predominantly White

middle schools. Current school-wide data indicate a lack of success among males in general and Black males specifically. These data can be inherently subjective and influenced by institutional racism as they focus on state testing scores, individual classroom grades, attendance, and discipline records. Whereas school initiatives focus on student issues believed to cause this lack of success, current research has suggested that these data are contaminated by cultural bias and are the product of school environments that many see as replete with macroaggressions and institutional racism (Hotchkins, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Warren, Douglas & Howard, 2016).

Prior to this research, I examined institutional processes and programs to determine if any changes were needed. Though outwardly the policies and procedures of my educational setting were within the state and national guidelines, there were a number of areas of concern both academically and within the disciplinary data. Over the past 10 years, my educational setting has not been helping marginalized populations of students find success both academically and socially. Student population, such as sixth-grade males, and more specifically Black males, has continually produced state testing scores and academic grades below other student populations and represented a disproportionate number of students who were either suspended or expelled from school.

Research Design

The research design came from Mertler's (2008) work on action research and provided the study structure's underpinnings. Mertler described action research as the systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of

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gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn. (p. 5)

He called for researchers to identify "an area of focus," collect data, analyze and interpret the data, and develop a plan of action (pp. 4–5). I further describe action research in the methodology section (Chapter 3) of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) serves as the theoretical framework for this study. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), CRT involves "Scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power" (p. 3). Though developed by legal scholars, this theory has become an important part of educational research and is grounded in the idea that one's social reality is "defined by racialized collective historical experiences of persons of color" (Parker, 2015, p. 199). Solorzano and Yosso (2000) posited that CRT is a "framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of [Black and Latino] students" (p. 40–42). They stated that "Critical Race Theory asks such questions as: What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination?" (p. 40-42) More succinctly, Bergerson (2003) broke down CRT into three main tenants. According to the author, CRT is centered on race, is skeptical of such ideas as "neutrality, colorblindness, and merit," and emphasizes the "voices and experiences of people of color" (p. 52). At the core of this research is the idea that race (such as at my educational setting) is oftentimes removed from the discussion when examining possible reasons for a

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lack of academic and disciplinary success within marginalized communities. Schools, such as at my school, focus on poverty (i.e., Ruby Payne) and often remove race from the conversation, especially when it comes to the microaggressions and institutional racism that may be found within our current school environment (Hotchkins, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Rector-Aranda, 2016).

Conclusion

I hope that by developing and eliciting the voices of young Black males, this study can assist the discussion about race in a way that allows all stakeholders a practical way to move forward: a way that does not marginalize, condescend, or belittle but that recognizes the issues we face in a productive and effective manner. In the proceeding chapters, I will underscore the evidence and create an action plan that will hopefully be true to the realities we face and provide a viable path forward.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter One provided an introduction to and basic definition of the issue at study. Chapter Two offers a review of the relevant literature. Chapter Three describes the methodology used in this research, and Chapter Four will focus on the findings and results of this study. Chapter Five will conclude with a focus on, overview, and summary of the study and provide an action plan for future activity.

Keywords

Asset-based mindset: helping students see themselves on an equal footing with others and learn to look for, appreciate, and build on their own and others' strengths (Bauer, Kniffin & Priest, 2015).

Common planning time: time set aside during the day when grade level departments can meet to plan together (Warren & Muth, 1995).

Common lesson plans: lesson plans created during the common planning time that ensure a common basic curriculum plan followed by all teachers within a grade level department (Warren & Muth, 1995).

Common benchmark assessments: a teacher- and administrator-created assessment based on standards indicated by the teacher covered in a particular 9-week period (Herman & Baker, 2005).

Culturally relevant care: care that can be characterized by a strong sense of community, rigorous demands, an integration of different cultures and a general affirmation of one's humanity (Watson, Sealey-Ruiz & Jackson, 2016).

Culturally relevant mentoring: mentoring techniques that use speech patterns, emotional support, consistency, and cultural respect to model and help young people construct an identity that values academic achievement and success (Woodland, 2008).

Culturally relevant pedagogy: a philosophy of teaching that aims to produce students who can achieve academically, demonstrate cultural competence, and both understand and critique the existing social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Deficit-based mindset: a savior mentality that "fixes" the problems of "needy" others.

District pacing guides: a time-bound list of instructional standards that teachers across the district use to ensure a certain amount of continuity within the school district. These plans tend to be very broad, leaving teachers latitude regarding instructional practices (Cobb et al., 2003).

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Evaluation paradigm: a process by which one evaluates a group of items based on a similar set of parameters (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Linking Individual Success to Educational Needs (LISTEN) mentor program: A mentoring program developed in 2003 to provide additional support for identified students employing professional educators to serve as volunteers to mentor identified students and to promote educational development, academic success, and growth throughout the school year.

Mentor: a classroom teacher, principal, school counselor, librarian, custodian, or paid faculty member.

Mentoring: "A one-to-one, teacher-student relationship occurring during regular school hours, using specific mentoring behaviors for the purposes of improving student academic success, decreasing referrals, increasing attendance, and improving the quality of student-adult relationships" (Alkin & Ellet, 2004, p. 24).

Meta-analysis: Quantitative statistical analysis of several separate but similar experiments or studies to test the pooled data for statistical significance (Marzano, 2001).

Professional development regiments: A planned set of activities that teachers undertake to better understand a specific content area or instructional process (Gharabaghi, 2010).

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This literary review explores two main topics. Section One focuses on an examination of some of the dominant research that has addressed issues facing Black males over the last 40 years. Section Two investigates how critical race theory (CRT) has been at the forefront of the movement to change the perceptions of Black males and how it has been a powerful tool for researchers as they find ways to address the important issues facing Black male students including institutional racism, racial bias, discrimination, and microaggression.

Section 1: Issues Facing Black Males

In the mid-1980s, researchers and educational advocates in the United States began a movement to create a national crusade drawing attention to the social and educational realities facing the Black male in America (Akbar, 1991; Anderson, 1990; Franklin, 1984; Hare & Hare, 1985; Majors & Billison, 1992; Staples, 1982; White & Cone, 1999; White & Parham, 1990; Wilson, 1993). In the literature, terms such as *at risk*, *endangered*, and *in crisis* were used to describe the plight of Black males' educational condition (Garibaldi, 1992; Gibbs, 1988; Parham & McDavis, 1987). This deficit perspective about Black males has been ubiquitous in the literature ever since (Dodge, 2008; Haegerich, Salerno, & Bottoms, 2013; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2002).

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Though this deficit paradigm has been prevalent throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, many researchers have shown that this theory is based on problematic data and rooted in a thinly veiled foundation of racism and discrimination (Gillborn, 2010; Marx, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). For example, Valencia (2010) posited that although this paradigm "has been rebuked by a number of scholars for many decades and is held in disrepute by many current behavioral and social scientists, it nevertheless manifests, in varying degrees, in contemporary educational thought and practice" (p. 160). Cobb and Russell (2015) stated that this theory has been debunked numerous times and has been referred to as "pseudoscience" (p. 631), and Howard (2014) further dismantled the deficit paradigm by stating that data presented about Black male achievement should not be seen as an indictment of the deficit among Black males but rather suggests that the "deficits may lie in the structures, policies, practices, and programs in schools that Black males attend" (p. 60). Unfortunately, an examination of the scholarly literature continues to indicate areas where Black males face deficit stereotypes and discrimination that take the form of over-placement in special education, disproportional disciplinary practices, and school-to-prison pipelines, just to mention a few. The following section consists of an examination of the issues past and present that Black males continue to face throughout their educational journey.

There is no shortage of studies that document the plight of adolescent Black male students in "public secondary schools (e.g., Brown & Davis, 2000; Davis, 1999; Davis, 2001; Ferguson, 2000; Hopkins, 1997; Mac & Ghaill, 1994; Noguera, 1995; Polite & Davis, 1999; Price, 2000; Sewell, 1997)" (Duncan, 2002, p.131). Examining the issues facing Black males, it is important to lay a strong foundation by focusing on empirical

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studies surrounding Black males. For example, Ivory Toldson in his 2011 work *Breaking Barriers: Plotting the Path to Academic Success for School-Age African American Males* examined the issues facing Black males by exploring "four national surveys:

- Health Behavior in School-age Children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001)

- National Crime Victimization Survey (U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006)

- National Survey of America's Families (Urban Institute and Child Trends, 2007)

- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007)" (Toldson, 2011, p.11)

Toldson examined 5,779 Black males 12–17 of age and used survey data that provided academic achievement, had an appropriate number of Black males represented, was national in scope, and measured contributing factors such as "parent relationship, school environment and involvement in extracurricular activity" (p. 11). The many variables Toldson used did "explore, analyze, [and] explore cycles" for the initial analytic procedures to "reveal the underlying distributions of response variable and covariates" (p. 12). For response categories, "principle components analysis was used to reduce the data before using multivariate techniques" and stepwise multiple regression analyses was used to restrict the range of the variables (p. 12).

Toldson (2011) found that feelings of happiness and self-worth were the most important "emotional indicator of academic success among black males" (p. 221). The results also indicated that Black males with a father in the home reported "higher levels

of academic achievement" (p. 28). Toldson reported that Black males who were reared in homes with more "financial resources" had increased odds of academic achievement (p. 35) and indicated that high-achieving Black male students had three core characteristics: (a) a more positive perception of school, (b) a more congenial relationship with their teachers, and (c) a perception of school as a safe environment (p. 44).

While factors such as financial security, a supportive home environment, positive feelings of self and a positive relationship with one's school and teachers are not surprising or counterintuitive to most educators, the realization that many Black males are educated in a world where they lack these basic characteristics is alarming. This is especially true when considering how many of these characteristics, such as a positive image of self, school, and teachers, are controlled by educational structures that often do not take the time or value these Black male students enough to instill these qualities into them. Therefore, it is important to conduct research focused on understanding how educational structures and policies are perceived by Black males. An important tool in collecting that information is eliciting the voices of the Black males and using those voices to pinpoint the structures and institutional behaviors that need to be changed. Reynolds (2010) refers to this type of counternarrative of elicited from Black males as one that "can facilitate uninhibited descriptions of their encounters with school officials that yield important insights for minoritized students" (Reynolds, 2010, p. 157) and it is through the acceptance of these unfiltered voices that schools like the participant researcher's can begin the process of moving forward.

An important work in the area of issues facing Black males comes from Anthony L. Brown in his 2011 work, *Same Old Stories: The Black Male in Social Science and*

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Educational Literature, 1930s to the Present. Brown examined the historical and contemporary beliefs surrounding Black males with the intention of prompting new "theories, research, and interventions that account for the complex needs of Black males' lives" (p. 2047). By employing the historicizing of knowledge methodology, Brown used the "trajectories of the past to help shape" the ideas, events, and constructs of the present (p. 2047). Brown analyzed the literature surrounding the issues facing Black males from the 1930s to the present and presents four recursive narratives: (a) absent and wandering, (b) impotent and powerless, (c) soulful and adaptive, and (d) endangered and in crisis.

Absent and wandering, according to Brown (2011), is a theme that finds importance sociologically in the 1930s–1950s as Black families moved out of the rural South and into urban cities. This movement sparked new interest in social theorists and African American scholars (Brown, 2011, p. 2052). Such researchers as DuBois (1935) and Woodson (1933) pointed to the many deficiencies within the schooling structure (e.g., under-resourced schools and untrained teachers, low expectations, segregation, negative imagery of African Americans) yet contended that "the Black family structure and Black male behaviors" remained the focus of research through the 1960s (Brown, 2011, p. 2054). Furthermore, researchers created the narrative of the absent and wandering Black father. However, researchers such as Rickets produced findings indicated "that Black families married at higher rates than white females of native parentage until 1950" (Brown, 2011, p. 2054). Nevertheless, this theory of the absent and wandering Black father led to a focus in Black male research on the impact of the fatherless home and the mother-centered family structure (Brown, 2011, p. 2056).

Research into Black males in the 1960s was then dominated by what Brown (2011) called the impotent and powerless, (Brown, 2011, p. 2069) centered around the perception that due to the events of the past and their effects on present sociological constraints (e.g., poverty, racial discrimination, chronic joblessness), Black males were powerless to change their circumstance. Because Black women were believed to be the dominant force in the family, Black men were thought to be unable to lead their families. This theory was then used to explain that Black male students did not conform to the norms of the day due to what "Clark (1965) termed a distorted male image" (Brown, 2011, p. 2057). Furthermore, Black male students were seen as having "psychological defenses that devalued their own capacity to achieve academically (Ausebel & Ausubel, 1963; McClelland, 1961)" (Brown, 2011, p. 2058). By the 1970s, scholars began to argue that lower achievement and behavior outside of the norms of the day were not due to powerlessness and impotence but actually demonstrated the Black male's ability to adapt and cope with the social structure of the time (e.g., being Black, male, urban, and poor; Brown, 2011, p. 2060).

This change, according to Brown (2011), led to a movement in the 1970s characterized as soulful and adaptive. This construct derived its meaning from what Rainwater (1970) argued was a creative and existential tool he referred to as the soul, and what Hannerz (1968) called the "essence of Negroness" that helped "Black males cope in a society that left them economically and politically marginalized" (Brown, 2011, p. 2060). This theme also found its way into the educational research surrounding Black males as researchers began to examine cultural difference and moved the prevailing thought from culturally deficient to culturally different. Unfortunately, the overarching

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narrative of broken family units, fatherlessness, mother-dominated households, and the impotent male role model continued to be the prevailing theoretical construct surrounding the Black male.

In the 1980s, Brown (2011) posited that researchers began to create the construct of the Black male as endangered and in crisis (Garibaldi, 1992; Gibbs, 1988; Parham & McDavis; 1987) and that researchers such as Anderson (1990), Franklin (1984), and Wilson (1993) laid much of the reason for this eventuality on the self-destructive behaviors of the Black male. Other researchers such as Majors and Billings (1992) referred to the behavior of the Black male as a "cool pose". This theory tried to counter the construct of Black male behavior as pathological and presented it as a way to illustrate the "resilience and complexities of Black male behaviors" after being psychological emasculated by society (Brown, 2011, p. 2065). In educational research, the deficit model was used in many schools to explain Black male academic achievement. Though this work was hidden under a veil of discussing poverty, its deficit theory nevertheless was used to explain much of what researchers were finding in the educational statistics about Black males and other marginalized racial groups (Fenwick, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

While the themes of being absent and wandering, impotent and powerless, soulful and adaptive, and endangered and in crisis are important in an historical context, this participant researcher wondered if they had any value to the 6th grade boys he was interviewing. The voices heard by this participant researcher seemed more focused on receiving a quality education, being treated equitably by all and having a voice within their schooling environment (more details can be found in Chapter 4 of this work). By

hearing from these voices, researchers can better understand what is happening from their perspective. As Howard (2014) and others (Harper, 2015; Hotchkins, 2016; Noguera, 2003; Warren, 2017) have done before by eliciting the voice of high school and college students, the participant researcher wished to add more voices by considering middle school Black males as well. It is in this rich tradition that we find true answers and begin to uncover areas from honest change.

As we continue to examine the literature in the area of issues facing Black males, the focus will shift to specific areas in the literature where there is specific need including subjects such as discipline discrepancies, creating culturally appropriate adult relationships within the educational setting, the power of perception, factors for academic success, and overt and covert racism to create a clearer picture of what Black males face in the current educational environment. In the following section, each area will be examined through specific Black male-centered research. Though these topics are not the only areas of concern, they represent a cross-section of some of the current issues of contemporary research.

One of the ongoing issues that face Black males in education is that of the disproportionate nature of school discipline. Lewis, Butler, Bonner, and Joubert (2010) sampled more than 3,500 Black males from an urban school district in the Midwest United States to investigate the discipline patterns of African American males and to determine what impact discipline patterns might have on academic achievement on state standardized testing (Lewis et al., 2010, p. 7). Through the use of a relative risk ratio analysis methodology, Lewis et al. were able to compute a cumulative relative risk of disciplinary action for African American males that used White males as the comparison

group. The authors found that Black males were twice as likely to have disciplinary action taken against them than did their White peers (Lewis et al., 2010, p. 14). Furthermore, the sanctions given to Black males were generally harsher than that given to their White counterparts. This led to increased loss of academic time, lower academic achievement, and lower state standardized test scores for Black males and became a self-fulfilling cycle of overly assigned disciplinary action and under-performance in the classroom. Lewis et al. called this cycle the "internecine warfare that is being waged between schools and African American male populations" (Lewis et al., 2010, p. 17).

While Lewis et al. (2010) focused on Black males, their main focus was on disciplinary action across a large urban school district. This participant researcher wished to add to this research by including the voices of Black male 6th graders regarding an entire school environment including from the standpoint of discipline. While the work that Lewis et al. undertook is important it is the hope of this participant researcher to expand upon it and include such areas as teacher student relationships, student to student relationships, and students' overall feelings toward their academic achievement. This will hopefully once again demonstrate the value of eliciting Black male voices in every setting.

Within the areas of creating cultural relevant relationships within the educational setting, Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz & Watson (2014) present the elicited the voices of Black and Latino males from a high school setting that serves students who are "overage and under-credited" (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz & Watson, 2014, p. 394). This high school setting is a small alternative school that is "often a student's last chance to successfully complete high school before turning to the General Equivalency Diploma (GED)"

(Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz & Watson, 2014, p. 401). During this research, "a qualitative method of phenomenology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) was used in this study to examine how the young men and their mentor experienced UMOJA during the 2 years of the study" (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz & Watson, 2014, p. 401). Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz and Watson used observational field notes and focus group interviews as their many data points over a 2 year period. The findings indicated that Black male students who are often stereotyped as criminal and as victim "encountering reciprocal love in a caring environment can be a restorative, healing, educative experience" (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz & Watson, 2014, p. 411). What was apparent in this research was a focus on the individual and an empowerment of their strengths rather than a focus on negative labeling and areas of weakness. The authors concluded that the insights from this study's participants "remind all who work with Black and Latino males that educating them transcends standards and curricula; their education requires positive relationships and an ethos of care through which they can connect" (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz & Watson, 2014, p. 410).

While Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz & Watson (2014) focused on Latino and Black and how they were able to use culturally relevant mentoring to create a caring environment that was "restorative, healing, educative" this participant researcher wished to add to this research by focusing solely on the voices of Black male 6th graders involved in a mentoring program that has embraced many of the tenants from this research to become more culturally relevant. While the work that Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz and Watson embark on is of great importance, it is the hope of this participant researcher to expand upon it and include such topics as the personal feelings of students toward school, their abilities

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in the classroom, and their perceptions of their teachers and administrators. This research reaffirms the power of ethnographic information from Black males by collecting data that describes participant's viewpoints, and allows the students and participant researchers to engage and interpret their thoughts about the school environment (Moustakas, 1994).

Likewise, Harper (2015) in an article entitled S*uccess in These Schools? Visual Counternarratives of Young Men of Color and Urban High Schools They Attend* also focused on Black males in a high school setting. In this research, Harper uses critical race methodologies to construct "counternarratives about boys of color and urban education" (Harper, 2015, p. 139). In this research, the participants were 325 "men of color" taken from a broad spectrum of 40 public high schools in New York City (Harper, 2015, p. 145). Harper began by painting a picture of urban schools that are replete with "teacher shortages, apathy, stress, and turnover" (Harper, 2015, p. 141). The author went on to describe the scholarship surrounding young men of color and their "academic underachievement", "misplacement in special education and disproportionate rates of suspension/expulsion in K-12 schools", "high school dropout rates" and "stagnant patterns of college enrollment and completion" (Harper, 2015, p. 142). In this research, Harper and his team interviewed and took pictures of participants. The photos were narrowed down to 11 and paired with the interview information to create a thematic representation of the schools and the students depicted within them. The findings, according to Harper, contradicted each of the commonly held and stereotypical beliefs that have become replete throughout modern society. Harper ended the articles by stating "students of color who are exposed to positive messages about themselves, their schools,

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and their communities often develop healthier identities and higher educational aspirations" (Harper, 2015, p. 163).

Again, while Harper (2015) focused on Latino and Black high school students and how commonly held stereotypes can be overcome by a powerful counternarrative, this participant researcher wished to add to this research by focusing solely on the voices of Black male 6th graders. Much like the participants in Harper's research, the students involved in the participant researcher's work create a linguistic picture of the school environment to paint a picture that breaks commonly held stereotypes of the participant researcher's educational setting. While on the outside the overt policies and procedures seem to be colorblind what is discovered through the voices of these young men is a powerful counternarrative that if listened to can create lasting change within the school setting. While Harper's work (2015) is of great importance it is the hope of this participant researcher to focus in on one school and provide the information needed to begin a powerful change movement. This once again reaffirms the power of ethnographic information from Black males.

In the article entitled *We Learn Through Our Struggles: Nuancing Notions of Urban Black Male Academic Preparation for Postsecondary Success,* Warren focuses on a group of 18 Black males from a high school in the Englewood section of Chicago, Illinois, who graduated high school together and had success in postsecondary education. Warren, a critical race theorist, undertook an investigation to determine what academic preparation, which the author broke into instructional supports and social supports, were in place that made this high level of success possible. Warren used ethnographic data through one on one interviews which described "teacher availability and academic

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expectations (instructional supports), as well as community building, social networking, and personal affirmation (social supports) as important aspects of their academic preparation for postsecondary success" (Warren, 2016, p.1). Warren spotlights the "resilience" of the Black male arguing that "understanding Black males' resilience is central to how urban high schools academically prepare boys of color for multiple postsecondary pathways" (Warren, 2016, p.2). Warren's findings indicated that the instructional and social supports provided to these students in high school parallel what scholars identify to be "protective factors underscoring students' resilience (Benard, 2004; O'Connor et al., 2014; Truebridge, 2014)" (Warren, 2016, p.30). Warren concluded the article by reframing the word struggle by stating that "helping Black males work through their struggle(s) means acknowledging the challenges they face inside and outside of school, not as sites of shame, but points of pride" (Warren, 2016, p.31).

Warren (2016) focused on Black high schoolers who were very successful in high school and college to determine what factors led to this success. This participant researcher wished to add to this research by focusing solely on the voices of Black male 6th graders. Unlike the participants in Warren's research, the students involved in the participant researcher's work did not all show huge degrees of success but their struggle will hopefully provide needed information to allow teachers in the participant researcher's educational setting make appropriate changes to be culturally responsive and open to societal norms outside the dominantly White culture that permeates every aspect of the school. Warren's work provides a blueprint of how to conduct this type of research in a single educational setting that can hopefully provide the information needed to begin a powerful change movement.

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Hotchkins (2016) examined how microaggression affects Black males in the educational setting. Hotchkins gathered data from six Black male high school students that included four interviews, five observations, and one focus group session. During these times of data collection, "participants were asked about racial experiences and interactions with White teachers, peers, and coaches" (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 13). Using CRT and a storytelling methodology, Hotchkins (2016) considered his reaction to the participants' narrative as well as the "cross-referencing of codes and emerging categories" (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 12). The results of his research indicated that participants believed that White teachers viewed Black students through a deficit lens as a way of "reinforcing dominant ideologies about a lack of Black male educational engagement" (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 15). Furthermore, participants believed that White teachers viewed all Black students as "monolithic yet multidimensional wholes," which led to gendered racism (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 15). Participants also reported instances when they were targeted by teachers for disciplinary purposes. One participant reported being sent to the office for "being persistent when asking clarifying questions," which the teachers saw as being disrespectful (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 21). As a result of this work, Hotchkins determined that students navigated "an adverse, even contentious, learning environment, one in which they withstand frequent overt racial insults, assaults, and invalidations" (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 25).

Hotchkins (2016) again focused on Black high school students who provide firsthand account of how teachers and others in the school community had shown racial bias and discrimination through microaggressions. This participant researcher wished to add to this research by focusing solely on the voices of Black male 6th graders. Much like the

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participants in Hotchkins' research, the students involved in the participant researcher's work also indicated areas where they experienced racial bias and discrimination mainly at the hands of the teaching staff. Hotchkins' work, much like other covered in this review of the literature, provides a blueprint of how to conduct ethnographic research in a single educational setting that can hopefully provide the information needed to begin a powerful change movement.

This portion of the review literature examined the issues facing Black males, by presenting research studies that were broad in their scope, historical, and focused on such issues as discipline discrepancies, creating culturally appropriate adult relationships within the educational setting, the power of perception, factors for academic success, and overt and covert racism. Though these studies were not presented in chronological order, nor do they represent all of the research involving the eliciting of Black male voices, they do represent a cross section of some of that research. Each study presented insight into the voices of Black males and created a foundation that the participant researcher hopes to build on. One common theme of many of the studies presented above was that of Critical race theory or CRT. CRT is one of the most invaluable theories in the study of Black males and will be the focus of the next section of this review of the literature.

Section 2: Critical Race Theory

In the 1960s, legal scholars began to create a new theory that could supplement the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, CRT. Educational researchers have used this theory to discuss issues such as school discipline, student tracking, affirmative action, high-stakes testing, and colorblind curricula (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 7). CRT researchers ask such questions as, "What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in

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the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination?" (Soloranzo& Yosso, 2000, p. 40-42) and center their analyses on a skepticism of such ideas as "neutrality, colorblindness, and merit" while emphasizing the "voices and experiences of people of color" (Bergerson, 2003, p. 52). Central is the idea that race is oftentimes removed from the discussion when examining possible reasons for lack of academic and disciplinary success within marginalized communities, especially Black males. This section of the literature review will examine educational research conducted on Black males using CRT.

In 2008, Howard used CRT's counternarrative methodology to investigate the experiences of a group of 10 Black males from five different middle and high schools located on the U.S. West Coast. Five students came from urban, low-income areas where the schools were mainly Black and Latino. The other five students came from predominantly White suburban areas where their schools were more racially mixed. Even though they came from different areas and backgrounds, there was a common "keen awareness of negative racial stereotypes" (Howard, 2008, p. 969). The group also reported that they believed race played a factor in "how they were dealt with by their teachers and school administrators" (Howard 2008, p. 970). One student even stated that "teachers never let you forget that you are Black" (Howard, 2008, p. 971). Another theme concerned accounts of discrimination or racism that many of the respondents stated occurred "at their schools with regularity" (Howard, 2008 p. 971). One student added that at his predominantly Black school they had a substitute teacher in their geometry class for the entire year. He asked, "Show me where they have a school with White kids that have it like we have it?" and added, "You can't prove that it's racism, but how can it be

anything else?" (Howard, 2008, p. 972). Building on Howard's use of CRT methodologies, I elicited the voices of five middle school Black males at a predominantly White middle school.

Howard (2008) again focused on Black middle and high school students who provide firsthand account of how stereotypes can be embedded in society. Much like Howard, I am a researcher who is interested in "more probing and critical theoretical frameworks that will invite a more penetrating analysis of the dismal state of affairs for many African American males in PreK-12 schools" (Howard, 2008, p. 959). By using CRT, the participant researcher hopes to create an "evolving methodological, conceptual, and theoretical construct" that will "disrupt race and racism in education" (Howard, 2008, p. 963). This participant researcher wished to add to this research by focusing solely on the voices of Black male 6th graders. Much like the participants in Howard's research, the students involved in the participant researcher's work also indicated areas where the common stereotypes of the Black male played a role in their everyday educational environment, whether at the hand of a teacher who demonstrates the power of low expectations or at the hand of a teacher who immediately assumes any behavior outside the norm is defiant and unwanted. The voices of the participants in the participant researcher's study speak loudly and add to the rich tradition of ethnographic information collected using a CRT methodology.

Another use of CRT in the literature is Berry's (2008) work on Black males who experienced success in middle school math. Berry used a phenomenological methodological framework, CRT, as the theoretical framework and counter-storytelling to capture the voices and experiences of eight Black males. Berry also included data from

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the boys' families and their teachers to provide context. The participants came from four middle schools in the same school district. Berry conducted "individual interviews, a questionnaire, students' mathematics autobiographies, parental/guardian interviews, teacher interviews, a review of documents and observations" (Berry, 2008, p. 471). This data provided five major themes "(a) early educational experiences, (b) recognition of abilities and how it was achieved, (c) support systems, (d) positive mathematical and academic identity, and (e) alternative identities" (Berry, 2008, p. 477). As for the importance of educational experiences, Berry found that seven of the eight boys had parents "who emphasized the importance of their sons' preschool experiences" (Berry, 2008, p. 477). It was this early exposure to education that these parents saw as critical to "ensuring that their sons got off to a good start in their academic experiences" (Berry, 2008, p. 477). The same was true with the theme of recognizing ability. Berry found that five of the eight boys had been placed in gifted classes and that this placement gave them the "perception of receiving richer mathematics instruction in elementary school" (Berry, 2008, p. 478). As for the effect of a support system, "for these boys, their families were critical to their success" (Berry, 2008, p. 479). As seen in the providing of educational opportunities, the value that immediate and extended family members placed on education and educational success was evident, as well as that of their involvement in and out of school was paramount. Furthermore, Berry found that a positive self-image and belief in oneself were important because seven of the eight boys "had a positive mathematical and academic" identity (Berry, 2008, p. 481). Lastly, Berry indicated that alternative identities "provided these boys a mechanism for dealing with peer pressure and helped them to foster resiliency" (Berry, 2008, p. 482). These identities allowed them

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to embrace African American culture and their parents' experiences to promote achievement. These identities included "(a) co-curricular and special academic program identity (b), religious identity, and (c) athletic identity" (Berry, 2008, p. 483). These findings provide insight into the world of these high-achieving Black males that counters much of the current stereotypes of Black males.

Berry (2008), much like the participant researcher, focused on Black middle school males and provided powerful information about the factors that lead to student success. The participant researcher hopes to build on the voices of middle school students and use the "racialized experiences of African American boys and to explore how these boys persisted in school" much as Berry has in this study (Berry, 2008, 469). Furthermore, the participant researcher, much like Berry, hopes to also examine the experiences of African American boys from an "anthropological and sociological viewpoint" (Berry, 2008, 469). Much as Berry was able to determine factors for success in mathematics, it is the participant researcher's desire to begin to create factors for success within the school environment that teachers can implement to be more culturally relevant and to create an environment where all cultures and races feel welcomed and valued. It is through the use of CRT that this is possible, which is why this theory has become such an important part of educational research at this time.

A further example of the use of CRT in the research of Black males is Duncan's (2002) work on identifying factors that contribute to both the "attrition and the retention of black male students at a Midwestern High School setting" (Duncan, 2002, p. 133). Using a CRT methodology, Duncan and her team conducted individual and focus group interviews. They obtained data related to "demography, standardized testing, attendance,

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and graduation rates, and documents related to the historical, ideological, and programmatic features of the school" (Duncan, 2002, p. 134). They also interviewed Black male students about the school culture and recorded the "day-to-day culture" of the school "including classrooms, hallways during passing periods, the main office, lunchroom, extra-curricular activities, and faculty and staff professional development workshops" (Duncan, 2002, p. 134). An analysis of these data indicated that though the school had a reputation of excellence and academic rigor, the ethnographic information painted a different picture. For example, the uncontrolled competitive nature of the school reinforced the importance of the individual, "making it difficult to sustain caring relationships but also reinforcing what the ethicist Victor Anderson (1995) called 'ontological Blackness' or 'the Blackness that whiteness created'" (as cited in Duncan, 2002, p. 134). Furthermore, this information indicated a tenacity with which racist stereotypes remained "fixed to the imaginations of CHS students and teachers (which) not only calls the reputation into question, it clearly undermines the ability of black male students to excel at the school as well" (Duncan, 2002, p. 134). One of the most powerful aspects of Duncan's research is the impact that CRT had on the participants. One stated, "black male students need people to 'truly listen to them'" (Duncan, 2002, p. 141). What cannot be understated is the importance of CRT in allowing those who suffer wrongs to express their grievances and to be heard on their own terms counters the powerlessness that constitutes a condition of oppression; it also provides those who do wrong to others with an opportunity to participate in redressing the situation (Duncan, 2002, p. 141).

Duncan (2002), much like the researchers presented above (Howard, 2008; Berry, 2008) focused on Black males in a secondary school to provide powerful firsthand

accounts of how students can be marginalized, ignored, and discriminated against in what outwardly seemed to be the best of circumstances. The participant researcher chose this research study due to the many factors that this research shares with his own. While its focus on high school students differs from the participant researcher's participants, the core aspects of the school are the same and many of the experiences are echoed in both studies. The participant researcher, much like Duncan, posits that "oppression and domination should be the primary terms for conceptualizing the exclusion and marginalization of black male student" and that "liberation should be the primary term for conceptualizing the remedy to the problems they encounter" (Duncan, 2002, p. 141). It is only through determining the factors for success within the school environment that we can begin to create a liberation movement that welcomes and values all and CRT plays a large role in that endeavor.

Conclusion

The two major parts of this literature review specifically target an area of educational research regarding the issues facing Black males paramount to this paper's area of study. These areas examine research surrounding Black males and the issues they face including an historical and overarching review of past issues and historical precedents, the effects of racism and microaggressions, the disproportional use of school discipline, the school-to-prison pipeline, and other important factors that lead to the disenfranchisement of Black males. I also examine the use of CRT in educational research and its importance in giving voices to those who often feel they have no voice. Collectively, this literature review creates an overarching construct on which to base a research design.

Section one reviews the historical and overarching principles that have laid the foundation for the current circumstance in which we find Black males in the educational setting. The review accepts that there exists a "voluminous body of literature and statistics that convey that Black males are not experiencing success in schools" (Boutte, 2015, p. 148) but notes that one cannot blame the victim if they wish for true change to occur. This current research paradigm was created to provide additional information to this growing body of work and to present the voices of middle school Black males. These additional voices focus on the whole school experience rather than on one small section, and they provide the insight into the experiences of a Black male in a predominantly White setting. Hopefully, this will provide new insight that leads to solutions offered to Black males at an earlier age to prevent some of the issues that current research has shown occur in high school and college. This can only be done by having an honest and open conversation.

Secondly, the literature review presents a clear picture that CRT is a valuable tool in creating a methodological and theoretical construct for identifying, analyzing, and transforming the structural and cultural aspects of education. By drawing from a broad literature base that includes law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Solorzano, 1998), CRT provides a multidisciplinary approach. Most important, it affords a way for students to offer a counternarrative that is authentic to their experiences, providing information that can be used to promote real change. This research will add to the existing base of literature because it will focus on Black, male sixth graders regarding their school environment and their experiences in a

predominantly White middle school. This research will provide its participants with the opportunity to add their voices to this needed research paradigm.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 2 focused on past and current research on Black male students. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology. The first section reintroduces the problem of practice, the purpose of the study, research question, and the rationale for qualitative research and discusses the research setting and site. Chapter 3 includes profiles of the participants, the research design, and the source of the data. It concludes with my positionality statement and conclusion.

Problem Statement

Several problems are inherent in both practice and the educational literature on Black male students in middle school settings. My school has an extremely small population (3%) of those identifying as Black male sixth graders. They are not often provided opportunities to share their experiences about school and the schooling process; therefore, they need a voice. Similarly, these students continue to perform disproportionally less well than their White counterparts and to have a disproportionate number of behavioral referrals. These disparaging outcomes have been addressed in previous research, which have suggested that Black males underperform in many content areas and, as previously suggested, are disproportionately suspended and expelled in comparison to their White male counterparts (Howard, 2014; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Jackson et al., 2014) as they struggle with the transition from elementary to middle

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school (Akos et al., 2015). However, few scholars have explored the institutional factors, as articulated by Black male students, which perpetuate such outcomes regarding Black males. These factors include culturally unresponsive teachers and schooling practices that contribute to these outcomes among Black males (Bryan, 2017).

Like teachers in general, the staff and faculty members at my school see Black males from deficit- instead of strength-based perspectives. They focus on student weaknesses and perceived inabilities instead of their strength and abilities in classrooms. These teachers also ignore institutional factors perpetuating academic and behavioral issues among Black male students.

Most of the studies on Black male students have focused on those in high school (Warren, 2016; Douglas, 2016; Howard, 2016; Harper, 2015; Jackson et al., 2014). Therefore, undertheorized in the extant literature are studies that elicit the voices and schooling experiences of Black males in middle school settings, particularly those in sixth grade, which is a transition year from elementary to middle school.

Finally, given the complexity of the sixth-grade year and a growing body of literature on transition years in both middle and high schools (Akos et al., 2015; Duchesne et al., 2012; Goldstein et al., 2015), too few studies have been conducted on the transitional experiences of Black males from elementary to middle school or have explored the transitional experiences of Black male students from elementary school to high school.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to elicit the voices of five Black male sixth graders regarding perceptions of their schooling experiences at a predominantly White middle

school. Moreover, the purpose of this research is to lay the foundation to help a predominantly White teaching and administration staff to think about ways to work against the intergenerational legacies of negative views of Black male students to better support them in a middle school environment.

Research Question

The following research question has been advanced for this study:

1. What are the perceptions of Black male sixth graders regarding their perception of their schooling experiences at a predominantly White middle school?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

This study uses a critical ethnographic methodology to elicit the voices of Black male sixth graders. Critical ethnography is "participant observation plus any other appropriate methods" including, "interviews, focus groups, video or photographic work, statistics, [and] modelling" (Forsey, 2010, p. 566).

Research Setting/Site

This ethnographic action research study focuses on a rural middle school in upstate South Carolina. This school has a history of excellent student achievement but has recently seen that reputation falter as the student population changes and teachers struggle to adapt. This school is steeped in the cycle of poverty research and has undertaken a book study (see Payne, 2005) on the topic within the last 2 years.

In spite of this issue, this school has gone through an instructional renaissance, receiving gold and silver awards from the state for 4 of the last 5 years. (These honors were awarded both for overall performance and for closing the gap with top performing

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schools.)[1] The school is currently striving to become more collaborative and purposeful in its instructional planning. All teachers are departmentalized within academic teams, and grade levels are broken into teams to provide for simpler planning times and shared student populations for mentoring purposes. This structure also provides for instructional meeting time with the instructional coach and administration, benchmark assessments, and lesson plans that are in alignment with district pacing guides.

The middle school houses sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students and serves the largest geographical area in the county. The school has a long and impressive history, both as a high school, which served many students who are now local parents, and as a middle school at present, serving their children. The high school was built in the 1950s. The building was completely renovated in 2001 and still serves as a community hub for local activities. Several current staff members were vital participants in the school as students and now serve as teachers. The school offers many high school-level courses (despite being a middle school), and has very active sports and community service programs through such organizations as the Junior Beta Club.

Of the 53 teachers at the educational setting depicted in Figure 3.1, 14 are certified in elementary education. Thirty-three faculty members are middle school certified with 13 teachers in social studies, 11 in math, 11 in language arts, and 10 in science. Eleven staff members hold secondary certification. Those teachers include five in math, three in science, and three in social studies. There are 13 other areas of certification represented in the faculty such as art education, gifted and talented, and

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[1] The Palmetto Gold and Silver Awards program recognizes schools that attain high levels of absolute performance and growth. Blue Ridge Middle School earned state recognition with a Gold Award in 2011–2012 and 2015–2016 and a Silver Award in 2012–2013, 2013–2014, and 2015–2016 in the area of General Performance.

German. Twenty-one teachers at Blue Ridge Middle School hold bachelors and 32 hold master's degrees as terminal degrees. Many have earned certification in multiple areas.

Figure 3.2 shows the racial breakdown of the school; 85 members of the teaching staff are White and two are Black. Of the 87 employees on staff, 18 are male. As indicated in Figure 3.3, 10 teachers have 0–5 years' experience, eight have 6–10 years' experience, 11 have worked 11–15 years, eight have worked 16–20 years, and seven have 21–25 years' experience. Nine have been teaching more than 25 years. The teacher attendance rate was 92.4 % for the 2015 school report card. This number showed a decline from the previous year's report card (South Carolina State Department, 2016).
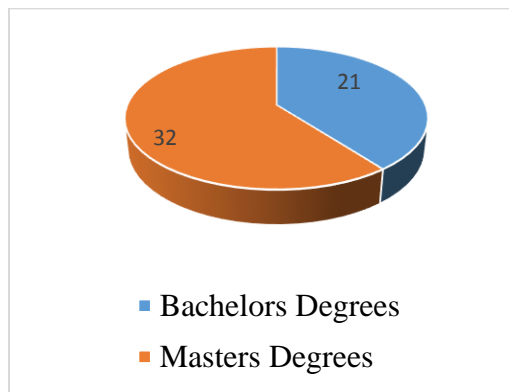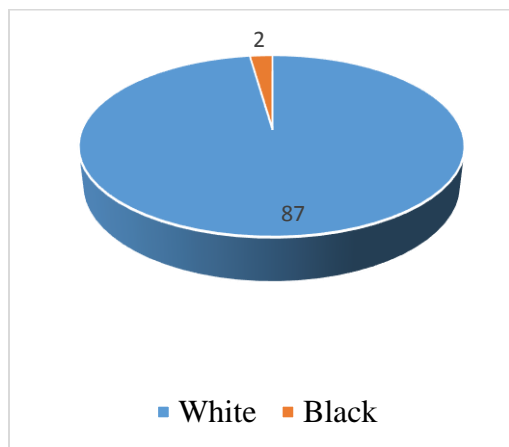

Figure 3.1 Staff Education

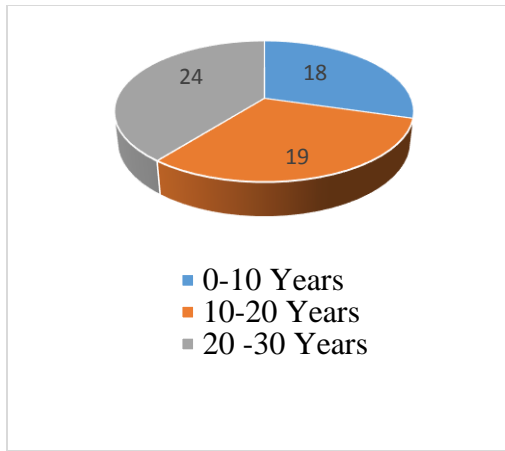Figure 3.2 Staff Racial Breakdown

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Figure 3.3 Staff Experience

The educational setting is somewhat unusual due to its demographic makeup, presented in Figure 3.4. The school student population consists of 915 students in grades sixth through eighth, a slight decline from last year's enrollment. The majority of the student body (793) is White, and the Black population consists of 26 students. The Hispanic student population consists of 54 students, and there are four students who classified themselves as Asian. There are also 26 students who claim two racial groups. Free and reduced lunch, as shown in Figure 3.5, is provided for 318 students. Special education services, as depicted in Figure 3.6, are provided for 211 students with the majority of those served through inclusion classes.
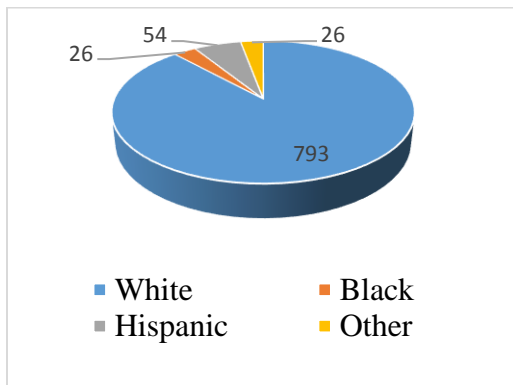
Figure 3.4 School-Wide Demographics

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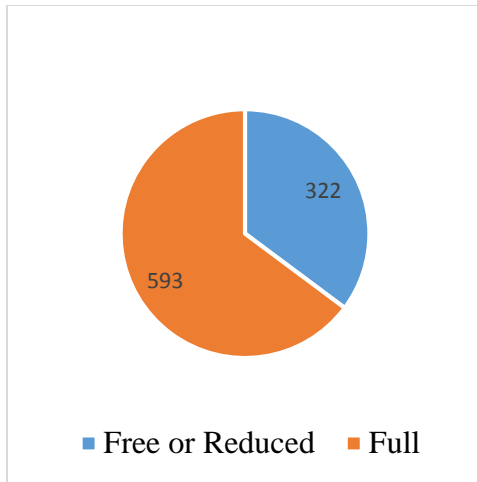
Figure 3.5 Free and Reduced Lunch
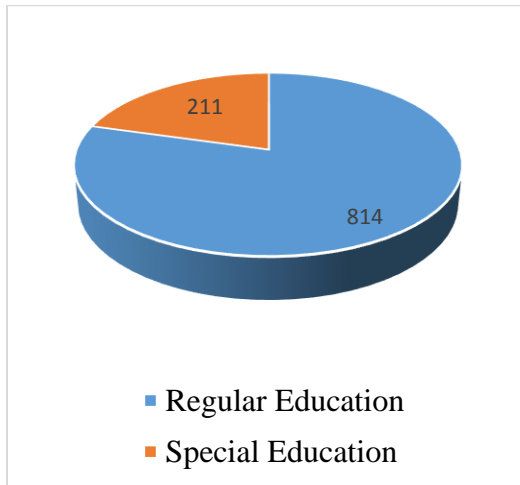
Figure 3.6 Special Education Population

Figure 3.7 shows the gifted population which consists of 238 students. The

population sample for this research process was from the sixth-grade school population,

which is approximately 330 students and is represented in Figure 3.8. I interviewed all

sixth-grade Black males, which totaled five students. All students received the same

general education, teacher-led instruction and will have their information included in the

study results.

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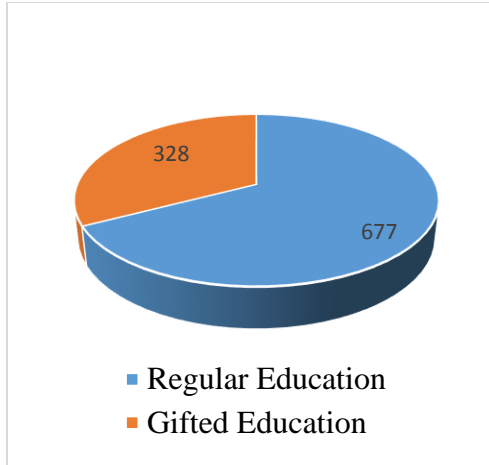
Figure 3.7 Gifted Population
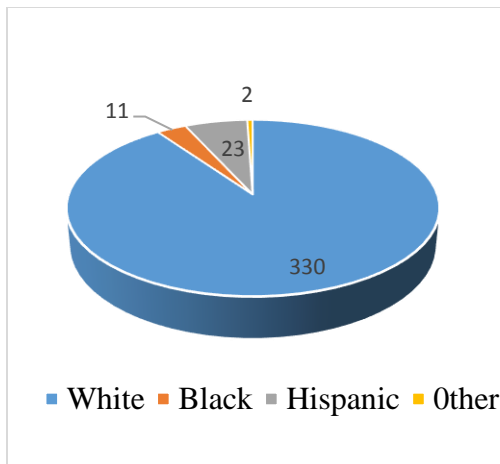
Figure 3.8 6th Grade Demographics

Research Participant Profile

Case

The student Case transitioned from a predominantly White elementary school that

shared many characteristics as the middle school described above. At the time of the

interviews, he had a 2.2 GPA and one disciplinary referral for a minor infraction. He was

liked by his peers and had many friends. His favorite area of the school was the Media

Center, and he and the media specialist had a wonderful relationship. Case spent most mornings before classes began helping in the Media Center. His teachers liked him, but as with most students, they wished he would study more because they did not believe he was working up to his potential. Case lived with his mother and two sisters, but his favorite family members were his two cats. Figure 3.9 shows the GPA, age, and discipline records of each student concurrently, and Figure 3.10 illustrates the transition breakdown of sampled students from predominantly White and Black schools.

Ike

Ike also transitioned from a predominantly White elementary school that shared many characteristics with the middle school described in the previous section. At the time of the interviews, he had a 2.5 GPA and one disciplinary referral for a minor infraction. He has been liked by his peers with many friends. Ike was very athletic and loved to play basketball. Ike was a bus rider and on one of the last buses to arrive every morning. This frustrated him because the administration pushes all students to have breakfast if they have not eaten at home, and taking time to eat made him late to class. His teachers liked him, but as with most students, they wished he would study more because they did not believe he was working up to his potential. Ike's teachers met with him twice during the school year to determine ways they can help him to improve his academic performance. Ike lived with his mother and siblings and visited his father often. Ike and I had a standing basketball game every Friday afternoon, which both seem to enjoy greatly. During the game, Ike has often talked about the car he and his father are building. Figure 3.9 shows the GPA, age, and discipline records of each student concurrently. Figure 3.10

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illustrates the transition breakdown of sampled students from predominantly White and Black schools.

Jay

Jay transitioned from a predominantly Black elementary school with a growing Hispanic population. This elementary school was much more ethnically and racially diverse than Jay's current middle school setting. At the time of the interviews, he had a 2.5 GPA and has improved in most academic subjects except science. He had three disciplinary referrals for minor infractions. Upon an examination of these issues, I found that all referrals came from his science class. Jay was liked by his peers and has had many friends. He was one of the leaders of our group and spoke freely about current issues within our school. He has enjoyed a wonderful relationship with his father and talked often about his father's role in making sure he makes good grades and studies hard. Figure 3.9 shows the GPA, age, and discipline records of each student concurrently. Figure 3.10 illustrates the transition breakdown of sampled students from predominantly White and Black schools.

Hank

Hank transitioned from a predominantly Black elementary school with a growing Hispanic population. This elementary school was much more ethnically and racially diverse than Hank's current middle school setting. At the time of the interviews, he had a 3.2 GPA and no disciplinary referrals. Hank has been liked by his peers with many friends. He was very quiet and had to be coaxed into talking during group meetings. He has worked hard this year and has made good grades. He mentioned during one of our first meetings that since he was going to a new middle school where no one knew him, he

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was going to change his behavior and improve his grades. When we talked about his transformation at the end of the year, he was very proud of the changes he had made and the improvement that he has shown. Figure 3.9 shows the GPA, age, and discipline records of each student concurrently, and Figure 3.10 illustrates the transition breakdown of sampled students from predominantly White and Black schools.

Taye

Taye transitioned from a predominantly Black elementary school with a growing Hispanic population. This elementary school was much more ethnically and racially diverse than Taye's current middle school setting. At the time of the interviews, he had a 2.0 GPA and no disciplinary referrals. He has been liked by his peers with many friends. Taye has been very athletic and said he loves to play basketball. Taye has been a bus rider on the same bus as Ike, which has been one of the last buses to arrive every morning. Taye said he takes his time eating breakfast and does not worry about being late to class. His teachers have liked him, but as with most students, they have wished he would study more because they did not believe he has been working up to his potential. Taye has lived with his mother and siblings and did not talk much about his father. Taye was also a leader within the group and, much like Jay, spoke freely about the issues facing the school. Figure 3.9 shows the GPA, age, and discipline records of each student concurrently to provide a visual representation of the research study's student population.
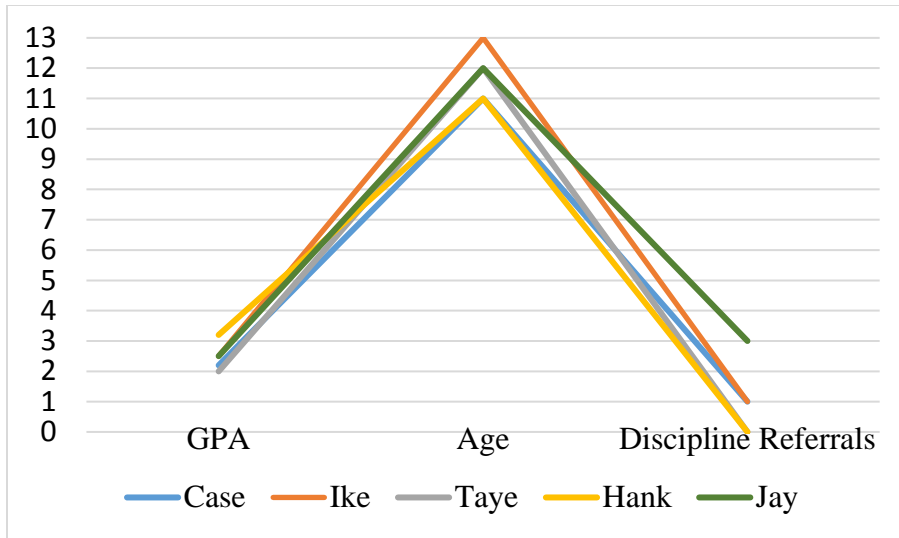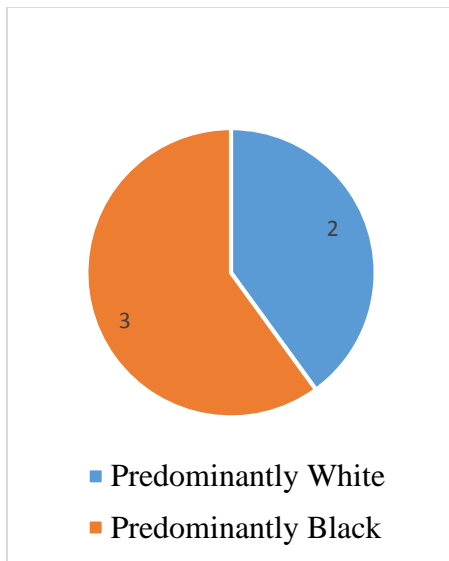
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Figure 3.9 Participant Demographics

Figure 3.10 Transition Schools

Research Design

The research design builds on Mertler's (2008) work on action research and

underpins the study structure. Mertler described *action research* as the systematic inquiry

conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors or others with a vested interest in the

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teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn. (p. 5) He called for researchers to identify "an area of focus," collect data, analyze and interpret the data, and develop a plan of action (2008, pp. 4–5). The methodology section (Chapter 3) of this study further describes research action.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Identifying Areas of Focus and Participant Selection</h3>

Phase one was to delineate and select the student cohort through the academic teams and with administrative input. The participant group began with 20 students. Prior to Phase Two, the group was narrowed to 5 to include all Black males. This criteria was used to allow the participant researcher to focus solely on the voices of Black males. Phase two included meeting with parents and students to explain the program and gathering permission and consent forms. Phase three involved conducting meetings and conversations with students during the second and third 9-week periods. These conversations and meetings mainly took place during lunch and prior to and after school. The lunch meetings were formal whole-group meetings, and meetings before and after school were more informal, one-on-one conversations. I also met and played basketball on Friday afternoons with any student in the group who was able to attend. Phase four included conducting interviews with students to elicit ethnographic information. These interviews occurred on three separate occasions, and they were recorded and transcribed.

The first interview was a one-on-one interview focused on a prewritten set list of questions with very little push back from me. It took place in an office directly connected to the Media Center. It was conducted at the end of the second 9-week period and was about 15 minutes in length. The second interview was a written survey in which

participants composed answers to preset questions, and then the group discussed the answers given. This interview took place in the instructional coach's office at the end of the third 9-week period and was about 45 minutes in length. The third interview was a focus group interview in the computer lab at the end of the fourth 9-week period and was about 1 hour in length. It began with having each participant member check the transcripts of their previous conversations to ensure accuracy. Participants were only able to view their personal transcripts and provide any explanations or additions needed for complete understanding. There were no changes needed, and the participants believed that the transcript accurately depicted their statements.

Multiple interviews allowed for a triangulation of data and provided a much clearer overall picture of each participant's experience. Phase five required that I analyze and interpret the data. Lastly, phase six called for the creation of a plan for future action.

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Sources of Data Collection

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I used semi-structured and structured focus groups and written survey data that provided information to better understand what a small group of sixth-grade Black males were thinking and feeling about their school environment and overall experience in middle school. The first interview which was focused on a prewritten set list of questions with very little push back from me took place in a one-on-one interview setting. They were conducted at the end of the second 9-week period and was about 15 minutes in length. These interviews took place in an office connected to the Media Center for recording purposes. The second interview was a written survey in which participants composed answers to preset questions, and then the group discussed the answers given. This interview took place in the instructional coach's office at the end of the third 9-week

period and was about 45 minutes in length. Using the instructional coach's office allowed space for participants to respond in writing to each question and for a discussion time afterward. The third interview took place in a computer lab, which allowed each participant access to a computer so they could digitally member-check their transcripts and allowed for a comfortable group discussion and review of the year. This session took approximately 1 hour to complete. During these sessions, students were encouraged to say what they truly felt with no fear of repercussions. I and the students reviewed the questions before the sessions to ensure they understood what was being asked of them and to provide them with time to think about their answers. Answers were not discussed before the taped session, although the interviewee could ask for clarification about the questions.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis portion of this research study, CRT served as the framework for analyzing the data. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), CRT involves "Scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power" (p.3). Though developed by legal scholars, CRT has become an important part of educational research and is grounded in the idea that one's social reality is "defined by racialized collective historical experiences of persons of color" (Parker, 2015, p. 199). Solorzano and Yosso (2000) posited that CRT is a "framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of [Black and Latino] students." (p. 40–42) The authors went on to state that "Critical Race Theory asks such questions as: What roles do

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schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination" (p. 40–42). More succinctly, Bergerson (2003) broke down CRT into three main tenants. CRT is centered on race, is skeptical of such ideas as "neutrality, colorblindness, and merit," and emphasizes the "voices and experiences of people of color" (p. 52). At the core of this research is the idea that race (as at my educational setting) is often removed from the discussion when examining possible reasons for lack of academic and disciplinary success within marginalized communities. Such schools focus on poverty (see, for example, Payne, 2005) and often remove race from the conversation, especially when it comes to microaggressions and institutional racism that may be found within our current school environment (Hotchkins, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Rector-Aranda, 2016).

To begin the process, I reviewed interview transcripts and mentoring meeting notes to systematically examine the data for thematic patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using a similar approach to that of Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000), I identified statements of concern that indicated racial bias, discrimination, and microaggressions. Then I looked for patterns among participants regarding like individuals and statements, collapsed information into themes, and then used that information to inform the questioning patterns of the interview session. The final data were analyzed by applying CRT tenets to help make sense of the data, including:

1. the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992, 1995; Lawrence, 1995);

2. Whiteness as property (Harris, 1995);

3. interest convergence (Bell, 1980); and

4. the critique of liberalism (Crenshaw, 1988).

These tenants provided a guide to focus the examination that includes an understanding: that racism is a lasting component of American life, that Whiteness, much like property, enables the user to enjoy certain rights that others who are not White cannot possess, that rights are gained only when the interests of Whites and Blacks converge, and that there should be a critical examination of the notions of colorblindness, neutrality under the law, and incremental change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27–29).

Pseudonyms were given to the participants to ensure privacy and to match data sets across the three interview sessions. By reducing the data into themes, reading transcripts multiple times looking for patterns, and using coding, I was able to collapse the data into four general themes for presentation purposes (Creswell, 2007; Agar, 1980; Patton, 2002).

Participant Researcher Positionality Statement

I came to this research from the most unlikely of places. As a White, middle-class male from the suburbs of a large Southern town, my personal world view and perspective on issues such as race and educational equity are steeped in the conservative White mindset of my upbringing. As a teacher, I prided myself on being tough but fair. I pushed students. I read books on pedagogy and used the strategies to engage Black students, especially Black males, to very little success. I attended conferences and came back ready to implement what I had learned. Most of what I accepted as truth was based on a deficit-based ideology that I now look at with a very skeptical eye. I found Payne's (2005) depictions of a culture of poverty to be in complete agreement with what I knew and understood as a White, middle-class male. Over the past 5 years as I have taken classes on diversity and on teaching African American Students, boys specifically, I have begun

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to understand that I had to get out of myself. If I wanted to learn something I would have to leave what I knew behind and embrace ideas that were uncomfortable and even antithetical to everything I believed instinctively. As a professor challenged my beliefs, exposed me to thoughts and constructs that had never entered my cloistered world before, I began to reconceptualize myself as a teacher, as a mentor, as a participant researcher, and as a member of society. Reading the works of researchers such as Hotchkins, 2016; Solorzano, and Yosso, 2001 began to make me aware of the microaggressions that I participated in on a regular basis under the auspices of helping students play the game of school and helping students understand the hidden rules rather than asking questions such as why the game of school is so often geared against Black students and why the rules are hidden from so many students of color (Hotchkins, 2016).

Over the past 10 years I have mentored many Black males. I saw each one as someone whom, if they would listen to me, I could fix. This positioned me as the "savior" of students rather than the teacher who demonstrates "effective culturally relevant strategies" and thereby creating "successful classroom communities and relationships with Black males" (Bryan & Williams, 2017, p. 219). Through the help of researchers such as Warren (2016), Howard (2014), Hotchkins (2016), and Ladson-Billings (2009), I realized my job was not to fix the Black males in my mentor group. It was to understand them, to empower them to embrace their culture and realize the great strengths within themselves. I reminded myself before every meeting to do less talking and more listening, to lead them to find the answers they already knew, and to empower them to believe in themselves. Most important, I want to show them I believe in them too

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and push them to be better than they imagined they could be. This journey has been enlightening and is hopefully just the beginning.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 included a reintroduction of the problem of practice, the purpose of the study, the research question, and the methodology and provided a positionality statement that will hopefully shine some light on the research processes in this dissertation. Chapter 4 offers the findings from the data collected and discusses these findings.

Chapter 4

Findings and Interpretation of Results

Introduction

Chapter Three included a description of the methodology of the dissertation. Chapter Four outlines and discusses the findings from this current study and so begins with a reintroduction of the problem of practice and the research question, followed by the data and a discussion of the findings.

Reintroduction of the Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the research is to elicit the voices of five Black male sixth graders regarding perceptions of their schooling experiences at a predominantly White middle school. Moreover, the purpose of this research is to lay the foundation to help a predominantly White teaching and administration staff to think about ways to work against the intergenerational legacies of negative views of Black male students to better support them in a middle school environment.

Reintroduction of the Research Question

The following research question has been advanced for this study:

1. What are the perceptions of Black male sixth graders regarding their perception of their schooling experiences at a predominantly White middle school?

Findings of the Study

The data presented in this research were derived from ethnographic interviews done with five sixth-grade Black males who make up the entire Black male student population within that grade level at the middle school research setting. Four themes were evident in that these Black males perceived the following: (a) White teachers used ineffective pedagogies and engaged in disproportionate school disciplining; (b) Black males were invisible in classrooms; (c) White teachers had low expectations for Black males and perpetuated Black male stereotypes; and (d) Black males perceived their ability to shatter Black male stereotypes.

White Teachers' Ineffective Pedagogical and Disproportionate School Disciplining Practices

During the first interview session, participants were asked how they believed they were doing academically and whether or not they liked school. Most of the participants said that they liked some of the teachers and enjoyed the opportunities to meet new friends. In the same vein, they critiqued the pedagogical and relational practices of a White male science teacher. Expressing his sentiments about school and his teacher, Jay replied, "I mean, I make new friends, and I like the teachers, or some of the teachers around here." When asked about why he liked some of his teachers, he expressed a certain level of animosity toward his science teacher, a colleague of mine, who he felt made the subject matter hard to understand. Taye also expressed that he "just didn't try hard because he did not want to" in his classes, particularly science. Later in the interview, Taye offered that his science class was boring and that his science teacher did not care about his well-being, which affected his attitude toward school and schooling.

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Both Jay and Taye felt the science teacher was disorganized and "jumped around" topics as he attempted to teach them.

Jay and Taye suggested that there were some aspects of the predominantly White school they liked and other aspects they did not like. While it was evidently easy to make friends and build relationships with students, it was not so easy to do the same with teachers, particularly the science teacher who they perceived to be an ineffective teacher. By ineffective, the participants meant that the teacher's pedagogies and practices were boring and disengaging. CRT helps us understand that ineffective teachers are a part of a larger racist institutional system that negatively affects Black male students' educational outcomes. This theme is consistent with other research studies (Howard, 2014) in which Black males described how teachers contributed to their negative schooling outcomes. While most research studies have suggested that Black males are unintelligent, lazy, and disinterested in school, a few studies have addressed the role teachers play in perpetuating such disinterest. Jay's and Taye's critique of their teacher demonstrated that they were interested in school and serves as a counternarrative to the dominant narrative surrounding Black males' lack of interest in the school and schooling. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) acknowledged that when employing "achievement gap" rhetoric, most people ignore how ineffective teachers, pedagogies, schooling practices, and limited school resources contribute to this gap between Black and White children.

Similarly, while the ineffective pedagogies and practices of any teacher are matters of concern, it is even more problematic in science education. Given that access to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses provide opportunity and access to higher-paying professional careers in the sciences where Black people in

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general and Black males specifically are underrepresented, an ineffective science teacher contributes to the social reproduction of limited upward mobility in these professional careers. This is clearly an act of institutional racism.

Not only did the research participants believe the pedagogical practices of their teacher were ineffective, they also believed that he was unable to build positive relationships with them. Take, for example, Jay's, Taye's, and Ike's critique of the science teacher. Jay and Taye felt the science teacher picked on them during class. During the 2017–2018 school year, Jay received three referrals from the science teacher that stated that Jay was "repeatedly talking out of turn," "being out of his seat," and "talking back," which are all subjective infractions. Although Ike was not a student in the science teacher's class, he too had felt picked on by the teacher in the hallway.

The research participants felt that the science teacher picked on them and disciplined them in ways inconsistent with how he disciplined other students at the predominantly White middle school. These disproportionate ways of disciplining often led to referrals, at least in Jay's case. Although this teacher's actions did not lead to the suspension and expulsion of Jay, Taye, and Ike from the predominantly White middle school, Black males are 3–5 times more likely to be suspended and expelled from school in comparison to their White male counterparts (Wright & Ford, 2016; Wright, 2018). Several scholars (Bryan, 2017; Bryan & Williams, 2017; Howard, 2014; Losen, 2013; Wright, 2018) have also maintained that Black males from preschool to high school are disproportionately targeted for subjective behavioral infractions, which causes them to enter the "school-to-prison pipeline" (i.e., the funneling of Black male students from the classroom to the criminal justice system; Alexander, 2010; Erevelles, 2014; Gonzalez,

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2012; Porter, 2015). CRT helps us to push back against both overt and covert forms of racism including subjective school disciplining and the school-to-prison pipeline and enables Black males to critique a schooling system that often stereotypes them. In other words, Jay's, Taye's, and Ike's comments serve as counternarratives to the dominant narratives that position Black males as disciplinary problems. In the case of the White male science teacher, CRT unearths White teachers' biases toward and stereotypes about Black male students, which is prevalent in most schools, particularly suburban schools where there are few students of color (Bryan, 2017; Howard, 2014).

Black Male Invisibility in Classrooms

Another example of clear bias and racism came during a conversation about teachers who make students feel undervalued and unimportant. During this discussion, Jay spoke of often feeling ignored by certain teachers. He said, "Like, I would be raising my hand for a question, and I'd be raising it, and [the White male teacher] get mad at me . . . other people have raised their hands, and he had picked them." Jay was not alone in this complaint about feeling ignored. Ike and Case remarked that they also felt as if teachers were ignoring them and selecting White students to answer questions.

Although they said they were hypervisible when teachers disciplined them, the research participants remarked that they were invisible during instructional activities. When they raised their hands to be called upon to participate in classroom activities, they were often ignored by teachers. This type of racial microaggression was spread across the sixth grade as each student represented different academic teams that encapsulated the entire grade level. In other words, the science teacher was not the only teacher who engaged in such microaggressive practices. Furthermore, these forms of

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microaggressions are often grounded in Black male stereotypes suggesting that Black males are disinterested in schools (Hotchkins, 2016; Warren, 2017). Taken collectively, these microaggressions also indicate the purpose of schooling for Black males in that schools are structured to engage in too much schooling and too little education (Shujaa, 1993). *Schooling* deals with the idea of disciplining and controlling Black males, whereas *education* deals with providing Black males with the essential skills to achieve upward mobility and to work against the status quo. All of these actions are a part of institutional racist plan to keep Black males at the bottom of the well. (Bell, 1992) suggested that the bottom of the well is the lowest rung in society with limited or no opportunity for upward mobility. Finally, the fact that participants discussed these microaggressions during this portion of our conversation concerning academic performance and personal value provides powerful evidence that the participants believe that these behaviors by teachers are affecting their academic performance in the classroom (Hotchkins, 2016). Furthermore, "battling racial microaggressions drains the energies and enthusiasm," leading students to the very apathy and lack of motivation so often attributed to Black males (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009, p. 680).

White Teachers' Low Expectations for Black Males and Perpetuation of Black Male Stereotypes

Adding to the ever-growing examples of bias and racism, some of the research participants also spoke about teacher low expectation. For example, Ike stated that he thought his teachers saw him as unimportant and undervalued because they "gave him less work." Ike contended, "Sometimes you sit there and have trouble with [school work] and [the teachers] just say, 'He can't do certain stuff like that . . . so just give him a little

bit to work on and see how he does.'" Jay and Taye also suggested that teachers had low expectations for them during instructional activities for which they were often excluded.

The research participants' experiences are prime examples of the microaggression of low expectation, which often comes from a "collective deficit framing" (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 27). While teachers may believe they are being instructionally sound by chunking information and differentiating their instruction, this type of educational practice creates an instructional cycle that perpetuates the very microaggressions on which this research is focused.

Shattering Black Male Stereotypes

During focus group discussions, participants also recognized their own ability to shatter Black male stereotypes, which was empowering for them and helped them to self-motivate. They spoke to how family members motivated them as well. For example, during the segment when Jay talked about not wanting to try because the teacher "didn't care," Hank, who very rarely talked during the focus group unless asked a specific, directed question, reminded Jay that even though the teacher seemed to not care, "You should care." This response was a very powerful statement of self-worth and self-power. It was obvious that this was a heartfelt response from Hank because he was willing to speak up in a group conversation without being called upon. The other participants had an outward physical reaction to this statement through looks and other nonverbal cues, but there was no verbal reaction, and the group moved on quickly. I asked Hank to repeat his statement and tried to engage the group in a discussion of this statement to no avail. This unsolicited response was a powerful break from the stereotype of Black males as uncaring and unmotivated when it comes to their education. Hank demonstrated his

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desire to take ownership of his education regardless of the actions of others as well as his willingness to step out to remind his peers of their own power.

Another powerful stereotype-shattering moment came when I asked who in their family "got on to them about their grades." Each student quickly stated that either their mother or father was the one who cared most about their grades. One participant answered that it was his sister and his mother, whereas another participant talked about his father and his coach working together to emphasize the importance of grades. Jay also relayed how his father encouraged him to take advantage of extra work. Consider the following conversation:

> Jay: Sometimes I want to be by myself when I work, and then sometimes I just want to
>
> get extra work in 'cause ain't nothing wrong with getting extra work in, so it helped me do good.
>
> PR: So there's sometimes when you want to be in groups, sometimes you just want to be by yourself and you don't mind doing extra work if it's going to help you?
>
> Jay: Yes, sir. My dad told me he was, like, if extra work gonna help you with your grades, then you need to do it. And that's all I've been trying to do is improve.

The students also shattered stereotypes of Black families and education. What is significant is that each participant had a very specific person who immediately came to mind who valued education and instilled those values in him. So often teachers in the building where this study took place have referred to students of color, especially Black males, as lacking support at home, which is consistent with other research studies on

Black families and male students. Often Black families are stereotypically constructed as being uninvolved in the education process of their children (Johnson, 2014). Faculty and staff make such claims without the requisite knowledge of whether that assumption is true. In this case, the stereotype that Black parents do not support their students in their educational endeavors was empirically untrue. This finding is another example of how race, racism, and racial microaggression infect a school culture even when teachers believe they are well meaning and are trying to understand the world in which their students live (Hotchkins, 2016). When that understanding is based in stereotypical ideas and long-held assumptions and preconceptions rather than specific facts drawn from meaningful conversations with specific students, it can cause school culture to erode (Noguera, 2003).

Conclusion

This research study has unearthed several themes that represent underlying issues of racism and bias currently permeating the educational environment of a predominantly White middle school in the South. These themes include:

1. White teachers using ineffective pedagogies and engaging in disproportionate school disciplining;

2. Black males being invisible in classrooms;

3. White teachers having low expectations for Black males and perpetuating Black male stereotypes; and

4. Black males perceiving their ability to shatter Black male stereotypes.

Though on the surface the teachers and staff try to present a school environment that is free from racial tension and discord, the lack of racial diversity and the existence of

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microaggressions cause those who come from outside the dominant culture to feel ostracized and marginalized. Whether intentional or unintentional, this issue must be addressed if Black male students are ever to become equal partners in this educational community. (Table 4.1 provides a chart with previously presented quotes but also includes quotes that were not included in the narrative section of the findings.)

Table 4.1 Interview Quotes

Table 4.1: Interview Quotes	
1. White teachers using ineffective pedagogies and engaging in disproportionate school disciplining.	
Jay	"I mean I make new friends and I like the teachers or some of the teachers around here."
Ike	"He even picked on me" (talking about a teacher on another team that did not even teach this participant.
Taye	"I'm doing OK but I really don't try because I don't want to. I just don't care!"
Taye	"I don't care cause he don't care" (talking about his science teacher)
2. Black males being invisible in classrooms.	
Jay	"Like, I would be raising my hand for a question and I'd be raising it and he'd get mad at me"
Jay	"Other people have raised their hands and he had picked on him."
Jay	"I tried to help people in class and the teacher told me to sit down and he let other people help."
3. White teachers having low expectations for Black males and perpetuating Black male stereotypes.	
Ike	"Sometimes you sit there and have trouble with it (school work) and they (the teachers) just say he can't do certain stuff like that…so just give him a little bit to work on and see how he does".
Taye	"They just give me something else if it is too hard and tell me its fine."
Ike	"If you just keep your head down you don't have to do so much work."
4. Black males perceiving their ability to shatter Black male stereotypes.	
Jay	"Sometimes I want to be by myself when I work and then sometimes I just want to get extra work in cause ain't nothing wrong with getting extra work in so it helped me do good."
Jay	"Yes sir. My dad told me he was like if extra work gonna help you with your grades then you need to do it. And that's all I've been trying to do is improve."
Hank	"You Should Care" (about your education)
Ike	"My mom and dad are divorced but I see dad all the time and we are even working on my brothers and my car, so when we are old enough we will already have a car."

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Chapter 5

Implications and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter 4 examined the findings from this current research and the data collected from the ethnographic interviews. Chapter 5 provides implications, an action plan, and recommendations for future research.

Focus of the Study

The focus of the research is the examination of the voices of Black, male sixth graders within the school population of my current educational setting. The goal was to use these ethnographic accounts to embark on a better understanding of what a small group of sixth-grade Black males were thinking and feeling about their school environment and the transition from predominantly Black elementary schools to a predominantly White middle school. Another goal was to lay the foundation for institutional examination of current academic and disciplinary practices that have been based on deficit assumptions about Black boys. This research question was advanced as the foundation for this study: "What are the perceptions of Black male sixth graders regarding their perception of their schooling experiences at a predominantly White middle school?"

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Summary of the Study

This study undertook the task of eliciting the voices of Black, male sixth graders imbedded in a predominantly White middle school. The ethnographic information gathered indicated that while the outside structure of the school seemed colorblind and accessible to students of all races, the hidden culture marginalized and pushed aside any but the predominant cultural norm. While there were issues brought forth that need immediate attention and remediation, most of what became apparent was hidden below the surface and will take time to change. This institutional racism is indicated in the areas of educational discouragement and dismissal, the prescribed underachieving of Black students due to low expectations, the lack of cultural diversity and interest, color erasure, and disciplinary bias. While many of these areas need further research to truly understand, this research lifts the veil and begins a discussion that will hopefully address dismantling these poisonous constructs.

Action Plan

The action plan for continued change must be fourfold:

1. Share this research showing that asset-based programs work and provide it for every student in the building;

2. As a staff, members should explore the findings of this dissertation and face the questions and concerns presented within, especially the need for a school-wide mindset change;

3. Look for possible ways to use an asset mindset throughout the school, beginning with a book study on culturally relevant pedagogy; and

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4. Have an honest conversation about institutional and structural changes needed for all students to succeed.

Overall, this has been a wonderful process that has presented more questions than answers but for this participant researcher, the need to continually question is the hallmark of a lifelong learner.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest some recommendations for future study.

1) Future studies should continue to elicit the voices of Black male students at predominantly White middle schools to learn about their experiences in these spaces. It is important that researchers conduct research with Black male students instead of on them.

2) Given that the focus of this study is on Black males, future studies should explore and elicit the voices of Black female students who attend predominantly White middle schools.

3) Future studies should explore the experiences of Black male students in science education. It is important to learn about the kinds of pedagogies and practices that support Black male students so that they can reach ultimate success in STEM.

4) Future studies can explore White teachers and their interactions with Black male students in predominantly White middle-school settings to study how they interact with them in these spaces.

Conclusion

After completing this research, I have become even more convinced of the need to build relationships with students. In doing so, we can humanize both students and

teachers in a way that can only improve the educational setting of any school. Furthermore, I see the need for better relationship building and communication for all students, especially Black male students, to encourage and empower them to embrace who they are both past and present. Too often Black students are not encouraged to see their past as a vital window into their present and their future. Lastly, schools must look at their disciplinary policies and understand the ramifications of the use of disciplinary actions on non-White students. Overall, this has been a wonderful process that has presented more questions than answers, but, for me, the need to continually question is the hallmark of a lifelong learner.

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"Mentoring"

Description of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore the possible academic and social benefit of a mentoring program in the middle school setting. Don Kauffman will be conducting the research, and the data collected will not be shared or communicated to reflect individual scores. All grade information, notes, and behavioral data will be stored under lock and key and will be coded with a pseudonym. Once compiled, all data will be available to the district if necessary as long as privacy is assured.

Risks and Discomforts
I do not know of any risks or discomforts to students in this research study as they will not be identifiable by name.

Possible Benefits
It is the hope that students will benefit greatly from this program. Upon completion of the study, all students, parents, and teachers will be provided with an executive analysis of the findings.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality
I will do everything to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Specifically, names will never be used in any dissemination of the work (e.g., reports, analysis, articles, presentations). Teachers will be assigned pseudonyms. Lastly, to protect confidentiality any data collected will be kept under lock and key and password protected.

Choosing to Be in the Study
Students do not have to be in this study. They may choose not to take part, and they may choose to stop taking part at any time. Students will not be punished in any way if they decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Don Kauffman at dkauffma@greenville.k12.sc.us or call 864-355-1911.

Consent

I have read this form and have been allowed to ask any questions I might have. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

A copy of this form will be given to you.

Appendix B: Research Consent Form – Principal Approval

Research Study Consent Form
University of South Carolina
Don Kauffman

"Remediation, Retesting and Mentoring"

Description of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore the possible academic and social benefit of a remediation, retesting and mentoring program in the middle school setting. Don Kauffman will be conducting a short survey and an interview with students before and after assistance to determine the benefits of the BRMS Skill Building Program. At the same time, the researcher will be following grades and attendance of cooperating students for data collection purposes. This data will not be shared or communicated to reflect individual scores but will be reported as group data points. The survey and interview should require no more 20-25 minutes and will be recorded through interviewer notes and survey results. The interviews can be conducted in a format that is most convenient and preferable to limit student time away from instruction, to include the time and location. All grade and attendance information, notes and survey data will be stored under lock and key and will be coded with a pseudonym. Once interview notes have been transcribed, "raw" transcription of the interview notes will be available to the district if necessary as long as privacy is assured.

Risks and Discomforts
The researcher does not know of any risks or discomforts to students in this research study as they will not be identifiable by name.

Possible Benefits
It is our hope that students will benefit greatly from this program. Upon completion of the study, all students, parents and teachers will be provided with an executive analysis of the findings.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality
The researcher will do everything possible to protect student privacy and confidentiality. Specifically, names will never be used in any dissemination of the work (reports, analysis, articles, and presentations, etc...). Teachers and students will be assigned a pseudonym. Lastly, in efforts to protect confidentiality, any data collected will be kept under lock and key and password protected.

Choosing to Be in the Study
Students do not have to be in this study. They may choose not to take part and they may choose to stop taking part at any time. Students will not be punished in any way if they decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Don Kauffman at dkauffma@greenville.k12.sc.us or call 864-355-1949.

Research Study Consent Form
University of South Carolina
Don Kauffman

"Remediation, Retesting and Mentoring"

Consent

I have read this form and have been allowed to ask any questions I might have. I give approval allowing Mr. Kauffman, with my permission, to conduct this research.

Principal's Signature: _Becky Greene_   Date: _2/22/16_

A copy of this form will be given to the signatory.