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Strangers in the Classroom: A Study of Black Males, Curriculum Bias, and Protracted Identity Conflict in Public Schools

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Strangers in the Classroom:
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by

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Dedication

In dedication to my parents, my children, and the community of love and support who have always cheered me on to be great, be grateful, and be gracious.

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Thank you to my committee chair Dr. Judith McKay. It was her use of the Socratic method during her classes that unfolded the depth, identity, emotions, and power play in undergirding conflict. This critical understanding about conflict aligned succinctly with The Ellison Model, a social development framework developed by my mentor Dr. Deryl G. Hunt. Dr. Hunt discussed conflict as a unitary process, which meant it begins with the individual's perception of their identity, emotions, and power. I stand here on the shoulder of that brilliance.

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Abstract

Strangers in the Classroom, an instrumental case study research, examines the Black male student as a *stranger* in Title 1 middle school classroom due to the subtleties of cultural domination and racial bias in the English Language Arts curriculum. The structural, direct, and cultural violence experienced by Black people in America, ranging from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Willie Lynch, Jim Crow, and institutionalized racism, have resulted in a damaged identity and post traumatic slavery syndrome of Black Americans. The same root of racism that founded the United States of America includes the formation of the K-12 and higher education systems. These systems of education have assisted in normalizing learners to patterns of anti-Blackness, whiteness, and structural violence that have historically failed Black indigenous people of color. This study examines the identity and lived experiences of Black males in Title 1 middle schools as reflected through the English Language Arts curriculum and interrogates the cursory viewpoints of school teachers and administrators when it comes to the academic performance and identity development of Black males. The stranger theory by Georg Simmel, in addition to social identity theory and Critical Race Theory, are used to develop and analyze the conflict in this case study. The Protracted Identity Conflict Concept/Diagram was developed as a framework to describe and understand the phenomenon of the Black male experience in a racialized educational construct in Title 1 middle schools.

Keywords: social identity, culturally relevant pedagogy, conflict, stranger, multicultural curriculum, minority students, Black males. Stranger theory, protracted conflict.

Opening Vignette

Homeroom

Why are our Black boys so angry?
Why do they have clanging cymbals for ears
and broken glass for teeth?
They are unassembled drum sets.
Their feet pedals with haste to go nowhere
Sprinting resentfully in concrete boots to dis-appointments
Where have we failed their souls?
Their noses are flared,
as if the mist of trust is a conspiracy in the air.
Their fingers point like satellite dishes
at reasons to prove the paint hasn't dried on their validation.
Their chests huff with the force
of bodies being dragged across the water by whales.
Their eyes are a light shade of red,
Distraught by the decisions already made for them
before getting to the fork in the road.
We (who care) see them, but do they see us?
They walk loudly in single file lines,
tracing one another's steps
We keep speaking the message, but they only see the mess
They live near tracks: train and sound.
They feel tracked and trapped
Even in an open box that comes with instructions
and bus routes out of the city
Their growth mindset takes the green mile
We (who care) tell them that we hear them,
but do they hear us?
They clamor for friendships
Experience repeated endships
No one can convince them where any of this ends
Why are our Black boys so angry?
Why do they have clanging cymbals for ears
They raise their hands when taking roll
I mark them present, but they're not here.

A poem by Adrian N. Carter

The following question rollercoastered throughout my mind during a parent-teacher conference with a Black American mother and her son: "Why are these Black boys so angry?" The son slouched further and further into his chair after each teacher described his poor academic performance in their class. While the teachers followed up with words encouraging him to complete his assignments and improve his grade, he mumbled unintelligible words meant for his understanding only, but clearly informing us of his disdain for this meeting. He slowly but intensely shook his head with lowered eyes that tried to stare away the classroom-tiled floor. His sighs were loud and grew deeper. Why was he so angry, is all I kept wondering? His mother reiterated how he had all of the technology and support at home to do well in school and lacked for nothing. But clearly, he wanted something. In spite of her insistence about his stable life of food, shelter, clothes, and supplies, he sat and seethed in his chair. This process of intervention did not convince him. I walked away from that parent-teacher conference more concerned for him and other young Black males that reflected similar behavior to his. In a short conversation with him a few weeks later, he stated that he saw school as a jail. I considered how interesting his statement was as I broke down for him certain nuances that differentiated school from jail.

On another occasion, I observed another Black male student who randomly walked around my classroom. He seemed lost and aloof. Redirecting him was often met with blank stares and "huh" moments. He clearly had a diminutive interest in school. His test scores were low and overall demonstrated low academic performance. It made me wonder if he was academically challenged or apathetic toward school? He, too, appeared very upset, even more so irritated with the idea of school. My one-on-one talks with him

to express my support to help him pull up his grades were met with a nonchalant reaction. He told me he did not “get” school.

These instances and many more experiences with other Black male students beep intensely on my radar of questions as a Black male myself. I empathize with their socio-economic plight, struggling academic progress, and overall mindset as I fear for their ability to be properly prepared for an America and world that has often been disadvantageous and disingenuous to Black people. Moreover, I have noticed a pattern amongst the Black male students to be disinterested in the learning process. They often speak of athletics as a career goal and of school as an involuntary obstacle to their goals. They prefer to be outside playing their preferred sport or at home playing video games as opposed to being "stuck" in a classroom.

I once reminded a Black male student in my class about a time period in American history when Black people were not legally allowed to read. I told him this hoping to encourage him to take advantage of the learning opportunity he was being provided—a luxury his ancestors were not afforded. He responded that he would rather it be like that again in the past than to have to read. I was blown away to say the least. He was vocal about his resentment toward school. Our small talks about his interests revealed he had an entrepreneurial spirit and wanted to pursue those goals.

When I considered the other Black males in my English Language Arts (ELA) class and their behavior toward the educational process, it was challenging not to have a deepening interest in understanding their educational experience. They constantly seemed outraged, easily provoked, angry, and defensive, raising even more questions. I would ponder, how do young Black males experience the education process? What connects

them to school? What influences their career choice? Why is the academic process not preferred?

I remember my middle school years being a blur of trying to find my identity and dressing and walking a certain way to establish my "cool." I used to tuck the back of my shirt in and leave the front part hanging out to look neat but stylish. I am certain I embarrassed myself more times than I cared to admit. I remember being a young Black boy in a learning environment struggling to fit in with the other students, working to meet the academic requirements for promotion, satisfying my parents to avoid punishment, and trying to determine a career path. I also remember how unsettling and uncertain I was at that age. I suspect many of these middle school students feel the same. I see that similar struggle in these young men, albeit more intensified with more socio-economic challenges, social media, and entertainment vying for their attention more so than when I was growing up.

I have taught students who have slept in a car with their mother and siblings for months, students whose main meal is school lunch, students responsible for taking care of their younger siblings, students who go unsupervised due to their parents working multiple jobs, and many other challenges. These familial pressures have an impact on their educational process. I can only imagine that it is hard to separate their real world outside of the classroom from the world inside the classroom.

This separation runs smack into what I see as an issue of identity in the classroom, where the academic environment appears to be a pseudo escape from their reality. School appears to be an escape that offers Black students the promise of upward mobility but often tends to offer no immediate solutions for their real-world, impending challenges

outside of school. Because of this, a classroom is an estranged place for them. At least, this is my observation from working with them for more than five years as an educator, coach, and as an older Black male who can culturally identify with some of their experiences. I am most concerned about the cultural relationship students have with the school and their education. I see cultural relevance as a connecting tool to their real world. Otherwise, some of these Black boys could be headed down a statistically proven trajectory of being a school dropout, criminal behavior, incarceration, low-income neighborhoods, menial jobs, or low education without a proper academic foundation. It is my experience that students who struggle academically feel defeated more easily and give up on assignments more quickly. On the other hand, I have witnessed students who comprehend well, as demonstrated through their participation and classwork, but are adamant about not consistently engaging in the academic process. I wonder if apathy is a bigger blithe in the classroom than their ability brought on by not identifying with the curriculum.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Problem

The body of literature on the education, race and the identity of minorities was described as an "avalanche of materials" by Cordasco (1977, p. 542). Brought on from the Black American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, Cordasco (1977) stated that the body of text contained "energetic affirmations of identity" and "the attention to minority education was not unanticipated" (p. 542). While the research emphasis on minority learners may have been unanticipated, nearly 60 years after the Civil Rights movement, a plethora of research continues to reiterate the current state of Black males in education as a crisis with the tremendous socio-cultural, political, and economic consequences (Dyce, 2013; Gholson & Wilkes, 2017; Kafele, 2012).

In 2018, the education system was described as part of an entrenched American narrative of anti-blackness built on colonialism, wherein Black people are seen as property and are subject to mechanisms of policing, controlling, imprisoning, and killing (Dancy et al., 2018). Black learners continue to be the subject and object of research as educational researchers attempt to understand their learning experience amidst the American narrative of anti-Blackness. Dumas (2016) defines anti-Blackness as the “psychic and material assault on Black flesh” and an attempt to deny Black humanity (p. 12). He elaborates that anti-Blackness “in the white supremacist imagination, it is positioned at the opposite end of whiteness, and plays the primary pivotal role in the discursive and material operationalization of race and racism” (Dumas, 2018, p. 32). Yancy (2008) states, “It is as if one’s Blackness is a congenital defect, one that burdens

the body with tremendous inherited guilt...one might say that Blackness functions metaphorically as an original sin" (p. 847).

The prevalent effects of racism found throughout the Black diaspora can be seen in the K-12 education system as young Black students confront socio-economic and identity challenges. Allen and White-Smith (2014) stated, “Though legalized racial segregation in schools is unlawful, de facto school segregation as a result of residential segregation (by race and class) allows school systems to act as colorblind institutions while maintaining racial inequalities through vastly under-resourced schools” (p. 446). Racial bias studies indicate teachers are racially biased to a similar extent as people in other professional fields (Starck et al., 2020). Teachers are ultimately complicit in creating a racialized experience for young learners.

The *Racial Contract* by Mills (1997) contends race plays a foundational role in our socially constructed lives within most American and world institutions. Mills (1997) stated that race is "itself a political system, a particular power system" (p.3). Whiteness is viewed as a set of power relations, while non-whites are viewed and treated with significantly less power throughout society. Mills (1997) points to the relationship between first and third-world countries as an example: first-world countries are predominantly white, and third-world countries are predominantly non-whites. Maintaining race as inherent to the social contract, the sustained tension and violence that accompanied school integration post the 1954 ruling in Brown versus Topeka Board of Education is more definitively clear (Birzer & Ellis, 2006; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Additionally, DeGruy (2005, 2017) argues the systemic trauma endured by Black people,

dating back to the transatlantic slave trade of the 1600s, has resulted in a social and interpersonal conflict referred to as post-traumatic slavery syndrome.

The Supreme Court's ruling of "separate but equal" in Plessy versus Ferguson (1896) codified the racial disparity between White and Black people in the formal education system. Thirty years prior to Plessy versus Ferguson, the Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1865 helped to usher in food, housing, medical assistance, and establish schools for freed Black slaves (U.S. Senate; History.com, 2018). By the end of 1865, more than 90,000 freed Black slaves were enrolled in their own schools throughout the southern states (Anderson, 1988). Legal changes to end Jim Crow and segregation laws that stemmed from the 1896 ruling of Plessy versus Ferguson did not occur until Brown versus Topeka Board of Education in 1954, nearly 60 years later (Zuczek, 2015). The six decades of legal segregation fused racial disparity into the American social, economic, and political psyche. As a result, issues of race and anti-Blackness are heavily found within the American public school system (Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Dyce, 2013; Gholson & Wilkes, 2017; Kafele, 2012). Currently, the Black American populous is still deeply impacted by the effects of centuries of structural violence experienced through slavery, disenfranchisement, segregation, and institutional racism (DeGruy, 2005/2017; Galtung, 1969).

One of the most alarming aspects of the education system has been the school-to-prison pipeline, which maintains a direct linkage to the socio-economic levels and racial lines of division found in schools throughout the United States of America (Dancy II, 2014; Heitzeg, 2009; Mallett, 2016). Michelle Alexander refers to mass incarceration as the new Jim Crow (2010; 2012). Adding to these issues of inequalities is the

representation (or lack thereof) of the Black male and female identity in the curriculum (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). According to White (2011), "Sometimes, minority students choose not to participate in an effort to maintain their sense of personal and cultural identity and/or because they lack a full understanding of the kinds of academic discourse employed in classroom discussions" (p. 250). To gain a better understanding of these matters confronting Black males in our K-12 education system, the following qualitative instrumental case study takes an ontological approach to collect, analyze, and synthesize information on the social, structural, and identity conflicts confronted by Black males throughout the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum of public middle schools.

Statement of the Problem

Representation of the Black male identity in the K-12 educational curriculum is recognized as a factor impacting the academic success of young Black learners (Burns, 2018; Hopkins-Gillispie, 2011; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). Statistically more vulnerable to lower graduation rates, Black boys and girls are challenged with being presented with strong, positive Black images throughout the curriculum whether by race, class, or ethnicity (Education Week, 2017; Zirkel and Johnson, 2016). In many instances, the teaching and learning process for Black males and other non-white learners has also become a matter of mistaken identity, wherein learners are being viewed through stereotyping lenses (Gholson & Wilkes, 2017). The cultural bias in the canonized literature of middle school English Language Arts (ELA) further adds to the lost Black cultural identity for young Black learners. There have been over three centuries-long of damaged imagery of the Black cultural identity (Scotts, 1997). The damaged imagery of the Black cultural identity in America stems from slavery, segregation, Jim Crow laws,

criminalization, and other institutionalized systems of racial bias experienced by Black people within the United States of America (Mills, 1997; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). How then do Black males perceive themselves in society, and how does this affect their academic performance?

Previous research (1) acknowledges the importance of a strong, positive Black cultural identity in education. Zirkel and Johnson (2016) note that weak or negative racial identity in education leads to poorer educational outcomes; (2) recognizes the importance of gender inclusion in the curriculum as an issue of identity for young learners (Arnett, 2000; Rios et al., 2010); and (3) identifies that cultural and educational bias against non-white learners in various subject areas including math, language arts, and social studies (Gholson & Wilkes, 2017). Reflection of the Black cultural identity in the academic text is referred to as multicultural education, to which Hopkins-Gillispie (2011) writes, "At the societal level, its major goals are to reduce prejudice and discrimination against oppressed groups, to work toward equal opportunity and social justice for all groups, and to effect an equitable distribution of power among members of different cultural groups" (Banks, 2008; Sleeter, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 2003).

With these considerations on the importance of identity and multicultural education, it becomes imperative to examine these modalities against the English Language Arts curriculum textbook used by school districts and their impact on minority students. Limited inclusion of the Black cultural identity in the curriculum has potentially produced what I refer to as strangers in the classroom: young Black male students who are not reflected in the curriculum, leading to disengagement, low academic performance, and faced with disciplinary challenges (Arnett, 2000; Rios et al., 2010; Zirkel & Johnson,

2016). Many of these Black learners, who endure not seeing themselves largely reflected in the teaching and learning process, are simultaneously subjected to a deficit experience within their Black communities of inadequate schools, poor teaching, lack of culturally relevant instruction, and inequities in funding (Dyce, 2013; Perry, 2003). Again, or as victims of dysconsciousness, teachers who take an unintentional and uncritical approach to “any ethical judgment regarding or critique of systemic racial inequality” (King & Akua, 2012, p. 724). However, both Perry (2003) and Dyce (2013) advise against using these deficits as the reason for poor academic performance amongst Black males. They insist, along with Glenn Singleton (2015), that poor achievement is a matter of racial exclusion from the education structure; it was never intended to teach the Black child. As such, the identity of the Black learner is significantly less represented.

The Black male identity is the focal point of this case study. Mandara (2006) states, "one of the most consistent findings in educational research is the underachievement of African American males at all levels (that is, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary) of the educational pipeline" (p. 206). How Black male students identify with themselves through the education system may have a protracted impact on how they manage themselves and their participation in society. The historical impact of damaged imagery reflects interpersonal identity conflict, protracted social conflict, structural conflict, violence, and crisis incurred by adolescent Black males. We are able to better identify appropriate conflict resolution approaches by studying this particular phenomenon.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ontological, instrumental case study is to (1) examine the protracted social, and structural conflict of race encountered by Black males in the education system. (2) Identify racialized structures of anti-Blackness and whiteness in the middle school English Language Arts curriculum textbooks. (3) Examine the subtleties of whiteness that may have relevance in how Black males succeed in K-12 education. (4) Understand the correlation between the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum and the Black male identity. (5) Examine the impact on the identity, perception of power, and effects on the emotions of Black males in the educational process (6) address the cursory viewpoints of curriculum administrators regarding identity and inclusion.

This study is researching how Black males, language art teachers, and school administrators understand the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum and its impact on the identity of Black students reflected throughout the curriculum textbook. The study will (1) conduct a critical historical analysis of the education system to identify the types of conflict impacting young Black male students in the classroom. (2) Conduct an analysis of the English Language Arts curriculum textbook (3) conduct semi-structured interviews of ELA teachers. (4) Conduct semi-structured interviews of ELA administrators and (5) a content analysis of demographic data and trends in students' State standardized test results. This case study research is bound to Title 1 middle schools within a specific school district. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), schools that meet the benchmark requirement of low-income families receive additional funding through the Title 1 program to help ensure all children meet challenging State academic standards.

The examination of ELA was selected for two main reasons. First, literacy education serves as a cultural-ideological practice that assists in developing students' cultural, social, and personal identity and self-esteem through the interplay of race and ethnicity (Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2010; Barrett-Tatum, 2015). The interplay is often reflected in all categories of text, including non-fiction, fiction, and social text, as discussed by Alicia Ritchey (2012). Second, ELA is foundational to all subjects in school because they consist of reading, writing, speaking, and listening as modalities of learning and displaying comprehension (Beach, 2011). As such, how students interpret the world is connected to their ability to decipher the figurative language, identify themes, archetypes, plot sequences, and trace and evaluate arguments presented in informational and historical text. Literacy and reading skills are necessary for every subject.

Block (2005) states, “School is a training ground for adult life, and the school must create education objectives that will permit attainment of those adult behaviors that are not already learned from general experience or that are learned imperfectly; it is our job as educational workers to find the disease and cure it” (p. 15). Using the relevant factors of the case study, this research aims to add to the cure through theory construction to develop a more critical thought process in understanding the central phenomenon of conflict in the identity of Black males in public middle schools and their academic progress.

Research Questions

According to Sonia Nieto (2000), “multicultural education challenges, rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society, accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender among others) that

students, their communities, and teachers reflect" (p. 305). We must examine school districts and their curriculums in order to best determine their practice and effective implementation of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy (Burns, 2018). To facilitate an understanding of racialized curriculum in English Language Arts and how the Black cultural identity is also reflected within the curriculum textbook, the following questions have been developed:

1. How does the public middle school English Language Arts curriculum reflect the identity and lived experiences of Black males?
2. What criteria do administrators use to determine the language arts curriculum, and what is their consideration for racial bias in the ELA curriculum?
3. What are the perceptions of racial biases, anti-Blackness, or whiteness in the English Language Arts curriculum textbook?
4. What are the academic results, systemic impact, and types of conflict experienced by Black male students when their identity is not included throughout the curriculum?

Significance of the Study Proposition

The racial strata in the American school system is a crisis impacting the learning experience and identity of Black males (Dancy II, 2014; DeGruy, 2005/2017; Heitzeg, 2009; Mallett, 2016). The relationship between Black males and the United Kingdom education system is confronted with similar challenges (Christian, 2005). Christian (2005) highlights the neglect on the part of the British education system to offer a broader curriculum that shows positive Black contributions to human civilization and the impact of peer group pressure, poverty and class, and the lack of cultural awareness deployed by

British mainstream teachers with regards to the various Black communities in Britain. To highlight the similarity of this issue confronted by Black males in Britain is to emphasize the prevalence of the social and structural conflicts and the significance of it to be studied and understood as a social phenomenon.

Noguera (1997) stated, “Where blacks generally, and males in particular, once saw education as the most viable path to social mobility, it now increasingly serves as a primary agent for reproducing their marginality.” This is largely the case due to additional factors that impact the lives of Black males. For instance, social problems such as poverty, crime, and drug use, and weak economies of largely populated Black neighborhoods and cities cause a direct impact on access to upward mobility (Dyce, 2013). Gorski (2019) asserts most of his experience of racial equity initiatives in schools “pose less of a threat to racism than to the possibility of racial justice” (p. 57).

Strangers in the Classroom: A Study of Black Males, Curriculum Bias, and Protracted Identity Conflict in Public Schools researches a segment of society (Black males in public middles of a specific school district in a specific subject area) to examine the structural, social, and the identity conflict Black males experience throughout the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum textbooks of public schools. In order to do so, the case study proposition theorizes that protracted social conflict of systemic racism experienced throughout the K-12 education system leads to sustained identity conflict within Black male students. Black males, as a result, become disconnected from the democratized educational intent and, in turn, are estranged from the learning environment. They become strangers in the classroom, and as such, the case study proposition is summarily referred to as the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept (PICC).

The Protracted Identity Conflict Concept underscores the relevance of conflict resolution studies in the identity and social development of adolescent Black males. Jones and Brinkert (2008) define identity as involving face (visibility), situated within an environment, constructed both socially and individually, and includes issues of freedom and constraint. Northrup (1989) maintains that conflict can become intractable when someone's identity is at risk.

When examining the ELA curriculum through this proposition, one is able to identify ways in which the Black male identity is visible, situated, constructed, free, or constrained within the middle school ELA curriculum. In order to learn more about the case, the researcher interrogated five embedded units of analysis: the ELA curriculum textbook, ELA teachers, ELA School/District Administrators, a historical analysis of racism in the American K-12 education system content analysis of demographic and standardized testing data.

The study is significant because one is able to determine the viability of the study proposition for theory development, support policy development, inform best practices for integration of multicultural education, and support teaching and learning methodologies within the classroom environment. Furthermore, the information from this study can potentially serve as a rubric to support preparedness and prevention of structural violence in the future academic interaction of Black males, Black females, Black teachers, and Black administrators in ways that are more inclusive. Teachers can benefit from a culturally relevant curriculum as it may assist in classroom management and combat student apathy. Importantly, this study impacts Black male students and their sense of belonging in the classroom and the overall school system.

Definition of Terms

Anti-Blackness. Dancy et al. (2018) define several layers to understanding anti-blackness. First, it is a system by which Black people are not considered as an "other" but property. Second, as property (not laborer), anti-Blackness is perpetuated through the extraction of labor and stereotypical narratives used to control the coming and going of Black people. Lastly, Black people are not a part of an interpersonal relationship dynamic because they remain the property, even though property rights have been legally abolished by the owner.

Cultural Violence. According to Galtung (1990), cultural violence means those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. Cultural violence exists in the third corner of Galtung's violence triangle, along with structural violence and direct violence. Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong.

Identity. According to Stets and Burke (2014), "An identity is a set of meanings that defines individuals in terms of the roles they occupy, the social categories or groups they belong to, and the individual characteristics that define them as unique persons" (p. 74). Another important element of a person's identity is their self-esteem, which includes a person's overall feelings of acceptance and respect (Rosenberg et al., 1995).

Multicultural curriculum. Sleeter (1996) defines it as an act of social activism to reduce prejudice and distribute power amongst members of different cultural groups (Hopkins-Gillispie, 2011). Nieto (2000) specifies multicultural curriculum as "a process

of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect" (p. 305). Nieto (2000) also insists that multicultural education should permeate the school's curriculum and instructional practice for students, faculty, and families.

Protracted Social Conflict. Azar (1991) defines protracted social conflict as a lens to view conflict in the international community: "the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition, acceptance, and fair access to political institutions and economic participation (Azar, 1991: 93). Protracted conflict and intractable conflict are interchangeable terms used to indicate conflicts that have prolonged over months, years, and sometimes decades.

Social conflict. Knight (1992) defines social conflict as the confrontation of institutional hegemony in shaping the social interaction of people and societies. These include formal and informal institutions that establish rules. Knight (1992) writes, "social institutions are conceived of as a product of the efforts of some to constrain the actions of others with whom they interact" (p. 19). Knight also describes social institutions as a by-product of conflicts over distributional gains, a struggle between groups in society over scarce resources. Rummel (1976) notes that social conflict consists of space, structure, situation, and behavior based on race, sex, class, age, and community bonds.

Structural violence. Structural conflict occurs through direct or cultural violence (Galtung, 1969). Galtung (1969) defines structural violence as violence that initiates from institutions and can precipitate into direct or cultural violence. The author further

described it as violence that is built into the structure, presenting itself as unequal power and therefore providing unequal life chances to those it overpowers. Structural violence includes psychological violence that "includes lies, manipulation, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats, etc., that serve to decrease mental potentialities" (169).

The Stranger. Simmel (1908) defines “the stranger” as a state of wandering wherein the detachment from any given point in space and attachment to any point are concurrently occurring. As opposed to the man who comes today and goes tomorrow, Simmel continues to describe “the stranger” as someone who comes today, remains tomorrow, and “his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it” (p. 143).

Whiteness. Whiteness is defined as the prevalence of hegemony and privilege associated with white as a race, yet, often invisible or unrecognized by white people (Singleton, 2015; Warren, 2001). Haviland (2008) describes the following three components of whiteness as “powerful yet power-evasive, that whiteness uses a wide variety of techniques to maintain its power, and that whiteness is not monolithic” (41). Whiteness in education is impactful in shaping identity and materiality (Toyosaki et al., 2009).

Assumptions and Delimitations

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations exist in every research study. Ellis and Levy (2010) note that what the researcher assumes constitutes the assumptions in a study, what the researcher does not have control over makes up the limitations of a study,

and what the researcher chooses to omit, not control, or not acknowledge as potential risks to generalization make up the delimitations of a study.

Assumptions:

1. The researcher assumed that the interviewees were familiar with the topic and language arts terminology. Being that each teacher was a language arts teacher, and the administrators were also former language arts teachers, it was assumed that the topic of discussion was understood.
2. The research assumed that the data collected from the various reporting agencies were accurate. The researcher had to rely on data from the state's Department of Education and additional education reporting agencies.
3. The researcher assumed that the interviewees were forthcoming, transparent, and gave responses to the best of their knowledge and experience.
4. The researcher assumed the study would provide additional insight into the topic of Black males in K-12 education.

Delimitations:

This study does not cover the experiences of Black females. However, a lot of data connects the identity and lived experiences of Black female students alongside Black males. Also, the Hispanic minority was not discussed.

A second delimitation included the objectivity of the study. The participants provided feedback on their perceptions and experiences with Black males. The information was trusted. However, it was subjective. Their shared experience in the classroom with Black males still provided important qualitative insight to the teaching of the learning process of Black males in Title 1 middle schools.

Summary

This case study on Black males and curriculum bias contains relevance to the experiences of Black males in a historically racialized educational system. The findings gleaned from this case study may assist in framing innovations for teachers and administrators on how policy is drafted and how curriculum is created and implemented for Black male learners. Also, considering the number of issues impacting Black society, these studies continue to be important in unpacking the Black experience as researchers work toward raising awareness and presenting solutions to education challenges.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to examine the protracted social and structural conflict of race encountered by Black males in the English Language Arts curriculum of public middle schools. By examining the racialized structures of anti-Blackness and whiteness in the curriculum textbook, the academic progress of Black males, and the impact it has on the identity of middle school Black males, one can learn more about these types of conflict. This case study aims to understand this phenomenon summarily as an issue of protracted identity conflict incurred by the lack or limited inclusion of the Black male identity within the English Language Arts curriculum.

The Achieve 2014 Annual Report, *Closing the Expectations Gap*, an education policy report in coordination with representation from all 50 States in the U.S., recommended approaches to the K-12 education alignment with expectations for college and career readiness policies and practices. The Achieve report stated, "States must have a comprehensive approach to college and career readiness and ensure policy and practice alignment across the pillars—graduation requirements, assessments, and accountability systems—to graduate all students ready for their next steps" (Achieve, 2014). Albeit the case, what does that look like in practice for the Title 1 student who is academically and socio-economically challenged? How does the teacher increase the learning gain of the low academic performing student that has moved through the education system each year without being flagged for intervention?

The National Council on Teacher Quality's report, *What Teacher Preparation Programs Teach About K-12 Assessment (2012),* identifies ways to build teacher

capacity, including policy changes to the Higher Education Act. The article recommends creating more incentives for teachers and training on using data-driven teaching to increase teacher retention and student success. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2006) emphasized that high-quality teacher preparation programs help to produce effective teachers. These types of programs also help with teacher retention, improving classroom instruction that moves beyond content knowledge of the teacher, and high-quality pre-teaching experiences (p. 3).

While those may serve as one set of answers to such a large education system, African-American/Black males in the classroom, amidst their socio-economic challenges, the school-to-prison pipeline, and apathy toward academic performance, must also overcome cultural barriers in the classroom (Burns 2018; Dyce, 2013, Hopkins-Gillispie, 2011). Ogbu (2003) indicates that quite often, Black males do not understand their teachers, and teachers do not understand the humor of Black males. On the other hand, teachers are able to connect with the humor of white students (Ogbu, 2003). Additionally, there is a tendency for teachers' classroom rules to deem the behavior of Black males as not culturally appropriate, which results in the culture of Black males as "not being recognized, understood, or valued" (Derrick & Ponton, 2006).

The following literature review discusses the racialized history of America and its education system, the effect of culture and identity, and the relevance for a multicultural academic curriculum and representation of the Black male identity. The literature review will also present data on the K-12 school system and review the “No-excuse” charter school model being used in education for Black males. Lastly, the literature review will

discuss the theoretical framework and rationale for the case study's research on the construction of Black male students as *strangers* in the classroom.

Race in American Education

Holst (2020) describes race, racism, or racial supremacy as a construct of material benefits, winners, and losers. This occurs when the social construct has "an objective basis for them to flourish" (p. 181), "Them" meaning white Americans. Presently, one describes this in terms of privilege. Holst (2020) further notes the social construct of race flourishes by an expanding accumulation of wealth from which these material privileges can be drawn. Drawing on the research of economists, Holst (2020) states, "economists have supplied ample evidence of the economic returns of racism for those on the winning end of it and the brutal costs of racism for those on the losing end of it. Income, wealth, wages, employment, and all the corollary social indicators associated with these are disproportionately distributed along racial lines in the United States and have been for centuries" (Economic Policy Institute, n.d.).

The American education school system was built within this social construct. Educational historians referred to as radical revisionists, argued the intent of public-school systems was created to (1) assimilate and (2) Americanize by reproducing the existing social order, which has resulted in consistent discrimination against immigrants and minorities (Derrick & Ponton, 2006; Donato & Lazerson, 2000; Greer, 1972; Kaestle, 1973; Karier et al., 1973; Tyack, 1974). Specifically, in organizing urban schools as a "one best" system, the inclusion of Black people as their own subculture with their own needs was eliminated (Donato & Lazerson, 2000; Tyack, 1974). Gholson and Wilkes (2017) describe the "Collective Black" as "inclusive of African American, Latino,

Indigenous, Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotian, West Indian and African immigrant children, and extended to Muslim and poor children, as social groups whose status has been racialized, Blackened, or, more pointedly, positioned as inferior" (p. 229). Students of this collective Black are subject to a racial script in the classroom. As said by Molina (2014), racial scripts "highlight the ways in which the lives of racialized groups are linked across time and space and thereby affect one another, even when they do not directly cross paths" (p. 6). The racial script and racial stratification for these groups within the school system create a structure of inequality in which proximity to whiteness affects the sourcing and distribution of valuable resources for learning (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Pearman II & Swain, 2017; Pais et al., 2012).

Due to the racialized past of the American education system, education researchers see the roadmap to connecting to Black students as different from other students (Kafele, 2012; Kumah-Abiwu1, 2019; Noguera, 2003). Albeit Black males constitute a much smaller percentage of the American population, Noguera (2008) notes the constant discussion of Black males in research. Why such an interest in Black males? Charles Mills' (1997) article regarding the *Racial Contract* discusses the ontological relationship between Whites in America as the subject and Black people in America as the object and the racial implications it has within educational practices and policies. Dancy et al. (2018) article critique higher education through the lens of the racial contract, noting that Black students on historically white campuses are engulfed in "continuities of colonial preoccupations." The resulting anti-Blackness drives the post-colonial legacy to the exclusion of voices of the object (Black people). The article further contends that Europe's position in seeing Africa as its property (seen through

colonialism) parallels the experience of anti-Blackness in America with Black people as presently internal property to its American colonial past.

As described by Mills (1997), the *Racial Contract* is foundational in the operation of power used by Whites against non-whites. The Black male, perceived as the non-white and historical property of the American white power base (Dancy et al., 2018), remains under constant assault as a danger and threat to society (Dumas & Ross, 2016). "White humanity is dependent on its ability to harm Black life; white humanity is predicated on Black inhumanity" (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 188). Frantz Fanon (1967) further explains the cauterizing effects of anti-Blackness in that Black men must be black in relation to the white man. Similarly, the Black male student must be black in relation to his white male counterparts.

Academic research on Black males aims to distill the narrative of anti-blackness and reflect strong, positive imagery of the Black racial identity (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). It further aims to combat the historical stigma Black males have endured throughout American history, including slavery, criminalization, and the imagery of the Black male as a defunct human or defect (Mills, 1997; Smiley &Fakunle, 2016; Yancy, 2008). Race, at this juncture, permeates our ways of viewing and interacting within the world around us, including curriculum design, instruction, and the education of experience of Black boys and girls (Singleton, 2015). For example, according to a study by Morris and Perry (2017), school disciplinary processes are mechanisms of inequality based on race and gender. Morris and Perry's (2017) findings from their study revealed:

> Black boys are twice as likely as white boys to receive a disciplinary referral in this population, but black girls are three times as likely as white girls to receive a

> referral. Overall, boys are more likely to receive an office referral, but when the race is considered, black girls have the same probability of receiving an office referral as do white boys and a higher probability than Asian and Latino boys. We observe similar interactions between race and gender in the severity of the offense. Black boys are generally twice as likely as white boys to be referred for a minor or moderate offense (Class I, II, or III violations), but black girls, again, are over three times as likely as white girls to receive such referrals. (p. 143)

Summarily, low academic performance is an amalgamation of factors including behavioral issues, teacher expectations, cultural differences in the behavioral expectations of students and teachers, language differences, and poverty (Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Gregory et al., 2010). Furthermore, the UCLA Civil Rights Project (2020) research on school segregation has found that public school students are increasingly isolated by race and class in American schools 60 years after Brown versus Board of Education.

Education Statistics

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020), Black students constitute 15 percent of the 50.7 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in Fall 2017, a decrease from 17 percent in Fall 2000. Out of the 50.7 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, 24.1 million were white, 7.7 million were Black, 13.6 million were Hispanic, 2.8 million were Asian/Pacific Islander (2.6 million Asians and 185,000 Pacific Islander), 500,000 were American Indian/Alaska Native, and 2 million were of two or more races.

The NCES also shows a lower rate of interaction with minority groups amongst white students. In Fall 2017, 58 percent of Black and 60 percent of Hispanic students

were enrolled in schools with at least 75 percent minority enrollment in comparison to their white counterparts at six percent. One can see the further saturation of Black and Hispanic students grouped together and outnumbering white students. About 31 percent of white students encountered a 25 to 39 percent minority enrollment at their school. About 48 percent of white students experienced a less than 35 percent minority enrollment at their school. Findings from the 2018 NCES Report, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups* (2019), indicated the following:

- In 2016, the percentage of children living with married parents was highest for Asian children (84 percent), followed by white children (73 percent); children of Two or more races, Pacific Islander children, and Hispanic children (57 percent each); and American Indian/Alaska Native children (45 percent). The percentage was lowest for Black children (33 percent).
- In 2016, the percentage of children under the age of 18 in families living in poverty was higher for Black children than Hispanic children (31 and 26 percent, respectively), and the percentages for both groups were higher than for white and Asian children (10 percent each). Among Hispanic subgroups in 2016, the percentage of children under age 18 living in poverty ranged from 11 to 38 percent. Among Asian subgroups, the percentage of children living in poverty ranged from six to 37 percent.
- In 2016, about 29 percent of children under six years old who were not enrolled in kindergarten regularly received center-based care as their primary care arrangement. The percentage of children who regularly received center-based care was lower for Hispanic children (23 percent) than for children of

two or more races (34 percent) and for Black (32 percent), white (31 percent), and Asian children (31 percent).

- Between fall 2000 and 2015, the percentage of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools who were white decreased from 61 to 49 percent. The percentage of Black students also decreased during this period from 17 to 15 percent. In contrast, there was an increase in the percentage of students enrolled in public schools who were Hispanic (from 16 to 26 percent) and Asian/Pacific Islander (four to five percent) during this time period.
- Between 2000 and 2016, the percentage of students retained in a grade decreased from 3.1 to 1.9 percent. This pattern was observed among white, Black, and Hispanic students.
- From 2013 to 2014, about 2.6 million public school students (5.3 percent) received one or more out-of-school suspensions. A higher percentage of Black students (13.7 percent) than of students from any other racial/ethnic group received an out-of-school suspension, followed by 6.7 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 5.3 percent of students of Two or more races, 4.5 percent each of Hispanic and Pacific Islander students, 3.4 percent of white students, and 1.1 percent of Asian students.
- From 2000 to 2016, the high school status completion rate for Hispanic 18 to 24 years old increased from 64 to 89 percent, while the Black and white status completion rates increased from 84 to 92 percent and from 92 to 94 percent, respectively. Although the white-Hispanic and white-Black gaps in status

completion rates narrowed between 2000 and 2016, the rates for Hispanic and Black 18 to 24 years old remained lower than the white rate in 2016.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) indicated that the 2017-2018 national graduation rates were 85 percent in comparison to Black students at 79 percent. For example, in Florida, the 2017-2018 state graduation rate was 86 percent, while Black students were 81 percent. Noteworthy, data shows an overall increase in the graduation rates for all races. However, Black students remain second to last behind American Indian/Native Alaskan. In other states, the disparity between white students and Black students' graduation rates differentiates as wide as 22 percent in Washington D.C., 21 percent in Minnesota, and 24 percent in Wisconsin (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). According to the UCLA Civil Rights Projects (2020, p. 6):

- Black students are far more segregated from white students now than in the civil rights era but attend school with many more Latinos.
- In 1991, the typical Black student was in a school with third white students but now only one fourth. However, the Latino share is up from 9% to 21% in the same time span. In the South, at its peak, about 42 percent of Black students were in majority-white schools; that percentage has declined to 27%.
- Illinois and New York state have the highest concentration of Black students with other Black students, 76% on average in both states. Black students are often isolated from white and middle-class students, attending schools with other non-white groups in concentrated poverty. In these states, Black students have the highest average percentage of Black classmates.

- Among the nation's 20 largest school districts, Black students have the least contact with white students in Chicago, followed by Dallas, Miami, and Prince George's County, MD, each with an average of less than 4% Whites.

As you can see, race plays an indelible part in our education system. The ramifications of our racialized education system have set in motion certain trends as presented by the National Center for Education Statistics and UCLA Civil Rights Projects, leading to systematic outcomes amongst groups and classes of Black students.

Culture and Identity

Identity development, belonging, validation, and mattering are extremely important to the development of human beings (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Rendon, 1994; Schlossberg, 1989). Healy and Richardson (2017, p. 442) state the following on belonging: "The hypothesis that people need to 'belong' underpins much of our empirical understanding of human motivation and behavior. It is thought that the resulting cooperative behavior has adaptive advantages: it encourages both the development of self-identity and group identity" (p. 442). The authors further indicate that part of the human being's motivation is to form and maintain relationships and bonds with others (Ainsworth, 1988; Aristotle, n.d.; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969). Furthermore, human beings operate within-group ties, group loyalties, and that we indicate where we feel we belong as we take aspects of this shared identity as part of our own identity (Fletcher, 1993; Guibernau, 2013).

Callero (2018) discusses the connection between identity and inequality by asserting the following principles at the core of its connection: “All human societies create and use identity categories to explain, justify, and contest the distribution of valued

resources" (p. 36). Callero (2018) also states (1) identities are category labels used to name and classify social relationships. (2) the "making and breaking of inequality depends upon and operates through a complex set of identity categories and identity processes" (p. 15), and (3) "Identities that are most central to the structure of inequality in modern society, such as those associated with race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation, tend to have a long history of political and cultural conflict" (p. 36). Also, inequality begins by dehumanizing the identity of others. In so doing, it creates blurred identity boundaries, forces individuals into identity negotiations, and builds into cultural identities that exert control in determining the value and distribution of resources (Callero, 2018).

Jackson (1974) lists the following as two dehumanizing tactics used against Black people by the white social class: a multiplicity of labels placed on Black Americans as a whole (Africans, negroes, colored people, people of color, bucks, toms, niggers) and the classification of slaves a property in order to refute citizenship. According to Milton Gordon (1964), ethnicity is the primary group through which individuals gain their own identity. Secondary groups include occupation, economic status, political interest, or entertainment preference (Jackson, 1974). As ethnicity is at the forefront in shaping identity and dehumanization is necessary to inequality, the subculture and identity shaping social constructs of Black people in America and within the education system have not been valued (Callero, 2018; Jackson, 1974). Moreover, the construction of identity as both male and Black is considered complex as efforts to embrace white hegemonic masculinity is compounded by ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Laing, 2016; McGuire et al., 2014).

The Social Text

Ritchey (2012) builds on the work of Freire and Macedo (1987), Rebecca Powell (2009), Spears-Bunton and Powell (2009), and Rosenblatt (1978) to describe the classroom as a social text in which students read the world before they read the written text.

> Textbooks, oral discourse, bulletin boards, arrangement of classroom space, even feedback/praise/recognition might serve as classroom media used to present particular messages, whether deliberately or unbeknownst to the teacher. Powell (2009) further explained reading as a sustained process of engagement with particular experiences – experiences with people, environment, and artifacts. Thus, it can be understood then that through experiences with reading the world, individuals not only develop a self-identity, but they also learn to organize themselves in relation to others within categories of "us" and "them" (Spears-Bunton & Powell, 2009). (Ritchey, 2012, p. 3)

Ritchey (2012) draws on character education as a nexus for teacher's instructional practice. Ritchey states, "In this case, teachers' instructional practices would involve the nature of instructional delivery of subject area content, classroom management, the integration of social interaction, and a deliberate and overt emphasis toward character building" (p. 6). *Literature as Exploration*, a seminal work by Rosenblatt (1995), offers two approaches readers take when approaching the text: efferent or aesthetic. The efferent response to reading reveals no relationship between the text and the reader. The reader is expected to "paraphrase, define, and apply proper rubrics" (p. 56). Ritchey (2012) notes the efferent approach to reading keeps the reader intellectually silent. On the

other hand, the aesthetic response is a transactional exchange between the reader and text, allowing for feedback, contributions, and criticism of the text (Ritchey, 2012). In understanding the two approaches to reading text and in also understanding the world and classroom as inclusive of its own social text presented by Rosenblatt (1995), one is able to extrapolate the importance of how certain responses are permitted, forbidden, or hindered. Subsequently, permission to respond, whether efferently or aesthetically to the social text, impacts how individuals interact and shape meanings and outcomes within the classroom. For the Black body, participating in an education system that originally forbids slaves to read the written text and then for a period of time was segregated and managed through Jim Crow laws, it is determinable that the Black person has been largely permitted to an efferent response to the racialized world text. Similarly, Black male students in the classroom have historically endured an efferent response to the educational system as a whole. When legally permitted to read, the classroom text excluded the Black story from the text, causing further efferent responses to a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Caraballo (2019) also highlights the interdependence of classroom contexts, students' identities, and academic performance amongst students of color in diverse urban middle schools. The narrative analysis uses the term "identities-in-practice" to document how students negotiate social and academic discourses of equity and opportunity. The study reveals how academic environments can be misleading because the Black experience of high-performing students of color is overlooked. These students are viewed as proficient and active participants who have taken advantage of the equal opportunities provided to all students. However, these students are not acknowledged for

surviving the system. Rather, they are applauded for embracing the normative, white-infused approach to education. “Normative whiteness propagates the uninterrogated standards and commonly accepted conventions about learning and behavior that prevent so many students from non-dominant backgrounds from feeling valued and respected by, and perhaps not succeeding in, the public-school system” (Caraballo, 2019, p. 1302; Lipman, 2004).

These topics of identity and culture projects themselves into stereotyped experiences for Black males (Nasir et al., 2017). Racial stereotypical beliefs are stronger for school-age children transitioning from elementary to middle school as they become more aware of their social environment and status (Nasir et al., 2017). Studies show that those who are a part of the negatively stereotyped group are more aware of stereotypes. In this instance, Black children are more aware of stereotypes than their white counterparts. DeGruy (2017) refers to this as part of the legacy of trauma experienced by Black Americans dating back to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The awareness of stereotypes impacts performance. Middle schoolers are more likely to think white students are smarter than Black students (Allen & Liou, 2019; Ferguson, 2003; McGee & Martin, 2011; Nasir et al., 2017). The implications of these stereotypes also impact student participation and their perception of identity and culture. White (2011) discusses Black students' resistance to classroom participation out of fear of being seen as "acting white." White (2011) further explains minority students embody their own cultural norms, their own culturally imbued patterns of communication, and beliefs that may differ from white or mainstream students.

Discipline and Identity

The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) systems within K-12 education reflect acute segregation on the basis of race, social class, and disability (Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Curran, 2020; Girvan et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2010). The policing practices of Black bodies are evidenced through the school systems behavioral intervention programs (Dancy et al., 2018; Morris & Perry, 2017; Mills, 1997; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Many education researchers call for cultural responsiveness to student intervention programs (Cramer & Bennett, 2015). According to Ispa-Landa (2018), the racial bias expressed through student disciplinary actions can be combatted by teachers who take more time getting to know their students, demonstrate empathy, and practice perspective-taking skills. Ispa-Landa (2018, p. 386) contends perspective-taking and empathy may work in tandem to reduce the “longstanding racial associations between Blackness and deviance” (Diamond & Lewis, 2016; Rios, 2011). Students' discipline practices reflect the importance of classroom management and the teacher-student relationship-building process. Classroom management and the task of instruction are the two most important roles of a teacher (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2011). Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to "organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" under differing conditions using the skills one possesses (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). O'Neill and Stephenson (2011) specify the importance of classroom management self-efficacy models in matters of discipline.

Curriculum and Identity

Identity in Literature

Literature used in middle grades can be instrumental in shaping the identity of students (Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2010; Eisenbach et al., 2018). For instance, Al-Hazza and Bucher (2010) discuss how adolescents develop their cultural and social identity, personal identity, and self-esteem through the interplay of race, ethnicity, and religion in literature. Similarly, Eisenbach et al. (2018) examine the importance of middle-grade school students reflecting their identity through safe spaces created in the classroom surrounding the use of diverse classics and young adult literature. They note that middle-level literature can serve as a springboard for reflecting on the beliefs and values of students because middle schoolers enter this grade level with the tendency to think what they believe is true is, in fact, true. Literature gives students a springboard into guided aesthetically responsive conversations that include the experiences of others (Eisenbach et al., 2018). These articles indicate the importance of cultural inclusion through literature, knowing and understanding your student population, and developing multiple/multiethnic perspectives within the classroom (Hyun, 2001).

Research findings in social studies, science, and math also reflect a racial bias in teacher and student experiences and test scores. Conversely, African-American students demonstrated higher academic performance when teachers used culturally relevant pedagogy to help them make personalized cultural connections to the curriculum (Burns, 2018; Martell, 2018). Regarding science and math, Black students have historically encountered stereotypes as less mathematically inclined as compared to their white counterparts (Davis, 2017; Riegle-Crumb & Humphries, 2012). Science, technology,

engineering, and math programs are criticized for their lack of inclusion, keeping the futures of white children more economically competitive (Laughter & Adams, 2012; Lee, 2003; Tate, 2001). Research by Yu (2018) on culturally relevant pedagogy in science and math indicated Black students developed an improved attitude toward the subjects. There remains an ongoing call for culturally relevant science teaching (Laughter & Adams, 2012; Brown et al., 2019).

In many respects, how the Black cultural identity is reflected in the K-12 school system is of tremendous significance to this study regarding the middle school English Language Arts (ELA) core curriculum. As mentioned before, literacy education serves as a cultural-ideological practice that assists in developing students' cultural, social, and personal identity and self-esteem through the interplay of race, ethnicity (Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2010; Barrett-Tatum, 2015). How students interpret the world is connected to their ability to decipher the figurative language, identify themes, archetypes, and plot sequences, and also trace and evaluate arguments presented in informational and historical text. Zirkel and Johnson (2016) state, "Empirical research demonstrating that a strong, positive Black cultural identity is positively associated with a stronger commitment to education and better educational outcomes measured in numerous ways is pervasive, consistent, and robust" (p. 301).

The classroom is an identity-shaping experience for students from which Black males learn and form understandings of society and groups (Curran, 2020; Girvan et al., 2019; Guibernau, 2013; Fletcher, 1993; Ritchey, 2012). As such, implicit to the curriculum is the social and written text that informs Black males of where they are placed in society (Ritchey, 2012; Spears-Bunton & Powell, 2009). Any attempt to

identify with the curriculum is an attempt to formulate an identity because classroom activities may be "viewed as historically, culturally, and socially situated action in which people are engaged towards a shared learning objective" (Barrett-Tatum, 2015, p. 4; Fisher, 2011).

Culture of Power and Narrowing

Caraballo (2017) highlights the significance of "the intersections between students' multiple identities, experiences of literacy and language, and discourses of achievement" in urban middle schools (p. 587). Further, noting that students negotiate their identity through their academic writing and reading levels. In turn, students' textual and literate identities shape their responses to dialogic approaches. Caraballo (2017) also emphasizes that students are considered students as achievers when they learn "mainstream academic knowledge" (Banks, 1993) and master the dominant "culture of power" (Delpit, 2006) implicit throughout the curriculum.

The significance of race and culturally relevant pedagogy remain of affixed importance when considering Caraballo's (2017) research of practices found within the English/Language Arts curriculums and the intersection of identity, curriculum, and pedagogy. There is a strong correlation between academic apathy, which is the student's level of academic interest and participation, and their socioeconomic status, race, and statistically fringed academic future. Slaughter (2009) writes, "Middle and high school teachers have long observed that a large percentage of students in urban districts become disengaged at the start of middle grades. When this occurs, research show that it greatly reduces the odds such that they will eventually graduate" (p. 18).

Crocco and Costigan's (2007) study of urban New York City middle and high schools discussed the concerns amongst educators on the effects of curricular and pedagogical impositions by expanding the term "narrowing the curriculum" (Dillon, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Manzo, 2005). "Narrowing the curriculum" indicates "the prescribed curriculum frequently limits pedagogical options" across multiple subject areas due to restraints in the curriculum caused by the desire to achieve testing standards (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, p. 514). The research revealed that the narrowed curriculum of scripted lessons, mandated curriculum, and narrowed options for teaching were more prominent amongst low-income schools. It appears the higher the proportion of students with low-income backgrounds, the harder they push to comply with the constraints of "narrowing the curriculum" as an appeasement to master "the culture of power" because of the mounting implications for accountability, including funding, perception, and job security (Delpit, 2006; Caraballo, 2017; Crocco & Costigan, 2007). However, the perpetuated cycle of the achievement gap amongst poor children of color begins at birth as Black children are subjected to different perceptions and narratives than white children (Delpit, 2012).

Basalisation also captures the nuances of narrowing the curriculum. The term basalisation characterizes how authentic texts are abbreviated to meet editorial and publishing requirements (Sulzer, 2014). In so doing, the richness (imagery, voice, and tone) of the text is lost. Sulzer (2014), however, moves the term basalisation beyond the book to also include the reader, the student. The term basalisation of youth highlights the "narrow and synthetic construction" of the reader—as the text is truncated, so is the youth in their academic pursuit. Sulzer (2014) observes that policymakers have made plans

regarding the curriculum based on students' future of entering the real world over the student's current self in the classroom. As mentioned by Caraballo (2019) and (Carter 2005) having fixed meanings and controlled identities results in a disregard for the multiplicity of identities shared by students.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy theorizes that instructional practices should consider the cultural identity and social engagement of historically marginalized students to create connection and relevance with the subject matter (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In so doing, the curriculum situates race and combats white supremacy (Milton-Williams & Bryan, 2016). Culturally relevant pedagogy also speaks to the need for more Black teachers, specifically males, in that they are more likely to directly bring with them bonding behaviors and a “transfer” of identity within the relationship (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Milton-Williams & Bryan, 2016).

While apathy, students lack interest, impacts teaching, which further implicates classroom management and test outcomes (Bishop, 1989), culturally relevant pedagogy is a commonly implemented approach to instruction with studies that prove its efficacy (Dee & Penner, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Milton-Williams & Bryan, 2016). However, Ledesma and Calderon (2015) noted the following:

> Research tells us that teachers are most effective when they teach in ways that are culturally relevant to students of color (Chapman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Being culturally relevant is about more than knowing a student's culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009); it extends to understand that students' cultures operate in a historical and contemporary context in which white

> supremacy institutionalizes a hierarchy in which Whites are at the top, and people of color are at the bottom (Chapman, 2007).

Culturally relevant pedagogy has expanded into what is referred to as Critical Race pedagogy, an emphasis on racial, ethnic, and gender education aimed at broadening the narrative surrounding indigenous people (Lynn, 2004). Nonetheless, the racialized achievement disparity remains constant due to several contributing factors, including school structure, funding, opportunity, exposure (Dyce, 2013; Peatross, 2011; Perry, 2003; Scheetz, 2018; Strayhorn, 2007).

Achieving cultural relevance by having Black male teachers as role models is called under scrutiny by Martino (2015). Martino stresses its limits as a form of policy and the lack of capacity to address structural inequalities confronted by Black males in urban schools. Additionally, Martino contends the emphasis placed on individual male teachers to enact critical and culturally relevant pedagogies is insufficient and redirects the costlier need for redistributive interventions. On the other hand, the study conducted by Milton-Williams and Bryan (2016), in which they tracked a Black male middle school teacher's experience, indicated that while all Black males are not role models, the Black male teacher's ability to engender trust, use the art of storytelling from first-hand experiences, and understanding and sustaining community culture are indispensable qualities for Black students.

"No-Excuse" Schools

Wax (2017) compares two growing approaches to addressing inequalities in K-12 education. The first aims to reduce the number of high-poverty schools where class and race are used to segregate students. The response is to send these students to more

predominantly middle-class or affluent schools. This integration model was described as an empirical "black box" because the geographic and economic mix does not reveal a clear benefit of the program. The second approach is the "no-excuses" K-12 charter programs that drive a more intense educational program designed to impact the student's outlook, habits, and behavior. Wax (2017) notes "no-excuse" charter schools are frequently bare bone programs with less staff and infrastructure, raising questions about the efficacy of these types of programs.

"No-excuse" charter schools take a militaristic approach with staunch rules about dress and classroom decorum, extended school days, monitoring of student progress through frequent testing, and college-readiness curriculum (Golann, 2015; Wax, 2017). While the approach of "No-excuse" schools in many instances has increased the achievement of Black and Hispanic students (Ellison & Iqtadar, 2020; Golann, 2015), Golann (2015) examination of "No-excuses" schools and the unintended consequences of disciplinary practices and accountability policies found the school reform approach had not necessarily produced better student achievement outcomes than do traditional public schools nor have they closed the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps. Golann (2015) revealed that while the results at particular "No-excuse" charter schools are astounding in narrowing the achievement gap, as an overall approach, students are experiencing a reinforcement of inequality in cultural skills. The findings of the Ellison and Iqtadar (2020) qualitative research synthesis on "No-excuses" charter school raises questions of the desirability of this programmatic approach altogether. The research highlights evidence that the "No-excuse" model "contributes to student segregation, under-enroll special needs students and English language learners, and falls short of their

ambitious goals for university success" (Ellison & Iqtadar, 2020, p. 2). Sondel et al. (2019) also observe the pervasiveness of white saviorism, colorblind racism, and anti-Blackness in "No-excuse" charter schools, performed by white teachers and non-Black administrators.

Theoretical Frameworks

Strangers in the Classroom: A Study of Black Males, Curriculum Bias, and Protracted Identity Conflict in Public Schools examines the structural, social, and identity conflict Black Males experience throughout the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum textbooks of public schools. In order to do so, the case study proposition theorizes that the protracted social conflict of systemic racism experienced throughout the K-12 education system leads to sustained identity conflict within Black male students. Black males, as a result, become disconnected from the democratized educational intent and, in turn, are estranged from the learning environment. They become strangers in the classroom. This case study proposition is summarily referred to as the Protracted Identity Conflict (PIC). The theoretical frameworks necessary to underscore and inform the study proposition are included in Simmel's Stranger Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Critical Race Theory.

The Stranger Theory

The Stranger Theory, developed by German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (1908), presents the sociological form of "the stranger" and its complex position within society. "The stranger" is described in several keyways. First, "the stranger," in this instance, does not come today and go tomorrow. Rather they "come today and remain tomorrow" as a wanderer affixed within a particular spatial group or spatial

boundary (Simmel, 1908, p. 143). Moreover, "his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it" (p. 143). The dynamic of the relationship between "the stranger" and the group, in which "the stranger" has not quite got over "the freedom of coming and going," is described as a co-existing closeness and remoteness. Simmel terms human relation as "the distance within this relation indicates that one who is closeby is remote, but his strangeness indicates that one who is remote is near" (p. 143).

Second, "the stranger" is assigned the specific character of mobility, not in their freedom to move about the spatial boundary but seen as a transient individual whose temporal status can change by leaving the group. In this, Simmel continues to indicate the formal position of "the stranger" as bounded in the existence of both nearness and remoteness, indifference, and involvement, allowing them to move freely about within the spatial boundary without having any organically established relationship within the space.

Third, while “the stranger” shares common human qualities that extend itself to a great many people, such as nationality, social position, or occupation, “the stranger” is not considered an individual of value to the space. These similarities extend beyond “the stranger” and the group to simply indicate a generality shared by most people. This notion of generality and commonality between “the stranger” and the bounded space is pervasive in that it eludes the intrinsic value of relationships. Simmel categorizes this as a sort of “strangeness” by which a connection is made. However, the generality of what connects the relationship is duplicitous in undermining it as well.

Fourth, Simmel asserts that the factors of nearness and distance between "the stranger" and the group also create tension. This is in part because “the consciousness of having only the absolutely general in common has exactly the effect of putting a special emphasis on that which is not common” (p. 148). Simmel further delineates "the stranger" is constantly confronted with their strangeness of having "nothing individual, but the alien origin, a quality which he has, or could have, in common with many other strangers" (p. 148). Simmel concludes, "Despite his being inorganically appended to it, the stranger is still an organic member of the group" (p. 149). Marotta (2012) categorizes the Simmelian stranger as a third type of consciousness created between the stranger and the host group. At this juncture, the general human characteristics that connected them are disallowed, creating a non-relation that further dubs "the stranger" as the other. Wessely (1990) argues the following regarding Simmel:

> He constantly searches for ‘third’ categories which might comprehend opposites and make us comprehend how mutually exclusive forces and principles do not annihilate each other but create, in their interaction, new forms by finding, as it were, a third way out of a dilemma. (p. 376)

The third consciousness is more philosophical in nature as a way to overcome binary thinking (Marotta, 2012). The third consciousness appears to be an unintended consciousness. The concept of double consciousness by DuBois (1903) asserts a White-Black construct for the survival of Black people in America and to gain progress or acceptance in both white and Black spaces. However, the third consciousness of the Simmelian stranger, offered by Marotta (2012), is an unintended middle ground reached by the individual in the process of negotiating their identity within the group. In the third

consciousness, the stranger is affixed between the national allegiance of immigration and assimilation and the racial dynamic of segregation and integration. The social distance between segregation and integration creates the stranger. The racial divide of a person physically integrated and emotionally segregated may result in a sort of strangeness described by Simmel, which may also be viewed as a conflict of identity, emotions, and power (Jones & Brinkert, 2008).

DeGruy (2017) writes the following regarding the Black experience: "Blind to our potential, we wander aimless, searching for enlightenment, remaining barred from the infinite possibilities that are all around us" (p. 106). The Stranger Theory raises an applicable perspective to the relationship between Black students and the educational system. Simmel's (1908) description of the stranger as "not quite got over the freedom of coming and going" can be transcribed to the students as not quite embracing their academic pursuit as a means to upward mobility within the American education system. The "wanderer affixed within a particular spatial group or spatial boundary" is akin to the Black male student affixed to the spatial boundary of the overall American education system, experienced through the classroom. Historically, the classroom presents a separation in culture, lived experiences, and socioeconomic realities, setting a sort of strangeness for Black students (Curran, 2020; Girvan et al., 2019; Guibernau, 2013).

Unlike Greene (1973), who asserts teachers remain as strangers in the classroom—meaning they are in constant question of the readymade standardized scheme, always prodding the system in a similar manner to how students should always involve in self-inquiry—Simmel's Stranger Theory illuminates the disconnection from the space, not the questioning. Black students historically have not been considered

indigenous to the American education system (Kafele, 2012; Kumah-Abiwu1, 2019; Noguera, 2003). As a result, they remain in a third consciousness, a spatial posture of closeness/nearness and remoteness, indifference, and involvement due to the proximity of whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Pais et al., 2012; Pearman II & Swain, 2017). Without having any organically established relationship within the American education system, the notion of generality and commonality removes the individual value of Black people as a race, making tension and disparities in curriculum design, discipline, instructional practice, and delivery permissible regarding the Black student (Galtung, 1969; Mills, 1997; Nasir et al., 2017; Nieto, 2000; Ritchey, 2012). Culturally relevant pedagogy (Banks, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015) is intended to correct the historical underpinnings that have often eluded the intrinsic value of relationships between American pedagogy and the otherness of Black people (Mills, 1997). Nevertheless, the inorganically appended Black student by the matter of law (Brown versus Topeka Board of Education, 1954) is still an organic member of the American spatial boundary.

In understanding the significance of spatial boundaries, the physical and environmental design impacts perception, utilization, human interaction, and the overall identity of spaces and their boundaries. Sabuncu (2019) maintains "the perception of space can lead to conflict through two types of paths, ultimately resulting in either isolation from the community or segregation within the community. Thus, the resulting conflict is synonymous with the human need for a sense of belonging and security" (p. 153). The Black male must then negotiate their course of action within the space, a space in which their Black body has been confiscated by the assumed natural authority of

Whites and have become part of an “interpretive stream that has configured their identity and shaped their course of action” (Yancy, 2008, p. 845).

Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory describes a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership. Groups provide a sense of mattering, belonging, and validation, thereby providing a sense of belonging to the social world (Schlossberg, 1989; Tajfel, 1979). Furthermore, these groups, such as the classroom, school, community, sports team, and club membership, impact the self-esteem of the members. Sartre's (1966) theory of *nothingness* emphasizes, “things that are absent are as important as those that are present in defining who we are and how we see the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). When we connect this theory to education and identity, an important message is relayed through the absence of one’s identity in the curriculum.

Social identity theory studies the development of stereotyping, conflicts, and conformity of in-groups versus out-groups (McCleod, 2019; Tajfel, 1979). Social identity is created as people tend to exaggerate the differences between groups and overemphasize the similarities of things in the same group (Leaper, 2011; McCleod, 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). McCleod (2019) states the central hypothesis of the social identity theory is that "group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image" (p. 1). Subsequently, prejudiced views amongst cultures may arise and result in further conflicts such as discrimination, racism, sexism, or genocide. Tajfel and Turner (1979) indicate that the "us" versus "them (in-group versus out-group) stratification takes place in the following order: social categorization, social identification, then social comparison. In the academic setting, a

study shows middle school Black boys who internalize race-based stereotypes are more likely to incur low-academic performance (Ellis et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2011).

Social categorization establishes categories for social uses, such as race, nationality, religion, educational level, types of employment, community organizational, cultural, and international (Northrup, 1989; McCleod, 2019). Social identification occurs next, in which the individual adopts the identity of the group they have categorized themselves to. In so doing, they adopt the role of their identity and conform to the norms of the group, including the development of shared meanings and symbolic communication (Burke, 1996; Stets & Burke, 2014; Stryker, 1980). The looking-glass self by Cooley (1902) indicated people see themselves as reflected by the reaction of others to them. This input, output process creates a feedback loop that shapes perceived self-meaning and controls behavior (Burke, 1996). Lastly, in an effort to maintain their self-esteem, group members engage in social comparison. Social comparison, utilized to reinforce identity, breathes competition and hostility as each group adopts an "us" versus "them/in-group versus out-group ideology (Stryker, 1980; Tajfel et al., 1979).

Ethnic and racial group membership plays an integral part in the social identity of children (Pauker et al., 2015; Quintana, 2007; Ruble et al., 2004). However, ethnic/racial identity is different for white and Black children. The crystallization of feelings, thoughts, and attitudes within the group membership of race is impacted by discrimination, which affects psychological health (Yip, 2018). Persisting threats against a social group, such as discrimination, violence, and danger, heightens the importance of the individual's social identity and leads to the exclusion of the individual's personal identity (Deutsch, 1973; Northrup, 1989). Furthermore, the discrimination may result in

the heightened determination of minority students to downplay their racial identity as Black in an effort to gain acceptance from the white majority group (Cheryan & Morin, 2005; Yip, 2018). Yip's (2018) research is definitive in stating that "identity development occurs within a sociocultural context of discrimination" (p. 173). Identity encompasses a sense of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual safety (Northrup, 1989). However, when threatened, the core sense of identity will respond defensively with interpersonal conflict as well as conflict between groups. According to Yin (2018), the threat to safety is usually centered on discrimination.

This understanding of identity and discrimination springboards into an important question: To what extent do Black students identify with their race as significant to their social identity? The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity was created by Sellers et al. (1997) to assess the degree to which race is important to individual self-concept. Nevertheless, a Black student's inventory of their racial identity does not dictate a white person's perception of racial identity. The following two issues arise amongst white and Black students regarding their social identity based on race: color-blindness for Whites and racelessness for Black people.

White children tend to perceive their whiteness as a less central role to their racial identity, creating an onset of colorblind norms (Manning et al., 2015; Picower, 2009; Turner & Brown, 2007). Color-blindness promotes racial non-recognition and elevates meritocracy, deficit thinking, linguicism, post-racialism, and stereotypes (Asimeng-Boahene, 2010; Chapman, 2007; Kohli, 2012; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Obasogie, 2013). As a result, scholars have proffered that color-blindness norms reinforce unstated racial bias and racially motivated discrimination personally and institutionally (Manning

et al., 2015). On the other hand, Black students engage in racelessness as a coping, survival technique in educational settings (Fordham, 1988). Racelessness is the disassociation from one's racial community in order to assimilate into the dominant culture. Black students from low-income housing and school districts tend to de-emphasize their Black cultural identity in order to achieve academically (Smith & Lalonde, 2003). Research intimates a correlation between academic achievement and Black males who endorse their race as significant to their identity (Ellis et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2011). Black boys who embrace their racial identity are more likely to have a higher academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2008; Ellis et al., 2018), furthering the imperativeness of the school system's impact on the student's social identity.

Northrup (1989) describes identity as an individual extending themselves “to encompass a sense of self-in-relation-to-the-world” (p. 55), which may be experienced socially and psychologically. As a result, Northrup (1989) states, "when a conflict between or among parties involves a core sense of identity (and therefore predictability of the world), the conflict tends to be intractable" (p. 55). Northrup emphasizes that social, historical, and political factors may be more deeply connected to the issue at hand. The six factors of the Social Cubism Model by Byrne and Carter (1996) further the holistic overview of factors that contribute to intractable conflict: history, religion, demographics, political institutions and non-institutional behavior, economics, and psycho-cultural factors.

Northrup's description of social identity and its relationship to conflict asserts that conflict evolves over time, there are multiple levels to every conflict, there are multiple factors at any level and any time, and most factors at all levels have subjective

components and objective components, and the distribution of power between or among parties has a significant impact on the course and conduct of a conflict (Northrup, 1989). The aggregate of Tajfel (1979), Northrup (1989), Byrne & Carter (1996), and Walby (2007) reflect the complexity of social identity and systems because the development of one's social identity is coordinated alongside the social system/group (Hendrick, 2009). Walby (2007) states the following about social systems.

> Each set of social relations is a system. Examples of sets of social relations are those of class, gender, and ethnicity; each is a social system. Each of these sets of social relations is not flattened to a culturally reductionist concept of identity or economically reductionist concept of class. Each set of social relations of social inequality is understood as a social system with full ontological depth, being constituted in the institutional domains of economy, polity, violence, and civil society. Not only are gender relations constituted in the economy, polity, violence, and civil society, but so also are ethnic relations and class relations. These systems of social relations are constituted at different levels of abstraction; one level is emergent from another. An individual will participate with a number of different sets of social relations. These are overlapping, non-saturating, and non-nested systems of social relations. (p. 459)

Northrup's connection of predictability and intractable conflict corroborates the link between racialized education and student achievement gaps (Curran, 2020; Burns, 2018; NCES, 2020; Ogbu, 2003). The Black male student's social identity has been confronted with a historically racialized system of stereotypes, discrimination, prejudice, and other threats as they navigate in-group and out-group dynamics. These threats play an indelible

role in their predictably lower academic performance. Furthermore, whiteness, anti-Blackness, color-blindness, and racelessness has categorically created drastic rifts in the social identity of Black and white learners (Fordham, 1988; Holst, 2020; Manning et al., 2015; Picower, 2009; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016; Turner & Brown, 2007; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). Consequently, the social identity of the majority group and minority group have been captive to the historical, religious, demographic, political, social, economic, and psycho-cultural complexities of America's racialized education system (DuBois 1903; Hendrick, 2009; Mills, 1997; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed from the critical legal studies work performed by Derrick Bell (1980) and other legal scholars. The legal work attempted to develop jurisprudence that identified racism as causality and work toward eliminating such racism from being legally institutionalized (Matsuda, 1991). Critical Race Theory was later introduced to K-12 and higher education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solórzano (1998). In education, Critical Race Theory is also referred to as Critical Race Pedagogy, defined by Lynn (2004) as "an analysis of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in education that relies mostly upon the perceptions, experiences and counter-hegemonic practices of educators of color" (p. 154). Critical Race Theory also focuses on the intersectionality of oppression and racism across the divergent planes of gender, politics, identity, economics, classism, sexism, and education (Crenshaw, 1991; Ledesma and Calderón, 2015; Roach, 2016). In education, it investigates the historic and contemporary structures of racial exploitation in schools (Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Considered both an epistemological and methodological approach to research, five tenets are widely associated with the Critical Race Theory framework. (1) The inter centric of race and racism with other forms of subordination (2) the challenge to dominant ideology (3) the commitment to social justice (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Researchers using Critical Race Theory may collectively focus on all five tenets or any specific tenet. Yosso (2002) expands the conversation on Critical Race Pedagogy by outlining the significance of a Critical Race Curriculum (CRC) in education based on the five tenets. Yosso describes a curriculum geared toward challenging the social and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, developing counter-discourses, and contemporary analysis of linkages between educational and societal inequality.

Critical Race Theory is appropriate for inspecting issues of systematic oppression and race within the education system. At least three epistemological tenets correspond with this study of Black males, curriculum bias and protracted identity conflict. First, the intercentricity of race in education accounts for the intersection of race, age, gender, and socioeconomics, specifically Black (race) males (gender) in Title 1 (socio-economic) middle schools (age). Second, the challenge to dominant ideology pushes back on claims of objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity in education for Black males, allowing space for the development of a counter-narrative to the Black education experience. Lastly, a commitment to social justice is established from the awareness that educational institutions operate in incongruous ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize yet coexisting with the opportunity to emancipate

and empower. Furthermore, this theoretical framework allows us to view the Black experience in education through a historical lens of systematic oppression and structural conflict.

Within this study, Critical Race Theory allows for the examination of the history of anti-Blackness rooted in colonialism and slavery, its direct impact on the formation of the education system, and literacy amongst Black students in America (Dancy II et al., 2018), the evidence of the damaged identity of Black people in the post-colonial era (Scotts, 1997). Again, it examines the aggregate impact of structural, direct, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969) on Black people resulting in post-slavery traumatic syndrome (DeGruy, 2005), the empirical data on the impact of identity and belonging (Ainsworth, 1988; Aristotle, n.d; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Caraballo, 2017; Fletcher, 1993; Guibernau, 2013; Healy & Richardson, 2017; Northrup, 1989). In addition, it examines the importance of strong, positive Black male and female identity in student success (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016) and the relevance of multicultural education (Banks, 2008; Hopkins-Gillispie 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). It further allows for the examination of competitors for a student's attention, including social media, athletics, and video games (Adeyemo, 2019; Xu et al., 2016; You et al., 2017), the large percentage of student disengagement in urban districts starting in the middle grades (Slaughter, 2009; Wilson et al., 2011). Also, it examines the student outcomes of assessment scores, low-academic performance, disruptive behaviors, and apathy toward the education process (Bishop, 1989; Wilson et al., 2011), teacher effectiveness, classroom management, leadership, and accountability (Derrick & Ponton, 2006; Murphy, 2011; Ogbu, 2003). Finally, it explores the need for college and career

readiness (The Achieve Closing the Expectations Gap 2014 Annual Report), and the importance of student's perception of themselves in the classroom and the society at large, and identifying with the curriculum (Arnett, 2000; Eisenbach et al., 2018; Rios et al., 2010).

Summary

Summarily, if the educational system was colonially built, then anti-Blackness and the mechanisms of slavery are at play throughout the education system (Dancy et al., 2018; Mills, 1997; Morris & Perry, 2017; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Moreover, as research exposes, the same colonialized system from the American enslavement of Black people and the Jim Crow era, which did not support the educational and socio-economic progress of Black people, still "manages" the teaching and learning practices of Black people today (Burns, 2018; Mills, 1997; Singleton, 2015; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). As a result, school funding systems tied to property value, in effect, remain connected to the value of Black bodies as property, which serves as a catalyst for poor communities to have poorly funded schools that results in under-educated and under-performing Black students (Alvord & Rauscher, 2019; Kenyon et al., 2020). This directly links to students' identities and perceptions of self and their academic performance (Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2010; Bunton & Powell, 2009; Caraballo, 2019; Eisenbach et al., 2018; Rosenblatt, 1978).

As social identity is derived from the social relationships within a system or group membership, in this instance, the education system experienced through the classroom, the spatial arrangement of the system, including its boundaries and stereotypes, reinforces constructs for potential conflict (Sabuncu, 2019). Because people can only operate within

the boundaries of how the space is constructed, the perceived distance between objects and the boundaries to which humans are permitted, whether closer or nearer, implies a conflict that humans must work through to come closer to a common goal. That is, closer through culturally relevant pedagogy, further through discrimination (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Yip, 2018).

The education system is one of many group memberships in which students glean their social identity. The spatial design, both environmentally and socially, includes the subject matter curriculums, organizational culture, textbook, teacher credentials, teacher expectations, cultural differences in students' and teachers' behavioral expectations, language differences, and socio-economic background of students and teachers, funding, and local, state, and federal policy (Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Gregory et al., 2010). The spatial design and its boundaries create the social text read by students (Ritchey, 2012). A racialized achievement disparity has become the outcome of Black boys within this spatial boundary and group membership (Dyce, 2013; Peatross, 2011; Perry, 2003; Scheetz, 2018; Strayhorn, 2007), reflective of an estranged social identity.

Spatial conflict becomes inevitable because human interaction is controlled by the handlers or designers of the space (Sabuncu, 2019). Similarly, the educational construct of the ELA curriculum textbook, put in place by members of the majority group, places barriers of whiteness that make it more challenging for Black students to see themselves within the curriculum. In the process of searching and wandering (Simmel, 1903), Black students become estranged from the classroom while attempting to navigate a space that has placed their identity out of reach or out of context. They search as strangers do in an

unfamiliar space, attempting to make meaning of symbols to locate oneself in the surroundings in an effort to de-racialize their identity.

This case study research can benefit many stakeholders. The school district and curriculum designers can be provided evidence for cultural and identity integration in the curriculum. Teachers can benefit from a culturally relevant curriculum as it may assist in classroom management and combat student apathy. It most importantly impacts Black male students and their sense of belonging in the classroom and the overall school system as not to be *strangers* in the classroom.

The research question regarding identity and curriculum bias linked to the academic performance of Black males reveals a certain level of complexity in understanding the sociological world of education, including students, teachers, administrators, educational governance, infrastructure, and the associated funding, just to name a few. It is a complex integration of many interacting objects and agents competing for limited resources (Johnson, 2007). By weaving it together through critical analysis of the compounded historical factors for causality of conflict, it may be possible to provide answers to the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The middle-grade years have a tremendous impact in shaping the cultural/social identity, personal identity, and self-esteem of students as they negotiate race, ethnicity, and religion (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2010; Eisenbach et al., 2018). *Strangers in the Classroom: A Study of Black Males, Curriculum Bias, and Protracted Identity Conflict in Public Schools* examines the structural, social, and identity conflicts experienced by Black males throughout the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum of public schools. The case study proposition theorizes that the protracted social conflict of systemic racism experienced throughout the K-12 education system leads to sustained identity conflict within Black male students, which has a direct impact on their academic performance. Additionally, Black males become disconnected from the democratized educational intent and, in turn, are estranged from the learning environment. They become strangers in the classroom.

The case study was selected as the methodology for its broader opportunities to use multiple data sources for triangulation and theory development based on the research findings. Yin (2014) provides a two-fold definition of case study: (1) "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in-depth and with its real-world context, especially when (2) the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). The phenomenon of this case focuses on the identity development of young Black males in a racially disparate academic environment experienced through the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum.

Also, a single instrumental case study focuses on one issue and uses “a bounded system” to illustrate the issue (Stakes, 1995, p 2). This instrumental case study research used the single case study approach: Title 1 school sites within a specific school district with embedded units of analysis of teacher and administrative interviews, curriculum content analysis, and critical historical analysis of the K-12 education system focused on Black students. Schools qualify as Title 1 when at least 40% of the student population is deemed as low-income families, indicating that students from these locations incur greater socio-economic challenges (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). According to the state's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, qualifications for the free and reduced lunch program are determined by household income and household size. School districts often use free and reduced lunch as a metric to determine family income, thereby concluding if students receive free and reduced lunch, then they qualify as low income. The narrowed scope of Title 1 schools allows for a more concentrated focus in establishing the case of the study, thereby bounding the study. The ontological philosophical approach to this research examined the power and identity struggles of Black Males in public Title 1 middle school using the following theoretical frameworks: Stranger Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Critical Race Theory.

Lastly, the case study research recommends stating a study proposition, which brings direct attention to something that should be studied within the scope of the study. It allows the study to have a very specific intent that drills down into the "how" or "why" of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The case study proposition, summarily referred to as the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept (PICC), is a phenomenon incurred by the lack or limited inclusion of the Black male identity within the English Language Arts curriculum

and its impact on the identity of Black males in the American education system. This case study research contributes theory development to the field of conflict resolution to assist in explaining the phenomenon and developing interventions that address these personal and social conflicts impacting Black males in K-12 education.

Research Design

The case-study design for this research included three phases: (1) define and design, (2) analyze and conclude, and (3) prepare, collect and analyze (Yin, 2014). The focus of the study, study proposition, and boundary of the case study research was determined within the *define and design* phase. In this phase, the case study research was determined to focus on the structural, social, racial, and identity conflict of Black Males in a Title 1 public middle school and its connection to their academic performance. The case study proposition, as mentioned before, is referred to as the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept (PICC). The case study proposition contends that the systemic racial experiences sustained by Black students in the education system are a protracted social conflict that leads to a perpetual identity conflict in Black males. When examining the ELA curriculum through this concept, we are able to identify ways in which the conflict is sustained.

In the *analysis and conclude* phase, the units of analysis are determined and analyzed. Five units of analysis were selected for this case study: (1) a critical historical analysis of K-12 education, (2) Middle School ELA curriculum textbook, (3) Title 1 Middle School ELA teachers, (4) Title 1 Middle School ELA School/District Administrators, and (5) a content analysis of demographic data and state standardized test results of Black males.

The district-approved ELA curriculum textbook *Collections* was reviewed and categorized by text pieces, racial content of the text pieces, author's name, author's race, and grade level. The *Collections* textbook, published by Holt McDougal (a division of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), contains pieces of fiction and non-fiction text pieces by numerous authors. Additionally, using semi-structured interviews, ELA teachers and ELA School/District Administrators provided feedback on (1) the curriculum selection and implementation process, (2) their perspective of racial bias in the curriculum, and (3) their observed experience of how Black male students interacted with the curriculum. Moreover, teachers and administrators provided their interpretation of how students engaged with the curriculum. Next, the student's State standardized test results over the past five years were examined for median scores, trends, and comparison to other school districts, states, and national norms. Finally, a critical historical analysis of the K-12 education system was conducted to contextualize the black body in America. A thematic summary of each unit of analysis was drafted, and conclusions from the findings were drawn.

The final phase, *prepare, collect, and analyze*, draws cross-analysis conclusions between the units of analysis, modifies the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept as necessary, followed by the development of policy implications, and a final cross-analysis report. The cross-analysis conclusions included the ELA curriculum textbook, ELA teachers, ELA School/District Administrators, findings from the standardized test scores, and the critical historical analysis. After which, further modifications of the study proposition (the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept) are further modified to determine its validity (Merriam, 1998; Stakes, 1995; Yin, 2014). From there, the relevant policy

implications for K-12 instructional practices and education discipline for Black males were determined. The final cross-analysis report is a matter of triangulation and synthesis to draw validated generalizations and reliability (Merriam, 1998; Stakes, 1995).

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability in qualitative research were established through great detail in the explanation of the study to triangulate information (Merriam, 1998; Stakes, 1995). Triangulation occurs by identifying the meaning of the multiple data sources at the point in which the data intersects. Referred to as methodological triangulation, in this study, the data from the semi-structured interviews of five ELA teachers and four district administrators, the curriculum textbook analysis of the *Collections* book for grades 6, 7, and 8, the standardized testing score for the past five academic years (2015-2020), and critical historical analysis of the K-12 education system were analyzed (Stakes, 1995). Pattern matching to identify structural, social, and identity conflicts of race experienced by Black males provided additional validity and reliability (Yin, 2014).

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative, ontological case study was to (1) understand the protracted social and structural conflict of race encountered by Black males in the education system. (2) identify racialized structures of anti-Blackness and whiteness in the middle school English Language Arts curriculum textbooks (3) examine the subtleties of whiteness that may have relevance in how Black males succeed in K-12 education (4) understand the correlation between the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum and the Black male identity (5) examine the impact on the identity, perception of power, and

effect on the emotions of Black males in the educational process (6) address the cursory viewpoints of curriculum administrators regarding identity and inclusion.

In order to facilitate an understanding of race in the English Language Arts curriculum and how the Black cultural identity is also reflected within the curriculum textbook, the following research questions have been developed:

1. How does the public middle school English Language Arts curriculum reflect the identity and lived experiences of Black males?
2. What criteria do administrators use to determine the language arts curriculum, and what is their consideration for racial bias in the ELA curriculum?
3. What are the perceptions of racial biases, anti-Blackness, or whiteness in the English Language Arts curriculum textbook?
4. What are the academic results, systemic impact, and types of conflict experienced by Black male students when their identity is not included throughout the curriculum?

The study (1) conducted a critical historical analysis of the education system in order to identify the types of conflict impacting young Black male students in the classroom (2) conducted a content analysis of the English Language Arts curriculum textbook (3) conducted semi-structured interviews of ELA teachers (4) conducted semi-structured interviews of ELA administrators, (5) a content analysis of demographic data and state standardized test results of Black males. Using the relevant factors of the case study, this research leads to theory construction to develop a more critical thought process in understanding the central phenomenon of conflict in the identity of Black males in public middle schools and their academic progress.

Setting and Participants

The case study research took place in a major school district found in the southeastern United States of America with a minority-majority student population. With 60% of students throughout the school district on free and reduced lunch, 61% of its schools were Title 1. Additionally, the racial demographic of the student population within the school district had a five-year trend of approximately 39% Black, 35% Hispanic, and 20% white. The school district's demographics indicated Black males comprised 20% of approximately 60,000 enrolled in its middle schools over the past five academic years.

Creswell (2013) refers to the strategic selection of sites and participants as purposeful sampling (p. 156). With regards to case study research, Creswell (2013) describes the case itself as the case study sample. Also, a single case study or multiple case study design may contain embedded units of analysis, also referred to as subunits within the study (Yin, 2014). This involves a specific sampling group from within the case.

Participants included (1) five ELA teachers who had at least five years of teaching in Title 1 middle schools where Black students were the majority student population (2) three district administrators who oversee the district-wide implementation of the ELA curriculum textbook for middle schools (3) an analysis of the school district approved ELA curriculum textbook categorized by literary work/text pieces, racial content of each text piece, and author's race and gender; and (4) Black male students' State exam testing scores.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) describes data collection as "a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions" (p. 146). Creswell (2013) also lists the following data collection process: locating site/individual, gaining access and making rapport, purposeful sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data. While a researcher may start at nearly any part of this process, researchers must ultimately build relationships with gatekeepers, gain access, identify a sample population and proceed with gathering data.

Yin (2014) strongly encourages the use of multiple sources of evidence in the data collection process to triangulate the data sources, theory, and methodology. Data can be collected in six ways: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). For this case study, data was collected from multiple sources, including (1) semi-structured interviews of ELA teachers, (2) semi-structured interviews of ELA school administrators, (3) a content analysis of the ELA curriculum textbook, (4) a review of Black males' academic performance on State exams, and 5) historical analysis of the K-12 education system.

Interviews

The researcher worked with school principals to identify ELA teachers who qualified for the study by having five years of consecutive ELA teaching experience using the *Collections* textbook in Title 1 schools. The principal, serving as the liaison, forwarded the names of the teachers they recommended. The researcher contacted the teachers by email to confirm their interest. Teachers responded to the email to confirm their interest and self-disclose their qualifications. District personnel was contacted

directly by the researcher via email. The email correspondence to all participants indicated the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, and contained an attachment of the school district's IRB approval letter. Each participant responded and confirmed their interest in participating. After which, a copy of the consent form, requiring an electronic signature, was emailed.

Were the interviews conducted using structured and semi-structured questions to determine (1) the criteria used by administrators to determine the (ELA) curriculum (2) their consideration for racial bias in the curriculum, (3) how the education system caters to the learning and behavioral styles of Black males, and (4) how the ELA curriculum textbook reflects the identity and lived experiences of Black males? With a total of 14 questions, the interviews were recorded on Zoom and lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

These teachers relayed the first-hand experience of their perspective of racial bias in the curriculum and their observations of how Black male students interacted with the curriculum, including formative and summative testing. Teacher participation was voluntary. District personnel responsible for reviewing, selecting, and implementing the curriculum across schools were able to elaborate on the text selection process and their perspective on the impact of race in the ELA curriculum textbook.

Document and Historical Content

The ELA curriculum textbook served as the foundational source to provide context to the interviews of teachers and administrators. The statistical racial breakdown of literary works/text pieces by author and content provided substantial evidence in determining the racial profile of the ELA curriculum. The researcher was able to collect

data using the hardcover and online editions of the textbook. Copies of the one textbook per grade level were provided by the school district.

The state's Department of Education website provides "access to standard and interactive reports that provide overall and demographic information in a variety of formats including graphs, tables, maps and custom reports based on your interests in education-related data." Using the information portal, the researcher was able to extract reports that provided statewide, district, and individual school data on enrollment, race, gender, and standardized assessment scores. Information on the academic performance of Black males on standardized and mandatory state exams, in addition to a historical overview of the K-12 education system, provided the necessary connecting points to draw validated generalizations regarding student identity as a protracted conflict (Merriam, 1998; Stakes, 1995).

Storage

Critical to the research process is how data is stored and coded to maintain confidentiality/privacy and bring no harm to participants. All files pertaining to the research, including audio files/recordings, memos, notes, participant consent forms, graphs, statistical data, interview transcripts, and content analysis, were digitally secured on Dropbox, a cloud-based storage service. Dropbox, a cloud-based storage site, can only be accessed by a login name and password. Interviews were conducted by Zoom. Zoom allows you to select if the files will be saved in Zoom's cloud server or saved to your computer. The researcher saved the files to the computer and placed them into the Dropbox folder. Notably, doing this eliminated Zoom from being another location of

storage. The names of teachers, administrators, and site locations of the teachers were not revealed in this case study to avoid implication.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) succinctly writes, "Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion" (p. 180). Data analysis drills down into the data by making margin notes, describing the case and its context, using categorical aggregation to establish themes of patterns, using direct interpretation and developing naturalistic generalizations of what was learned, and presenting an in-depth picture of the cases through a narrative, tables, and figures (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

Creswell also cites pointers from Wolcott (1994) on data analysis, which included "highlighting certain information in the description, identifying patterns and irregularities, and contextualizing with the framework from the literature" (p 181). Yin (2014) describes five analytical techniques for case study research. First, pattern matching "compares an empirically based pattern that is, one based on the finds from your case study—with a predicted one made before you collected your data" (p. 143). Second, explanation building (considered more difficult than pattern matching) is an approach that "analyzes the case study data by building an explanation about the case" (p. 147). Its relevance is in the ability to explain a phenomenon through a presumed set of casual links about it, or the "how" or "why" something happened. Explanation building usually occurs in narrative form through the case description "in which the explanations reflect some theoretically significant propositions, whose magnitudes might start to offset

the lack of precision" (p. 147). The third analytic technique is time-series analysis, in which data is reviewed against a timeline and the outcomes of the case. Yin presented the success of crime deterrent strategies implemented by a police department over time as an example of time-series analysis. Fourth, the logic model refers to analysis that assesses the events in repeated cause-effect-cause-effect patterns. Yin indicates that this technique is ideal for evaluating programs for programmatic actions.

For this case study, the researcher followed the second analytic technique presented by Yin (2014): explanation building. Yin describes this technique as a type of pattern matching used to *explain* "how" or "why" something happened. Yin further elaborates that explanation building is done in a narrative; however, because it is complex and not precise, it requires theoretically significant propositions to balance the narrative. Considering this case study research proposition regarding racial bias in the ELA curriculum textbook, explanation building is appropriate in that numerous conflict resolution theories were used to assess the K-12 education system to understand the structural, social, and identity conflict experienced by Black males. We are then able to explain the multiple layers that lend itself to the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept. If the research findings do not support the proposition, then it will be necessary to modify the proposition. Additionally, Yin (2014) states explanation building is a special type of pattern matching that does not aim to conclude a study but develops ideas for further study. To accomplish this, the researcher analyzed the data, discussed the findings, and discussed at length the relevance of the study proposition and opportunities for future research using the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept.

Interviews Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and uploaded into the data analysis software that allowed the researcher to assign headings to highlighted content, track and group those headings into subheadings, and provide a content map of all grouped information. Using the content map of codes, the researcher grouped and created headings as patterns and themes were determined. Cycle one coding began with In vivo coding, then values coding, followed by versus coding, and concluded with structural coding (Saldaña, 2013).

In vivo was used to identify terms used by the participants. Next, values coding was used to identify levels of "a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs," providing insight into what they find most important (p. 131). Aware of what the teachers highlighted as important versus what the administrators shared made coding very effective. Versus coding was used to identify dichotomous relationships between teachers versus students, white pedagogy/curriculum versus Black students, and administrators versus teachers. Lastly, in cycle one, coding, structural coding was used to identify topics that relate to a specific research question (Saldaña, 2013). To mitigate errors, the researcher replayed the original audio alongside the transcription for comparison.

In cycle two coding, the researcher conducted code mapping and pattern coding. Code mapping was used to compare and sort the data into similar groups of concepts. The coding software provided a layout of all headings and subheadings that allowed for additional comparison. Lastly, pattern coding was used to identify emergent themes and explanations.

Document and Historical Analysis Coding

Document and historical content consisted of three sources: (1) *Collections* textbook (2) statewide, district, and individual school data on enrollment, race, gender, and standardized assessment scores and (3) historical analysis of the K-12 education system already discussed in the literature review of this case study.

The approved ELA curriculum textbook of the school district was categorized by grade level, racial content of each text piece, author's name, and author's race. The researcher used a combination of the hardcopy textbook and the digital version found in the school districts' portal to categorize each text. The textbook provided the name, picture, and biography of each author at the beginning of each text. Using that information, the researcher was able to determine the gender and race of each author. In many instances, the biography indicated the author's race/ethnicity. Some text pieces within the textbook were authored by a news or magazine publication. In those instances, the author was categorized as unknown. The author's biography and etymology of the author's name also gave insight into their race or ethnicity. For example, a person named Chang may perceivably be considered of Asian descent. In those instances, to ensure accuracy, the researcher gathered additional information on the author using the internet. Google searches revealed the author's picture, other publications, and additional biographical information to accurately categorize the author.

The racial/ethnic demographic of each text piece was also determined. Each text piece within the textbook was read to identify the race or ethnicity of the characters. For example, a poem written by an African American author was categorized as Black if the poem was written in the first person. The facial characteristics of drawn characters, the

story's word choice, story setting, and author's race were also used to determine the racial/ethnic demographic of the text. For example, *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain was categorized as a white demographic of the text. Meanwhile, the description of the characters from Africa and slavery indicated a Black demographic in the text piece *The People Could Fly* by Virginia Hamilton. Part of the deciding factors included the face value of the text, which is to say, how would a student see the demographic of text based on the names of the character and the setting of the story? For example, while the text was not explicit about the race of the characters names, such as Vinny, Joe-Boy, Mo, and Starlene, found in *The Ravine* by Graham Salisbury, how would Black students racially categorize these characters? In this case, the photo of a character swimming in *The Ravine* appeared white or, we can say, did not appear Black. The text pieces throughout the textbook were also assessed for any racist stereotypes, slurs, or racial tropes. Text pieces that did not indicate a racial demographic was listed as race-neutral. The historical analysis, already presented in the literature review of this case, was gathered from peer-reviewed articles and scholarly books.

Statewide, district, and individual school data on enrollment, race, gender and standardized assessment scores were retrieved from the state's Department of Education information portal.

In cycle one, coding of the documents and historical data, values coding was used to identify levels of importance based on statistical outcomes. Then, structural coding was used to identify topics that related to a specific research question (Saldaña, 2013). In cycle two coding, the researcher conducted code mapping and pattern coding. Code

mapping was used to compare and sort the data into similar groups of concepts. Lastly, pattern coding was used to identify emergent themes and explanations.

Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical considerations were implemented while conducting this research. The researcher did not include the name of the state, school district, or school sites used throughout the case study. The anonymity maintained throughout the case study was intended to not implicate the school district and its personnel, considering the sensitive nature surrounding topics of race. Additionally, the school principals facilitated the process of identifying teachers for the study. Participation was explained as voluntary, and each teacher signed a consent form. Also, the interview participants were given pseudonyms with no identifying characteristics.

Summary

In summary, the researcher conducted a qualitative case study with an ontological perspective to collect and analyze data regarding the structural, social, and identity conflict Black Males experience throughout the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum textbooks of public schools. The researcher took measures to ensure the validity and reliability of the data by using multiple sources of data to triangulate information. Those sources included (1) a critical historical analysis of K-12 education (2) Middle School ELA curriculum textbook (3) Title 1 Middle School ELA teachers (4) Title 1 Middle School ELA School/District Administrators and (5) a content analysis of demographic data and state standardized test results of Black males. The coding cycles were electronically coordinated through reputable coding software employing various coding techniques to analyze the data. The qualitative coding approaches were selected to best

investigate an answer to the study proposition summarily referred to as the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept (PICC). The concept underscores the relevance of conflict resolution studies in the identity and social development of adolescent Black males. Additionally, ethical considerations were taken to ensure the anonymity of participants, including the school district at the center of this case study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

Representation of the Black cultural identity in the K-12 educational curriculum is recognized as a factor impacting the academic success of young Black learners (Burns, 2018; Hopkins-Gillispie, 2011; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). With these considerations on the importance of identity and multicultural education, it was imperative to examine these modalities against the English Language Arts curriculum textbook used by school districts and to examine its impact on minority students. Limited inclusion of the Black cultural identity in the curriculum has potentially produced what is referred to as strangers in the classroom—young Black male students who are not reflected in the curriculum, leading to disengagement, low academic performance, and faced with disciplinary challenges (Arnett, 2000; Rios et al., 2010; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016).

The examination of ELA was selected for two main reasons. First, literacy education serves as a cultural-ideological practice that assists in developing students' cultural, social, and personal identity and self-esteem through the interplay of race and ethnicity (Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2010; Barrett-Tatum, 2015). The interplay is often reflected in all categories of text, including non-fiction, fiction, and social text, as discussed by Ritchey (2012). Second, ELA is foundational to all subjects in school because they consist of reading, writing, speaking, and listening as modalities of learning and displaying comprehension (Beach, 2011). As such, how students interpret the world is connected to their ability to decipher the figurative language, identify themes, archetypes, plot sequences, and trace and evaluate arguments presented in informational and historical text.

The previous chapters of this dissertation offered an introduction to the phenomenon of race and multicultural education in the social identity development of Black male students in middle school. The previous chapters also included a historical analysis of anti-Blackness within the K-12 American education system, the theoretical frameworks underpinning the case study research, and the methodological design for the study. In this chapter, the researcher will provide findings and thematic analysis in response to each research question. To explore the study proposition of protracted identity conflict experienced by Black male students due to racial bias in the English Language Arts curriculum, four research questions (RQ) guided the data collection and analysis:

1. RQ1: How does the public middle school English Language Arts curriculum reflect the identity and lived experiences of Black males?
2. RQ2: What criteria do administrators use to determine the language arts curriculum textbook, and what is their consideration for racial bias in the ELA curriculum?
3. RQ3: What are the perceptions of racial biases, anti-Blackness, or whiteness in the English Language Arts curriculum textbook?
4. RQ 4: What are the academic results, systemic impact, and types of conflict experienced by Black male students when their identity is not included throughout the curriculum?

Descriptive Data

The case study research took place in a major school district of the southeastern United States of America. The state's Department of Education website provides an

information portal on education statistics, including statewide, county/district, and individual school data. Within the school district, nearly 60% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch, deeming 61% of its schools as Title 1. The five-year trend data indicated 60% of the student population was economically disadvantaged. Of its high, middle, elementary, and combination schools, 22% percent of all schools were middle or combination schools that included grades 6-8. Of all its middle schools, more than 85% were listed as Title 1. According to the state's Department of Education, the student racial demographic had a five-year trend (2015-2020) of approximately 39% Black, 35% Hispanic, and 20% white. Black male and female students comprised 20%, and 19% of approximately 60,000 enrolled in its middle schools over each of the past five academic years (2015-2019), making Black students the largest demographic throughout the district and Black males the largest gender.

The participants in the study included five ELA teachers from five different Title 1 school throughout the district. Different schools throughout the northern, southeastern, eastern, and western parts of the district were selected to provide a representation of various student and teacher populations. All teachers were female with five to ten years of teaching experience. The self-identified racial demographic of the teachers included three African Americans, one Black American of Caribbean descent, and one as white American. The three district administrators included one male and two females with administrative experience ranging from four to ten years.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher used five data sources as units of analysis: (1) Title 1 Middle School English Language Arts curriculum textbook (2) a content analysis of demographic

data and state standardized test results for Black males (3) semi-structured interviews of Title 1 Middle School ELA teachers (4) semi-structured interviews of Middle School ELA School/District Administrators (5) a critical historical analysis of K-12 education. The researcher used a combination of processes to prepare for the data analysis, such as notes taken during the interviews, a coding software to analyze the data and develop themes, and the development of charts and tables to visually explore statistical trends.

Curriculum Textbook

The school district adopted the *Collections* textbook in 2015 from textbook publisher Holt McDougal (a division of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). According to the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) website, Henry O. Houghton started his own printing company called the Riverside Press in 1852. By 1864, the company of Hurd & Houghton was formed. It later purchased Crocker & Brewster in 1876, a publisher of books for schools. Two years later, in 1878, Houghton purchased Ticknor & Fields, which was now known as Osgood & Co. In 1880, George Mifflin became a full partner, and Houghton Mifflin & Co. was established. A separate department dedicated to the education market was later created in 1882. Houghton Mifflin and Co. continued to impact the education field with their teacher training book titled the Riverside Education Monographs, followed by a series of popular books from up-and-coming authors.

In 1919, Alfred Harcourt and Donald Bowe started their own publishing company with the intent to publish books dealing with contemporary ideas. Between the two companies, an array of popular, groundbreaking, and memorable books is published. Some of those books included works by Virginia Woolf, *Black Reconstruction* by W.E.B. DuBois', *Curious George* by H.A. Rey, *Mary Poppins, The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R.

Tolkien, and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. A landmark book, *Guided Reading* by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, became the definitive book on small group reading instruction for teachers. In 2007, Houghton Mifflin acquired Harcourt Education and officially became Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Its leadership in K-12 education was cemented in 2015 with the acquisition of Scholastic's EdTech, the digital curricular READ 180, MATH 180, and System 44. This teacher-led instruction and adaptive technology to personalize instruction lay the groundwork for being awarded multiple contracts with the *Collections* textbook across numerous school districts throughout the nation. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt provides online platforms for English Language Arts, Math, and teacher education and professional development for teachers.

The Common Core State Standards was established in 2009 by 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia to streamline the college and career readiness of all students. Up to 2009, school standards varied across states. In collaboration with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), “state school chiefs and governors recognized the value of consistent, real-world learning goals and launched this effort to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life” (Corestandards.org).

The *Collections* textbook was created to meet the Common Core requirements with a suite of books for grades 6-12. The textbook was named *Collections* because each book contained multiple text pieces grouped together in unity as a "collection" under a specific theme. For example, Collection 4 of the seventh-grade *Collections* textbook is

named “Risk and Exploration.” This collection features a Remarks at the *Dedication of the Aerospace Medical Health Center,* a speech by John F. Kennedy about space exploration. An original audio version of the speech accompanies the text via the HMH online platform for *Collections.* The next text piece is *Why Exploring the Ocean is Mankind’s Next Giant Leap,* a commentary on ocean exploration by Phillipe Cousteau, grandson of Jacques Cousteau. The remaining text pieces include an excerpt from the science article *Living in the Dark* by Cheryl Bardoe, discussing the life cycle of animals at the bottom of the ocean, and lastly, the poem *Your World* by Georgia Douglas Johnson.

As one can observe, each informational article deals with exploration and discovering some aspect of earth, life, space, or the ocean. The collection of informational articles leads students to a culminating persuasive essay: Is exploration worth the risk? Students are expected to pull evidence from each of the text pieces to make their argument in favor or opposition to the risks associated with exploration.

The *Collections* textbook includes a plethora of text pieces throughout each unit, including informational text, fables, Greek myth, short stories, poems, autobiographies, biographies, dramatizations, memoirs, graphic stories, infographics, journals, newspaper articles, historical novels, and personal essays. The textbook is also supported by an online platform that includes a complete online version of the book and resources for writing, grammar, and vocabulary.

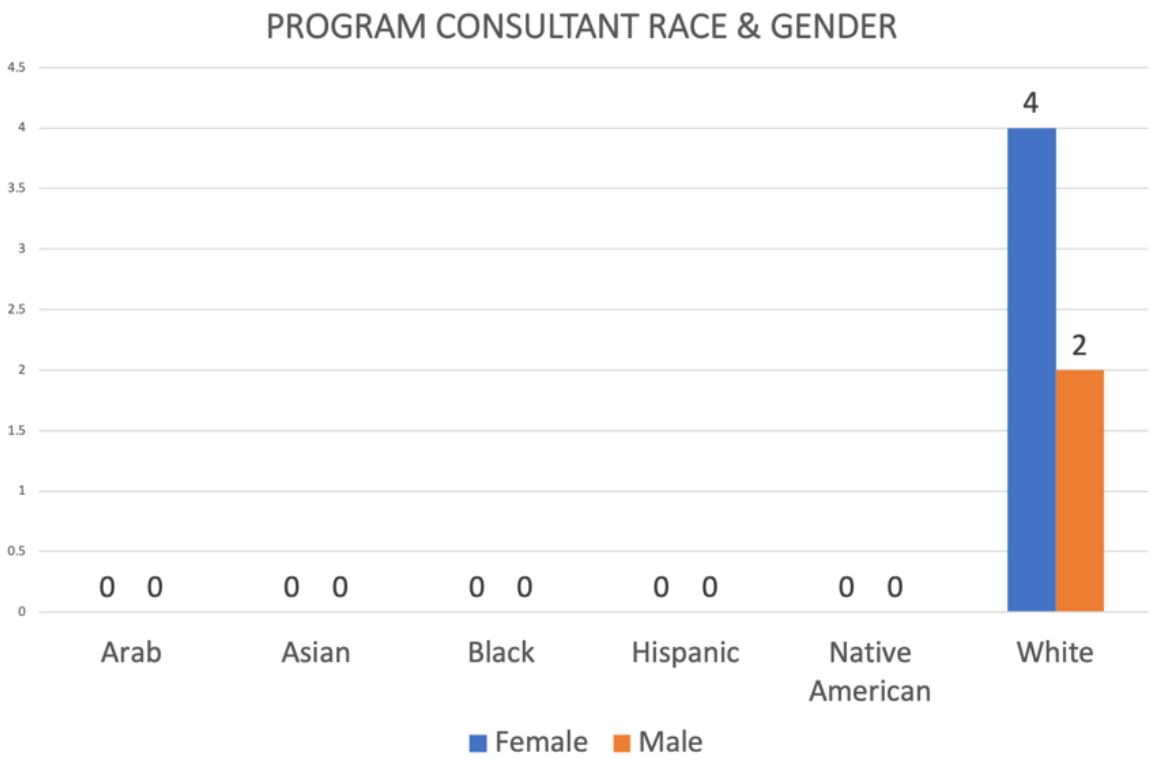
The primary source of the case study was the district-approved ELA curriculum textbook *Collections.* The *Collections* textbook, published by Holt McDougal (a division of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), contained pieces of fiction and non-fiction literary works by numerous authors. The textbook was reviewed and categorized in several categories:

the racial/ethnic and gender makeup of the consulting team and authors; the racial/ethnic content of each text piece; and the racial stereotypes, slurs, or tropes of each text piece.

According to Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2017), the program consultants, authors, and advisors "work together to choose rich, engaging, and complex texts to anchor *Collections*. They design materials that challenge and support all students in the process of becoming critical close readers and effective writers, speakers, and listeners." As reflected in Figure 1, the six highlighted program consultants found at the beginning of the *Collections* textbook are 100% white with a 67% to 33% female to male gender classification.

Figure 1

Program Consultant's Race and Gender

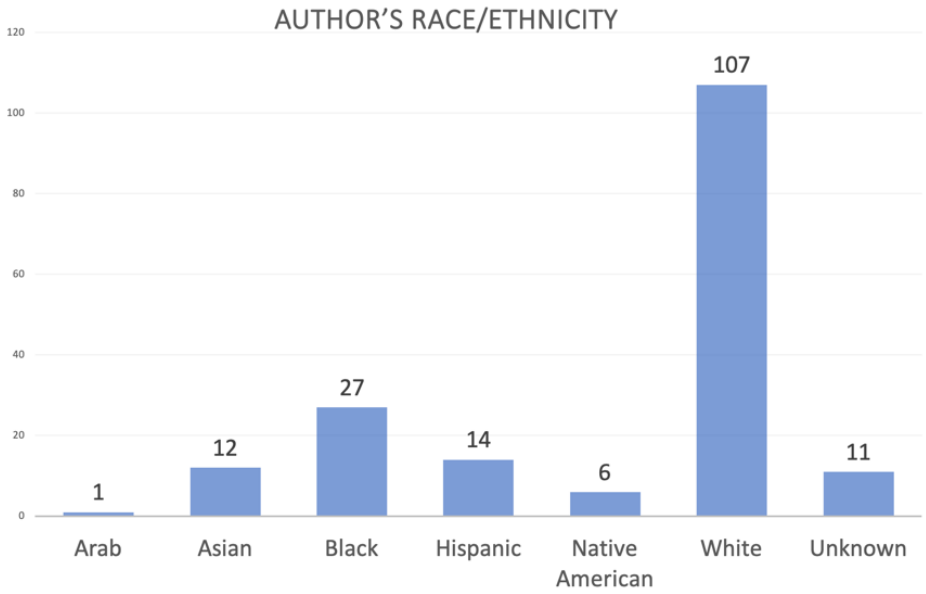


Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

The *Collections* textbook consisted of 165 literary works written by 178 authors. Text pieces were authored by one author, a group of two or more authors, or by a corporate news or magazine outlet that indicated the organization as the author. The latter were categorized as unknown. Using the biographical information provided by the textbook for each author, the researcher was able to determine the author's race or ethnicity, as reflected in Figure 2. The 107 authors identified as white constituted 60% of the demographics (see Figure 3). Meanwhile, Black authors, 27, constituted 15% of the demographic. The 14 Hispanic authors totaled 8% of the group.

Figure 2

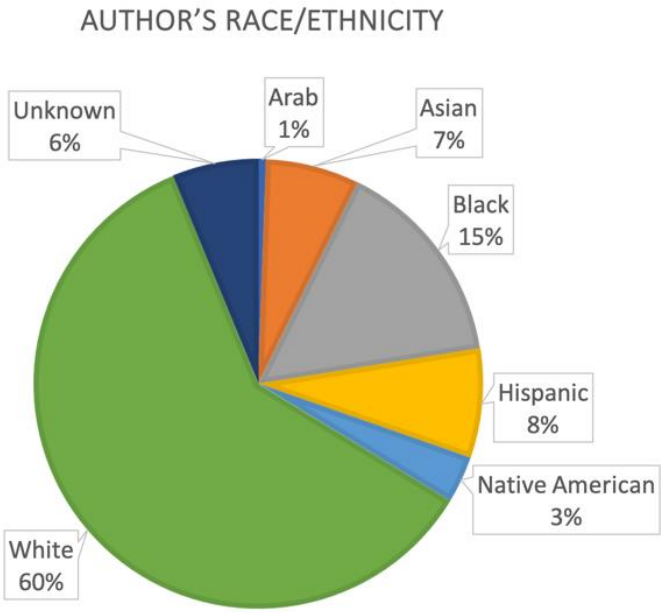
Author's Race/Ethnicity within the Middle Grades



Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

Figure 3

Author's Race/Ethnicity (%) within the Middle Grades

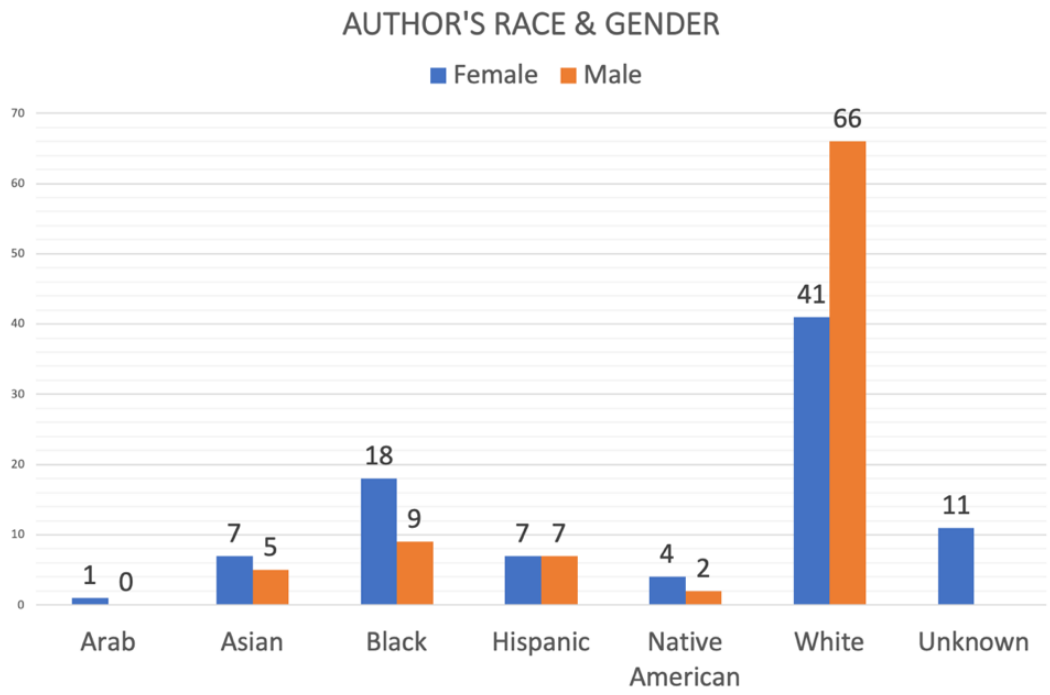


Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

The author's gender totaled 89 male, 78 female and 11 unknowns, as seen in Figure 4. White men were the largest group of authors at 37%, followed by white women at 23%, totaling 60% of all authors. Black women comprised 10%, and Black men comprised 5% of the authors. The Hispanic men and women authors comprised 4% each.

Figure 4

Author's Race/Ethnicity and Gender in the Middle Grades

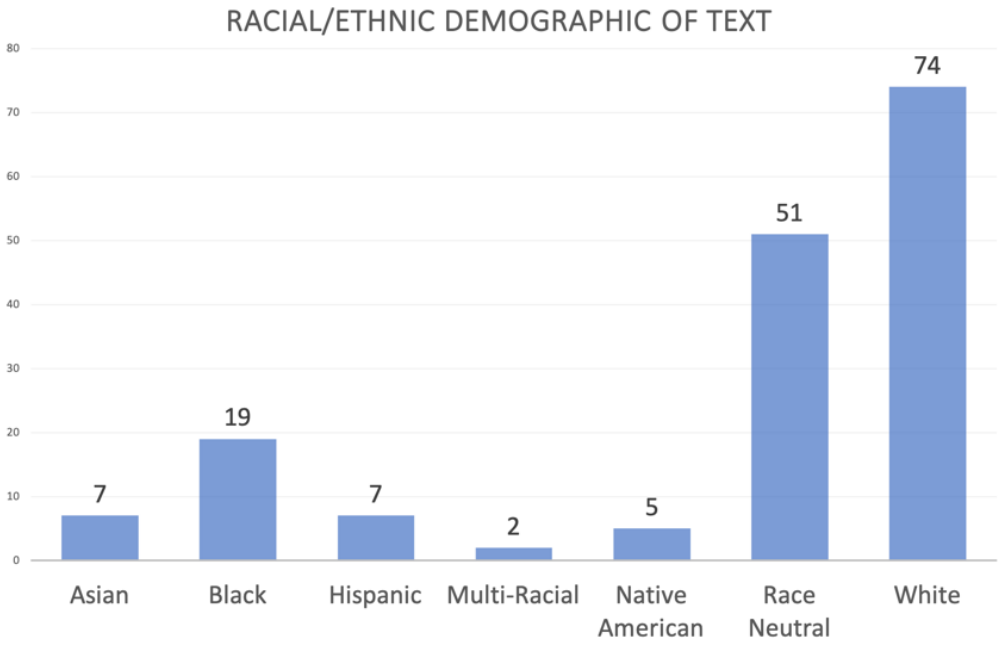


Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

The three *Collections'* textbooks for grades 6-8 combined for a total of 165 literary works, as illustrated in Figure 5. Each text piece within the textbooks was read to determine the race or ethnicity of the characters. The racial or ethnic demographic of the text pieces was determined by a combination of the author's race, the author's point-of-view in the narrative, the description of the characters, drawings of the characters, story setting, and story genre. Genres throughout *Collections* included informational text, fables, Greek myth, short stories, poems, autobiographies, biographies, dramatizations, memoirs, graphic stories, infographics, journals, newspaper articles, historical novels, and personal essays. For example, Greek myth characters, such as Achilles, are mostly white.

Figure 5

Racial/Ethnic Demographics of Text Pieces in the Middle Grades

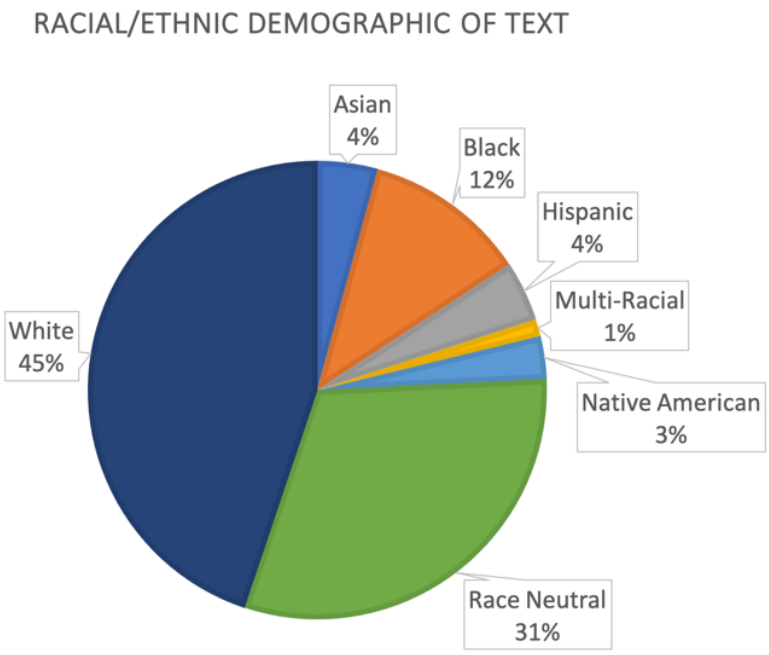


Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

A personal essay by Craig Kielburger discussed multiple characters from different racial backgrounds. Stories as such were labeled as multi-racial, only 1% of all text pieces. Fiction or non-fiction texts that did not indicate a race was labeled as race-neutral. Figure 6 indicates the researcher was not able to identify 31% of the text pieces as specific to a race or ethnicity. As reflected in Figure 5, white characters were identified as the largest race found throughout the textbook. Only 12% of the characters within the text pieces were identified as Black. Only 4% of the characters within the text pieces were identified as Hispanic.

Figure 6

Racial/Ethnic (%) Demographic of Text Pieces in the Middle Grades

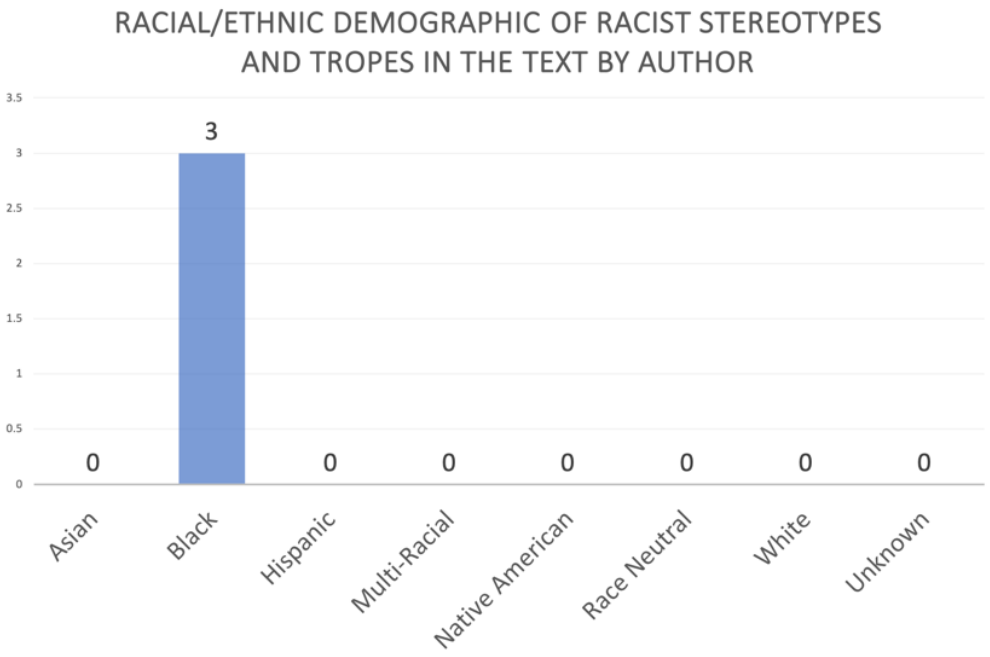


Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

As indicated in Figure 7, only three instances of racist stereotypes, slurs, or tropes were identified amongst the 165 text pieces. The three instances were each authored by a Black person. Two of the three were historical recounts of slavery, which used crass language in its recount. For example, in *The People Could Fly* by Virginia Hamilton, the subject matter of slavery and the description of slaves being whipped and defamed by phrases such as "black cow" indicated a racially charged story. The third story, *Big Things Come in Small Packages* by Eleanora E. Tate, described Black people as not knowing how to swim. That statement may be perceived as a stereotype or as written by the author in this story, which may have been a factual element of the story.

Figure 7

Racist Stereotypes, Slurs, or Tropes in the Text Pieces



Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

State Standardized Test Results

The school district administers the mandatory statewide standardized assessments each year. The assessments, which measure student success with the state's standards, include assessments in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and End-of-Course (EOC) assessments for Algebra 1 and Geometry. As noted, English Language Arts is important because it is foundational to all subjects (Beach, 2011), and it serves as a cultural-ideological shaping tool in the identity formation of students (Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2010; Barrett-Tatum, 2015). Accordingly, students' academic performance on the state-mandated standards assessment indicates, at some level, their connection to ideologies and norms of the dominant culture. The following data on the statewide standardized English Language Arts assessment include the academic years of 2014-2015 to 2018-

2019. According to the state's Department of Education portal, assessments are categorized into five achievement levels:

- Level 1: Inadequate: Highly likely to need substantial support for the next grade
- Level 2: Below Satisfactory: Likely to need substantial support for the next grade
- Level 3: Satisfactory: May need additional support for the next grade
- Level 4: Proficient: Likely to excel in the next grade
- Level 5: Mastery: Highly likely to excel in the next grade

The five-year trend data indicated Black students ranked lowest amongst their white, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and multi-racial counterparts in achieving a Level 3/satisfactory proficiency. Overall, Black students achieved a Level 3/satisfactory score or higher at an average of 35% statewide and 40% district-wide. When examining the differences amongst genders, Black males, over the past five years, averaged 29% statewide and 34% district-wide Level 3 proficiency on the standardized ELA assessment. Black females were the second lowest, with an average of 41% statewide and 47% district-wide.

Conversely, Asian females, Asian males, and white females were ranked the highest over a five-year trend in achieving a Level 3 proficiency in both statewide and district-wide ELA scorings. The average proficiency rates of Asian females were 81% statewide and 83% district-wide; Asian males were 74% statewide and 76% district-wide; white females were 69% statewide, and 76% district-wide; and white males were 69% statewide and 59% district-wide. The five-year averages of Level 3 proficiency were 49%

statewide and 58% district-wide for Hispanic students; 58% statewide and 58% district-wide for multi-racial students; 50% statewide and 61% district-wide for American Indian students; and 55% statewide and 57% district-wide for Pacific Islander students.

As stated before, Black male students show the lowest reading proficiency levels throughout the state and the school district. Collectively, Black male and female students rank last in achieving reading proficiency levels deemed on-grade level. In other words, Black male students appear to struggle the most with comprehending key ideas and details, craft and structure, and the integration of knowledge and ideas, as delineated by the state standards.

Teacher Interviews

The researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with five English Language Arts teachers who were each asked at least 12 questions to understand the teacher's observation and experiences of Black males in their classroom and those students' interactions with the textbook. Each teacher had a minimum of five years of teaching from the *Collections* textbook. The purpose of the interviews was each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. All of the interviewees were Black female teachers with 6-25 years of teaching experience.

The interviewees (both teachers and administrators) explained that due to school choice vouchers, innovative programs, magnet programs, and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) program offerings, the students enrolled at any given middle school does not necessarily reflect the population of the surrounding neighborhoods or city. Many students are bussed to different schools to participate in their choice of magnet, innovative, STEM programs or to take advantage of their school

choice voucher to enter a more competitive or higher graded school. Also, students were bussed from different parts of the county to diversify the school enrollment.

Teacher 1, Ms. Amber, has taught English Language Arts for six years using the *Collections* textbook at a Title 1 middle school. Ms. Amber has also served as the literacy department chair, providing her access to school committees and leadership discussions regarding English Language Arts and Reading. For the past five academic years, Ms. Amber estimated Black males comprised more than 40% of their teaching load of approximately 120 students each academic year. At the school site of Ms. Amber, the state's Department of Education reported the five-year average of student enrollment by race was 47% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 27% white. Additionally, an average of 68% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged. Responses to the following five key questions provided insight on the teacher's perspective on the academic performance of Black males, the identity and experiences of Black males reflected throughout the curriculum, the *Collections* textbook data, and the impact of role modeling for Black males:

Table 1

Teacher Interview Responses (Ms. Amber)

Interview questions	Teacher Responses
Q3. What do you attribute the low academic performance of Black male students to?	"I think, well, I know, without a doubt, it's we have not done a good job at creating a culturally competent school. Secondly, when I speak of cultural competence, the students do not have any references or any examples of what they encounter in the real world when they sit in the classroom. It's they can't build any relationship with the material or the content at all like they have no idea what's going on. Those are not their lived experiences, so they cannot build... they cannot relate to it. There's no relevance to their lives and their experiences. And, besides that, the third reason they underperform is that

	teachers don't tend to try to build a relationship with them."
Q6. In what ways do you feel the English Language Arts curriculum reflects the identity of Black males?	"It doesn't. It just doesn't. And that's just it…There's Tom Sawyer, all boys can be a little mysterious, but that that story is rooted in like in deep South when there was technical, there was like a Black boy that was their housekeeper slave and a little recording of it." So, there's nothing uplifting about any of the stories, and this is from 8th grade. Like there's nothing uplifting."
Q8. How effective do you believe the English language arts curriculum is at connecting to the lived experiences of Black males in your classroom?	"It doesn't. It doesn't. Percent, probably 1%, because they know to read. They know about Tom Sawyer. And a lot of them are immigrants, and they understand the immigrant part with that collection. I'm thinking through. I wouldn't go above 10% at all."
Q9. After reviewing the data of the *Collections* textbook, what do you believe is the effect of this outcome on Black male students?	"But just seeing this, for me, I think it underpins a lot of what I already knew and understood, but it's making it more of a reality. So, then as a teacher, I take that, and I try to understand, "How am I going to have a student read something or be engaged and highly focused on something that is of zero interest?" But in terms of reading with that one factor of them are already at a deficit because they're not reading on grade level, and that fear, it's another layer being added to that when it's not relatable at all."
Q12. Do you see positive role-modeling in the curriculum that reflects the black male experience or identity, and what is the impact of that?	"No, not at all. I sit, and I think about my Black male students, and I think it's just a subconscious thing that it creates. They don't see themselves in the text. They don't see anything close, like remotely close to anything about their lived experiences. So, for them, it's like, "Yeah, this isn't it. Let me just do what I need to do to get by so I can get what I want. Because I turn on the TV, I'm going to see a Black male playing basketball. I'm going to see it." And so, it shapes their perception of who they are, who they can be, the heights that they can reach. It's creating these notions and these perspectives like for them. I think it's sucky, even saying this for me, like saying that out loud is making me realize like it's really messed up. But yeah, they don't see themselves in the text, so they don't think it's for them."

Teacher 2, Ms. Brown, has taught English Language Arts for 16 years. Ms. Brown has taught for the past five years using the *Collections* textbook at a Title 1 middle school. For the past five academic years, Ms. Brown estimated Black males comprised more than 60% of their teaching load of approximately 120 students each academic year. Ms. Brown has also taught a male-only Language Arts Class as part of a pilot program for gender-based learning. At the school site of Ms. Brown, the state's Department of Education reported the five-year average of student enrollment by race was 72% Black, 21% Hispanic, and 3.5% white. Additionally, an average of 85% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged. Responses to the following five key questions provided insight on the teacher's perspective on the academic performance of Black males, the identity and experiences of Black males reflected throughout the curriculum, the *Collections* textbook data, and the impact of role modeling for Black males:

Table 2

Teacher Interview Responses (Ms. Brown)

Interview questions	Teacher Responses
Q3. What do you attribute the low academic performance of Black male students to?	"A lot of things, but lack of motivation, stories they can't connect with, not getting the support that they probably need, outside environment. It's like a plethora of things that could affect performance, but [inaudible] of them. Few of the major ones."
Q6. In what ways do you feel the English Language Arts curriculum reflects the identity of Black males?	"In some ways, they try. Like, they have the Frederick Douglass story there in the 8th-grade curriculum, and it shows strength. It shows perseverance. It shows tenacity. It shows a lot of things in that one story. But are there enough examples? I don't know if it does enough to kind of say anything about the identity of a Black male. But I think it should. I think there should be more. But I don't think it does enough of that. And we definitely need those images. We need those messages. As most of the time,

	when they even talk about Blackness at all in the textbooks, it's like slavery, which, like I remember, *The People Could Fly* in there. And then you got Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. But it's all slavery. Like, we're more...that was a period in the life of Black people. But there's so much more to us than slavery. And I definitely don't think the textbooks go anywhere near beyond that."
Q8. How effective do you believe the English language arts curriculum is at connecting to the lived experiences of Black males in your classroom?	"It's not so effective. Because like what I more depend on Language Arts for with students is to teach them language and the art of language, you know I mean? Like, and lesson teaching them culture. Because it is clear, if you were to flip through the collections, that you're not going to... you can't use that and that alone to teach a Black male anything about being a Black male."
Q9. After reviewing the data of the *Collections* textbook, what do you believe is the effect of this outcome on Black male students?	"This is sad, and that maybe they should create books that match the statistics of the district, the numbers that we have in the district. There might need to be something put together. I don't know. Like FUBU, for us, by us."
Q12. Do you see positive role-modeling in the curriculum that reflects the black male experience or identity, and what is the impact of that?	"Tiny little, like I said, a little bit. But then some of the things are not easy to understand. They really had to even break down the text to understand the role model. I'm thinking of the Frederick Douglass thing. His language was so heavy with the vocabulary that before you could get his message, which is a positive one way, you had to break it down first. They can't see themselves beyond where they are right here right now. Seeing people that look like you do big things and experience these things that you would never see on your block or in your neighborhood, it's like is an eye-opener. So, I think that would definitely help. And when you don't see that, then you can only see where you are in this moment and not look beyond that. And then it kind of stifles them from dreaming."

Teacher 3, Ms. Green, has taught English Language Arts for 25 years. Ms. Green has taught for the past six years using the *Collections* textbook at a Title 1 middle school. For the past five academic years, Ms. Green estimated Black males comprised about 70% of their teaching load of approximately 120 students each academic year. At the school

site of Ms. Green, the state's Department of Education reported the five-year average of student enrollment by race was 72% Black, 19% Hispanic, and 4% white. Additionally, an average of 83% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged. Responses to the following five key questions provided insight on the teacher's perspective on the academic performance of Black males, the identity and experiences of Black males reflected throughout the curriculum, the *Collections* textbook data, and the impact of role modeling for Black males:

Table 3

Teacher Interview Responses (Ms. Green)

Interview questions	Teacher Responses
Q3. What do you attribute the low academic performance of Black male students to?	"They don't have the resources. They don't have the drive."
Q6. In what ways do you feel the English Language Arts curriculum reflects the identity of Black males?	"Unfortunately, it does not. It is so... I have to always go outside of the curriculum to try to pull something in to get them to... like I said, a lot of them are sports. A lot of them are not even about race. Based on whatever we're working on, not one thing, as long as I've been teaching, actually caters to our Black boys, except things that I had to bring to the front. Since I've been in the school system, Black History might almost does not exist as far as curriculum. It used to be infiltrated where we had a chance to stop and say, "Okay, let's do this for this month of February." But as of late, the last ten years, nothing, not a peep. They may have a show that used to be during class. Now it's like in the evening and is voluntary. So, I was like, "What happened?"
Q8. How effective do you believe the English language arts curriculum is at connecting to the lived experiences of Black males in your classroom?	"I will say it's no connection. If I let them by themselves, they wouldn't touch that book. I definitely know that. If I said, "Hey, turn to page 15 and start on the top to the bottom doing such and such," they sat there and looked at me like, "Are you serious? What do you mean? What do I start? What is this about?" In that book, I had to bring in other things, and I had to modify everything from the

	background all the way down for those boys. Because they didn't see anything that looked like them in it. The vocabulary was well above what they were experiencing. The real-life things, like, for example, I taught in 6th grade, 7th, and 8th. So, the 7th grade definitely was complex. That is the most challenging part of collections because they have to do so much."
Q9. After reviewing the data of the *Collections* textbook, what do you believe is the effect of this outcome on Black male students?	"We never give them a chance to go back to that identity thing and reevaluate themselves or re reconnect with who they are, what they look like. They only get the bits and pieces when I spoon feed it to them as much as I possibly can. And our boys don't say that. If you don't ask, they don't say. I read a story that I was so shocked when the lady said, "We were not even meant to be in the classroom and in schools as Black Americans. They didn't think we should even be in the classroom. They kept us out." So, when I look at that, heard that in my head, and I'm looking at this, I'm not surprised."
Q12. Do you see positive role-modeling in the curriculum that reflects the black male experience or identity, and what is the impact of that?	"It's not. If I don't see me, and I don't hear you talk about me positively, if I don't see an example of a story in here about me, then I'm not serious about what I'm doing because I'm not reflected in this text." I would think they won't buy in as much or as quickly. Like I said, if they see me if I'm telling them to do it because of who I am and how I represent myself, then they'll listen to me. They'll buy in quicker. But if another color, they do not take it as seriously. Unless again, they also try to. So, it has to be represented in some form or fashion. If it's not in the text, it has to be visual."

Teacher 4, Ms. Rose, has taught English Language Arts for 17 years. Ms. Rose has taught for the past six years using the *Collections* textbook at a Title 1 middle school. Ms. Rose has also taught advanced students and lower-level students. For the past five academic years, Ms. Rose estimated Black males comprised about 50% of their teaching load of approximately 120 students each academic year. At the school site of Ms. Rose, the state's Department of Education reported the five-year average of student enrollment by race was 59% Black, 25% Hispanic, and 11% white. Additionally, an average of 80%

of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged. Responses to the following five key questions provided insight on the teacher's perspective on the academic performance of Black males, the identity and experiences of Black males reflected throughout the curriculum, the *Collections* textbook data, and the impact of role modeling for Black males:

Table 4

Teacher Interview Responses (Ms. Rose)

Interview questions	Teacher Responses
Q3. What do you attribute the low academic performance of Black male students to?	"I think it's confident, and I just think it's a lack of skill. I think with confidence; you only gain confidence by being engaged. Something is interesting. And I think that has been the biggest problem. Textbooks are not interesting. So, it's easy for them to just say, well, this is not interesting, and I'm just gonna fall back into old habits. I know what's in it. A play, some non-fiction, a poem, some weird art that I'm supposed to ask a question about. They look exactly the same. Why does teaching in 2021 look the same as teaching when I was in school? Or teaching materials?"
Q6. In what ways do you feel the English Language Arts curriculum reflects the identity of Black males?	"Zero. They're either magical Negroes, or it's the civil rights movement to which they don't connect to. It's valuable, but they don't connect to it. I don't see Black Lives Matter anywhere in the textbooks. That's something those kids care about, and even then, they don't care about it as much as they care about their social media, but that's something a little more than they can identify with. But textbooks zero."
Q8. How effective do you believe the English language arts curriculum is at connecting to the lived experiences of Black males in your classroom?	"Not at all, zero. But by and large, it this idea that the only way that we can educate black people is to educate them to remind them that they were slaves or to remind them that at any moment, they could be falsely accused and put in jail. That is not what white children learn."
Q9. After reviewing the data of the *Collections* textbook, what do you	[The student thinks.] "I don't count. I don't matter."

believe is the effect of this outcome on Black male students?	
Q12. Do you see positive role-modeling in the curriculum that reflects the black male experience or identity, and what is the impact of that?	"No. It's probably one of the most important things. We're allowed to have black girl magic. It's a thing. It's a real thing out there—black girl magic. Black girls, we have our attitude that we can get. It can be toxic, but we have it, and it's okay. Black men don't have it. The idea to be emotional, no, it's a lot of competition. It's a lot of embarrassment and what you do and don't know, at least from my perspective, and just not enough. When you see how these kids gravitate towards their black male teachers, it's incredible. It's they want it. They need it. Even if they give them a hard time. They look at how black men perform for their coaches. And then they'll come in class and be a complete jerk to somebody else, but that coach can tell them to do something, and they're going to do it. There's something they're getting from that."

Teacher 5, Ms. Teal, has taught for 16 years within the school system, including English Language Arts and intensive reading for the past six years using the *Collections* textbook at a Title 1 middle school. Ms. Teal has also held a leadership role within the literacy department. Additionally, Ms. Teal broadens the scope of the research having had the benefit of also being an intensive reading teacher. For the past five academic years, Ms. Teal estimated Black males comprised more than 50% of their teaching load of approximately 110 students each academic year. At the school site of Ms. Teal, the state's Department of Education reported the five-year average of student enrollment by race was 81% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 2% white. Additionally, an average of 84% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged. The responses to the following five key questions provided tremendous insight on the teacher's perspective on the academic performance of Black males, the identity and experiences of Black males

reflected throughout the curriculum, the *Collections* textbook data, and the impact of role modeling for Black males:

Table 5

Teacher Interview Responses (Ms. Teal)

Interview questions	Teacher Responses
Q3. What do you attribute the low academic performance of Black male students to?	"Those foundational skills have been skipped. So, at some point, as the students have gotten older, of course, they're in a higher grade level. What teacher thinks, "I need to go back and teach Phonics with the students in the 4th and 5th grade?" And they continue on with those big gaps. Some of its behavior because they're frustrated at some point in time. And I will say, a lot of male students that I have connected to, even in the high school, behaviors have developed, and they're very defensive…those are the students that I reached for the most, that I've developed relationships with them. They're ashamed. They're upset. So, "I'm not good at academics. Let me just act out in some way. Maybe the class clown. Or let me just be the defiant one." I have seen some students who have been able to overcome that. And through intensive, intensive support, they've increased. But most often, I don't see that."
Q6. In what ways do you feel the English Language Arts curriculum reflects the identity of Black males?	"I don't think there are an abundance of texts or stories that, as a young Black male, I see myself in that, that's me. I believe there are some situations in some texts and stories that, "Oh, I've done that. I've done that before. I've been to that place, possibly." But I don't see them seeing themselves like looking in a mirror and seeing me as that young Black man. But I think they can relate to what that person may have done."
Q8. How effective do you believe the English language arts curriculum is at connecting to the lived experiences of Black males in your classroom?	"They're disengaged. They're disengaged. "If I can't connect and be in relation to it, I'm disengaged." However, the teacher does have the power to use that and draw in other resources to make those connections. That's what a good teacher does. You don't rely on just that text because whose perspective is it being told from?"
Q9. After reviewing the data of the *Collections* textbook, what do you	"I think our text tends to look at... that particular *Collections* looks at the literary elements and what's needed to teach, but not thinking about who the audience

believe is the effect of this outcome on Black male students?	is. You're looking at a typical, what they would think would be anyone who can relate to... it's taken from the white perspective. Even when they're giving texts that deal with African Americans, it's not necessarily from the perspective of that reader, that African American young man. I'm not surprised at the data at all. I'm just not…"
Q12. Do you see positive role-modeling in the curriculum that reflects the black male experience or identity, and what is the impact of that?	"That our students can relate to today? No. I think one of the greatest impacts is the students have an unwillingness, not ready to work, "Oh my gosh, we're going to read this again? Another story." I want them to be excited about what they're reading, knowing like, "Oh, my gosh, that was great. What's next?" When they don't have a reason to want to open that book, they're not going to."

Administrator Interviews

The four school/district administrators interviewed for this case study included two men and two women. Their race and ethnicity comprised of Black, Hispanic, and white. Each participant boasted more than 20 years of experience in K-12 education as classroom teachers, school leaders, and district personnel. The administrators described the importance of English Language Arts and their consideration for multicultural education.

Table 6

Administrator Interview Responses

Administrator Callahan	Response
Q1. What is important to you about teaching and learning English Language Arts.	"My goal when I was an ELA classroom teacher when I was a middle school teacher was to expose students to a very wide variety of literary pieces. Everything from classic pieces up to modern-day pieces. Things they could relate to and things they couldn't relate to but needed to learn about so that they could relate to it later in the big bad world. I had a huge focus on writing in my classroom, more so than a focus on reading instruction. My focus was on writing from what we've read. A very big believer that success comes to people who can express themselves and communicate through writing, whether it's through an email, through a letter to the editor, or through an essay of any sort. And not

	just to get them through college, but in the workforce of how important writing skills are. I'm still a huge believer in that."
Administrator Morgan	Response
Q1. What is important to you about teaching and learning English Language Arts.	"My view of ELA is inclusive of the ELA classroom, English Language classroom, and the Intensive Reading classroom. And so, I say that part of it is understanding who your learners are and understanding the needs that they bring with them. And in addition to the curriculum side, the academic side, there's also the social, emotional learning side. And that includes Teacher SEL, and addition to Students SEL, and things like equity, culturally responsive pedagogy, and wrapping it up altogether, versus considering it as something separate. So, one of the things that's very important to me is addressing the cognitive side, as well as the conative side or that social, emotional learning."
Administrator Hall	Response
Q1. What is important to you about teaching and learning English Language Arts.	"The first one is about appreciation. And the second one is about connection. So, nothing lives in isolation. And nothing is really, really static. When it comes to thought, language, words, literature, history, culture, all of that kind of stuff. There's so much dynamism in it all. There's so much perspective in it all. And there are so many connections between at all that there's almost there's a humility that's required when you're approaching the learning process when it comes to language, and when it comes to literature, and when it comes to history, and when it comes to culture. And so, the two things that are uppermost for me in teaching and learning are just appreciating the perspectives, the variety, the context, and recognizing, within that same context, the connections to time in place. I can't separate the text from the connections that are related to that text. And so, it's that appreciation for the language, and what that language offers revealed, and the connections of... without that, I don't think real learning can take place. I just think it's exposure, but I don't think it's real learning."

When asked do you think that the curriculum textbook reflects the identity of Black males, the district administrators gave varied responses. Administrator Callahan indicated the identity of Black boys and girls were unauthentically represented. It was

described as Black stories not being told by Black authors. Administrator Morgan indicated the text was not responsible for the representation of the readers, however, "it's important that it's supplemented with the voices of whoever's in the classroom" because the textbook from companies must be as generic as possible. Administrator Hall discussed the challenges of including diverse voices in the text due to how broad diversity as a subject can be. For example, should diverse voices in the text be pulled from an African American or Caribbean author, and if the Caribbean, what about the Afro-Latin text pieces?

Historical Analysis

As discussed throughout the literature review, Holst (2020) describes race, racism, or racial supremacy as a construct of material benefits, winners, and losers. Holst (2020) notes the social construct of race flourishes by an expanding accumulation of wealth from which these material privileges can be drawn. The American education school system was built within the social construct of white privilege. Specifically, in organizing urban schools as a "one best" system, the inclusion of Black students as their own subculture with their own needs was eliminated (Donato & Lazerson, 2000; Tyack, 1974). The racial script and stratification for non-white groups within the school system create a structure of inequality in which proximity to whiteness affects the sourcing and distribution of valuable resources for learning (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Pais et al., 2012; Pearman II & Swain, 2017).

Additionally, due to the racialized past of the American education system, education researchers see the roadmap to connecting to Black students as different from other students (Kafele, 2012; Kumah-Abiwu1, 2019; Noguera, 2003). Albeit Black males

constitute a much smaller percentage of the American population, Noguera (2008) notes the constant discussion of Black males in research. Why such an interest in Black males? Charles Mills's (1997) article regarding the Racial Contract discusses the ontological relationship between Whites in America as the subject and Black people in America as the object and the racial implications it has within educational practices and policies.

Moreover, low academic performance is an amalgamation of factors including behavioral issues, teacher expectations, cultural differences in the behavioral expectations of students and teachers, language differences, and poverty (Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Gregory et al., 2010). According to the UCLA Civil Rights Projects (2020, p. 6):

- Black students are far more segregated from white students now than in the civil rights era but attend school with many more Latinos.
- In 1991, the typical Black student was in a school with a third white student but now only one fourth. However, the Latino share is up from 9% to 21% in the same time span. In the South, at its peak, about 42 percent of Black students were in majority-white schools; that percentage has declined to 27%.
- Illinois and New York State have the highest concentration of Black students with other Black students, 76% on average in both states. Black students are often isolated from white and middle-class students, attending schools with other non-white groups in concentrated poverty. In these states, Black students have the highest average percentage of Black classmates.
- Among the nation's 20 largest school districts, Black students have the least contact with white students in Chicago, followed by Dallas, Miami, and Prince George's County, MD, each with an average of less than 4% Whites.

Findings

The researcher used five units of analysis: (1) Title 1 Middle School English Language Arts curriculum textbook (2) a content analysis of demographic data and state standardized test results for Black males, 3) semi-structured interviews of Title 1 Middle School ELA teachers (4) semi-structured interviews of Middle School ELA School/District Administrators (5) a critical historical analysis of K-12 education. The data was coded using in vivo, values coding versus coding, code mapping, and pattern coding. The researcher read and coded each transcript, created charts, and provided an overview of the data. To arrive at the themes, the data sources were sifted through, organized by color-code, grouped by similar ideas using the cutting and sorting technique, and organized according to (1) how often it appears and (2) how pervasive it is across different types of cultural ideas and practices" (Bernard & Ryan, 2010 p. 55). The analysis was used to develop the major themes of the study in response to the four research questions:

1. RQ1: How does the public middle school English Language Arts curriculum reflect the identity and lived experiences of Black males?
2. RQ2: What criteria do administrators use to determine the language arts curriculum, and what is their consideration for racial bias in the ELA curriculum?
3. RQ3: What are the perceptions of racial biases, anti-Blackness, or whiteness in the English Language Arts curriculum textbook?

4. RQ4: What are the academic results, systemic impact, and types of conflict experienced by Black male students when their identity is not included throughout the curriculum?

The analysis was conducted to explore the study proposition of protracted identity conflict experienced by Black male students due to racial bias in the English Language Arts curriculum. The following four sections will present the data sources used to answer each research question and present the corresponding themes. A sample from the data will be provided to corroborate the theme.

Research Question 1. The researcher used the data from the *Collections* textbook, the teacher interviews, administrator interviews, and standardized testing data to answer RQ1. Three themes emerged from the data that addressed this question: relationship building, teacher responsibility, and the impact of low reading scores. Theme 1 focused on the significance of teachers building relationships with students. Theme 2 focused on the teacher's responsibility to provide supplemental content. Theme 3 focused on the impact of low reading levels and creating a connection to the text pieces with supplemental content.

Results from the teacher interviews specified three main factors affecting the interplay of Black males, the classroom teacher, and the Collections textbook. Each teacher indicated Black males demonstrated a strong level of disengagement with the text due to the lack of representation. To address this lack of representation in the text or the student's classroom experience, teachers highlighted the following. First, the better the relationship was with the students, the better the student's learning outcome. As such, teachers were responsible for getting to know their students and building effective

relationships with them. Ms. Amber stated, "They underperform because teachers don't tend to try to build a relationship with them." Ms. Green stated, "Once they know when they come in my classroom, there's a routine that I'm going to expect you to do this, this, and this, I had a little problem. They'll goof off every now and then, but once they really believed that I was there for them, I did not have an issue with them making that grade or putting forth that effort."

Second, the teachers noted the importance of procuring supplemental content to assist students in creating a connection to the text. Ms. Brown stated, "I would try to find like something from a current event to kind of try to bring something that's happening now and try to connect it to whatever was going on in a story or try to compare it to a real-life issue." However, they also noted time restraints as a challenge to procuring supplemental content from sources outside of the textbook. The mandate to use the *Collections* textbook took up most of that time. Overall, their time was limited to effectively do both: build relationships and supplement while following through on the mandate to move through the curriculum at a particular pace. Ms. Green elaborated, "It is difficult…well because it's not a lot out there. And it's the hardest thing. I think it's because of the timing. If we were to substitute something, because I think it would be more so of, how do we time this so that we don't knock everything off the curriculum?" Administrator Callahan corroborated time as an ongoing challenge, "One thing that I think all teachers will agree with is that we simply don't have time in this profession. And that's a big part of this also of not seeing the changes that we need to see. So, I don't categorize it as is it hard work? I think it's timely, time-consuming work."

However, teachers who also served as department chairs insisted teachers make the time to provide supplemental reading content. Ms. Amber stated, “This is a part of the responsibility that we took on as educators. I would hate to think that if there's a doctor who works from 9:00 to 3:00 and at 3:05, I walk in his door and I think I'm having a heart attack, “I get off the clock at 3. Sorry.” It's the same thing with education. I mean, there are some things that we just have to be willing to do. That's the nature of the game. Education is serious, and it does take a lot out of you. It's sacrifice.”

Lastly, the teachers discussed the challenges associated with the low reading levels of Black males. Whether by lack of motivation, resources, skills, or support from their parents or guardians, low reading comprehension levels created another level of challenge in building student-teacher relationships and making connections to the text. Ms. Rose stated, “You get to middle school, that is where reading goes to die. Because we think they need to be grown up now. They're changing classes. We have to use the textbook or test, test, test, test." The standardized testing data indicated Black male students showed the lowest reading proficiency levels throughout the state and the school district. Collectively, Black male and female students ranked last in achieving reading proficiency levels deemed on-grade level. In other words, Black male students appear to struggle the most with comprehending key ideas and details, craft and structure, and the integration of knowledge and ideas, as delineated by the state standards. Ms. Teal described, "…reading is that missing piece for many of our Black students who have those gaps. Those are our level 1s, our level 2s. Those students aren't going to be successful in ELA if we don't meet those reading needs." Table 7 shows additional feedback from teachers regarding the teacher's responsibility for building effective

relationships with their students, the teacher's responsibility for providing supplemental information, and the teacher's reaction to the low-reading comprehension levels of Black males.

Table 7

Thematic Data for Research Question 1

Theme	Data
Relationship building	Ms. Rose: “They're growing up in a different world where social acceptance is even greater because it's like global. So, I can't even compete with stuff like that. So, I don't even bother. I'm not going to use Barack Obama as my example because he's a little bit too, you know like people call him elite. But you know, he's a little bit outside of he did not have an easy life by any means, but they don't connect to that. That's like somebody's granddaddy." Ms. Teal: I think the biggest factor is that teacher, being able to connect with that teacher. "Does that teacher relate to who I am? Do they understand who I am?" And unfortunately, there are many teachers who can't connect in some schools. I'm sure because you don't know what it's like to be a young Black man if you're not a young Black male yourself or if you have not grown up around young Black males. How can you connect to them? So, you have to be willing to take that time to learn the culture, to be around that culture. And I think that's what's important. They need somebody that they can relate to, in some way."
Teacher responsibility	Ms. Teal: "I think it's the teachers, they have to do the back work. I think they just have to. They just can't sit in that, "Okay, this is what the textbook says. This is what I'm going to do," because then all of those other problems, like I previously said, are going to start, we're going to head. Kids are not going to be involved. The kids are going to start misbehaving because behavior is not a cause. This is really a symptom of something else. The lesson is boring, the kids are not... they don't care what we're talking about. So, they're going to start finding something to entertain themselves with. That's what I think the teacher's role is."

Low reading scores	Ms. Amber: "The fear of reading and not being able to comprehend what's going on. Or even the vocabulary, that's like a big problem for them, like a really, really big problem. So, I think it's them coming face to face with all of more or less these things that they see as their weaknesses." Ms. Green: "They don't practice. They don't study. They don't have anyone to kind of drive that into how important it is to just pick up a book at one point in your life and just read because you want to read this book, not because somebody's standing over you. But they don't have the love or the passion or the resources to read. And if they don't read at all, and except when they come in my room, they don't have the background, they don't have what they need to continue reading without me." Ms. Rose: "…if you're a struggling reader, you might be able to read it, but then you forgot to listen to what you are reading. So, you don't really know what you read, but you read it.

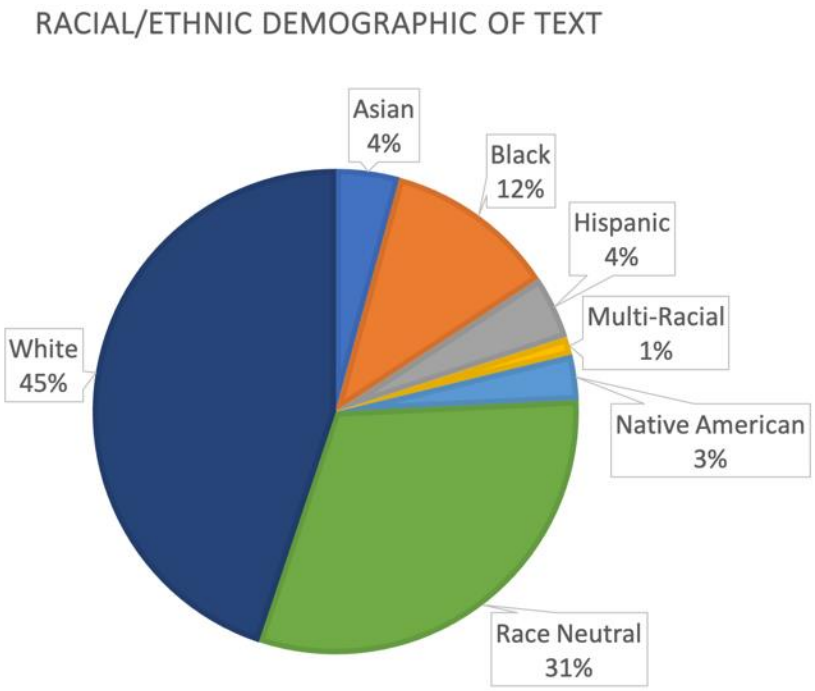
Overall, the teacher's impression of the text was consistent with the *Collections* data. According to the data on the racial demographic of the text pieces throughout *Collections* (Figure 6), Whites had the highest representation throughout the textbook. White characters were identified in 45% of the text pieces. Black characters were identified in 12% of the text pieces. Hispanic characters were identified in 4% of the text pieces. Race-neutral text pieces constituted 31% of the text pieces. Ms. Amber stated:

> "I sit, and I think about my Black male students, and I think it's just a subconscious thing that it creates. They don't see themselves in the text. They don't see anything close, like remotely close to anything about their lived experiences. So, for them, it's like, "Yeah, this isn't it. Let me just do what I need to do to get by so I can get what I want. Because I turn on the TV, I'm going to see a Black male playing basketball. I'm going to see it." And so, it shapes their

perception of who they are, who they can be, the heights that they can reach. It's creating these notions and these perspectives like for them. I think it's sucky; even saying this for me, like saying that out loud, is making me realize like it's really messed up. But yeah, they don't see themselves in the text, so they don't think it's for them."

Figure 8

Racial/Ethnic (%) Demographic of Text Pieces in the Middle Grades



Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

Research Question 2. The researcher used the data from the administrative interviews, the statewide academic standards, and the textbook adoption rubric (provided by the administrators) to answer RQ2. Two themes emerged from the data that addressed this question: multiculturalism and skills-based learning. Theme 1 focused on the curriculum selection criteria for multiculturalism. Theme 2 focused on skill development as the role of middle school English Language Arts. Two areas of the administrator

interviews were abstracted to develop the themes: First, the administrator's consideration for the identity of Black boys and girls in the textbook adoption process and second, the administrator's perspective on the *Collections* textbook data.

Regarding theme 1, the consideration for the Black cultural identity in the textbook was based on the textbook adoption process. The English Language Arts textbook adoption process was comprised of a committee of teachers and district personnel who reviewed submissions from corporate companies through a formal bidding process with the school district. The process was guided by a rubric called the Adoption Review Evaluation Form, which outlines specific benchmarks for the textbooks under the categories of Content, Instruction, Teacher Support Materials, Assessment, Format/Organization, and Digital Components. Each category has a list of expectations referred to as indicators. These indicators are scored on a rating from 1-4, with 4 being the best possible point and one being unsatisfactory. There are a total of 49 indicators.

Out of the 49 indicators in the adoption rubric, which outline specific expectations to be provided by the textbook, only three questions addressed multiculturalism. The first indicator was located under the Content category: "diversity across cultures and other educational content areas are thoroughly integrated." The second indicator was found in the Instruction category: "teaching strategies, materials and resources address the needs for all students (ESE, ELL, and Multiple Learning Styles)." The third indicator was found in the Format/Organization category: "content portrays equity among gender, ethnicity, age, work situations, and multicultural groups." Administrator Callahan discussed the competition amongst various groups for representation in the text, making the fulfillment of the Format/Organization category rigorous for committee members.

Administrator Morgan stated the consideration for the Black cultural identity in the textbook adoption process was framed as "culturally responsive to students." Administrator Morgan further stated, "Along with that, have to make sure that the people [committee members] that are examining it are also versed in culturally responsive pedagogy. And so, that is an important piece. Also, making sure that the text the students are reading, whether it's within the curriculum, or the novels that they're reading are culturally responsive."

Administrator Hall further explained the process as not beholden to a specific micro demographic but reflective of multiple cultures. They stated, "So, whether it's Hispanic or Latin cultures or Black cultures or Asian cultures or whatever, it has to have a diverse representation. We only look at whether or not it has multiple dimensions of diversity." Administrator Hall also explained, "we don't select the curriculum; we review the options that have been selected for us by the powers that be." Before the textbook adoption committee convenes, textbook publishers must first "meet the requirements of the state, and they have to meet the requirements of the school board."

According to the statewide standards, the requirements for middle grades English Language Arts for career and college readiness included citing textual evidence, determining a theme or central idea, analyzing the development of ideas, providing the summary of the text, and analyzing elements of a story. Again, they determine the meanings of words and phrases, analyze the form and structure of dramas and poems, analyze an author's points of view, compare and contrast multiple formats of text, audio, drama, and poems. In addition, they write informative essays to examine a topic and convey ideas and write argumentative essays with clear reasons and evidence. Textbook

companies must provide a textbook that captures these elements plus more as dictated by the state. Administrator Hall explained the book options are tremendously narrowed down before it even gets to a study of the curriculum itself."

> "We get a lot of pressure from different groups to make sure that there's a representation of them in the literature. And right now, the LGBT community is extremely vocal about that. And it is hard for us because there are not a lot of publishers that have gone that direction yet and pulled those pieces in. There's some, but there's not a lot. With African American writers, I think it's... I'm going to say it's easier because there's more to select from. I mean, none of it is easy in trying to find a fair distribution of text pieces. But there are far more African American writers now that publishers can have access to and utilize their materials and bring them on board and make them in-house writers and all that than there were 15 years ago."

Theme 2 focused on skill-based learning. While the *Collections* data may not reflect the dominant demographic of the school district, the administrators argued the essential role of English Language Arts was to teach certain skills. Administrator Hall stated, "The goal of a curriculum is to supersede the individual demographic into a common knowledge base…This is what every student should know. Regardless of race, regardless of gender, this is what we expect as a common knowledge base across society…we're not talking about culture, we're talking about ideas. And ideas are universal." Consequently, the importance that individual schools, districts, and teachers bring in supplemental differentiate their classroom. Administrator Hall reiterated, "Because if you rely only on the curriculum, you're relying on the generic State-mandated

curriculum." As listed above, the statewide standards are skill-based expectations that focus on content, not a race. Also, while the district-wide demographic may reflect Black males as the largest block of students, the racial makeup of individual schools differs across the district. All three admins specified certain schools within certain communities have a majority white student population or a majority Hispanic population, and by dictating a culturally infused textbook, the cycle may repeat itself at the school level, wherein the text does not reflect the race. Again, the rationale for why ideas, skills, and concepts override race.

> "I think that's where having the conversation at the school level, that's with teachers. And the teachers are the people in the classroom doing the work. So, if I'm having the conversation with a bunch of other district staff, that's important, and that needs to take place. But it's not going to change what happens in the classroom with the students. And that if I have a dictation of, "Oh, there has to be at least... out of the 100 texts you read, at least 76 of them have to be from African American authors," well, that doesn't help the school population of students that may be a more Hispanic, and they might choose to do more Hispanic-based offers to address the needs of their school." (Administrator Morgan)

Research Question 3. The researcher used the data from the *Collections* textbook and administrator interviews to answer RQ3. One theme emerged from the data that addressed this question: the prevalence of whiteness. The theme of whiteness was reflected in the overall demographics of the text. The lead program consultants, authors, and the demographics of the characters within the text pieces indicated Whites had the highest representation throughout the textbook, as seen in Figure 8. The lead program

consultants were represented at 100% white. The authors of the text pieces were 60% white, 15% Black, and 8% Hispanic. The racial gap between white authors and the second largest group, Black authors, was 45 percentage points. The racial demographic of characters within the text pieces were 45% white, 12% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 31% race-neutral. Black students do not see themselves, or anyone, in the race-neutral text. The white and race-neutral demographics of the text totaled 76%, creating a gap between the next highest represented groups, Blacks, of 64 percentage points. In reference to the authors and text pieces, Administrator Callahan acknowledges the prevalence of whiteness, "It's old, dead, white guys. We can't have the old white guy list." Administrator Hall stated, "And yet I mentioned about how a curriculum, because of how it's being designed, can't speak to the demographics of the school district. It has to speak to the demographics of a state of the nation. And don't you agree that those numbers reflect the national statistics a little bit more than maybe the district?" Table 8 shows additional responses from the Administrators.

Table 8

Thematic Data for Research Question 3

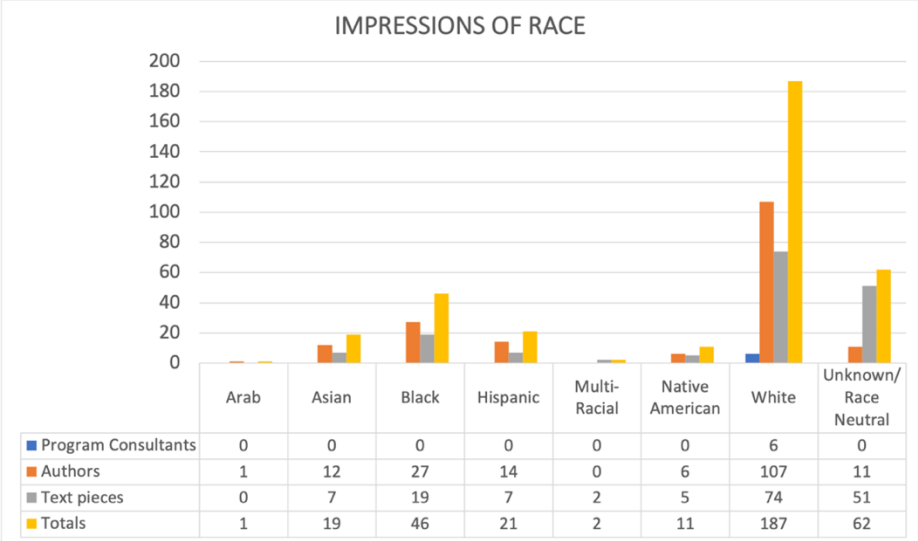
Theme	Data
Whiteness	Administrator Callahan: "I think bringing the African American experience to a white student is just as important as bringing it to a Black student. It's how you get that empathetic quality into a student who, like I said, might have gone to a predominately white middle school, which was a feeder school from an all-white elementary school to feeding into a predominately white high school, to expose them at least somewhere before they get out into the real world where the demographics look more like what you showed us. I think that's very important. I don't think we're there yet."

	Administrator Morgan: "The traditional ELA curriculum and the canon is very white-centered, and our district isn't. And I think that there needs to be more of a connection made to how to... what's the onboarding process of our students into a curriculum where they can have a source of like resonance? And the whole purpose of literature is to be... is to find yourself in literature, and then to be inspired by literature. And I'm thinking that, because that there may be a large gap between finding that piece of residence, that there needs to be some being intentional to draw that out."

Both administrators Morgan and Hall emphasized the need for generic text and the need for teachers to supplement content to create relevance between the text and student. Administrator Morgan initially stated, “I think the curriculum from the companies has to be as generic as they can be. And then it's important for teachers to be able to see who's in front of them and say, “Okay, well, here's the piece that I have to teach. How can I make this accessible to the students that are in my classroom in a way that's relevant to them?” However, after reviewing the *Collections* data, Administrator Morgan noted their observation of the text pieces racial breakdown in contrast to the student demographic of the school district and a need for change. Administrator Morgan also concluded the term generic and race-neutral "play off each other" yet still has an essence of whiteness to them.

Figure 9

Impressions of Race/Ethnicity in the Middle Grades

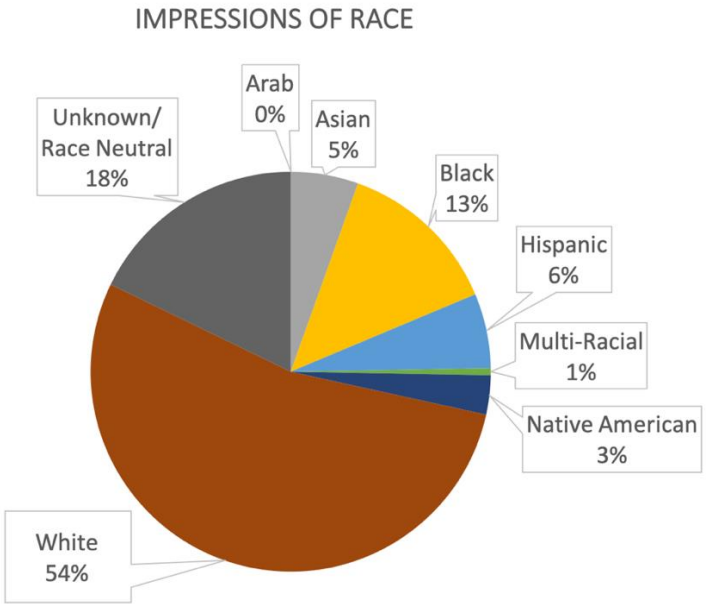


	Arab	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multi-Racial	Native American	White	Unknown/ Race Neutral
Program Consultants	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0
Authors	1	12	27	14	0	6	107	11
Text pieces	0	7	19	7	2	5	74	51
Totals	1	19	46	21	2	11	187	62

Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

Figure 10

Impressions of race/ethnicity (%) in the Middle Grades



Note: Adapted from *Collections Textbook*

Figure 9 and Figure 10 reveal the prevalence of whiteness based on the impressions of race throughout the text. The impressions of race are the incurrences of race experienced by a reader. This becomes the sum total of program consultants, authors, and the text pieces. The sum total of 6 lead program consultants, 178 authors, and 165 text pieces comprises 349 impressions of race throughout the textbook. As seen in Figure 9, throughout grades 6-8, students experienced whiteness in 54% of the *Collections* textbook. Students experienced Blackness at 13% and Hispanic-relevant text pieces at 6%. Race neutral impressions occurred at 18%. In summary, Black students incurred a 54% rate of whiteness, a 13% rate of Blackness, and a 15% rate of multiculturalism throughout the text.

Research Question 4: The researcher used the data from the standardized test-taking scores, critical historical analysis, the *Collections* textbook, teacher interviews, administrator interviews, and district demographic data to answer RQ4. Three themes emerged from the data that addressed this question: the hypervisibility of Blackness, structural violence, and the prevalence of whiteness. Theme 1 focused on the hypervisibility of Blackness throughout the school district. According to the state's Department of Education information portal, the school district's student racial demographic had a five-year trend (20215-2020) of approximately 39% Black, 35% Hispanic, and 20% white. Black male and female students comprised 20% and 19% of all students. Black males are the largest demographic of students throughout each middle school grade level (grades 6-8). As such, Black males are hypervisibility. Hypervisibility is the high visibility of marginalized groups associated with negative stereotypes (Chaudry, 2021; Buchanan and Settles, 2019; Ryland, 2013), "which combine with being

marked as different and perceived as being deviant and therefore the subject of increased surveillance" (Obasi, 2021, p. 9).

Hypervisibility can also be observed in the academic performance of Black males. Their low reading scores again highlights their visibility across the district. Black male students show the lowest reading proficiency levels throughout the state and the school district. Collectively, Black male and female students rank last in achieving reading proficiency levels deemed on-grade level. In other words, Black male students appear to struggle the most with comprehending key ideas and details, craft and structure, and the integration of knowledge and ideas, as delineated by the state standards. The five-year trend data indicated Black students ranked lowest amongst their white, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and multi-racial counterparts in achieving a Level 3/satisfactory proficiency. Overall, Black students achieved a Level 3/satisfactory score or higher at an average of 35% statewide and 40% district-wide. When examining the differences amongst genders, Black males, over the past five years, averaged a 29% statewide and 34% district-wide Level 3 proficiency on the standardized ELA assessment, the lowest across the state and school district.

Theme 2 focused on structural violence. Galtung (1969) defines structural violence as violence that is built into the structure, presenting itself as unequal power and therefore providing unequal life chances to those it overpowers. Structural violence also precipitates psychological violence that "includes lies, manipulation, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats, etc., that serve to decrease mental potentialities" (169). The "decrease of mental potentialities" may be evidenced by the low reading scores of Black males.

Also, structural violence is evidenced in the school-to-prison pipeline, which is linked to students' academic reading performance and disproportionately higher rates of discipline and suspension rates (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2020; Gorski, 2019; Mallett, 2016). Also, implicit to the nature of Black school children are linkages to the socio-economic levels and racial lines of division found in schools throughout the United States of America and within the school district of this case study (Heitzeg, 2009; Dancy II, 2014; Mallett, 2016). Over the past five years, an average of 60% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged, which remains in lockstep with nearly 60% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch 60% and 61% of its schools deemed as Title 1. However, nearly a ten per cent decrease has occurred over the past five years. In 2016, 62% of the student population was listed as economically disadvantaged. In 2021, only 53% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged.

Theme 3 focused on the prevalence of whiteness throughout the curriculum and school district. Data from the English Language Arts curriculum textbook analysis revealed the statistical impressions of race experienced by Black males. The impressions of race are the incurrences of race experienced by a reader. The sum total of 6 lead program consultants, 178 authors, and 165 text pieces comprises 349 impressions of race throughout the textbook. Students experienced whiteness within 54% of the *Collections* textbook. Students experienced Blackness in 13% and Hispanic-relevant text pieces in 6% of the textbook. Race neutral impressions occurred at 18%. Overall, Black students incurred a 54% rate of whiteness, a 13% rate of Blackness, a 15% rate of multiculturalism, and an 18% rate of race neutrality throughout the text.

Lastly, a discrepancy in the student demographic data led to additional discoveries. The state's Department of Education student demographic report indicated a five-year trend of approximately 39% Black, 35% Hispanic, and 20% white. However, the school districts website indicated many different numbers for its most recent years of diversity breakdown. The stark difference in data led to the interview of a fourth administrator for clarification. Administrator Iris has more than 25 years of experience within the district and has served at multiple levels of the organization. The school district's website indicated 51% of its student population was white. Administrator Iris explained the reporting difference of race versus ethnicity based on changes in the 2010 U.S. Census reporting guidelines.

> "The Hispanic and the white data are captured in the white data. And that was part of the 2010 census change in which the Hispanic subgroup was extracted from the demographic data. And so, they took the ethnic combination out of the demographic data and how it's being reported by the district. And so, when they did a change, it was just an automated change to make everybody who had an H within their subgroup move to the white category, regardless of what they identify as, or what people... how they show up in spaces."

The 2010 U.S. Census Brief (2011) on the Hispanic population mandated race and ethnicity (Hispanic origin) be categorized as separate and distinct concepts and "that when collecting these data via self-identification, two different questions must be used" (p. 1). However, the approach used by the district did not consider the self-identification of race, only ethnicity. As explained by Administrator Iris, a Black (race) Hispanic (ethnicity) was still categorized as white, ballooning the number of white students to

surpass the large Black demographic. Table 9 provides additional insight into the motivation of reflecting a larger white student population.

Table 9

Thematic Data for Research Question 4

Theme: Whiteness	Administrator Iris
Q: Why has it become important to the district to show an increase in the white demographic of our student enrollment?	"Because children are tied to money. And so, when the kids leave, so does the money, so does the money. And so, when there's a decrease in the overall population, there's a decrease in funding. That means there is a decrease in staffing, resources, everything. And so, as we even move closer to privatizing, education is still this broader attack on public education in some sense."
Q: Why white students, as opposed to that, show an increase in Black students, or Hispanic students, or Asian students?	"Racism."
Q: Who is driving that decision? Where do you think that the driver of that decision comes from?	"It's an institutional structure that is embedded in a mindset and culture within our society, within our community. It's an institutional mindset that children have better behaved in a Whiter environment. Children that are higher achieving. And to have schools that have more white students allows people to have a perception that schools are good regardless of grade. You can have an A school that children of colour, and regardless of race because of implicit bias in some cases, that still will be perceived to be not a good school. You can have a C or D school that is overwhelmingly white, and that will still be perceived to be a good school. It is in order to keep people in a community that is considered more desirable. It is designed to have students in the school that is considered to be more desirable. And it's based on historical and institutional racism from a mindset that's existed long before both of us were here."

Summary

The data analysis provided important themes to understanding the identity and lived experiences of Black males as reflected through the textbook and learning environment. The viewpoints of both teachers and administrators constructed parameters in understanding the intentions of language arts, the process for textbook adoption, and the importance of relationship-building in the classroom. The information also provided an important outlay of charts that framed the statistical impression of race incurred by students in Title 1 middle schools. With this data, we are better able to assess the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept and determine its legitimacy in describing the phenomenon.

The next and final chapter of this dissertation offers a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings, overarching themes, development of the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept, and implications for teachers, administrators, and policymakers, in addition to providing recommendations for further research in this area of study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussions, and Suggestions for Future Research

Introductions

The purpose of this case study was to examine (1) understand the protracted social and structural conflict of race encountered by Black males in the education system (2) identify racialized structures of anti-Blackness and whiteness in the middle school English Language Arts curriculum textbooks (3) examine the subtleties of whiteness that may have relevance in how Black males succeed in K-12 education (4) understand the correlation between the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum and the Black male identity (5) examine the impact on the identity, perception of power, and effect on the emotions of Black males in the educational process (6) address the cursory viewpoints of curriculum administrators regarding identity and inclusion. The case study sought to understand this phenomenon summarily as an issue of protracted identity conflict incurred by the lack or limited inclusion of the Black male identity within the English Language Arts curriculum.

Considering the importance of identity and multicultural education, it was imperative to examine these modalities against the English Language Arts curriculum textbook used by school districts and their impact on minority students. Limited inclusion of the Black male and female identities in the curriculum have potentially produced what this research refers to as strangers in the classroom: young Black male students who are not reflected in the curriculum, leading to disengagement, low academic performance, and faced with disciplinary challenges (Arnett, 2000; Rios et al., 2010; Zirkel &Johnson, 2016). To acquire an understanding of the phenomenon, the researcher examined five units of analysis, including interviews of teachers and administrators, a critical historical

analysis of the K-12 education system, and a meta content analysis of the curriculum textbook, state and district demographic data, and the standardized testing scores of Black males.

This chapter includes a discussion on major findings related to the literature on Black males and curriculum bias. It will also review the theoretical underpinnings and the overarching themes of the findings, in addition to its relevance to the development of the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept. The chapter will conclude by discussing its implications for teachers, administrators, policymakers, and opportunities for future study. In order to facilitate an understanding of race in the English Language Arts curriculum and how the Black cultural identity was also reflected within the curriculum textbook, the study was guided by four research questions:

1. RQ1: How does the public middle school English Language Arts curriculum reflect the identity and lived experiences of Black males?
2. RQ2: What criteria do administrators use to determine the language arts curriculum, and what is their consideration for racial bias in the ELA curriculum?
3. RQ3: What are the perceptions of racial biases, anti-Blackness, or whiteness in the English Language Arts curriculum textbook?
4. RQ4: What are the academic results, systemic impact, and types of conflict experienced by Black male students when their identity is not included throughout the curriculum?

Summary of Findings

The Black male identity within the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum, predominated by the *Collections* textbook, was interrogated through a series of interviews, content analysis, and critical historical analysis. The teachers in this study provided feedback regarding Black males and their representation within the ELA curriculum. The first research question inquired about the Black males' perception of connectedness to the text through the lens of teachers and administrators. From this question emerged the themes of relationship building, teacher responsibility, and the impact of low reading scores. Teachers indicated the curriculum did not reflect the identity or connect to the lived experiences of Black males. They further discussed the importance of building relationships with the students and providing content to supplement the text pieces to arrive to connectivity with the students. Teachers and administrators stated that learning outcomes improved with the relationship dynamic between the student and teacher being developed. While the process of teaching from the textbook, building relationships with the students and finding additional material to supplement may be time-consuming, both teachers and administrators stressed the significance of doing so. They argued it provided better learning outcomes amidst a group of students who were economically challenged and produced low reading scores. Furthermore, the Black male student low reading scores on the state standardized test as well as in the classroom proved challenging to overcome. Teachers indicated students were not motivated to read. Some teachers pointed to the test-heavy environment of middle school as a deterrent to reading. Others indicated the students lacked the human resource to help motivate and encourage them to read.

The second research question sought to understand the cursory viewpoints of school administrators who were affiliated with the textbook selection process and provided oversight of the English Language Arts curriculum. From this question emerged the themes of multiculturalism and skill development in language arts. The administrator interviews provided context on the textbook selection process as being state and district driven well in advance of the textbook adoption committee process. Next, the administrators provided their consideration for the Black male identity within the text pieces. The administrators explained that while the school district's mandates for textbook adoption included multicultural text pieces, it does not include a particular number of culturally relevant text pieces nor discretion to any particular sub-group. On the other hand, the priority on language arts skills acquisitions overrode but did not eliminate the focus on multiculturalism. Language art skills included learning how to cite textual evidence, analyze the development of ideas, analyze elements of a story, analyze the form and structure of dramas and poems, and write informative and argumentative essays. However, the administrators made room for more intentionality toward expanding the expectations for multicultural text pieces within the textbook adoption process.

The third research question inquired about the perception of the textbook being used as a racialized tool of anti-Blackness and whiteness. If it did, then research question four sought to understand the academic and social impact of the racialized experience. The prevalence of whiteness emerged as a theme for both research questions three and four. The themes of hypervisibility and structural violence were identified for research question four.

Whiteness. The *Collections* textbook reflected a greater preponderance of white representation throughout the demographics of the text, authors, and lead program consultants for the textbook. The prevalence of whiteness was also reflected in the district's reporting of its student population. The demographic data reported by the district showed a much greater white student population from what was reported by the state's Department of Education information portal. This was done at the expense of Hispanic students being grouped with the white students even when those students self-identified as Black Hispanic. Separating the race from ethnicity in this manner was believed to be advantageous in preventing the parental white flight from the school district and attracting white students to combat white flight.

Hypervisibility. Black students represented the largest population by race, and Black males represented the largest population by gender throughout the district. Black males were also ranked the lowest in meeting the satisfactory benchmark for reading proficiency. Black males, thereby, were an extremely visible and noticeable group by virtue of their headcount and academic performance, constituting the theme of hypervisibility. Moreover, the Black male learner in the school district appeared to be in an academic crisis due to the lack of connectivity with the curriculum, prevalence of whiteness, and low reading comprehension levels.

Structural violence. Collectively, the learning environment reflects an agent of structural violence. The reshaping of the demographic data was an example of structural violence against the Black student population. Black males, the largest group within the student population, were met with skewed demographic data that replaced their hypervisibility with invisibility, possibly lessening attention to their identity and

academic needs. The skewed data reporting may be considered an act of implicit bias and structural racism. Notably, plagued with low reading scores, apathy, and extensively limited role models within the text, the development of their identity has been hampered for decades as generations of Black males move through the education system.

The findings suggest Black males participate in a disconnected educational process that presents gaps in fulfilling their need for relationship building and connectivity. Individual teachers indicated moments of success. However, the focus on language arts skill development, the textbook adoption process, and the use of the *Collections* textbook (and other similar textbooks) may be counter-intuitive to the desired outcome of academic achievement.

The research findings further suggest implications for theory, research, and practice that can expound on dispute systems design as an alternative dispute resolution approach to the phenomenon.

Implications for Theory and Research

The findings of the case study were consistent with the three theoretical frameworks used to undergird the research. The theories included the stranger theory, social identity theory, and critical race theory. The following section will discuss how each theoretical framework fits in this study alongside the study proposition and the major themes of the research. The study proposition is the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept. The major themes that corroborated the study proposition are whiteness, the hypervisibility of Blackness, and structural violence.

The study proposition theorizes that the protracted social conflict of systemic racism experienced throughout the K-12 education system leads to sustained identity

conflict within Black male students. Black males, as a result, become disconnected from the democratized educational intent and, in turn, are estranged from the learning environment. They become strangers in the classroom, strangers in the school and strangers in the academic construct. The case study proposition was summarily referred to as the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept. Jones and Brinkert (2008) define identity as involving face (visibility), situated within an environment, constructed both socially and individually, and include issues of freedom and constraint. Northrup (1989) maintains that conflict can become intractable when someone's identity is at risk. Collectively, the prevalence of whiteness, the hypervisibility of Blackness, and structural violence of the organization constitute the protracted identity conflict experienced by Black males throughout the school district.

Whiteness is defined as the prevalence of hegemony and privilege associated with white as a race, yet, often invisible or unrecognized by white people (Singleton, 2015; Warren, 2001). Haviland (2008) describes the following three components of whiteness as “powerful yet power-evasive, that whiteness uses a wide variety of techniques to maintain its power, and that whiteness is not monolithic” (p. 41). Whiteness in education is impactful in shaping identity and materiality (Toyosaki et al., 2009). Literacy education serves as a cultural-ideological practice that assists in developing students' cultural, social, and personal identity and self-esteem through the interplay of race and ethnicity (Barrett-Tatum, 2015; Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2010).

Additionally, whiteness consists of various hegemonic mechanisms with an economic and political interest in perpetuating white privilege, colorblindness, white

fragility, and racialized inequalities and injustices to maintain its identity of supremacy (DiAngelo, 2018; Jupp et al., 2016; Provost, 2021; Suspitsyna, 2021; Tanner, 2020).

> "From the original works of Dubois (2005) to Baldwin (1963), Black scholars have been interrogating the operations and prevalence of whiteness in American society for some time. Fanon (1967) argues that whiteness leads the white man to believe he is the "predestined master of the world" (p. 128), a process that corrupts the "soul of the white man" (p. 129). Hooks (1994), claims that naturalizing whiteness and Otherizing people of color leads to Whites believing that "there is no representation of whiteness as terror or terrorizing" (p. 45) a blatant falsity considering history. If, as Ignatiev and Garvey (1996) argue, "treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity" (p. 10), then loyalty to whiteness pulls one's soul away from humanity…whiteness need not be only indicative of white folks since people of color can inhabit whiteness ideology—albeit for different reasons; yet, whiteness is indeed most prevalent in Whites themselves." (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p. 34).

The identity of whiteness requires constant vigilance and subjugation of others to keep itself centered and re-centered when challenged (Foucault, 1975-1976/2003; Suspitsyna, 2021). Its vigilance, subjugation, elitism, corruption, exploitation, and terror institutes structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Structural violence is built into the organizational, societal, and educational structures, presenting itself as unequal power and thereby providing unequal life chances to those it overpowers. Structural violence doubles as psychological violence against members of the structures who then experiences "lies, manipulation, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats,

that serve to decrease mental potentialities" (Galtung, 1969, p. 169). The psychology of whiteness, therefore, frames its social pathology and identity into its own personality (Stone, 1971), and by virtue of the structural violence experienced through its mechanisms, whiteness can thereby be considered a personality disorder that is fragile and protracted. Stone (1971) describes whiteness as an "obsession" for exploiting humans. The racial contract, as described by Mills (1997), contends race plays a foundational role in our socially constructed lives within most American and world institutions. As these types of threats persist against a social group, the importance of the individual's social identity heightens and leads to the exclusion of the individual's personal identity (Deutsch, 1973; Northrup, 1989). In effect, Blackness responds to whiteness from a subjugated posture and can only see themselves through the white lens forced on them, which in turn further spreads the identity and pathology of whiteness (Johnstone & Lee, 2020; Suspitsyna, 2021).

The results of this case study corroborated the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept. However, it appears that the protracted identity conflict experienced by Black males is the result of a pass-through effect and a feedback loop to the protracted identity conflict initiated by whiteness. Therefore, the identity of whiteness is the origin of protracted conflict as it has historically sought to override the identity of others through subjugation, elitism, corruption, exploitation, stereotyping, labelling, and terror (Dubois, 2005; Holst 2020; Hooks, 1994; Stone, 1971). It may be the case that whiteness does not know who it is outside of itself, which is to say, the exclusionary practice of whiteness prevents its ability to acknowledge inclusive practices. In some ways, it is akin to the Greek mythology character Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection.

Whiteness then experiences an identity crisis whenever it is challenged by Blackness and multiculturalism for the exchange of equity and inclusion and, in turn, works diligently to re-center supremacy (Johnstone & Lee, 2020; Provost, 2021; Stone, 1971; Suspitsyna, 2021). We can surmise that when whiteness is confronted with the hypervisibility of Blackness and multiculturalism, whiteness reaffirms itself through structural violence.

For example, throughout 2021, legal action by all 50 states was taken to restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism in K-12 education and ban the teaching of the 1619 Project. As of August 2021, 12 states have successfully passed legislation or adopted policies within their Department of Education to institute the restrictions (EdWeek.org, 2021). The 1619 Project is a New York Times Magazine initiative that centers on the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans as the focal point of America's history (NY Times, 2019). The Pulitzer Award-winning project was led by a Black woman, journalist and professor Nikole Hannah-Jones. Again, it appears that when the exclusionary practice of whiteness is confronted with the practices of equity and inclusion, whiteness reaffirms its identity through compounding acts of exclusion. The attention (hypervisibility) brought to Blackness (critical race theory; 1619 project) as a result of racism (whiteness) was met with legislation (structural violence) to deter (render invisible) the visibility of Blackness to maintain the status quo (reaffirm whiteness).

According to the findings from this case study research, the hypervisibility of Blackness is attributed to Black male students, the largest cohort within the student demographic and the largest cohort of students with the lowest academic performance in reading/English Language Arts on the statewide standardized tests within the school

district. Such high visibility is usually stereotyped as deviant and therefore intensifies the surveillance of Blackness (Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Ryland, 2013). The school district published skewed demographic information that purported a larger white student population to maintain appeal to white parents. Additionally, the canonized literature of the curriculum esteemed white authorship and white content to the oversight (or dismissal) of the lived experiences and identity of Black males and others.

The published skewed data and the predominance of white impressions of race throughout the *Collections* textbook presents a complex position for Black males within the school society. When examining the findings of this case study through the stranger theory by Georg Simmel (1908), Black males are affixed within a particular spatial boundary of the classroom and the curriculum. However, "his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it" (Simmel, 1908, p. 143). The history of discrimination against the Black body, ranging from slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation, affirms Blackness is not indigenous to the education system (Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Dyce, 2013; Gholson & Wilkes, 2017; Kafele, 2012). The space eludes the intrinsic value of relationships. However, the paradoxical nature of the relationship is that while being inorganically attached to the education system, the Black male student is still an organic member of the group. Summarily, the Black male is the Simmelian stranger to the environment.

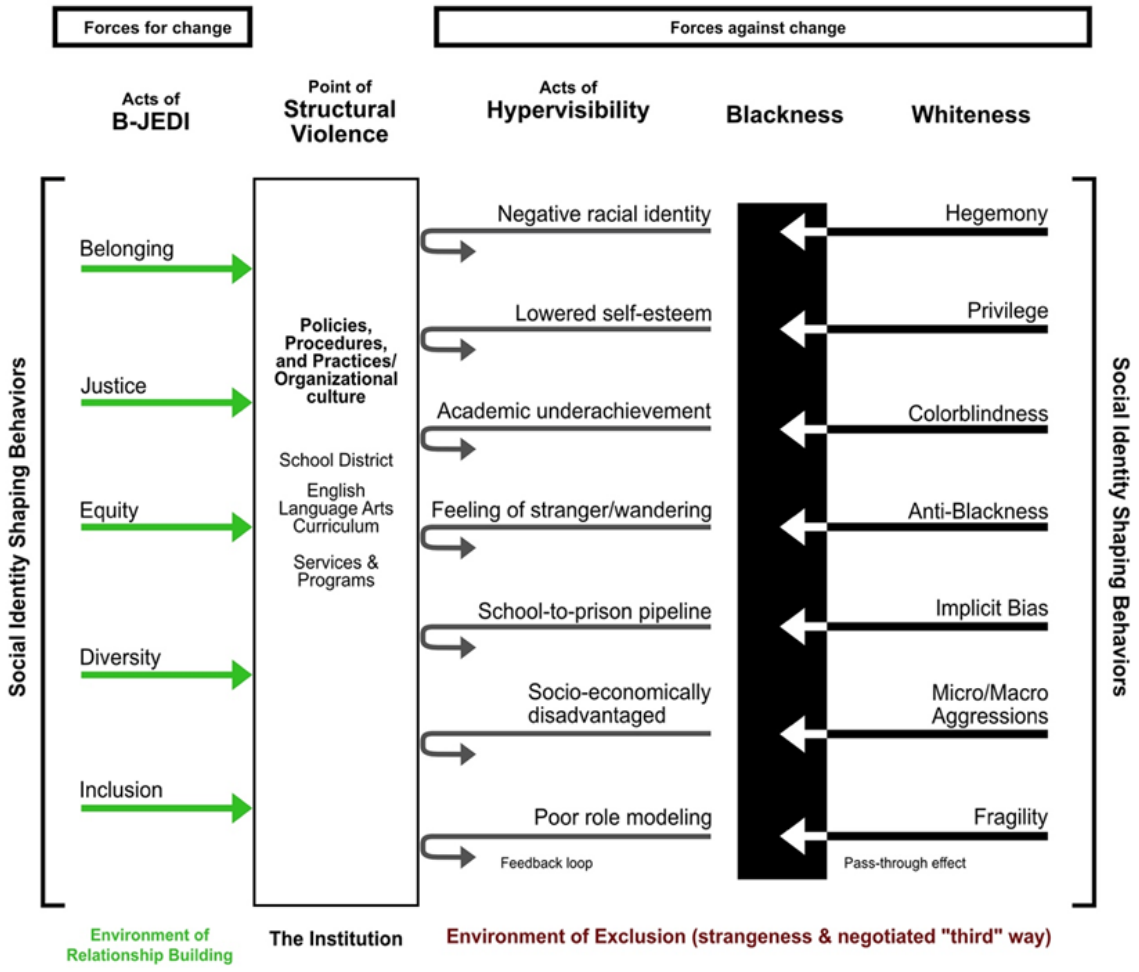
Wessely (1990) discusses the stranger and those indigenous to the group as opposites in constant search of ways to intermingle and in the process develop a new form or “third” way of interaction. This third way represents a negotiated landscape that

endures the visibility and invisibility of Blackness. However, hypervisibility momentarily presents a “Black” way that may appear to dominate the “white” way. In those moments, the indigenous group selects to prompt the Simmelian stranger back into the “third” way of interaction.

As mentioned before, it appears that the protracted identity conflict experienced by Black males is the result of a pass-through effect and a feedback loop to the protracted identity conflict initiated by whiteness. Therefore, the identity of whiteness is the origin of protracted conflict as it has historically sought to override the identity of others. Structural violence, amongst other mechanisms of racism, is intended to maintain superiority. The Black male is affixed as a stranger to this environment and remains the visible focus of treatment of invisibility. Pulling from the themes of the study, whiteness, the hypervisibility of Blackness, and structural violence underscores the Protracted Identity Conflict Concept. The following graphic was developed to illustrate the concept.

Figure 11

Protracted Identity Conflict Force Field Diagram



The protracted identity conflict diagram was adapted from the force field analysis diagram developed by Kurt Lewin (1948) and utilized the explanation building analytical approach discussed by Yin (2014) to discuss "how" the exclusionary practices of whiteness pass through Blackness, including Black bodies, Black culture, the Black psyche, and the Black cultural identity. The pass-through effect means whiteness affects the authenticity of Blackness, influencing the identity and behavior of Black bodies. The social identity shaping practices of whiteness include any act of hegemony and privilege; they are not limited to those in the diagram used for demonstration purposes, albeit

accurate. The effect of whiteness passes through Black bodies, in this instance, Black males bounded to the English Language Arts curriculum of Title 1 middle schools within a specific school district, resulting in a negative racial identity, lowered self-esteem, academic underachievement, substandard role-modelling, and other negative outcomes (McCleod, 2019). The more prevalent these outcomes, the more visible they are. For instance, the overwhelmingly low reading scores by the largest sub-group within the school district are very visible. Hypervisibility occurs when hegemonic gatekeepers survey and determine these negative results have reached critical visibility.

The institution has a force field that protects whiteness by upholding the legacy of exclusionary practices within its organizational culture. The institution, therefore, serves as the hand of structural violence for hegemonic gatekeepers who seek to make whiteness palpable through legislation, policies, procedures, and practices. Furthermore, the institution's response to the hypervisibility of Blackness provides feedback to Black bodies of what is acceptable within the bounded space. The looking-glass self by Cooley (1902) indicated people see themselves as reflected by the reaction of others to them. This input, output process creates a feedback loop that shapes perceived self-meaning and controls behavior (Burke, 1996). Ritchey (2012) describes the classroom as a social text in which students read the world before they read the written text. Consequently, students are engaged in reading the feedback of the institution presented through the subject area content, classroom management style, the integration of social interaction, and a deliberate and overt emphasis toward character building or non-character. Nonetheless, they are all social identity shaping practices.

As such, Black bodies, the Black student, are left in a loop, as a wanderer, ping-ponged between society-at-large and the institution, rendered paradoxically visible and invisible (Simmel, 1908). Affixed to the environment, this child must still go to school, read the consistently white-based text, participate in the same activities, and return to the same home-life experiences and world as he knows it (until something interrupts or disrupts the status quo). Blackness has even become affixed to research because of these same acts of hypervisibility. The structural violence causes the impacted Black bodies to remain in a sustained or protracted state of negotiating their social identity in contrast to the white identity to develop a “third” way of interaction (Simmel, 1908; Tajfel, 1979). The “third” way of interaction is a negotiated space in which Blackness may see proximity to whiteness as a means to acquire value (Pais et al., 2012; Pearman II & Swain, 2017). The "third" way is also synonymous with the double consciousness described by Dubois (1903), a White-Black construct for survival by Black people in America in order to gain progress or acceptance in both white and Black spaces. The protracted identity conflict concept describes it as the authentic Black mind versus the negotiated Black mind versus the unnegotiated white mind.

As the critical conversation surrounding race in America magnified after the killing of George Floyd in 2020, legislators drafted bills to sequester the conversation about race within public schools (EdWeek, 2021; Harris & Gagne, 2020; Kevin Powell's Writing Workshop, 2021). The legislation was enacted to create boundaries and, in the process, provided feedback to Black bodies to remain or loop within the negotiated ways of interaction. In July 2020, a music artist made controversial remarks about the LGBTQ community and incurred multiple cancellations by promoters for other events, resulting in

substantial financial loss. The cancellations were feedback to the artist to inform him of his spatial boundaries (Rao, 2021).

Also, racial bias in the disciplinary and referral process for students results in disparate disciplinary outcomes that fuels engagement with the justice system and the "school-to-prison" pipeline (Curtis, 2014; Faulkner et al., 2014; Morris & Perry, 2016). In these instances, the policing practices of Black bodies are evidenced through the school systems behavioral intervention programs (Dancy et al., 2018; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Policing is an institutional reaction to maintain order as perceived by the hegemonic gatekeepers, again creating a feedback loop that constrains students to the negotiated environment.

When the school district incurred an overwhelmingly larger Black student population, the school district hegemonic gatekeepers inaccurately presented data with Whites listed as the largest demographic of race. According to the racial contract, the feedback to non-whites was to assert dominance, hierarchy and to loop the relevant individuals back into the spatial boundary. The structural violence in this instance was psychological. Ms. Rose provided another illustration of the feedback loop in operation when asked: what factors impact the learning of Black males and their academic performance?

> "Oh, it's all about swag and sauce. [Slang term for cool.] They don't want to be seen as too smart, and they don't want to be seen as too dumb. I could be a little dumb because it's cool, but I can't be an idiot. I can't be answering too many questions. Got to be apathetic. Apathetic is the new cool because they get to benefit. There's a benefit to it. [What is the benefit?] Look at how much attention

> they get—like, not paying attention to help them academically. They get attention to excuse them academically to not have to perform, to not have to fail when they try. Failing when you don't try is way better than failing when you've tried. That is a horrible, terrible feeling. "I didn't fail because I really worked hard, and I'm a level 1 [on the statewide standardized test reading test]. I failed because I'm a level 1, and I just didn't even bother."

The teacher's remarks on swag, attention and the relaxed academic expectations example, the feedback loop of whiteness passing through Black bodies and negotiating a "third" way of interaction within the space. In this example, the student's academic apathy becomes an act of hypervisibility. The institution responds by relaxing academic expectations. The student receives enabling behavior as their feedback that keeps them wandering and affixed to the space of low academic performance. While that is only one response from a teacher within the study, it still speaks to an aspect of the institution and its struggle to successfully connect with Black males.

The acts of belonging, justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (B-JEDI) provide critical theoretical lenses to disrupt hegemonic practices. Critical race theory provides such lenses to (a) challenge the dominant ideology and push back on claims of objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity in education for Black males, allowing space for the development of a counter-narrative to the Black education experience; and (b) commit to the establishment of social justice from the awareness that educational institutions operate in incongruous ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize yet coexisting with the opportunity to emancipate and empower (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Delgado

Bernal, 2001). Whether engaging in Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Pedagogy, or Critical Race Curriculum, they are appropriate for inspecting issues of systematic oppression and race within the education system to reshape the social identity of the institution and its gatekeepers (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 2004; Solórzano, 1998; Yosso, 2002).

Summarily, the findings corroborate the stranger theory, social identity theory, and critical race theory. The data from the *Collections* textbook indicated high levels of white impressions of race in comparison to the drastically low representation of Black authors and characters within the text pieces. The cultural, social, personal identity, and self-esteem shaping role of English Language Arts is challenged by low representation of one's identity in the text (Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2010; Barrett-Tatum, 2015). The interviewed teachers consistently indicated the challenge with creating connections with the student due to low representation of their identity and lived experiences within the text. Additionally, the low reading scores, comprehension, and fluency made the classroom challenging in creating connections. Administrators indicated the textbook adoption process requires multicultural text but is not specific to any sub-group of demographics. The critical historical analysis regarding the racial script and stratification within the school system revealed the creation and maintained the structure of inequality in which proximity to whiteness affects the sourcing and distribution of valuable resources for learning (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Pais et al., 2012; Pearman II & Swain, 2017). Collectively, these disconnections create strangers in the classroom.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study may have implications for teachers, administrators, and conflict resolution practitioners. Understanding how the forces of whiteness and hypervisibility work against Black bodies, from the most discrete measures of structural violence to the most blatant, reinforces the significance of relationship-building measures with Black males in contrast to the skill-based entrenchment of the language arts state standards. Without the most effective relationship, Black males in this school district will most likely not have academically performed. With teacher evaluation rubrics tied to the state standardized testing scores of their students, teachers should have a vested interest in primarily building relationships. It appears the same is relevant for combatting the racialized school systems behavioral intervention programs. According to Ispa-Landa (2018), the racial bias expressed through student disciplinary actions can be combatted by teachers who take more time getting to know their students, demonstrate empathy, and practice perspective-taking skills. Again, relationship building plays an indelible part in addressing the discriminant practices of behavioral intervention.

Furthermore, understanding the Black male student is not simply a matter of understanding the intersectionality of socioeconomics, race, and family. It is a wholesale realization of the immersive and pervasive nature of whiteness across many institutions that collectively participate in maintaining a narrative of Black inferiority. Thus, role modelling and the presentation of robust and positive imagery of the Black racial identity is paramount (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). School administrators and policymakers involved in the textbook adoption process may benefit from understanding the severity of having a textbook that does not reflect the identity and lived experiences of their most

academically fragile population. Broadening textbook options to match the student demographic may be advantageous. Because education curriculum textbooks are corporately developed, textbook companies may be motivated to meet the bid request to be awarded the contract. Have we ever considered asking students what text pieces they would like to see in the textbook?

Implications for the Field of Conflict Resolution

The multidisciplinary field of conflict resolution was recognized as a field of study in the 1950s and 1960s (Ramsbotham et al., 2011). An amalgamation of international relations, political science, criminal justice, psychology, and other social sciences, the field has strengthened to embody a dynamic array of conflict resolution modalities, peace building practices, and theoretical frameworks by the likes of John Galtung, John Burton, Joyce Hocker and William Wilmot, Dean Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim, Kevin Avruch, and many more contributors. James Schellenberg (1996, p. 9) describes the relevance of conflict resolution studies with the following statement:

> Conflict is so fully a part of all forms of society that we should appreciate its importance—for stimulating new thoughts, for promoting social change, for defining our group relationships, for helping us form our own senses of personal identity, and for many other things we take for granted in our everyday lives. Indeed, nearly all of us have loyalties to a national state that was forged through bitter conflict. Things we love, as well as those we despise, are inexorably shaped by social conflict.

Whether by persons, groups, or nations, conflict is inevitable. Therefore, whether by resolution, settlement, containment, management, transformation, peace building, or

peacekeeping, there is an irrefutable necessity for practitioners who, most importantly, work toward the prevention of conflict (Burton, 1990).

An important development to the field of conflict resolution and peace studies is the evolution of work within the diversity, equity, and inclusion space. This type of work has grown in popularity (and necessity) over the past 25 years. The transition from using the term diversity to the term inclusion was identified by Jiaojiao and Shuming (2018) as part of the active utilization phase of the mid-1990s as corporate and educational entities developed their culturally relevant acumen to more obvious and direct solutions for cultural inclusion. Additionally, while the roots of diversity, equity, and inclusion may stem from legislative reform that initially used the term affirmative action in the 1960s (Anderson, 2004), the conflict caused through issues of inequity and injustices has created an ideal post for conflict resolution practitioners to serve as change agents where racial awareness appears to be a premium.

As such, this case study research supports the intersection of conflict resolution practitioners and the relevance of equity and inclusive community building. The visual aid of the Protracted Identity Conflict diagram may further assist conflict resolution and equity practitioners in framing the conversation of whiteness, the hypervisibility of Blackness, and structural racism in ways that inform us of how Black bodies, like a tennis ball, are volleyed between a racially constructed social world and the institution that reinforces those same racial ideals. The Protracted Identity Conflict concept also highlights the tools of relationship-building needed to counter the strangeness experienced by Black bodies within the institution and society at large. The diagram can be updated to reflect the parties of any institution participating in systemic racism against

Black bodies, including how Black bodies participate in internalized racism. Overall, this study adds to the body of knowledge to further the theoretical frameworks codified within the discipline. In so doing, practitioners have more tools to utilize in their alternative dispute resolution approaches.

Limitations

The findings of this case study have to be seen in the light of some limitations. The primary limitation of this case study is no input from Black males is included. The case study was originally designed to include feedback from Black male students directly. Their direct input, as the subject of the study, would have provided the most direct answer to their experience in school and perception of the curriculum. However, this study occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, presenting additional challenges to gaining approval to include students. Considering school closure for a period of time, followed by virtual classrooms and the emotional toll of family sicknesses and death impacting students, the school district stopped approving research study requests and limited its approvals. The dissertation committee agreed it was best to move forward with the study and rely more heavily on teacher perspectives who have taught a significant number of Black males throughout their teacher career while using the textbook under review for this study. Therefore, only teachers from schools with a majority Black male student population were selected. This approach allowed us to come as close as possible to understanding the student experience without including students.

The second limitation concerns the pool of teachers from whom the researcher was allowed to choose. The school district did not allow all middle schools to be used. However, it did not limit which middle schools could be used. They requested the names

of a handful of school sites to be included in the study and then requested the researcher work with the principals of those schools to identify volunteers to participate. The researcher narrowed the schools to seven schools dispersed throughout the district in an effort to capture input from varied demographics. All schools were approved by the district. However, this leads to the following limitations of the study: lack of participation from Black male English Language Arts teachers and lack of participation from non-Black English Language Arts teachers.

The third limitation is the lack of participation from Black male English Language Art teachers or participation from non-Black male or female English Language Art teachers. The input of a Black male teacher or teacher from another race may have provided additional information and context to understanding the perception of Black male students and their experience with the curriculum. Interviews were conducted after the school year ended, which meant teachers were not checking their emails as frequently or may not have been available due to prior engagements. Because participation was voluntary and no more than one teacher would be interviewed from the same school, it limited the pool of teachers. The opportunity to hear from additional voices may have provided additional insight or may have been in line with the Black female teachers who volunteered.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several areas for future research could add to the findings in this student. A quantitative study to gain input from Black male students regarding their perception of the textbook would move them from being the object of the study to the subject. Hearing their perspectives first-hand through a phenomenological qualitative study with

structured interviews and focus groups may also solicit deeper context in understanding the phenomenon.

Moreover, Black female students can also benefit from a similar study such as this one. Albeit in the same classroom, the intersectionality of race and gender in the identity development of the Black female student experience deserves equal interrogation in understanding the evolution of their identity within the school environment.

An expanded qualitative study of the curriculum textbook grades 9-12 would complement the findings of this study. A review of the racial demographic of the *Collections* textbook, authorship, and racial identifiers used in high school would indicate how systemic the issue is throughout a student's academic journey from middle school to graduation. In addition to student reading scores and teacher perceptions, we can examine the evolution of Black males as they reach 18 years old.

As the American education system is sometimes referred to as K-16 education, higher education is slated as the next academic landing place for many Black male learners. A case study research of higher education students' general education courses can improve again further our understanding of how race and text pieces reflect the identity and lived experiences of Black males and the role it plays in shaping their social identity. Again, this data can provide insight into the potential prevalence of structural violence and hegemony exercised by higher education institutions. When grouped together, data from middle grades, high school, and lower-division coursework may provide deep insight into the systemic levels of structural violence, anti-Blackness, and whiteness impacting Black male and female learners.

To build on the study of the *Collections* textbook, a comparative study of other widely used curriculum textbook choices for English/Language Arts could lead to the development of culturally relevant pedagogy ratings, which could be instrumental in guiding the textbook selection process of school board officials and school administrators.

Considering the normalization of whiteness, another qualitative study to explore is the perception of parents and their preference for the racial makeup of their school choice. Do parents believe the school is safer, smarter, or has more advantages when the demographic of the school is largely populated by a particular race? Do they prefer such schools? Learning about their preference may shed light on implicit bias or further conversations on how school districts attempt to appease parents in maintaining enrollment and funding.

Lastly, another study to consider is the experiences of Black male teachers and their approach and challenges to building relationships with Black male students. This study may shed light on the impact of Black male teachers as solution-oriented agents in creating connections to the classroom and the text. Additionally, learning how Black male teachers confront the various types of social, structural, and interpersonal conflicts found within the educational system may also solicit information on resolving racial conflict.

Conclusion

In order to address the phenomenon of what appeared as strangers in the classroom, this research investigated the Black male identity as experienced through the English Language Arts curriculum within Title 1 middle schools of a specific school

district. The study inquired of teachers to understand their viewpoints when engaging Black boys in the classroom. The study also gained insight from administrators on and the process for selecting the curriculum textbook. The textbook, in which the vast majority of the curriculum is based, sat in the center of the study. The Black male sat in the middle of the textbook. What was their relationship with the text? Do their lived experiences identify with the text? Do they receive positive imagery of Blackness within the text? Surrounding the Black male and the text was the historical underpinnings of a racialized education system that unfolded from a critical historical analysis of K-12 education. The learning outcome of Black males on the state standardized reading test was also analyzed to better examine their academic progress. This case summarily reflected an interest in understanding the Black male's experience and the potentiality of curriculum bias. The protracted identity conflict concept was developed as the case study proposition, a consideration of what was summarily causing the phenomenon. The findings of the study corroborated the concept and led to the visual development of a diagram to convey the correlating themes of the study and the concept.

The findings indicated several key factors to understanding the phenomenon of Black males as strangers in the classroom. Such insight included the importance of teachers connecting with their students by building relationships with them and teachers being responsible for supplementing the curriculum textbook with additional content to assist students in creating connectivity to the text. The findings also revealed that while multicultural text pieces were a requirement in the textbook adoption process, the textbook was more heavily designed for language arts skill development. The most impactful findings revealed the barriers affecting the identity development of Black

males within their educational experience. These factors included whiteness, the hypervisibility of Blackness, and structural violence.

Whiteness, the hypervisibility of Blackness, and structural violence served as corroborating agents to the protracted identity conflict concept, which led to the development of a diagram to explain the Black male experience within Title 1 middle schools. Economically disadvantaged, low reading scores, yet the most visible group of students, Black males, experience a protracted identity conflict as they endure through whiteness and subtle but meaningful elements of structural violence within the school district. The feedback from the institution plays an integral role in drafting a social text from which students materialize their identity. The findings revealed that the environment created by the teacher, school leadership, district administrators, and additional stakeholders directly impacts the relationship the student develops with the environment and themselves.

With these factors in mind, what concern for the agency of Black males should then be considered? School district stakeholders may benefit from facilitative dialogues with Black male students that enumerate their experiences. Doing so opens a dialogue for connection and relationship building. The teachers of this study highlighted the necessity of building relationships with Black male students amidst their "cool" and "swag" to positively impact their learning outcomes. We can postulate, based on this case study, that when their identity is absent from the textbook, they turn to other cues within the educational environment to develop meaning and a sense of self. Those other cues undoubtedly include other persons with agency, such as teachers, staff, and administrators. For the benefit of the environment, centering the voice of Black male

students may provide important insight into their learning outcomes and opportunities for developing a culture of belonging.

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