BLACK STUDENTS: STEREOTYPES
AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctorate in Education

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice
California State University, East Bay
June, 2017
BLACK STUDENTS: STEREOTYPES AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Abstract

This study examined the effects of the stereotypes held by educators and adults on a high school campus of Black students and its probable effect on their educational opportunities. Studies within the last twenty years have addressed stereotyping and its relationship to student engagement. While there has been a significant amount of studies on stereotyping, few address the possible effect of the negative stereotyping of students on their educational opportunities. Using a Critical Race Theory lens, this study examined student experiences with negative stereotyping and their perceptions of the ways it has shaped their education. The study contributed strategies and awareness for those working to combat negative stereotyping in schools and teach Black students more effectively.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge Dr. Kate Strom, my dissertation chair, for her leadership, guidance, and encouragement through the doctoral program. I also acknowledge and thank Dr. Brad Porfilio and Dr. DiShawn Givens for serving on the committee. I am very grateful for all time and effort spent to make this moment possible.

This dissertation is dedicated to my entire host of family and friends who supported me continuously. To my son Kwame C. Grant Jr., and my mothers, Diane Douglas, & Minnie Grant, it was your encouragement and prayers that guided me when I no longer wanted to continue: Thank you. To my goddaughter Brazzie Brown “Homework Guru”, my sorority sisters and best friends, Kim Watts, Sabrina Shumake, and Noni Thomas who are always my greatest cheerleaders: your love and support has made this journey possible.
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CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Stereotypical beliefs and/or perceptions held by adults on high school campuses interfere with Black students’ educational opportunities. Stereotypes are “cognitive structures that contain the perceiver’s knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about human groups” (Peffley, M., Hurwitz, J., & Sniderman, P. 1997 p. 31). Troublemakers, underachievers, gangsters, and athletes are just a few of the stereotypes associated with Black people. Consequently, these stereotypes influence racist, prejudice and injustice behavior towards Black students from adults, creating obstacles hindering their success in schools. Black Students receive harsher discipline measures (more suspensions & expulsions), and are more likely to drop out of school or spend time incarcerated than their White counterparts due to the negative connotations associated with Black stereotypes. Adults’ behavior is further influenced on school campuses by policies and other strict mandates such as zero tolerance policy. The No Child Left Behind Act and boundary restrictions are some other contributing factors to this problem, which continues to help confirm negative stereotypes.

Racism in the U.S.

Racism is a fundamental part of U.S. culture, directly into the social fabric of our country, with a particular emphasis on Black people (Feagin, 1995). Some scholars have even suggested that racism are endemic and permanent in the United States society (Bell, 1992; Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Feagin 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994). Racism in
the U.S. dates back to the 1700’s. During slavery, Blacks were not considered full
human beings, as evidenced by the 3/5 compromise, a law that dictated that a black
person counted as three-fifths of a white person when calculating population. The
mindset that Black individuals are inferior to Whites has continued to plague the Black
community through the centuries. For example, today, media and pop culture do not
depict the Black community in a positive light, instead portraying them as threats to
society, broadcasting them as thugs, murderers, and pimps. In daily life, Black people
are implicitly told their lives do not matter. In the 21st century, police are killing black
people at such enormous rates, with officers rarely held accountable for the violence,
that the Black community has begun movement protesting the injustices called “Black
Lives Matter.”

According to Sue (2010), another type of less obvious racism is played out
daily in subtle interactions known as racial micro-aggressions. These racial micro-
aggressions send degrading messages to people of color in everyday exchanges. They
are “brief and common place daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities,
whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative
racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Capodilups, Torino, Bucceri,
Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007, p. 273). Racial microaggressions can be displayed
in three forms: microassault, microinsult, and microvalidation. A microassault could
be considered the most blatant type of microaggression because it is intended to hurt
the victim through name calling or any type of discriminatory behavior. A microinsult
happens when a statement or gesture based on a stereotype is exhibited. It may be the
least identifiable kind of microaggression because it is subtle in nature, but the victim
understands clearly the hidden insulting message conveyed by the perpetrator. Examples
of micro-insults might include a White teacher stating to a diverse group of students,
“This is a test everyone can pass,” or “I know no one in this room would steal my
phone.” Although the statement did not seem to clearly verbalize a racist message on the surface, but a hidden racial message was communicated through implied negative stereotypes that are associated with Blacks as common knowledge.

A third type of microaggression, microinvalidations, are characterized by negating a person of color’s existence or specific struggle connected to racialization—for example, when Blacks are told by someone, “I don’t see color” or “We are all human beings”. Such statements downplay the contributions Blacks have made to society and create a sense of inferiority or hostility. These daily occurrences convey negative images and messages to people of color that, while seemingly acceptable to dominant society, cause stress that can manifest psychological as frustration, anger, anxiety or physiological as headaches, high blood pressure, rashes, and so on (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

The public school system mirrors societal norms (Bourdieu, 1977). Daily occurrences of racial microaggressions can manifest themselves in classrooms, hallways, offices and any other area of school campus. (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). In a classroom, teachers might simply ignore a Black student by not acknowledging their raised hands repeatedly. In this instance, the teacher communicates to the Black student that their voice doesn’t matter. In a hallway, a teacher can make a comment in the presence of a Black student, such as, “I left my classroom door open, and that’s not a good idea because my personal belongings are in there.” With this statement, the teacher gives the impression that the sight of the black student was a reminder to her to keep her classroom locked, which contains underlying meaning that Blacks are untrustworthy or thieves. These are just a few examples of the way negative connotations or stereotypes associated with being a Black student can appear in the school setting.

Black students who experience racial microaggressions are deeply affected by the adults on campus who negatively stereotype them. The Black students are at a several disadvantages: as underage people of color, as underrepresented ethnic members who are
constantly to be viewed as outsiders (immigrants), and as “others” treated in stereotypic, discriminatory ways (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2002; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Pierce, 1995; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Thus, when adults on campus constantly communicate inferiority and division among class and race, even without ever directly stating it verbally, these students’ education is impacted (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Take the following example. As the bell rings and class starts, campus security guards bypass a group of White students standing at their lockers to reprimand a group of black students who are walking and talking. The security guard says to them, “Let’s go to class.” Immediately a black student from the group replies, “Why didn’t you say anything to those students by their lockers? Is it because we are black?” The campus security guard, offended by the comment, angrily replies, which leads to a negative verbal exchange. As a result, the Black student ends up in the office with a referral for defiance instead of merely being late for class, which means the student will miss instructional time in that class. Moreover, these daily occurrences often lead to other situations, like academic disengagement, depression, low-esteem, fights or arguments with other peers, causing interruptions in the student’s school routine, which ultimately hinder academic progress (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002).

These ubiquitous stereotypical perceptions have multiple negative affects on Black students, including higher suspension rates or harsher discipline practices among Black students than their White counterparts and lower academic performance. Black students suspensions tend to be disproportionate to the nature of violations (Bowditch, 1993), and Black students in the 1990’s were suspended approximately 2.3 times more often than White students (Mendez and Knoff, 2003). Today, the problem has not been solved—in one study, Black students represented approximately 37% of the student population but accounted for 80% of on-campus suspensions and 68% of out of school
suspensions (Gregory and Mosely, 2004). Research shows that frequent suspensions appear to significantly increase the risk of academic underperformance due to loss of instructional time (Brophy, 1988; Davis & Jordan, 1994). Suspended students may become less bonded to school, less invested in school rules and course work, and subsequently, less motivated to achieve academic success. Consistently research findings confirm the correlation between strong positive adult relationship, academic engagement, learning, and student achievement (Brophy, 1988; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). Other research findings highlight the importance of school bonding for reducing the risk of inappropriate behavior (Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004). Suspensions, over time, have been found predictor of dropout and not graduating on time (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

**School Discipline and Academic Achievement**

Racial overrepresentation in public school discipline and low academic achievement is by no means a new discovery in the educational setting—it has been discussed for years by organizations such as the Children’s Defense Fund (1975). Ladson-Billings (1998) emphasizes that Critical Race Theory (CRT) suggests that the current instructional strategies and practices in public schools presume that Black students are deficient. The notion of “stereotype threat” (Steele, 1995, p. 795) evolved from the research work compiled in CRT, using intelligence testing to show how racism is integrated into the structure of the school system. One example is the disproportionate amount of Black students enrolled in remedial courses, or enrolled into high school completion paths that do not meet eligible requirements for admission into a four year institution. Curriculum is another example. CRT sees the “official school curriculum {is} a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21). Educators accept the school curriculum as normal, never
confronting how others are portrayed next to the dominant white culture. This suggests that Black students are not capable, nor worthy of the same accessibility to programs offered in schools to their White counterparts. Another example is teachers identifying students as the “problem” rather than considering the systemic deficiencies in the school system. When adults who work with Black students have low expectations of them, it is difficult to give voice to the injustices students confront in public education. Therefore, when Black students’ encounter racism in U.S. public schools and do not perform well, it confirms the probable stereotypes that Black students inherent academic abilities differ from that of the White dominant culture, and implies something is wrong with their cultural identity and language.

Lower academic achievement could possibly contributed to adults’ perception evoking Steele’s concept of stereotype threat (If there is a negative stereotype associated with the group, then the person can be affected.) Schmader, Johns, and Forbes (2008) present a process model that explains the activation of a negative stereotype that causes the student to question his or her ability and evokes negative thoughts and emotions, which in turn impedes their performance. In Schmader and Johns 2003 study, they assessed the working memory of female college students. Participants were assigned to either a stereotype threat condition or not. Thus, students’ tasks were described either in a manner that evoked a stereotype threat (measure of qualitative capacity relative to math ability), or was described as a measure of working memory (non-threat condition). The results showed those in the stereotype threat group scored lower than when the task was described with contextual factors highlighting the role contextualizing can play in the establishing the condition of threat resulting in “attention anxiety, self-consciousness, withdrawal of effort, and/or over effort” (Schmader and Johns 2003, p. 809). The messages of expectations block their working memory, resulting in underperformance, even though the students were not incapable of learning. This supports the idea that the
perceptions of adults on campus can affect a student’s school experience or academic performance.

Stereotypical perceptions among adults can be attributed to the deficient thinking model where educators’ perceptions hinder a student’s academic progress (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Deficit thinking occurs when a teacher allows their racial bias to interfere with how they interact with Black students. The teacher subconsciously thinks the student doesn’t deserve a thorough explanation to assignment because she/ he lives in poverty. Even worse, the teacher doesn’t allow the student time to develop a critical thinking response to a prompt or questions and belittled him/her in front of the class. Gay explains the results of deficit thinking on students of color:

Students of color, especially those are poor and live in urban areas, get less total instructional attention; are called on less frequently; are encouraged to continue to develop intellectual thinking less often, are criticized more praised less; receive fewer direct responses to their questions and comments, and are reprimanded more often and disciplined more severely. (Gay, 2000, p. 63)

This type of adult behavior can interfere with the student’s academic ability by causing self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, the student internalizes the expectation of the adult, and does not attempt to learn, and is discouraged, which often may result in defiant behavior. The teacher and student relationship is a crucial part to learning, and authentic caring plays a role by helping the student become comfortable and motivated to learn. Students who experience negative interactions with teachers are less likely to form meaningful relationship and since, racial micro-aggressions happen so commonly to people of color (Franklin, 1999) and results in academic underperformance, rather than inherent ability as suggested by Black stereotypes. Stereotypes are often cognitive constructs formed from a tidbit of truth then slanted beyond actuality (Cowan, & Hoffman, 1986; Green, 1999).
Black students are subject to these unfair practices which could possibly hinder their school success.

**Purpose**

Students at a continuation educational setting have already experienced being pushed out of the comprehensive setting for numerous reasons. By investigating students’ views, information gathered can be analyzed for evidence of racism, classism, and other external factors, such as social economical background, which can be explored as motives for stereotypes to be continuously confirmed and believed as societal norms among adults on high school campus. These 11th and 12th grade students have experience obstacles on and off campus that has impacted them their school performance. It is important to hear their stories to bring awareness to allow students and adults to overcome these obstacles to become productive citizens of society by increasing their educational opportunities by opening other pathways for success that would otherwise be blocked.

Often, without malice, teachers are the primary transmitters of stereotyping and these prejudices result in negative connotations affecting the Black students they teach. Even the subtlest and most commonplace exchanges that somehow convey insulting messages are known as racial micro aggressions. Over the years, traditional explicit forms of racism have replaced or has changed into less obvious behaviors such as gestures, comments that imply inferior ranking among class and race as in stereotyping. These everyday occurrences could be addressed by examining how stereotypical perceptions of educators and adults on a high school campus might affect Black students school’s experiences. Thus, this study will investigate the following two-part question: What are the perceptions of Black students regarding (a) stereotypes that adults in school hold about them and (b) how these stereotypes affect their school experiences?
CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Societal norms, racism, and stereotypes are embedded within society. As a result Black people experience racist occurrences daily in numerous ways, whether explicitly through blatant racist behavior or indirectly through racial micro-aggressions. Solórzano (1998) used the term “racial microaggressions” to describe the everyday racialized incidents that individual could face in social settings, such as schools and classrooms, which can impede their feelings of acceptance and assimilation (p. 121). Since stereotyping is based on people’s perceptions or biases and many of the stereotypes surrounding the Black community are negative, such stereotyping, can influence how students are treated by adults. In schools, when adults’ decisions are based on stereotypical beliefs, it can be a crucial component in blocking educational opportunities for Black students.

Often stereotypes are used by people as a gauge to compare or judge other people’s cultures against the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology frames how the majority of the population thinks, which includes a complex system of beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and opinions that become known as common knowledge (Abercrombie, & Turner, 1978; Heal, 1978) and allows people within a society to know what is acceptable behavior, speech, or dress. In educational settings, stereotypical perceptions that adults hold can affect how they interact and communicate with high school students on a
campus in a variety of ways. For instance, Black students’ academic achievement can be impacted when teachers perceive them as culturally different and less competent (Lockheed, 1977; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). In addition, school policies and practices can be used to hide the structural racism that also hinders their success (Thompson, 2010). In the following section, I present two theoretical perspectives that can help explain stereotypes, structural racism, and Black student achievement. I then offer a third perspective, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, which has shown promise for addressing these inequities.

**Stereotype Threat**

Stereotypes exist as common knowledge among American society, and stereotypical perspectives can have some influence in the school system when dealing with students from different ethnic backgrounds. Stereotypes are fractional and typically insufficient synopses of socially-shared identifications regarding individuals and the groups to which they may belong (Nelson, 2001). Stereotypes represent beliefs about a certain culture, which can be influenced by media, news, and personal observations. As Larnell, Boston, & Bragelman (2014) note, since “stereotypes are often linked to biases, personal prejudices, and/or systemic discrimination, they become cultural assumptions about people that they represent” (p. 49). If there are negative stereotypes associated with a particular group, then unwanted pressures or intimidation can occur, as Steele & Aronson (1995) demonstrate. In their work, which investigates intellectual performance among Blacks as compared to Whites, they described the “stereotype threat” phenomenon. Stereotype threat can be described as the social-psychological influence that threatens a person’s ability to perform a task, which arises when that person is in a
situation or doing something for which negative stereotypes exist (Steele, 1997) economic disadvantage, gender roles.

There are several common knowledge stereotypes that circulate about Black people: “Black men are dangerous, Blacks can play basketball, they like fried chicken, they are lazy, dumb, violent, rude, and aggressive.” Therefore, the term stereotype threat can simply be viewed as the risk a person confronts because of their identification with particular group. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) explained being Black in America perfectly when he coined the term “double consciousness,” which articulates the sense of always viewing oneself through the eyes of others (that is, through dominant White ideology). For Black individuals, race is and has been a stipulating factor for other people’s negative assumptions, rather than a Black person’s moral behavior or astuteness. If Black stereotypes are associated with skin color and negativity, then being a Black person comes with tainted collective opinions. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed this manifestation of racism in his “I have a Dream” speech on August 28, 1963, calling for people to challenge the ingrained assumption that skin color has some relation to a person’s intelligence or character. He stated, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but the contents of our character.”

Black people presently are faced with discrimination and prejudices solely based on their race (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). West, 2001), this mistreatment is still widely accepted as societal norm today. Therefore, a person’s belief in a negative stereotype is not required in order for to a threat to occur. Further, stereotype threat is not linked to any one particular group. Black students, gay men, Latina women, lesbian women, and blonde haired-women—if there is a negative stereotype associated with the group, then that person can be affected. The knowledge of a negative stereotype is enough to trigger contextual cues that can heighten the feeling of ‘threat’, causing unwanted pressures
and stressors that block a person’s working memory. When the mind is battling low self-confidence, worrying or experiencing physiological stress about how others might perceive them according to a negative stereotype (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn & Steele, 2001; Spencer & Castano, 2007), completing the task becomes harder, resulting in lower performance (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele et al., 2002; Nguyen & Ryan, 2008).

Stereotype threat can affect any student who has knowledge of a negative stereotype that exists regarding their particular group (Aronson, Fried, & Good 2002; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Steele, 1997, Steele, 1999; Steele & Aronson 1995). Even students who are invested in their own education are often unable to perform at their highest potential due to the stress caused by not wanting to confirm the negative stereotype about one’s group. Hence, Steele and Aronson (1995) proposed that stereotype threat can be used as a way to explain the underperformance of Black students. In educational contexts, threatening stereotypes provide some explanation for the vulnerabilities of Black students and their heightened anxiety regarding school tasks (Bosson, Haymovitz, & Pinel, 2004; Osborne, 2001). Over time, these stereotypes can discourage students from persisting in specific disciplines or in academic pursuits. As these researchers showed, the success of Black students is at risk when adults hold negative, stereotypical views of these students.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides important perspectives on the nature of race and racism in American society by pointing out social constructions, discriminations, and exchanges based on race in a world that is persistently imbalanced (Teranishi 2002). CRT emerged out of the need to recognize how a system of white supremacy--and its subordinate of individuals of color--had been created and sustained in America. Built on a set of 5 tenets which extended from Law and Legal Studies, CRT was co-created
by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman in the mid-1970s (Ladson-Billings, 2003). The major components of CRT include (1) the notion that racism is ordinary and not an abnormality; (2) the idea of an interest convergence--that is, Whites are the benefactors even when policies and practices seems to be geared toward helping minorities; (3) the social construction of race, with societal norms judging people accordingly; (4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling—the silencing of minorities’ contributions; and (5) commitment to social justice and the notion that whites have actually been beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Hartlep, 2009). I will explain each of these major tenets next.

The first tenet states that racism is commonplace. In other words, the patterns of race relations and racism that have played out in American culture is the usual way society operates. This makes racism difficult to cure, or even begin to address. It is manifested in both institutional (e.g., workplaces and educational settings) as well as individual forms. Further, racism can be both conscious (e.g., name-calling) and unconscious (e.g., gestures, body language) elements that impact the system as a whole as well as different groups and individuals. Every day, people encounter racist acts whether at school or in a restaurant. As previously noted, “racial micro aggressions” describe the everyday racialized incidents that people of color face (Solórzano, 1998). These incidents also inhibit their feelings of acceptance and assimilation. Consequently, within educational environments, racial microaggressions are “filtered through layers of racial stereotypes” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 68). For example, if any negative actions occur among one or more Blacks, then they are used to justify disapproving perceptions about all Blacks (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). This ongoing behavior helps racism to continue while confirming negative stereotypes and hindering Black students’ academic success (Allen, 2012; Cokley, 2006).

The second tenet of CRT challenges the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology in America is a Western European perspective of values, attitudes and beliefs
that American society holds to be true or important about how people should function. CRT exposes “interest convergence” which explains that Whites will tolerate or support racial justice and progress when it benefits the White culture. They will support the cause to the extent if something positive is in it for them. The concept of interest convergence demonstrates that our system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes. For instance, the notion of color-blindness-- to pretend or “wash away” that the society is not stratified or that race is unimportant in peoples’ lived experiences--helps to sustain and promote the illusion of racial equality (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003). Negating racism advances the interests the dominant culture, and thus there is little incentive to eradicate it.

Races are categories that society has invented, manipulated, or even retired when convenient. They have been constructed socially, much to the detriment of minority people. The 3rd tenet of CRT espouses this notion of the social construction of race, an idea which is documented by numerous researchers (Armelagos, Carlson, & Van Gerven, 1982; Akintunde, 1998; Cameron & Wycoff, 1998; Chang, 1985; Delgado, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney López, 2006a, 2006b, 1994; Parker et al, 1998; Takaki, 1993; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). Social construction of race and stereotypes are bonded together by people’s opinions or an accepted ideology rather than facts. Stereotypes have little to do with proven facts, but rather, are subjective and can change depending on location or context. They feed into the generalization of people’s physical characteristics and blind judgment, without considering a person’s personality, intelligence, or moral behavior. People’s assumptions manifest in several documented models, such as deficit thinking (Pollack, 2012; Weiner, 2006), cultural deficiency (Valencia, (1997), genetic determinism (Castera & Clement, 2014) to name a few. People who share common origins, share certain physical traits such as (skin color, physique, hair texture), and are judged by these social constraints and are lumped together as a race (Marks, 1995).
CRT examines how race and power are combined together to keep the dominant culture intact. For example, in schools, the curriculum teaches and praises the White culture. As Ladson-Billings (1998) notes, “Critical Race Theory (CRT) sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (p. 21). Operating on this assumption, Black students’ struggles start as soon as they enter the classroom. Because the school curriculum is crafted to align with and build on dominant White knowledge and ways of knowing, Black students cannot possibly obtain the knowledge needed to succeed without additional supports or some form of cultural brokering. Thus, the public school’s curriculum reinforces this belief that students of color are culturally deprived (Gay, 2003) and the curriculum does not promote equality. Consequently, it is designed to show preferential treatment for White students by only telling their stories, honoring their knowledge, and promoting their ways of thinking and speaking. The public school curriculum, which is written from a European perspective that reifies the dominant culture and race as White, gradually causes Black students to develop a sense of inferiority.

Ladson-Billings (1998) uses the term “master scripting” to indicate that stories of Black students are muffled and deleted when they challenge dominant culture authority and power (Ladson-Billings, 1998 p. ). CRT provides a strategy to combat master-scripting with the strategy of counter-story, which is defined as a method of telling stories of people whose experiences are often erased or ignored. This method is especially important for Black students, since the materials in the textbooks do not empower them, but instead, confirms stereotypes. For instance, most school curriculum regarding civil rights icon Rosa Parks casts her as “a tired seamstress instead of a long-time participant in social justice endeavors as evidenced by her work at the Highlander Folk School to prepare for a confrontation with segregationist ideology” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.
Seldom do students learn about the careful advance planning that went into the bus boycott or that Rosa Parks was an educated civil right activist. Providing the entire story, rather than a narrow slice, would allow Black students to see themselves positively in the curriculum. Such a re-telling of Rosa Parks’ story with these details would be considered a counter-story, because it highlights the positive accomplishments of “others” that are often muted in the dominant curriculum.

Counter-stories serve several functions when challenging the racist system within the educational setting. Using counter-stories as an empowerment tool allows exposure and the opportunity to challenge the dominant stories would otherwise be ignored (Solorano & Yosso, 2002). Further, Hartlep (2009) notes “Without CRT’s counter-storytelling, the true stories would never be publicly proclaimed, and perhaps the world would come to believe and perceive that all was fine” (p. 11). While the counter-story challenges, storytelling comforts because of its cultural context. Storytelling has a rich and continuing tradition in Black communities of being used as an empowerment strategy (Bell 1987, 1992, 1996), challenging societal norms that function as truths by providing a context to understand and transform the belief systems that drive harmful stereotypes. In so doing, counter-stories can build community among those considered to be at margins of society. Further, storytelling urges minority writers to recount their experiences with racism, and apply their own unique perspectives to the dominant culture’s narrative. Examining the world’s happenings differently by addressing negative stereotypes can create an avenue for Black students’ voices to be heard. In this study, counter-storytelling will be employed as an avenue allowing students to empower themselves and address the negative treatment they have likely received from adults due to negative stereotyping.

Lastly, CRT’s framework emphasizes a committed social justice agenda that confronts and challenges racism on all levels. Black students may be able to communicate to their White counterparts the difficulties that they are unlikely to understand otherwise.
through the social justice lens of CRT. Since people fit into different categories depending on situational contexts, “intersectionality” is a critical aspect of CRT. Intersectionality, the examination of multiple identity markers—such as race, sex, class, gender, and so on—and how their combination plays out in various setting (Crenshaw, 1991), emphasizes that it is impossible to view situations from a one–dimensional approach. CRT highlights the notion of intersectionality by pointing out the multidimensionality of oppressions and recognizing that race alone cannot account for disempowerment.

In this study, I will explore the negative stereotypes that plague the Black community through a cultural lens. Applying a cultural lens to policy and practice may be described by different terminology including the following: cultural relevance, culturally responsive practice or pedagogy, cultural competence, cultural proficiency, cultural responsivity or multicultural education. In particular, culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) can help negate personal biases and support the success of Black students. Importantly, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes that race and cultural values are a part of learning. Unfortunately, there are far too many teachers that do not understand how teaching practices “reflect European American cultural values” (Gay, 2000 p. 21). Therefore, when teachers do not understand Black students’ cultural heritage or cultural values, they rely on their own personal opinions and stereotypes for direction. This is can be detrimental to a Black student success they have trouble connecting with the curriculum, teachers, or others that do not have the same values that are emphasized at home.

However, if teachers or adults approach the student from a culturally responsive perspective, then their cultural references would be addressed in all aspects of learning or interactions. In this type of setting (classroom, office, cafeteria), the teaching is inclusive emphasizes what and why the material is being learned as well as its relationship to the students’ experience. All the students share in the ownership of the learning material by
collaborating and cooperating. In inclusive teaching environments, all students are treated equitably and are able to point out behaviors that discriminate without being penalized. Students are engaged and are validated by inspiring classroom experiences (Wlodkowski, & Ginsberg, 1995).

Culturally Relevant pedagogy has several comprehensive components that validating empowering, multidimensional, transformative, and emancipatory (Gay 2000). The goal of culturally relevant pedagogy is for all students to be successful while helping others reach their fullest potential, in contrast to the traditional classroom setting that fosters individualism and competitiveness. Cultural relevant strategies (Irvine & York, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999) taught professional development on a continuous basis with particular sessions on stereotype threat, defenselessness, racial/ethnic identity, and examination of whiteness (Apple, 1997; Blanchett, 2006; Cooper, 2003) in educational setting could help promote changes in Black students’ educational experience. When adults learn strategies that address the unique ways Black students learn to communicate, a relationship can be established and the students are able to develop a sense of belongings in their school community. In this type of environment, all students can flourish especially Black students.

The following section examines the literature regarding stereotyping and its effects on students’ educational experiences. Negative stereotypes can influence the adult decision making process, which, in turn, can alter a student’s educational pathway (e.g., special education placement, suspensions, expulsions, incarcerations, drop-out and graduation rates). There are many stereotypes or stereotypical beliefs surrounding the Black community, but for the purpose of this study, I will examine the stereotypes surrounding Black culture/language, as well as other common stereotypes including the single parent or fatherless household, the underachiever, troublemaker, and the double consciousness struggle of Black athletes.
Literature Review

Black Culture and Language

A culture can be defined as a particular way of life or “social or normative glue” (Smircich, 1983, p. 6) by a group of people who share common principles, comforts, and morals (Smircich, 1983; Shaw & Reyes, 1992). Additional aspects of culture include the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, which is defined by everything from their language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts (Lortie, 1975). Black culture is often portrayed negatively or disdainfully when compared to dominant White culture (Lemons, 1977). Often the dominant White culture is used as society’s gauge or default, and, in comparison all other cultures are lacking. As Lemons (1977) notes, “Since the dominant popular culture was created by and for whites, they showed themselves in a flattering fashion while blacks were usually exaggerated in the worst way” (p.113). Thus, the language of White culture, also known as Standard English, as well as the appearances, behaviors, and privileges belonging to White culture, are accepted by most people as “correct.” Because Black culture is not considered correct or proper, Black people are judged as if there is something wrong their “particular way of life” (Rothman, 2014, p.2). For example, many popular music artists (whether unintentionally or intentionally) communicate representations of race or Black culture in a negative way. Many mainstream musicians associate Blacks (African Americans) with violence, misogyny, materialism, and deviancy (Balkaran 1999; Childs, 2014; Ruffner-Ceaser 2012; West, 1993), which magnifies Black culture’s negative tendencies. Interestingly, however, there are facets of Black culture that are considered tolerable or even desirable by mainstream culture, such as music, the arts, and sports. This represents
an instance of interest convergence, a tenet of CRT that emphasizes that if or when Whites benefit, they will tolerate the actions of Black people.

Language and culture are inseparable (Jiang, 2000) and language is a means of identifying with a group. Accordingly, Black culture is also intertwined with the language of the Black community and the ways they use their language to communicate with others within it. People’s collective identity is also expressed with cultural symbols that reflect their beliefs, language or dialect (Ogbru, 2004). The ability to manipulate White English by changing word context, pitch, and intonation, along with their style, give Black students their “collective identity” (Ogbru, 1999, p. 3). Through their spoken words, their language gives the students their sense of who they are, “we-feeling,” or “belonging” (Ogbru, 1999, p. 3). Likewise, Baldwin (1997) considers language to be the most necessary conduit to identity. Therefore, if Black students are told by adults in an educational setting that the way they use their language to communicate is wrong, the implicit message is that something is wrong with them and their identities. Additionally, words, gestures, language and the way Blacks communicate with their surrounding creates a way of acceptance among their peers. Gay (2003) states, “Communication cannot exist without culture, culture cannot be known without communication and teaching and learning cannot occur without communication or culture” (p.77). Thus, she suggests that in the classroom, the student’s culture must be integrated into daily activities within the school day—and not just through cultural celebrations, which is a common misconception among teachers (Sleeter, 2011). Teachers who do not recognize the importance of their students’ culture nor adjust their teaching style to their students’ needs create barriers that affect the Black students they teach. They are also likely to engage in deficit thinking. Deficit thinking is a practice of holding lower expectations for low income, minority students in particular because such students and their families experience deficiencies such as limited intelligence, lack of motivation and inadequate
home socialization (Valenica, 2012). Multiple studies regarding deficit thinking show how adults’ attitude can hinder a students’ academic progress (Harper, 2007) by placing blame and academic failure on students’ families and culture (Ladson-Billings 1998). As an illustration, a mixed method study conducted by DeCastro-Ambrosetti, & Cho (2005) surveyed 160 teachers who were enrolled in education classes regarding diversity to understand how the teachers’ perceptions of their students of color were affected. The findings concluded the classes helped the teachers’ attitudes toward issues of diversity, but did not change their belief about the home environment being the reason for student’s low academic performance. When teachers are not able to recognize societal racism, they will not be able to understand the deficiencies that hinder culturally and linguistically diverse students (DeCastro-Ambrosetti, & Cho, 2005). This qualitative study illustrated how racism is embedded into the structure of the school system, which makes addressing injustices in the educational field difficult.

Similarly, a qualitative study by Gatlin and Wilson (2016) illustrates the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students and the effect those perceptions had on academic success among students with disabilities. From interviews and observations, the researchers found that that teachers’ and parents’ expectations contributed to the students’ success. For example, “Mrs. Laughlin (the Intensive Reading teacher) stated, I expect them all to learn no matter the ability level” (Gatlin, & Wilson pg. 136). This quote illustrates that the teacher expected the children to learn, unlike an adult with a deficit thinking mindset. According to their findings, students who interact with and are taught by teachers with an asset-based, equitable mindset will experience more academic growth than a teacher who believes otherwise.

Academic success is sometimes linked to giving up Black cultural behaviors and language and instead acting “White,” which causes more pressure for Black students who want to experience academic success. Black students could be teased by peers,
excluded from activities or worse called a ‘sell-out’ (Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Tyson, Darity & Castellino (2005) use acting white “… in reference to blacks who use language or ways of speaking; display attitudes, behaviors, or preferences; or engage in activities considered to be white cultural norm” (p. 583). For instance, in a longitudinal study included 90,118 students ranging from grades 7 through 12, Fryer & Torelli (2010) noted that “acting white” for black students consisted of raising their hand in class, making good grades, being in advanced classes, listening to heavy metal music or having an interest in ballet.

To be successful in school, students must speak the language of school—that is, standard or “White” English (Ogbu, 1999; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). This causes a conflict for Black students, who perceive that, to be successful, they must give up their Black cultural identities. That is, they have to choose between being successful by adopting White speaking patterns or being Black (Harper, 2007). Consequently, students who conform by using Standard English could possibly be labelled as traitors to their culture and experience negative peer pressure (Austen-Smith, & Fryer, 2005; Fryer, & Torelli, 2010; Fordham, & Ogbu, 1986).

The dominant language of schooling also affects Black parents’ ability to communicate with the school staff or teachers, since Black students’ English spoken at home often does not align with the sentence structure or vocabulary of the academic language spoken in the school environment Fordham, & Ogbu, 1986). For example, in Ogbu’s (1999) study, he noted, “Lafayette Blacks believe that society equates their slang English with ignorance” (p. 167). Because of that belief, Black parents can be hesitant to interact with teachers. Compounding this problem, school administration, teachers and school staff have not constantly provided openings for Black parents to become involved with them in positive ways. As Latunde & Clark-Louque (2016) noted, “For some time, Black parents have voiced their frustration with the interaction and communication
between home and school” (p. 73). Since culture is transmitted from generation to
generation by the family unit placing emphasis on the parent-child relationship, teachers
must be able to connect with the student and the parent to strengthen the bond that has
already been created before these children became students. In such an environment,
students are able to make connections between their home and school experiences by
having positive relationships with the teachers (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, Hsu, McIntyre, &
Rogers, 2016). Thus, many stereotypical beliefs could be eliminated if adults, especially
teachers, would learn to embrace culturally relevant pedagogy designed for success
marginalized students, and especially Black students, who are affected a disproportionate
rate than other ethnic groups (Jennings & Lynn, 2005).

**Fatherless or Single-Parent Households**

All educators and adults on school campuses should be aware of the control,
influence and privilege that corresponds with racism, as well as the insensible attitudes
and behaviors of our society that presumes, but does not acknowledge, the extensiveness
of White cultural norms (Smith, 2001, Ewing, 2001). One of these norms is the two-
parent household. As a result of this entrenched norm, single parents are regarded as
unable to provide the all the essentials that a two parent household would (Woessmann,
2015). In the view of society, a stereotype of the single parent household has been
constructed—one that equates to limited income, time, and other essential resources
(James, 2012; Woessmann, 2015). As another aspect of this stereotype, a single parent
is not able to fully engage with their child’s education by helping with classwork,
homework, or volunteering. Because, according to the stereotype, the single parent
cannot properly monitor school performance or attend parent–teacher meetings, Black
students being raised by single parents are deemed “dysfunctional” (James, 2012).
However, Williams, & Bryan (2013) conducted a qualitative, multicase study of low-income, single parent of students who were successfully academically and found ten themes collected through interviews, documentation and field notes. School-related parenting practices was one of the themes that emerged. Contrary to these stereotypical beliefs, the single parents were able to monitor their student’s school progress regardless of limited time or resources. For example, one participant, Brandii, described her mother’s commitment to monitoring her academic success as follows:

My mom worked multiple jobs, but no matter what time she’d get home from work, she’d always ask, “Did you do your homework?” OK, then she might ask about school and stuff like that, or she might have my older sister check my work to make sure it was done, and done correctly. . . .She made it her business to monitor my progress at school. (Williams, & Bryan, 2013, p. 293)

Although many other factors contribute to a student’s academic success, the single parent stereotype continues to plague the Black community. Stereotypes function as a scale of social benefits, giving people the right to judge others based on their appearance, behaviors and their speech (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011). Stereotypes are a normal way of critiquing people and “as human beings, we naturally evaluate everything we come in contact with [and]… try to gain insight and direction from our evaluations of people.” (Green, 1999, p. 1). This quote from Green (1999) also suggests that people make decisions based on their personal inclinations. Thus, children from single parent household are seen as lacking education, social skills and are treated differently. In particular, the stereotypical belief of absent fathers is overemphasized, suggesting that, without a present male figure, Black boys will not learn how to conduct themselves like responsible students, become career-oriented, have goal setting ambitions, or become productive young men. In contrast, studies suggest that fathers are active and involved
just like mothers regardless if it is a single mother household or single father household (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Nord, 1997). For example, Jeynes (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of urban schools that included 66 studies, to determine the relationship between father involvement and the educational outcomes of urban school children. The findings held positive effects of father involvement for both White and minority children. However, fathers of students of color had more involvement for this specific group of youth than for the general population of children included in this study suggesting Black student’s fathers or fathers of minority children are involved in their children’s education contrary to the stereotype surrounding absence fathers.

**Underachiever**

Another widespread stereotypical belief about Black students is that they are underachievers and do not value education. Yet, there is a substantial amount evidence that most Black students, including males, would like to be successful in school (Anderson, 1990; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Noguera, 2003). Further, about one half of the inconsistency and discrepancies in the Black-White achievement gap cannot be attributed to skill differences at the entry of their academic career (Phillips, Crouse, & Ralph, 1998; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). With that being stated, there are obstacles built into the school system that construct hindrances for Black students and create a divide as their student school career progresses.

For instance, first-graders--students as young as six years old--know what a teacher expects of them (Rist, 1970). Studies have shown the way in which the teacher behaved was an important influence on the student’s achievement (Fisher, 2005; Rist, 1970). Hence, teachers’ behaviors and perceptions can affect a student’s performance. Fisher (2005) conducted multi-method study with the 26 students grades 9-12 identified by teachers. The research showed that family, self-concept, and cultural history all
contribute to their academic achievement for both underachievers and high achievers. However, it was the teacher’s perception of who was an underachiever and who high achievers that was most influential to their success (Fisher, 2005; Spencer, Noll, Stolzfus & Harpalani, 2001). Many underachievers believed the teachers within the school had prejudged them. For that reason, the underachievers did not have connection to the school or had the support needed to apply themselves. Thus, the teachers’ perception made a difference and contributed to their underachievement.

Another study by Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, (2003) showed that teachers tend to underestimate the ability of Blacks when their values or culture is discordant (Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, 2003). This longitudinal study of 105 kindergarten students, which included questionnaires, students’ academic assessment, parents’ interviews, and observations, found that teachers’ predictions aligned with students’ actual performance. Like other studies, on average, low-income children’s academic skills lagged behind that of their middle-class peers (Lee & Burkam, 2002). Furthermore, Black students are overrepresented in the lowest stages of instructional accommodation (special education, grade retention, suspensions and expulsions) and “these accommodations have become segregated, rigid, and ineffective instructional pathways that do not help all children learn.”(Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004, p. 515).

Yet, the stereotype persists that Black students are underachievers, when studies have shown that teachers’ perception play a major factor (Spencer, Noll, Stolzfus & Harpalani, 2001).

“Underachiever” stereotypes paint Blacks as being lazy and incapable of learning, or as less intelligent than their white counterparts. As a result, many administrators and teachers have low expectations of the Black students. In addition, teachers may fail to offer the support they need which also contributes to the perpetuation of the stereotype. In a series of experiments, Steele and Aronson (1995) investigated how stereotypes
influence and cause underperformance. By creating conditions (threat-evoking & non-threatening environments) participants were informed that they were completing a problem solving assignment rather than taking a scored examination. Participants were asked to complete a verbal ability test consisting of completing 80 incomplete words. Researchers found that participants placed in a threat-evoking environment underperformed on a given a task when negative producing conditions were present. Simply placing their race on test booklet was enough to heighten anxiety resulting in lower test scores (Steele, 1997). As another example, Noguera (2003) conducted a survey with a total of 537 student participants (Blacks, Whites, & Asians) regarding their opinions of their teachers. The findings showed that 69 black participants strongly disagreed with the statement, “My teachers support me and care about my success,” and 83 black participants disagreed, indicating that Black students did have a positive outlook about their schooling or their teachers. As previously mentioned, many teachers practice deficit thinking about students, blaming them for their academic failure, their lack of motivation to learn in the classroom and the parents’ lack of involvement in their student’s education. Those adults who practice this paradigm use the students’ backgrounds or their socio-economic status as an excuse for academic failure (Delpit, 1995; Valencia, 1997). As a result, Black male students avoid challenging themselves academically (Noguera, 2003), resulting in a self-filling prophecy, which happens when a person conducts themselves in a fashion due to other’s expectations (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). Consequently, Black students are more susceptible than White students in confirming negative rather than positive self-fulfilling prophecies (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). In an attempt to preserve their culture and self-esteem, disengaging in academics is likely to occur. Further, they may also behaviors that further alienate them. For example, Gregory (2004) found that in classrooms where high school
students perceived their teachers to be unfair and non-caring, there was a correlation to defiant and uncooperative behavior.

Teachers who are able to foster connections with their students spend more time teaching, instructing, and discussing curriculum and spend less time on correcting inappropriate behaviors (Gay, 2003). However, caring must be displayed before a relationship can form. When dealing with Black students, caring is manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors. Teachers who display caring attitudes demonstrate concern for these students as people with intellectual capabilities, and demand performance responsibilities from their students in the form of trust (Cialdini, 2009; Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008). Decker (2007) conducted an exploratory study examining student–teacher relationships for a group behaviorally at-risk Black students identified by their teachers. Student participants included 26 males and 18 females plus 25 teachers (2 males and 23 females) from two suburban schools and three urban elementary schools in a Midwestern state. Data collected and analyzed from students, teachers, and observations suggested that the quality of the student–teacher relationship can either support or deter resiliency for at-risk students. Therefore, a positive teacher and student relationship is essential for motivating and learning to take place.

Students can be also looked at or labelled as ‘underachiever’ when they are suffering from or experiencing stereotype threat. For example, Schmader and Johns (2003) tested the working memory of female college students in threatened and unthreatened environments. Females that were in the threat-evoking condition underperformed, confirming that stereotypes could affect a person’s performance. Dennehy’s study (2014) dealing social identity threat similar in nature to stereotype threat because of the essential premise deals with identifying with a particular group confirmed a student’s working memory could possibly be blocked due to stereotypes associated
with that group, and underperformance occurs even though the student is prepared. Therefore, if the threat is removed, then students can compete equally and score as well as their counterparts. If public school educators, administrators or any adult interacting with students, operate from a deficit thinking perspective or unaware of the effects of stereotype threat when working with Black students, then academic underperformance (Lattimore, 2005; Weiner, 2006) can occur along with inappropriate behavior problems, which help confirm negative stereotypes that are associated with the Black community. Adults with unknown biases can subconsciously alter their interactions and decisions due to stereotyping. However, when culturally relevant teaching strategies are applied, school can have meaning to the students’ daily life as well (Gay, 2003) and dispel the stereotype of Black students being underachievers.

Troublemakers

“Troublemaker” is a label placed upon a student when, over time, several negative interactions or exchanges have taken place with the adults on campus that result in some disciplinary action (Hilliard, 1991). Since Black students are disciplined more than any other ethnic groups, many Black students are labeled as “troublemakers”. If a student has been labeled as a troublemaker, then any adult exchange can cause racial tension. Since students are very aware of labels that have been placed upon them or their peers, they can reluctantly respond or respond unfavorably to correction or re-direction indicating the need for positive, caring, relationships (Decker, 2007). Occasionally, adults’ subconsciously stereotypical beliefs are demonstrated in the form of racial microaggressions. These subtle body gestures, or racially charged phrases are too subtle or too hard to describe but students who are on the receiving end understand completely the insinuating dislike because of the labelled that has been placed upon them. Often Black students who are labeled as troublemakers are from low socioeconomic areas and
they are frequently overrepresented in punitive measures of discipline. This pattern has been well documented for over forty years across the United States (Smith, 2001; Raffaele Mendez, 2003). For example, Black students are suspended at greater numbers than their proportion of the total school population (Heitzeg, 2009). Documenting this trend, the Applied Research Center (2000) reported Suspension and Expulsion Data by Race. For instance, in Austin, Texas, the percentage of all Black students totaled 18%, but the suspension and expulsion rate of Black students from equaled 36% of total students suspended. Although the White students’ population totaled 37%, its suspension/expulsion rate only equaled 18% of the total of suspended students. As this data showed, Black students are suspended at disproportionately higher numbers than White students. In the same study, these disproportionate discipline rates appeared in other cities such as San Francisco, CA, Providence, RI, and Boston, MA. As another illustration, Hoffman (2014) conducted a study in a diverse mid-sized urban school district serving more than 24,000 students to see if the zero tolerance policy expansion had an effect on the student population. The findings revealed that the expanded zero tolerance policy effect on the population of Black students in the District was much greater than the effect on students of any other race or ethnicity--it was documented that Black students were suspended at a ratio of 7 to 1 compared to White students. Yet, despite this stark disparity, there is no evidence demonstrating that Black students misbehave at greater rates than their White peers (Heitzeg, 2009; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Skiba et al., 2002; Witt, 2007). Nevertheless, these statistics help perpetuate the stereotype that Black students are troublemakers, even though there is a large body of studies that report differently (Heitzeg, 2009; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Skiba et al., 2002; Witt, 2007).

Critical Race theorists argue that policies cannot be racially neutral in the present school system, because many of these policies and practices cater to White students to maintain the status quo of the dominant culture. Zero tolerance policies are one example
of how structural racism is embedded within the school system. Zero tolerance policies require school officials to hand down explicit, consistent, and severe punishment when students break certain rules. This means that suspensions or expulsions are applied without considering the student’s circumstances, reasons for the behavior (even self-defense), or the student’s history of discipline problems (Mongan, & Walker, 2012). Zero tolerance policies emerged from commitments to keep schools safe after an increase of gun shootings on school campuses in the 1990s, beginning with the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which mandated automatic expulsion for students who possessed a weapon (Sughrue, 2003). Zero tolerance policies required that schools address offenses such as possessing firearms, knives or other weapons, drugs, alcohol, violence and tobacco without considering other interventions. There was a correlation between Black students’ poor attendance, poor academic performance, and disengagement from school curriculum, which could have to do with adults’ deficient thinking mentality or stereotypical beliefs in any case Black students were affected more than their White peers (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Henry & Tator, 2010). Consequently, Black students, especially Black males, have more potential to be labeled as “troublemakers” (Hilliard, 1991, Noguera, 2003).

As a means to combat the increase of suspensions resulting from zero tolerance policies, in 2012, AB-1729, “Pupil Rights: Suspension or Expulsion: Alternatives and Other Means of Correction Legislation” was passed. This assembly bill required students to receive some type of intervention before suspended. The intervention can include, but is not limited to, counseling and an anger management program, for a pupil subject to discipline under this provision. Consequently, AB-1729, “Pupil Rights: Suspension or Expulsion: Alternatives and Other Means of Correction Legislation” did not overrule if a student violated Education codes 48915(c) which include: a) possessing, selling or otherwise furnishing a firearm, b) brandishing a knife at another person, c) sale of any
controlled substance including the prescription drug Soma®, d) committing or attempting to commit a sexual assault or battery, e) possession of an explosive (“Bill Text - AB-1729 Pupil rights: suspension or expulsion: alternatives and other means of correction,,” n.d.). These five offenses carry an automatic expulsion regardless of the student’s background, discipline history, grades, attendance, victim of bullying etc. Yet, there is no evidence of safer sites when these offenders are removed (Skiba et al., 2002) even though students’ suspension rates continue to rise. Further, Black students are impacted more due the negative stereotype that circulates in society along with adults’ deficient thinking mindset that promote unfair treatment.

**Athletes**

Another pervasive racist stereotype can be found in the sports world. The belief that Black people are better athletes than their White counterparts is an idea stemming from the nineteenth century that is still perpetuated today (Washington & Karen, 2001). Despite the stereotype of Black athletic prowess, however, Whites are still considered intellectually superior (Harrison, 2001; Hodge, Kozub, Dixson, Moore III, & Kambron, 2008; Wiggins, 1989). According to Anderson (1996), “Black athletes are often described in ways that attribute their athletic success to natural ability, whereas white athletes are described as intelligent and hardworking” (p. 362). Due to these stereotypical beliefs, teachers and other adults on campuses have been found to have lower academic expectations of their student athletes (Sailes, 1993, 1998).

In a study of Black college athletes (Beamon, 2014), participants identified their classroom as isolated as well as a racially intimidating environment because their professors communicated their belief of stereotypes regarding Black males as well as athletes and isolating atmosphere (Beamon, 2014). One student, Devin, shared his experience with both stereotyping and racial isolation: “…. I was usually like the only
Black person in a lot of my classes and being an athlete and the only Black person in the class, that’s two strikes against you. A lot of professors see athletes as a problem. They figure you not gone come to class, you not gone do your work” (p. 128). In the same study, another student athlete, Ivan, described the negative assumptions of his professors due to his size: “people knew I was a athlete so sometimes that worked to my advantage, not with professors; it’s like all they could see was a big, Black, so I must be dumb” (Beamon, 2014 p.128). As these studies show, due to negative stereotyping, Black athletes are often perceived as only possessing physical, but not academic, capabilities, which often leads to further academic failure by these students, and serves to perpetuate the stereotype (Steele, 1997).

Beyond academics, stereotyping influences Black athletes in several ways. For example, Blacks are navigated towards sports such as basketball and football, but sports such as golf, swimming, and tennis are seen as inappropriate for Blacks by mainstream white America (Hodge, Kozub, Dixson, Moore III, & Kambon, 2008 Ogden & Hilt, 2003). Football, and Basketball are Black sports or sports for Black participants emphasized by mass media, and advertisement by mass media help promote these stereotypes. For instance, Lee & Browne’s (2009) study showed how athletes are exposed to influential messages about what sport they should pursue. The study surveyed 256 Black track and field athletes to investigate sports media consumption behaviors at the Annual TSU Relays. Several trends emerged: one-third of respondents used television as their favorite source of sports information and watched sports on a daily basis. One-fourth of the participants used multiple sources of information and one-half of all respondents named having a favorite sport. Currently, in the United States 8 million students participate in high school athletics but only 480, 000 of them will compete at the National College Athletics Association (NCAA). Of Black high school students who do enter a university, the Black male student-athletes population, in particular, at
Division I-A universities have the lowest graduation rate of all race, ethnic, and gender classifications (Smith, 2004). Yet, many Black students have aspirations of competing professionally. Even though the amount of high school student athletes who enter the National Basketball Association (NBA), and National Football League (NFL) are only a fraction of the 480,000 that will have competed on collegiate level. Black students have some cultural connection with basketball since many successful basketball players are Black. The basketball players can represent financial freedom as a result of physical abilities not intellect or academic ability. In some ways, “basketball has become a means of expression and freedom in African American communities, particular those in the inner city (Ogden & Hilt, 2003, p. 214). This type of messaging helps maintain stereotype that Blacks are better athletics than successful academic students and the way to upward mobility is through succeeding in sports.

Because Black NBA players, and Black NFL players are among the few positive role models confirmed by the media, there are many Black students who focus on their athletic ability rather than their academics (Anderson, 1996). These student athletes are often presented with a false sense of security, because they are led to believe that, through their successful high school athletic experience, they will continue to be provided social approval that will translate into academic success (Anderson, 1996). However, as the studies discussed in this section demonstrate, these students do not experience that approval, but rather, are treated with the same stereotypical conditions that often lead to academic disengagement (Anderson, 1996).

Yet, despite the fact that media, teachers and other adults might have lower expectations of student athletes, students who are involved in sports do benefit in a variety of ways, as demonstrated by Jordan’s (1999) study. The researcher concluded, “Sports participation was found to improve the school engagement and academic self-confidence of all student athletes” (Jordan, 1999 p. 54). Further, participation in high
school sports was associated with healthier self-esteem, and better academic confidence and higher academic achievement. These findings demonstrate that sports can have a valuable effect on students’ intellectual development and motivation, while also developing important extra-academic skills and orientations such as respect for rules, fair play, teamwork and determination (Jordan, 1999).

Other studies have echoed Jordan’s (1999) findings that students who participated in sports developed a more positive attitude about school, were more engaged in academics, and had more personal student-teacher contacts (Crain, 1981; Trent & Braddock, 1992). Crain (1981) included 200 schools and over 10,000 responses from high school students in the South and found that racial conflicts among black and white groups were minimal among student athletes. It was reported that students involved in sports had a better attitude towards school, had more parent involvement, and had more personal contact with teachers. Moreover, there was a greater feeling of satisfaction among the students who participated in sports because they were a part of the team. This aligns with cultural responsive pedagogy’s contention that a sense of belonging and connectedness fosters learning (Gay 2003). These positive attributes could be carried over to other aspects of the student athlete life both inside and outside of the school community (Chickering 1969).

**Conclusion**

To recognize how stereotyping affects Black students in the United States public school system, one must understand that racism is a major factor. Critical Race Theory allows the space for the historical and socioeconomic perspective to be addressed in education. Then, we must explore how cultural relevant pedagogy can make a difference in these Black students educational experience. The literature states the importance of
building relationships, trust and developing culture sensitivity to combat deficit thinking, and stereotype threat. When this combination of elements are not addressed Black students are pushed out of the public school through multiple exclusionary practices. Black students are often labeled as troublemakers, underachievers and intellectually deficient. It may be due to the social construct that is rooted in perceptions that dominant society and culture has of its students of color (Brick, 2009). These stereotypical perceptions that surround the black community are detrimental hindrances. By analyzing the experiences of students, we can look social attributes, capital and resources that give way to this negative stereotyping. Adults who are trained to recognized a student’s cultural needs can then offer resources that will help the student academically, mentally and socially. Professional development, networks, and meaningful relationships between administrators, teachers, students, and family can possibly mediate stereotyping on high school campuses, as well as provide tools for Black students to be able to navigate institutional racism. Thus, the current study will attempt to examine how stereotypes affect the educational experiences of Black high school students to provide coping strategies that will help Black students become successful people while attending high school.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study used qualitative methods to examine the stereotypical experiences of Black students enrolled in Bayside Continuation High School located in Hayward, California. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of Black students regarding stereotypes that adults in school held about them and how these perceived adults’ views about them affected their school experiences. Findings from this study offers options to help students navigate through the school system and eliminate some stereotype threat which causes underperformance. The following two-part question guided the study: “What are the perceptions of Black students regarding (a) stereotypes that adults in school hold about them and (b) how these stereotypes affect their school experiences?”

Research Design

A qualitative case study design was used for this study. Case study is an experiential inquiry to investigate a current phenomenon in real-life context, especially when the limits amongst phenomenon and situation are clearly evident (Yin, 2003). The case study method can thoroughly explain this phenomenon or describe the experiences in this particular context. Moreover, the case study method allowed for exploration and took the holistic view of the situation and which gave the researcher the ability to answer the “how” and “why” questions.
The method included interviewing students from Bayside School. I believe this methodologically was beneficial to this study to clarify what strategies could be derived from the detailed analysis of Black students who have been pushed out of the comprehensive high school. I believe it was important to hear the complexities of interactions that lead to the demise of their school career. Education is a social process that cannot be reduced to one single incident but it is a process that leads to disengagement. Nevertheless, if the proper resources and supports are put in place at the appropriate times I believe as educators we can help student navigate this institutional racist system that exists. Therefore, the utilization of the case study as a research method in a continuation school can enhance the possibilities of gaining further insight into the mechanisms of adaption utilized by Black students to be successful in what appears to be white middle class valued oriented institution plagued with racism. Racism can be understood as biased behavior attached with prejudicial beliefs towards an entire race that places that group in a subservient position in society (Beamon, 2014; Anderson 1996; Singer 2005). In the United States, Black people are confronted with a wealth of complications and “many of these difficulties can be explained by past and present perceived and actual discrimination” (Beamon, 2014 p. 122). Therefore, interviewing students, I believe is an important data collection method for this study, for it allows the interviewee the freedom to express their perception in the less restrictive environment with words, facial expressions, and body language which cannot be captured in a written survey. The interview questions consisted of open questions. “Open questions are those that provide broad parameters within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer (Roulston, 2010 p. 12). Each student was audiotaped and each conversation was transcribed.
Setting and Participants

Hayward Unified School District (HUSD) is located in Alameda County with a diverse population. It is made up of African American 11.9%, Asian/Pacific Islander 25.1% Hispanic or Latino 40.7%, White 34.2% two or more races 7.1% (www.hayward-ca.gov, n.d). Most households have an average income of 45-64,000 dollars yearly (“San Francisco Association of Realtors, n.d.). HUSD is comprises of 21 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, Adult Education Center and Helen Turner Children’s Center for pre-school children. HUSD serves over 20,000 students in grades K-12 with alternative educational options for students who need nontraditional setting: home schooling (K-8) independent study (9-12) and one Continuation High School (10-12)

Bayside school is a continuation school that can accommodate 200 students. The largest ethnic groups is Hispanic or Latino, the second largest in White, and the third largest group is African American/ Black students. Class sizes range from 15-24. This smaller class size allows for the students to receive more individualized attention. The school day is from 8:30 am until 12:40 pm, which is a shorter period of time than comprehensive settings, which normally meet from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm. The comprehensive setting includes a nutrition break and lunch while the continuation school only has a nutrition break after the 3rd period. Bayside’s daily schedule consists of 6 periods of 45 minutes each, with a 4 minute passing period in-between. The major focus of the classes offered is meeting graduation requirements (Math, Science, English, Physical Education, History), and thus they only offer a minimum selection of electives (Art, Music). 10 student participants were recruited from Bayside school on a volunteer basis. All participants were students of color who were similar in age, ranging from ninth to twelfth grade, and who had similar school experiences.
Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research holds that the individual and the world are so interconnected that one does not exist without the other (Pole, 2007). For that reason, I believe semi-structured interviews will be the best approach since “…the interview subject has an ‘inner’ or ‘authentic’ self, not necessarily publicly visible, which may be revealed through careful questioning by an attentive and sensitive interviewer who contributes minimally to the talk (Roulston, 2010 p. 52). Further, interviews used in research to examine how people understand social cultural issues and relationships, which was relevant to my purpose regarding students’ perceptions of stereotypes held by adults and how those stereotypes affect their education. I conducted interviews with ten Black students (females & males) of approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. The interviews consisted of seven questions. Some of the questions included: Why are you a student at Bayside Continuation High School? Please describe some of issues that lead you to transferring to this site such as attendance, suspensions, referrals, grades, teachers, or any other issues that you have had). How were your relationships with adults (principals, campus security, teachers etc.) like at your previous high school? What would you consider to be a healthy relationship with the adults on your campus? The interviews took place on school grounds either before, during, or after school. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Afterward, the data was analyzed by coding in multiple rounds. First, I read the interviews multiple times to familiarize myself with the data. I then engaged in an open coding process where I generated a large set of initial codes (Saldana, 2009). These codes were then clustered into larger categories in a second round of axial coding (Saldana, 2009) and eventually became the main themes I report in chapter 4. Throughout the coding process, I also created memos on the emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006).
The ability to use descriptive words based on interviews, field notes and observations captured the beliefs of the participants than relying solely on a survey such as a Likert-scaled questionnaire. Qualitative researchers believe the meaning of human behavior is constructed when “looking at what people think, feel and do in a comprehensive way” (Pole, 2007, p.2). Qualitative research encompasses this in all its stages. This is the reason I chose to analyze my interviews and observations with certain codes by the definitions created by the participants. I believe as humans we are connected with the world and it cannot be separated. Often when examining academics and people, the relationship part is overlooked and a complete diagnosis cannot be determined when you try to separate a person’s life into pieces.

**Trustworthiness**

Several techniques were used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study (Tracy, 2010). For example, multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, observations, field notes) were used to answer the research questions. An additional strategy included member checking. Member checking consisted of asking participants to (a) review the interview questions to check for clarity and transparency (b) review their personal interview transcript to ensure adequate depiction of their ideas, views and comments, and (c) make remarks on the themes and expressions that contributed to their results. Saturation occurred naturally during the progress of the study once incremental learning became marginal.

**Positionality**

My lived experiences have made it very easy to recognize the racism that is built into the school structure and how stereotype threat can cause brain freeze. Society promotes stereotypes as realities to preserve the dominant white culture. I have experienced stereotype threat. I am a single parent, and I grew up in a household where
my father was a drug user. But, I have overcome all of these stereotypes which are placed against Black students. As a teacher, I have practiced culturally relevant strategies, and have observed when proper resources are given, the students are then more than likely to experience academic growth, as well as the opportunity to develop a sense of self-worth and confidence. As an educator, I understand and am aware of the need to fill in the possible gaps that may have occurred in a student’s learning process. As a caring human, I must also be able to recognize that external factors can hinder the learning process. (i.e., traumatic experience such as violence, and death, hunger, homelessness or even a sleepless night…) Learning cannot be measured or assessed by standardized test. Learning occurs at different rates and times. It is my basic premise that all children can and want to learn. Racial stereotypes were worth researching to see how I can help students navigate the racist public school system that hinder students of color.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, I present data collected from students at a continuation school to address the two-part question that frames this study: What are the perceptions of Black students regarding (a) stereotypes that adults in school hold about them and (b) how these stereotypes affect their school experiences? The 11th and 12th grade students who served as participants have experienced obstacles both on and off their school campus which have impacted their school performance. From the information gathered, several themes emerged as motives for stereotypes to be perpetually assumed as societal norms among adults in secondary educational settings. These themes provide insight into how stereotyping affects Black students’ school experiences. The themes discussed below include students’ attempts to resist these imposed stereotypes, the importance of self-advocacy, the existence of perpetual stereotypes, and the need for healthy relationships and culturally relevant teaching. Hearing the stories the students shared is important to help raise awareness for any adults who are working with Black students in an educational setting— and educators in particular, because they can have a direct influence and can help students to overcome the obstacles described and become productive citizens of society. Undeniably, developing their awareness can increase students’ educational opportunities by opening other pathways for success that would otherwise be blocked due to negative stereotyping.
Resisting Stereotypes

All participants described multiple stereotypes surrounding their age group, their culture, and their race, most of which were negative. However, they made it clear that while they were very aware of these stereotypes, the participants did not think that these labels accurately described them. Many deliberately tried to avoid behaviors that would connect them to these stereotypes.

Students discussed “acting black,” “ratchet,” “ghetto,” and “thugs” as being stereotypes commonly associated with Black people. “Acting black,” or “ghetto,” was associated with inappropriate and/or unacceptable social behavior. Students described, for instance, yelling or arguing with your significant other (boyfriend/girlfriend) in the middle of the street, or dressing for school in “club” attire, as behaviors that would be considered “ghetto.” In school, they connected “acting black” to displaying inappropriate behavior, such as breaking school rules, talking loud, or disrespecting teachers. On the other hand, students associated certain behaviors, such as sitting in the front of the class and raising their hands to answer questions, as “acting white” (rather than behaviors associated with being a “good student”). If they “acted white,” they worried that they might be perceived unfavorably by their peers, so they felt at times they had to simultaneously negotiate behaviors that would allow them to access education and those that were acceptable to their friends. Describing this situation, John stated,

“I did not get into fights but I stood my ground. You’re not about to push me over. I was a big dude back then. They were like, I don’t know what he is about so back up off him. I sat closer to the first [row] so I can listen and pay attention in class. I was book smart and street smart. Being an African-American you have to have both.”
John’s statement provides an example of the difficulties the students in this study experienced because of the negative connotations regarding Black students and their education. He also had to work harder to ensure that he broke away from the stereotypes in the eyes of his teacher to ensure fair treatment. He said,

My relationship with teachers, I mean, I try not to be a part of the stereotypes. Even though it can push you to actually put your head in the books and work harder. When teachers notice that, they want to give you some extra leeway if they see you working a little bit harder. But when you fall into that stereotype, they are going associate you with those statistics.

In addition to the stereotypes described above, female students shared specific stereotypes that they, as young Black women, were subject to. For instance, a “ratchet,” which they defined as an aggressive female who exhibits a worthless appearance, has poor hygiene, practices promiscuous behavior, and/or enjoys drinking and doing drugs on a regular basis. They also described being stereotyped as “hood-rats”. The term “hood-rat,” they related, is a synonym for “ratchet,” describing a female who sleeps around, has provocative tendencies and low or offensive standards of personal care. For instance, Dee Dee described that she felt Black girls were stereotyped as “loud, aggressive, mean,” adding, “And I think I am the complete opposite.”

Like Dee Dee, 9 out of the 10 participants did not identify themselves with any of the stereotypes they mentioned. For instance, when asked, “Do you associate with any of those stereotypes?” the students suggested they were resistant to associating themselves with any of the negative stereotypes. Maya, in some ways, avoided the entire question and gave a general synopsis of how she interacts with all people, responding,

Not me specifically. I’m my own person--just because some white people might hate black people that is not going to make hate white people. I like you because
of your personality. How I feel about you is how I feel about you, and I will not
let the world or anybody else change my perspective of someone.

Maya’s statement indicates that she does not see herself as society perceives Black people
according to stereotypical behavior. Instead, she judges everyone by the relationship and
interactions she experiences with them on an individual basis. With this statement, Maya
gives an important insight into the mindset of today’s youth, indicating that she cares
more about cultural significance than the color of the person’s skin. In her eyes, skin
color doesn’t matter—rather, a person’s actions, morals, and values are more important.
The relationship she has with a person will be based those characteristics, and if a person
is treated a certain way, it is because of their personality not their skin color. Rather than
being inherent, these characteristics are developed by a person’s surroundings, influences,
and decision-making skills. However, while the students I interviewed made it clear that
they do not consider skin color a major factor in their interactions with others that is not
their experience when it comes to adults on campus. They felt that skin color, a person’s
attire, and gender play a part in the interactions among adults and other students, as
discussed further below.

In the conversations I had with them, students shared that the societal perspectives
of Black males caused pressure and negatively affected their school experience, whether
it was what they selected to wear, whether they decided to speak or not in class. As Black
male students, they perceived that they were judged before they ever had a chance to
show their academic performance or achievements. Stereotypical images that plagued the
boys in this study included being labeled as “thugs” and “hood.” Tommie mentioned that
adults considered “hood” boys to be males who dressed a certain way. He explained,

You could tell by the way they dressed--the way they acted, their mannerism and
their cars and everything about them “hood”. They wear very flashy clothes, very
expensive clothes, the signature belts, all the name brand items [like] Gucci and Louis Vuitton.

Terry shared a similar perception about the adults on campus as Tommie—that is, that they judged him to be a “thug” because of his attire. He said, “I think they consider me like a thug or something because I wear hoodie.” Terry was a very shy and quiet student, and as I was interviewing him, I learned he was very sensitive to how others viewed him. He stated that he tries very hard to prove that he is not actually anything like the stereotypes that surround his age group.

Another participant, Joe B, also mentioned that he did not say much in class because it might be interpreted the wrong way. In Joe B’s case, due to the stereotypes holding that Black students were dumb, he felt asking questions was not an option. He worried it would confirm this stereotype in his classmates’ and teacher’s eyes. Joe B expressed it this way:

I realized inside my early middle school years… how attitudes were taken towards certain types of students and smaller communities on campus. You know with certain groups and stereotypes, and how they fit in and where their roles really came into play… it came down to the classroom situations and daily interactions.

Students also described how stereotypes they felt were unhealthy and hurtful affected their school experiences with the curriculum that was taught. The students in this study had no control of or input into the material they are required to learn, since it is mandated by the state in which they reside, and according to Dee Dee, sometimes that mandated school curriculum could trigger an uncomfortable atmosphere in the classroom. For example, slavery would be considered a sensitive subject because of the negativity associated with the historical ordeal. Making a connection between stereotypes and
her curriculum, Dee Dee explained, “Yeah, anything that is a hurtful stereotype hurts anybody. Just like when you are in history class and they start talking about slavery and you are the only black person in the class, you get uncomfortable. You don’t want to talk and you feel weird.” Dee Dee was one of only two people of color in her class, and teachers would often require her to speak about Black people, making her feel as if they believed she would be able to explain Black culture since she was African American. Dee Dee said, “It is a fear if something does come up about Blacks and you are the only Black. And they are looking to look you to be the expert.” As a result, Dee Dee described not attending school because she did not want to be in situation where she was asked to speak on behalf of all Black people. Like Joe B choosing not to talk in class, not attending school was a way for Dee Dee to avoid the negativity associated with being Black.

Overall as a race, the participants said that they felt Blacks are viewed and considered to be unintelligent human beings. The students shared as Black students they have a harder time asking for help than any other race because it could possibly confirm the stereotype that Blacks are dumb. Consequently, they shared that they found it easier to disengage from school rather than accept being labeled dumb. For instance, the wording Joe B used to describe this situation is telling:

I mean you obviously want to be seen to great heights to get inside of the better graces of you know the people around you, especially this person [the teacher] putting in time effort, and faith into you to excel and how you view you. Of course, you know, with some sort of quality. And so if you lose that quality or that texture, you know, it kind of makes it all for nothing? I think that’s the mindset of a lot of students, and why they don’t ask for help. Because they don’t want to be viewed a certain way, and looked down upon.
In this quote, Joe B is sharing that he would like for adults to see him for a student with potential to learn, and not as anything less. He notes that the teachers are the ones putting their time in to prepare and present the material, so it would be great for him to be able to grasp the concepts. However when school is difficult and teachers are not treating student properly, the students stop trying, which can lead to more pressures outside of school (such as their family becoming upset).

Interestingly, however, not all students took the approach of disengaging. Unlike Terry, who is an above average student, Joe B has learning difficulties. Therefore, Joe B’s efforts to resist the stereotype of Blacks being unintelligent, lazy and do not value education is very different than how Terry approaches it. Joe B does not ask questions of his teachers, even if he does not understand the curriculum, because he does not want to confirm the stereotype. On the other hand, Terry eagerly volunteers to answer as many questions as he can in his classes. He feels that demonstrating his knowledge of the content proves he is smart, which, in his view, would negate the stereotype that to be Black means to be unintelligent.

The students also shared that music and television play a part in the stereotyping that goes on at school. Mass media is a dominant part of the students’ lives. Social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat, just to name a few, are readily available from computers, phones, tablets, and laptops. These communications can influence people’s beliefs and help perpetuate the stereotypes. “Music is widespread so everybody hears it,” stated Maya. Students felt that when the artists rap and sing about cultural issues seen as negative and glamorize them, it does not help the images of Black students or Black people. For example, Edward spoke about how the media depicts him as a Black male. Edward said, “The media in the last couple of years has portrayed us to be criminals and stuff, and that they’re [black males] bad, they do wrong, and they steal.
But not all black people are like that.” The students felt that fighting stereotypes was more difficult with the media spreading negative images of them.

Jazmin also talked about the ways music perpetuates stereotypes for Black people, stating,

It’s no good. It is not good at all. Music is like heroin and coke in the 80’s. It is killing our people. The music is promoting negative stuff and it is directed towards the black community. Music is promoting extremely in the black community like killing each other for stupid stuff, getting hecka high, drinking hecka lean. It is turning our people into zombies. The music you listen to makes you the person you are. I believe that absolutely because if I am listening to some crazy stuff then I want to go do some crazy stuff. It is really true the music we are listening to makes us who were are. If females are listening to hecka sexual songs, then you are going to want to do something. I know what I am talking about.

The students in this study were aware of and able to discuss how music and television affects them in terms of stereotypes. Because of the images perpetuated by music and mass media, students have become aware of their actions, and pay attention to what others are hearing about them from music and television. The students explained that with each decision they make, they could be confirming or negating a stereotype in the eyes of the adults they are interacting with on a daily basis at school. Ironically, as shown in this section, the students did not identify or see themselves in any of the stereotypical categories others imposed on them, but despite that, the students emphasized that resisting stereotypes is a never-ending job for them.
Single Parents, Autonomous Students

A second theme emerging from this study involved the stereotypes of single parents, and the conflict caused between students’ level autonomy at home and the lack of autonomy at school. In the Black community, a commonly held stereotype concerns students from a single parent household. It is portrayed that when Black students are from a single parent household they lack the necessary essentials to be a productive student. Their households are sometimes viewed as dysfunctional, or worse, as if the parents do not value their students’ educational endeavors. Nine out of ten students I interviewed lived in a single parent household either with a mother, father or grandparent. Nevertheless, the students shared that education is highly valued in the home. However, because of living in a single parent household, the students have more responsibilities placed upon them. These students shared that their parents worked long hours to provide the basic needs such as shelter, food, and clothing, often leaving them to take care of themselves and sometimes siblings. One of the students, Nakia, described her home life as follows:

My mom works all day. She doesn’t help my sister. We have never had a family. We never had family time literally. We don’t have family talks. We do not have none of that. Since we start living there, everybody leaves in the morning. I am always home first because I never had a job or anything. Now I do. I am always home first then the baby comes home, my little sister. They drop her off because my mom doesn’t come home until ten at night and my older sister doesn’t come home until 11 at night.

In this statement, Nakia indicates how lonely it can be without family dinners and family outings. In her home, everyone has a set routine and there is not time to fellowship with each other. In addition, due to her mother’s hectic schedule, she has adult responsibilities:
Nakia not only has to take care of herself, but also is required to help her sister with homework and make them both dinner.

Nakia’s experience is not unique among the participants in this study. John also expressed the struggles of being raised in a single parent household: “Some of the cons are that when they (parent) are at work, it gets lonely when you are in the house by yourself. And they don’t have time to really make sure you are doing what you are supposed to be doing.” However, unlike Nakia, John also described an upside of having a single parent, stating,

The pros are there is more like a sense of freedom. I am there by myself with my little brother. I can kind of mentor to him, like more one-on-one bonding time. Another pro being in a single-parent household is more close interaction and not so many distractions in the house. You have to be accountable for your own actions. That’s another con or a pro. That’s in the middle because it makes you responsible, but at the Joe Be time you don’t have somebody breathing down your neck….

Similarly to Nakia, John had to take care of his younger sibling—his responsibilities included making sure his little brother arrives to school each day and comes home on time.

When these adult responsibilities are placed upon high school students, it affects their schooling experiences. For example, Terry explained that his mother expected him to talk to his teachers when things were not going well in class or when he had assignments are missing. However, students shared that, often, teachers were not willing to talk to the students about their well-being or about failing grades in their class. Typically, it is a societal expectation that a parent would take time to discuss their student’s academic performance with a teacher. However, when interviewing the students,
students communicated a different situation. The single parents of the participants in the study held their students in high regard and expected them to be as self-sufficient at school as they were required to be at home. Although the students communicated that their parents did this because they were comfortable and secure in their belief that their student could handle the responsibilities that were placed upon them at home, a teacher who does not understand this cultural expectation might be inclined to believe the parent does not care about their child’s schooling.

Contrary to stereotypical beliefs, the single parents of the participants in this study do value, or are very much concerned about, their child’s education. More than half of the participants expressed how their parents very much want them to be successful in the future and believed that their parents do see the value in earning a high school diploma. Maya, describing her mother’s expectations for school, said,

She really wants me to graduate. She doesn’t care what I do after[ward], she just wants me to graduate. She does not want me to have a lot on my plate. She’s like, “Graduate, first you can do anything after that. Think about that after you graduate. Focus on graduating first.”

Further, each student I spoke with expressed their parents’ frustration and disappointment when learning about their student’s poor academic performance, which further dispels the notion that single parents of color are disengaged from, or do not care about, their child’s education.

The misconception of the single parenting manifests itself worst when the parent was faced with information that their student is not performing well in school. This is an example of how autonomy too soon didn’t benefit the student. Their ability to carry out adult-like responsibilities at home did not transfer into mature adult-like decision concerning the choices they made about school. The students expressed that
disappointing their parent was very hurtful and caused shame to the family because their behavior helped confirm the stereotype of Black students as inferior intellectually, and culturally, students believed that “kids are a reflection of their parenting skills”.

Although they made choices that had landed them at the continuation school setting, all the participants described engaging in a self-reflection process that had changed their mindset. The students understood that they could no longer blame or use the racist and stereotypical behavior of others to completely excuse their own actions, which many of them reflected that they had done. The students explained that they each had to face obstacles as they presented themselves without making careless mistakes, such as voicing their opinion about the unfairness or injustice that the adults in power were displaying. This is something they learned the hard way, and being aware of the stereotypes dealing with Black students including that they do not value education, and they are less intelligent than their white counterparts has allowed these students to move past the actions of others and focus on what was best for them and their future. For example, Serena decided to use her past mistakes as a motivator. In the quote below, she expressed how being expelled from the comprehensive high school changed her perspective.

[Being expelled] made me be a better person. It really opened my eyes. It made me realize that I could strive for what I want to be. I really want to be without being judged like here [at the continuation school]. I got support--I have people here always reminded me. ‘You’re doing good. You’re doing good. Keep it up. Keep it up.’

This understanding came with maturity and experience, since prior to entering the continuation school, Serena would challenge the racist teacher’s behavior. However, because Serena did not have any authority in the school setting, she would get in trouble,
and her mother would have to come to the school to advocate for her. Serena had to learn that, no matter how much responsibility was demanded from her by her mother, the school officials only saw her as a child.

Unfortunately, for many of the students, having heavy responsibilities at home did not help them in the high school setting. They explained that their teachers only saw them as children who had no responsibilities, but they doing well in their classes. Their teachers did not consider that a student might have been up all night babysitting a young sibling, be tired from cooking and cleaning the house, or perhaps did not finish their homework because of various home responsibilities. Furthermore, many teachers did not understand the pressure that came from parents for their student to be self-sufficient. Serena, described that many teachers and adults on campus do not recognize the weight placed on them in their household, stated it this way:

“Behind a smile you can have so many tears. Teachers don’t even know. They are always nagging on students. They don’t even know what students go through. They just expect we have this great, luxurious, perfect life. They think we don’t have anything to worry about. But in reality, they don’t know what we’re going through as teens. Teens go through a lot of stuff. They don’t even be knowing.”

With this quote, Serena notes that she does not feel that her teachers understood her complicated teen life. Instead, teachers often display micro-aggressions that provoke, disrespect the students, such as failing to find out what might be going on in the students’ backgrounds. Overall, the students reported that they felt their teachers did not relate or understand the pressures involved with being a young person. For example, when a student is unable to dress in today’s popular fashion they could be teased, bullied, and ostracized from their peers. This weighs heavy on teens, and adults do not understand.
In summary, growing up in a single parent household created a challenging environment for these students due to multiple factors—societal norms deem this as dysfunctional setting, and the adults on campus were not ready to communicate with students. The adults were not able to recognize that the autonomy students experienced at home made them more likely to challenge school authorities if and when they were faced with discrimination on campus. Consequently, their behavior assisted in confirming stereotypical beliefs surrounding the Black community. The responsibilities placed on these students by their parents created a false sense of adulthood, while their maturity level often proved that they were not ready for such demands in the school setting. Voicing their opinions about the injustices they experienced were interpreted as disrespectful defiance and resulted in disciplinary infractions, which perpetuated stereotypes of Black students as unintelligent, loud, and aggressive.

**Teachers as Gate Keepers**

Teachers are the most influential adults on the school campus in terms of daily interaction with the students, and accordingly, the students in this study shared how teachers’ perceptions of them can affect them in positive and negative ways. Importantly, the students felt that teachers should be aware of their biases. All students had come in contact with teachers who had poor attitudes and low expectations of them, and often, these teachers were positioned in classes that are required for graduation. These teachers would be considered a “gate keeper” because they have the power to hinder a student’s success in graduating high school. A gate keeper is a person who has the power to control, provoke or escalate a situation, or an adult that has the ability to place blame on students. Joe B explained it this way: “Many of them [teachers] are really set inside of a certain mindset or mood.” Since stereotypical perceptions suggest that Black students do not care about their education, it makes it even harder for the students to ask
for help. These students are aware of the stereotypes and the unjust, unfair personality of the teacher so it causes a conflict. Ultimately, it is the student that suffers because, as discussed in the last section, they have not authority in the school setting, and even if they do report the behavior to administrators, their voices often go unheard due to deeply-held negative beliefs surrounding Black students.

Over half of the students shared they must adjust their demeanor or mannerisms in a way that is appeasing to the teacher in order to receive help. For instance, if a student is quiet, it may be interpreted wrong. Joe B said his shy behavior and quiet demeanor was often interpreted incorrectly, with teachers. They assumed he did not care about his education, and often figuring the stereotype held some truth—that Blacks were not intelligent. Joe B explained, “I think that’s the mindset of a lot of students, and why they don’t ask for help. Because they don’t want to be viewed a certain way, and looked down upon. I mean, why else would most students never ask for help?” This is an example of how negative stereotyping affects students. Students do not want to be viewed as “dumb” according to the stereotype surrounding the Black community and Black students.

Students also described that, many times in their experience, teachers are more concerned about their subject matter, deadlines, and standardized testing timeline than how to disseminate the information in a way so the students are engaged, encouraged and empowered. Tommie describes these teachers as textbook teachers in our dialogue:

Tommie: There is only textbook teachers. You know, what I am talking about

Drea: You know, I’m going to ask you to explain a textbook teacher

Tommie: A textbook teacher is a teacher only goes by the book. Ummm, only sets it out like the book says it. This is what is. This is the formula. This is how you do it.
Drea: So textbooks teachers don’t really help the students.

Tommie: Not really, because everybody’s different.

At Hayward High, there is a policy that keeps students from transferring out of a teacher’s class due to personality clashes. Serena gave an example of how her Health teacher would target the Black students. She said,

She would pick on the specifically the African American kids. She wouldn’t be messing with nobody else. The other kids she was cool with. She was hecka nice with but with us she never wanted us to sit with each other. Whenever she heard us talking, she would always thought we was talking about a different subject. But half the time, we would be talking about the actual subject. We would be going into more in depth talking how we usually talk. Because you know we can’t talk like that to her.

Often, Serena shared, this situation would escalate into an argument with the teacher or other classmates. Subsequently, the teacher assumed the students were off task and would send the students out. Since the teacher was in charge, the administration never questioned whether the teacher’s personality was a factor. Stereotyping students or poor classroom management skills was not bought up for discussion. Instead, the blame was immediately placed on the student as an act of defiance.

Edward gave this example: “My friend, he’s Black too and this other kid, he asked to use the bathroom. The teacher said ‘yeah’ right away. But then like my friend she always said “No”. Then one time my (Black) friend, he asked, “How come they get to go?” And she said, “Just go to the office!” It was just because he asked that.”

Like Serena, Edward’s friend and other Black students were victims. This same situation where students were sent out of class due to clashes with the teacher happened
in in other high school graduation requirement classes, but only with the Black students. When students are removed from class, the loss of instructional minutes cannot be regained and the students’ academic performance is affected—which is particularly problematic when the classes are required for graduation. Despite who might be at fault, students suffer and the teacher is never questioned to find out whether it might have been a poor attitude, injustice, and/or lack of judgment on her part.

As an example, World History is one of requirements for a high school diploma, but the teacher in that position had a reputation for losing only the Black students’ assignments, as well as making inappropriate comments. Serena said, “The World History teacher told me I wasn’t going to graduate. I wasn’t going to be on track with nothing. He crazy. He kept saying I was going to be a drop out. He even cussed, saying, ‘You ain’t going to be shit.’ I am standing there looking at him like” (here she made a shocked face). This student knew that this was an inappropriate comment; yet, this is a person she must see every day, and he has some control over her academic future.

As mentioned before, students are disciplined frequently for misconduct. Yet, teachers are rarely questioned about their classroom management and interpersonal relationship skills. Nevertheless, these two qualities are essential to running a smooth, productive learning environment where students can thrive.

The students explained that many adults are judged them based on their personal biases, not on their academic capabilities. When Black students are constantly exposed to this type of behavior throughout their school career, it affects their school experiences. However, depending on the student, it can have a positive or negative result because each student is different. When asking Tommie if stereotypes affected his school experience, he responded,
They have actually. Recently in this school, there is a teacher. I will say this name. His name was Mr. K. He’s an older gentleman. He’s white and I had to be removed from his class because he was racist towards me and my one other friend. I kept telling Mr. Redman the principal, about it. I think he got into but I don’t think he talked about the racist part. He did get me removed. Thank God now he put me with the teacher that I’m with now.

From the student interviews, they made it clear that they were not afraid to call out the racist behavior of the adults, but their complaints seldom were addressed by the school officials. The action Tommie described his principal taking seems to be an exception to common practice. Notably, Tommie’s principal was an African American man, so he might have had similar experiences that enabled him to relate to Tommie’s request. Unfortunately, for the rest of the students, they were not able to have their concerns addressed, but instead, the students are the ones that had to adjust to their teachers. For instance, Nakia spoke about how she made adjustments in Mr. K’s class. She said, “I didn’t even like Mr. K at first but I had to adjust myself to his way of teaching. There was certain stuff I did that he wasn’t used to. So, I had to adjust it and rub it off. Now, he calls me his favorite student.” This is another example of the student appeasing the teacher in order to receive help.

While interviewing the students, many spoke about discriminatory behavior, racism, and selfish personalities of teachers that clashed with the students and hindered their academic performance and/or success. John described his experiences that changed his perspective on teachers, explaining,

When I raised my hand and it was a diverse community, if the teacher was Latino then she led towards the Latino hands. If the teacher was African-American, she would lean towards the African-American hands. I’ve had a mixed variety of
teachers. If you sit in the back of the classroom, then you won’t get picked. If you sit towards the front of the classroom, then you’re definitely willing to get picked on. Usually it is, like first come, first serve. Actually, it was assigned seats and based on alphabetical order and because my last name begins with “W”, I sat in the back of the class. That was where a lot of African-Americans was towards the back because of their last names in the same area. So, because we set in the back, let’s just say the teachers have bad eyes.”

According to John, teachers showed favoritism and it affected his learning experience. Edward agreed with him, saying, “The teachers, they didn’t like to help me really. Like whenever I needed help, they had favorites in the class. So yeah”. Interestingly, Edward felt like having a Black teacher was best for him because, in his experience, they did not play favorites and stayed consistent.

The students talked about how their teachers’ attitudes and expectations affect them because of the negativity surrounding their community and stereotypes. The students I interviewed felt like teachers with poor attitudes and low expectations of Black students were positioned in high school graduation requirement classes. These teachers fit the description of a Gate Keeper, since it was solely on the student to adjust their mannerisms to receive the education intended for them. Unfortunately, according to the experience of the students I interviewed, stereotypes do affect their Black students’ school experiences.

The Need for Human Connections

Teacher-student relationships were mentioned as an important factor for the student participants in this study. Healthy adults’ relationships affected them positively both socially and academically. They explained success in school happened easier when they felt that their teacher believed in them and supported their growth. Unfortunately,
all of the participants could not name five or more teachers in their school career that provided them with a sense of safety and security. Instead, the students spoke about disengaging because of the poor relationships they had with teachers. They did not feel comfortable to attack academic challenges because of the internal conflict about confirming negative stereotypes. The need for human connections play an integral role in learning (Bernstein-Yamashiro, & Noam, 2013).

Despite having some teachers who made things difficult for them, all the students were also able to describe at least one teacher or another adult who they felt had their best interest at heart. From these discussions, relationships with the teachers emerged as being very important to the students. Especially, if the teacher did not display any racial-macroaggressions towards them due to the negative stereotypes concerning Black students. Most importantly the students mentioned they felt safe to ask questions. Students used words like helpful, respectful to describe these teachers. The students explained these teachers did not judge them but instead displayed characteristics such as friendliness, open-mindedness, self-expression, and was able communicate with them on their level. These non-judgmental teachers gave them the opportunity to prove themselves as a student. Tommie described his teacher by saying, “He doesn’t judge one person. He doesn’t even judge a fly. That’s the one teacher in my whole life. Honestly no other teacher has shown nothing like that before.” These are some elements that were mentioned that helped form healthy relationships and their school experience was enhanced. As a result they felt more confident both socially and academically.

In the educational setting, relationship expectations and standards coincide or mirror acceptable societal norms. For example, mutual respect, trustworthiness, honesty, and the ability to communicate emotions are considered components of a healthy partnership with a significant other (Antle, Karam, Christensen, Barbee & Sar, 2011; Gardner, & Parrott, 2004). These elements can be used in describing in a good teacher
The ability to communicate can be similar to teaching competencies meaning the teacher has the ability to relate curriculum in a meaningful way. Fairness can relate to or comparable to mutual respect and 100 percent of the student participants expressed a gratitude for having a relationship with an adult on campus that made them comfortable at school. For example, John, described his understanding of a healthy relationship as consisting of “Conversations, eye contact, communication, expressing what your needs are and how they [adults] can help you. Also expressing or being aware of what needs to be done or what can to be handled and how they can help is a healthy relationship.” Another example was by provided by Terry. He said, “They (Adults) help you when you need it. They are there for you. They can communicate with you.” Similar to Terry and John, Serena shares an example of interaction she had with adult on campus. He was the campus security and he would remind her of her obligations. She states, “He was actually helping me be on track. Afterschool came around and he was see me kicking it with people. “Hey, it’s about that time, It’s about practice time”.” The students expressed their gratitude for having a caring adult on campus.

Students’ discussions of their relationships with adults on campus were notable because these connections are a part of the school environment and, depending on the nature of those relationships, stereotyping can affect the academic experience in a positive or negative way. In the classroom, a comfortable healthy environment can inspire learning, ignite motivation and promote a safe learning atmosphere. However, developing those positive relationships between adults and students takes time, as Joe B noted: “There’s no mutual or regulation, only respect between me and a lot of the adults, and that’s something that needs to be crafted through time.” Not only is time is an important factor in building a relationship with the students, but that relationship must also move beyond the surface and into life beyond the school. Nakia described, “A healthy
relationship is more than ‘hi and bye.’ They talk to you. They kind of know what’s going on. It is deeper than school; they know what’s going on in your personal life to help you with that.”

Nine out of ten participants said they had one adult on campus that they could talk to about anything. Serena even shared that one geometry teacher functioned as a mother figure in her life:

I was only cool with one of my teachers which was my geometry teacher, also my step teacher. I was cool with her my freshman, sophomore and my junior year. She was like my mom. She was like my mama at school. I was very cool with her. If I wasn’t feeling it or something I could go to her class. I could talk to her and stuff. She was the only teacher I was cool with.

As the students in this study noted, they were willing to take advice from trusted, non-judgmental adults who had established a rapport with them. In this instance, stereotypical behavior exhibited by student can be addressed if a relationship with an adult has already been formed. Seven out of ten participants said they changed their decisions as a result of conversations they had with their trusted adult. As an illustration, Nakia talked about a physical altercation she almost had with another student that was prevented by Sam, a campus security officer she respected and trusted, and whom she knew from her previous school. She described, “I almost got into [a fight] here one time. Me and this girl was face to face. I was going to do it, but Sam came and said ‘Nakia, don’t do it [get into a fight]!’ Sam was like, ‘Nakia, I know you about to do it. Nakia, don’t do it.’” Even though she was angry and ready to hit the other female, because of her relationship with Sam she listened to him and made the decision not to engage in a fistfight.

Dee Dee also felt comfortable with her teachers and chose to spend her time with them instead of other students. She said, “I was super close with my teachers because I
would always be in their classrooms since I didn’t talk to any kids. They were kind of who I hung out with.” She considered them her friends because she was able to interact with them on a daily basis and she felt safe to talk to them. However, she also made it clear that there needed to be boundaries when you considered an adult as your friend. There must be a no misunderstanding about the nature of the relationship, because, as Dee Dee noted, people will sometimes take situations out of context. Dee Dee explained, “I feel like you can be a friend with an adult or teacher. I think as long as it is nothing inappropriate. Even here at break, I hang out with a teacher. He is a cool person. He’s funny and he can say things and it doesn’t disturb you because you know where his heart and mind is. He is a good person. So as long as it doesn’t overstep boundaries.”

Other students described how important positive interactions were with specific teachers. Jazmin expressed her feeling about one teacher. She said, “I have one teacher that really, really like me. I think his name is Mr. Hogan. He was a great teacher. He was so sweet and so genuine. He really loves his work because he was so helpful. He cared.”

Tommie talked about one of his teachers, Mr. F, whom he thought was a wonderful teacher. He got excited when explaining about how he interacted with all the students.

Tommie said,

“He actually takes the time to go one-on-one with every single student in class. He actually takes the initiative and he shows the respect to every single person. It doesn’t matter how they look or what they’ve done as long as they say, “Hey Mr. F.” He’s like, “Hey buddy, how’s it going? That’s the one teacher in my whole life. Honestly no other teacher has shown nothing like that before.”

The students shared how having that human connection with a teacher can make a difference in their lives. It helps them to alleviate some pressures when they are able to confide in an adult at school.
Summary

In this chapter, I presented several themes that emerged from interviewing these 11th and 12th grade students such as the importance of a human connection that fosters social and academic success. Since teachers are the most influential adults on campus, they should be aware of their biases. Stereotypical perceptions can hinder a student can create obstacles. For example, the perception that when Black students are from a single parent household they lack the necessary essentials to be a productive student. All participants described multiple stereotypes surrounding their age group, their culture, and their race, most of which were negative. The stories of the students are important to hear, and it can help raise awareness that will allows students and adults to overcome these obstacles of becoming productive citizens of society. This awareness can increase their educational opportunities by opening other pathways for success that would otherwise be blocked due to negative stereotyping. Students at a continuation educational setting have already experienced being pushed out of the comprehensive setting and these findings can lead to new policies and procedures to empower the Black students, as I describe in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the stereotypes that Black students perceived educators and adults on a high school campus held about them, and the ways they believed these stereotypes affected their educational opportunities. I, as the researcher, reviewed Hayward Unified School District’s discipline data, attendance, and grades of students placed in an alternative educational setting, and targeted the high school in Hayward that has the largest Black student population to recruit participants. Then, I interviewed 10 Black students, five females and five males, focusing on listening to the stories of these students regarding their daily interactions with the adults on their campus. Because research shows that Black teens are more likely to be suspended or expelled (Gregory, 2004; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 2003), and are less likely to graduate high school or attend college (Greene, Forster, & Manhattan Inst., N.I. 2003); Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). I reasoned that interviewing 11th and 12th grade students in face to face interviews about the positive and negative stereotyping surrounding their community would provide beneficial information for all students of color, and especially Black students.

The study results indicated that the students who were interviewed are aware of the negative stereotypes that surround their community, and they believe adults on their high school campuses viewed them according to many negative stereotypes. Before they were able to prove themselves as “academic” students to teachers and other adults, students felt that they prejudged them, treated them differently and had negative
assumptions due to their attire, mannerisms and/or speech. As a result of the negative stereotypes surrounding their culture, the students were in a constant battle to negate preconceived notions about their character and race. Although none of the students in the study personally identified themselves with any of the commonly-known stereotypes regarding Black people, they still expressed how these partial truths affected their school experiences in profound ways. In this chapter, I discuss my findings in light of my theoretical framework and relevant literature. I also draw on the results of the study to make several recommendations that would enhance the chances for Black students to be successful in educational setting.

Critical Race Theory in Action

When examined through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens, students’ stories confirmed that their educational opportunities had been blocked. The main Critical Race Theory tenets, described in detail in chapter two, offer tools to analyze these students’ experiences with stereotyping in the educational setting. In this discussion, I interpret my findings using these concepts from CRT as well as relevant literature regarding stereotypes and culturally relevant instruction, and to make recommendations for schools.

Stereotypes and Everyday Racism

CRT holds that racism is ordinary (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001), and, accordingly the students I interviewed spoke of daily obstacles because of their skin color. The first tenet also theorizes that racism is deeply entrenched socially and psychologically (Bell, 1994; Haskins, & Singh, 2015). Since the students were aware of the stereotypes, as noted in chapter four, they knew they were at a disadvantage because they were Black students. These students already faced extra pressures due to negativity surrounding their
culture, which ties in with CRT’s tenet number three dealing with the social construction of race, colorblindness, and counter-story telling (Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). This is something they have no control over, and thus are at the mercy of their teachers and other adults in the setting. If the adults’ personal opinions aligned with societal norms, their interactions and conversations could be tainted. Consequently, even students who were invested in their own education experienced stereotype threat (Steele, & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 1997) and were afraid to ask for help. As a result, they became disengaged from school, and were often unable to perform at their highest potential, while also being frequently mistreated by adults.

The students explained that it was constant battle not to fall prey to the negativity about their culture, which exhibits how stereotype threat became a constant menace in their daily lives at school. Stereotype threat can affect any student who has knowledge of a negative stereotype that exists regarding their particular group (Aronson, Fried, & Good 2002; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Steele, 1997, Steele, 1999; Steele & Aronson 1995). As noted in the previous chapter, many students in this study made decisions regarding how to interact with adults and peers in an effort not to confirm the negative stereotype about their group. They were very aware of the duality of their reality, which W.E.B Dubois describes as “double consciousness” in his 1903 work, The Souls of Black Folk. Although he wrote this book over a century ago, in it he discusses the very same struggle the students I interviewed are faced with today—that is, are judged by others before they ever spoken a word. Further, since being a good student is often equated with “acting white”, Black students are faced with a dilemma (Ogbru, 2004), weighing whether to do well in school by adopting “white” cultural behaviors or to maintain their cultural identity. If they do the former, they risk being called a “sell-out” or traitor by their peers.
As demonstrated in my analysis, when the Black students participants made a mistake or broke a school rule, the harsh disciplinary processes in school, such as the zero tolerance policy mandates that required suspension and/or expulsion (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2017; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010), forced consequences that made them a statistic, which in turn merely reinforces general stereotypical beliefs about Black students. Steele and Aronson (1995) proposed that stereotype threat can be used as a way to explain the underperformance of Black students, as well as provide some explanation for the vulnerabilities of Black students and their heightened anxiety regarding school tasks (Bosson, Haymovitz, & Pinel, 2004; Osborne, 2001). Over time, these stereotypes can discourage students from persisting in specific disciplines or in academic pursuits, causing a downward spiral in the school careers of students like the ones interviewed in this study.

The Centrality of Relationships and Asset-Based Perspectives

The importance of building strong relationships with students is often overlooked, and the emphasis is placed on the curriculum and academic achievement instead. But before learning can ever take place, the environment must be conducive to students’ needs (Osterman, 2000; Wentzel, Battle, Russell, Looney, 2010). Moreover, taking into consideration high school students’ developmental stage, during this critical time their social and emotional development takes precedence over academics. Therefore, if a student feels connected, validated, and empowered, then the student is more motivated to learn (Gay, 2000; Uslu, & Gizir, 2017). This suggests that, at least in some educational settings and with some groups of students, academics may need to play a secondary role to developing relationships with students, even though the primary purpose of school is to become educated. As a testament to this, the students I interviewed talked more about the relationship with the teachers, students, and rarely mentioned the subject matter. They
confirmed that, once a relationship with an adult is established, trust and learning can then take place. However when it comes to education, students are expected to conform.

The students I interviewed were very clear about the type of teachers who were attentive to their needs: these teachers understood that all students are different and that they perceive the world in many ways. Students also expressed that they appreciated the teachers’ honesty and openness and being able to see the teachers’ “human” side. Further, teachers who built great relationships with the students made the students feel good about who they were, taking initiative and making connections with students. Students further shared that teachers who often shared personal stories, and always looked for the positive in their world, fostered safe, learning environments. The students I interviewed believed these teachers genuinely wanted the best for their students and wanted to see them succeed. These teachers had caring conversations with them, and were understanding and flexible towards students’ different needs. These type of teachers had realistic expectations and standards that everyone were supposed to adhere to. They exhibited fairness, justice and it was a safe space to ask questions. Therefore, as the students in this study shared, learning was fostered because of the relationship established between teacher and student (Uslu, & Gizir, 2017).

The relationship with students was established in these cases because teachers made efforts to ensure these components were found in the classroom. Teachers accept and celebrate their students many differences, and they do not judge them according to the stereotypes. These teachers listen effectively, and students showed the same mutual respect. Empathy was developed in the classroom first, then the subject matter was tackled. Students said they were able to thrive in this kind of classroom setting, but unfortunately this environment is not consistently found in classrooms. A Teacher’s attitude and personality play a part, therefore relationship building
should be highlighted and taught to Teachers on high school campuses, and discussed later in this section.

Unfortunately, as the students in this study pointed out, many of their teachers did not seek to establish a relationship with them. While the students were expected to respect the adults on their campus, follow school and classroom rules, and act accordingly, the adults did not often consider the part the students played in this situation. Consequently, students were labeled if they did not conform to the adults’ wishes, and a positive relationship was not established, which affected learning and the students’ academic trajectory. Stereotypical perceptions among adults can be attributed to the deficient thinking model where educators’ perceptions hinder a student’s academic progress (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). These are adult-created barriers that stop students from thriving academically. Deficit thinking occurs when an adult allows their racial bias to interfere with how they interact with Black students. As noted earlier in this study, Critical Race Theory sheds light on how Black people presently are faced with discrimination and prejudices solely based on their race (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002; West, 2001), mistreatment which is still widely accepted as societal norm today. Some scholars have even suggested that racism are endemic and permanent in the United States society (Bell, 1992; Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Feagin 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994).

These adults were responsible for Black students’ educational success. Yet, the students I interviewed could only name one or two teachers whom they felt were attuned to their needs, even though they had been students in the educational setting for over ten years. Instead, students more commonly spoke of adults seeing all Black girls as “ratchet” or ghetto” and saw black males “thugs” without giving them a chance to show their actual character. Sadly, all the students I interviewed felt that most of the adults they interacted with at school only saw them from the perspective of the stereotypes, such as “ratchet,” ghetto,” and “thug”.
Curriculum that Perpetuates Inequalities

The curriculum taught in school today does not include diverse perspectives, but rather promotes the accomplishments of Whites while negating all other races’ accomplishments (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). As a result, Black students are considered to be “less than” their White peers, and “White privilege” is perpetuated. White Privilege can be defined as one group (whites/European descent) having something of value that is denied to others simply because of the color of their skin, rather than because of anything they have done or failed to do (Dotts, 2015; McIntosh, 1990). Transcormizing white students’ views about racism and white privilege has been shown to be extremely difficult (Dotts, 2015; McIntosh, 1990). Privilege simply means being aware that some people have to work much harder just to experience the things you take for granted. In this case, not having White privilege meant that the students in my study were faced with the obstacle of trying to navigate through a curriculum that does not acknowledge their cultural contributions.

CRT can inform strategies and culturally responsive methods to combat the injustices found in curricula that perpetuate inequality. For example, CRT tenet number four deals with the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). Counter-storytelling practices tell the stories of diverse peoples rather than silencing the contributions of people of color. “Master-scripting,” which teaches that only the European perspectives are correct and socially accepted, strips Black students of their cultural pride (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). Without the strategy and implementation of counter-story as a method of telling stories of people whose experiences are often erased or ignored, students would rarely be exposed to the accomplishments of people who look like them. This method is especially important for Black students, since the materials in the textbooks do not
empower them, but instead, tend to confirm stereotypes. However, practitioners must have training to implement such methods in the classroom, and policy makers should make that training an essential component in teacher training programs. I take up this point next.

**A Need for Cultural Relevance**

According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching involves “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches through and to the strengths of these students” (p. 619). Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that distinguishes the significance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning by including high expectations. Culturally relevant teaching recognizes the importance of families and connects the classroom to the student’s realities, emphasizing what the students know and live every day. Importantly, this type of teaching is not about just “heroes and holidays.” Teaching is a complex art and it is more than merely placing learning materials in front of the students and expecting them to absorb the curriculum given. Students come from different backgrounds and have different lived experiences, so it follows that each student is different, and culturally responsive pedagogy allows for the appreciation of that difference.

As pointed out earlier in this discussion, however, a relationship of mutual respect and a foundation of expectations must be established for powerful learning to occur. Culturally responsive teaching is a method that allows the teacher to connect and interact with their students in meaningful way, which promotes engagement, and with engagement comes learning. As it fosters relationships, then, this style of teaching when dealing with student from diverse background and community especially the Black students is promising for mediating stereotypes.
Ladson Billings (2000) offers three propositions or criteria on which culturally relevant pedagogy rests. First, “Students must experience academic success” (p. 3). This directly contradicts stereotypical beliefs that promote that Black students do not value education or incapable of learning, perceptions which can hinder or promote students’ learning. Instead, this premise suggests that teachers are responsible for setting up a classroom where all students can experience success. Teachers need to have professional development on an ongoing basis regarding how to reach the diverse population without the opportunity to blame the students because of their social economic status. Although certainly a factor, the student’s academic abilities are not solely reliant on their external circumstances, and teachers should be able to hold them to high expectations while providing appropriate support.

Finally, cultural competence must be developed (Ladson-Billings, 2000), which requires adults to be aware of Black students’ cultural knowledge, values, and traditions. Cultural competence refers to knowing how to learn and teach about different groups in ways that acknowledge and honor all people and the groups they represent (Lopes-Murphy, & Murphy, 2016). In developing cultural competence, teachers can raise their awareness about implicit stereotypes, and work to assess each student based on their needs, not stereotypical knowledge of what is partially true and which overemphasizes the negative aspects of Black students’ economic status or background.

Moreover, policy makers should consider the relevance of cultural competence as a part of educating the diverse population of students who attend public educational settings. While these methods have shown the potential to be successful with Black students, systemic racism may explain why these components are left out of teacher training, along with another important idea from CRT, interest convergence. In other words, Whites are the benefactors, even when policies and practices seem to be geared toward helping minorities. Programs funded geared to help marginalized student
populations provide careers for adults, which is a very good reason to continue negative stereotyping.

Policies like requiring a culturally-competent interviewing and screening process would also help identify adults who are unwilling to recognize their position in escalating or deescalating situation when communicating with Black students. For instance, a part of cultural competence is the ability to understand the within-group differences of students and that each student is unique and possesses hidden academic potential (Gay, 2002). By having an awareness of one’s own cultural identity, views about differences, and the ability to build on the cultural norms of students and their families, all students will feel respected and a sense of belongingness.

Administrators and teachers who are considered for positions in a school district should be able to demonstrate culturally competent orientations. For instance, candidates should understand every student possesses a unique cultural background and demands respect for others. Such activities may encourage students to engage in critical reflection on deeply held assumptions related to values and beliefs. Culturally competent instructors need to demonstrate they are willing to learn from their students and engage in active listening. They need to recognize the potential of intercultural communication as a means of enhancing the learning of the entire learning community by using elaboration, paraphrasing, and restatement strategies. In addition, culturally-responsive teaching engages students in self-awareness activities that lead to reflection on cultural assumptions. This means teachers need to know how to facilitate these activities and possess essential dispositions such as compassion, fairness, integrity and respect for diversity.

To do this, however, the interview process has to move away from roundtable and conference-style interviews to a more interactive interview process. The interactive interview process would require the candidates to demonstrate the proficiency in these
targeted skill areas, and provide candidates an opportunity to demonstrate cultural competency in various situations. The interactive interview process might also, for example, include preparing a 90-day plan where the candidate’s communication, problem solving, interpersonal skills could be observed in a realistic setting.

Consider the following full-day interview process screening for cultural competency. The candidate would need to engage in four different stations, consisting of 3-4 panel members each. For administrators, each of these stations would focus on a certain skill set. After each station, there would be a question and answer period to access the candidate’s cultural competency. At the first station, for instance, the candidate must write a 90-day start-up plan relative to time of school year they would be starting at the school, whether it would be the start of school in the fall or sometime during the school year. The information in the school plan must be reflective of information in the school’s accountability report card, and in the presentation of the plan station, verbal communication skills would be showcased.

A second station would deal with conflict, where the candidate would demonstrate their problem solving skills with scenario where the staff members’ actions require disciplinary actions. A third station might include a scenario dealing with a parent complainant around a student issue. Last, the candidate would participates in a mock post-observation conference with a teacher to debrief a lesson observation. For teachers, this could be modified to three stations: the 90-day start-up plan, staff conflict and dealing with a parent complaint, and lastly a question and answer period after each station focusing on cultural competency and relationship building.

**Even after being hired**, practitioners must have ongoing training in cultural responsiveness, since teaching students is much more than merely presenting them with materials to learn. Further, my study illustrated that teachers’ attitudes, personal opinions and biases can profoundly affect Black students school experiences. In teacher
training programs, although classroom management elements may be addressed, little attention is given to the connection between building relationships, cultural competence and disciplinary processes. In both initial teacher preparation as well as in-service development, teachers must have sustained opportunities to unpack their biases, develop culturally responsive teaching methods, and learn ways to better connect with students. At the administrative level, principals need to be able to support teachers in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy, and part of this means ensuring that all staff participate in regular, in-service cultural competency training on an on-going basis. In addition, administrative leaders must promote programs that respect and incorporate cultural differences, as well as list cultural competency requirements in all staff job descriptions.

**Conflicting Power Struggles**

The high school students in my study had adult responsibilities placed upon them at their homes. They were required to cook, clean, pay bills, grocery shop, and care for their young siblings, and deal with many other responsibilities not traditionally associated with young adults. Single parents, especially, placed additional household requirements on their children. As such, at home, these students had substantial autonomy over their actions and that of others’. However, in schools, they had no such power or authority. Often, parents also believed their student could handle the school’s demands too. However, rather than being seen as budding adults dealing with adult responsibilities, these students were seen by the adults on campus as children without any authority, which caused conflict. In addition, since their parents held them responsible for their own education, these students often had to advocate for themselves with teachers. In many cases, the students expressed their opinions, which resulted in disciplinary infractions.
With more parent engagement and advocacy, and an alternative approach to discipline Black students, these students can overcome stereotyping and prosper at school. Typically, the school’s culture expects parents to be active participants. Parent engagement indicates and includes all the endeavors that parents do to help their child succeed in school (Estell, & Perdue, 2013; Wentzel, 1998). It is comprised of making sure they are prepared and have good attendance (Epstein, & Sheldon, 2002), attending parent meetings and conferences, chaperoning study trips, and volunteering on campus or in their child’s classroom. Further, since teachers are expected to report their concerns to the parent, the parents communicating with teachers regarding their student’s academic progress is especially important.

When a rapport has been established (Hartlep, & Ellis, 2010; Seyfried, & Chung, 2002), the parent and teacher share a common bond, which tends to improve student achievement (Eccles & Harold, 1993, 1994; Epstein, 1991). With this relationship, the parent will be more responsive if the teacher reports behavior concerns, and missing assignments. If there is not a relationship established, when a parent comes on campus after numerous bad reports, they may be more likely to be frustrated and feel as if the student is being targeted.

Considering the stereotypical perceptions surrounding the Black community, it is very important myths regarding parents are dispelled. Time invested in parent engagement activities to build relationships, with an emphasis on academics, can help (Hartlep & Ellis, 2010). For instance, parents who are invited on campus might have opportunities to continuously learn how to maneuver through the school system, and will recognize the importance of their presence. Parents will be more inclined to be the active participant the school expects. As research shows a positive correlation between parent engagement and educational outcomes (Seyfried, & Chung, 2002), such as good school
attendance (Epstein, & Sheldon, 2002), higher grades and higher classroom test scores (Fan, & Chen, 2001), it is imperative that schools provide activities to engage parents.

Once a relationship has been established and the lines of communication with parents are open, teachers and other staff member can play a role in the advocacy of their students. A supportive triangle of parent, student, and teacher is formed, and they can communicate their concerns with each other. This can help the stigma of “family versus the school”. Moreover, the parent has someone on campus that knows the daily intricacies school system, and if parents have any questions and concerns, they would be able to contact this staff member directly. This will also allow students to have an adult on campus that they trust, and if needed, teachers and staff can become advocates for the student in place of an absent parent. Further, if parents need to be contacted for a disciplinary concern, and the parent’s schedule is either interrupted or they are not available, a staff member could step in so the parent’s schedule does not have to be interrupted.

With a strong bond among all parties, alternative solutions could be an option and the school can move away from punitive punishments towards a more supportive and corrective action. Suspensions and expulsions do not deter a students’ behavior, and the instructional minutes lost due to a suspension or expulsion are irreplaceable. Other options like community service in an area of interest to the student and service learning opportunities would be beneficial for all parties involved. In this way, the power struggle could be minimized and student would be able to blossom, parents would feel welcomed, and teachers would be able to teach.

**Directions for Future Research**

As a result of the findings of this study, several areas could be considered for further study. The first consideration for future study will be to expand the current study
by including the dialogues with teachers and adults on high school campuses about cultural competency. People’s religion, culture, and ethnicity often are essential to their self-definition. These characteristics are not possessions, like clothing, that can be shed or changed at will. This reason is sufficient to demand for respecting diversity. Failing to do so is to reject people and deny their human worth (Strike, Haller & Soltis, 2005). In the educational setting, the ability to acquire knowledge of education-related beliefs, attitudes and practices is imperative for improving student achievement. It can increase the quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes for students. Further, expanding the study in this way would help educate school populations there by building relationships to foster involvement when interviewing both parties. Both the student and the adults’ perspectives would be heard. Those ideas would be useful in planning next steps on how all parties involved can combat negative stereotyping by implementing culturally responsive pedagogy.

A second line of research might involve taking a closer look at how relationship building promotes student and parent engagement, and how, in turn, an increase of student and parent engagement might increase student achievement. This study might also examine how learning about a student’s or family’s culture, and recognizing the influence of their own background on the school community, might foster relationships. Finally, this research might involve planning how to include neighborhood and community outreach efforts by involving community cultural leaders if possible is a way to foster relationships.

**Conclusion**

This study supports the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy to combat negative stereotyping so students can navigate through the public education
system successfully. Culturally responsive teachers value their students’ diversity and see their students’ lived experiences as knowledge they bring to school with them, rather than seeing students as empty vessel to be filled with the expert knowledge of their teachers (Freire, 1970). As our schools become increasingly diverse, the negative stereotyping that has long been a part of our culture should not hinder Black students, and their diversity should be embraced. As educators, self-reflecting on teacher practices and questioning the status quo should be a part of the daily routine to enhance their professionalism.

This research study adds to literature on disciplinary processes in public schools, informs policy makers of the inequities Black students experience due to negative stereotyping, and provides policy makers with recommendations to help create more equitable school policy for all students regardless of their socio-economic status. Black students, like all students, should have the same opportunities as their white counterparts. They have the right to safe, positive, learning environment free from racism so they can graduate from high school, pursue a career, and become productive citizens of society.
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APPENDIX A

STEREOTYPE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This questions are to look at attitudes and behaviors experienced towards yourself by adults on high school campuses.

Please answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

Grade: _________________________

Gender: _________________________

Ethnic origin (race): __________________________

1. Why are you a student at Bayside Continuation High School? Please describe some of issues that lead you to transferring to this site such as attendance, suspensions, referrals, grades, teachers, or any other issues that you have had).

2. How were you relationship with adults (principals, campus security, teachers etc.) at your previous high school?

3. Give two examples of a negative interaction you witnessed or experienced on a high school campus with an adult.
4. What are some of the stereotypes associated with your group? Or ones you might identify with?

Do you think these stereotypes or other stereotypes has affected your school experience with adults on campus. Describe how?

5. Explain how stereotypes can affect your school relationship with teachers’ positively.

6. Explain how stereotypes can affect your school relationship with teachers’ negatively.

7. What would you consider to be a healthy relationship with the adults on your campus?