

WORKING WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN URBAN EDUCATION:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS
A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF APPLIED AND PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
OF
RUTGERS,
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
BY
LATOYA J. GAINES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

OCTOBER 2017

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ABSTRACT

Research in the field of urban education has identified multiple challenges facing African American males in public school systems. The need for teachers and school personnel who understand these unique issues is paramount. Teachers have a direct impact on students and positive relationships with them are among the best predictors of success. This exploratory study examined urban high school teachers' experiences of working with African American male students. Eleven participants, who were teaching or had previously taught in an inner city public high school and were identified as effective by their fellow faculty members, were interviewed about their experiences working with these students. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the types of strategies used by teachers when establishing and maintaining positive relationships with African American male students. An interview questionnaire composed of open-ended questions was developed to explore the approaches these teachers utilized to effectively engage their students. A qualitative analysis of the participants' interviews was completed using grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Results from the study revealed six important themes: (a) understanding urban communities, (b) creating an atmosphere of safety and trust in the classroom, (c) the influence of race and gender on relationships with African American male students, (d) the connection between race and discipline, (e) the need for a culturally sensitive and relevant curriculum, and (f) setting high expectations. Additional themes included: (a) preparation to teach in urban communities; (b) the ineffectiveness of colorblind approaches; and (c) the need for role models of color and father figures. The findings of this study have five important implications for teachers, mental health professionals, teacher education programs, and policymakers: (a) addressing teachers' reluctance and/or difficulty discussing race related issues, (b) developing interventions that can successfully

reduce the racial discipline gap, (c) preparing teachers to work in urban districts, (d) implementing professional development for teachers that challenges the colorblind approach and provides strategies for working effectively with African American male students, and (e) creating policies and interventions to address poverty and its relationship to urban education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). I must first give all honor to God, for it is only by his grace that I have been able to complete this journey. Through every obstacle, he has continued to show favor upon me and confirmation of my purpose. I am extremely grateful to my parents and my brother, Lance, for always supporting and believing in me. It has served as motivation during the rough times. To my entire family, thank you for every encouraging word that was offered throughout this process. This would not have been possible without Nancy Boyd-Franklin. I am so fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from all of your wisdom. I am forever grateful for your kindness and support. To Pat, our conversations about race and working in schools have influenced my work in so many ways. Your thoughtfulness and guidance have inspired the visions that I have for my future in this profession. To my GSAPP peers, words cannot describe the amount of gratitude that I have in my heart for you. During the most challenging times in my life, your warmth, generosity, and encouragement were endless and helped me to continue moving forward. I am fortunate to have worked with so many amazing supervisors and I thank you all for sharing your knowledge with me. I am especially thankful to Anita McLean for providing a space to talk through issues of multiculturalism and helping me engage in deeper self-reflection. To my extended professional family at Yale University, I am humbled to have had the experience of working with you and I am grateful for your support during the writing process. Thank you to the Children's Defense fund for the opportunity to work within such a dynamic program and for opening my eyes to the crisis facing Black males in education and the school to prison pipeline. Finally, to my boys group at Piscataway High School who inspired this work; I am grateful for the privilege to have met with you and for the motivation you have instilled in me to make change.

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Chapter I

Introduction and Overview

Statement of the Problem

African American males are often considered as a population at risk in education (Noguera, 2014). Historically, they have been viewed within a pejorative, deficit framework that has portrayed them as culturally and socially deviant, criminal minded, and academically inept (Howard, 2013). These terms often bring up strong negative emotions, which often perpetuate stereotypes about young African American males which can be seen in the media. However, it is difficult to ignore the fact that national statistics on education, unemployment, and incarceration show that African American males face numerous challenges in today's society (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

For the last four decades, Black males' educational experiences have received serious research attention (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Noguera, 2012). Throughout the educational trajectory, many Black males do not perform as well as their Black female and White male counterparts (Noguera, 2014; Polite & Davis, 1999). They are more likely than any other group to be suspended or expelled from school (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010), overrepresented in special education programs, and underrepresented in gifted education programs (Noguera, 2012). Today, education is perhaps more important than at any other time in American history. A person's quality of life tends to be highly correlated with his or her level of education (Carter & Welner, 2013).

The challenges of African American males in urban education are unique and the consequences of their poor performance are vast. Teachers have a direct impact on these youth and positive teacher-student relationships are among the best predictors of their success.

Unfortunately, most of the research conducted on teacher-student relationships is all-encompassing and does not speak to the uniqueness of African American male adolescents. This fails to capture the specific qualities teachers need to connect with African American males, and additional research on how effective teachers establish these relationships is needed. This research study was designed to increase understanding of the factors to consider and types of strategies used by teachers to establish and maintain positive relationships with African American male high school students. By understanding these dynamics, psychologists will be more knowledgeable and effective in consultations with school personnel as well as in interventions with African American males.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing body of research dedicated to the state of urban education in America. More specifically, research has delved into the experiences of African American male students with a focus on their socioeconomic disadvantage, disproportionality in the discipline and achievement gap, and the link between low achievement and involvement in the juvenile justice system. Throughout the literature, researchers agree that a robust predictor of student success is the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Considering the importance of the teacher-student relationship, it is rather alarming that there is such a shortage of research on how teachers establish effective relationships with African American male students.

Urban Education

Students living in urban communities experience a variety of challenges. Noguera (2012) notes that students living in urban neighborhoods often come to school sick, hungry, without adequate housing or social and emotional support, and from families in distress. Further, Gregory et al. (2010) have indicated that many urban children experience adversity, such as poverty, exposure to violence and substance abuse. Edmin (2016) has written about his experiences both as a student and an educator of urban youth stating, “The gunshot that rang past an apartment window (the experience) and the fear and anxiety that resulted from it (the emotion) creates a reality that is almost impossible for an outsider to fully comprehend” (p. 21). Noguera and Wells (2011) assert that concentrated poverty in urban neighborhoods and the adverse social and economic conditions that typically accompany them impact students’

academic and social supports outside of school, influence students' health, safety, and well-being; and compromise the ability of parents and schools to develop social capital. Viewing students' academic struggles in isolation from external factors such as the adversities described above is a major oversight (Steen & Noguera, 2010). Since learning is fundamentally contextual, Edmin (2016) argued that there are extra political, social, emotional, and cognitive competencies required of Black youth, precisely because they are Black, if they are going to be able to commit themselves to perform at high levels in school over time.

Howard (2013) discussed his qualitative interviews with Black male middle and high school students. His study revealed that a number of Black male students' poor academic performance was due to family challenges, peer pressures, health concerns, and financial considerations. Furthermore, these young men expressed a desire for more educators to understand why they arrive at school late, why homework is incomplete, or why they often appear to be disengaged in school when there are other issues that occupy their minds. One of the major lessons from these interviews was that the social context of education, or non-school matters, played an important role for many Black male students.

Teaching in Urban Schools. Urban schools suffer from an absence of resources tied to their location in poor communities. In comparison to more affluent suburban schools, urban schools typically are underfunded. As a result, they often have less-qualified teachers and overcrowded classrooms (Noguera 2014). Carter and Welner (2013) reported that urban schools further disadvantage their students because of the generally lower quality of their faculty and, compared to their counterparts who teach in more affluent communities, teachers in high-poverty schools are far more likely to be paid less and to work under conditions that undermine their efforts to teach effectively.

Teaching in urban schools presents a more complex challenge than teaching in rural or suburban schools. It requires gaining students' cooperation in addition to ensuring academic growth while addressing the cultural, ethnic, social, identity, language, and safety needs of the students (Brown, 2003). The need for this type of attention is often due to what may be missing from urban students' homes. Dryfoos (1998) stated that urban adolescents may "lack nurturance, attention, supervision, understanding, and caring" and they may have inadequate communication with adults in their homes (p. 37). As a result, those responsibilities often fall on teachers in the absence of consistent caretakers (Brown, 2003). In light of this, the relationships between urban educators and their students become even more important. Several researchers who have studied urban teaching and the characteristics of urban children and adolescents state that care and psychological safety are critical components of teacher-student relationships (Brown, 2003). Gordon (1999) stated, "The best urban teachers show warmth and affection to their students and give priority to the development of their relationships with students as an avenue to student growth" (p. 305).

However, it has long been documented that there is a high turnover rate for teachers in urban schools (Noguera, 2012). Because teachers are the most important in-school resource, the national failure to invest in improving the teaching force and to equitably distribute this resource is contributing to an opportunity gap for African American students (Carter & Welner, 2013). This is especially problematic because Ronfeldt et al. (2013) found that the negative effects of turnover on academic achievement are greater for low-performing and Black students than for their higher performing, non-Black peers. High turnover rates have been linked to teachers' being unprepared to deal with mismatches in cultural norms and the challenges that come with teaching in urban communities. This lack of preparation is probable because too few teacher

education training programs offer substantive training on how to work effectively with ethnically diverse students and families or students who live in urban poverty (Ford, 2005).

It can be a challenge for teachers to be effective in schools if they are unfamiliar with urban communities. Most teachers and staff commute to their schools and have little understanding of, or connection with, the lives of their students outside of school (Warren, 2005). Kafele (2009) argued that regardless of their ethnicity, teachers who have never lived in the inner city can probably never imagine, much less endure, the hardships that many of their students face. As a result, teachers must make a concerted effort to stay aware of students' everyday experiences and be mindful that students may not openly discuss these experiences unless asked directly (Kafele 2009).

Statistics

The Schott Foundation (2010) reported some alarming statistics for Black males in urban education. According to the report, the percentages of children who were living in poverty were higher for Blacks than for any other race. Forty-eight percent of 4th-graders in public school were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, including 74% of Black students. Forty-two percent of Black students attend schools that are under-resourced and performing poorly. Black boys are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their White peers. Black and Latino males constitute almost 80% of youth in special education programs. Black boys are 2.5 times less likely than White boys to be enrolled in gifted and talented programs, even if their prior achievement reflects the ability to succeed. Black male students make up 20% of all students in the United States classified as cognitively impaired, although they are only 9% of the student population. Twenty-eight percent of core academic teachers at schools with a high representation of ethnic minority students lack appropriate certification. According to the Schott

Foundation's (2015) most recent report on Black males, the estimated national 2012-13 graduation rate for Black males was 59% as compared to 80% for White males. Black males graduated at the highest rates in Maine, Idaho, Arizona, South Dakota, and New Jersey. Each state had estimated graduation rates of over 75%. A majority of the states with the ten highest Black male graduation rates had smaller than average Black male enrollments. New Jersey and Tennessee were the only states with significant Black male enrollments to have over a 70% Black male graduation rate.

The Impact of Race

Teacher-student racial mismatch. According to the National Education Association (NCES, 2014), more than 90% of classroom teachers throughout the country are White, and more and more they are teaching children from cultural, racial, and class backgrounds different from their own, particularly in high-poverty urban areas where Black and Latino students make up 69% of the total enrollment. Furthermore, because of the underrepresentation of students of color in teacher education programs and the population growth in racially and ethnically diverse communities, it is safe to assume that the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic divide between teachers and their students will continue to grow in the near future (Egalite, Kisida & Winters, 2015). These differences or mismatches have the potential to hinder efforts to create safe and responsive learning communities for all students (Bates & Glick, 2013). Some teachers may feel that they are not prepared for these students and, for the differences that come with cultural diversity.

Further, research has also shown academic benefits when there is racial congruence between teachers and students. In a study conducted by Egalite et al. (2015), the results indicated that assignment to a teacher of the same race or ethnicity had a positive impact on reading

achievement for Black students in addition to a significant impact on math achievement for Black students. They also examined the effects of racial and ethnic matching by students' prior performance level, and they found that lower-performing Black students appeared to benefit more from being assigned to a race-congruent teacher. Teacher-student racial congruence has also been found to influence discipline. Bates and Glick (2013) found that there are persistent racial/ethnic differences in the ratings of student behaviors and, teachers' ratings tended to be consistent with stereotypes commonly associated with specific racial and ethnic groups when they were rating students' externalizing behaviors. Results of their study indicated that Black students are more likely to be rated as exhibiting externalizing or problematic behaviors in school. However, if teachers were of the same racial or ethnic group as the student, the ratings were less consistent with expectations based on stereotypes. Further, Wright (2015) presented evidence that teachers' assessments of African-American students' disruptive behavior are highly sensitive to the race of the teacher. African-American students who are exposed to more African-American teachers are less likely to receive an in- or out-of-school suspension. Moreover, Fairchild et al. (2012) found that teacher–student racial congruence is positively associated with job satisfaction for both White and Black teachers. The study showed that, when the racial composition of students is equal to or exceeds 70% of the entire student population and the teacher is of the same race as a majority of the students at the school, this racial congruency was positively associated with job satisfaction.

The colorblind approach. Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, and Bluemel (2013) defined colorblind racial ideology (CBRI) as being characterized by the interrelated domains of color evasion (denial of racial differences by emphasizing sameness) and power evasion (denial of racism by emphasizing equal opportunity). CBRI in schools can include both domains and can

be seen when educators engage in a denial of race, blatant racial issues, institutional racism, and White privilege. Neville, Gallardo, and Sue (2016) wrote that, although CBRI has historically been marked as a positive concept, (e.g. skin color should not matter; therefore, ignoring it will eliminate racial issues), it actually leads to a misrepresentation of reality in ways that allow, and even encourage, discrimination against ethnic minority students in K-12 education. They argue that CBRI can contribute to a shared, collective ignorance that permits those in power to ignore the realities of racism.

Even without deliberate malevolence or consideration on the part of those in power within the educational system, “treating others all the same because we are all the same” (one of the main tenets of CBRI) is often the attitude embraced by educators who believe intensely that by simply ignoring racial group membership or skin color, all resulting decisions and practices will be fair (Neville et al., 2016). Milner (2012) asserts that teachers cannot afford to embrace colorblindness in their practices with students because teachers’ and their students’ identities, experiences, worldviews, and consequently behaviors are shaped by race in complex ways. Teachers who do not view themselves as racial beings can have trouble recognizing how racism works and how it can manifest through the curriculum, instructional practices, as well as in broader, systemic, and institutionalized structures that prevent particular groups of students, such as Black students and students living in poverty, from succeeding in the classroom and beyond.

In schools, colorblindness often conceals, while at the same time promotes, deficit thinking, which is usually linked to membership in a racial minority or low economic-status group (Watson, 2012). Thus, despite good intentions, teachers often inadvertently bring to the classroom conscious beliefs or unconscious biases that certain cultural practices are “deficits” that hinder individual growth which result in low expectations of student success. Immersed in

deficit theories, teachers may view their Black and Latino students as burdens, rather than assets, in the classroom; these negative thoughts may then permeate the teaching and learning that occurs (Milner, 2012; Ullucci & Battey, 2011).

Research on effective teachers of Black students highlights that Black students' potential will not be realized in classrooms where teachers view them from a deficit perspective (Milner, 2012). Most often associated with White teachers, this view of Black students does not take into account their potential. Instead, it promotes a belief that teachers need to compensate for what is assumed to be missing from the students' backgrounds (Gay, 2013). Several scholars have reported that deficit thinking by White teachers is one of the most powerful forces working against Black students (Milner, 2006; 2012). Hale (2001) wrote extensively about teaching Black students, stating that "inferior educational outcomes are tolerated for Black children day in and day out, in inner-city, suburban, and private school settings" (p. 56). Further, Thompson (2004) reported that White teachers consistently believe that Black students should not be held to the same academic standards either because of their own beliefs or because of pressure from school officials. As a result, Milner (2012) found that deficit thinking inhibits teachers from valuing the knowledge that Black students bring to the classroom.

Teacher-student relationships

A positive teacher-student relationship is considered to be essential for effective teaching and it has been shown to have strong links to academic achievement (Fisher, Waldrup, & den Brok, 2005). The teacher-student relationship has also been shown to be affected by attitudes and communications grounded in racial and ethnic differences. Decades of research has highlighted the importance of the teacher's and student's attitudes toward one another, yet much less is

known about how the teacher-student relationship is established, particularly between teachers and African American male students.

Numerous elements within teachers' control affect their ability to make meaningful connections with Black students and positively influence their academic growth. In order for teacher-student relationships to work, Riddle (2003) stated that four items must be established on day one. These include trust, respect, communication, and discipline. Demonstrating that the classroom is a safe environment for all students, and that respect is expected at all times is crucial. Further, without trust, Black students may be more wary of their teachers' intentions. Past research suggests that Black students develop less trust and exhibit less cooperation with teachers who do not get to know them personally (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). This is also consistent with Boykin's (2014) research that demonstrated that a sense of mutual trust and encouragement from teachers must be maintained so that students feel comfortable asking for help, raising questions, and announcing to others what they do not yet know. Boykin also showed that those who understand learning processes appreciate that by definition, learning exposes a students' intellectual vulnerabilities and it requires them, sometimes publicly, to admit what they do not know or cannot presently do or do well. In order for these things to occur, open lines of communication between teachers and students are essential. They must sense that teachers not only care about them, but want them to succeed. Kafele (2009) found that teachers must be able to demonstrate to their Black male students that they are genuinely interested in them and their overall growth and well-being beyond their academic progress.

Much of the literature on teacher-student relationships has focused on the role of caring (Muller, 2001). Gay (2010) wrote, "Teachers demonstrate caring for children as students and as people. This is expressed in concern for their psycho-emotional well-being and academic

success. This happens when teachers acknowledge their presence, honor their intellect, respect them as human beings and make them feel like they are important” (p.45). In a study conducted by Lapointe, Legault, and Batiste (2005) adolescents stated that a caring teacher “makes class interesting,” “pays attention,” “listens,” “trusts me,” “acts as a friend,” and “asks if I need help.” Caring requires that teachers use awareness and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interests of others. To go one step further, Gay (2010) stated that culturally responsive caring also places “teachers in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (p. 52).

Additionally, Noguera (2012) has demonstrated that safe schools are places where students feel that they can be themselves, where the peer culture reinforces the value of learning, and where character, ethics, and moral development are important. Research has shown that behavior problems, such as physical aggression, and feeling unsafe both independently predict student attitudes, feelings, and commitment toward their studies as measured by school engagement (Côté-Lussier & Fitzpatrick, 2016). These research studies on teacher caring, effective teachers, and cultural sensitivity are examples of influential works highlighting the significance of teachers’ attitudes and actions toward students in determining whether the relationship is academically productive. Much more research is needed to understand the kinds of structures that might foster the teacher-student relationship, especially with African American males.

Teachers as parental figures. In the absence of consistent parenting, many ethnic minority students feel a need to have a personal connection with teachers (Gay, 2010). Based on empirical research examining the effect of teacher–student relationships in adolescence, high-

quality teacher–student relationships may serve as a buffer between negative parenting and adolescents' psychological and behavioral adjustment (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Similarly, research suggests that positive relationships with teachers may be particularly beneficial to those students who do not have secure relationships with their parents (Wang, Brinkworth, & Eccles, 2013). Connectedness to adults in school was also found to moderate the association between poor family relations and adolescent conduct problems (Dubois et al., 2011). When adolescents are not strongly connected to the family, other contexts, such as school, may be able to provide the necessary relational experiences. By modeling caring and providing support, teachers can demonstrate that positive relationships with adults are possible. In this way, a teacher-student relationship may become a “corrective experience” for youth who have experienced unsatisfactory relationships with parents or other caregivers (DuBois et al., 2011).

Therefore, it is no surprise that schools that are successful at educating Black male students have an administrative and teaching staff that includes a strong male presence that often provides alternate parental figures. Noguera (2012), in his research on successful urban schools found that students at Eagle Academy and Urban Prep, both of which are urban schools with high graduation rates, reported that male staff members were regarded as father figures. Anderson (1999, p.38) discussed the importance of the father figure for Black boys. He stated,

The role of the “man of the house” is significant. Working class Black families have traditionally placed high value on male authority. Generally, the man is seen as the “head of the household.” His role includes protecting the family from threats, at times literally putting his body in the line of fire on the street. He encourages his sons to do the same.

Despite the fact that fatherless homes are becoming more prominent in urban communities, young Black men who grow up without a father know enough about the role to miss it (Anderson, 1999) and will respond positively when it is provided via relationships with male teachers.

Teacher Expectations

Steele (2003) found that low teacher expectations either cause emotional responses that directly harm performance or cause students to dis-identify with educational environments. Van Houtte and Van Maele (2012) contend that when students believe that they cannot achieve, they find no incentive for academic achievement, are often inattentive, withdrawn, disruptive, and they have reduced attachment to school. Further, social status characteristics including race or ethnicity, class, gender, and physical attractiveness have been prominent in formulating teachers' expectations of their students; and in the absence of first- and second-hand sources, teachers utilize social characteristics to formulate their evaluations (Persell, 2012).

In their prolific study, Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, & Brewer (1995) found that teachers' race, ethnicity, and gender were likely to influence teachers' subjective evaluations of their students. McCullough (2013) noted that, of all of the social characteristics, race continues to be the most significant contributor to the formulation of teacher expectations and they found that teachers reported holding lower expectations when a majority of the students in a school were lower income and Black as opposed to middle class and ethnic minority or upper class and ethnic majority. Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge (2015) also found that non-Black teachers of Black students have significantly lower expectations for Black students than do Black teachers. Additionally, Baily and Dynarski (2011) found that teachers hold significantly lower expectations for all male students.

Teacher expectations can also be discussed in the context of student discipline. Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) found that the degree to which students perceived that teachers pushed them to work hard and tackle challenging assignments was associated with lower suspension rates. There were consistent relationships between school wide suspension rates and the degree to which students perceive their teachers as having high academic expectations, being caring, and being respectful. These findings extended previous research showing that teachers' expectations for student success were linked to the development of students' academic self-concept and achievement over time (Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001).

Stereotype Threat

Research has documented that the prevalence of low expectations for their performance may act as a self-fulfilling prophecy for Black male students. This highlights the importance of stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when a student perceives that he could be viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype and lowers his academic engagement and performance as a result (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2004; Steele, 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby (2008) found that people who belong to stigmatized groups, such as Black male students, may question whether their group is valued in mainstream settings, especially settings in which their group has been historically discriminated against or stereotyped (e.g. schools).

Steele and Aronson (1995) conducted a classic study to understand the impact of stereotype threat on academic achievement. This study found that making Black students vulnerable to judgment by negative stereotypes about their groups' intellectual ability depressed their standard test performance in comparison to White students. Further, they found that merely recording Black participants' race was enough to impair their performance. In assessing the

impact of a social-psychological intervention on the writing grade of Black males, Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, and Master (2006) found that students' fears about confirming negative stereotypes about their race could impact their achievement, but when given a reaffirming task, they were then able to significantly raise their grade. Purdie-Vaughns et al. (2008) found that when Black participants expect that their group will be devalued, the setting can be characterized as threatening. In response to certain contextual factors, Black participants may expect that their race will be stigmatized.

Disproportionality

In his research, Noguera (2005) noted that in the urban schools he studied, including those in Boston and Los Angeles, maintaining order and discipline were the priority of the administrators and relatively little attention was paid to the quality of education being provided. Some of the schools he referenced were large schools with elaborate security systems. Even the smaller public schools showed evidence of a fixation with discipline and had high suspension rates due to rigid enforcement of rules and regulations. At the larger schools, the focus on security appeared to be largely superficial. These schools had metal detectors at the entrances and a high presence of guards patrolling the hallways. Nevertheless, beyond these symbols of order, high levels of discipline referrals were still evident (Noguera, 2005).

The Children's Defense Fund (1975) first brought the issue of racial disproportionality to national attention by showing that Black students were overrepresented two to three times in groups of students suspended from school when compared with their rate of enrollment in localities across the nation. Since then, over 40 years of research has unfailingly demonstrated the overrepresentation of Black males in the exclusionary discipline practices of suspension and expulsion (Gregory et al., 2010). Recent reports state that 33.8% of Black males with disabilities

in high schools across the country were suspended during the 2011-2012 school year. (Losen et al., 2015). A recent longitudinal study followed students in the Texas public school system and found that Black students were more likely to receive out-of-school suspension in response to a first offense compared with Latino and White students (Fabelo et al., 2011). This disparity held even after Fabelo et al. (2011) accounted for other risk factors.

There are a variety of hypotheses about the causes of the suspension gap documented in the research literature. Kawakami and Dovidio (2001) argued that teachers' interpretation of behavior may be affected by implicit racial bias which operates out of conscious awareness. Ferguson (2000) emphasized the influence of White teachers' cultural misreading and negative stereotyping of Black students' language and physical expression. Stevenson (2008) noted that authority conflicts between teachers and Black students are fueled by racial tension. Further, literature has also focused on attempting to show that Black males commit more serious offenses (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010).

School personnel feel a tremendous amount of pressure to be in complete control of students (Noguera, 2005), and this pressure is often exacerbated by cultural confrontations and misunderstandings which lead to African American males being labeled as "dangerous" or as "troublemakers" (Casella, 2003). Once labeled in this manner, these students are removed primarily for nonviolent infractions found in the school discipline policy (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000). However, Gregory and Weinstein (2008) showed that teachers often experience the same students differently. In their study of African American students who received discipline referrals for defiance, they found that the discipline referring teacher perceived the student as more defiant than another teacher with whom the student reported having a positive relationship. In addition, several studies have found that African American

adolescents reported differential, negative treatment based on race, which they believed resulted in harsher punishments for engaging in the same behaviors as White students (Stevenson, 2008). Gregory and Thompson (2010) also found that reports of a student's cooperation and defiance depended on the teacher. The number of office discipline referrals the student received varied significantly across classroom teachers.

Furthermore, racial threat has been associated with the high suspension rates for Black male students. Rooted in the conflict perspective, the racial threat hypothesis suggests that as the proportion of Blacks increases in relation to Whites, intensified measures of control will increase in response to the perceived growing threat (Welch & Payne, 2010). In their study, Welch and Payne (2010) found that schools with a larger composition of Black students were more likely to respond to student misbehavior in a harsh manner and less likely to respond restoratively. They concluded that some schools were more likely to respond extremely harshly to misbehavior partly because of the racial composition of the student body.

Finally, the use of school exclusion as a discipline practice may contribute to the well-documented racial gaps in academic achievement. For instance, after accounting for demographics, attendance, and course performance, Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox (2014) found that each suspension further decreases a student's odds of graduating high school by 20%. This suggests that there is a pressing need for scholarly attention to the racial discipline gap if efforts addressing the achievement gap are to have a greater likelihood of success. Noguera (2014) indicated that unless a conscious effort is made to counter the negative effects of disproportionate discipline practices, dysfunctional school cultures will continue to emerge where relationships between educators and students are poor.

School-to-prison Pipeline

A term has been used with increasing frequency among those invested in urban education to describe the collective impact of educational inequalities: the “school-to-prison pipeline.” This phrase is used to describe a pathway through school that is often taken by ethnic minority students, who will be placed in restrictive special education programs, repeatedly suspended, retained, and banished to alternative, “outplacements” before finally dropping out or getting “pushed out” of school (Warren, 2005). Far too often, the end result is a life of juvenile delinquency followed by criminal behavior as an adult. According to Wald and Losen (2003), approximately 68% of state prison inmates in 1997 had not completed high school and seventy-five percent of adolescents under age 18 who have been sentenced to adult prisons have not completed 10th grade. Further, within the juvenile justice population, 70% suffer from learning disabilities and 33% are reading below the 4th grade level (Wald & Losen, 2003).

Recent studies examining the connection between race, discipline referrals, and involvement in the juvenile justice system found empirical support for the school-to-prison pipeline (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeire, & Valentine, 2009). Research suggests that when African American males enter school their educational path is changed by situational variables (Skiba et al., 2000). These situational variables include undergoing harsher discipline practices, being taught by unprepared teachers, being referred for special education, and developing feelings of detachment from school.

In many cases, the end result is a life of juvenile delinquency followed by criminal behavior as an adult. The future outlook for youth who drop out of school is disturbing, with dropouts making up 85% of juvenile justice cases and 82% of the adult prison population (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). Risk factors outside of school also may further the progression

toward delinquency. For example, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds more often than not, come to school with lower pre-academic skills. These students begin school at a disadvantage and are more likely to experience academic failure. Peer and community risk factors, such as neighborhood violence, association with delinquent peers, and limited opportunities for extra-curricular activities or job opportunities, also may contribute to the pipeline (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). This results in a snowball effect as the risk factors increase, especially if there are no protective factors available to slow the progression. Researchers have also found that, although academic failure, suspension, and dropout rates are related to student demographic characteristics and to specific behaviors, they may be more strongly impacted by the characteristics of schools, including poor teacher-student relationships (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005).

Research done within California public schools investigated the reasons why Black youth were disproportionately banished to the school's "punishing room" and "jailhouse." Researchers discovered that young Black students facing discipline, unlike White students, are put into roles imagined for adults in the world outside the school. Referring to a dominant image of Black males as criminals and prisoners, many school authorities view chronically disobedient Black males as "bound for jail." Hirschfield (2008) wrote that:

Implicit in the label of Black students as "bound for jail" is the recognition of two emergent structural realities: (a) that prison, which reifies criminality and tends to foreclose a productive future, looms over the future of African American youth who fail in school; and (b) that schools lack the resources to reverse the downward trajectories of the most troublesome students without compromising the quality of teaching and services aimed at more deserving or more promising students (p. 92).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is an evidence-based model which has been shown to reduce disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). Restorative justice is centered on several core values: (a) a focus on relationships first and rules second, (b) giving voice to the person harmed and the person who caused the harm, (c) engagement in collaborative problem-solving, and (d) strategic planning for restoration (Schiff, 2013). Restorative responses to misbehavior can take a range of forms including student conferences, peer mediation, restitution, or community service. The assumption underlying a restorative response is that "justice" is more than merely punishing students. It is about repairing the harm caused to victims, offenders, and a community. To the greatest extent possible, restorative processes seek to rebuild relationships damaged by conflict (Schiff, 2013).

Research suggests that the use of restorative practices can be beneficial for maintaining positive relationships between teachers and students, particularly Black and Latino students. Gregory et al. (2016) found that teachers who implemented restorative practices at a high level rarely used exclusionary discipline for defiance, and they had a narrower gap in referrals between White and Asian American students versus African American and Latino students compared with teachers who used restorative practices infrequently. Further, results suggested that greater use of restorative practices was associated with better teacher-student relationships as measured by student-perceived teacher respect and teacher use of exclusionary discipline. In particular, African American students reported feeling more respected by teachers who used restorative practices than teachers who did not.

In spite of the research that shows the effectiveness of restorative justice, such interventions are not used frequently in many schools. Payne and Welch (2015) found that a

greater percentage of Black student enrollment decreased a school's odds of using student conferences, peer mediation, restitution, or community service in response to student violations. In addition, a greater percentage of Black student enrollment decreased the likelihood that a school would espouse a restorative justice model of discipline. Notably, when the racial composition of the student body was not accounted for, other factors such as student socioeconomic status and student deviance predicted the use of many of the restorative responses as well as the use of restorative justice overall.

Culturally Sensitive and Relevant Curriculum

Culturally relevant pedagogy has been promoted by scholars and practitioners as an effective tool to guide work with students of diverse backgrounds. In her study of successful teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1994) credited their effectiveness to what she called "culturally relevant pedagogy." She later defined culturally relevant pedagogy as a "theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings 1995, p. 469).

Gay (2010) in her work on culturally responsive teaching contended that teaching is a contextual and situational process and it is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and the ethnic identity of teachers and students, are included in its implementation. She further outlined the benefits of using ethnically diverse curriculum content and asserted that culturally relevant content that provides accurate representations of ethnic and cultural diversity offer students who have never had close personal contact with members of ethnic groups other than their own, opportunities to engage and communicate with ethnically diverse people as well as to confront themselves. This is especially

important given that a vast majority of Black male students will be taught by White teachers. Also, Boykin (2014) found that a viable way for teachers to mediate teacher-student racial mismatch is to build bridges across cultural differences through culturally responsive teaching.

Howard (2013) in his qualitative study found that Black male students felt that much of what was taught in school was not interesting, was irrelevant, was not connected to social realities, and seemed to be intensely centered on testing. Research has shown that curriculum that is disconnected from urban students' context and does not depict ethnic minority populations has had detrimental effects on Black males' academic achievement. Boykin (2014) discussed evidence-based practices for increasing Black males' academic performance. One strategy is to create meaningful learning experiences which entail building on students' past experience and prior knowledge and making connections in school to significant events in the students' lives. Another strategy is to use cultural resources which involve building proactively on the cultural, community, and family assets, values, and practices that students bring to the classroom. Edmin (2016) explained that the relationship between curriculum content and students' contexts allows the teacher to circumvent the tensions that come from the cultural misalignments between school and community. Further, the classroom that respects student contexts becomes a way to reconcile the broken relationship that students may have with schooling.

Literature has also shown that by not utilizing a diverse curriculum, teachers may be alienating their students and not realize it. As Milner (2012) noted, when teachers do not include curriculum content related to a certain racial or ethnic group, "students are actually learning something about [the excluded group] through the absence of the content in the curriculum" (p. 869). Gay (2010) indicated that the high-quality educational programs and practices can never be accomplished if some racial and ethnic groups and their contributions to the development of U.S.

history, culture, and life are ignored. As a result, Neville et al. (2016) argued that it is imperative for teachers to encourage discussions about racial identity, historical and present-day inequalities, and the accomplishments of people of color within a curriculum because this can provide a safe forum for both White children and children of color to stimulate critical thinking skills, thus promoting academic achievement for all students.

Teacher Education Policy

Ongoing cultural and demographic changes in this country have serious implications for teacher education programs. More than 15 years ago, Haberman (1999) argued that teacher education programs should emphasize the importance of the context in which children develop and learn. Since then, a growing body of research has called for teacher education programs to address teacher preparation for working in urban schools. Matsko and Hammerness (2014) posited that knowledge about specific features of the classroom, school, community, district, and federal contexts all influence teaching and learning at the classroom level. Teacher education programs with specializations in multicultural education are better equipped to prepare teachers to face the challenges of the growing racial and ethnic diversity of our nation. Programs that lack a specific focus on racial and ethnic diversity are frequently guided by the assumption that the job for our schools of education is to train teachers to work in classrooms that have mostly White, middle class students. This means that there are teacher education programs that give little consideration to the fact that many classrooms will have students of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds (Nieto, 2000).

The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) issued a policy on multicultural education in 1973 called *No One Model American*, which stated that schools of education have a responsibility to respond to multicultural issues in their curriculum and

teaching practices. It was the first clear indication that race, ethnicity, difference, and social justice were finally to be taken into account by teacher education programs (Nieto 2000). Four years after this statement was adopted, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2004) issued standards that required all of its member institutions to pay more attention to diversity in their curriculum, instruction, and field placements.

Although the AACTE policy and the subsequent NCATE standards were issued to address the importance of cultural competence for teachers, research has shown that there have not been enough changes in teacher education programs to address the inequities of the educational system. Gay (2010) wrote that teacher education, whether traditional or nontraditional, struggles to prepare teachers with the attitudes, dispositions, knowledge, worldview, skill, and practices to develop curriculum rigor and other necessities for urban teaching.

In a review of teacher education syllabi from multiple teacher education programs, Gorski (2009) found that most of the courses were not designed to prepare teachers to identify or eliminate racial, socioeconomic, or other inequities to create more equitable learning environments. Only a small percentage appeared to prepare teachers to work in multicultural classrooms and address related issues, such as poverty and racism. Most of the syllabi analyzed for the study failed to frame multicultural education as (a) a political movement concerned with social justice, (b) an approach for comprehensive reform, (c) a critical analysis of power and privilege, or (d) a process for eliminating educational inequities (Gorski, 2009). Further, the pre-service teachers participating in a study done by Aragon, Culpepper, McKee, & Perkins (2014) did not believe it is important to integrate the existing teaching curriculum with the kinds of

issues about social inequity that are highly correlated with the social struggles that people of color encounter.

Research on the attitudes and beliefs of pre-service teachers and teachers also suggests that more needs to be done in teacher education programs to prepare teachers to work in urban schools. In a study conducted by Watson (2012), the majority of the participants rarely used race words such as “Black” and “White,” instead replaced them with urban and suburban. Because teachers saw urban teaching as teaching economically disadvantaged ethnic minority students, they tended to focus on the perceived deficits of ethnic minority students or the perceived culture of poverty. Thus, urban became a cultural construct. The urban in urban teaching was largely a reference to the racial differences between the majority White teachers and their ethnic minority students, as well as the perceived cultural deficits associated with ethnic minority students. Moreover, in another study, Watson (2011) found that, even when teachers desire to teach in urban schools, they do not want to teach “typical urban students.” Instead they prefer to teach students “perceived as having cultural and symbolic resources that were more in line with those of suburban students . . . who exhibit middle-class-ness” (p. 31).

Nieto (2000) suggested that teacher education programs need to take a stand on social justice and diversity, make social justice universal in teacher education, and show teachers how to reflect on their biases and how those biases may inform their practice. Further, she stated that one cannot teach low-income, minority students effectively without understanding how race and poverty inform the ways in which such students experience the world and, as an extension, their classrooms. As such, Milner (2012) stated that teacher education reform requires that those from urban communities, P-12 teachers, policy makers, as well as researchers have some input in what gets addressed and how in the preparation of teachers for urban education. It is critically

important that those who have experience in urban communities and schools have direct input into how teacher education programs can better prepare individuals to work in such schools. Once teachers learn and have a better understanding of the ways in which race, poverty, and implicit bias influence their students, they will be able to form better relationships with them, which in turn, will foster academic success.

Educational Reform Policy

There is growing evidence that the educational reforms implemented over the last 40 years have not succeeded in bringing about lasting improvements in the most disadvantaged schools because they have largely ignored, or at least failed to address, the impact of poverty on student learning and school performance (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Moreover, researchers of educational policy have asserted that reforms are frequently conceived and implemented in a top-down manner and without sufficient understanding of how they will impact schools (Noguera & Wells, 2011). The persistent failure of urban school reform has also contributed to the educational crisis facing Black male students. Rather than schools serving as a community's support system for children, they are commonly the settings where the problems facing Black male students emerge and worsen over time (Noguera, 2014). If schools continue to ignore these issues or attempt to tackle these problems without the investment of family and community stakeholders, there is no reason to believe that any breakthroughs in reform will occur and urban schools will improve (Steen & Noguera, 2010).

Boykin and Noguera (2011) argued that, in order for change to occur, federal, state, and local policies will need to promote greater equity in learning conditions and greater external support to Black male students to mitigate the effects of disadvantage. Steen and Noguera (2010) posit that successful schools that serve Black males devise strategies that support a wide-

reaching approach to educating students while mitigating the effect of outside negative factors. In his research, Nogeura (2014) found that race- and gender-neutral approaches to solving the problems confronting Black male students are unlikely to be successful because of the unique ways in which their problems are exacerbated by the interaction between school and neighborhood conditions. As a result, interventions and reforms must be designed to address the particular challenges facing schools located in neighborhoods where economic hardships are greatest and social problems are most severe. His research demonstrates that there is a need for public policies, school reform strategies, and supplemental interventions that are consciously and specifically implemented in an integrated manner to address the needs of Black male youth. Carter and Welner (2013) indicated that more teachers must be trained to create connections between academic standards and the social and health supports children need to meet them. They further suggested that the federal government offer special scholarships to prepare professional educators to serve in hybrid roles as teachers and community organizers in an effort to build bridges between schools and neighborhoods and the lives of students in and out of school.

Chapter III

Methods

Qualitative Research

For this study, qualitative research methodology was used to examine the experiences of high school teachers working with African American male students in urban school districts. A qualitative research design was used to provide a robust and in-depth account of ways high school teachers form relationships with these students and the factors they consider when establishing those relationships.

Qualitative research is based on the premise that the researcher is studying the subjective reality of others. It is an inductive process in which data are collected for the purpose of interpretation (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The data include the statements of the participants in the form of descriptions and narratives, along with the researcher's notes about the theoretical implications. The qualitative researcher uses close examination and analysis of the data for the purpose of the inductive building of meaning (Willig, 2013).

The primary assumption of qualitative research is that research is an investigation of the process by which reality is interpreted by individuals, both by participants and by researchers (Willig, 2013). The process of an interview itself evolves according to the direction of the participant. The researcher can respond flexibly with follow-up questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's experience. Although qualitative research is an exploration of the subjective experience of participants, it is seen as valid, reliable research in its authentic adherence to the data which represent the perceptions of participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory involves the systematic identification and integration of categories of meaning from data (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). It provides an explanatory framework with which to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Originally, grounded theory was designed to study social processes from the bottom up. The method allowed researchers to trace how actions had consequences and how patterns of social interaction combined to give rise to particular social processes. In recent years, grounded theory has been adapted as a qualitative research method for psychological research.

Grounded theory researchers use strategies such as coding. Coding constitutes the most basic and fundamental process in grounded theory. This is the process by which conceptual categories are identified. In the beginning stages of analysis, coding is largely descriptive. Descriptive labels are then subsumed into low-level categories. As coding progresses, the researcher is able to identify higher-level categories that systematically integrate low-level categories into meaningful units (Willig, 2013). This process is discussed further below in relation to the analysis of the data for this study.

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 11 participants who were working or had previously worked as teachers in an inner city, public high school. Participants included eight current teachers; two administrators (vice principal and principal), who previously taught at the high school level; and one retired teacher, who previously taught at the high school level. All of the participants had taught at urban public high schools in New Jersey. Participants included five males (two White and three African American) and six females (one White, two Latina, and

three African American). All of the teachers had been identified as effective by faculty members in their respective school districts.

Procedures

Network sampling was utilized to recruit participants. The recruitment process consisted of the principal investigator contacting known teachers and administrators of local school districts and reading an oral script which outlined the purpose of the study and asked for participation (see Appendix A).

Eleven participants were interviewed for this study. The interviews ranged from 25 to 72 minutes in accordance with the participant's availability. All of the interviews were conducted in person. Interviews took place in a variety of settings, including the participant's school of employment, Rutgers University, and the GSAPP clinic. Each participant reviewed and signed a consent form to participate in the study (see Appendix B), as well as a consent form for audio-video recording (see Appendix C). Participants were informed that, when completed, the results of the study would be made available to them upon request.

Interviews were recorded using multiple methods, including a video recording and an audio recording. When it did not appear disruptive to the process, notes were written during the interview. The interviews were transcribed by a third party after all the interviews were completed. The transcriptions and recordings were used to review the data gathered during each interview. Once the results were compiled and analyzed, as discussed below, themes were extracted and synthesized. Similarly, quotes from individual interviews were utilized to illustrate strategies for forming positive teacher-student relationships, as well as case illustrations.

Measures

A semi-structured interview questionnaire (see Appendix D), designed to examine the experiences of teachers working with African American male high school students, was prepared by the researcher for this study. The interview addressed engagement strategies, sociocultural factors, and disproportionality trends related to African American male high school students. The questionnaire included open ended questions, as well as a scenario that participants were asked to respond to in an effort to provide information on the strategies they used to engage their students, the behavioral impact of their actions, as well as efforts to repair relationships following a rupture. Open-ended questions were designed to encourage participants to communicate their perspectives in an unrestricted conversation. Open-ended questioning shifts the focus from requested information to an invitation for participants to explore their experiences and thoughts and to verbalize their perspectives in a revealing way (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). The interviews were examined from a qualitative perspective to incorporate the experiences of each of the interviewees (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed with grounded theory techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) whereby the principal investigator generated the findings from the data collected during the interviews. Consistent with grounded theory, the qualitative data analysis involved several steps of coding. First, an open coding analysis was performed, followed by axial coding, and finally selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

As suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014), open coding was a process whereby the researcher broke the data down into parts, examined the parts closely, and compared and contrasted them. The progressive building of the findings from participant responses involved a

constant or continual study of the data in search of emerging categories. Open coding involved examining the interviews in their entirety with information broken up to identify initial conceptual categories. This provided a foundation for an initial understanding of the data and was essential for further coding procedures.

Axial coding required that the researcher collapse the concept categories and subcategories by finding connections and relationships between the different concepts obtained through open coding. The goal of this process was to combine the data to create more robust categories. Corbin and Strauss (2014) referred to the coding process with the inclusion of axial coding as an increasingly dense conceptualization in which linkage of categories ultimately leads to the identification of the higher level, core categories.

In the final step, selective coding, themes were generated based upon categories obtained from all of the responses and coding procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). These themes were grounded in the data, and they allowed the researcher to create a conceptual framework based upon the direct responses and subjective perspectives of the participants.

Treatment of Data

Interviews were confidential. When the research records included some information about the participant, this information was stored in such a manner that limited linkage between the identity of the participant and the response. Some of the information collected about the participants included gender identity, ethnicity and the school district where they were employed. The investigator kept this information confidential by limiting access to the research data and keeping them in a locked filing cabinet in a secure location. In addition, each participant was given an identification code. Only the researcher had access to the code key.

Consistent with Institutional Review Board Policy, all identifiable information within the interviews was disguised to protect the confidentiality of the participants. For example, any mention of the school district by a participant in the interview was deleted in order to preserve the confidentiality of the interviewees. All study data will be kept for three years and then destroyed.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter presents the researcher's analysis of participant responses to the semi-structured interview divided into four major sections. These sections include (a) building relationships with African American male high school students, (b) systemic issues related to urban education, (c) strategies on how to handle conflict with an African American male student based on a case vignette, and (d) reflections and advice to teachers working with African American males. Each of the four major sections of the results are further subdivided and articulated below.

Building Relationships with Students

Relationships as the basis for student success. Participants were asked a series of questions about their relationships with their African American male high school students and how they went about establishing those relationships. All eleven participants (100%) stated that they felt maintaining a positive relationship with their students was important. Within that group, six participants (55%) indicated that relationships are the basis for student success. One Hispanic female participant stated:

Maintaining positive relationships is the only way to be able to educate our students. A student doesn't want to know what you know. They want to know that you care, and when they know you care, they are willing to work for you, listen to you, learn the material, and do whatever it is that you need them to do because they want you to see what they're capable of. They want you to feel proud of them.

Participants also acknowledged that, if a positive relationship is not maintained, it will have a negative impact on the student's performance. As one White male participant stated, "I

find that often, if it's a negative relationship you have then, they tend to just tune you out. They don't really get as much out of the class as they should.” A Black female participant stated:

I find that if they don't like the teacher or if they don't get along with the teacher, they'll say, “Well I'm just not going to do her work.” And I have to explain to them [that] it's not the teacher that you're hurting, it's you. You're the one who ultimately has to get a grade.

A Black male participant elaborated further saying:

Teachers that are successful are the ones that build relationships with students. It doesn't matter what you're teaching, and it doesn't matter how much you know. If you don't have a relationship with the students, you won't be able to succeed. There's this phrase that teachers have, “classroom management,” meaning that a teacher can control the room. That's a myth. Teachers are never in control of the room. Teachers are outnumbered 20 or 30 to one. You're not in control. What effective teachers do is that they're able to convince their students that they should relinquish their control temporarily in exchange for getting something worthwhile. The teachers that don't have discipline problems are the ones that successfully make that barter with their students. The students understand that they're getting something worthwhile so it's in their best interests to relinquish their control to the teacher.

Understanding the community context in which students live. Each of the eleven participants (100%) also discussed the importance of understanding the communities in which their students have been raised. Each participant discussed the impact that community influences have on student performance in the classroom and ways sensitivity to those issues helps to maintain their relationships with students. One White male participant stated, “I don't really have

a background in [this community], but I try to make sure I'm understanding, because I know there's issues that I wouldn't normally be used to.” A Hispanic female participant elaborated further:

I believe that 9 out of 10 times, it [success] has a lot to do with home. I can only support you from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. I can't support you from 5:00 p.m. to midnight if you're out on the streets and if mom and dad or uncle, grandma, grandpa are not home and you're not a strong person by nature. It's very easy to fall apart. I mean, there are some kids out there who don't have a home life, don't have a support system at home, but they're good kids. They make sure they get on that bus.

One Hispanic female participant elaborated on the conditions of the community:

Many of my students have attendance issues, but you know that comes with working in an urban district, because when you're working in an urban district you are dealing with families that are economically disadvantaged and usually have a lot going on in the home, including pitching in to the family income and other responsibilities....So, for example, if you look today where most of our communities of color live in the United States, there is higher poverty, higher teen pregnancy, higher AIDS rate, higher unemployment rate, lower academic grades, higher mortality rate, higher incarceration rate, so these things do impact a child from achieving and reaching his top potential....So, I think that when you look at those communities and you see all the things our kids have to deal with, I mean looking at [this community], we're in the paper almost every day. We're dealing with gangs, we're dealing with shootings, crime, violence, drug trafficking; and these are things that are prevalent in our urban

communities, and these things are going to have an impact on how students perform in school.

A Black male participant provided an anecdote to illustrate community influences on a particular student he worked with and how he addressed it:

I had a young man who grew up in the projects. His mother got cancer when he was 10. His father went to federal prison [and is] still in federal prison. He was living with his sister....He was the drug dealing, gang banging type. But, he only did it because that was a means of an outlet of his pain....But I told [his class] one day, you all are dealing with something at home that you bring in here with you. I have things at home. I have children. I have a wife. I have things that I deal with, and I bring it here, but you can make a decision. You can decide whether those things at home are bigger than the future that you're walking to. When you succumb to those things, then those people that aren't rooting for you, they've won. But I'm here. I'm your biggest cheerleader. I want you to do great. So...just really getting to the core of why Black and Hispanic males act the way that they act. And those things that I've mentioned, it's just a factor of pain. And a person that doesn't psychologically know how to deal with pain, they'll deal with it the best way they know how.

Growing up in the community and sharing personal stories. Within the study, seven of the participants (64%) acknowledged that they grew up in the communities where they are currently teaching or communities that were similar. This allowed the participants to relate to their students by sharing their own personal stories of success. One Black male participant stated:

Being an African American man growing up in the urban place, working in an urban school setting, helps me to understand, first of all, the culture of the city, because I grew up in the city, and then also just understand what it is to be Black or an ethnic minority in America. So, when you can understand where people [students] are coming from, you kind of tailor what you do or how you teach to that and also it helps me to be able to say, “Listen I’m from here and I get it, ... so let’s go for it!”

Another Black male participant stated:

In order for that [relationship] to happen, the teacher has to see them as human. The teacher has to see them as the same kids that are in their communities and that’s easy for me. I live in the same town I grew up in and I teach in so I’ve been there since 1978. That’s one of the things I connect with the kids. I went through the same schools you went through. I literally sat in the same desk that you sat [in], and I had many of the same teachers that you’re having now, even though I graduated from high school 20, 30, 25 years ago or so. But the fact that I’m part of the community, that I teach there, that I don’t run for the hills at the end of the day, that I live with these people, allows me to connect on a level that some teachers can’t.

Further, two teachers (18%) discussed “keeping it real” with students and provided their experiences of sharing personal stories with students. One Hispanic female participant stated:

I find that keeping it real with them and being down to earth and you know I’m always willing to share some of my personal experiences and things that I went through growing up. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, so right away the students are able to see that we come from similar backgrounds and similar conditions. We struggle through similar hardships, so you know building that relationship with them but also letting them know

that I understand where you're coming from because I went through the same thing. I find that this draws them more to me. All of the sudden they start stopping me in the hallway and saying, "Miss, can I talk to you?" or "I'm going through this." I think that it's because that level of comfort is reached where they understand that I know where they are coming from.

A Black male participant provided this response:

I keep it real. I have this struggle as well... I shared a part of my experience with them. You know, I grew up in the worst city in [this community]. I mean the worst block in [this city], and I share with them all types of stories. I graduated number two in my class in high school. So, I had guys that knew me from the hood. So, they would say, "You know, I trust you. I need you to count my money for me. You don't have to sell nothing. You just have to count..." And I explained to them [the class], I said, "You know, I made a decision." I said, "You all can make decisions..." I said, "I've been homeless twice. I've been in homeless shelters." I'm telling them this. What it's doing is letting them know, and in some of their minds, it's like dang, "I'm homeless right now..." I tell them. I say, "You know, I know what it's like to be fatherless. My father stopped living with me when I was 13." I said, "My father died when I was 19..." But you know, then after all that, then I start giving success [stories]. I'm 27 years old and they look at me like, "You look like us" I've told my class about what my closest friends do. They are engineers, pharmacists, doctors, and students at Harvard Medical School and Harvard Law School....Telling them these are guys from neighborhoods just like you. So, to hear the success stories and then meet us. It just gives them the idea of it's not as bad as you all think it is. You know, you can do it.

Establishing trust, respect, safety and care. A majority of the participants ($n = 10$, 91%) discussed the importance of maintaining a particular atmosphere in the classroom that included trust, respect, safety and care. One Black male participant talked about safety and trust:

One of the things I tell the students in my first day of school speech, I say that, some of you come from places where you need to be hard, where you need to be aggressive, you need to be assertive all the time; and it wouldn't be wrong, it would actually be dangerous for me to tell you to change who you are. You have to be who you have to be to survive your particular circumstances. But, what you need to understand is that when you come through this door, you're in a safe place. So, all the psychic armor that you need out there and the artificial identity you have to have in order to survive out there is not what you have to have here. So if this room is 90 degrees, you can take off that giant fur coat you have and hang it up and when you need to go back out in the cold, you can pick it up again....If you're a teacher and you haven't established that trust, that I care about you, that this teacher cares about me, this teacher is looking out for me, that student is never going to hear what you have to say. They don't trust you, they don't have a reason to trust you, they don't know what your motives are, and they can't put their guard down. But if there's a level of trust and I say, "Hey, you're going to need to learn this."

It's like, "Okay fine."

A Hispanic female participant discussed caring for students:

When you form those relationships, students realize that they're important. One of the most important things for a student is that they feel valued and they feel included and you can only do that by getting to know them, by getting to know their personal and individual situation, what's going on in their family life, what kind of circumstances are

they are surrounded by every day. And, when they realize that you care, they're more open towards learning and towards participating in your class.

Viewing students as human. One aspect participants mentioned as part of establishing this type of atmosphere in class is treating their African American male students as human beings or just simply as children. Four participants (36%) stated that it was important to treat their students as human beings specifically because of their race. One Hispanic female participant stated, "...Giving them the respect they deserve and talking to them like the people that they are. You know children are little people, but they're still people." Another Hispanic female participant stated:

Because you [have] to treat them like a human being, and I feel that a lot of these students, they come into my classroom and other teachers tell me, "Oh watch out for this one, and watch out for that one, because this one's going to cause you a headache." I go in with a clear head and I treat them like I would treat anybody else. You're no different because you're from [this community] or because you're African American or whatever. I don't care about that stuff. You're a human being so [it is important] to maintain that positive rapport, not yelling and not screaming. It does make a difference because some "problem student" might be a problem to his three other teachers but with me he does all my work and he's awesome with me.

A Black male participant also addressed race:

The big thing is, when you don't see Black children as different from other children, you see them as human children...and I'll tell you what's different, when you're not afraid of them. You can't teach people when you're afraid of them and I see that. I've watched that in the hallways. I've watched teachers who are actually afraid of their students so it's

hard for them to see the 6 foot, 3 inch, 16 year old boy as just a boy, because he looks like the scary guy on the news that they saw last night. But when you see them as children and you treat them like children, they respond.

Viewing students as their own children. Within the study, six participants (55%) also explicitly stated that treating their African American male students like their own children contributed to the atmosphere of trust, respect, safety, and care. One Hispanic female teacher responded:

I've always said to myself [that] I treat and love these kids the way I want somebody to treat and love my kids, because I have an 8 and an 18 year old in public school also. So I really believe that what goes around comes around; so I always try to give these children all of my attention and all of my positive energy, because that's what I hope for my own kids in their own schools.

A Black male teacher stated:

There's no shortage of kids looking for a stable adult to take [an] interest in them. Kids don't usually buck back against that. The phrase you want to listen for is if someone says, "these kids." "These kids," they say, it's always something negative afterwards, "These kids don't want to learn. These kids don't want it." The good teachers will always say, "My kids. My kids"...so when I saw that example I was like, "No my kids wouldn't do that. They wouldn't do that to me." The [other] teacher that says, 'These kids, those kids,' [means] 'someone else's kids.'

The class as a family. The final quality mentioned by participants that contributes to maintaining a positive atmosphere in the classroom is treating students in the class like a family.

Participants ($n = 3$, 27%) mentioned that they refer to their class as a family and encourage students to treat each other as brothers and sisters. One Black male teacher explained:

I said, “You know, when I see you guys and I greet you and I say brothers and sisters, I really mean that. I’m not just saying those words.” I say, “You know, I really approach this not as a job, but I approach this as a life experience. So, all of us are together. We’re having this life experience together, you know. And we’re coexisting.” I said, “So, when you come to me, I’m going to speak to you as a brother, regardless. Some things you are going to love to hear. And there’s some things that you’re not going to want to hear. But either case is going to be good for you.”

Setting high expectations. In the study, seven participants (64%) indicated that setting high expectations in their classrooms helped to maintain relationships and overall student performance. These participants acknowledged that students performed to the best of their ability when there were high expectations and encouragement to perform well. Participants also acknowledged the impact high expectations had on student behavior. One Black female participant stated:

My expectation is that you’re going to do your best....I would have frank discussions with them. My students knew that when they came to my classroom that there were certain things I expected as they crossed the doorway coming into my classroom. All the males knew that I expected for them to take those caps off their heads. All students knew I expected them to empty the gum out of their mouth[s], sit down, and do whatever your assignment it was you had to do to prepare to work on for the day so there was this level of expectation that I had for them....I did not like hearing them say, “I can’t do!” And I would have them turn that around to say, “I can do.”

A Hispanic female participant recalled a particular experience with a student and acknowledged the importance of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers set low expectations:

I had one particular student, who... gave teachers a hard time. He didn't give me a hard time. We were fine in class, but you know my other colleagues would come to me and would ask my advice on how to deal with this student a little better because this student was acting up and not behaving and coming late to class, not doing what they had to do. I always asked the teacher, "Did you take the time to get to know him? Did you form those relationships"... So with this particular student, he was doing well in my class, but he was not doing well in other classes so he was failing, and I was able to get together with other teachers and just inform them, give them a different picture of who this student is and what he was capable of. I showed them some of his writing, some of his essays, and another thing that I had found is that all of these teachers automatically had low expectations of him because they had heard what so and so said about him last year and the year before. I feel like it's a self-fulfilling prophecy so to speak. They never really gave him a chance. So after that collaboration, teachers started taking a different approach to this student, and this student was able to graduate. He graduated with a very high GPA, he got a scholarship for school, today he is doing his masters, and he actually coaches baseball downstairs.

Race. Participants were asked about race and whether or not they felt it impacted their relationships with their African American male students. Out of the participants, three (27%) felt that race had no impact on their relationships with students. Further, these participants were the three participants who identified as White. One White male participant stated, "I haven't really

felt anything so far. They've all been very respectful and nice, and I feel like it's a nice environment. That [race] doesn't really come into play.” A White female participant stated:

They knew already that I don't like to talk about the difference based on the color of skin....I'm really against that because I don't see the difference....This is a hard question. I never see the difference, so....And I try to explain to them that I don't see any difference between me and them, or between students who are different, different color or race, because they [are] equal.

In contrast, the rest of the participants (73%) who all identified as either African American or Latino stated that race does impact the relationships with their African American male students. One African American male participant reported:

It [race] is everything, completely. It allows me to see the world from their point of view. It allows me to see the Black students from their point of view and to see my Latino students' world better than I think my White counterparts, who are very naive about how race plays a role in the students' lives.

An African American female participant also stated:

So, for our African-American males, they may not give me the attitude that they may give another teacher because of the relationship, because they can relate. And I think I'm free to say this, a Caucasian teacher will never know and understand what it means to grow up in America and be a Black male.

A Latino female teacher recalled an experience where she recognized that race affected her relationships with her African American students:

I have my African American students. I did struggle with them in the beginning because they saw me as, even though I'm not White, but they saw me as the White teacher, the

Hispanic teacher. Then, once they started to get to know me better and I started sharing my experiences with them, they were like, “Oh okay she’s cool. Yeah and the reason that I say that is because Mrs. D. (an African American teacher) was with me for the first few months and they would listen to her but they wouldn’t listen to me. They responded to her, but they wouldn’t respond to me even though I was the main teacher, and I caught that and I was like, ”I’m the teacher.” Then when I started connecting with them more that’s when they were like, ”Alright cool.”...They definitely responded to Mrs. D. more than me in the beginning now that I think back.

Role models of color. Furthermore, of the eight teachers that stated race was an important factor when establishing relationships with their African American male students, five participants (45%) also acknowledged the importance of having role models of color within the school for students to identify with. One African American female participant explained, “They really need to see strong, African-American male teachers and faculty members....We will call in other male teachers that are on staff, who they may have had a relationship with.” A Hispanic female participant elaborated further:

...Strong female Black principal, strong Black man vice principal. I think that this strong front of administrators...[from this community], who grew up [here] and still live here, really made a difference with how the kids viewed what their potential could be. Lots of kids have the image that I’m from [this community]. I’m not ever going to be nothing, but when you see these administrators, these people in authoritative and powerful positions, who have made it, who still live here, it gives them hope. We had Black guidance counselors; we had the majority of teachers of color. That makes all the difference in the world. So we dealt with conflict differently. Kids had opportunities to be

able to really express themselves and talk about what was really going on with them, because the adults in the building were not so quick to judge and say, “I’m suspending you” or “I can’t deal with you.”

Gender. In addition, nine of the participants (82%) agreed that gender is also an important factor that contributes to forming relationships with African American males. Some of the female participants ($n = 3$, 27%) acknowledged that there is a maternal transference/countertransference that takes place with their African American male students and the importance of that process. One African American female participant stated, “As a female educator working with African-American males you have to be careful, because you... you are mommy, auntie to them.” A Hispanic female participant reported:

I think my gender has given me an advantage because I tend to go into the mommy role. I will not tolerate any type of disrespect [from] my students that I would not tolerate with my own children. So I become very protective, and as a motherly figure, I always strive for my children to see me as a motherly figure, and I think that it helps a lot because it’s more of a nurturing image. I feel like they’re more open to me where I think if I was a man they’d be more intimidated by me.

Other participants ($n = 3$, 27%) acknowledged the need for a strong male presence and the impact male staff have on African American boys. An African American male teacher stated, “I don’t know if it’s the novelty of having a Black male teacher. I don’t know if it’s the experience of actually having a Black male authority figure in front of them for a change that affects both my boys and girls.” One Hispanic female teacher reported:

I’m telling you still I ask some of the male teachers to help me out in some things to get through to kids. I think a lot of our kids are old school. The Hispanic and the African

Americans like that male presence, that male. For example, if I would have an issue with a student I would be like, "Coach L. can you talk to them." He would be like, "Man what did you do? Like, come on. Mrs. R. is cool." Just like that, because maybe there's not a male figure in their life. Maybe they need that; or maybe there is, but it's not a strong male figure. I've noticed that with African American students they need that male figure, that male. At least in my case, I've noticed that.

One African American female teacher acknowledged both her maternal role and the need for a strong male figure:

You have to be conscious, because my approach may be different than the male approach. So, sometimes I will say, "Okay, go see Mr. So and So, because I'm the female. I can't tell you some things." I say, "Go, because my perspective is going to be a little different because I'm the female, and I need you to hear it from a male perspective." So, they will go to the other male teacher, and that creates collegial relationships to help build up the child. And I think the students are conscious, because they sometimes they'll be like, "Hey, Auntie L.; hey Ma L.!" They end up calling you, you know, those terms because they don't have that at home. Instead of saying, "Ms. L."...it's like, "Ma, Ma, Auntie"...and it's just their term because you have now had a personal relationship or a personal connection with them. So, they are conscious that even though that's my teacher, she acts as a mother or she acts as an aunt in my life.

Going the extra mile. All of the participants (100%) discussed seeing their role as more than just teaching academic material to their students. Participants often referred to this as "going the extra mile." In going the extra mile, teachers discussed involving themselves in extracurricular activities (64%) and meeting with students before or after school (100%). Further,

27% of the participants discussed frequently allowing students to make up missed work due to sports, excessive absences, or job interviews. Finally, three teachers (27%) mentioned checking in on students outside of the classroom. A Hispanic female teacher stated:

I used to drive up on my students because my car was very famous. I had a Nissan Maxima with a bunch of music in it, you know, back in the day, and so my kids they loved my car, and they could hear me boom down the road all the time, and I told them, if I see you up on the corner I'm gonna run up on you. I don't care where you are and what time it is and I did that a few times. They thought I was playing, but jokingly aside, they knew I cared. [They knew] that I was willing to get involved in their life after school just to make sure they were okay and see how they were doing and make sure they're not putting themselves in a bad or negative [situation].

Specific strategies. Of note, six participants (55%) were able to provide specific strategies that they felt worked well when trying to connect with their African American male students. An African American female teacher stated, "Probably my home was open to my students, to some of my students. So they had the...they felt comfortable enough to come by the house, and we would sit outside on the steps and have conversations and just talk with an easiness about the relationship." A Hispanic female teacher reported:

Once I find out something about them, something on a personal side, whether they like a sport or they like this, I use that so they could connect with me. I'm speaking about the African American students. Yeah, for example, if they like basketball, baseball, football, even though I might not know much about it, I try to implement it when I speak to them in my lessons, or I become the student and they become the teacher. I kind of flip it and

tell them, “You teach me this, and I’ll teach you that.” That’s how I form some sort of bond with them or relationship with them.

Another Hispanic female teacher stated:

Well, the first assignment that I would assign is an essay called, “*Who am I?*” And you know I always assure the students that this essay was completely confidential. So, in other words, they are not going to be asked to read it in front of the class. I wasn’t going to share it with other colleagues or other students, and it was just an opportunity for them to let me know, to give me a little window of who they are and what their passions are and what they’re going through, anything significant that has really happened in their lives to put them on the path that they are, any tragedies that stay with them, that they carry with them, basically anything that they want me to know about them. And I stress the confidentiality so the majority of the times when I get these papers they are filled with really sensitive information, and I appreciate it. I hold it very dear to me, because I know that it’s tough for them to get some of those experiences out on paper, especially with a new teacher that they barely know. But those papers really help me to decide what kind of angle I am going to take with each of these students.

An African American male participant reported:

All right, so my first week of teaching, I don’t even teach my students math. I do relatable topics. So, one thing that I do with them, I show them a picture of me sitting on a car with my hat backwards with a chain on. It’s an actual, real picture of me in college. And I have another picture of me holding my son. And I ask them, you know, when you see the news and you see Black males portrayed or young Hispanic males portrayed, which image would you see? And they say the one on the left. Where the one on the right

could be the guy that has been transformed. So, I say, “Show me images of you, one that people perceive you as versus who you really are.” That’s one good icebreaker that I have with the students.

Finally, an African American female participant stated:

Personal relationships. There's something called personalization, and I think we all need to get back to that. They need to see you in a community, so in the classroom...you teach, but you still also need to connect your teaching to real life situations. Enable them to voice their opinion. Nobody is above confrontation, and that's positive. They need to be able to understand that they can have a dialogue with their instructor and educator and agree to disagree. Always speak to them, and that...I think that fosters positive communication. One strategy I do use, and we've learned it throughout the years, it's called Restorative Practices and Positive Peer Culture.

Systemic issues related to urban education

Disproportionality. The participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to some systemic challenges that are present in urban education settings. These questions were asked to elicit participants’ perspectives on disproportionality in discipline and special education.

Discipline. Participants were asked about high rates of suspension for African American males across the country. Of the participants, three teachers (27%) were unsure why the phenomenon exists and speculated reasons such as aggression or challenges at home. Of note, these three teachers identified themselves as White. The remaining teachers (73%), who identified as people of color, discussed their perspective that the high suspension rates were related to negative perceptions of African American males. A Hispanic female teacher responded:

...to be honest with you I just think that people have a negative perception of African, especially urban, African American students. I'm being brutally honest. I think people just have a really bad perception of not giving them a chance and just automatically ... [say that] they're a troublemaker. "He's not going to get anywhere so..." It's horrible to say, but even talking to some teachers, they have that perception and I'm like, "Wait." get to know the kid first before you make that judgment. I mean racism, it's alive and well and just maybe the older teachers that's how they grew up. It's horrible to say but I do feel that way or maybe because they are not coming from a diverse background, because yeah. I've heard some pretty horrible things.

A Black female teacher stated:

Because there's this perception about Blacks, country-wide. I mean we see that in the political arena with the campaign that there's still some people that have this misconception about African Americans that we have to be harder on them, we have to discipline them more, like they're an unruly people and we have to confine them more, bring the law down on them more.

Additionally, a Black male teacher responded:

It suggests there's some perception of Black males of otherness that there's something different about them and that's what I was talking about. I'm not sure to what degree the White middle class teachers that work with students see that 15 year old boy as the same as their 15 year old son in their communities and so it's the thing that always happens with Black people, that they're not allowed to express the same type of anger that White people are. Expressions of anger have implied violence, automatic violence attached to

them and therefore we have to do something with you right away instead of just talking to you.

Further, a Black male teacher elaborated, saying:

I like that question. I'm glad you saw that. I think that's such a huge thing to talk about, but I think some of it is perceptual on behalf of the staff. So, there might be this perception of Black kids, where it's a negative perception of Black boys, and you did it, so you're getting suspended. I also think...kind of like the justice system, criminal justice system, you know, it's all right for these cops to go around shooting these Black boys left and right, pow, pow. And there's no indictment, you know, the cops walk free, it's kind of like that. So, I think that perception starts early, it starts with our Black men early. I also think that Black boys are suspended more frequently because of... Black males do come from urban America and a rough neighborhood, and I think the environment that they come up in, teaches them to be a little resistant and noncompliant. And then they...that goes unchecked for a while....And then, that just becomes kind of the behavior...

Special education. Participants were also asked about their experiences with special education students. Within the study, four of the participants (36%) stated that they have not worked with special education students and seven participants (64%) stated that they had worked with special education students. Of all the participants, four of them, (36%) stated that often, there was no discernable difference between the regular education students and special education students. One Black male teacher stated, “I don’t want to know who the special ed students are in my class because frankly there’s very little difference between my special ed students and my regular students. I hate knowing....I want to get to know who they are and then see. Additionally, two teachers (18%) discussed the over-classification of African American males in

special education. A Black male teacher stated, “Not much of a difference...first of all I think too many kids are over diagnosed, not over diagnosed, overly classified and they probably don’t even need to be in special education classes...and it’s mostly Black boys...” A Hispanic female teacher responded:

I feel that a lot of our students are misdiagnosed. I feel that it’s very easy for educators today to say those Black kids over there have ADD or they’re hyper or they have behavioral problems. This is not to take away from very real problems that do exist out there, that our students need very specific treatment and medication but I do feel that our population is overly diagnosed. I think that part of the problem is that we do not have a lot of teachers that these kids can identify with. So you know you have teachers from other cultures that are not Black and they don’t know how to deal with our kids and they don’t understand our kids and they’re very quick to say you know I can’t deal with this kid and people are very quick to diagnose the kid and put him on medication...

Diversifying the curriculum and making it relevant. A theme that became evident during the interviews was that teachers felt it was important that their African American students have a curriculum that is more representative of their culture. Participants (n=5, 45%) discussed the lack of diversity in the curriculum or the importance of making material relevant to the students’ lives. A White male teacher stated, “I’m an English teacher, so I try to make my literature a little diverse, a little mixed up. I just don’t want to just be teaching like the same old canon every time.” A Black female teacher spontaneously added to the interview after the final question by saying:

I think a lot of times in dealing with African American students in general I think the curriculum can be a little insensitive in that it’s not something that would hold the interest

of African American students or minority students for that matter. So I think that schools can do more in changing the curriculum to content that would be of more interest to minority students...I think maybe something that would have been of more interest was like something that dealt with social issues, something that they could relate to instead of this highly scientific unit that I had difficulty with some of the words, you know?

A Hispanic female teacher was very passionate about the issue stating:

I think one of the biggest issues with our schools is that our curriculum is mono-cultural and our students cannot identify themselves with it. As a history teacher, as a former history teacher, I always incorporated our histories into the curriculum, even though it wasn't in the curriculum. I made time for it, I got those extra resources, I showed those documentaries, that information that's not in the history books. My kids always knew about it. And especially when you're talking about Black people, people of color, a lot of our kids seem to think that our history started with slavery and they are mistaken, and that's part of the problem. So if you're in a class and the teacher is just talking about your people as far as being a slave, being conquered, struggling for civil rights, struggling for equal rights, it affects how you see yourself. It affects how you think the... height that you can reach, it affects pride, it affects self-esteem. I always started our history classes back when Black people were kings and queens and ruled the world and showed other people how to behave and how to act and in doing so it inspired a lot of pride. When children know that my ancestors invented mathematics and science and arts and taught other people how to do that, and then this terrible thing called slavery happened and interrupted our history, now it makes sense, because they understand that they come from greatness and if you come from greatness, that means you're capable of greatness.

A Black male teacher addressed the issue of relevancy, stating:

One of the first things I tell my students is that whatever I'm teaching...if they raise their hand and say what does this have to do with me, what does this have to do with today, the real world, right outside my room? If I can't give them an answer, we stop the lesson and we do something else, so it's relevancy...the discipline problems are a result of the meaningless education that Black children receive. I remember this time that there was some kid in the hallway, dancing to music on his phone and I'm watching him and then, he's out there for a good while, he's not in class, and then after several minutes he goes into a class...The student made a decision that dancing to this club music in the hallway was more valuable than what was happening in his class...When you're not giving students anything that's meaningful in their life, well what are they supposed to do, just sit there and let their minds be abused all day?....Let's stop focusing on the test and actually teach these kids some stuff that's relevant to their lives, that way if they fail the test, at least they still learn some information that's actually useful to them and maybe they do a little bit better.

Conflict between school policy and personal practices. Participants were asked if they ever felt there was a conflict between their own best practices for working with African American males and the district policy. In the study, five of the participants (45%) stated that they do feel there is a conflict. A Black male teacher discussed letting students use headphones in class:

They listen to their music while they're doing classwork...because I know this works. Outside of this classroom, I have no control, no power over that. But inside this classroom, this is mine. I control this. And when my administrators come, I let them

know. They're doing that because I allowed them. So, that gives the students faith in me that I'm protecting them based on what I've said. So they come into the classroom and the administrator sees them with their headphones. I allowed them to use their headphones. I mean they can pull me and say, well you can't do that. Well, you know, it works. And I give them why it works. And my test scores show that.

The other four participants (36%) discussed write ups and suspension policies. A Black female teacher stated:

I'm on the fence with the in school suspension because it takes kids out of class but that, I think that's the only thing. For the most part I'm trying to you know, follow the guidelines that have been set for the kids, the only thing, you know like I said pulling them out of class for in school suspension...there are some things that maybe we could do differently.

Another Black female teacher commented:

Always a conflict, because I just think everything doesn't warrant a suspension, or everything doesn't warrant a consequence. What is going on, why is this African-American student still being abrupt, what is it? And you have to get down to the core issues...because suspension is not working, ISS is not working. There are a lot of entities that are not working, so what's going on? Because I'm going to suspend him, where is he going, home? So, do I need to suspend him to a program like I said before, or do I need to suspend him within the school where's he's meeting or having some type of mediation with the teachers or working with the Discipline Team, or something at that school?....Have them do things that they can be involved with. So, that way they have a sense of responsibility, number one, and then that would create a personalization

component for them. Number two, to get them to understand and know some other faculty members and a teacher at a different level. So, that way you know what's going on in their [lives].

Strategies for Handling Conflict: A Case Vignette

Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding the following case vignette:

Your student, Shemar, an African American male, comes into class late and in a visibly bad mood. He comes in and sits down and puts his head on the desk. Another student makes a joke about him, and Shemar proceeds to start a verbal confrontation which has the potential to turn physical. You say, “Calm down Shemar.” and he says, “Get out of my face!”

In response to the prompt, five participants (45%) stated that they would not have let the scenario escalate that far and would have done something sooner to intervene. Ten participants (91%) speculated that the student, Shemar was most likely upset by something that happened at home or something that happened just prior to coming to class. A Hispanic female participant stated, “Something happened last night, or someone pissed him off and he needs to let it go.”

Additionally, eight participants (73%) also stated that they would address the other student immediately in an effort to minimize the antagonizing behavior. A Black female participant stated, “And I'll tell the other student, “It's not your place to say anything. You just sit down, be quiet, and we'll get on with the lesson.” Forty-five percent of the participants ($n = 5$) also stated that they would not engage in a confrontation with Shemar after he told the teacher to get out of his face. Four teachers (36%) acknowledged that the other students in the class would instigate

the confrontation so they would not address the problem in front of the class. One White male teacher reflected:

Because generally, the other students either tend to aggravate the situation by either cheering someone on, or maybe agreeing with the other student...[or] maybe agreeing with the verbal, that joke that the student made earlier, and making the situation worse just in general.

Additionally, seven participants (64%) reported that they would remove Shemar from the classroom in an effort to better understand his behavior. Further, five participants (45%) acknowledged that Shemar was displaying some displaced anger and he was not directly angry at the other student or the teacher. A Black male teacher stated, “Usually when children go through a situation where they can’t control their emotions they’re going to take it out on the most available opportunity, so you know a kid saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, that’s really not addressing the issue. He’s just expressing his anger.” Also, sixty-four percent of the participants ($n = 7$) also stated that they would allow Shemar to take a walk to the bathroom or to get some water to help him regulate his emotions. A Hispanic female participant reported, “Usually it’s just like, Shamar you’re in a bad mood, just take it easy, relax. Maybe take a breath, maybe take a walk to the bathroom, throw water on your face and come back.” Moreover, thirty-six percent of the participants ($n = 4$) also stated that they would take Shemar to another place (go for a walk or to the office) to have an in-depth conversation with Shemar to understand his behavior. The participants ($n = 8$, 73%) also stated that they would try to understand Shemar’s feelings and validate his anger. Two participants (18%) stated that they would talk with Shemar about taking his anger out on other people. One Black male teacher elaborated:

Some of you are dealing with real stuff, but no one in this room caused your problems, so it's okay to be angry, it's ridiculous for you not to be angry, not to be sad, not to be frustrated at times, but when you are at that place, it's your responsibility at the beginning of class to come to me and say Mr. P I'm having a bad day, I just need to be left alone and I will always say, okay, no problem.

Two participants (18%) stated that they would help Shemar find a solution to whatever the problem was that he was dealing with. A Hispanic female teacher stated,

They need a solution and maybe I could provide that solution, which sometimes I have provided that solution for them and I need to tell them, "Dude you're just having a bad morning. That's it. It's just a bad morning. Don't make it worse by getting sent to the office or getting suspended because everything's a domino effect.

Further, forty-five percent of the participants (n=5) also stated that they would call other staff (guidance counselor or male teacher) to help them intervene. As one Hispanic female participant put it,

I would definitely call for help, but I would be very careful of who I'm calling for help because again, a lot of these teachers that don't understand our kids right away want to use words like threatening and police and all of this other stuff that is unnecessary if you just get the right people that these kids trust and identify with and they'll sit down and talk about what's going on. Because 9 times out of 10, it's something having to do with living in an urban community.

In addition, seventy-three percent of the participants (n=8) also stated that they would call security to get involved if the fight became physical. Six participants (55%) stated that they would check on Shemar the next day but would not mention the incident and would not bring it

up in the future. Two participants (18%) stated that they hoped Shemar would be glad that they took the time to help him instead of having him get into further trouble. As one White male teacher stated, “He would be glad that he avoided probably a suspension for that.”

Reflections and advice to other teachers

Participants were asked a series of questions to elicit reflections about lessons learned from challenges with African American male students and feedback they received from students about what they did well.

Feedback from students. Participants were asked if students had provided them with feedback about what helped them to succeed. Participants discussed the structure they provided (18%, n=2), never giving up on their students (18%, n=2), remaining consistent (18%, n=2) and preparing them for college (18%, n=2). A Hispanic female teacher discussed preparing her students for college by saying:

I’m a big note taker. So I used to have those kids writing and you know we used to make jokes and we used to do wrist exercises so the blood flows and the hand doesn’t cramp up when you’re writing all those notes, but one of the most common things they tell me is, Miss I never threw those notes away, because those notes are part of my heritage and they made me feel pride and confidence in my identity, in who I am, and what I’m capable of and they help prepare me for college. They always tell me that my class was the class that always really helped prepare them for college. A lot of our kids make it and get to college but then they’re in for a shock because they realize they don’t have the skills they thought they had and it’s hard to keep up when you don’t have that basic foundation.

A Black female teacher discussed remaining consistent and never giving up:

Most of my students [are] just glad that I stayed on them, I get that. [I] Stayed on them in terms of all of the fussing that we did. And they'll say, if it wasn't for me nor the Child Study Team, they wouldn't be where they were today. But it was because of the constant...during those times, it was the constant mediations that we had to stay on them. I heard from one of my students the other day, "Ms. L, if it wasn't for you staying on us like you did in class, making sure we got our work done. Even if we played around or got in trouble, you stayed on us and still helped."

Lessons learned. Participants were also asked to reflect on how they grew from unsuccessful experiences with their African American male students. Two themes that emerged included reaching out more to students (36%, n=4) and learning that you cannot reach all students (45%, n=5). A Black male teacher discussed learning that he could not reach every student:

What you learn is that when you first start teaching you think it's like the movies, you kind of get every single kid and you're not supposed to. People are...different people are attracted to different personalities...I'm a photographer, right? And sometimes when I'm shooting sports there's something happening way on the other side of the field and what professional photographers learn after a while is, that's just not my shot. There's nothing I can do to get that shot, so stop stressing out over it, that's not mine. Because while I'm stressing out about [what] I'm missing over there, [there is] something right in front of me that I should have [gotten]...

A Black female teacher discussed learning to reach out more to one particular student stating, "I probably should have dug a little further; that's me...I think most teachers have a social work background too or whatever so I probably should have tried to dig a little further or harder with

him. Maybe that's what I should have done." Another Black female teacher stated, "Basically, you can't build Rome in a day, it takes time, and if you could just save one, then you will have a success story. You can't save everybody, I had to learn that."

Advice to other teachers. Participants were asked to share some words of wisdom for other teachers based on their own personal experiences of teaching African American males. Their responses were divided into advice for groups of teachers including Black teachers, White teachers, female teachers, male teachers and new teachers.

Black teachers. Themes that emerged from participant responses included relating to students based on the experience of being African American, setting an example as a person of color and treating students as if they were your own children. One Hispanic female participant stated, "Connect with them. You know, if this was your son how would you like for it to be handled?" One Black male participant also stated, "Black teachers, stay relatable. If you are of the community, keep that premise. You know, they are looking for someone that's like them that can understand them." A Hispanic female participant responded:

Black teachers, our kids need you they need role models they can identify with, both Black woman and Black men...models that our young kids can identify with and say he was in similar circumstance as me, he struggled and he made it, so that's who I want to be, because he looks like me when I look in the mirror I kind of look like him, so this is a role model to me. So Black teachers, we need you...I really fear that there's going to be a huge teacher shortage but especially a huge Black teacher shortage and that worries me. That worries me because that means less multicultural education that means less teachers infusing Black history and multicultural curriculum and social justice education in the classroom.

Another Black male participant stated:

Black teachers with Black males, be Black. Don't run away from who you are. See the world from your point of view, that's what makes you valuable, that's what makes you valuable to these kids, they don't need a person with a heavy dose of melanin in their skin that believes the same things and views the world the same way as White people, they have White people to play that role, they don't need you to pretend to an off brand version of that. Be the person that gives legitimacy to their voice, to their vision, their frustration.

One Black female participant elaborated:

As a Black teacher, we cannot forget...that you once sat where they were, so they need to be where you are. And because, you have to look at them, because they are a product of you, because that's your son, that's your daughter, that could be your son. And what you expect of your family, and what you expect of your children, you should expect that from them.

White teachers. The advice given to White teachers included having an open mind to the challenges that African American students face (36%, n=4), do not try to "fix things" (27%, n=3), do not talk down to students (9%, n=1), do not get into a standoff with students (9%, n=1) and avoid race (9%, n=1). One Hispanic female participant stated, "I notice that with a lot of White teachers. They talk down to them and they talk so much about them...this is why they act up in your class and they don't act up in mine because they feel it, because they ain't stupid.

They know it and they feel it." A Black male participant stated:

White teachers, don't be arrogant. Don't be White colonizers trying to civilize the natives, don't be arrogant enough to think that you're smarter than that mother from the

projects...don't walk in with this idea that you have the gift, you're the thing they need to aspire to be like and that you have the answers. You don't have the answers. You don't even know what the questions are yet, so figure out what the students, who the students are, who they really are and what they need and then give it to them.

A Black female teacher elaborated:

I would want White teachers to understand that you cannot fix the Black male students' problem, resolve it for them because you are not...you cannot come at them with the understanding with saying to them I understand what your issue is because you won't understand what the issue is because you don't live their life just as I may not be able to understand the White female student['s] issues because I have not lived her life you know? You can't be the 'do gooder'; I'm going to fix this kid; I know what he needs, because that may not be what he needs.

Lastly, one Black female teacher commented:

Caucasian teachers, the advice is to make sure we understand and know what our African-American males go through. Because I don't think everyone understands what they go through, especially what's going on in our society today. Understand what's happening in their [lives] and what they go through, so that way you can move beyond and move past.

Male teachers. Themes that emerged in advice to male teachers included do not try to physically intimidate students (27%, n=3) and be strong positive role models (45%, n=5). One male teacher stated, "Male teachers though, don't come in like you're going to be physically intimidating. This macho hyper masculine super hero that's going [to] lay down the law. That's especially true for White male teachers." Another male teacher stated, "Male teachers, fall back

on the testosterone because then it becomes a pissing contest and, you know, that testosterone against the young testosterone. They're going to try to out testosterone you so just fall back on the testosterone." Another male participant stated simply, "Male teachers, always remain a strong male teacher. Never bend. Once they see a little chink in your armor, you're not going to win." Of note, these three responses came from the three male participants who identified as African American. A Black female teacher stated:

I think Black male teachers have to serve as positive role models. They cannot be afraid to even share some of their...personal issues that they may have gone through in growing up as youngsters. There are plenty of positive Black males out there and they can serve as positive Black role models I think for the kids; again put the kids in a place where they can see successful Black men...successful because they made a turnaround in their life you know and they can share with those students I once did this you know and this is all it's going to get you and they can physically share with them, this is always going to take you down to this road if you do this. It took this to turn me around; I need to help you to turn around now you know before you even get down that road.

A Hispanic female teacher stated:

Male teachers, just make sure they understand their role and responsibility as a male, because half of our African-American students, and male students in general do not have a father figure in their life. So, understand that you might be the father, you may be the model father. And they look at you like that, even though you don't know, they look at you like that.

Female teachers. Themes that emerged from advice to female teachers included maintaining boundaries (45%, n=5) and maintaining a nurturing female presence (36%, n=4).

One Black female teacher stated:

As a female teacher with your Black male students always keep uppermost in mind that you are the teacher and he is [the] student. That's key! That you have the authority and the responsibility of behaving as a teacher and you set the parameters around which your relationship exists.

A Hispanic female teacher responded:

Female teachers, I think the big part is the nurturing side. You can nurture your students, I guess that works for all teachers, but it's a female quality. It's just a natural quality to nurture your students. [If] You can nurture and be patient, you'll win every time.

New teachers. Themes that emerged from advice to new teachers included do not be so strict (9%, n=1), teaching is going to be difficult (9%, n=1), know your demographic and urban education (55%, n=6), have your own teaching philosophy (9%, n=1) and maintain classroom management (18%, n=2). One Hispanic female teacher discussed being too strict with students:

New teachers, because I made this mistake. Don't be so strict. Don't try to prove something to them. Just go with the flow and a lot of new teachers they come in, they have this persona of [this community]. Oh, it's a bad school. Did you see "Lean on Me." It's exactly like that...I'm like dude relax. You know, you don't have to be that teacher. Don't be so strict and I made that mistake.

One Black male participant talked about the challenges of teaching:

You can't learn to be a good teacher, you can't...if that's not your personality. ...that's enough, that hug that you get, if that's not enough to get you through the week, through

the month, to get your next hug your next high five, then you're in the wrong profession, you need to get out ... That first year of teaching is going to be the hardest thing you've ever done in your life, you're the worst teacher that you'll ever be, if you make it through your first year, you might be okay but it's going to take you about 10 years to actually be a decent teacher.

One Black male participant talked about having a teaching philosophy:

You have to have your own teaching philosophy... And stick to it... And also be willing to change. You've got to see what works. This textbook stuff of how to teach classes doesn't work. Not in Black and Hispanic communities. Those books weren't written for us. They were written for a different demographic of students that eat breakfast and come home to parents that are telling them to do their homework. And that they're going to be fine.

One Black female participant talked about knowing the students:

Fresh out of college; first of all don't go in as Mr. know it all because you don't know it all... you have to go in with a game plan from day one they need to know that you're there to help them to learn. There is a responsibility that you have; your responsibility is to teach them and help them learn. Their responsibility is for them to expect for you to help them to learn. Be aware of the fact. ... [P]articularly in this day and age, they're so many things that are impacting on them as the Black male; in today's society this whole Black Lives Matter thing is out there so you see so many Black males being caught up in the legal system and what have you. Broken homes, so many Black young males with children on the way or already have children or what have you and I think that we must constantly be aware of that because parents of black males today are younger than parents

were of Black males when I first began teaching so you hear this all the time, it's become almost like a catch phrase...children raising children...you hear that all the time and we've got to be aware of the scenarios and the lifestyles that the young males are coming up in now; they're impacted with so many things...Our drug problem is so rampant in the city now. The encounters with law enforcement are all over television every time we turn around another Black man is shot and what have you so we've got to help them

One Hispanic female participant elaborated on understanding the students and challenges in urban education:

Teachers...need to realize where they're applying. Lots of our teachers they have that loan forgiveness if you work in a poor district, yadda, yadda, yadda, I feel like we're getting a lot of teachers that really don't want to be in a urban district, don't know anything about being in a urban district, don't even know how to spell urban, have never had to struggle in their life for nothing. Then they come here and they're having panic attacks and they don't know what to do and they feel threatened, so what are you doing here? So I find that a lot of these new teachers are coming here for other purposes, to get their loans forgiven, to get their foot in the door, to get their feet wet, to get experience that looks good on the resume before moving on. I think the loan forgiveness period is something like three years, so many of them leave, so I think that they need to really understand what it is that they're getting themselves into and are you prepared to go above and beyond to service our kids? Because our kids need a lot more...but you have these teachers that are not here for that and so they're not successful and then they make our kids feel bad. Our kids feel like there's something wrong with them when there isn't.

So teacher preparation programs really don't prepare you to deal with urban education.

So my advice to them, study the community, find out what's going on.

Summary

Participants discussed their experiences working with Black male high school students. Among these responses, major themes were identified including being cognizant of the community context in which students live and the impact of race related issues in relationship to academic success and discipline. Working with Black males appears to present a variety of unique issues that teachers must be prepared to deal with; often these are not addressed in teacher training programs. Major themes of this study in the context of pre-existing literature will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Themes

This study explored the experiences of high school teachers working with African American males in urban school districts. Participants were asked questions related to (a) building relationships with their African American male students, (b) systemic issues related to urban education, (c) strategies on how to handle conflict with an African American male student based on a case vignette, and (d) reflections and advice to teachers working with African American males. This chapter explores six themes that emerged in the data: (a) understanding urban communities, (b) creating an atmosphere of safety and respect in the classroom, (c) the influence of race and gender on relationships, (d) the connection between race and discipline, (e) the need for culturally sensitive and relevant curriculum, and (f) setting high expectations. Limitations of the study and directions for future research are also discussed. Implications of current findings for teachers, mental health professionals, professional training, and policy are addressed.

Understanding urban communities. In discussing their experiences forming relationships with their Black male students, all of the participants acknowledged the importance of understanding the communities in which their students live. In fact, some teachers stated that growing up in the communities they taught in, or one that was similar, directly impacted their approach to forming relationships with their students. Participants were aware that the context in which their students lived had a direct impact on their classroom behavior and their academic performance. As a result, teachers were attuned to how these influences manifested in the classroom. This confirms much of the literature about working with students in urban education

(Steen & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 2012). Furthermore, teachers expressed similar thoughts to the Black male students interviewed by Howard (2013).

Some teachers discussed factors such as drug abuse and community violence. Other teachers talked about students living in poverty and needing to help support their families financially. As one teacher noted,

When you're working in an urban district you are dealing with families that are economically disadvantaged and usually have a lot going on in the home, including pitching in to the family income, and other responsibilities; maybe having to [take care of] siblings or working part time.

Another teacher talked specifically about the effects of living in urban communities stating, "Because half of the time, they're physically in school, but not at school...their mind is focusing on, whether somebody passed away, whether somebody just got shot, how I'm going to get a next meal?" Edmin (2016) discussed these issues both from the perspective of a student being educated in the inner city and a teacher of urban youth. Noguera and Wells (2011) asserted that concentrated poverty in urban neighborhoods impacts students' academic and social supports outside of school. This idea was further illustrated when participants were given the vignette about the student Shemar. Many of the teachers made the assumption that the student had experienced something at home that was directly impacting his behavior in the classroom. This suggests that it is important for teachers to look beyond the surface of student misbehavior, especially when working with Black male youth who may not readily share their experiences outside of school (Kafele, 2009).

Being prepared to teach in urban schools. Because of the impact of urban communities on Black males, the participants in this study also discussed the importance of teachers being

prepared to deal with these unique challenges. As such, the participants argued that teachers should spend time in the community they work in beyond the hours of the school day. Warren (2005) discussed this idea noting that many teachers do not live in the community in which they teach. Further, one teacher interviewed in this study said that, “teacher preparation programs really don’t prepare you to deal with urban education. So my advice to them, study the community, find out what’s going on.” Similarly, Gorski (2009) found that courses in teacher education programs do not adequately prepare teachers to work in urban schools.

Other researchers have also discussed teachers’ misconceptions about teaching in urban districts and their distance from students’ realities (Watson, 2011). This idea was also confirmed in the present study. A participant stated, “[Some teachers] don’t know anything about being in an urban district, don’t even know how to spell urban, have never had to struggle in their life for [anything].” Given that teaching in an urban district presents a specific set of challenges and requires a particular skillset, teachers interviewed in this study indicated that new teachers would be better equipped for the challenge if they spent more time in the community. This might include participating in afterschool activities and city council meetings or visiting places in the community where students frequent, including places of worship and recreation centers. This would allow for teachers to gain a better sense of the culture of communities and what issues are important for them to consider. In doing so, teachers have more awareness of students’ lives outside of school and can make connections with them more easily.

Creating an atmosphere of safety and respect in the classroom. Another theme that emerged in the study was the need for students to feel safe and respected in the classroom. All of the participants identified these principles as essential to maintaining relationships with their Black male students. In the present study, teachers would often describe treating their

students like “human beings,” which meant creating a relationship of mutual respect, dignity and trust. This is consistent with the work of Gay (2010) who presented clear guidelines for helping teachers to demonstrate caring for their students. Past literature also states that trust between students and teachers is essential for behavioral compliance (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Noguera, 2012).

Participants also discussed students’ need to feel safe in relation to helping them achieve academic success. One participant in the study simply stated, “Students don’t learn from [teachers] they don’t like.” These results confirm the concept that the heart of the educational process is the interactions that occur between teachers and students (Gay, 2010). One teacher in the study used the metaphor of getting students to “take off their armor.” This is similar to Boykin’s (2014) idea that students need to feel safe in order to expose their weaknesses during the learning process. As the present study shows, teachers who are successful in urban schools recognize this idea and make sure that they create relationships that allow students to feel comfortable expressing that vulnerability.

The teachers interviewed also realized that these principles apply to discipline as well. In the case vignette presented to participants in this study, all of the teachers stated that they would remove the student causing the disruption from the class in order to avoid a confrontation in front of his peers. Teachers acknowledged that it would be a form of disrespect to confront a student publicly. Also, many of the teachers acknowledged that, because of the relationship they would have formed with the student, either the situation in class would not have escalated or the student would have felt comfortable enough to let the teacher know why he was upset. Because of this, the situation would have been handled in the classroom and the student’s actions would not have resulted in further disciplinary action, such as detention or suspension. Edmin (2016) indicated

that if educators are truly interested in transforming schools and meeting the needs of urban youth of color who are the most disenfranchised students within them, then creating safe and trusting environments that are respectful of students is essential.

The influence of race and gender on relationships. In this study, the majority of the participants thought that race and gender influenced their relationships with their African American male students in important ways. It was notable that participants, who identified as White, believed that race does not influence what happens in the urban classroom, while participants who indicated they were ethnic minority agreed that race does influence what happens in the urban classroom. In addition, both male and female participants thought that gender plays a unique role. Each of these factors is discussed further below.

The colorblind approach. Each of the participants who identified as White stated that race does not play a role in their relationships with their Black male students. One teacher stated, “I don't like to talk about the difference based on the color of skin...I'm really against that because I don't see the difference.” Another participant indicated, “That [race] doesn't really come into play.” From these responses, it can be seen how well-meaning teachers can use the colorblind concept in relationships with their students. Neville et al. (2016) demonstrated that teachers often rely on a colorblind racial ideology because of its perceived advantages. They stated that, when there is fear of conflict or of appearing prejudiced, the “race does not matter” approach offers a paradigm of easy escapism that allows teachers to avoid dealing with the realities of racial inequities.

The denial that race matters, or that racial inequality and institutional racism exist, means that K-12 educators that adopt a perspective grounded in colorblind racially ideology (CBRI) do not acknowledge the policies, structures, and racial beliefs that unfairly discriminate against

students of color (Neville et al., 2016). As one African American female teacher stated, "...my White counterparts ... are very naive about how race plays a role in the students' lives." By claiming to treat everyone the same, those who favor color blindness deny any need to discuss inequality (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Further, this suggests that some well-meaning teachers may experience difficulties relating to their Black male students and may not be aware that their colorblind approach may be contributing to their problems. Milner (2012) cautioned against this approach when he wrote that race shapes students' identities and behaviors. Therefore, when teachers adopt a colorblind approach, they can unintentionally invalidate a student's perception of a particular event or interaction.

The role of the mother or father figure. Participants in this study noted that they often serve a parental role for their Black male students. One Black female teacher stated, "As a female educator working with African-American males you have to be careful, because you... you are mommy, auntie to them." Another indicated, "I always strive for my children to see me as a motherly figure and I think that it helps a lot because it's more of a nurturing image." Dryfoos (1998) stated that urban adolescents sometimes experience a lack of connection with adults in their home. As a result, parental responsibilities often fall on teachers in the absence of consistent caretakers (Brown, 2003). Similarly, research suggests that positive relationships with teachers may be particularly beneficial to those students who do not have secure relationships with their parents (Wang et al., 2013). This was confirmed by participants in the study.

These results also confirm the results of another study that showed connectedness to adults in school moderated the association between poor family relations and adolescent conduct problems (DuBois et al., 2011). By modeling caring and providing support, teachers can demonstrate that positive relationships with adults are possible, and a teacher-student

relationship may become a “corrective experience” for youth who have experienced unsatisfactory relationships with parents or other caregivers (DuBois et al., 2011). This highlights the idea of creating relationships that allow for some flexibility in traditional student-teacher boundaries. Black male students in particular could benefit from teachers who are willing to go beyond the traditional teacher role and provide additional nurturing and support in the absence of strong parental figures.

Participants in this study also noted the importance of a positive adult male figure for Black male students. One Hispanic teacher stated, “I think a lot of our kids are old school, the Hispanic and the African Americans like that male presence...I’ve noticed that with African American students they need that male figure.” This is consistent with research done by Anderson (1999) who emphasized the importance of the male role in many African American families. This is also similar to Noguera’s (2012) research on successful schools for Black males. He found that staff and administrators frequently provide this type of strong male presence.

The need for role models of color. In this study, teachers verbalized a need for faculty and role models of color for their Black male students. One teacher stated, “They really need to see strong, African-American male teachers and faculty members.” Some of the participants also discussed the importance of other role models of color within the school. For example, one teacher indicated that, “...strong female Black principal, strong Black man vice principal. I think that this strong front of administrators, really made a difference with how the kids viewed what their potential could be.” Manning and Baruth’s (2004) study is consistent with this point of view. They demonstrated that students benefit from models of persons with similar racial and cultural backgrounds. Research has also found that minority teachers are uniquely positioned to

improve the performance of minority students directly or indirectly, by serving as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators for students of color (Egalite et al., 2015).

There are many reasons why teacher-student racial congruence actually benefits Black male students. One of these reasons is the reduction of race- and ethnicity-based stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 2003; Perry et al., 2004). Further, research has also shown academic benefits when there is racial congruence between teachers and students (Egalite et al., 2015). Teacher-student racial congruence has also been found to influence discipline (Bates & Glick, 2013). Further, Wright (2015) presented evidence that teachers' assessments of African-American students' disruptive behavior are highly sensitive to the race of the teacher. This was confirmed in the present study. As one teacher stated, "We had black guidance counselors, we had the majority of teachers of color that makes all the difference in the world, so we dealt with conflict differently."

The connection between race and discipline. All of the teachers who identified as African American and Latino acknowledged the relationship between high suspension rates and negative perceptions of African American males. One teacher stated, "There's still some people that have this misconception about African Americans, that we have to be harder on them, we have to discipline them more, like they're an unruly people and we have to confine them more." Another teacher stated, "I think some of it is perceptual on behalf of the staff. So, there might be this perception of Black kids, where it's a negative perception of Black boys, and you did it, so you're getting suspended." This is consistent with an extensive body of research that documents the disproportionality of Black male students involved in exclusionary discipline practices (Gregory et al., 2010). Wright (2015) also demonstrated that teacher-student racial interactions affect the likelihood that students face school discipline.

Unfortunately, the effects of suspension may also contribute to decreased academic performance and disengagement from school. The school disciplinary practices used most widely throughout the United States may be contributing to lowered academic performance among the students in greatest need of improvement (Gregory et al., 2010). As one participant in this study stated, “the discipline problems are a result of the meaningless education that black children receive.” Students who are less bonded to school may be more likely to turn to law breaking activities and become less likely to experience academic success (Gregory et al., 2010); which could ultimately result in placement on the school-to-prison pipeline (Skiba et al., 2000; Warren, 2005).

One strategy that has been shown to reduce high rates of suspension is restorative justice (Gregory et al., 2016). One teacher in this study gave a strong endorsement of this approach. However, only this one participant acknowledged using this practice to handle discipline issues. This is not surprising as research has highlighted the disproportionately low use of restorative practices in schools (Payne & Welch, 2015).

The need for culturally sensitive and relevant curriculum. Another emerging theme in the study was the need for a more diverse and culturally relevant curriculum. As one teacher stated, “When children know that my ancestors invented mathematics and science and arts and taught other people how to do that...they understand that they come from greatness, and if you come from greatness, that means you’re capable of greatness.” Many of the teachers acknowledged that such a curriculum would increase the self-esteem of their students. This is consistent with research that has demonstrated that one benefit of exposing students to content that includes culturally relevant material is that it has positive effects on how they view themselves (Milner 2012).

Decades of research have documented the positive effects of a culturally diverse curriculum for all students. Gay (2010), in her work on culturally responsive teaching, also demonstrated the benefits of using a culturally relevant curriculum. Literature has also shown that by not utilizing a culturally sensitive curriculum, teachers may be alienating their students and they may not realize it (Milner, 2012). This was illustrated by one Black female participant as she stated, “So if you’re in a class and the teacher is just talking about your people as far as being a slave, being conquered...it affects how you see yourself. It affects how you think...the height that you can reach, it affects pride, it affects self-esteem.”

Not only did teachers discuss diversifying the curriculum, but some teachers recommended making it relevant to what students were experiencing in their everyday lives. One teacher stated, “Let’s stop focusing on the test and actually teach these kids some stuff that’s relevant to their lives, that way if they fail the test, at least they still learn some information that’s actually useful to them.” Another teacher stated, “I think maybe something that would have been of more interest was like something that dealt with social issues, something that they could relate to instead of this highly scientific unit.” These results reflect similarities with results obtained by Howard (2013) in his qualitative interviews with Black male students. This is also consistent with the work of Boykin (2014) who wrote about meaningful learning, an evidence based practice for academic success with Black males. Edmin (2016) further explained the importance of the relationship between curriculum content and students’ contexts. This further highlights the need for teachers to spend quality time in urban communities in addition to understanding sociological issues facing Black males. With that understanding, teachers can further strengthen relationships with their students and promote academic success simultaneously.

Setting high expectations. Finally, teachers discussed setting high expectations for their Black male students as a way to maintain positive relationships. This is an important factor as Gay (2010) found that teachers who really care about students expect high performance from them and use strategies to fulfill their expectations. Decades of research have shown the effects of low expectations on student performance and behavior, particularly as it relates to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Steele (2003) wrote that low teacher expectations either cause emotional responses that directly harm performance or cause students to not identify with educational environments. This was illustrated in this study as one participant discussed an experience with a student stating, “So with this particular student, he was doing well in my class but he was not doing well in other classes...I showed them [teachers] some of his writing, some of his essays, and another thing that I had found is that all of these teachers automatically had low expectations of him.” Van Houtte and Van Maele (2012) contend that when students believe that they cannot achieve, they find no incentive for academic achievement; they are often inattentive, withdrawn, and disruptive; and they have reduced attachment to school. This provides one explanation for why Black male students do not match their White counterparts in academic achievement and are disciplined at higher rates.

Several studies have highlighted the relationship between race, gender, and teacher expectations (Baily & Dynarski, 2011; Ballantine & Spade, 2012; McCullough, 2013; Gershenson et al., 2015). This research, along with the results of the present study, highlights the importance of teacher expectations, particularly for Black males, and its implications for their relationships to schools, teachers, and ultimately their success. There may be conscious and unconscious elements to this phenomenon. Some teachers may lower expectations to compensate for the stress of external factors placed on their Black male students. However, it is important for

teachers to examine these biases and address external influences with students directly. In doing so, teachers will show their students that they care about them beyond their academic performance.

Limitations of the Current Study

The qualitative research methodology utilized in this study was chosen to produce in-depth descriptions of teachers' experiences of working with African American male adolescents in urban schools. There were, however, a number of limitations that should be considered in the interpretation, utilization, and application of the results. There are factors impacting the generalizability of the results, including a small sample size and a nonrandom sample. With this in mind, readers should avoid generalizing the results of this study to other teachers working in other urban school districts. With regard to sample size, participants consisted of 11 educators in three urban school districts in New Jersey. Eight participants were current teachers, two were administrators, who were former teachers, and one was a retired teacher and principal. Geography and professional affiliation may have impacted the results obtained and the generalizability of the findings to the general population of high school teachers working with African American males in urban high schools. Additionally, because this was a qualitative study, the current research did not make use of a randomized sample or control group, further impacting the generalizability of the results. The average time teaching among the sample was 11.5 years. Thus, these results may not be reflective of the experience of teachers who are new to the profession and have just completed their training. In addition, the urban school districts included in this study serve primarily African American and Latino students. Because of this, the results obtained may not reflect the experiences of teachers in urban school districts where there is more ethnic diversity among the students. A second limitation of the study included restricting

the sample to those teachers who were recommended by other colleagues as highly effective. In addition, 73% of participants identified as an ethnic minority (African American or Latina.). It could be the case that the large percentage of participants of color influenced the results, particularly with questions related to race.

Implications

Implications for future research. This study explored the experiences of high school teachers working with African American males in urban school districts. Participants were asked questions related to building relationships with their African American male students. Much of the pre-existing literature was confirmed within the results of this study. However, there are some implications for future research.

One consistent theme throughout this study was the relevance of race and its influence on a variety of personal and systemic issues. However, the literature review and the results of this study reveal that race is a difficult topic to discuss. White teachers in this study appeared to use a colorblind approach in their relationships with Black male students. Neville et al. (2016) stated that the colorblind approach, although still used frequently, is not as straightforward as it seems. Teachers may use the colorblind approach in practice but deny that it is a part of their belief system, making interventions to correct it complicated (Neville et al., 2016). Future research should address teachers' difficulty discussing race-related issues. Further investigation of the personal, psychological, and social aspects of the difficulty could help teacher educators design professional development that focuses on how to address teachers' resistance. Future research should also include larger samples of African American, Latino, and White teachers and teachers from other racial and ethnic groups. It would also be helpful to broaden a sample of teachers to include a larger number of teachers from urban school districts throughout the country. As stated

above, it would be interesting to explore whether there are regional differences in the perceptions of teachers working with African American male students.

This study focused upon teachers working in urban school districts where there are large numbers of at-risk Black male students. Throughout this country, there are also many communities in which African American students constitute only a small percentage of the student body. This may be particularly true in many suburban and rural communities. It would be important for future research to focus on the plight of these students and their experiences in school systems in which they represent a minority of the total school population. Research on the experiences of teachers working with these students might also contribute to a more complex and nuanced view of the experiences of African American males in a wider range of school districts with different socioeconomic levels.

Additionally, a larger number of qualitative interviews with successful White teachers of Black male students could provide some insights into effective ways to work cross racially. Further exploration of how these teachers came to consciousness about the challenges of Black males in education is needed. Close examination of how these teachers handle race-related issues could also help in creating professional development trainings to target colorblind ideologies.

Further, it has been shown that Black male students are disproportionately selected for discipline referrals. Research has shown that one effective way to reduce the discipline gap is the use of restorative justice approaches. However, it has also been documented that these practices are used inconsistently (Gregory et al., 2016) and less often in schools with higher African American student enrollment (Payne & Welch, 2015). Future research should focus on how to implement such practices more effectively across large urban school districts.

In addition, further study should focus on current teacher education programs and the lack of preparation to teach in urban districts. As the student population in urban schools continues to diversify, teachers will need more training to address the academic, social-emotional, and cultural factors that present in urban schools. Research should focus on identifying the different theoretical and experiential components that need to be added to teacher education programs to adequately prepare teachers to be effective in urban schools. These components may include (a) helping teachers understand themselves as cultural beings, (b) challenging the concept of colorblind ideologies, and (c) training in how to deliver a diverse curriculum.

Finally, a future study could also look at successful Black males who were educated in urban public schools and once considered at-risk. Research questions could address the tangible factors that caused the shift that put them on the path to academic success in addition to teacher qualities that were instrumental in altering their educational trajectory.

Implications for teachers. This study reinforces the crucial idea that strong teacher-student relationships are critical for Black male students' success. Results from this study add to an extensive body of research indicating that not only are relationships the basis for success, but these relationships mitigate a host of risk factors. Relationship building requires specific attention to how issues of race, gender, and growing up in urban communities impact students emotionally, academically, and socially.

Ullucci and Battey (2011) argued that racial awareness should be a shared goal among educators. Thus, all teachers, especially White teachers, need to understand themselves as racial beings whose beliefs, behaviors, and customs are culturally and racially specific. As such, professional development should focus on (a) racializing Whiteness, (b) validating the

experiences and perspectives of people of color, (c) naming racist educational practices and developing a race-conscious repertoire, and (d) challenging neutrality in policy and recognizing institutional racism (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). With this, the concept of race as an influential factor in both relational and systemic issues would become easier to understand. Further, Milner (2012) argued that it is crucial for teachers to identify their own and their students' racial backgrounds to plan for, work with, and teach their complete students, rather than fragmented, disconnected students. Although Black males have many factors that make up their identity, their race is a central part of their identity that is essential to their overall well-being.

A major theme in this study was for all teachers to recognize that students bring community influences with them into the school. Edmin (2016) indicated that there are three basic steps to fully learning about, and engaging with, students' community context. It is important for teachers to take all three steps in order to gain a better understanding of how to meet the needs of the Black male student and teach with their contexts as an anchor of instruction. The first step involves being in the same social spaces with the students; the second step is engaging with the community context; and the third step is making connections between the out-of-school context and classroom teaching. This requires that teachers spend time outside of their classroom in the communities in which they teach. If teachers are able to understand the dynamics of the community, they will be better able to relate to their Black male students.

Implications for teacher education programs. The findings from this study also point to the continued and urgent need to assess teacher education programs. Research has documented the fact that, even teachers who graduate from programs that embrace multiculturalism, are not fully prepared for teaching students from diverse backgrounds (Noguera, 2012). Although research on these programs has been conducted, there is not yet clear evidence that mere

exposure to multicultural approaches to teaching actually result in effectiveness in classrooms comprised of children of color from low-income backgrounds (Gorski, 2009). It seems that courses in multiculturalism alone do not push teachers to engage in a rigorous process of self reflection to understand their own biases and how their biases may impact students in the classroom (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

In addition to addressing these phenomena in courses, it is also of importance that teachers spend time in urban communities while still in training. Carter and Welner (2013) suggested that teachers participate in internships in urban cities to learn about the communities in depth before finishing their teacher education program. New Visions for Public Schools, an organization that hosts an Urban Teacher Residency (UTR) based in New York City, is evolving as a unique, groundbreaking teacher education program designed to bridge the gap between academic preparation and the actual realities of teaching in urban schools (Fairchild et al., 2012). In these programs, teacher education candidates learn alongside an experienced mentor-teacher and receive ongoing support for multiple years once they become fully credentialed teachers. The program also facilitates mentoring relationships that provide different levels of support for new teachers and help root them more firmly in urban schools.

Implications for mental health professionals in schools. Mental health professionals in the schools routinely consider students' social and economic contexts when attending to their needs. Mental health professionals' training in education and counseling from a developmental and systemic framework allows them to play a key role in helping schools implement interventions that focus on meeting the needs of children (Steen & Noguera, 2010). Therefore, the role of these professionals should expand to helping teachers and administrators understand how race and the community context affect students' academic performance and behavioral

functioning at school. This in turn will facilitate effective relationship building between teachers and Black male students.

As the present study and prior research outlines, Black males would benefit from being exposed to role models and mentors who have shared experiences. Mental health professionals can engage in programming efforts beyond the typical school activities and organize such opportunities for Black male students. Further, research has also outlined the impact of poverty on urban schools and mental health professionals can also establish partnerships with health, social, and other community agencies and service providers in order to address these needs (Steen & Noguera, 2010).

Implications for training. Although teachers are required to attend professional development, it is often focused on curriculum and instruction. Therefore, Black males' racial and cultural issues are not given sufficient attention during the required trainings. Professional development for teachers should be focused on increasing awareness of these specific issues at a broader societal and systemic level. As a result, teachers would increase their awareness of how these phenomena impact their students. Then, this knowledge should be funneled into understanding the challenges at the school level. This could involve interviewing Black males about how their race and context has impacted them in school, in addition to how it impacts their relationships with teachers. Professional development could also shed light on racial disparities in discipline and engage teachers in conversations about why they exist.

Teachers and school personnel should also engage in ongoing self-assessment to understand their cultural identity and how it impacts their view of the world and their view of Black male students. Neville et al. (2016) outlined two main paradigms of diversity training. The first is cultural knowledge training, which emphasizes learning about differences in culture and

cultural learning styles. The second is color-conscious training, which enables teachers to create a fundamental shift in their conceptual thinking about racism, their own racial attitudes and identity, and the effects of skin color and institutional discrimination on the opportunities of non-White students.

Further, mentoring programs within the schools can be implemented so that novice teachers can learn from veteran teachers who have had success with Black male students. In addition, teachers who have grown up in the communities where they teach could serve as cultural brokers for teachers who are just beginning. As such, new teachers would be given targeted information from colleagues about the history of the community and current challenges in the community that could impact Black male students in the classroom.

Implications for policy. Findings from the present study, along with existing research, suggest implications for policy regarding urban schools. One of the major themes of this study was understanding the context of Black male students which includes looking at the impact of poverty on urban communities and schools. There is a substantial body of evidence that indicates educational reforms have not succeeded in making change in urban schools because they have failed to address the impact of poverty on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Moreover, researchers have pointed out that too often reforms are conceived and implemented in a top-down manner without sufficient understanding of how they will impact schools. Further, Edmin (2016) indicated that leaders in urban education typically do not live in urban communities, and they do not look like the students they discuss in decision-making processes. They also do not consider their distance from these communities as an impediment to their ability to engage in the work within them. Some leaders within the field of urban education cannot fathom the day-to-day experiences of urban students and lack awareness of the fact that

what happens outside of school has an impact on what happens inside school. Therefore, it is important that policy focus on the impact of poverty on schooling. In order to do so, those in positions of power need to spend a considerable amount of time in the communities they serve to make more informed policies regarding urban education practices.

Research has also documented the importance of learning from models that have been successful at educating Black male students. Noguera (2012) highlighted such schools in his research. At schools such as Frederick Douglass Academy and Thurgood Marshall Academy in Harlem and Eagle Academy in the South Bronx, high graduation rates have been the norm for several years. These schools serve students from low-income backgrounds who come from some of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, but the school staffs have found ways to create school cultures that counter negative community influences and reinforce the importance of learning. Also, Harlem Children's Zone in New York City has found a way to address the needs of the surrounding community by providing a traditional school curriculum along with early childhood programs, parent training and engagement, and social and health services (Carter & Welner, 2013). The success of these schools have been attributed to their ability to foster and support the capacity of schools through good teaching and learning while confronting external issues simultaneously (Steen & Noguera, 2010). As these schools have been successful at addressing both the academic and contextual factors related to Black males, policymakers should use these as models for creating urban schools that will better meet the needs of Black male students nationwide.

Conclusion

In summary, this study explored the experiences of high school teachers working with African American males in urban school districts. Subjects were asked questions related to

building relationships with their African American male students, systemic issues related to urban education, strategies on how to handle conflict with an African American male student based on a case vignette; and reflections and advice to teachers working with African American males. The results of this study confirmed much of the pre-existing literature focused on the challenges facing African American males in urban education. Throughout the study, participants highlighted the importance of understanding the impact of race, gender, and living in urban communities when forming relationships with their Black male students. From the participants' perspective, it is imperative that those working with Black males in urban schools understand the dynamics of how these factors intersect with one another and manifest within the school. Further, within the context of the school, providing a safe and caring atmosphere while maintaining high expectations for academic performance, were paramount.

The emphasis on the communities where students live was discussed by the participants in every aspect of this study. As such, those who want to work in such settings need to have an accurate understanding of the realities of working in urban schools. The findings of this study illustrate that policymakers, administrators, and teachers need to spend time in the communities where they are working in an effort to better understand how to meet the needs of the students. Moreover, teacher education programs should prepare teachers to work in urban settings by providing the opportunity for pre-service teachers to learn about their cultural identities, the impact of racial bias, and multicultural approaches to teaching.

As this study and much of the existing literature have highlighted, consideration should be given to the slow translation of research to practice. If research has unfailingly confirmed the same ideas for nearly 40 years, why has implementation of programs to counteract negative outcomes for Black males been such a slow process? How do we now create effective programs

based on the literature and ensure that they are implemented accordingly? How do we continue to push for funding to make such interventions successful? How do we tangibly address the issue of external community influences on public schools? These are questions that need to be addressed by future research to combat the crisis facing Black males in urban education.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate in this Study

My name is LaToya Gaines and I am a clinical psychology doctoral candidate at Rutgers University. I'm currently collecting data for my dissertation, which focuses on high school teachers and how they relate to their African American male students. This study is being conducted through interview questionnaires. The following criteria are required for eligible participation:

- i. You need to be an active or retired teacher.
- ii. You need to have experience teaching at the high school level.
- iii. You need to be recognized as an effective teacher by one other faculty member.
- iv. You need to have experience teaching African American males.

Your participation is voluntary and there is no compensation for your participation. If you agree to participate, you will be provided with an informed consent form which provides more detail about the study. If you choose not to be in the study or if at any time, you wish to withdraw from this study, you are free to stop participating at any time. If you are not eligible to participate, please spread the word about this study widely amongst your peer and professional circle.

Thank you very much for your consideration. Would you like to participate?

Please contact me at: toyagaines@gmail.com.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Agreement

Study Title: Establishing Positive Teacher-Student Relationships with African American Males

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. The principal investigator, LaToya Gaines, is a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School for Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University. If you have any questions, ask the investigator. You should be satisfied with the answers before you agree to be in the study

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore strategies used by teachers to establish positive relationships with African American male high school students. By understanding the experiences of teachers who have been successful with these youth, school staff and personnel may be better able to support them to achieve academic success.

Participants: This study will use a network sample of approximately 10-20 public school teachers and will be conducted at various settings contingent upon their geographic location. You will only be considered for participation in this study if you return a signed consent form. There is a cap on the number of participants, as this is a small study, so the acceptance into the study is on a first come, first serve basis. That is, the first fifteen participants who return their signed consent form will be offered the opportunity to participate in the study.

Procedure: If you participate in the study, you will be interviewed individually during a designated time at an agreed upon location. With the researcher, you will discuss your experiences with teaching African American males; which strategies you found to be the most useful; some of the challenges working with this population posed; what advice you would give to other teachers working with this population. **If you indicate at any time that you want to stop the interview, you will be thanked for your participation and will be free to go home.**

Risk/Benefit: There are minimal risks associated with your consent and participation in this research study. Talking about challenging experiences may create discomfort for some participants. Again, you can indicate that you would like to stop the interview at any time. Participation in this study may not benefit you directly; however you will play a major role in helping other researchers, teachers, psychologists, and others to understand how to foster positive relationships with African American male students.

Compensation: There will be no compensation for your participation in this research study.

Cost: There will be no cost to you for participating in this research study.

Confidentiality: This research is confidential. The research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes: your name, age, ethnicity, geographic location, and employer/school affiliation. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location (password protected computer) in

the researcher's residence. All study data will be kept for three years after the completion of the research, and all documents with identifying information will be shredded and any audiotapes will be erased by the researcher after publication.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you may contact me, LaToya Gaines, at (201) 486-4518 or email me at toyagaines@gmail.com. You can also contact my dissertation faculty chairperson, Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin, at boydfrank@aol.com.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732.235.9806
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

I have read and understood the contents of this consent form and have received a copy of it for my files. By signing below, I consent to participate in this research project.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

Consent to Audiotape and/or Videotape

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: “Establishing Positive Teacher-Student Relationships with African American Males” conducted by LaToya Gaines. The Principal Investigator (LaToya Gaines) is asking your permission to allow her to include an optional procedure of audiotape (sound), as part of the research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the Principal Investigator (LaToya Gaines) and to ensure that information from the research study has been recorded properly.

The recording(s) will include the responses that you provide throughout the interview. Name and/or address will not be included within the audio recording.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to your identity and will be destroyed upon publication of study results.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Participant (Print) _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

1. Demographic Information
 - a. What school district do you currently work in?
 - b. How long have you been teaching?
 - c. What is your ethnic background?
2. How many African American males do you currently have in your class?
3. What percentage of the African American boys would you consider to have behavior issues?
 - a. What would other teachers say about the boys you consider to have behavior issues?
4. What percentage have attendance problems?
5. What strategies do you use to connect with your students?
 - a. Do you use any different strategies to connect with the African American male students? Please give some examples.
6. Do you feel that maintaining positive relationships with your students is important?
 - a. Why do you feel that it is/is not important? Can you give me an example?
7. How would you rate your relationships with your African American male students?
 - a. If good-what steps did you take to establish that? Please provide 2 examples.
 - b. If bad-why do you feel it is bad
8. Have you ever had a negative interaction with an African American male student?
 - a. What happened?
 - b. What was the outcome?
 - c. Did you take any steps to repair the relationship?
 - i. Can you describe them?
9. What challenges have you encountered in trying to give support to African American males in your school?
10. National research shows that African American boys are suspended at higher rates than other students. Why do you think this phenomenon exists?
 - a. Have you had to recommend suspension of African American male students?
 - b. How did you handle this with the students?

11. Are you involved in extra-curricular activities?
 - a. If yes-which ones? Do they involve African American male students?
12. Do you take time to meet with African American male students individually? Can you give me some examples?
13. Have you had an experience with an African American male student that you think was successful?
 - a. What happened?
 - b. What was the outcome?
14. Have you had any experiences with African American males when you felt like you were not successful?
 - a. If yes-please provide an example
 - b. Did you grow from this experience? How?
15. Have any students tried to come back and give you feedback?
 - a. If yes-what was the feedback you received?
16. Do you have any experience with special education students?
 - a. How are they different?
17. How do you feel your race impacted your work with students?
 - a. Were you conscious of it? Please explain
 - b. Do you feel that your students were conscious of it? Please explain
18. How do you feel your gender impacted your work with students?
 - a. Were you conscious of it? Please explain
 - b. Do you feel that your students were conscious of it? Please explain
19. Scenario

Your student, Shemar, an African American male, comes into class late and in a visibly bad mood. He comes in and sits down and puts his head on the desk. Another student makes a joke about him and Shemar proceeds to start a verbal confrontation which has the potential to turn physical. You say “calm down Shemar” and he says “get out of my face!”

- a. What is your thought process?
- b. What do you do?
- c. Why would you use that approach?
- d. Is there anything you would do to prevent it from turning physical?

- e. What would you have done if his behavior had turned physical?
 - f. Would your way of handling it be different?
 - g. How would your behavior impact Shemar?
 - h. What impact do you think your actions would have on your relationship?
 - i. What would you do afterwards with Shemar to repair the relationship?
20. Do you ever feel there is a conflict between your own best practice and the school's expectation for handling student behavioral issues with African American males?
21. What advice would you give to other teachers working with African American males?
- a. What advice would you give black teachers?
 - b. What advice would you give white teachers?
 - c. What advice would you give male teachers?
 - d. What advice would you give female teachers?