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The Male African American Teaching African American Male Students: Exploring Teacher Influence on Students' Perceptions of Teacher Care and Attitudes toward Mathematics

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This dissertation, THE MALE AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS: EXPLORING TEACHER INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER CARE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MATHEMATICS, by JASON GARRICK HUNTER, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

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THE MALE AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE
STUDENTS: EXPLORING TEACHER INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
TEACHER CARE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MATHEMATICS

by

JASON GARRICK HUNTER

Under the Direction of Dr. David W. Stinson

ABSTRACT

Educational and public narratives on the achievement outcomes of Black boys in mathematics are too often negative. Contrary to these negative narratives, however, research affirms positive outcomes for students, including Black boys, when engaged in caring teacher–student relationships (see, e.g., Bartell, 2011; Roberts, 2009; Steele, 1992). Considering the growing importance of mathematics both nationally and globally, an investigation into the benefits of such caring relationship is important. But literature specific to caring teacher–student relationships, African American male students, and mathematics teaching and learning is all but nonexistent. For this reason, I sought to uncover the definition that African American male students had of teacher care, and how, if at all, an African American male teacher might influence their perceptions of teacher care. Additionally, I was intrigued with and wished to uncover any influence an African American male teacher might have on African American male students' attitudes toward mathematics.

The purpose of this qualitative study, therefore, was to explore the influence a “successful” African American male teacher had on three African American male students' perceptions of teacher care and their attitudes toward mathematics. This critical ethnography was guided by an intersection of an eclectic array of theoretical traditions (Stinson, 2009), including

care theory (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1992), critical race theory (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1998), and culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1992). This eclectic array aligned with both the philosophical foundations of the project and the methodological procedures employed. The project used ethnographic methods—specifically, participant observations and semi-structured interviews—during data collection. Data analysis identified six overarching themes that the participants used to describe teacher care: (a) motivation, (b) culture, (c) confidence, (d) discipline, (e) concern for futures, and (f) environment. The findings of this study suggest that teachers should reconsider the ways they care for African American male students, specifically, in the mathematics classroom, and that a caring teacher–student relationship has a positive influence on African American male students’ attitudes toward mathematics as well as their descriptions and perceptions of teacher care.

INDEX WORDS: African American male students, African American male teachers, Caring teacher–student relationships, Mathematics teaching and learning

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my late grandmother Elouise Hunter, my mother Barbara Hunter, and my Aunt Gwen Hunter. These three women have been a vital part of my life, my growth, and my development. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my aunts Deborah Battle and Linda Bartley, as they too, have contributed to my success. I am also grateful for the support of my cousins, Jamaal, Kendall, and Terren. We grew up together, like brothers, and made each other better. Consequently, I owe my accomplishments to my entire family, church, friends, mentors, and the people of Green Cove Springs, Florida. Without your guidance, support, and love, I would be lost. I love you all.

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PREFACE

Stangor and Schelter define stereotypes as “mental representations of characteristics of a particular social or cultural group that are shared among members of society” (as cited in Hudley & Graham, 2002, p. 202). I, however, prefer the word *narratives* when referring to the mental representations shared by our society on male African Americans in mathematics. Using narratives rather than stereotypes emphasizes the social aspects of these representations, as opposed to conceptualizing them as purely in-the-head phenomena; it also implies the role of storytelling in the propagation, which takes place through media and social interactions (Nasir & Shah, 2011).

Unfortunately, narratives of male African Americans tend to frame them as unintelligent, lazy, and inclined toward criminality (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Howard, 2002; Irvine, 1999). Additionally, these narratives follow male African Americans into the mathematics classroom, and aid in the creation of low societal expectations. These expectations are consistent with those that some teachers have for male African Americans, which are important because teacher expectations are vital to the success of students. For this reason, teachers should understand that they are in the forefront when it comes to perpetuating common racialized narratives in schools and classrooms (Nasir & Shah, 2011). I believe that teachers are empowered to either reify or nullify such narratives, and must carefully navigate their methods and interactions with students in an attempt to achieve the latter. Their expectations are an important component of the teacher–student relationship, and I argue it is critical in understanding the way African American male students make sense of these narratives in the mathematics classroom. I believe a teacher that is sensitive to the influence of these narratives can change the perceptions and attitudes that African American male students have toward mathematics, and this cannot be more evident than in my personal story.

I am an African American man who has chosen to make mathematics a major part of my life. Although I am considered a success by most, it is unfortunate that I am also considered a rarity in the African American community. Face it; there are not many male African Americans with similar backgrounds and accomplishments. I have a Bachelor's degree in mathematics, a Master's degree in mathematics education, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in mathematics education (with the successful completion and defense of this dissertation). And as much as I would love to credit myself with these accomplishments, I understand and recognize the many environmental influences that contributed to the decision I made to explore the field of mathematics. A decision that was considered an anomaly by society's standards, but one that seemed like a natural choice for me; however, in all actuality, this decision was not natural.

A "ton of factors" beyond my control, which included caring teacher–student relationships, helped contribute to my decision and ultimately my success in mathematics. But before I discuss this decision, I would like to share a story I wrote when I was 13 years old. Although a bit lengthy, I believe it sheds light into my early life outside of the mathematics classroom, including some of the environmental factors that have influenced me. And just like the participants in this study, these environmental factors are virtually impossible to be controlled for because of the varying home lives of African American children. With that said, this story prematurely speaks to some limitations of this study, while also helps to position myself, the researcher, within this study. These issues will be addressed more thoroughly near the end of this dissertation. Keep in mind, this story is in its original form; however, I have replaced all names, except for mine, with pseudonyms.

"JASON JASON ... JASON, get up from there; get up now," yelled grandmother. "Uncle George needs you now; get up, get up right now," she yelled again! "Ughhhh," I hate hearing her yell at me. It was close to 6:30 am on a Saturday morning and things around the house that needed to be done. Grandmother and Uncle George wake up at the crack of dawn

every day and I was the first thing on their agenda. I feel like a slave, not a child. I wake up early to either go to school or work around this place all day. I'm envious of my cousins and other children in the neighborhood. They get to play and enjoy childhood. They have a normal life; they go to school during the week, and sleep in on the weekends. I don't feel like I am 13 years old.

I am my mother's only child, but I live with my grandmother in Green Cove Springs, Florida, which lies at the mouth of the St. Johns River. It's a beautiful town for tourist, considering the great natural springs, and the St. Johns, which is one of a two rivers in the world that flow inland instead of emptying into the Ocean. This makes for a nice mixture of fresh and saltwater creatures. The view of the water from City Park is amazing, but I only remember seeing it a few times, because we lived on the "other side of the tracks." We live in a small two-bedroom house 15 feet away from the railroad tracks. Only an old Oak tree and a dirt road separate our house from the tracks. The house shakes as if it's going to fall each time a train passes. There are eight of us in all, two aunts, one uncle, three cousins, my grandmother, and "Uncle George." The space is limited, but we manage it well, considering we share it with the rats and roaches. I have great memories of this house and the people in it, some good and some bad; it's hard to reminisce without crying.

Aunt Peggy is the seventh of ten children by my grandmother and she is the boss of the household. Everyone tends to respect her space and stays out of her way for the most part. Everyone except my uncle Albert, he doesn't respect anyone, but I'm not sure how much of it is his fault. He has an addiction to crack cocaine. I've witnessed other addictions, but crack seems to be the worst of them all. Uncle Albert is very manipulative and takes what he wants to support his habit. I remember being conned out of my hard-earned money at the hands of Albert. But I guess it was either that, or he would steal what he wanted. My aunt Karen and her son Randell are staying with us temporarily until their house is completed. Her husband is staying with his parents as well. She is the eighth of my grandmother's children and Randell is my first cousin. They have been here five years already and not much progress has been made on their house, so I don't think they will be leaving anytime soon.

Kamal is also living with us. His story is similar to mine. His mother lives in Georgia and he has been here almost as long as me. That leaves my grandmother and Uncle George, which have been a vital part of my life. Uncle George is not really my uncle. He was sort of ... my grandmother's boyfriend after my grandfather died, which was before I was born. He lives on the porch of our house, which we converted to a room with a ramp so that he can be wheeled into it. He has a circulation disease and lost all but one limb by means of amputation. He has only one arm, the right one, but he was lefty; I'm sure life is very difficult for him, but you would never tell by talking with him. I never understood why he is always so happy, given his condition. His bed is near the window of the converted porch, so he can see the street. He smiles and waves at everyone that passes. It also provides for easy access for the "crackheads," to knock on his window in the middle of the night to beg for money. My grandmother has been his caretaker since before I was born. He gets around town on a scooter that was provided to him by government funding.

As the older of the cousins, by a couple of years, I feel lots of envy toward the others. I am called upon to handle all yard work and household chores. I am the arms and legs for Uncle George as he performs small repairs on lawn appliances and the neighborhood cars for extra

cash. It's like a daily ritual for me to massage my Aunt Peggy's back after she enters the house after a long day of work. She is slightly overweight and has considerable back ailments. My massages provide a temporary relief. My feelings toward my cousins and other neighborhood kids are deep and sour. I watch them play in the street from the yard holding a rake or mower. I wonder if there is a purpose. My childhood seems to have been stripped from me by the yell of my grandmother's voice or the call of Uncle George or maybe from the scream of Aunt Peggy from the other room that wakes me up to change the channel on the TV that is five feet away from her.

Why do I not rebel like the others? What makes me respect all my elders and not express my dislike for all I am asked to do? Why do they call on me alone and not have these expectations for the others? I have thought about these questions during the entirety of my short life. While the others slept together in a room, I spend my nights on the couch outside of my grandmother's door near the entrance to the porch where Uncle George sleeps. I am in a location where I can hear everyone call me, if I am needed. I go to church with my Aunt Peggy every Sunday, but I still don't know the true meaning or purpose of this life. My relief from all I feel comes in the few moments I have alone to toss the football in the air and catch it in the small field behind our house as I pretend I am Walter Payton. Things aren't the best for me now, but I have dreams. I'm not sure how, but one day the entire world will know Jason Hunter. I see myself in the NFL.

Similar to many male African Americans, I was an athlete, or jock as some might say, from a poor family, but yet I still decided to pursue a career in mathematics. This career path in mathematics was not easy. On many occasions, I was told that mathematics was too challenging for students with my background, and many believed I would fail in the field as did too many of my African American male peers. Too many not only failed, but they maintained negative perceptions of mathematics. But I was different; mathematics intrigued me from an early age and I believed it was my "calling." The interest I maintained for mathematics was often a contradiction to the expectations most teachers had for me. But why was this? Why did I not fit the narratives of most male African Americans in mathematics? If you ask me, I believe a few select teachers helped shape my early experiences with respect to mathematics and helped prevent me from being trapped into believing racialized narratives, as too many of my peers did, and ultimately allowing these narratives to indirectly impede my success.

Vivid memories of mathematical experiences inside and outside of the classroom flood my mind as I reflect on my childhood. The sheer usefulness of mathematical concepts to solve problems and its role in the advancement of technology were amazing. What I remember most are teachers who influenced my attitude and beliefs with respect to the constructs around me; they guided me to a view of the world through a mathematical lens. I “bought into” the idea that everything could be explained through mathematics, because my teachers had high expectations for me. Yes, my teachers had high expectations for me regardless of the inferences drawn by society that are rooted in historical data related to male African Americans in mathematics. I maintain that these teachers truly cared for me, and considered the cultural influences I brought to class with me each day in their lessons. Even to this day, I have deep admiration for the most influential teachers I encountered throughout my educational experience. Teachers who not only made mathematics relevant to me but also those who believed in my abilities. From the confidence that these teachers had in me, I fueled a passion for mathematics.

There have been a handful of mathematics teachers who I felt cared for me, but one in particular stands out. Mrs. Love is an amazing teacher and an even better person. She taught gifted third-grade classes and I recall being one of three African American students in her class. The other two African American students were girls, but for some reason, I was her favorite and she seemed to have higher expectations for me than other African American children. It was an intriguing situation; a White teacher investing so much into developing a relationship with a young “black boy.” In actuality, I believe she viewed me differently than the other African American students. The rationale behind why her expectations for me differed remains a mystery and to avoid speculation and/or further complication of this story, I choose to withhold my opinion on this matter.

Nonetheless, looking back, I felt like I was treated as an exception to the narratives previously mentioned, which by most accounts influenced the practices of my teachers. It was almost unheard of, at the time, but I am almost willing to contend that Mrs. Love's expectations for me rivaled those she had for the White students in the class. In all honesty, I believe she cared about me. She took time to get to know and understand my background, and the experiences I had in her classroom were vastly different from what my African American male peers depicted in stories from their experiences. You see, the African American students from my neighborhood did not have classes with me and I only saw them on the way to and from school, on the bus.

I remained confused for a while, because the concept of student "academic tracking" was foreign to me; I did not understand why my peers, students who lived in my neighborhood, did not have any classes with me. Hindsight eventually helped put things in perspective and provided questions that I continued to ponder. Why could these students not share my mathematical experiences? Would these African American male students have chosen a different life path or made different decisions had they been able to stand in my shoes? Would a caring teacher like Mrs. Love have made a difference in the lives of other African American male students? These questions came into focus and ignited my passion for research during my life experiences and growth as a graduate mathematics education student.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I discuss the historical performance and attitudes of male African Americans as they relate to mathematics. I then lead the reader into an analysis of dialogue on the significance of the attitudes male African Americans have toward mathematics and explain the purpose of the study. Lastly, I state the research questions that guided the study, and provide the rationale behind it.

Civil rights leaders declared literacy to be the key to full citizenship for African Americans in the 1950s and 60s (Morris, 1984). Back then, if African Americans became literate, they could not be denied a voice in political practices by the Southern states that imposed literacy tests as a condition for voting. Ladson-Billings (1997) notes, “They could begin to read and discern for themselves the political practices that could lead to liberation” (p. 698). Similar to the work of Freire (1970/2000), the efforts to increase literacy for African Americans were infused with notions of developing “critical consciousness,” which is described as an ability to read both the world and the word. Literacy was regarded as the key for African Americans to not only understand words but also to understand the world and how they were situated in it. During this brutally inhuman time in the United States, the ability to read was used as a gatekeeper to political practices that had direct implications on the lives of African Americans. As the literacy rate of African Americans increased, so did the progress toward critical consciousness, and liberation (Ladson-Billings, 1997).

Today, in the 2010s, it is evident that the climate has shifted drastically in the United States, and so has the battleground for civil rights. Jetter (1993) believes mathematical literacy represents the “new” civil rights battleground. According to Ladson-Billings (1997), Bob Moses

(a stalwart of the civil rights movement of the 1960s) supports this argument on mathematical literacy, she states:

Because of the crucial role of algebra as a curricular gatekeeper, urban students cannot continue to be tracked out of it; in the current arrangement of curriculum, access to higher level mathematics, beginning with algebra, can mean increased educational and economic opportunity for students. (p. 698)

Like it or not, mathematics is a vital piece of the puzzle in accomplishing the so called “American Dream.” Hrabowski (2003) asserts our nation will need to produce more qualified male African Americans in the fields of science and mathematics to meet increased demands and to address their underrepresentation in these fields. The opportunities are there, if schools can prepare African American male students for them.

Unfortunately, when using mathematics achievement as a measure of success, this new battleground is one in which African Americans and more particularly male African Americans are lagging behind (Noble & Morton, 2013). Regardless of the manner in which mathematics achievement is measured, male African Americans are consistently labeled “at risk” for academic failure, chronically underrepresented among high achievers, and overrepresented among underachievers (Davis, 2003; Martin, 2000). This persistent situation of being placed at risk, suggests that African American male students are not performing as they should in the mathematics classroom and of key importance to the performance of male African Americans is their relationship with teachers (Siddle Walker, 1993; Strahan & Layell, 2006).

Research that is specific to teacher–student relationships, African American male students, and mathematics education is scarce. The available research focuses on African American students as a whole, and how they underperform in the mathematics classroom. In addition to the teacher–student relationship, contributing to African American students’ sub-par performance is a school mathematics curriculum that is divorced from African American

students' everyday experiences (Ladson-Billing, 1997). The literature on African American students and mathematics suggest that both the mathematics curriculum and the culture of mathematics seem to be disconnected from African American students' culture (e.g., Bartell, 2011; Davis, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Noble & Morton, 2013). Using this literature, an argument can be made that African American students are lacking the understanding and care needed to reach their highest potential in public schools.

I believe the teacher–student connection, one of the more powerful pieces of the academic achievement puzzle for students, is extremely important to students of “colour” in present day classrooms (Siddle Walker, 1993; Strahan & Layell, 2006). Literature that discusses teacher care affirms that students experience positive outcomes such as improved attendance, attitude, self-esteem, effort, and identification with school if they believe their teachers care for them and their well-being (e.g., Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995; Noddings, 1995; Steele, 1992). In short, students perform better in school when they feel cared for by teachers. But what is teacher care? How can we define or measure it? Do we truly know if a student has been cared for or not? Similar to some educators, in the beginning I maintained a sense of skepticism and pondered the above questions as I critically analyzed the literature related to these matters. The existing literature provided me with some answers to my concerns, supported the theoretical soundness of teacher care, and pointed a direction for further research.

Performance of Male African Americans in Mathematics

High school can be a challenging time for many students but particularly for students of color who face many educational challenges (Howard, 2003; Noble & Morton, 2013; Thompson, 2007). Unfortunately, male African Americans are overrepresented in this group of students facing educational challenges. It is well documented, and current data reinforces the argument, that male African Americans are underperforming in the high school mathematics classroom

(National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009). When African American male students' mathematical achievement is compared to White and Asian male students, historically and currently, they are viewed as underachieving, unmotivated learners with inferior skills (Bartell, 2011; Davis, 2003; Irving, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Reyes & Stanic, 1988). This perspective is a major cause for concern, considering the importance of mathematics for male African Americans if they are to compete globally, both economically and educationally (Noble & Morton, 2013).

Given the importance placed on mathematics, I argue that the performance of male African Americans in the mathematics classroom warrants serious attention. Flores (2008) confirms that persistent gaps in opportunities to learn mathematics between historically underrepresented students (e.g., male African Americans) and their middle-class White counterparts remain. Bartell (2011) writes, "Addressing these gaps in opportunities to learn requires teachers to see mathematics as not only relevant to but also part of students' lives and communities" (p. 50). Literature on teacher care provides support to the theory of an effective teacher-student relationship facilitating positive educational outcomes for students. In fact, teacher care has been identified as "the most important belief system related to student achievement" (Agne, Greenwood, & Miller, 1994, pp. 177-178). I find it only appropriate to consider the influence such a relationship may have on male African Americans in mathematics.

Attitudes of Male African Americans Toward Mathematics

Research specific to the attitude of male African Americans toward mathematics is embedded in the midst of research that focuses on their low performance. The majority of this research positions Black boys as underperforming and unmotivated in mathematics without directly claiming that male African Americans have negative attitudes or perceptions toward mathematics, but all indications point in this direction. According to Nasir and Shah (2011), "the

research on African American male students in mathematics tells us that African American male students often view racism as central to their mathematics learning experiences” (p. 26). As mentioned earlier in my own story, I believe one of the main ways racism influences African American male students is by the perpetuation of stereotypes or racialized narratives in schools and classrooms. Unknowingly, teachers are assisting in the creation of identities for students, and for African American male students, it is an identity that views their mathematics ability negatively. Nasir and Shah’s (2011) central argument “is that racialized narratives about students’ intellectual and mathematical abilities play a central role in processes of positioning and identification” (p. 27). As students develop educationally and socially, they construct identities for themselves and others. Steele (2003) agrees that societal stereotypes about specific groups can influence the intellectual functioning and identity development. Black boys are branded with negative labels from an early age, which affects their perceptions of mathematics and how they position themselves within it.

Stinson (2006) claims that much of the research on African American male students tends to argue that they reject schooling because of the many deficit views of their culture. He classifies this large body of research as falling into one of two discourses: the discourse of deficiency or the discourse of rejection. The discourse of rejection, for Stinson, is the discourse that “focuses on the [perceived] systematic rejection of school and academics by African American students, specifically by African American male students” (p. 487). My argument is that African American male students tend to have a similar perceived rejection toward mathematics that stems from the myriad of ways racialized narratives affect them. I refer to this rejection as an *attitude of rejection*. Many interpret this attitude of rejection that African American male students have toward mathematics as them being lazy or unmotivated, but this is

actually the result of them identifying themselves as their teachers do. I contend that the attitude too many male African Americans have toward mathematics is deeply rooted in their relationship with teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence a “successful” African American male teacher has on three African American male students’ perceptions of teacher care, and their attitudes toward mathematics. This study fills gaps in research on teacher care as it relates to African American male students and mathematics. This critical ethnography was guided by a combination of critical race theory (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1998), care theory (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1992), and culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1992), providing an eclectic theoretical framework (Stinson, 2009). Three research questions guided the study:

1. How do tenth-grade, African American male students define teacher care, and how does this definition compare with that of their African American male teacher?
2. How does a successful African American male teacher influence the attitude of tenth-grade, African American male students toward learning mathematics?
3. How does being taught by an African American male teacher affect the way tenth-grade, African American male students perceive teacher care?

Definitions and Terms

African American/Black: The 2000 Census refers to this category as “people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa” (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2). In the United States, this definition includes those of African Caribbean or African Canadian heritage who share similar cultural characteristics (Roberts, 2010). Here, I do not differentiate between the aforementioned.

Successful African American Male Teacher: Teachers who are defined as successful are those who have been identified through community nomination by parents of high school students and/or principals as teachers who influence repeated positive student academic outcomes and hold high academic standards for their students (Roberts, 2010).

Rationale for Study

As mentioned earlier, African American students have been described as “one of the most disenfranchised and underachieving segments of the nation’s K–12 student population” (Howard, 2003, p. 5). Mathematics remains at the forefront of the current reform efforts addressing equity in schools (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM], 2000, 2014). Despite previous educational reform and restructuring attempts by the U.S. government, African American students and many other students of color are struggling in the public education system (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2002; Irvine 1990, 1999). Simply put, African American students and, more specifically, African American male students are not performing to their full potential in schools.

Historically, there has been limited research examining the racialized mathematical experiences of students (Lubienski & Bowen, 2000; Parks & Schmeichel, 2012; Martin, 2009; Stinson, 2011). The existing research does not adequately attend to male African Americans and teacher care in the mathematics classroom. Flores (2008) discuss persistent gaps in opportunities to learn mathematics between African American students and their middle-class White counterparts. I argue the mathematics classroom is the perfect battleground to attack the ever-present “achievement gap” for African American male high school students.

According to the literature, students’ perceptions of teachers also influence their attitude toward mathematics (e.g., Bartell, 2011; Nasir & Shah, 2011). As Nasir and Shah (2011) argue, “The learning sciences has long known that learning is deeply related to engagement: learning

occurs when one is invested in the learning setting, and when one has access to the resources necessary to learn” (p. 24). If students can believe they belong and are invested in the mathematics classroom they will become more passionate about learning (Alleksaht-Snider & Hart, 2001). What would help students feel at home and more connected and invested in the mathematics classroom? First, I believe students must identify with mathematics. To identify with something is to feel a sense of connection, because “identity ... is deeply intertwined with processes of learning, because identity speaks to one’s sense of connection and belonging” (Nasir & Shah, 2011, p. 24). Teachers who show compassion and understanding of students and their cultures will help students identify with the mathematics classroom and gain a sense of belonging. In the case of African American male students, it will contribute to them being able to overcome negative perceptions and racialized narratives. As a byproduct of teacher compassion and understanding students’ perceptions of mathematics education and their attitudes toward learning will change (e.g., Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Irvine, 1999, 2002; Morris & Morris, 2000, 2002; Thompson, 2004; Ware, 2006).

I propose that an effective teacher–student relationship can have positive outcomes in the mathematics classroom for male African Americans, but one must first understand the intricacies of such a relationship. Roberts (2010) claims, “Growing research evidence suggests care has been an integral part of culturally responsive pedagogical methods and characteristics purposefully demonstrated by a number of African American teachers” (p. 450). The care provided by African American teachers to African American students intrigues me: “Their particular type of caring is often demonstrated in an effort to amend the systemically-induced educational deficiencies of African American students” (Roberts, 2010, p. 450). Literature suggests this type of care models the care that improves students’ performance in school. And

researchers have found the practices of caring teachers to be associated with positive school outcomes for students, such as improved self-perceptions, renewed dedication to education, and successful post-high school outcomes (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Irvine, 1999, 2002; Morris & Morris, 2000, 2002; Thompson, 2004; Ware, 2006). Indeed, the literature supports the arguments that care provided by African American teachers improves the outcomes for African American students.

The available literature clearly supports the use of an ethic of care to promote an effective teacher–student relationship in the classroom. This literature, however, is largely centered on elementary school students, and is not specific to African American male students. The majority of this literature is informed by Gilligan’s (1982) and Noddings’s (1992) theoretical conceptions of care. For instance, Noddings introduces the term “engrossment,” and defines it as the process of a caregiver understanding the cared from the perspective of the cared. I interpret the care described by Noddings as only being possible if the caregiver understands the perspective of the cared for. I argue that African American students and, in particular, African American male students, need a “voice” in the research on an ethics of care, more specifically, a voice in the research on teacher care in the mathematics classroom.

Davis (2001) believes teachers consider a number of factors when determining whether to engage in relationships with their students. These factors are inclusive of a teachers’ sense of a student’s likelihood for success (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999). Much of the available literature points toward “effective” teachers becoming more “culturally aware” of students’ backgrounds, and adjusting classroom practices based on that knowledge (e.g., Bartell, 2011; Howard, 2014; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1997). Bartell (2011) believes teachers tend to have preferences for students whom they perceive to be most like them, and used theories of culturally relevant

pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1997) to illustrate effective practices employed by caring teachers. Given that the mathematics teacher population, reflecting the teacher population generally, consists primarily of White, middle-class, women teaching a student population that is increasingly racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse (Feistritzer, 2011), I assert that African American male teachers can provide care for African American male students unlike other teachers. This type of care can serve as an exemplar for other teachers of African American male students. My aim is to provide insight to this type of teacher care from the perspective of African American male students, because their perceptions of teacher care is vaguely represented in the current research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I give a brief review on literature related to male African Americans in society and within schools. I then transition into an analysis of current discussion on male African Americans in mathematics. Additionally, I examine the notion of care and how mathematics teachers might negotiate it. Finally, I identify the gaps in the current literature related to male African Americans in mathematics and teacher care. (As previously noted in the definition section, I use the terms African American and Black interchangeably.)

African American Boys and Youth in Society

Rarely, do researchers focus on the strengths or positive aspects of African American boys. Many researchers (e.g., Garbarino, 1995; Kozol, 1991; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Spencer, Harpalani, Fegley, Dell'Angelo, & Seaton, 2002; Stinson, 2006) have illustrated (and convincingly argued) that most of the literature on African American boys in society focuses on their (perceived) “deficiencies” among them and their families. Some social scientists—for example, Hernstein, Murry, and Jenson—have even gone as far as pointing to genetics, dysfunctional families, being lazy and unmotivated, and the “culture of poverty” in inner-city neighborhoods in search of an explanation of the deficiencies of African American boys in society (Wright, 2009). During these discussions, the words “at-risk,” “unmotivated,” “endangered,” “uneducated,” “lazy,” and “left behind,” are only some of the words that have been associated with Black boys. These negative descriptions of African American boys “shed light into the way in which much of the literature has fallen short in providing a more holistic, positive, and affirming account of Black males in schools” (Howard, 2014, p. 12). I argue African American males have been unfairly painted with a brush of negativity, which has been perpetuated in their hearts and minds by society.

African American Boys and Youth in Schools

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), Black males comprise nearly 7% of the student population in the United States. Howard (2014) painted a picture that reflects many of the educational challenges that this population of African American boys face in schools, yet still offers an “anti-deficit view of Black males’ performance in schools” (p. 13). The challenges faced by this group, although “not dramatically different from those encountered by other males of color, namely Latino, Southeast Asian, and Native American males,” are disturbing, but not accurately portrayed in most of the available literature (p. 11). Unlike what has occurred with other males of color, society has labeled Black males as a “problem” (Escott, 2009). They are perceived as not only a challenged group, but as being problematic. I find this label troubling in itself, especially considering problems are something we as a society desire to “fix.” But are Black males really the ones needing to be fixed? A closer look with a different lens allows for different perspectives. From a critical race theory (CRT) lens, Howard (2014) shifted the focus “on how we can fix *schools* and *practices* that serve Black males” (p. 13). He calls for a paradigm shift “in how Black males are taught, studied, and discussed” (p. 19). This shift calls for us to reexamine what we think we understand about Black males as well as our current practices within schools.

Despite the disproportionate amount of data and literature that supports the contrary argument, Black males’ performance in school can be explained without using genetic and cultural reasons. By viewing Black males through a lens of institutional racism and discrimination, it is easy to see a more reliable explanation for the underperformance of Black males (Gordon et al., 1994). This view creates a culture in which scholars tend to be more compassionate and understanding of issues like drugs, crime, violence, inferior schooling, and

economic instability when searching for an explanation for the deficit of Black boys in schools (Howard, 2014).

From a CRT perspective, “the plight of Black males in schools is an expression of racism that is endemic to North American society” (Howard, 2014, p. 23); and it has been argued by critical race theorists that racism is an integral part of the North American society and is embedded in all practices, norms, ideologies, and values (e.g., Bell, 1992, 1995; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda, 1989). From this lens, it would be difficult to believe the educational experience of Black boys is not a result of racial influence, and although research has shifted, most educators do not realize the role race plays, and it is therefore an “unrecognized component of underachievement among students of color” (Howard, 2014, p. 23).

African American Boys and Youth in Mathematics Education

In the field of mathematics, African American boys are not immune to the influence of race on their educational experience. The group as whole has underachieved, but there are many successful African American males in mathematics as well, and thus far, I have given adequate attention to the negative aspects of African American males in education. I would be remiss, however, if I did not acknowledge and discuss the successes as well. Just as I have offered my story earlier, an examination into the success stories of African American boys in mathematics is necessary so it can be repeated far more often.

Jonson-Reid and colleagues (2005) claim that it is important to assist students in building strategies that increase their belief in the importance of education. They argue that not only is academic self-efficacy important but also, and perhaps more so, mathematics self-efficacy. In fact, most literature on what motivated successful Black boys is consistent in a sense that the support system and self-efficacy are major factors in their success (e.g., Johnson-Reid, Davis,

Saunders, Williams, & Williams, 2005; McGee & Martin, 2011; Thompson & Lewis, 2005).

How can schools and teachers provide the needed support as well as help increase the mathematics self-efficacy of African American male students?

Noble (2011) conducted a study aimed at investigating stories of African American males who excelled in mathematics. During the study, an “analysis of autobiographies and interviews revealed that attainment and vicarious experiences were influential sources for these African American men’s self-efficacy beliefs and were supported by family, friends, and peers” (p. 188). The more Black boys accomplish in mathematics and the more they witness those like them accomplish, the more they believe they can accomplish. But why are there not more Black boys who believe they can excel in mathematics to begin with?

I contend that an examination into the components of successful Black boys will provide insight as to why some lack confidence or motivation. Along those same lines, Stinson (2006) suggests we need more critical examination into the motivation of successful Black male students. Therefore, if we find out what works, just maybe this could generalize to the rest of the population of African American males. Consequently, researchers like Berry (2008) used CRT to convey the success stories of eight middle school African American boys in mathematics. The findings of his study revealed five themes that influenced the academic success of these boys in mathematics. They were: (a) early educational experiences, (b) recognition of abilities and how it was achieved, (c) support systems, (d) positive mathematical and academic identities, and (e) alternative identities. Based on his findings, Berry concluded that programs that target early schooling experiences; educators being more cognizant of their influential power; and raising consciousness of parents, teachers, and the public about the performance of African American boys must become a significant priority for repeat success.

Howard (2014) discussed Black male success in an attempt to “transform the narrative in framing how Black males are viewed” (p. 112). He noted that students from all ethnic, racial, and gender backgrounds struggle academically at some point, but Black males are treated more harshly. When it comes to keys to success, he points to teachers, curriculum, and school ownership of its educational outcomes as ways to promote success among Black males. During his interviews with Black male students an interesting perspective was revealed, which adds an intriguing dynamic to this study. Most of the conversations Howard had with his student-participants focused “on complex notions of identity tied to academic success” (p. 116). Several of the students he spoke with mentioned having their masculinity called in to question by their peers because they were high achievers. They were said to be gay, or “acting gay,” which contrast previous research by Fordham and Qgbu (1986) in which Black males felt racial or cultural abandonment and the concept of “acting White” were the major disparagements from their peers. The group Howard (2014) interviewed suggested this concept of racial abandonment to mostly be a nonissue. When considering how this dynamic fits with the consistent themes that emerge from literature on successful African American males in mathematics, one has to consider the identity aspect, and in what ways it has been perpetuated by society.

Teacher Care

Mathematics education has taken somewhat of a leadership role in an effort to reform our schools: “Prominent in the reform of mathematics education is the call for students not merely to memorize formulas and rules and apply procedures but rather to engage in the process of mathematical thinking, that is, to do what mathematicians and other professional users of mathematics do” (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 697). Efforts have been made to revamp mathematics education. These efforts have been focused on engaging students in problem posing and problem solving rather than on rote memorization and convergent thinking. The idea is to

build on students' learning and make mathematics more relevant to students. Teachers play an important role in making connections from the curriculum to relevant applications in the lives of students. Existing literature suggests that teachers should have a better understanding of the students they teach to better provide relevant scenarios for the application of mathematics (Bartell, 2011; Davis, 2000; Noble & Morton, 2013; Roberts, 2010). The literature reviewed in this section examines an ethic of care in teaching (teacher care) that promotes a teacher–student relationship that is aligned with the efforts of the mathematics community.

In a synthesis of literature on an ethic of care in teaching, Owens and Ennis (2005) discuss three theoretical frameworks that affect teaching practice: the ethic of care, relational knowing, and teacher development of self. Based on their review of literature, they describe care as one of the key characteristics that help beginning teachers in their practice. Owens and Ennis conclude by emphasizing how vital an ethic of care is to the educational process and commenting that current teacher education programs do not address the ethic of care properly.

This work conducted by Owens and Ennis (2005) focused on the available literature involving teacher perceptions of care. Similar to most researchers of the available studies, they agree that effective teachers are caring teachers, but do not offer any findings that are generalizable to African American male students' perceptions of teacher care. Owens and Ennis's study also lacked any specificity to teacher care and mathematics teaching and learning.

To assist in filling a void in the literature on teaching care and mathematics, Hackenberg (2010) conducted an 8-month teaching experiment aimed to establish and maintain *mathematical caring relations* (MCRs) with four sixth-grade students. She defines MCRs as “the quality of interaction between a student and teacher that conjoins affective and cognitive realms in the process of aiming for mathematical learning” (p. 237). Hackenberg effectively used Nodding's

(2002) care theory and her own theory based on von Glasersfeld's constructivism as a starting point to postulate what is required of teachers to establish MCRs with students. The questions she aimed to provide answers to were: What is the nature of establishing MCRs in extensive, small-scale interaction between students and their teacher? What is mathematical about the caring relations? She views mathematical learning in the context of making accommodations in schemes and operations. To establish MCRs, a teacher has to "harmonize" with students' current schemes and energetic responses to mathematical activity, and pose problems that challenge students (Hackenberg, 2010). In other words, teachers have to be in tune with students' understandings, current schemes, and energetic responses to mathematical activity. Teachers then need to make accommodations and thereby develop students' mathematical ways of operating.

Hackenberg (2010) employed a constructivist teaching experiment methodology drawing from the work of constructivist such as Confrey and Steffe to explore the development of MCRs. Given the main goal of a constructivist teaching experiment is to understand the ways students operate mathematically and to monitor how these ways change in the context of teaching, she believes this design is well suited for her study. Her findings present three themes in response to her question related to the nature of establishing MCRs: harmonizing and challenging are linked, the linkage between student and teacher perturbations is what the teacher aims to influence, and acts of learning may be a confirming sign of having established MCRs. The question she posed related to the mathematical components of caring relations revealed varying perspectives. From the teacher's point of view, establishing MCRs requires decentering from one's mathematical thinking and constructing new mathematical ways of operating that mesh with the experiences of

the students. From the student's point of view, these caring relations are mathematical because they foster responsiveness to the teacher through engagement in mathematical activity.

Hackenberg's (2010) investigation of MCRs is a major contribution to research on mathematical learning. She provides guidance in the establishment MCRs and evidence of their benefit to student learning. However, her study raised additional questions related to how it is positioned in the larger landscape of caring for students in schools. She suggests further research in the development of MCRs with larger groups of students and making connections of MCRs to the larger landscape of caring for students. The platform Hackenberg provides for further research can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the lack of generalizability of her work to larger more diverse populations. Her study does add support to the benefits of an effective teacher-student relationship; however, it does not address the perspective of African American male students on teacher care.

Cornelius-White (2007) synthesized 119 studies from 1948-2004, providing for a large-scale analysis exploring the benefits of an effective teacher-student relationship. In this meta-analysis, over 355,325 students, 14,851 teachers, and 2,439 schools were examined. The guiding questions of the study were: "(1) What is the degree of association between positive teacher-student relationships and positive student outcomes, and (2) What are the degrees of association between individual person-centered teacher variables [warmth or care] and positive student outcomes" (p. 116)? The results of the analysis of data responding to the first question found the mean correlation between a positive teacher-student relationship and positive student outcomes was $r = .36$ ($SD = .32$) at a 95% confidence level. An analysis of data related to the second question found the mean correlation between empathy $r = .32$, warmth $r = .32$, and positive student outcomes was significant at a 95% confidence level.

These findings suggest that variables related to teacher care such as positive teacher–student relationship, empathy, and warmth have an above-average association with positive student outcomes. Given that empathy and warmth are often considered major components in teacher care, the argument for the effect of teacher care on student achievement is substantiated even more.

Overall, Cornelius-White (2007) provides support for the positive influence of teacher care on students; however, it is not specific to secondary grades or African American male students. In reference to the variables in Cornelius-White’s study, Roberts (2009) states, “One could argue that a large limitation of this study is the fact that ‘learner-centered teacher variables’ are not the same thing as teacher care” (p. 25). However, I assert that components of teacher care are included in these “learner-centered teacher variables,” which makes the findings of this study quite relevant to research on teacher care.

Perhaps a quantitative study by Wentzel (1997) provides a more compelling argument for the benefits of teacher care. Wentzel conducted a longitudinal study of sixth through eighth graders’ perceptions of teacher care. The study was conducted using middle school students and attempted to answer the following guiding questions: (a) To what extent do adolescents’ perceptions of caring teachers predict efforts to achieve positive social and academic outcomes at school? (b) How do middle school students characterize a caring, supportive teacher? An instrument called the Teacher Social and Academic Support Subscales of the Classroom Life Measure was distributed to 248 students. This instrument was designed to allow students to measure perceived caring by teachers using a Likert-type scale. A caring questionnaire was also distributed, so students could define behaviors they believed constituted teacher care.

Findings from Wentzel's (1997) study show that perceived caring from teachers predicted motivational outcomes of students even after accounting for levels of personal psychological distress or previous motivation. Students describe a caring teacher as one who demonstrates democratic interaction styles, develop expectations for student behavior in light of differences, model a caring attitude, and provide constructive feedback.

Wentzel's (1997) work, however, does have a few limitations. Her study examined White sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students and has limited generalizability to the population of interest in my empirical study. Also, Wentzel recognizes that differences in adolescents' and researchers' understandings of teacher care were limitations when using the adolescents' definitions to evaluate teacher care. She acknowledges that more research needs to be conducted in the area of determining what constitutes caregiving in the classroom from a student perspective; other researchers express similar sentiments (see, e.g., Howard, 2001, 2002; Peart & Campbell, 1999; Wilder, 2000).

Agne, Greenwood, and Miller (1994) conducted another study relevant to my project. Their study, quantitative in nature, investigated expert teachers' beliefs using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to assess four teacher beliefs known to be highly correlated with student achievement and teacher actions. The participants were 88 Teacher of the Year awardees from various states between the years 1987–1990. The data obtained by the questionnaires from these teachers were compared to responses from a group of 92 in-service teachers with varying levels of experience.

An analysis of the data showed that Teacher of the Year awardees were significantly more humanistic in their approach to student control. In general, they tend to be more caring, friendly, trusting, accepting, flexible, respectful, democratic, and student empowering than the

in-service teachers. Agne and colleagues (1994) conclude that teacher care is a critical part of the development of a “Master Teacher Self.” They also argue that because of the importance of teacher care to student achievement, teachers must understand factors that enhance as well as diminish it.

Summary of Teacher Care

Collectively, the studies reviewed above suggest teacher care is important to students, teachers, and the educational process in general; they also give credibility to the positive influence of teacher care. Teacher care has been associated with positive educational outcomes for students, and known to broaden teachers’ perspective of students. The definition of teacher care and significant aspects of it vary between students and teachers. From the perspective of teachers, most research suggests that teacher care involves concern for students’ futures, and the achievement of equity in the classroom. Students tend to define teacher care as it relates to the control the teacher has on the classroom and how well they get to know their students. Both students and teachers agree that communication is an important aspect of teacher care.

Nevertheless, much of the research on teacher care is from the perspective of teachers or a population of students that make the generalizability of the findings to African American male students virtually impossible. The need for research on teacher care that can be generalized to diverse populations is evident and acknowledged by some researchers (see, e.g., Hackenberg, 2010; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Wentzel, 1997).

Teacher Care for African American Male Students

The primary focus of this study is African American male students’ perceptions of teacher care, but there is limited research in this area. The perceptions African American male students have of teacher care are often embedded in research focused on other concerns or a part of a study on African American students in general. Consequently, the studies examined in this

section cull discussions from a variety of research that focuses on teacher care (e.g., Alder, 2002; Bartell, 2011; Howard, 2003; Roberts, 2010; Wilder, 2000).

In a research synthesis of literature addressing caring, race, culture, and power, Bartell (2011) drew from theories of care to lay out a theoretical map of what an effective, caring teacher–student relationship that supports student learning might “look like.” She explored the intersection between theories of care and culturally relevant pedagogy in conceptualizing the nature of an effective teacher–student relationship. Bartell used the work of Carol Gilligan (1982), a pioneer of care theory, and Neil Noddings (1984), who modified and expanded Gilligan’s work to the field of education, to build a strong case for teachers to move beyond a narrow focus on measurable performance and attend to students’ interests, cultural backgrounds, and concerns. Bartell synthesized literature to support her argument that an effective teacher has the ability to cultivate and maintain strong interpersonal relationships with students (Good & Brophy, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noddings, 1992). The literature she examines suggests that certain relationships such as those promoting an “ethic of care” between teachers and students (Noddings, 1984, 1992) lead to higher levels of student engagement and achievement (Pianta, 1999).

Although equity is a loosely defined term in the field of education, it is of extreme importance. Bartell (2011) also argues that to achieve equity in classrooms, it is essential for teachers to develop caring relationships with students. In the mathematics education community, most focus on equity as defined and outlined by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM, e.g., 2000, 2014). A caring teacher–student relationship is in alignment with the NCTM’s *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*, which provides explicit measures to achieve equity (NCTM, 2000). Bartell used equity to establish an argument for the

benefit of teacher care: “Establishing productive teacher–student relationships in the mathematics classroom has direct implications for equity” (p. 51).

Overall, Bartell (2011) provides a strong argument supporting the need for a “caring” teacher–student relationship that explicitly attends to issues of race, culture, and power; however, her work was not without gaps. Similar to most research in this area, she fails to examine the perspective students have of teacher care. Bartell also fails to provide suggestions as to how teachers can operationalize what she calls “caring with awareness,” particularly with students across racial and cultural lines. To her credit, she acknowledges the need for additional research to provide teachers with professional development that supports them in the application of her suggested classroom practices that focus on an ethics of care.

Howard’s (2003) study of 20 students who attend two majority African American high schools addressed secondary teacher care. He identifies three themes critical to students’ academic identities: the role of parents, the perception of teachers, and the role of college. The student participants believed racism, discrimination, and the lack of a teacher–student relationship influenced their classroom performance. The students felt that teachers pre-judged them based on race and made them feel incompetent.

Howard (2003) provides the perspective that African American students have on the importance of teacher care, but does not show how it influences their attitudes toward learning; nor does he provide insight into teacher care from African American male students in the mathematics classroom.

Similarly, Alder (2002) conducted an interpretive qualitative study that explored what care means to urban middle school students and teachers. She used two district assigned majority African American schools for the study. Alder interviewed one teacher from each school who

was designated by each principal as “caring.” She also interviewed 12 students from a total of 50, which elected to participate in the study.

Alder’s (2002) findings show that the majority (10 of 12) of student-respondents believed all teachers care. The students define teacher care based on teacher actions. They believe teachers care when they get to know students, provide personalized leadership for students, teach until all students understand, answer questions, talk privately with students, help students with problems, and call home to provide parents with feedback.

Limitations in Alder’s (2002) research are related to participant selection. Selection issues become a problem because district administrators selected the schools the principals of the participating schools selected teacher participants. Also, the students who participated were those who returned the consent form. According to Alder, the students who most likely returned the forms are the students most likely to be successful in the class and may have a positive bias for either teacher. Other limitations related to participants include her choice to study middle school students. Roberts (2010) notes:

Alder’s study only included middle school students and, since students’ perception of teacher–student relationships seem to grow more negative the longer they are in school, a longitudinal study of student perceptions of teacher care may have provided a more accurate picture. (p. 29)

Additionally, I argue Alder’s study fails to provide research that is relevant to the African American student, which Howard (2003) describes as the most disenfranchised and underachieving segment of the population. I believe Alder lacks an unbiased perception of teacher care from African American students and more specifically African American male students. Her study also lacks insight into how teacher care influences African American students’ attitudes toward mathematics education.

Similar to Bartell (2011), Roberts (2010) combined components of teacher care and culturally relevant pedagogy and coined the phrase “culturally relevant critical teacher care.” She utilized a qualitative, phenomenological inquiry methodology to study eight successful African American secondary teachers who discussed their caring toward African American students. In phenomenological inquiry, perception is regarded as a primary source of knowledge and describes lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Groenewald, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of her study was to explore these African American teachers’ perspectives and definitions of care for their African American students. Specifically, Roberts defines teacher care for African American students “through self-described behavior that addressed the realities of racism in students’ lives, reflected aspects of CRT and mirrored existing literature on African American teachers pre- and post-*Brown*” (p. 457). In her study, 11 overarching themes were revealed from the teachers’ definitions of care. I focused on the two themes that appeared most frequently: (a) political clarity and “colour” talk and (b) concern for students’ futures.

Colour talk, closely related to political clarity, takes place when marginalized teachers of color inform marginalized students of their same culture about the challenges and issues germane to being a member of that culture in the United States (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Thompson, 2004; Wilder, 2000;). Political clarity, also referred to as sociopolitical critique, describes conversations between student and teacher in which the teacher acknowledges that race does make a difference (Rolon-Dow, 2005; Thompson, 2004). This type of talk demonstrates the African American teachers’ willingness to unmask hidden faces of racism by exposing and unveiling White privilege (Roberts, 2010).

The second frequently appearing theme from teachers' definitions of teacher care in Robert's (2010) study was concern for students' futures. The majority of the teachers in her study expressed a feeling that if complete mastery of specific subject content was not within reach, they could help students understand personal value, collective power, and political consequences of selecting or rejecting academic achievement. It seems like having concern for students' futures is an important aspect of care and key for African American teachers. These feelings described by African American teachers are consistent with findings from a study conducted by Foster (1993) that revealed that African American teachers are often proficient in understanding and appreciating community norms and concerned that their students master much more than mathematical content, but are to master life. Additionally, King's (1993) comprehensive literature review supports these views by showing a trend in which African American teachers view caring for African American youth and education as one step in improving the quality of life for all Americans.

Roberts (2010) adds depth to the literature on the ethic of care by providing an investigation into the phenomenon of caring demonstrated by African American teachers for African American students. Limitations of her study are related to awareness of her positionality in the study. She is an African American teacher of African American students. Seidman (1991) argues that the influence of researcher bias and positionality on processes such as bracketing, contribute to the validity and sophistication of phenomenological findings of a study. Because Robert's study uses bracketing to analyze data, researcher bias was a major conflict.

Additionally, Roberts (2010) examined teacher care using an intersection of care theory and critical race theory as a theoretical lens. She avoids the colour-blind approach like much of the available research and disaggregates lines of race. Her focus was African American

secondary students, but the study lacks the perspective African American students have of teacher care. Considering that Roberts utilized care theory as defined by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1992) as a part of her theoretical framework, I argue that the student perceptions of care should have been a major focal point of her work. Noddings describes a caring relationship that is not complete unless there is some sort of confirmation given by the cared for. In other words, according to Noddings, there has to be a confirmation that the care given has been received by the person being cared for.

And finally, Wilder (2000) used ethnographic techniques to study 12 respondents ages 18 and 19 over a course of 6 months in her attempt to demonstrated how exposure to African American teachers and their practices helped a group of African American students connect to those teachers and the content they taught. Her participants were volunteers from a pool of college freshmen enrolled full-time at a 4-year university in the northeastern United States. The students in Wilder's study noted several ways in which teachers of African American descent influenced African American students. The students said these teachers increased their confidence, added content related to African Americans to the curriculum, and discussed the African American culture.

Nonetheless, although Wilder (2000) provides the perspectives of African American students with respect to teacher care, it is not within the context of secondary or middle grades African American male students. Additional critiques of Wilder's study are related to participant selection (volunteering) and her decision to study college students. College students are more likely to have a positive view of education, which may result in positively biased images of teachers.

Summary of Teacher Care for African American Male Students

Collectively, the studies reviewed discuss teachers and their relationships with African American students in general because of the lack of teacher care research specific to African American male students. Data presented by the researchers suggest a positive relationship between culturally relevant teachers, and African American students' attitudes and performance in school. The students who feel caring relationships with teachers are ones in which the teachers understand their culture and believe in them. Teachers of African American students express feelings of a connection to the students and concern for students' futures. Regardless of the differences in how teacher care is defined or perceived, both teachers and students agree, there are only positive influences of it.

The positive influence of an effective teacher–student relationship is evident throughout the literature; however, I contend the perception of what society considers the most at-risk group (male African Americans) is virtually absent in the literature on teacher care. Given the positive influence teacher care has on students, male African Americans need to have a “voice” in it, one that is not embedded in other research concerns. Furthermore, African American male teachers should be provided an avenue for expressing their perceptions on this concept of care as well.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I begin with my thoughts on an eclectic theoretical framework. I then explore the historical and epistemological evolution of care theory as defined by Gilligan (1987) and Noddings (1992), and its connection to educational research. Next, I explain why ignoring race is problematic when using care theory for education research. I also discuss how the intersection of care theory and the three loosely formed principles of critical race theory (CRT) as defined by Ladson-Billings (1998) are relevant to this study. Finally, I analyze why possible parallels can be drawn to this research from culturally relevant pedagogy and, within the above referenced discussions, I address the limited theoretical work of teacher care in mathematics education.

The Need for an Eclectic Framework

In my effort to select a theoretical framework, I engaged in an analysis of the ontological, epistemological, and ethical perspectives underpinning each of the available paradigms, which is aligned with what Paul and Marfo (2001) suggest all educational researchers participate in as they make such a selection. According to them, this is an imperative process, or researchers are “likely to find themselves mired in simplistic conceptions and choices of methodological preferences, informed, at best, by the same tradition that has perpetuated the inquiry-as-technique mindset in quantitative research” (pp. 537–538). Heeding their advice, my objective in the theoretical framework selection process was “to understand not only the methodological implications of each paradigm, but also its philosophical foundations” (Stinson, 2009, p. 499). I investigated possible theoretical frameworks in an attempt to find one that aligned with my philosophical foundations, as well as provide ethical and effective methodological procedures for collecting data on African American male students. After many attempts, I concluded this task

was too daunting. I did not need to try and force fit a theoretical framework into my study. I needed to be comfortable with the mesh between theoretical frameworks, my philosophical foundations, and methodological procedures. I realized, as did Stinson (2009), that “no single paradigm quite satisfied both requirements, leading me to piece together an eclectic theoretical paradigm to frame my study” (p. 499). I pulled theoretical concepts and methodological procedures from a variety of paradigms. By doing this, I was able to align my philosophical foundations with an eclectic theoretical framework and provide methodological procedures that proved suitable for this study.

Care Theory

An examination into the historical evolution of care theory is important in gaining a sense of the many perspectives it is understood from and how it is viewed from an educational perspective. In an attempt to define care from an educational perspective, Roberts (2009) states, “because of its many possible definitions, the definition of care, although extensive, is more tacit than established” (p. 10). Therefore, comprehending the origins of care is necessary in order to appreciate the difficulty in defining the term educationally.

History of Care

Since the early 19th century, the notion of care has been associated with the field of nursing. As a part of the character and virtue of a woman, nursing and caring “became an important manifestation of women’s expression of love of others” (Reverby, 1987, p. 199). From this manifestation, caring evolved into the “moral thing to do” (Purtillo, 2005, p. 32), with considerations for traditions, customs, laws, and other markers an individual and society use for moral guidance.

In other words, care and caring is a philosophy, a science, a practice, and symbolic of nursing (Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 2003). According to Noddings (2003), the ethics of care

arises out of both ancient notions of agapism and contemporary feminism. Gilligan (1987, 1993) began to study and develop her own theories on moral development in women. As a student of Lawrence Kohlberg, who studied the psychology of moral development in women, Gilligan noticed a pattern in women that different from that of men. Women expressed an ethic of care instead of an ethic of justice when discussing morality and moral maturity. Women faced and dealt with moral decision making in a very different manner than men, which might stem from the fact that the act of caring has historically been viewed as a way for women to achieve their femininity (Reverby, 1987; Tronto, 1987). Como (2007) claims, “women have also been much influenced by societal constructs where women’s voices have traditionally been subordinated to that of men” (p. 39). Through Gilligan’s search for a view of moral thinking, the pattern of care from the perspective of women developed.

As a pioneer in the field of care theory, Gilligan’s (1982) navigates her definition of care around power differences. For Gilligan, an ethic of care

contains the ideals of human relationship, the vision that the self and the other will be treated as equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt. (p. 63)

Gilligan’s theory suggests a feminized scheme parallel to Kohlberg’s (1984) theory of moral development. In that, she suggests the consideration of care above the ethic of justice on a “Kohlbergian” scale and further establishes a paradigm where “people, including women, are seen and heard within the context of their own histories” (Jorgensen, 2006, p. 186). Although Gilligan’s theory is not directly related to the field of education, it establishes the paradigm where people are viewed within the context of their histories. I interpret and generalize this definition to conclude that African Americans and, more specifically, male African Americans should be seen and heard within a context of their own histories if they are to be cared for.

An ethics of care starts with the perspective of “persons as relational and interdependent, morally and epistemologically,” rather than independent, self-sufficient actors (Held, 2005, p. 13). Most research on care within organizations has positioned it as a response to some sort of suffering (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Frost, 2003; Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, 2011). I pose the conjecture that schools are organizations, and within these organizations male African Americans are suffering. According to Lawrence and Maitlis (2012), this organizational view of care “shifts the metaphor of care from being anchored in caring professions, such as nursing, to being anchored in loving relationships” (p. 642). These describe relationships are consistent with the description of an effective teacher–student relationship that promotes positive student outcomes in schools.

Over the past two decades, care has been taken up widely in feminist scholarship as a way of understanding how human beings develop and how communities are and can be structured (Held, 2005; Liedtka, 1996; Noddings, 2003; Sevenhuijsen, 2004; Wicks, 1996). Lawrence and Maitlis (2012) claim, “feminist writing sees care as an ongoing central dimension of relationships, regardless of the suffering or the flourishing being experienced” (p. 657). In 1982 Carol Gilligan published *In A Different Voice*—a foundational writing that established an ethic of care as a powerful alternative to justice as the central value around which moral theory and practice might revolve. Noddings (1984, 1992) modified and expanded Gilligan’s work by considering its application to education; she notes that caring is relational, requiring both teacher and the student to contribute to the formation of a caring relationship (1992). A relationship of this type involves the caregiver understanding the cared for from the perspective of the cared for (Mayerhoff, 1971), which Noddings (see 1984, 1992) terms “engrossment.”

Care as a Theoretical Framework

As a theoretical framework, the ethic of care has a vast history and has been described from many perspectives from a variety of disciplines. This body of knowledge is a result of contributions from several scholars who have defined care in multiple ways (see, e.g. Agne, 1999; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1984; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002a, 2006; Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Siddle Walker, 1993; Tarlow, 1996). This multiplicity has often created somewhat of a muddled definition of care: “Because of its multiple characterizations, the definition of care can seem muddled and, in fact, is often more tacit than clearly established” (Roberts, 2010, p. 451). Nonetheless, Gilligan’s (1982) study provided the foundation in which current research on an ethic of care is established where caring transitioned from being initially rooted in the field of nursing, to being recognized as a framework to base other research.

Noddings’s (1984, see also 1992) study is recognized as the first to expand Gilligan’s (1982) work on care to education. Noddings believes human interaction was the central theme of care theory, which created a natural fit in education research. Noddings defines a caring relationship as inclusive of components of understanding, inter-subjectivity, and constant activity. She claims that a caring relationship is not complete unless there is some sort of confirmation given by the cared for. Therefore, Noddings argues that the teacher–student relationship should be reciprocal and requires a certain amount of trade. She also reveals concerns of cultural relevance when it comes to care in the classroom. Noddings (2006) states, “Two students in the same class are roughly in the same situation, but they may need very different forms of care from their teacher” (p. 20). The teacher must understand each individual student to better provide the care defined by Noddings’s theory. Noddings (1992) does note how difficult it is to know another’s nature needs, and desires.

As a part of my theoretical framework, I take on a lens of care as defined and applied by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1992), because from this perspective, the cared for—African American male students—are required to confirm that they are indeed receiving care. My study provides male African Americans the opportunity to confirm and describe care and its influences on them, whereas existing research does not. I believe the integration of Gilligan’s and Noddings’s definitions of care are the most appropriate theoretical perspectives for use in educational research. This integration not only requires a viewpoint focused on teacher practices and behaviors but also demands student input to substantiate what these practices and behaviors mean. Several other researchers agree and support the appropriateness of a combination of these two views of an ethic of care to study education (e.g., Alder, 2002; Bartell, 2011; Hackenberg, 2010; Noddings, 1995; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Roberts, 2009, 2010; Steele, 1992; Toldson, 2008; Wentzel, 1997), but few have applied this theoretical combination to the study of mathematics education.

A few exceptions to the aforementioned statement were discussed earlier, Hackenberg (2010) and Bartell (2011). Referring back to her study, that I reviewed earlier, Hackenberg used the aforementioned theoretical combination to study the establishment and maintenance of mathematical caring relations (MCRs) with four 6th-grade students. She defined a mathematical caring relation (MCRs) as “a quality of interaction between a student and teacher that conjoins affective and cognitive realms in the process of aiming for mathematical learning” (p. 237). However, if you recall, I noted earlier that Hackenberg did not address diverse student populations, such as race, ethnicity, culture, language, and so on. Awareness of issues related to race or cultural understandings and misunderstandings are not emphasized components of

MCRs, as a result neither critical race theory nor culturally relevant pedagogy is a part of the theoretical framework of MCRs.

Bartell's (2011) also uses a Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1992) care theoretical framework and unlike previous research using care, she does address issues of race, culture, and power in mathematics. Earlier, I discussed how Bartell intersects care theory with the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy in conceptualizing the nature of effective teacher–student relationships. Bartell's goals were to lay a theoretical map of sorts on what an effective, caring teacher—student relationship that supports student learning might “look like” (2011). By not avoiding race and researching mathematics education through a care theoretical lens, she ventured further than others before her, but also left room for future research related to care when it comes to the perceptions diverse student populations might hold with respect to just what care actually is and what being cared for actually means.

Overall, despite its prominence in broad discussions of morality and community, little attention has been paid to an ethic of care in the scholarly literature in mathematics education. Even less attention has been paid to an ethic of care in scholarly literature surrounding male African Americans in mathematics education. Roberts (2010) claims, “The fields of care and moral development theory have often empirically and theoretically overlooked teacher care, its connection to culture and its powerful influence in the lives of African American students” (p. 452). Attending to a context of caring for African American male students would extend the ideas of Gilligan and address the shifting characteristic of care based on group affiliation aforementioned by Noddings (e.g., Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004).

Care Theory and Race

Descriptions of care theory, outlined by Gilligan (1982), Noddings (1984, 1992), and others, have been criticized as being “colorblind” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Thompson, 1998,

2003). Thompson (1998) argues that care theorists (too often) “fail to acknowledge and address the Whiteness of their political and cultural assumptions” (p. 524). In the field of education, it is important for teachers to consider both their backgrounds and those of their students. Milner (2007) believes students’ learning opportunities are hindered when teachers adopt color-and culture-blind beliefs and practices. King (1991) discusses a “dysconscious racism” existing in the beliefs and behaviors of far too many White teachers. In other words, far too many White teachers support dominant White norms and privileges and focus on negative rather than positive characteristics of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lewis, 2001; Lopez, 2003; Nieto, 1996). Similarly, Irvine (1990) notes that even some Black teachers have fallen into the trap of having negative expectations for African American students. In short, teachers should consider their own and their students’ racial backgrounds when developing caring teacher–student relationships. Bartell (2011) contends, “A color blind approach is problematic because it ignores the fact that inequity and discrimination are current issues and are not easily remedied by simply ignoring race” (p. 56).

As previously mentioned, research on care inside organizations has mostly been in response to suffering of some sort (Dutton et al., 2006; Frost, 2003; Lilius et al., 2011). Schools are organizations, and I believe they are underpreparing African American male students to compete both economically and educationally in mathematics, which in my opinion, constitutes suffering. Lynn and Adams (2002) build a case for education being the one discipline where the effects of racism are felt the most, so the argument for not only care but also a care that does not ignore race in the organizations called schools is strong. Thompson (2004) argues that caring teachers implement anti-racist curriculum, reject a colorblind approach, and instead embrace “colortalk,” and acknowledge racial identity, culture, racism, and racial privilege as factors that

shape the color experience. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) consider critical race theory in education as a step toward eliminating racism in schools. For these reasons, I use a combined view of care as defined by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984, 1992); but I do not ignore color or race, and frame this study using an ethic of care perspective from a critical race stance.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework was first derived from the legal field in the 1980s, when scholars such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Alan Freeman searched for a way to more directly and adequately address race and racism in the United States (Roberts, 2010). It was initially rooted in critical legal studies (CLS), a movement that critically examined formalism and objectivism (Tate, 1997). CLS offered critiques of the law, but failed to address issues related to race. As a result of the shortcomings of CLS, came the development of CRT.

From the early stages, CRT was used to address the lack of diversity in the faculty at Harvard's law school and the marginalization of students of color from the school's curriculum (Carbado, 2002). From this origin, it transitioned to investigating many issues of race, racism, and power in society, while considering economics, history, and context. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) claim, "CRT seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 144).

Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate were the first scholars to introduced CRT to the field of education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT stresses the need to interrogate how the law as well as socio-cultural and -political structures and discourse reproduce, reify, and normalize racism in society. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) assert that CRT "advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education" (p. 25). Meanwhile, Ladson-Billings and Tate's argument was to extend CRT as a theoretical and analytical framework in educational research. Ladson-Billings (1998) claims that CRT consists of three

loosely formed principles. First, CRT stresses the need to interrogate how the law reproduces, reifies, and normalizes racism in society. Second, CRT entails “interest convergence,” a belief that European Americans will be concerned about the interests of people of color only when those concerns promote the self-interests of European Americans (Lopez, 2003). Third, and most pertinent, CRT acknowledges two differing accounts of reality: dominant and subaltern.

The first principle of CRT seeks to “unmask the hidden faces of racism by exposing and unveiling white privilege in its various permutations” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12). Critical race theorists see racism as a normal component of our society and the majority of people fail to notice it because it is a part of everyday reality. In studying the perceptions male African Americans have of teacher care, it is important to also explore the culture of secondary and middle schools and unmask any racist practices or behaviors.

The second tenant of CRT—interest convergence—acknowledges how unimportant the issues of African Americans are to European Americans when they do not promote the self-interests of European Americans. I venture that the perceptions male African Americans have of teacher care and their attitudes toward mathematics must promote an agenda consistent with the agenda of European Americans to gain the attention of European Americans. An agenda similar to that described by Noble and Morton (2013) concerning America’s ability to compete globally, both economically and educationally.

The third premise of CRT recognizes two differing views of reality, a dominant reality and a subaltern reality. This component of the CRT puzzle declares that the racial reality has been filtered out of conversation by the U.S. society. With a stance based in CRT, a study that focuses on male African Americans helps bring awareness of racial reality to the forefront of the U.S. society, just as it has in other studies.

In a study examining the discourse on race and racism of adult educators over several decades, Closson (2010) claims, “CRT reveals areas of racism left untouched by other forms of theorizing” (p. 261). Closson provides a thorough critique of CRT and examples of areas within the field of adult education that might benefit from using it as a theoretical lens. She believes many adult educators are confused about CRT’s definition because it incorporates a mix of concepts, strategies, and methods. In her work, Closson defines CRT “as a critique of the racial reform movement in the United States” (p. 276). She acknowledges the evolution of CRT “into first and second generation indicates the increasingly prominent position of the intersectionality premise” (p. 276). However, she cautions adult educators interested in applying CRT to not simply hone in on certain areas that can be “nailed down,” but focus on the areas that are relatively consistent across the CRT literature. Overall, Closson claims, (as cited in J. Johnson-Baily & R. B. Cervero, 2000, p. 278) “authors call for movement away from a color-blind pedagogy while advocating a personal ethic of social justice” (p. 278).

Brand and Wallace (2012) used CRT to identify whether there was any influence of students’ racial identities on the teachers’ beliefs and practices in a middle school science class. They claim, “An analysis of sociocultural and political realities of color requires a framework that exposes the pervasiveness of social constructions of race” (p. 346). According to Delgado (1995), CRT is such a framework; it operates under the premise that racism is naturally woven into the fabric of American society. Brand and Wallace operate within a CRT lens within the following tenets: (a) racism as normal in American culture, (b) White over color hierarchy as it exists mentally and materially, and (c) race as a social construction. For the most part, these tenets are consistent with those of Ladson-Billings (1998). The results of their study “reveals that teachers’ beliefs and practices were informed by their critical awareness of social constraints

imposed upon their African American students' identities" (p. 341). This finding is relevant to this study in the sense that it uses CRT to understand racial inequities and develop sociocultural awareness. Brand and Wallace believe the understanding of racial inequities "is the foundation for culturally responsive dispositions and practices of (in this case) middle school science teachers" (p. 341).

As suggested by Closson (2010), this study is framed using tenants of CRT that are consistent across much of the literature. The theoretical frame of CRT as described by Ladson-Billings (1998) provided a foundation for this study, but I feel it is imperative to acknowledge the few concerns mentioned over the actual application of this theory in education. Ladson-Billings expresses a fear that it may "continue to generate scholarly papers and debate and never penetrate the classrooms and daily experiences of students of color" (p. 22). She suggests that educational researchers take time to study CRT and understand the legal literature in which it is based. Additionally, Ladson-Billings claims adopting a CRT as a framework for educational reform will call for "bold and sometimes unpopular positions" (p. 22).

CRT as describe in Ladson-Billing's (1998) article "Just What is Critical Race Theory and What is it Doing in a Nice Field like Education?" details why it is appropriate for educational research. She points out that CRT addresses conceptual realities of categories that exist as the norm for White students, such as "achievement, middle classness, beauty, and intelligence," while also addressing categories such as "gangs, welfare recipients, athletes, and underclass," which are the marginalized and delegitimized categories existing as the norm for Black students. Solórzano and Yosso (2000) describe the use of CRT in education as:

a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of students. Critical Race Theory

asks such questions as: What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination? (pp. 40–42)

Considering the critiques of care theory for being color-blind, I believe CRT, as described by Ladson-Billings, provides the perfect theoretical match for care theory as defined by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1992) when studying male African Americans in education. Parker and Lynn (2002) assert, “Essentially, the color-blind perspective on race calls for assimilation, while critical race theory calls for full awareness and critique of the ideology of race” (p. 174). The intersection of these two theories—care theory and CRT—guided my theoretical analysis with the students’ perspectives as the focus.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is frequently identified with the work of Ladson-Billings (e.g., 1992). Ladson-Billings defines CRP as pedagogy that “prepares students to effect change in society, not merely fit into it” (p. 382). She stresses how vital the teacher–student relationship is to CRP, and says it allows teachers to “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically” (p. 382). This type of pedagogy views culture as a powerful variable in the success of students, and it acknowledges the importance of high standards and expectations for teachers (Irvine, 2001).

Roberts (2009) argues, “CRP is a philosophical construct that discusses a set of pedagogical behaviors that identifies, values, respects, and utilizes the cultural knowledge and performance styles of ethnically diverse students” (p. 16). My study provided male African American students the opportunity to describe teacher care and explain the practices of a caring teacher. The openness of this research project made it possible for the descriptions that the male African American students had of caring teachers to include tenets of CRP.

Additionally, the argument that African American teachers demonstrate practices with African American students being consistent with those that produce positive outcomes in students (cf. Bartell, 2011) was pertinent to this study. Roberts (2009) believes CRP has been a thematic underpinning of much of the work that discusses African American teacher pedagogy. She argues, “Growing research evidence suggests care has been an integral part of culturally responsive pedagogical methods and characteristics purposefully demonstrated by a number of African American teachers” (p. 450). I believe this care is provided as a result of these teachers having a deep understanding of the histories of male African Americans.

Ladson-Billings (1992) outlined three overarching contentions related to culturally relevant pedagogy (a) conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers, (b) the manner in which these teachers structure social relations, and (c) the conceptions of knowledge held by these teachers. Teacher practices aligned with Ladson-Billings’ contentions were connected to the practices of African American teachers in the work of Irvine and Fraser (1998). Therefore, the relevance of CRP as outline by Ladson-Billings is evident and necessary to provide clarity to the likely described caring practices of African American teachers in this study.

Summary of Eclectic Framework

The available literature gives credibility to the argument that teacher care has a positive influence on students. This small body of research investigating teacher care is most often framed from a theoretical perspective using care theory as defined by Gilligan (1987) and Noddings (1992); with few researchers bringing a perspective that addresses controversial issues related to race in schools. Some of this research captures only the perspective teachers have with

respect to care, which I believe contradicts the vision Noddings had of an effective teacher–student relationship, one that should be reciprocal.

In review of the definitions of care given by Gilligan (1987), and the expansion of care theory to the realm of education by Noddings (see, e.g., 1984, 1988, 1992, 1995, and 2002), Roberts (2009) states, “It becomes evident that all of these theories serve to enhance human interaction and possibly, student achievement” (p. 15). She believes this focus on quality and type of caring interactions between teachers and students drives the line of inquiry examining teacher care for African American students. I agree with her stance, and pose the same justification for the intersection between my study and care theory as described by Gilligan and Noddings.

The criticisms of care theory as defined by Gilligan (1987) and Noddings (1992) have been associated with their descriptions avoiding “racetalk.” Another such criticism comes from Parker and Lynn (2002), who argue, “A color-blind view of race upholds white supremacy in terms of sweeping away racial classifications, but leaves political majorities intact, which in turn uses the power of racism to undermine minority interest” (p. 173). The colorblind “community of care” discussed in the literature does not disaggregate the lines of ethnicity or gender. As introduced earlier, this study actually utilized an eclectic theoretical framework acknowledging the existing race issues in society and schools as I explored the intersections of care theory with critical race theory while allowing for the potential connections to culturally relevant pedagogy. The intersection of these frameworks is the overlap and connection of some of their tenants, hence the eclectic theoretical framework.

There is a limited body of research on care theory and mathematics, and none specific to African American male students in mathematics. As discussed earlier, Bartell (2011) studied

mathematics with a care theoretical frame addressing race, culture, and power; however, she did not use a critical race theoretical lens. My eclectic theoretical framework relied heavily on tenants from each of the aforementioned theoretical frames. Borrowing tenants from critical race theory has allowed researchers (like myself) to explore the culture of K–12 institutions with a focus on exploring the nature of racist acts, behaviors, and/or utterances to students of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), much of the scholarly literature of CRT is focused on bringing a voice, or additional power to discourses of racial injustices and hope for racial justice. The intersection of this study with CRT brings a voice of African American male students' perspectives of teacher care and insight into the significance of race and its influences on care. Additionally, the linkages to CRP became relevant to this investigation into teacher care. African American male students describe and define pedagogical care behaviors of African American teachers; and just as in previous research, these described behaviors included aspects of CRP.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I lay the foundation for the qualitative methodology in which I employed. Next, I discuss how my theoretical framework and methodology interconnect, while explaining ethnography, its flexibility, and appropriateness for this study. I then describe previous uses of critical ethnography in the field of education, and provide an explanation for selecting it as a methodology. Later, I position myself, the researcher, within the study, followed by revealing details of how this study was conducted. I conclude with a discussion on the limitations and delimitations of this study.

Qualitative Frameworks

Given the multiple complexities of this study exploring the influence a successful African American male teacher has on African American male students' perceptions of teacher care, and their attitudes toward mathematics, I employed a qualitative methodology to assist in filling gaps in research on teacher care as it relates to male African Americans and mathematics. More specifically, this study employed a critical ethnographic methodology.

Creswell (1994) describes qualitative research in terms of philosophical assumptions that researchers have about the nature of reality, epistemology, values, the rhetoric of research, and methodology. This description was reexamined because of developments in the use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies (i.e., mixed methods) and new philosophical assumptions (most notably, critical perspectives). Crotty (1998) in his book *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* establishes a framework of sorts for most current research designs. He suggests that qualitative researchers consider four questions with respect to a project: (a) What epistemology (i.e., the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective) informs the research? (b) What theoretical

perspective (i.e., philosophical stance) lies behind the methodology in question? (c) What methodology (i.e., strategy or plans of action that links methods to outcomes) governs the researcher's choice and use of methods? (d) What methods (i.e., techniques and procedures) does the researcher propose to use?

In the following sections, I detail and discuss how the chosen methodology relates to the theoretical framework of this study and addresses each of the questions outlined by Crotty (1998). I also justify the appropriateness of the chosen methodology and methods. I then explore the use of my chosen qualitative methodology in educational research while discussing its advantages and disadvantages within the context of this study. And finally, an explanation of how the theoretical underpinnings of teacher care influences data collection and analysis is discussed while providing details to each aspect of this study.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Researchers bring a number of assumptions into a chosen methodology. For this reason, a vital requirement for researchers is to describe a philosophical stance behind the chosen methodology and acknowledge these assumptions. In his description of a theoretical perspective, Crotty (1998) ask: "How, then, do we take account of these assumptions and justify them? By expounding our theoretical perspective, that is, our view of the human world and social life within that world, wherein such assumptions are grounded" (p. 7). In doing just that, I assert this research was guided by a combination of critical race theory (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1998) and care theory (e.g., Carol Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1992). There is also added support for this project being provided by a culturally relevant pedagogy lens as described by Ladson-Billings (1992) and Roberts (2009).

In this study, as mentioned earlier, I merged ideas from three different theoretical frameworks to take in account my philosophies and their connection to methodological practices.

This idea of an integrated theoretical framework is similar to what Stinson (2009) refers to as an eclectic theoretical framework, one in which he “borrowed theoretical concepts and methodological procedures from different [theoretical] paradigms” (p. 499). And here, just as he did, I attempted to understand not only the methodological implications but also the philosophical foundation of my theoretical choices. The use of this eclectic theoretical framework allowed me more flexibility to match my philosophy on education with methodological procedures appropriate for analyzing and depicting the experiences of African American male students.

Describing the philosophical foundation that lies behind a chosen methodology explains how it provides a context for the process and grounds its logic and criteria (Crotty, 1998). As a part of the theoretical framework, this study took on a lens of care as defined and applied by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1992), because from this perspective, the cared for (African American male students) are required to confirm that they are indeed receiving care. This study provided male African American high school students the opportunity to confirm and define care and its influences on them, whereas existing research does not. An integration of Gilligan’s and Noddings’s theories not only requires a viewpoint focused on teacher practices and behaviors but also demands student input to substantiate what these practices and behaviors mean. Many researchers agree and support the appropriateness of a combination of these two views of an ethic of care to study education (Alder, 2002; Bartell, 2011; Hackenberg, 2010; Noddings, 1995; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Roberts, 2009, 2010), but few have applied this theoretical combination to ground their view and logic in the study of mathematics education.

As mentioned, criticisms of a care theoretical framework are related to it being colorblind, and not addressing racial issues. This study acknowledges racial assumptions as

observed by myself, the researcher, who just so happens to be a Black male teacher with experiences that are closely connected to the context of this study. I elucidate my position of sight, and allow my audience into my mind to better understand how I am seeing and interpreting details of this study. In doing just that, care theory, as described above, is merged with critical perspectives, as to provide a more holistic view of my assumptions.

Crotty (1998) argues, “Critical forms of research call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice” (p. 157). In other words, a critical theoretical perspective is concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender. The theoretical perspective of this research merges with critical race theory (CRT). Which if you recall from the earlier discussion, Ladson-Billings (1998) argued for extending CRT to the field of education because it stresses the need to interrogate how the law as well as socio-cultural and -political discourse reproduces, reifies, and normalizes racism in society; and based on my assumptions, as a researcher, I anticipated the interrogation of the normalization of institutional racism in schools. The last piece to the complex set of assumptions informing the methodology of this study is culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Ladson-Billings (1992), as discussed previously, defines CRP as pedagogy that “prepares students to effect change in society, not merely fit into it,” (p. 382). This type of pedagogy views culture as a powerful variable in the success of students, and it acknowledges the importance of high standards and expectations for teachers (Irvine, 2001).

The eclectic theoretical perspective (i.e., care theory, critical race theory, and culturally relevant pedagogy) of this study is the lens in which this research is viewed and what assists in grounding the rationale behind the process. The intersection of the previously described frameworks guided the intricacies and many facets of this investigation into the notion of teacher

care. In other words, my eclectic theoretical framework took in account my assumptions as the researcher and provided a foundation for selecting the appropriate methodological procedures for conducting this study.

But how were these theoretical frameworks informed? The process of research “involves knowledge, therefore, and embodies a certain understanding of what is entailed in knowing, that is, how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Consequently, the need to identify, explain and justify the epistemological stance is in order.

Epistemology addresses the “nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis” (Maynard, 1994, p. 10). Social constructionism is the epistemology inherent to the theoretical framework of this study. According to Crotty (1998), constructionism views believe truth and meaning (knowledge) come into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. Social constructionists “emphasize the idea that society is actively and creatively produced by human beings”; social worlds are “interpretive nets woven by individuals and groups” (Marshall, 2008, p. 694). Therefore, with “this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). In this study, the concept of difference relates to the many student perspectives (constructions) of the phenomenon of teacher care. The participants in this study “do not create the natural world but have to make sense of a ‘world always already there,’ the very existence of social phenomena stems from human action; the process of bringing these social realities into action is the process of interpreting and reinterpreting them” (Crotty, 1998, p. 55–56).

Critical Ethnography in Education

In ethnography, the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time, by primarily collecting observational data (Creswell, 1998; Madison,

2005; Patillo-McCoy, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). However, “when ethnographers do not remain in the field for extended periods, they still have the opportunity to make detailed inquiries and conduct in-depth observations for strong data collection as a consequence of choosing an ethnographic methodology” (Dunbar, 2008, p. 53). This flexibility is an advantage for the researcher, by arguably providing leeway in the amount of time spent in the field; just so long as the data that emerges sufficiently addresses the research questions, and is not contrived. As a matter of fact, ethnography, which is originally a form of fieldwork for anthropologists, involves a flexible research process, and typically evolves contextuality in response to the lived realities encountered in a cultural setting (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Simply put, during an ethnography what an ethnographic researcher does is examine a phenomenon within a culture, while being guided by the contextualized realities of the participants. I next review several previous uses of critical ethnography in the field of education.

Dunbar (2008) employed a critical ethnography methodology to examine the early experiences of five African American women as they developed into culturally relevant pedagogues. She sought to uncover if these five women had a clear understanding of what it meant to be a culturally relevant pedagogue, and allow them to share their experiences as women of color in a Teacher Education Program (TEP). She took a critical lens to explore structures within these programs possibly preventing teachers from fully developing the ability to work in diverse classroom settings and causing issues that reduced their retention rate in TEPs. What she found was that the “resilience demonstrated by the participants was achieved by a self-engineered support system” (p. 152). Through this support system, it was possible to retain minorities in such programs, although the existent literature disagreed. While acknowledging there is still “much work to be done,” the critical viewpoint allowed for an examination of the

program and its practices, more so than the participants. Furthermore, Dunbar contended that TEPs could be improved so that “they are more sensitive to the needs of their minority trainees” (p. 153).

Cavanaugh (2009) used critical ethnography to explore how students’ interactions with teachers, peers, and texts shaped and influenced their literacy learning. Over a period of 7 months, she used ethnographic techniques (i.e., observations, field notes, audio tapes, and interviews) to collect data. Cavanaugh claimed that she “attempted to enter the classroom in a nonintrusive way while documenting naturally occurring events” (p. 83). She considered herself “solely a researcher, as opposed to a participant or a teacher-researcher” (p. 84). This approach was an attempt to allow her to critique aspects of data without manipulating the context by directly participating. I believe her approach was applause worthy; however, I contend this non-intrusiveness was an impossible task. She, too, acknowledged that “it is impossible to remain invisible as a researcher” (p. 83). Cavanaugh, drawing from Geertz, notes, all human presence affects the dynamics of a setting, and as pointed out later, I argue a better approach would have been that of a participant observer.

Although it was not a critical ethnography, Roberts (2010) did use ethnographic techniques to investigate teacher care of African American students. As it turns out, her methodology was a phenomenological inquiry, which is when perception is regarded as a primary source of knowledge and describes lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Groenewald, 2004). I briefly considered this methodology for my study, but Roberts claimed that due to the “transcendental or pure consciousness” requirement of this methodology, some researchers have questioned the use of phenomenological inquiry to investigate care. So, in my case, considering my previously

acknowledged background, I foresaw this pure consciousness as possibly being problematic. I believe this requirement further substantiates my argument that a critical ethnography was more appropriate for my study. Critical ethnography does not require a suspension of judgment by the researcher.

In general, ethnographic research has been considered a “soft science” in the field of education within a society that looks for concrete answers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It has been used on occasion to evaluate government programs and examine relationship dynamics in schools, but does not gain the respect it deserves in educational research. In the next section, and in addition to what is embedded in other aspects of this research, I discuss some of the advantages, and disadvantages of critical ethnography as my methodology.

Critical Ethnography as a Methodology

The origin of ethnography is based in cultural anthropology (Atkinson, Delamont, Coffey, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001). This foundation of ethnography allowed for a more cultural understanding of the participants in my study. Additionally, because I was able to experience the daily activities, rituals, and interactions of participants in their culture, observational data collection methods seemed most suitable, and lead to the decision to use ethnography. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) claim:

For anthropologists and social scientists, participant observations is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture. (p. 1)

This study aimed to provide additional understandings of male African American mathematics students’ classroom lives and perceptions of teacher care. I allowed the participants to articulate things about themselves and their surrounding culture by collecting and analyzing data using participant observations and semi-structured interviews.

As mentioned previously, the decision to select an ethnographic design was guided by my choice in method: participant observations and semi-structured interviews. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) claim that participant observation “represents the starting point in ethnographic research” (p. 91). They believe participant observation is the foundation method for ethnographic research; while Crotty (1998) contends semi-structured interviews with non-directive forms of questioning are in line with an approach focused on seeing things from the perspective of the participants. Hence, the methods of choice for gathering and analyzing data directed the design of this project toward an ethnographic methodology.

More specifically, the type of ethnography this study employed was a critical ethnographic methodology. And, unlike Cavanaugh (2009), I used it to explore how high school African American male students define and perceive teacher care as demonstrated by an African American male mathematics teacher; and under these circumstances, I propound that critical ethnography is a fitting methodological design that complements my eclectic framework. I acknowledged the embedded racism within the structures we call schools and teacher practices but maintain the core foundations of ethnography, which in itself has deep philosophical roots derived from the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism and pragmatism (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Methodologically speaking, symbolic interactionism directs the investigator to take, to the best of his or her ability, the standpoint of those studied (Denzin 1978, p. 99). And as I continually reiterate, this study was most interested in uncovering the perceptions African American male students have of teacher care in mathematics. That is, I wanted to provide an understanding of teacher care from their standpoint. Coincidentally, according to Denzin, “some interpretive sociologists—those identified as ‘symbolic interactionists’ for example—are content to operate with a relatively naïve set of assumptions about how we come to know about social

phenomena” (p. 99). This study operated under a slightly different philosophical stance and/or set of assumptions in the investigation into the phenomena of teacher care.

In this study, I encountered a situation similar to that of Cavanaugh (2009) when she states, “throughout the study, implicitly held assumptions were questioned and practices in the classroom were subjected to a critical interpretation” (p. 81). Originally, Cavanaugh never intended her study to be a critical ethnography, but a critical stance became apparent throughout the process (p. 81). In an attempt to be proactive and avoid a similar fate, I considered the critical interpretations in advance. I believe I was able to foresee my study as one that “takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control” (Madison, 2005, p. 5). That is exactly what a critical ethnographer does; and in addition, critical ethnography itself draws from multiple sources of theorizing, such as critical theory, as well as many critical theorists, such as Freire (e.g., 1970/2000) and Hall (e.g., 1982). Willis (2008) suggest that these theories inform a “critically conscious” approach to research (p. 13). Here, I took a critically conscious approach to informing the analysis and interpretation of how power relations are negotiated in a mathematics classroom. I also took the necessary precautions to avoid pitfalls (Madison, 2005), subsequently discussed.

The employment of a critical ethnographic methodology to explore the notion of teacher care was decided mainly because of my planned use of participant observations and other ethnographic techniques, such as semi-structured interviews. The choice to use these techniques was based on the goals I set for this study, which were to observe what happens with the participants in their environment and to voice their perceptions of teacher care. Crotty (1998) claims that ethnography “seeks to uncover meanings and perceptions on the part of the people

participating in the research, viewing these understandings against the backdrop of the people's overall worldview or culture" (p. 7). An ethnographic study allows researchers to document, understand, and describe alternative realities from the participants' perspective, which are salient to understanding the behaviors of people in a particular culture. By choosing this methodology, teacher care was examined from the perspective of the participants within the context of their culture. I uncovered details and specifics regarding teacher care. And although teacher care is loosely defined, so much so that most researchers cannot agree what actually takes place between teacher and student, I argue that most will agree that what took place in this study was for the most part observable.

Furthermore, in this critical ethnography, I adopted the use of perception as a primary source of knowledge from phenomenological inquiry (Roberts, 2009). And given the emphasized goals of my study, I argue that this adaptation is more than appropriate. Perception, as a source of knowledge, was pertinent to my study and my findings relied heavily on it. Teacher care is defined as the participating African American male students and teacher perceived it. Additionally, I use one of the three ways of undertaking critical ethnography research: incorporating ethnography into a dialectical analysis to gain further insight. In this approach, ethnographic techniques are used to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants view teacher care along with the structural relationships surrounding it. The ethnographic techniques involved all support the goal of this project.

Harvey (2012) contends, "Marxists, feminists and black perspectives have all adopted critical ethnography of one kind or another in order to get a closer understanding of the subject's perceptions" (p. 2). These critical perspectives aim to show how participants' perceptions relate to wider social structures (of oppression). In this research project, I used critical ethnography in a

similar way. I demonstrated how the perceptions of African American male students and teachers connected to the wider structures related to overcoming narratives about Black boys and their overall success in mathematics. While doing so, I maintained an awareness of the structural factors and simultaneously probed for the meanings the participants had of teacher care and the influences of it. Meanwhile, I identified common themes from the participants, explored contradictions and considered biases while maintaining the validity of this research.

Using this critical ethnographic design, I viewed things from a critical race theoretical perspective, searching for what would rise to the surface regarding care from the students' perspectives. Atkinson (1992) describes ethnography as an exploratory process, inductive and, at least for a time, open-ended. This open-endedness inevitably means that the contours of the inquiry are not clear in advance, but rather unfold over time. Hence, the study of teacher care from the perspectives of students recorded an evolving process within a framework that was captured by the end product. Ethnography, with deep and diverse roots, and wide-ranging methods and many applications can bring great benefits, such as flexibility of methods and openness approaches of data collection (Atkinson et al., 2001). In this study, I used this openness to explore the perspectives of students as well as provide insight to their culture; this use is justified, considering the origin of ethnography is in cultural anthropology (Atkinson et al., 2001).

Researcher Positionality and Subjectivity

According to Seidman (1991), it is virtually impossible for any researcher to enter into a study with a blank slate. The transcribing and interpretation of interview and observational data is not without bias. Roberts (2009) claims, "all reactions and responses to any text are the result of mental and emotional interactions between reader and text" (p. 76). When handling data, I was careful to consider these emotional interactions; I am an African American teacher of African

American students and I had to be positioned within this study. Cavanaugh (2009) says, “In order to analyze the data from the perspective of the children and adults in the research setting, I adopted a phenomenological stance throughout the study” (p. 82). Within my critical perspective and while acknowledging my positionality within this study, I also adopted this stance in an attempt to understand the world from the participants’ perspectives (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Madison (2005) contends, “positionality is vital because it forces us [the researchers] to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects” (p. 7). I had to recognize and acknowledge that I am passionate about improving the achievement of male African Americans in mathematics, and have strong beliefs about the effects of teacher care. I have been impacted by my life experiences as an African American male mathematics student, and have witnessed the experiences of other students that look like me.

Currently, I am privileged to be in a position to influence the lives of African American male students; but outside of my influence, there are many factors that I believe play a vital piece in the successes of mathematics students. However, when it comes to African American males operating within structures (schools) that are not designed to their benefit, successes in mathematics seems to be less tolerable to the impact of these factors. And of these factors, I believe the teacher–student relationship and the relevance of the curriculum to culture are of key importance in improving the success of African American male students in mathematics. In addition to these beliefs, I am extremely sensitive to issues of race, class, and gender; my lived experiences as a male African American resulted in my own perception of outcomes and solutions related to this study. I considered and acknowledge how this (my researcher bias and positionality) contributed to the validity and sophistication of this study.

As Roberts (2009) did, I remained cognizant of the effects of my opinions and experiences on this study, as the data were “filtered through my own lens,” I allowed the “existing phenomena to emerge from my participants” (p. 76). Managing the discussed concerns, I spent every school day during an 18-week semester (spring semester 2016) observing and gathering data at an all-male African American School (approximately 540 hours of observations, and 360 pages of field notes).

Methods

Research Setting

In the real world of research, sites for research are chosen for a number of reasons, which include the practical considerations of the life of the researcher (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 127).

This study took place at Divine High School (pseudonym), an all-male majority (at least 95%) African American public high school located in the southeastern United States. More specifically, Divine is a public charter school and is located in the “inner city,” in a low socio-economic neighborhood. I chose this school because it is conducive to finding a class composed completely of all male African Americans that is taught by an African American male teacher. The all-male classroom created an environment for this study that lessens the complexities of gendered social spaces. Additionally, this location was convenient and my professional relationships with some of the previous staff members made gaining access easier.

The student grade levels at Divine ranged from sixth through twelfth grade, with middle and high school aged students in different buildings. The buildings are constructed with brick, and a covered walkway connects them. Both buildings are nestled behind a church and a small diner, with a small parking lot in the front of the school. The school’s parking lot could easily be confused for that of either that of the church or the diner. Consequently, the main entrance is narrow, making it easy to miss if you are not paying close attention; and ironically, the culture of

the surrounding environment is in stark contrast to the culture of learning that takes place within the building walls. Entering the building each day, students would leave behind a world of violence, drugs, gangs, and poverty. It was their escape; it was their opportunity to experience a new world and invest in their futures.

Participants

The participants in this study are male African Americans in a tenth-grade Geometry class and the African American male teacher of this class (see Appendix D). As previously mentioned, the school's student body is composed of all male African Americans. The participants are students of the same "successful" African American male teacher who was selected by the process of "community nomination" (Foster, 1997), whereby members of a community of interest suggest individuals who they believe will be the best subjects for research. Arguably, this process of identifying and defining the successful teacher is appropriate. I consider it a limitation, and discuss it as such, later. But this selection method was initially developed by Foster (1993) where members of a community selected the participants to be interviewed based on specific criteria. The success of the teachers in her study was based in their proven ability to increase student achievement in mathematics. Similarly, I searched for a teacher with a proven ability of success with African American male students in mathematics. By using this process to identify a teacher, I was then able to explore the teacher–student interactions and determine what takes place. Presumably, if previous research was any indication, I anticipated a special interaction between the students and teacher.

In my case, school administrators, staff, parents, and teachers nominated the subject most suited to participate. They considered each teacher's historical gains in student achievement, rapport with students and staff, experience, personality, and a few items they considered

intangible. In this process, the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), counselors, staff, and principal each provided me with a list of recommended candidates. After cross-referencing each of these lists, only one candidate Mr. Ira (pseudonym) was consistent across all four lists.

The average class size in this school was 28 students, but there were 26 students in Mr. Ira's geometry class. On my first day at the site, I was formally introduced to the class by Mr. Ira and began to acclimate to the classroom. I spent the first few days making observations and speaking with school staff to identify three student candidates within his class for participation; pseudonyms are used to conceal their identities and their participation in my study was voluntary.

Seidman (1991) provided two criteria for determining whether a study has enough participants. What Seidman asked was if there are a sufficient number of participants in the study to reflect the range of the population so that outsiders might have a chance to connect to the experiences described, and are there enough participants in the study to take the researcher to the point of saturation (where he or she is no longer learning anything new)? And just as Roberts (2009) did, I used these criteria to inform my study.

During the observation period, it was not long before potential candidates for further study began to reveal themselves. I took note of the different personality types and paid close attention to classroom interactions before identifying several students for participation. The eventual participating students were those that seemed to be the most active when it came to classroom discussions/activities and those that seemed to interact the most with the teacher. I wanted to select participants that would not hesitate to share their thoughts, but also provide the necessary saturation of information to inform my research questions. I realized that even though this study is specific to male African Americans, I needed to do my best to consider and reflect

a range of personalities and socio-economic levels within this population as to adequately address the criteria set forth by Seidman (1991).

After I identified several students for potential participation, I meet with them to provide more information regarding the study and to answer any questions they had. The meeting also allowed me to further develop a rapport with the participants and provide them with documents to obtain the appropriate permissions. Three of the potential participants returned all the documents, as they were eager to participate in the study. These three students are introduced by pseudonyms, and characterized later.

Data Collection

As is common with any ethnography, participant observations, interviews, and field notes are the major sources of gathering data. The multiple sources of data collection allowed for triangulation: processes in which researchers cross check each source of data collection with a different data collection source for accuracy (Maxwell, 1996). Triangulation is discussed in detail later; for now, I look deeper into each data collection technique.

Participant observations and field notes. The data collection method of participant observation suggests researchers should take part in activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the participants as a means of learning about their lives and culture (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), while field notes help me “construct the case” and the theoretical underpinnings of teacher care (as described earlier) provide a lens to ground my logic as I performed these observations. I was the sole investigator in the data collection for this study. I spent almost every day for a school semester at the research location for participant observations. As mentioned, in the first week I used observations to “orient” myself to the site (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004, p. 103) and to identify

possible research participants. I also took notes detailing the classroom setting, as well as noting routines while “gaining a sense of the flow of events in the classroom” (Cavanaugh, 2009, p. 91).

Participant observation “puts you where the action is and lets you collect data...any kind of data that you want” (Bernard, 2006, p. 343). Field notes were used to record data from the observations; field notes were crucial to recording the observations. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) claim:

The method of participant observation requires a particular approach to the recording of observations (field notes), and the perspective that the information collected through participation is as critical to social scientific analysis as information from more formal research techniques such as interviewing, structured observation, and the use of questionnaires and formal elicitation techniques. (pp. 2–3)

As did Cavanaugh (2009), I divided field notes into two categories, reflective and descriptive. The descriptive field notes were used to provide the details of “the classroom setting, activities, and interactions” (p. 92). The reflective field notes were composed of my comments before, during, and after each research visit as I reflected on my experiences.

The field notes recorded from participant observations laid a foundation for the contexts of semi-structured, open-ended interviewing, because participant observation “is rarely, if ever, the only technique used by a researcher conducting ethnographic research” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 3).

Interviews. The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, allowing the participants to expound on ideas and evoke storytelling. As noted, of the 26 students in the class, I identified three students to take part in interviews. These three students were selected within the first week of observations based on their involvement in classroom activities, willingness to participate, and input from school staff. Each of these students and the teacher was interviewed three times. The first interview (see Appendix A) concentrated on concrete details of the

participants' understandings and definitions of teacher care. It also allowed participants to explain their perceptions of teacher care and attitudes toward mathematics. As described by Roberts (2010), participants were also asked to provide details of "experiences upon which their perceptions were built" (p. 456).

The second interview (see Appendix B) was a bit more structured to elicit a deeper understanding with respect to the meanings and perception of themes, issues, stories or statements from the first interview (Roberts, 2009). Furthermore, participants were asked to provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of their experiences, to address "the intellectual and emotional connections between school and life" (Seidman, 1991, p. 12). The third interview (see Appendix C) allowed respondents to review their profiles and narratives for comment or further extension of its contexts. In this third, and final interview, they also disclosed how an African American male teacher influenced their perceptions of teacher care. Interviews were recorded (with appropriate approval) and transcribed.

Additionally, I maintained a researcher journal throughout the process and encouraged the participants to do so as well. The journals aided in the consideration of the validity of findings.

Data Analysis and Representation

The goal of all data analysis is the summarization of large amounts of data into understandable information from which well-supported conclusions can be drawn. This study involves two main data collection methods: participant observations and interviews. The participant observation field notes and transcribed interviews went through an iterative process of "reading, thinking, and writings; and rereading, rethinking, and rewriting" (DeWalt & Dewalt, 2011, p. 179).

To make sense of the data and find out what took place, ethnographers often incorporate two components to their data analysis process. These two components are data reduction and data verification or validation (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Including these two components, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that all data analysis include three fundamental activities: data reduction, data display, and interpretation/verification. Using a similar theoretical framework, Roberts (2009), drawing on the work of Colaizzi and Creswell, used a data analysis system that was inclusive of these three components to analyze her interview data. Just as she did, I used a combination of processes to reduce, display, and interpret data collected from participant observations and interviews. The bulk of the data was from interviews, similar to Robert's study. Therefore, I chose to code and analyze data in a four-stage process to determine the respondents' perceptions and definitions of teacher care. The first stage employed bracketing of information, which is also known as phenomenological reduction or first level coding. This first step extracted "sections of text from all transcribed data that represented statements significant to the research questions, while simultaneously noting any emergent themes" (Roberts 2010, p. 457). Most of the themes develop naturally, but some were anticipated, using previous research as a guide (Alder, 2002; Bartell, 2011; Hackenberg, 2010; Roberts, 2010). I charted each *significant statement* (i.e., a statement that I determined was directly related to one of the three research questions) by the participant it came from and as it relates to each interview question.

The second stage involves constructing profiles of the interviewees as both an act of interpretation and analysis. I eliminated duplicate statements and clustered the larger themes to form a narrower meaning; doing so assisted me in discovering and identifying "meaning hidden

in the various contexts of the phenomenon but present in the respondents' original descriptions" (Creswell, 1998, p. 280).

Similar to Roberts (2010), the third step called for clustering the represented themes that emerged. Matrices, which separate second level codes by research question and participant, were constructed. For validity, I created clusters of themes concerning participants' perceptions of teacher care while referring back to original descriptions of teacher care; I also crosschecked these themes with field note data. During this stage, I triangulated the data and checked for its consistency across the different sources. Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) define triangulation as "the use of multi-data sources or theoretical perspectives" (p. 275) to gain a better understanding of the data. According to Maxwell (1996) ethnographic research is subjective and triangulation assist in correcting biases that may occur given that the researcher is the only observer of the phenomenon. So, by collecting data through observations, interviews, field notes, and journals I was able to cross check for discrepancies. All discrepancies found during this process were noted, assisting in the reliability and validity in this study.

Finally, in step four, all aforementioned steps were integrated and structured to address the research questions. Charts that examine the representation of codes across and between participants were created. Significant findings were identified and noted.

Confidentiality and Ethics

Participation in this study was voluntary and there was not any monetary gain for the participants. Given that the participants are minors, the proper consents and protocols with the appropriate authorities were followed (see Appendices F, G, H, I, and J). Personal or identifying information obtained from the participants in this study will not be shared with or viewed by anyone other than the researcher.

Participants and their guardians were informed of all the pertinent details of the study before they made the decision to participate and could have withdrawn from the study at any time. Additionally, the participants were never asked to leave their normal environment. Risks were limited to what they would face on a normal daily basis. Furthermore, participants were informed of the intended use of the information collected and that their information will be maintained under lock and key by the researcher. Pseudonyms were used instead of real names to protect the identity of the participants.

CHAPTER 5

DATA REPRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

As discussed earlier, I used perception as a primary source of knowledge in this study to unearth the intricacies of teacher care, as the participating African American male students and teacher perceive it. Framed from an eclectic theoretical viewpoint, the purpose of this study was to explore the influence a successful African American male teacher had on African American male students' perceptions of teacher care and their attitudes toward mathematics. In this chapter, the results that follow are presented in four sections. I use the first section to describe the research environment and give background information on each of the participants while shaping their profiles. Additionally, I allow the participants to share their descriptions of teacher care as they respond, in part, to the first research question. And as specified in the last section, statements were recognized as being significant or not, based on their importance to each research question. These statements are clustered under the identified themes. Furthermore, the remaining three sections are intended to fill gaps in research on teacher care as pursued by the final two research questions, and to summarize my findings. In these sections, I present the identified themes as they address each research question, with only a brief discussion of them. Further analysis and connections are provided in summary sections.

Participants' Profiles and Descriptions of Teacher Care

This study involved four participants, three student participants and one adult participant. The adult participant was the teacher of the student participants. Originally, I only sought to uncover how students described and perceived teacher care. But given how I framed the study theoretically, it was in order to not only get a sense of how the student participants described teacher care, but also determine how the male African American teacher participant described it as well. Doing so was important because previous research on male African American students

and teacher care, more specifically, Roberts's (2010) study, provided only teachers' perceptions—leaving a void. So, one of the goals of this study was to simply fill that void by providing the students' perceptions of teacher care as well. Doing so became especially important given that this study is partially framed within Noddings's (1992) theory of care, which argues for a confirmation of care from the receiver, which she refers to as engrossment. Therefore, I aimed to determine if the behaviors the teacher participant demonstrated—and believed defined teacher care—were indeed confirmed from the student participants' perceptions as practices of a caring teacher. The information given in the next section describes the classroom environment, shapes the participants' profiles, and addresses research question 1: How do tenth-grade, African American male students define teacher care, and how does this definition compare with that of their African American male teacher?

The Classroom

In a small room, with no windows, I sat in a desk barely big enough to get my long legs under (see Appendix E). It was a student desk, and positioned in alignment with the other desks, but right in front of the teacher's desk. The rest of the student desks were arranged in rows, facing the front of the class, with a small table that symmetrically separated the rows into two clusters. I had no idea, that the desk, where I sat, would be my eventual home for the remainder of the school year. It was only the first day of the semester, my first day of observations, and I nervously awaited the arrival of the teacher and students. I am an early bird; when I was working, I usually arrived a couple hours before everyone else. The intense pressure of embarking on a new phase of such a significant study did little to alter my habit. My early arrival afforded me the time to ponder, the time to reminisce on my experiences as an African American math student, the time to gather visual notes, and I had hoped, the time to have a brief discussion

with the teacher. However, in contrast to my patterns, I quickly learned that everyone else at Divine Charter appeared to have regarded time as merely a way to document when daily activities occurred, instead of when they were supposed to occur.

I was let into the building and subsequently the classroom where I sat, by the lone janitor who quickly corrected me on his title, “I am the general manager of this building, not a janitor, get it right young man,” as he chuckled. Nonetheless, I noted some of the pertinent details of the class as I waited on the others to arrive. The walls of the room were an off-white color, because the brick had been painted. There were a few posters on the walls, but none were content related. They were motivational in nature, which was the precursor to what this teacher would eventually lay his foundation. The teacher desk was in the front left corner of the classroom, and as I previously mentioned, it was directly in front of the desk where I was seated, but it faced toward the classroom door; this way, the teacher could see who entered and left his classroom. As my eyes continued to scan the room, I noticed what appeared to be class projects on the table, they must have been from the semester that preceded this one, but they did shed some light on the creativity of the students at Divine, as well as the teacher who assigned them. The projects were some sort of structures, constructed using various geometric figures. As I walked over to get a closer glimpse at the students’ work, I heard a voice, “those are from the group I had last semester, some amazing students, they were.” It was the voice of Mr. Ira, the teacher who was kind enough, to allow me to document and share some of his most intimate classroom experiences.

Mr. Ira

As the successful male African American teacher participant, Mr. Ira was a vital piece in my study. He had been teaching for over twenty-two years, working at Divine Charter School

since its opening. Mr. Ira was a tenth-grade geometry teacher; he was a 54-year-old father of three, originally from the northeastern United States, and identified as an African American man. He is viewed as such, but as was common practice among his students and some in the African American community, Mr. Ira was categorized by his skin tone and grade of hair. They described him as “light skinned with good hair,” which he credited to his Cuban grandfather. Yet still, Mr. Ira said he could only relate to being black, because, as he said, “you can tell by my features, only the black side shows, look at this wide nose; and it was the way I was raised, I had no contact with anyone from that side.”

For his age, Mr. Ira kept himself in pretty good shape; his physic was that of a former athlete, but you could tell it had been years since he was a competitive participant in his sport of choice (basketball). He stood about six feet tall, so only when he sat, did I notice that his hair was thinning and slightly graying, as the remnants of the henna tint began to fade. He was always nicely dressed; it was rare for him not to wear a coat and tie. And, most times, they were worn in conjunction; but on occasion (jeans Fridays), Mr. Ira would wear a t-shirt that was always accompanied by a blazer and possibly a bowtie. I quickly learned that his students were his biggest critics, and it was not unusually for them to assist him in maintaining his image, which he did find important. He made sure his students understood where he came from, and how his origins had influenced his desire to always, look the part. “My mother raised a family of four on eight...thousand...two...hundred...and...ninety-six dollars a year,” is what Mr. Ira would say to the class when they complained about something. Although it may have been an exaggeration, it was his way of letting them know how minimal their complaints were relative to the bigger picture of life, while also giving him “street cred.” He never hesitated to share his “struggle” with the class, “I’m from the bricks,” he would say, and had faced many of the same

issues his students encountered daily. He explained, “I was the one that wasn’t supposed to make it,” when referring to what he had to overcome in life. If he could do it, so could the students he taught, despite all they had working against them. This was Mr. Ira’s way of giving his students hope. He believed hope was required for all students, but more importantly for those with “difficult circumstances.” In his eyes, being a male African American was difficult enough. In his case, he credited hope as his source of motivation. The hope he described reminded me of the same hope that I [the researcher] can link to my success as a male African American in the field of mathematics. For me, the belief a teacher had in me gave me hope, and shaped what would be my attitudes toward mathematics. Now Mr. Ira was doing the same for his students, albeit in a different way. He believed he was serving as an example of what his students could become, if they worked hard. He also believed in them, he wanted them to believe in themselves; he experienced success in the field of mathematics firsthand and knew what it took. They too could get a master’s degree in mathematics, as did Mr. Ira, or a Ph.D. in a field, that from almost every historical perspective seemed difficult for male African Americans to succeed in. But is it? Or, have we just been convinced to believe so?

According to Mr. Ira, “when teachers look at these kids, these Black boys, they see them as students. When I look at them, I see my sons.” Mr. Ira prided himself on being a “father-like figure” to all his students. I recall, watching him nurture students, as a father would, while also providing the rigor necessary to challenge them. During the first week of my observations, I noted several interactions that Mr. Ira had with his students. But, one in particular stands out; I witnessed him handle a discipline situation for another teacher.

His neighboring teacher, visibly upset, and without knocking, entered his classroom. The door flung open, she was clearly irate, but instead of running to the discipline office, she came to

see Mr. Ira. At the time, I was not privy to the details, but as I looked on, she did her best to whisper, as she explained the situation to Mr. Ira. Her tearful face said it all; it was obvious, she had become upset at a student. A calmness came over Mr. Ira's classroom, as everyone shifted their focus toward this brief interruption; we listened for any clues we could decipher. And as the saying goes, I could hear a pin drop; but to the disappointment of the class (myself included), Mr. Ira placed his hand on her shoulder and gently guided her outside of the room, away from our listening ears. Fortunately for me, my curiosity was satisfied, as I was later briefed by Mr. Ira on what had transpired. The teacher had a discipline matter with one of his former students. A student that Mr. Ira had developed a rapport with had been extremely disrespectful, and refused to leave her class when she directed him to do so. With only a peek in her classroom, Mr. Ira motioned his finger for the student to exit the room. "Once I got him outside, I said, what the heck is wrong with you; he tried to explain, I shut that down, he knew the deal; I made him apologize, by letter, and he owes me some push-ups" claimed Mr. Ira. One thing Mr. Ira never tolerated was the disrespect of women. I noted several occasions that Mr. Ira preached to his students on the beauty of women; how they are queens, and should be cherished. "Our mothers are women, treat every young lady like you would want your mother treated," he stated. This was all a part of how Mr. Ira expressed his care for young African American male students. He wanted them to be great math students, but even better people. And through care, he was making a difference, one black boy at a time. When discussing his definition of teacher care (Interview # 1), the conversation went as follows:

Jason: What is your definition of teacher care?

Mr. Ira: Teacher care is knowing your students, and making them feel like they belong. Knowing where they come from, knowing what they experience. I forget who said it, but "they [students] don't care what you know, until they know you care."

When I pressed Mr. Ira on what he meant by “know your students,” he focused mainly on cultural matters. He stressed the importance of not judging students strictly based on what takes place in class. He said, “When a child has an attitude or wants to just sleep in class, you can’t react like most teachers do, you have to look deeper at the situation.” Mr. Ira claimed he understands the culture of the African American family, more specifically, a poor one, and recalled being in a similar situation as a child; one in which he had been up all night with his younger siblings and wanted to sleep, as did the student in an example he referenced. Mr. Ira’s mother was working late, and he was “burdened” with the responsibility of caring for his sick younger brother. He was only a child himself, and had school the next morning, “but you have to do what you got to do,” said Mr. Ira. “Man, that next day, I didn’t feel like doing anything! So, I slept, in class, every class.” He believed not many teachers empathized with their students, or either they are not capable. Mr. Ira stated, “In order to have empathy you have to have experienced those circumstances before, I mean you can imagine it, but that’s not the same.”

When asked to provide a little more clarity to his statements, Mr. Ira made it clear, “I do not believe that someone who has not walked in these student’s shoes can care for them like I do.” He admitted the implications of his statements could possibly be offensive, or exclude a lot of people from being able to care for male African Americans (or any student not like them), but he does think a person can learn to care for students like he does. “It is possible to care for someone that does not look like you, or who is not from where you are from, but it takes dedication, lots of effort, and maybe even some training.” Mr. Ira argued the need for teachers to develop cultural understanding and empathy for their students. Additionally, he argued that teachers must understand how male African American students define and view mathematics as well. Without these qualities, a teacher cannot begin to care.

Mr. Ira believed another aspect to the teacher care definition, and possibly the most important was confidence: “Teachers have to believe in their students, and make them believe too. You have to build their confidence.” In the case of male African Americans, Mr. Ira suggested that they lack confidence in the educational system, and the importance of school in general, just as the system lacks confidence in them. He asked, “If they don’t believe in their teachers, and their teachers don’t believe in them, then what?” He continued to make a case for how difficult male African Americans have it in a school system “designed for their failure.” Additionally, he made an argument for why male African Americans need to be taught by someone like him that understands them culturally. He said, “I create an environment for success, we love each other, in my class, and tell each other that. They know I believe in them and that I expect great things.” On many occasions, I observed Mr. Ira tell his students how proud he is of them, how amazing they were, and what he expected them to accomplish in life. And he really did have high expectations and belief in his students. What caught my eye was how much he bragged to other teachers about his students, even when the students were not around. He sounded like a proud father at a soccer game: “Those are my boys,” he would say. At times, he seemed naïve, or possibly did not care as to how he came off to others. Because what I noticed, or interpreted from their expressions, was that some teachers would become perturbed by what seemed to be him bragging on his students’ performance. He attributed most of his success to the environment he created, and in meetings, he never hesitated to give advice on how to replicate what he has done. He argued that there is a need to establish an environment of love, “so when you need to scorn them [students], they know your intentions, and students respond by not wanting to disappoint you, and hence perform well,” which brings me to the last piece of his definition of teacher care, the concern for the future of his students.

“I care what happens to these boys; they aren’t just a test score,” Mr. Ira explained. He wanted to make sure that he not only teaches them mathematics, but also teaches them how to succeed in life. He taught his students how to be independent, how to raise a family, and how to be a good person. He contended that society does not expect much from the “type” of student he teaches, “which is a shame,” so he must hold them to a higher standard. The students know he cares for them, so that allows him to build them up, but also give them tough life lessons as well. Most of the statements that Mr. Ira made regarding concern for the future of his students were on how the public-school system is not designed to prepare male African Americans for life. According to him, his passion for developing young men, good young men, is fueled by “the ones that come back years later to say thanks for making me who I am.”

Kareem

The first of the three male African American student participants that I discuss is Kareem. Physically, Kareem is “tall and lanky,” as Mr. Ira calls him, and his dark skin provides the perfect canvas for his high mounted, perfectly structured cheek bones, pearly white teeth, and glossy eyes. He began the semester with short dreadlocks, but transitioned to a low fade about midway through. He was 15 years old, had been at Divine for 3 years, and maintained a 3.8 grade point average. He had received an “A” in every mathematics class since arriving at Divine. Kareem was being raised by a single mother and his family was classified as “low socioeconomic” according to school system’s guidelines, but he expressed, “money has never been a problem” (Interview # 1). His dad was in prison, but he said, even before that, “my mom sent me to Divine, because she felt like I need a bit more structure in my life” (Interview # 1). His mother wanted him to have “a strong male figure in his life,” and keep him away from the distractions of a “regular” public school. Kareem said that in his “neighborhood, those

distractions consisted of drugs, gangs, and other not so nice things.” In interview number one, when discussing his definition of teacher care, the conversation went as follows:

Jason: What is your definition of teacher care?

Kareem: It’s when a teacher looks out for you. When they ask you about your day, and what’s going on in your life. You should be able to talk to them too, without them judging you.

Jason: Can you give me an example, or tell a story about a situation when a teacher showed you he or she cared?

Kareem: Hmmmm, I would probably say the time when Mr. Jones (pseudonym) called my house to see if I was okay. I had been out for a few days; the other teachers thought I was skipping, but my dad had got arrested and I had to be there for my mom, she was really upset.

Jason: Who is Mr. Jones, and what did he say?

Kareem: He was my math teacher last year. He wasn’t mad or anything. He already knew something had happened, because I didn’t skip his class, like others. He asked if there was anything he could do, but didn’t stress me over the work [school work]; he said that he would catch me up on the work when I got back, and to handle my business.

Mr. Jones was Kareem’s ninth-grade algebra teacher, the math class that preceded Mr. Ira’s math class, and I could tell that Kareem had a lot of admiration for both men. As the interview continued, Kareem discussed the connection he felt with Mr. Jones. He claimed, that he “can just tell Mr. Jones cares,” for him. “It wasn’t just about school for him, if I was in trouble, that man would do what he could.” As I questioned Kareem on how he “can just tell” that Mr. Jones cares, he mentioned how well Mr. Jones understood him. Kareem continued by detailing how Mr. Jones was just like him as a child, but “maybe a little worse.” Kareem says, “Mr. Jones is just an older version of me, they both are, Mr. Ira and Mr. Jones,” as he directed the conversation toward making a connection to both teachers. He ended his story by saying how

he felt the same connection with Mr. Ira (as he did with Mr. Jones), and how much Mr. Ira reminded him of Mr. Jones.

Later, Kareem shared a story in which he believed exhibited how much Mr. Ira cared for him. Kareem began by detailing how Mr. Ira created an environment of comfort in his classroom. “What he does, is he never makes you feel embarrassed to be yourself,” says Kareem. He went on to say, “I remember at the beginning of the semester, I was having problems with my algebra; I went to him and said, I get adding numbers, but just can’t get adding up the alphabet.” Kareem was referring to variables used in algebraic expressions and equations, and Mr. Ira began the geometry school year reviewing those skills. Kareem continued his story by explaining that Mr. Ira never made him feel bad about that comment, and now, “looking back, it sounds stupid.” Kareem believed, that Mr. Ira had accomplished an amazing feat. From Kareem’s perspective, it seemed as if Mr. Ira created a classroom environment in which the fear of failure and fear of embarrassment had been removed. Kareem made it clear that he associated comfort and the “feeling of just being able to be yourself” with how he defined teacher care.

Joshua

One of the most outspoken students in the class was 16-year-old Joshua. Originally from the midwestern United States, Joshua had been at Divine for only 2 years. He was a short kid, with dusty brown hair. Occasionally, he wore his glasses, but most times he had his contacts in. He was what the students considered “brown skinned,” and always kept his hair in what they called a “baby fro”. He considered himself a decent math student, but noted, “there is always room for growth.” Joshua is from a middle-class family, with both parents in the household; he ended up attending Divine because of what he called “behavioral issues.” He felt like math was his strongest subject, and credited his hard work, for the success he was having in math. In our

first interview, when asked how he defined teacher care, Joshua made some interesting comments:

Jason: How do you define teacher care?

Joshua: It's when they [teachers] treat you [the student], like you are important. Like it's more than a job to them, and there's a purpose behind what they do. I can tell when a teacher is just here for a check, and if they like their job or not.

Jason: How can you tell?

Joshua: If they never ask you about your day, or your life, that says a lot about how they feel.

Jason: Is there anything else that comes to mind when you think of what teacher care means to you?

Joshua: Just a teacher that is interested in the students and wants the best for them. One that teaches to make you better, to make your [the students] lives better, and not for selfish reasons.

Jason: Can you give me an example, or tell me a story, about a time when a teacher showed you they cared?

Joshua: About Mr. Ira?

Jason: It doesn't have to be.

Joshua: Well probably, [pause]___ the best story, of when I knew a teacher cared for me was first semester. I was having a bad day, so I didn't really want to be bothered, and Mr. Ira asked me about my homework. I went in on him (had some harsh words for him), but that guy is patient.

Jason: For what reason, why did you "go in on him?"

Joshua: I just snapped. I had a lot going on, and he caught me at that moment.

Joshua went on to explain how he felt any normal human being would have reacted in that situation. He even acknowledged that he himself could not have been as poised and patient as Mr. Ira was in that situation. "I have anger problems sometimes," says Joshua, and "Mr. Ira knows how to handle me when I am in my moods." Joshua contended that Mr. Ira does not let

him get away with “stuff like this,” but would just make him pay for it later. Joshua now led the conversation in a different direction and described circumstances for which Mr. Ira has scorned the class. He described a Mr. Ira that “wasn’t like the Mr. Ira we see daily.” And, the circumstances were not academic related either.

What would ignite a fire in Mr. Ira was when “we would, what he calls, confirm stereotypes about Black boys,” Joshua uttered. It was not acceptable for us to cheat ourselves, because “the world expects us to give up, in education anyway; in their eyes [society] people like us are not supposed to reach certain heights.” From Joshua’s perspective, Mr. Ira used data on the achievement gap and propaganda that is being perpetuated by the media, and others, as a tool to help motivate his class of male African Americans. In class, he consistently emphasized the lack of representation of male African Americans in the field of mathematics, and constantly pleaded with the class, “to be not what they expect you to be, but be what I know you can be.” And to Joshua, these actions were consistent with a teacher who cared.

Michael

The perceived “goody two-shoes” of the class was 15-year-old Michael. He lived with both parents, in an affluent area; his family was considered wealthy by most standards, and because of where they lived, it took him about 45 minutes to commute to school each day. Like Joshua, Michael was short, and brown skinned; however, he did not wear glasses, and had light brown eyes, that he welcomed compliments on. He was at Divine because his parents loved their STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) program, and because it is a public charter school, it was not a requirement for him to live in district. In mathematics, he considered himself a “hard worker.” He said, “math doesn’t come easy to me, but if I study any subject, I can do well in it.” Michael was more interested in the application of mathematics and how it

connected to technology. He had been at Divine for 4 years, and had always maintained an “A” average in math. The first interview, and my discussion with him on teacher care went as follows:

Jason: How do you define teacher care?

Michael: Teacher care is when your teacher feels like family. You develop a relationship with them [teachers], as if they are like your aunt or uncle, and they look out for you too.

Jason: Can you think of a time when you had a relationship like this with a teacher?

Michael: I think so.

Jason: Please tell me about it.

Michael: Well, I’ve had a lot of close teachers, but probably Mr. Ira is like my closest. My parents trust him, and they know he will treat me right. They take his word over mine; he could beat me if he wanted, and they wouldn’t even be mad.

Michael described a situation in which he felt Mr. Ira demonstrated that he cared for him. He recalled listening to Mr. Ira defend him to the class, after a student questioned his belonging at Divine. The student referred to Michael as a “rich boy,” and felt like he was out of touch with the “hood,” which was sort of representative of a constant struggle that Michael had faced since arriving at Divine. “It’s difficult to survive here when you aren’t from this neighborhood,” says Michael. “A lot of students feel like I think I’m better than them, but that’s not true at all. Mr. Ira stood up for me, and explained to them [the class], that as a black male, all of our struggles are the same.” During his discussion with the class, Mr. Ira elucidated that Black boys face enough challenges already so should not participate in “cannibalism,” where they prey on each other. Mr. Ira encouraged them to root for each other, he always said, “Y’all should be each other’s biggest fan.” To Michael, the actions he described in his story about Mr. Ira are consistent with those of a caring teacher.

Summary of Participants' Profiles and Descriptions of Teacher Care

Table 1 outlines the overarching themes that I identified from the participants' significant statements, when discussing their descriptions of teacher care. It illustrates what I inferred from each of the participants' significant statements, and is presented in a cumulative fashion—meaning, I did not separate the themes by the participant who spoke it. Rest assured, however, I later take a closer look at this data, and dissect the statements based on the participant in which they came. For this reason, a quick glance at the themes presented in Table 1 does little to shape the profiles of the participants, but does provide a holistic view of the ways in which they described teacher care. In fact, I argue that the participants' voices as it related to teacher care were unified. They mostly reiterated each other's message, but in different ways. Unpredictably so, I was fortunate enough to experience firsthand their enthusiasm for storytelling and charisma, which helped expose their unique personalities, while giving a glimpse of who they are as people. And in doing so, also furnishing me with a clearer picture of how they described teacher care

Table 1
Overarching Codes/Themes and Sub Themes – Descriptions of Teacher Care

Motivation	Culture	Confidence	Discipline	Concern for Futures	Environment
Inspirational	Understands struggle	Believes in students	Rules	Will not allow students to cheat themselves	No judging
Leads by example	Fights stereotypes	Gives students hope	Expectations	Future job concern	Safe
Encouragement	Defends students	Teaches self-efficacy	Second chances	Treats students like his children	Comfortable
Makes students feel important	Diversifies lessons		Empathy	Cares about students' lives outside of school	Mistakes okay
Praises students			Patience		Family environment
			Firm but fair		Offset institutional racism

Participants' Attitudes Toward Mathematics

In this section, I examine the participant's attitudes toward mathematics; the focus here is to address research question 2. The participants shared their view of mathematics and the influence teacher care had on this view.

Kareem

Just as has been the case for all our interviews, in an empty classroom adjacent to Mr. Ira's classroom, Kareem and I discussed his attitude toward mathematics. There was a door that connected the two classrooms, which remained opened during the interview; we could hear small chatter coming from the after-school tutorial students next door. As a consequence, I asked Kareem to speak louder, this time (Interview #2), as opposed to our last interview. He did, and our conversation on attitude went as follows:

Jason: How do you feel about mathematics in general?

Kareem: I like math, it's my favorite class!

Jason: Why do you like math so much?

Kareem: Because I know how important it is. It's better to be good in math than anything else. You can get better jobs if you are good in math, because most people don't like it.

Jason: How would you describe your attitudes toward math?

Kareem: I have a positive attitude in class, and everybody knows. I'm one of the ones giving all the answers, when some people just sit there.

Jason: Have you always liked math?

Kareem: Yes, pretty much.

Jason: Why do you like math?

Kareem: Well, like I said, you can get a good job if you are good at it. Plus, it's cool to know something everybody else doesn't. Everybody hates math because they think it's so hard, but it just depends on the teacher.

- Jason: Can you explain that a little bit more? What do you mean by it just depends on the teacher?
- Kareem: If you have a teacher that breaks it down for you, it's a lot easier to understand and do well. For example, they [teachers] have to make it useful for me. Also, it has to be fun, or I will just tune them out.
- Jason: So how much of a role, if any, did teachers play in how much you like math?
- Kareem: Oh, it's a big role, if I like them [the teacher] then it helps me learn.
- Jason: How has being taught by an African American male teacher influenced how you feel about math?
- Kareem: That's the biggest reason for me. When you [the students], see someone that has been through what you been through and can do well in math, then you know it's possible. It makes me feel like, if he [Mr. Ira] can do it, then I know I can. A teacher like that knows how you are thinking and that means a lot.

Kareem continued by crediting Mr. Ira with having a big part in how he felt about math. He expressed how seeing someone like Mr. Ira was encouraging in itself, but it also helped to have a teacher who understood his circumstances, a teacher who believed in him, and one who he could relate to. Kareem was skeptical at first, but then interjected what I feel is one of his most significant statements into the conversation; "I'm not racist, but White teachers can't relate to us, and no matter what, they think we aren't as smart as White kids." Kareem had not been taught by a non-Black or a White mathematics teacher since sixth-grade, but Mr. Ira was only his second male African American teacher, ever. He had a good memory though. In a story, he recounted his last experience with a non-Black teacher, one in which he was made to feel inferior to White students in his class. A feeling he said, "I can never forget." Not willing to share any specifics, as to the behaviors of this teacher, he claimed, "It was just how she [the White teacher] made me feel, made us all feel." We wrapped up our second interview with Kareem explaining how his sixth-grade experience almost ruined his positive attitude toward mathematics: "I was close to giving up, but coming here to Divine, has made me begin to love math again."

Joshua

Of the three student participants, Joshua's initial attitude toward mathematics was the worse. He remembered how he "dreaded the walk down the one thousand hall for math" each day. In the past, he never saw the usefulness of math, and considered it a waste of time. He admitted that he did everything in class, except, what he was supposed to do. In our second interview, he recounted, "I was a big distraction, and probably all my teachers hated me, but that has since changed." He no longer had to sit and "listen to a teacher that didn't give a crap about me [him] lecture for almost an hour." In Mr. Ira's class things were different. Joshua had begun to love math, and credited Mr. Ira for this transformation. "He just makes things interesting for us, and does more than just lecture; and when he does lecture he always tells a story about his life or something to keep us into it," said Joshua.

Jason: How do you feel about mathematics in general?

Joshua: I used to hate it, because I've had some horrible teachers, but now I like it. After being asked why he used to hate math, Joshua discussed a few of his former math teachers and blamed them for his attitude toward math. As I pressed him for details, he noted they were all non-black teachers, and he believed a lack of connection to the students, a lack of diversity in the lessons, and the inability to create an environment conducive for learning were all factors in his previous math teachers' shortcomings.

Jason: So, for the record, how would you describe your attitude toward math now?

Joshua: It's good. I told you Mr. Ira has changed it.

Jason: Can you tell a story or give me an example of how Mr. Ira helped change your attitude toward math?

- Joshua: Just by making it interesting, he does like to talk a lot, but it's usually funny. He makes us want to learn, so we can be like him if we want to, but I'm going to do other things. I want to be an engineer, so he tells me how math can help me with that.
- Jason: How much of a role, would you say, teachers play in your attitude toward math?
- Joshua: Teachers are the biggest factor, if you like their class, then you [students] become interested in the subject they teach and your attitude changes [a positive change].
- Jason: How has being taught by an African American male teacher influenced your attitude toward math?
- Joshua: I never really thought about it like that, but I guess he is black, huh? I try not to look at race, but it helps, because you see someone like you doing it, so you have a role model. It's good he can relate to us too.

Throughout the interview, Joshua had been careful when discussing race and gender. He made a few statements about viewing Mr. Ira as a teacher and not as an African American male teacher. "Race doesn't really matter to me, any teacher can teach me, I just like Mr. Ira as a person," he explained. He seemed concerned with how his previous statements may be viewed, and wanted to set the record straight regarding his thoughts. However, he did acknowledge that Mr. Ira had advantages not afforded to others; advantages he was born with, and those he gained through lived experiences as an African American male.

Michael

As we approached the entrance to our interview room Michael asked, "is it okay if I go get a drink of water, real fast?" He was coming from his team sports class, and seemed a bit winded, "I will be fast," he says, as he took off down the hall before waiting on me to respond. After stopping by the water fountain, Michael entered the room, to find me patiently waiting. I greeted him with a smile, as he apologized for making me wait. But, on this day (Interview #2), Michael seemed to be in control, and have our session all planned; before I could ask my first

question, he suggested I let him tell me a story about Mr. Ira. He assured me that I would find it entertaining, but more explicitly he argued that its content would be useful in my work.

Jason: Okay Michael, I would like to hear your story.

Michael: So, you know how Mr. Ira acts all tough sometimes right? Because he's from the hood. Well there's this app on people's phone that can prank call you using different voices. Then it records it, I can let you hear it later, but we got Mr. Ira good, boy!

Jason: What happened?

Michael: I can't tell you who it was, but he acted like he was one of his [MR. Ira's] wife's ex-boyfriends that was going to beat him up. He [the prankster] said, "Why you messing with my woman, stop calling her, she's mine now?" Mr. Ira thought it was real; started apologizing, saying "I don't want no drama man, I'm just trying to live in the future, not the past, and black people need to love not fight." You know how Mr. Ira is.

As it turns out, this prank worked so masterfully because Mr. Ira has had to deal with a similar situation in his recent personal life. The students were not aware of the incident, but it was something Mr. Ira had disclosed to me privately. Initially, I was not sure how or why this little prank could be useful in my study, but as Michael continued to talk, it became more evident.

Jason: Wow, why did you guys do that to Mr. Ira? That could possible cause problems for him.

Michael: He knows it was a joke now. We just wanted to have a little fun with him because of how he's always talking about his upbringing.

Jason: And what are your thoughts on the outcome of the prank? What did you guys determine?

Michael: I don't know, the way he's always talking, I thought he would have been trying to fight the dude, but I think Mr. Ira is a different dude right now. He told us that the old him would have been like that, but he's not about that life now. He thinks with his head, like we should.

Jason: Was Mr. Ira upset when he found out you guys pranked him?

Michael: He was kind of upset that we did that, but thought it was funny too.

What I gathered from the remainder of my interview with Michael is that this prank was a test of some sort. It was the students' way of trying to validate everything that Mr. Ira had discussed with them about his life, his upbringing, and the man he is today. Even Mr. Ira argued, "Students will constantly try to test you, they want to see who you really are, not just what you tell them you are." I am not so sure I would have reacted as calmly as Mr. Ira did, but to me, this situation spoke volumes on his connection with the students. He always seemed to see things through their perspective as well as his own, and the intersection of the two perspectives was always reflected in his reaction.

While discussing his attitude toward mathematics, Michael referred to it as an optimistic one. He believes in himself a great deal, and believes through hard work he has accomplished a lot in math. "I think my hard work is why I excel in math, it doesn't matter who the teacher is," Michael claims. He admitted he does like the comfort of being taught by an African American male teacher, but does not think his attitude has been influenced by these circumstances at all. He told me, "I am positive regardless, I know what's at stake, and my parents tell me the same stuff Mr. Ira does." I get the feeling he does not credit Mr. Ira or any teacher for his positive attitude toward mathematics because of the foundation his parents had already laid. It is sort of a confirmation of his parents' message when he hears Mr. Ira speak. As our second interview ended, Michael emphasized that the attitude he has toward mathematics is a result of a message his parents delivered to him, a message that has been consistently reinforced by Mr. Ira.

An African American Male Teacher's Influence on Teacher Care

Being taught by an African American male teacher is clearly significant to each of the student participants in this study. The last of my three research questions attempted to gain insight as to how being taught by an African American male teacher influenced the perceptions they have on teacher care. In this section, I allowed the participants to review their profiles and

narratives from the previous two interviews for comment or further extension of its contexts. Furthermore, I allowed the participants to share their personal experiences and thoughts on the influence a male African American teacher has had on their perceptions of teacher care.

Kareem

In our third interview, and while reviewing his profile, Kareem decided that for the most part he was comfortable with the way it looked. He did, however, want to make sure I understood that Mr. Ira is the most influential teacher he has ever had, and “It has nothing to do with you [me] being here.” Moreover, he introduced an aspect that was not mentioned in the previous two interviews; he discussed accountability. Kareem maintained that despite how patient and caring Mr. Ira is, he held them [the students] responsible for all their actions. “That’s the reason you know he cares; he doesn’t just let you sleep or not do your work, a teacher that does that, doesn’t care,” Kareem said with a straight face. He was mostly concerned with those two matters possibly being misconstrued or left out; and once they were cleared up, he closed by saying, “Mr. Ira is the only teacher that I can say I have no doubt cares for me.”

When it came to how being taught by an African American male teacher influenced his perception of teacher care, Kareem had to think for a minute. After a brief pause, he explained that comfort is a big part of it: “I am more relaxed having a Black teacher, than if it would have been someone else, it’s also good he’s a man too.” The comfort he felt with Mr. Ira was a major part with how he described teacher care. This comfort was a result of being taught by a male African American teacher and what Kareem associated with teacher care.

Later in the conversation, Kareem acknowledged possible prejudices behind why he gave Mr. Ira opportunities to get closer to him than some of his previous teachers, but he also thought the results would have been the same regardless. “Mr. Ira doesn’t judge; he is as real as it gets,

and even if he was White he would have eventually won me over,” expressed Kareem. Kareem continued by saying, “He won’t stop trying. I’ve seen him break through with different personalities, he can get through to anyone; he’s got a gift.” Kareem recalled a situation in which Mr. Ira has built bonds with some of the most notorious students, and this is how he perceived care from an African American male teacher.

Shifting topics, Kareem mentioned how “the best thing about him [Mr. Ira] is we do things together,” when referring to classroom activities. This togetherness was important because he pointed to rare occasions when Mr. Ira made mistakes and the class had to correct him. Mr. Ira jokingly said, “It was a test to see if everyone was paying attention,” but as a byproduct it humanized him. The way Kareem saw it, if Mr. Ira was not afraid to make mistakes, neither should he.

The described practices and behaviors from Mr. Ira have now become a fixture in Kareem’s view of teacher care; and from here on, he expected male African American teachers to care for him in this unambiguous manner. He said, “The standard for a caring teacher has changed; the bar went up,” as he laughed. He, like the other student participants, now perceived teacher care through the practices they had become accustomed to in Mr. Ira’s classroom.

Joshua

With concern that he may have previously come off as a racist, in this, our third interview, Joshua immediately made corrections to some of his previous statements. In an earlier interview, Joshua had made comments regarding non-Black teachers’ inability to connect with students and diversify lessons; he wished to explain what he meant by those statements. “I really didn’t mean it like that, I was only trying to say that a Black teacher can do it a little better when teaching Black students,” he said. And just like Kareem, Joshua accentuated the behaviors and

practices of Mr. Ira that set him apart from other teachers. Joshua agreed with everything else in his profile.

In our discussion on how a male African American teacher influenced his perception of teacher care, Joshua steered the conversation to one that separated teacher practices and teacher race. He spoke of how Mr. Ira challenged him, and forced him to think critically; but stated, “Him being Black has nothing to do with this.” To Joshua, race was only relevant when it came to giving a teacher a “significant advantage in background knowledge of students, and lived experiences.” However, he admitted that this background knowledge and experience aided every aspect he previously described in his description of teacher care; and that these advantages are what set Mr. Ira apart from other teachers. I argue that Joshua indirectly provided me with how his perceptions of teacher care have been influenced by a male African American teacher.

Michael

After an examination of his profile, which was constructed using significant statements from the previous two interviews, Michael was content. He was satisfied with how he came across, and did not have a desire to change a thing. In terms of how a male African American teacher influenced his perception of teacher care, that was a different story.

Unlike in his previous interviews, Michael presented an argument as to how the race of a teacher alone helped make him feel more comfortable in class. “It makes me feel like they won’t judge me,” he says. Michael conceded that having a teacher that looks like him allowed him to lower his guard and makes him more receptive to being cared for. “I assume that since he looks like me, he has been through the same things I have; he must think the same way I do,” Michael claimed. And from Michael’s perspective, this “sameness,” if you will, is what teacher care is—a

teacher being able to relate to the experiences of students and make them feel comfortable. This comfort that Michael described brings to mind the comfort described by Kareem and Joshua.

Discussion on Interview Data Representation and Analysis

Throughout this study, I have discussed how, historically, there has been difficulty in “defining” teacher care. One of my assumptions, however, leading into the data collection for this project was that African American male students and an African American male teacher would both have similar descriptions of behavior and practices related to teacher care. Additionally, I ventured to argue that having a teacher who looks like them would positively influence African American male students’ perceptions of teacher care. These arguments were based on my personal experience and the limited research, specific to the topic, at the start of this research project. My analysis of the data suggested that the teacher and student participants are “on the same page,” so to speak, when it comes to their respective descriptions of teacher care. I concede, however, that the excerpts of their interviews alone do not make this point as clear as I had hoped. And although Table 1 provides the themes that were identified from the interviews, a further analysis and display of data are required to help substantiate this argument.

Further Analysis: Definition vs. Behavior

Roberts (2009) says, “because respondents did not make a clear delineation between the two [definitions and behaviors], I have decided to condense the discussion of research question one [i.e., defining] and two [i.e., behaving]” (p. 127). Her dilemma was that she had difficulty making a distinction based on the data her participants provided. In her situation, one of her research questions sought to uncover participants’ definitions of teacher care and the other to examine the behaviors the participants displayed that serve as examples of teacher care. For her, a merger of the two was an adequate solution. My situation was different. I was not attempting to make an argument for the condensing of research questions, but given that my participants

mostly used storytelling when asked to define teacher care, I am now rationalizing my use of teacher behavior examples and behavior descriptions as a supplement to this definition. Yes, a definition is what I truly sought, and in hindsight, it would have yielded an exact meaning; one common to all involved, whereas the participants' descriptions varied, but did provide more detail. Consequently, as I proceed forward, I favor the use of participants' descriptions more so than their so-called definitions. Assuredly, I did continue to use the word definition throughout, but only when referring to the overall goal of this project: to deliver a concise meaning to the term from the student participants' perspective. Additionally, in my study, I did have some overlap while attempting to uncover the way an African American male teacher influences the participants' perception of teacher care versus the way the participants define/describe teacher care. For a brief moment, I contemplated that it is possible the participants in this study do not see any dissociation between the two. In my final determination, however, the participants do differentiate between the two. They tended to define teacher care by describing behavioral actions of the teacher that targeted making them feel special, and perceptions of teacher care with how vital they felt it was to their success in mathematics, along with assumptions they made about the teacher because of his (or her) race and gender. As a result, I partially blended some components of the two.

To further this line of thinking and to provide additional support for my choice, I reference Cooper (2002), who made the same choice while attempting to differentiate between the beliefs and practices of Black and White teachers. Although her circumstances were slightly different, she too decided it was best to mesh beliefs with behavioral examples of the participant teachers in her study. For me, it was also a logical decision: teacher care was mostly defined through elicited storytelling, and the participants in this study expressed their thoughts by

describing behaviors more so than their own feelings. Thus, “teacher care definitions and behaviors were inferred from participant statements,” regarding how they perceive and define teacher care (Roberts, 2009, p. 127). These inferred definitions and behaviors were analyzed and coded so that the most frequent and reoccurring significant statements are represented in the emerging overarching themes. In the following sections, I outline and discuss what I call categories, or minor themes, which support these broad overarching themes, while addressing the overlap between the participants’ perceptions and definitions of teacher care.

Overarching Themes from the Participants’ Definitions/Descriptions of Teacher Care

From data analysis of the participants’ definitions/descriptions of teacher care I identified six categories of overarching themes (a) motivation – identified as inspiration, leading by example, encouragement, being praised, and made to feel important; (b) culture – identified as understanding the struggle of Black males, fighting the confirmation of stereotypes, diversifying of classroom lessons, and defending students; (c) confidence – identified as believing in students, giving them hope, and teaching self-efficacy; (d) discipline – identified as expectations, rules, second chances, patience, firm but fair, and empathy; (e) concern for futures – identified as refusing to allow students to cheat themselves, expressing concern for their future jobs or careers, treating them the way you would your own child, and showing interest for their lives outside of school; and finally (f) environment – identified as not being judgmental, comfort level, safety, students feeling okay to make mistakes, a family atmosphere, and attempts to offset institutional racism.

Motivation

The overarching theme that was represented by the most significant statements was that of *motivation*; all the participants contended it was a vital component to teacher care, and reflected this “must have” in our conversations. During our first interview, Joshua called Mr. Ira,

“the king of motivation; every Monday he gives us the inspirational vitamin for the week, just to put us in the right mindset.” The motivational vitamin was Mr. Ira’s weekly pep talk for the class, and at times, to my surprise, involved a little spirituality. On occasion, and to my dismay, I witnessed Mr. Ira recite Bible verses before he offered a motivational speech. He never read directly from the Bible, but would reference a verse that he felt most suited his daily theme. I cringed at just the thought of him doing something like this in another school; especially with the range of beliefs in most public schools, this was not pragmatic. So of course, when the opportunity presented itself, I could not resist asking Mr. Ira if this practice was one he would participate in under different circumstances. He responded with an emphatic, “No, only at Divine, and only with these kids.” He trusted the kids at Divine; he knew their parents, and under these circumstances alone, was it possible for him to have integrated something like referencing the Bible into his weekly rituals without hassle from administration. And in response to the apparent incredulous look on my face, he said, “I’m unscathed after over 20 years,” as he chuckled. These were his students; he did with them exactly as he does with his own children, and did not see anything wrong with it.

I believe encouragement and praise are often overlooked in the field of education, but not in Mr. Ira’s classroom. He magnificently used his words to encourage students; as a participant observer, I witnessed students develop into dedicated math students right in front of my eyes. He was a believer in giving students things they can do. He called this building confidence through praise; then later, he would increase the rigor at what he deemed an appropriate rate. “If you challenge them too much, too early on, you will lose them,” said Mr. Ira. He argued for winning the small victories first. In his class, even the smallest accomplishments were met with words of praise and I was amazed at how this transformed his classroom environment. He not only praised

correct answers, but he praised effort, enthusiasm, collaborative work, preparedness for class, and almost anything his students did.

Overall, Mr. Ira was confident in his ability to motivate students and points to his personal accomplishments as the “biggest motivator” for the students he teaches. He is an African American male that has accomplished so much through mathematics and just seeing what he has done encourages his students. When discussing how the students perceive him, Mr. Ira said: “I look like them, I’ve lived a similar life as did they, had to overcome some of the same obstacles they face, and still made it. How could they not be motivated with me teaching them?” He made a good point, one that was confirmed in many of the statements from the student participants. Kareem considered Mr. Ira as his role model, and Michael said, “Mr. Ira is one of the smartest men I know.” In total, Mr. Ira made five statements related to the example he sets as an African American male in mathematics; and all were echoed/confirmed within the 11 statements from the student participants. In all, Table 2 below demonstrates the substantial number of significant statements made by each participant related to motivation. The percentage of statements made by each participant indicates the portion of the total statements in that category they made, and confirms the importance of this theme to both student and teacher participants.

Table 2
Motivation – Number of Significant Statements by Participant

Code/Theme	Kareem	Joshua	Michael	Mr. Ira	Total
	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements
Inspirational	5 (26%)	7 (37%)	3 (16%)	4 (21%)	19
Leads by Example	3 (19%)	3 (19%)	5 (31%)	5 (31%)	16
Encouragement	6 (35%)	2 (12%)	2 (12%)	7 (41%)	17
Makes Feel Important	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	6 (60%)	10
Praises	3 (18%)	3 (18%)	1 (6%)	10 (58%)	17

Culture

Culture may not have been the overarching theme represented by the most number of participants' statements, but I argue, and as confirmed by the participants, it could be the most important. As an African American male, I personally connected with much of the information the participants provided. Thoughts of my past experiences as a mathematics student and teacher flooded my head during the interviews. And although I struggled keeping my emotions in check, I did so as to lessen my bias while interpreting their responses. Furthermore, it would be negligent for me not to acknowledge my connections to culture and how crucial I believe it is, but I also remained cognizant of these feelings during data collection and analysis as to provide the most accurate representation of the participants in my study.

Mostly, the participants concentrated on how important it was having a teacher that understood their struggles. Not only their struggles in mathematics but also, and perhaps more importantly, their struggles as Black men. "The African American culture is a little different, you know it, and so do I, because we are Black, strong Black men, and even the way we think about math is just different," Mr. Ira said to me. He expressed a comfort or connection he felt with me, just because I am an African American. "It's just something you feel," he said, as I did my best to not give him any sort of confirmation. But what I gathered was that he associated being black with the understanding of African American culture, which is something he later acknowledged do not always correlate. However, he felt that "to understand what a Black man thinks and how he perceives mathematics you must know their culture," and for this reason, he chooses to design his classroom lessons based on cultural insight. This statement resonated with me, and really "hit home" when I heard Michael make a similar statement about teachers needing to diversify

lessons. In fact, Mr. Ira’s statement on diversifying his lessons aligned with statements made by all the student participants.

Switching gears, Mr. Ira said, “Not only are we different culturally but it’s just plain difficult being a Black man in this country; no one expects anything from these students, let alone in math.” He mentioned the stereotypes of African American male students in mathematics, and how he teaches his students to be a counter example to them; this was also confirmed by some of the student participants’ statements. “We are smarter than they think we are; we just need the same opportunities as everyone else,” said Kareem. And Michael added, “Every time one of us makes it in math, we show the world just how smart black men are.” I posit that these statements give insight to Mr. Ira’s teachings—teachings that are designed to change the discourses on African American males in mathematics. And although I prefer using the word narrative as opposed to stereotypes, Mr. Ira’s discourse accounted for the justifications behind my preference. He spoke to the social aspects of stereotypes and argued against the consistent use of negative propaganda in the media’s portrayal of Black boys in the classroom, and more specifically the mathematics classroom. Table 3 represents an analysis of significant statements from each participant as they relate to culture.

Table 3
Culture – Number of Significant Statements by Participant

Code/Theme	Kareem	Joshua	Michael	Mr. Ira	Total
	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements
Understands Struggle	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	4 (40%)	10
Fights Stereotypes	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	5
Defends Students	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	4
Diversifies Lessons	2 (17%)	4 (33%)	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	12

Confidence

When it comes to defining teacher care, *confidence* was an overarching theme frequently reflected in participants’ statements. The participants not only spoke of the confidence students

had in themselves, but also that their teachers had in them. What I inferred from participants' statements was interesting; they suggested that the teacher's confidence in his or her students rivaled and was possibly more important than the students' confidence in themselves. Kareem said, "When a teacher believes in me, it helps me believe in myself." Whereas, Joshua credits Mr. Ira with changing his attitudes toward mathematics by teaching him how to believe in himself. They both are products of Mr. Ira's self-efficacy teachings, and their feelings align with his message. A message he has "preached" to all that will listen: "For students to learn and believe in their own abilities, it is a must for teachers to believe in them first." He argues for teachers to believe in students and encourage them to dream: "Dreaming gives them hope, and hope is an emotion that is stronger than fear, and you know how strong fear is! If a student has hope, they can, and will accomplish anything." A survey of Table 4 provides an idea of how balanced the participants' statements were when describing how confidence relates to teacher care.

Table 4
Confidence – Number of Significant Statements by Participant

Code/Theme	Kareem	Joshua	Michael	Mr. Ira	Total
	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements
Believes in Students	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	10
Gives Students Hope	2 (22%)	2 (22%)	2 (22%)	3 (33%)	9
Teaches Self-Efficacy	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	2 (50%)	4

Discipline

An aspect of teacher care that yielded a wide range of discourse was that of *discipline*. The participants introduced topics that were inclusive of rules, expectations, giving second chances, empathy, patience, and being firm but fair to students. These categories, along with the number of significant statements made by each participant can be observed in Table 5. Furthermore, the consensus was that discipline was the most delicate piece to their definitions of

teacher care. A caring teacher was one that “treaded softly and was slow to judgment,” according to Mr. Ira. “A teacher can’t just judge students without truly understanding them,” expressed Kareem. And he has a point. In my experience as a teacher, and in the time I spent observing Mr. Ira’s class, I have concluded that it is best to consider every discipline issue situationally, and without judgment. I witnessed Mr. Ira’s patience, which is commendable; he never rushed to judgment and always seemed to know how to handle each student. By his own admission, he “treat[s] all the students differently, but loves them the same.” He claims, “each student is different, and must be handled that way; they all have issues, but you as a teacher are responsible for individualizing discipline.” While not fully understanding what he meant by this statement, I prodded for more information. As it turns out, just like me, Mr. Ira does believe in consistency when it comes to discipline, but only when it comes to consequences. He argues that a “teacher’s initial reaction, or handling of a situation, is what should be individualized.” It should be structured from a mutual perspective of all parties involved, then managed accordingly.

This line of thinking, however, goes against many of the guidelines and teacher policies of the traditional classroom, but is a required element in how the young African American male is disciplined. “You have to nurture this new generation of young Black men, they don’t respond well to yelling. But yes, I lay down the law when I have to, but love always comes first,” noted Mr. Ira. And that is what he did. He started the semester by developing a rapport with his students, and once they understood how much he loved them, he could then be harsh when necessary. As a fellow teacher, I was enamored by Mr. Ira’s patience. He maintained his tranquil demeanor, even in situations like the prank call incident that I mentioned earlier. After he became aware that the students had played a joke on him, I expected him to explode in anger and possibly refer all the involved students to the school’s administrative team, but that is not what

happened. Mr. Ira showed empathy; he recalled being a young Black man himself, and wanting to “test” someone. He says, “that is their [students] way of checking to see if I’m real, or not; and I can’t help but respect that.” Mr. Ira revealed to me, and to the students, who he really was. He was a patient man, one that loved his students, and empathized with them. He remembered being in their shoes, and wanted to provide them with a “care unlike any they had received from other teachers.” Because to these Black boys, he was more than just a teacher. He was Mr. Ira, and the bond he developed with his students, this group of young African American male students, was evident in the way he disciplined them. Overall, Mr. Ira demonstrated all the described components of the theme discipline as inferred from the participants’ statements and confirmed from my observations.

Table 5
Discipline – Number of Significant Statements by Participant

Code/Theme	Kareem Number of Statements	Joshua Number of Statements	Michael Number of Statements	Mr. Ira Number of Statements	Total Number of Statements
Rules	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	1 (33%)	3
Expectations	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	6
Second Chances	3 (37%)	1 (12%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	8
Empathy	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	10
Patience	3 (23%)	2 (15%)	4 (31%)	4 (31%)	13
Firm but Fair	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (67%)	3
Accountability	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (75%)	4

Concern for Students’ Futures

In my opinion, which is also shared with that of Mr. Ira, the most telling overarching theme in determining whether a teacher cares or not is the one of *concern for students’ futures*. If a teacher does indeed care for a student, they must think long-term. “What will the student’s life be like as an adult? Will they attend college? Have I, as the teacher, done my best to prepare the student for a world that won’t give a darn about him?” were questions Mr. Ira frequently asked of himself. He believes that a teacher must think in terms of preparing a student to be successful

in life and not just in mathematics. “A teacher is a counselor, a parent, a role model, and much more; when you think about it, we [teachers] are extremely powerful people,” he stated. Mr. Ira keeps his life’s challenges at the forefront of his mind as he prepares the young men he teaches for the world that awaits them. He views his class as only a small window of opportunity to impact the lives of his students, and he must take full advantage of it.

As I suggested earlier, by influencing the lives of young African American men, Mr. Ira is changing the narrative on Black boys, and more particularly the narrative on Black boys in mathematics. Just from observing his class and listening to his students speak, I was able to decipher a consistent message on disproving stereotypes; or narratives, as I call them. Not to mention, during interviews, each student participant emphasized how important it was for them to counter existing stereotypes. Moreover, as I analyzed data, I could not help but notice how obvious the effectiveness of Mr. Ira’s tutelage was. His students were focused on success; I mean success beyond the classroom. They discussed mathematics in terms of future jobs, and the eventual impact it will have on their lives. Joshua said:

I want to be an engineer; it has always been a dream of mine, and I know you must be strong in math for that. Mr. Ira teaches me how math can help me with that. He never lets me cheat myself, because that’s what society thinks we [Black boys] will do. I work hard, every day and it’s going to pay off.

Mr. Ira treats Joshua and the rest of the students like they are his own children. Each semester, when a group of students leaves his class for the year, he said the feeling he gets compares to when his children left his house as adults. He “prays” that he has used his experience and wisdom to “mold them into young men capable of great things.” Young black men, that are equipped to compete against, for a lack of better words, what he calls a “stacked deck.” By this, he means “the institutions in this society; that is, our educational institutions, our justice system, and job market that are designed for them to fail.” Mr. Ira assails that if he can equip enough

Black boys to compete, and teach other educators to do the same, then eventually the very society that works against them, will be coalesced with them. Below, represented in Table 6 are the categories associated with the significant statements of each participant along with the corresponding percentages.

Table 6
Concern for Futures – Number of Significant Statements by Participant

Code/Theme	Kareem Number of Statements	Joshua Number of Statements	Michael Number of Statements	Mr. Ira Number of Statements	Total Number of Statements
Will Not Allow Students to Cheat Themselves	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	5
Future Job Concern	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	10
Treats Students Like His Children	3 (33%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	3 (33%)	9
Cares About Students' Lives Outside of School	4 (50%)	1 (12%)	1 (12%)	2 (25%)	8

Environment

In every classroom, the environment is a significant part in the educational experiences of students. And, while discussing their definition of teacher care, the participants made enough statements pertaining to the classroom environment to warrant it as an overarching theme. These statements however, were more so related to the atmosphere created by the teacher than they were to physical structures, and hence this theme represents what was inferred from those statements. Student participants mentioned a judgment-free, safe, comfortable, family environment, in which it was okay to make mistakes. Statements made by the teacher participant included these components, with the addition of others related to the teacher's attempts to offset institutional racism, which to my consternation, only one student participant made a statement about. In the coming paragraphs, I expound on these components.

Earlier, I discussed situations in which Mr. Ira evinced his care for his students, and “the focus of this care was on the outcome.” Mr. Ira contended: “I want these students to leave my class ready for the world.” But contrary to this statement, and from my observations, it seems that his success in student preparation has focused more on the developmental process and not just the result. He attributes most of his success to the positive learning environment he created: “Most students don’t try; because they are just afraid to fail. They look at a problem for two seconds, if it doesn’t immediately ring a bell, then they give up, or wait for help. But not my class.” His students work hard; they try everything, whether they know it or not. “Once they see me, the teacher, make mistakes, and then humble myself, it’s a lot easier for them to do,” he stated. Mr. Ira had a reward system for students that “try.” And at times, an attempt was worth more than a correct answer, just so long as it was followed with an “argument.” His students were encouraged to develop arguments or justifications for their positions when problem solving. If they could justify their position, Mr. Ira could begin to understand their thought process, and as a reward, he would give them donuts. He did not bring donuts every day, but kept a list of the students he owed them to, on the bulletin board; he paid these debts on the Fridays that followed.

Feeling comfortable in class was important to the student participants in this study. They all described a comfort associated with a judgment free environment and a teacher that looks like them. “For me, having a teacher that’s the same race means a lot. It means they probably know more about my life, and who I am. It’s not always like that, but there’s a good chance,” Kareem pointed out. Joshua has similar feelings: “A black teacher makes me feel more comfortable. I just feel like they understand me better.” Whereas, Michael believes a teacher’s race and gender gives him advantages in terms of how well they know the students. A teacher has lived experiences that are afforded to him because of his race and upbringing; this is beneficial when it

comes to cultural knowledge. Michael argues, “a black teacher knows more about black culture, because he has lived it.” In total, there were ten significant statements made by the participants related to the comfort of the environment, with nine of these statements coming from the student participants. The majority, or six out of the nine of these statements, mention culture and/or lived experiences as explanations for the comfort they felt. The remaining statements discussed the family atmosphere and the connection it has with comfort.

Mr. Ira views many of the challenges that African American male students face as a byproduct of “a system designed for their failure,” and he does not shy away from this conversation in his classroom. He openly expresses his allegiance to the Black? race, and advocates for what he calls “necessary changes to achieve equity in schools.” He consistently mentioned things such as funding, curriculum design, professional training, and other items purposefully “devised” to prevent African American males from being treated fairly. He wanted to fight against these discriminatory practices. The significant statements he made, that are relevant to *attempts to offset/counter institutional racism*, are tallied under the overarching theme of environment. I grappled with this decision, giving it careful consideration, but based on my observations, interviews, and logic, I contended that Mr. Ira established an environmental space in which he remove most of the effects of institutional racism. Additionally, he used this space to teach his students to recognize and fight against what he referred to as “the system.” The parents, community, and school staff were all aware of Mr. Ira’s position and teachings; and they trusted him. He had the freedom, and felt it was his duty to inform young African American males of what they were up against. “That way, they can be prepared for the challenges ahead; once they buy-in, and believe they can do mathematics, I must motivate them; give them a reason to fight. It changes their attitude,” said Mr. Ira. During my research, it became more and more apparent

that Mr. Ira is strategic in everything he does. He intentionally targets students' confidence, motivation, attitudes, and other aspects of their psyche with the hope of producing successful mathematics students. He contended, "I know the culture, I know what pushes these kids, and I have to bring it out." Possibly, a scary thought to those of us in education, or those familiar with the ethical boundaries in the profession, but Mr. Ira was trusted and his historical success left him "untouchable." As an educator, a researcher, and as an African American male, I pondered how "troubling" a Mr. Ira might be to the "system," in another setting.

Of an important note, all but one statement related to this discourse on institutional racism was made by Mr. Ira. It was by Michael, who made a statement in which I inferred the meaning to associate with this topic: "We [black students] are treated like second class students. Ask anyone, we don't get resources like the White schools, but Mr. Ira makes up for that." There were other significant statements made by student participants that conceivably linked to this topic; however, I did not feel comfortable inferring it. Table 7 illustrates the categories and themes that were identified from inferences I made using the participants' significant statements.

Table 7
Environment – Number of Significant Statements by Participant

Code/Theme	Kareem Number of Statements	Joshua Number of Statements	Michael Number of Statements	Mr. Ira Number of Statements	Total Number of Statements
No Judging	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	10
Safety	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	2
Comfortable	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	10
Mistakes Okay	4 (33%)	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	2 (17%)	12
Family Environment	2 (28%)	2 (28%)	1 (14%)	2 (28%)	7
Counters Institutional Racism	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	4

Summary of Participants' Definitions/Descriptions of Teacher Care

I anticipated that defining teacher care would be a challenge, and I was not disappointed. To begin, and as previously mentioned, the term is so loosely defined, and historically, has

mostly been viewed through the lens of the caregiver (e.g., Alder, 2002; Bartell, 2011; Howard, 2003; Roberts, 2010; Wilder, 2000). Noddings (1992), however, insist that care be confirmed from the receiver's perspective as well. Next, I had to be cognizant of my personal conflicts and biases to carefully infer meanings from the significant statements made by the participants. Doing so was challenging, but necessary to be as accurate as possible in representing the student participants. This process also involved the interpreting of stories and behavioral descriptions. So, to improve accuracy, I allowed each participant to review their profiles to make sure they agreed with how they were represented. Additionally, I triangulated the data, or crossed referenced interview data with that of field notes and journal entries.

Moreover, while seeking to define teacher care, I focused on examining teacher care mainly from the receiver's (student participant) perspective, and on confirming tenets of this definition with those of the caregiver (teacher participant). The six overarching themes that were identified from the student participants' descriptions of teacher care were all confirmed with those of the teacher participant; these themes are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8
Overarching Codes/Themes – Significant Statements Totals/Percentages

Code/Theme	Kareem	Joshua	Michael	Mr. Ira	Total (%)
Motivation	19	16	12	32	79 (31%)
Culture	8	7	5	11	31 (12%)
Confidence	5	6	4	8	23 (9%)
Discipline	12	8	10	17	47 (18%)
Concern for Futures	10	6	7	10	33 (13%)
Environment	12	12	10	11	45 (17%)
Total (%)	66 (26%)	55 (21%)	48 (19%)	89 (34%)	258

A visual inspection of Table 8 reveals that each emerging theme was represented by the student participants and then confirmed with statements from the teacher participant. The cumulative total number of significant statements for each theme ranged between 23–79 times, with motivation being represented the most. Ironically, the least occurring theme was

confidence. It is important to note that the teacher participant's statements compose 34% of the total statements, with the student participants' statements making up the remaining 66%. Table 9 displays a side-by-side comparison of the percentages each theme comprises of the participants' description of teacher care. A close examination shows comparatively how crucial the student participants felt each theme was to teacher care, versus that of the teacher participant.

Table 9
Overarching Codes/Themes – Side-by-Side Totals/Percentages

Code/Theme	Kareem's Statements	Joshua's Statements	Michael's Statements	Student Totals (%)	Teacher Totals (%)	Mr. Ira's Statements
Motivation	19	16	12	47 (27%)	32 (36%)	32
Culture	8	7	5	20 (12%)	11 (12%)	11
Confidence	5	6	4	15 (9%)	8 (9%)	8
Discipline	12	8	10	30 (18%)	17 (19%)	17
Concern for Futures	10	6	7	23 (14%)	10 (11%)	10
Environment	12	12	10	34 (20%)	11 (12%)	11
Total (%)	66 (39%)	55 (33%)	48 (28%)	169	89	89

Throughout the literature, collective studies have suggested the importance of teacher care in the educational experience of students (e.g., Hackenberg, 2010; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Wentzel, 1997), but the difficulty was in understanding it from the perspective of a diverse group. I promulgate that the data I presented helps establish a definition of teacher care from the perspective of male African American students, and makes a compelling argument that the caring practices of male African American teachers are indeed, interpreted by the students, as intended.

How an African American Male Teacher Influences Attitudes Toward Mathematics

Perhaps attitude is the most difficult attribute of a student to influence. "By the time, they are in high school, I have my work cut out for me. They [students] are convinced already that they can't do math, or that they don't like it," claimed Mr. Ira. He blamed previous teachers for the negative attitudes some of his students had toward mathematics, and says he is tasked with "transforming it." Also, Mr. Ira emphasized the need for the "other teachers" [the ones that do

not care] to be properly trained, “but either way, if it’s not in their hearts, they will never care for these students.” As our conversation continued, Mr. Ira introduced several aspects that he felt are key when influencing the attitude of Black boys in math. He said, “you have to be optimistic, passionate about what you do, and keep them interested at all times. This comes by making your lessons relevant to them, and from being consistent with your praises.” The student participants brought up all these key themes—with the addition of those of rigor, high expectations, diversity of lessons, and relating to students—during interviews, all can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10
African American Male Teacher’s Influences on Attitudes Toward Mathematics

Code/Theme	Kareem	Joshua	Michael	Total
	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements
Being Optimistic	1	2	0	3
Being Passionate	2	1	0	3
Makes Class Interesting	3	2	2	7
Rigor	1	1	2	4
High Expectations	1	1	2	4
Diversity in Lessons	1	2	2	5
Relating to Students	2	3	2	7

In examining Table 10, it is clear, relating to students, making class interesting, and diversity in lessons are the most important factors in a teacher changing the attitudes of African American male students in mathematics. These are all categories in which the student participants argued that an African American male teacher (e.g. Mr. Ira) has a significant advantage. They claimed that Mr. Ira’s lived experiences as a Black man have prepared him to relate with them, and by the same token, provided him with some insight into their world as Black boys. Reluctantly, they acknowledged that they are more receptive to these aspects of care from Mr. Ira because of his race and knowledge that they perceive he has of their backgrounds. In the next paragraph, I discuss these and other identified themes related to the influence an African American male teacher has on the attitudes of Black boys.

The student participants all felt that their optimism toward mathematics was both important and contingent upon the practices and behavior of the classroom teacher; and they conceded that an African American male teacher has made a substantial difference in how they feel about mathematics. They each described their current attitude toward mathematics as a positive one, but for Joshua, it was a difficult evolution. He claimed his feelings toward math have not always been positive; and that it took a teacher like Mr. Ira to change his attitude. Joshua characterized his initial attitude toward math as horrible. In fact, he claimed that he “hated it.” He even recalled hating “the walk” to his math class, and blamed his previous teachers for these feelings. He said they made him feel “inferior to the white students,” and could not relate to him. Arguably, these teachers were not qualified to teach African American students; and for this reason, Joshua made a case for how their lessons were not designed for a diverse population of students. He said, “They [previous teachers] didn’t teach to me, they just taught for the white kids.” Consequently, Joshua tuned these teachers out and developed a negative attitude toward math.

With his arrival at Divine, Joshua was exposed to what he called “a different way of doing things.” Mr. Ira’s passion and dedication for teaching young African American men transformed his attitude. What he credited Mr. Ira with was serving as an example of what a Black man could do in the field of mathematics, while simultaneously building his confidence with his infectious optimism. This contrasted with Joshua’s previous teachers, none of which looked like Joshua or had any interest in his background. Whereas in Mr. Ira’s class, Joshua felt smart and capable, he also felt like the two of them related to each other because “Mr. Ira once was a young Black student with similar experiences.” In addition to his physical appearance, Mr. Ira provided diverse lessons that challenged Joshua; he forced Joshua to think critically and

become a problem solver. Joshua contended that Mr. Ira has always maintained high expectations for him.

Joshua's story serves as an example of how powerful a caring teacher–student relationship can be in the educational experience of students, more explicitly African American male students. Joshua was “converted,” as Mr. Ira would say, when referring to students he had to work-on so that they viewed math in a different way. From my observations, and the perspectives of the student participants, Mr. Ira demonstrated practices that reached all the students in his class, and influenced them all to love math. But Mr. Ira did not think he was “batting 100%.” He claimed, “I’m at like 90%, because it’s hard to change years and years of attitude imbedded in these students by other teachers. Then add-on other factors that have negatively influenced them, then it’s harder.” But regardless of what he said, I argue that Mr. Ira is at 100%; even the students that do not go from hating math to loving it have been positively influenced. I contend that even in this fraction of students, the groundwork has been laid for a transition to a more positive attitude toward mathematics. Mr. Ira was responsible for this transition.

How an African American Male Teacher Influences Perceptions of Teacher Care

African American male teachers have transcended the way African American male students perceive teacher care. Although it was not my original intention, what emerged during my research was an overlap of themes between the participants' definition of teacher care and their perceptions of it. While the two were closely connected, during the process, I was guided to the emerging distinction that the student participants made between the two. Their definitions of teacher care reflected the practices and behaviors of a teacher, which expressed to them that the teacher genuinely wanted the best for them. However, their perceptions of teacher care reflected how important they, as students, believe teacher care is to their success in mathematics. It also

included the overlap in their definitions of teacher care that they perceived are specific to and a result of the teachers' race. The key to making a distinction between the two was that the definitions involved teacher practices and behaviors, whereas perceptions involved the student participants' beliefs and/or assumptions about the teacher, mostly based on appearance.

When describing the influence an African American male has had on their perceptions of teacher care, the consensus, from the student participants, was that "comfort" was the biggest factor. They perceived teacher care in terms of their comfort level; the more comfortable they felt with a teacher, the more they perceived that the teacher cared for them. Comfort was an example of a theme that overlapped as described in the previous paragraph. What I inferred from the participants' statements was that comfort from the definition standpoint reflected the actions the teacher took to make them feel welcomed in the classroom environment. In terms of how the student participants describe comfort as it relates to perception, it was something they felt because of assumptions they made about the teacher based on his gender and race, and had nothing to do with the teacher's actions. Table eleven demonstrates not only how vital comfort was to the student participants' perception of teacher care, but also it displays the other components that were often noted during the interviews.

Table 11
African American Male Teacher's Influences on Students' Perception of Teacher Care

Code/Theme	Kareem	Joshua	Michael	Total
	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements	Number of Statements
Keeping it Real	3	1	1	5
Being Persistent	2	1	1	4
Race	3	1	2	6
Comfort	4	3	4	11
Encourages Students to Lower Their Guard	1	1	1	3
Makes Students More Receptive to be Cared for	1	1	1	3

During participant interviews the topic of “race” was frequently mentioned; however, when addressing it, the participants carefully selected their words. They did not want to come off as Michael stated, “a racist.” What I gathered was that before being exposed to an African American male teacher, the student participants perceived and defined teacher care more along the lines of classroom management, as has been suggested in previous research (Owens & Ennis, 2005; Wentzel, 1997); and there was hardly any differentiation between the two—definitions and perceptions. Additionally, the participants did not recognize its importance in their educational experience; however, an African American male teacher, in this case, Mr. Ira, has forced them to look at things differently. As a result of Mr. Ira’s behaviors and practices, the student participants now perceive teacher care as important for their success. And although the line between their perceptions and definitions of teacher care remains a thin one, they suggested that their perceptions of teacher care encourages them to lower their guard, and always “keep it real” with them. They also added that their perception of the teachers as “persistent” was based on historical reputations of teachers and contingent on their racial background; it also serves as an indication as to how likely a teacher is to give up on them.

Summary of Influences on Attitudes Toward Mathematics and Perceptions of Teacher Care

As shown, the descriptions of teacher care were closely connected to the influence an African American male teacher had on the participants’ perceptions of teacher care. Also, as previously mentioned, there was an unanticipated overlap between the two. The overlap was intriguing; the student participants spoke of perceived connections to teachers even before any interactions. These perceived connections would eventually manifest themselves in their descriptions of teacher practices that are consistent with a teacher who they believed cared for them. In most cases, however, these preconceived connections were based merely on

assumptions. Although it is not always best, the student participants assumed that because Mr. Ira “looked like them,” he must know a lot about them. Correctly so, they also assumed that his life struggles had been similar to theirs. Yet he overcame those struggles, and so could they. Furthermore, the participants’ assumptions about Mr. Ira, for the most part, were confirmed throughout the semester and had a positive influence on them. Mr. Ira shared his lived experiences and used his cultural knowledge of African American males to get the best out of his students. Moreover, as the results of this study demonstrate, he and his students were on the same page regarding teacher care. Nonetheless, I wish to examine this notion of student assumption further.

For some time, the described dynamic of students’ assumptions seemed problematic. I pondered how had these assumptions impacted Mr. Ira’s ability to care? How might these assumptions impact other teachers’ abilities to care? As I continued to analyze the data, however, I learned that the student participants had provided me with probable answers to these questions. They acknowledged, as did I on the onset, the advantages that Mr. Ira (or any African American male teacher) might have because of his race and gender. Similarly, the disadvantages faced by teachers who are of a different race and gender. These advantages, however, are short lived. There comes a point when the students will test the teacher, just as the students described here tested Mr. Ira. The student participants in this study had somewhat unifying perceptions of teacher care, and with their descriptions, provided me with a level of “genuineness” that they expected in caring teacher–student relationships. They also provided a level of empathy and cultural knowledge and understanding that they expected. And rightly so, over the course of a semester, if not sooner, students, but more specifically African American students, will determine if a teacher is what they constitute as a caring teacher. In this same line of thinking,

Mr. Ira once said, “Either the teacher has *it*, or they don’t.” The questions then arise, what is “It,” and how can we as teachers get “It”?

From my personal experiences, as both an African American male student and teacher, I can testify to the positive effects of caring teacher–student relationship, particularly, caring teacher–student relationships with African American male students. Throughout this study, I have suggested that the care that was experienced, described, and witnessed is unlike anything found in the available research. In fact, I propose that the significance of this study is more relevant than I initially intended. I would be remised, however, if I did not acknowledge that others before me have come close (e.g., Bartell, 2011; Roberts, 2010) to developing a similar science for Black boys, but none quite like this—none based on the perceptions of African American male students. Yes, these are uncharted waters. I argue that I, along with the data from my study’s participants, have delivered on a new and innovative approach to the way we might educate African American males. This argument is made clearer in the next chapter, but this is the “It” that Mr. Ira spoke of. “It” is a way of caring for Black boys similar to what Mr. Ira experienced as a student, and similar to what he believes he provides for his students. “It” is a way of caring like Ms. Love cared for me as a student and, most importantly, as demonstrated here, “It” is a way of caring as described by the student participants. I contend that it is not by coincidence that Mr. Ira and his students were on the same page when describing teacher care. Nor was it by chance that regardless of how unbiased I attempted to be, I viewed these descriptions as representative of how I define/describe teacher care as well. Even when accounting for the varying home lives of Black boys, evidence suggests that our schooling experiences are somewhat on par. I argue that because the participants and I are African

American males with simultaneously similar and different life and schooling experiences, we qualify to contribute to a science specific to Black boys under analogous circumstances.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, I briefly summarize the study, and argue for a commitment to caring when educating Black boys. I then outline some conflicts encountered during the study, and consider things I might do differently. I refrained from using the term *limitations* because I do not believe the spirit of the study was limited. I refute such a suggestion. While I recognize there are always different ways to engage in the research process, I chose to do this study my way. A way that was sound, and adapted to help avoid the pitfalls of others, while simultaneously unearthing a new perspective on educating male African Americans in mathematics. I close the chapter, and the study, with a few implications for practice and research.

Caring, Male African Americans, and Mathematics Teaching and Learning

Narratives on the achievement outcomes of Black boys in mathematics are too often negative. Contrary to these negative narratives, however, research affirms positive outcomes for students, including Black boys, when engaged in caring teacher–student relationships (see, e.g., Bartell, 2011; Roberts, 2009; Steele, 1992). But literature specific to caring teacher–student relationships, African American male students, and mathematics teaching and learning is all but nonexistent. Therefore, in this study, I sought to uncover the definitions that African American male students had of teacher care, and how, if at all, an African American male teacher might influence their perceptions of teacher care. I also sought to uncover any influence an African American male teacher might have on African American male students’ attitudes toward mathematics.

At the onset, I anticipated some of what this investigation into teacher care might reveal. But in accordance with Nodding’s (1992) theoretical conception of care, I believed that I must first unravel the intricacies of such a relationship from the perspective of African American male

students. Because, from Noddings's description, the caregiver must understand the cared for from the perspective of the cared. In so doing, I proceeded carefully while negotiating through a key criticism of Noddings's theory: the absence of "racetalk." I needed to therefore account for my views on race and racism in society—hence, the use of critical race theory—as well as my thoughts on the cultural understanding of Black boys and how culturally sensitive curriculum and teacher practices might meet their needs—hence, the use of culturally relevant pedagogy.

When it comes to the relationship between culture and care for Black boys, I believe a caring teacher–student relationship must be preceded or, at a minimum, developed in conjunction with a cultural understanding of them. The notion of teacher care and cultural relevance must cross paths. The findings of this study's linkages to CRP are significant. Agreeing with Roberts (2009), I think the term care is certainly complex; however, I believe that if we narrow our focus, and take into account the perception of the cared for, it becomes more simple.

With these ideas in mind, I categorized this study as a critical ethnography guided by an intersection of an eclectic array of theoretical traditions (Stinson, 2009) that included care theory (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1992), critical race theory (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1998), and culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1992). This eclectic array aligned with both the philosophical foundations of the project and the methodological procedures employed. The participants for the study included three African American male high school students and one African American male high school mathematics teacher from a public charter school in an urban school district in the southeastern United States. Data collection included semester-long, daily participant observations (and accompanying field notes) and three semi-structured interviews with each participant.

During data analysis, I identified six overarching themes that the participants used to describe teacher care: (a) motivation, (b) culture, (c) confidence, (d) discipline, (e) concern for futures, and (f) environment. These themes were interpreted from the participants' significant statements, and of these six themes motivation and classroom environment were noted as the most important to the student participants. These African American boys wanted to feel (and be) capable and comfortable in a mathematics classroom. Fortunately for them, they had an African American male teacher, Mr. Ira, who also found these aspects of teacher care important and who would stop at nothing to encourage and create an environment designed for their success in mathematics.

Not only were the referenced themes interpreted from participants' significant statements, but also as an observer I saw firsthand how Mr. Ira contoured his practices to maximize his students' potential. Furthermore, while analyzing the data, I contrasted what I interpreted and witnessed with my personal experiences as a male African American in the field of mathematics. At that point, it all began to make sense. The way Mr. Ira negotiated his interactions, his patience, his concern, his lack of judgment, his cultural understandings, and, most importantly, his love were all key components to the success of Black boys in mathematics. But as anyone with experience teaching Black boys is probably saying: it is much more complicated than that. The experienced educators, among others, are clamoring for more, but the question that must be asked first is: How far are teachers willing to go to develop the relationships necessary for African American male students to know that they are care for? The students will test their teachers, just as they did Mr. Ira. They will test the resolve of their teachers; they will attempt to break them.

But as I learned from my experiences, and as I learned from observing Mr. Ira, it is all in how teachers respond. Teachers must respond with the patience and understanding that Mr. Ira responded with. They must realize that these tests come from within an existence where all trust (too often) has been lost, an existence where things may be difficult for those outside of the African American community to understand. African American male students are (too often) faced with teachers who do not believe in their abilities, they are too often seen as they are portrayed in the media: problematic and inclined toward criminality. This existence has been one of reality for Black boys for far too long. Consequently, a caring teacher must be willing to overcome these obstacles, and reestablish trust with African American male students prior to anything else. Not only trust between student and teacher, but trust between the students and the educational system. I propound that this is a difficult task for a teacher who cannot, as Mr. Ira said, “empathize with Black boys and their experiences.” Because as the case was made earlier, most teachers unknowingly help perpetuate the racialized narratives associated with Black boys and mathematics. Hence, a teacher must first be prepared to critically examine his (or her) practices and beliefs as to be more sensitive to the challenges that Black boys face during their educational (and life) experiences. Subsequently, a teacher can then provide the care as described by the student participants in this study.

When it comes to the influence an African American male teacher had on the participants’ perceptions of teacher care, there was some overlap with how they described teacher care. An African American male teacher simply softened the environment, so to speak, and made the student participants feel more comfortable. Clearly, the students perceived connections to the teacher participant, based on his appearance, and assumptions they made about him. Pursuing this further, and based on the participants’ descriptions, I am all but certain

that these assumptions were also rooted in their historical interactions with teachers of other races. These interactions helped garner the assumptions and shape the eventual expectations the students had of the teacher participant in the beginning. Mr. Ira called for “empathy and patience as teachers weather the storm, because they will be tested.” But when the storm is over, hindsight reveals that this is a nonissue. Because as intelligent as they are, the student participants, and Black boys in general, eventually crossed reference their pre-expectations with how they define a caring teacher.

Throughout this research project, the student participants made several significant statements, which I used to identify the overarching themes of caring student–teacher relationships. As some of the literature suggests (e.g., McGee & Martin, 2011; Thompson & Lewis, 2005), motivation and self-efficacy were identified as reoccurring descriptors of the definition of teacher care. Teachers must not only convince their students but also convince themselves that male African Americans can succeed in mathematics. And in the end, their attitudes toward mathematics are a clear indication of their final determination.

Things to Consider

With the original goals of this study in mind, I engaged in a thorough review of related literature, considered my positionality and biases, and felt obligated to ground my philosophy and logic, which initiated the evolution of this important project. In the beginning, I had to find the source of my motivation and passion, as to limit its fingerprint on the project. To do so, I contemplated the details of my personal story and the narratives regarding Black boys in mathematics before I framed the study. At that point, I knew that I must not only unearth the intricacies as to the student participants’ definitions of teacher care, but also that of the teacher participant. I needed to verify if the feelings the students had about teacher care matched with

those of the teacher, and if so, how similar were they. After all, my eclectic theoretical framework included the theory of Noddings (1992), which calls for a confirmation of the caring from the cared for. Furthermore, to take into account my critical perspective, I included tenants of critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy, which would eventually be included in aspects of the participants' descriptions and perceptions of teacher care.

Additionally, when choosing to embark on this study, I anticipated a few conflicts; none were more significant than my choice of location. I wanted to find a location conducive to an all-male class of African Americans being taught mathematics by an African American male teacher. These circumstances would lessen the complexity of gendered social spaces. As a result, my search led me to Divine, an all-male charter school, located in an urban area. Initially, I was hesitant because of Divine's charter school status, and the possibility of its population of African American males not being reflective of a public school in a similar environment. Nonetheless, after further research, I learned that outside of being an all-male school, Divine did not have any "special" entry requirements. If a child lived in the district, they were welcome to attend. Furthermore, students outside the district could apply for a waiver to attend as well. But less than five percent of Divine's population lived outside the district. This scenario calmed (most of) my concerns regarding the population of Black boys at Divine.

Besides concerns of location, there were several things I considered approaching differently during the study. First, because the successful African American male teacher was selected through a process of community nomination and based solely on the belief of members of the community "the actuality of this 'success' is unsubstantiated" (Roberts, 2009, p. 181). So I considered alternative ways of making this selection, but none were without some level of subjectivity. In the end, due to the difficulties surrounding and defining the word success, I chose

to view this word through the eyes of the experts. I allowed experienced educators, administrators, school staff, and parents to not only develop criteria for this selection but also to make nominations. From the list of nominations, I choose the candidate that happened to be the consensus of all groups involved. This method was similar to what Roberts (2009) did, and I felt comfortable with the results after considering the complexities of other methods.

Second, the sample size and selection are other items of this study I considered adjusting. A larger or different sample of students could provide other perspectives of teacher care. It is also important to acknowledge I only examined one teacher's perception or definition of care. Robert's (2009), drawing on the work of Thompson, cautions that often "teachers might believe they are being caring, or demonstrating care, yet students may not perceive their actions as caring" (p. 181). I believe the teacher's perception of care is important and cross-referencing it with the views of students (which I did) serves to provide a more thorough understanding. Nevertheless, I believe there would be a benefit in having the teacher's perceptions of care represented by several teachers.

Third, given that the student participants come from different home lives, the multiple outside factors that exist in these respective environments are beyond the control of the researcher. Therefore, a different group of participants would most likely yield different results, depending on these outside factors.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, researcher positionality sometimes characterized as the "reflexive turn" has facilitated a seismic shift in the ways researchers locate themselves within the content of their own research and writing (Coffey, 1999). I am African American and a mathematics teacher of African American students. As Seidman (1991) argues, the influence of my researcher bias and positionality on processes of conducting research is substantial and

should be acknowledged; I cannot discount the possible biases that existed because of my presence. My influences on the participants' responses are difficult to quantify, but I acknowledge that some responses were likely due to the perceptions the participants had of me. For this reason, it was important to triangulate the data, whereas to "validate" the participants' responses. There are also concerns with the requirement of "absolute suspension of judgment" as discussed by researchers such as Maso (2001). He argues that ethnography posits considerable shortcomings in the traditional view of nature, claiming that the bracketing procedure underlies the same socially, culturally, contingent prejudices and presuppositions it attempts to dismantle. So it was important for me *not* to frame the findings in absolute terms.

Implications for Practice and Research

I believe this research supports existing arguments of the benefits of teacher care for students, which are consistent with the pedagogical practices of African American male teachers toward African American male students. It also fills voids in existing literature related to African American male students' perceptions of teacher care and their attitudes toward mathematics. This study hopefully will motivate teachers and school personnel to view and question their instructional beliefs and practices differently. Additionally, their perceptions of African American male students will more than likely be influenced as well. I believe this study provides insight as to how African American male students perceive teacher care, and to some of the factors that promote their success in mathematics. However, it creates some questions with implications for future research. I believe the questions created by this research are related to: (a) other groups of diverse students, (b) non-African American male teachers and teacher care for African American male students, (c) teacher care training and staff development, and (d) environmental factors outside of schools that influence students achievement.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A

Interview Guide A – Information and Definitions of Teacher Care

1. Personal and Demographic Questions:
 - a. Name
 - b. Age
 - c. Gender (all males)
 - d. Race/Cultural Identification
 - e. Socioeconomic Level
2. School Performance Questions (student participants only):
 - a. How long have you been at Divine?
 - b. How are you grades?
 - c. Historically, how have your grades been in math?
 - d. Do you consider yourself successful in math?
3. You have been nominated by school administrators, staff, and parents to participate in this study. They consider you a “successful” teacher; can you describe some of your teacher practices that may explain why they selected you (teacher participant only)?
4. How do you define teacher care?
5. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a caring teacher?
6. How important do you think teacher care is in the classroom?
7. Do you think teacher care has anything to do with your nomination (teacher participant)?
8. How do you think stopping or limiting interactions between teachers and students would affect the classroom environment? Why do you feel this way?
9. Are there any prerequisites to teacher care? If so, what are they? (Explain what I mean by prerequisites to teacher care, if necessary.)
10. How difficult is it for a teacher to care for students? Why do you feel this way?
11. How does being an African American male influence your ability to care for African American students, if at all (teacher participant only)?
12. How do you believe being African American influences the way a teacher cares for you, if at all? How do you believe being male influences the way a teacher cares for you, if at all (student participants only)?
13. How does being taught by a male African American influence your definition of teacher care, if at all (student participants only)?
14. Can you tell me a story about a situation in which a teacher made you feel cared for (student participants only)?
 - Probing Questions
 - a. Academic
 - b. Interpersonal
 - c. Discipline
 - d. Other
15. Can you tell me a story about a situation in which you believe you demonstrated to a student that you care

(teacher participant only)? Probing Questions

16. Can you share any other examples of how teacher care is demonstrated in your classroom (teacher participant only)?
17. Can you share other examples of how teacher care has been demonstrated to you by a teacher (student participants only)?
18. How does a teacher know when a student has been cared for (teacher participant only)?
19. Do you think a teacher can tell when you feel cared for? Why or Why not (student participants only)?
20. What is your philosophy of teaching (teacher participant only)?

Closing Questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add to what we discussed today?
2. I am going to create a profile for you based on our discussion today; I will show it to you for review later so you can give me some feedback on it, is that okay? Thanks for your time!

Appendix B

Interview Guide B – African American Male Teacher’s Influence on Attitudes Toward Mathematics

1. What is your attitude toward mathematics; how would you characterize it?
2. Why do you feel the way you do about math?
3. How long have you felt this way about math? When did you start feeling this way about math? Please Explain
4. Has being taught by an African American male teacher influence your attitudes toward math, if so, how?
5. If you have any, can you share an example or a story of when a male African American teacher made a difference in your attitudes toward math? What are some of the things he/she did to influence your attitudes?
6. Why was this teacher able to influence your attitudes? (Probe)
7. Have you ever felt intimidated by math? Why or why not?
8. If any, can you share some negative experiences you have had in math? Please explain why these experiences were negative and any lingering influence it has on you attitudes toward math to this day.
9. Can you share some positive experiences you have had in math?
10. What role, if any, did the teacher of the class play in the negative experience? The positive experience?
11. What could the teacher have done differently, if anything?
12. What factors play the most important role in your attitudes toward math?
13. Why do you think you achieved academic success in mathematics?
14. How much influence (if any) does an African American male teacher have on your success in mathematics? Please explain.
15. Have you ever felt any pressure as an African American to be a high achiever? If so, what type of pressure and how did you handle the pressure?
16. What part do your friends and/or family play in your success? Are they encouraging?
17. Have any of your friends achieved the same level of success in mathematics as you?
18. Have you had any negative experiences related to you being a high achiever? If so, please explain.
19. Are there others to whom you would contribute your success? Who are they? Are these people related in any way to your group of friends?

Closing Questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add to our discussion regarding your attitudes toward mathematics?
2. As mentioned after our first interview, the information will be used to construct your profile, which you will have the opportunity to review later. Do you have any questions for me? Thanks for your time!

Appendix C

Interview Guide C – Member Checking/Profile Review and Influence on Perceptions of Teacher Care

1. Now that you have seen your profile, are you comfortable with it?
2. Have I misrepresented any of your words?
3. Is there anything else you would like say about your perceptions of teacher care or attitudes toward math?
4. Are there any statements from your previous two interviews that you would like to clarify?
5. Has being taught by a male African American teacher influenced your perception of teacher care, if so, how?
6. What specific behaviors or practices of male African American teachers have influenced your perceptions of teacher care, if any? Can you share an example of this with me? (Probe)

Closing Questions

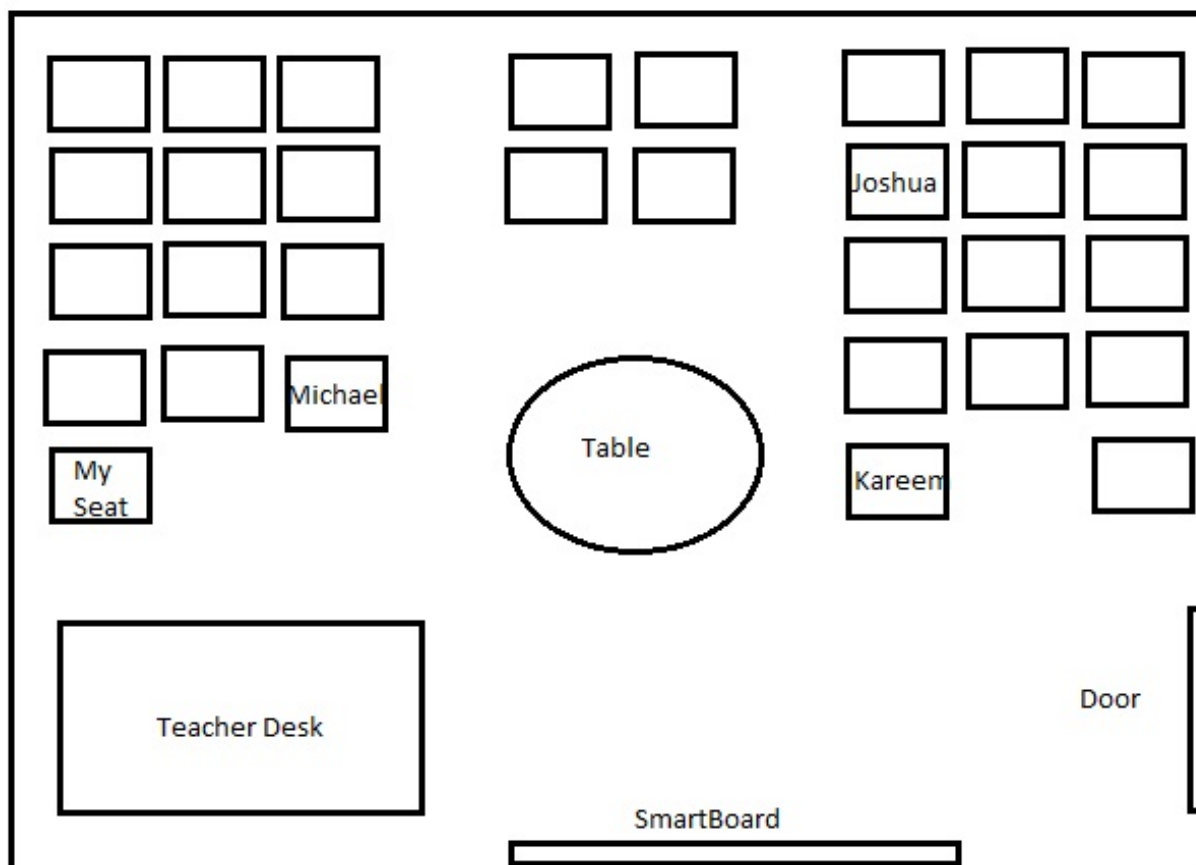
1. Is there anything else you would like to add to any of the information you have given me?

Thank you for your time; I appreciate all that you have done to assist me with my work!

Appendix D**Participant Table**

Name	Title	Gender	Race	Age	Grade Level	Course Name	Course Grade	Socioeconomic Level
Mr. Ira	Teacher (22 years)	Male	African American	54	N/A	Geometry	N/A	N/A
Kareem	Student	Male	African American	15	10	Geometry	10	Low
Joshua	Student	Male	African American	16	10	Geometry	10	Middle
Michael	Student	Male	African American	15	10	Geometry	10	High

Appendix E
Classroom Diagram/Layout



Appendix F

Youth Assent Form

Georgia State University
College of Education and Human Development
Department of Middle and Secondary Education

Title: THE MALE AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS: EXPLORING TEACHER INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHER CARE, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MATHEMATICS

Principal Investigator: Dr. David Stinson

Student Principal Investigator: Mr. Jason Hunter

I. PURPOSE:

You are invited to join in a study. The reason for this study is to look at how your teacher has played a part in your success in school.

II. PROCEDURES:

If you choose to join, you will be observed and interviewed when you have time. The interviews will take place once per month over one school semester (for a total of 3), each interview will last 45 to 50 minutes and will be at the school. If you allow, we would like to audio record each interview.

III. RISKS:

In this study, you will not face any risks other than you would in a normal day.

IV. BENEFITS:

If you choose to join, there will not be a direct benefit to you. You will have the chance to share your successes and your feelings on how your teacher has helped you succeed.

V. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Joining in this study is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. You can drop out of the study at any time. You will not get in trouble for not joining.

VI. CONFIDENTIALITY:

We will keep your information private. Only Dr. David Stinson and Jason Hunter will have see your information. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly. We will use a fake name and not your real name. The information you provide will be kept on Mr. Hunter's computer that has a password. The names of all the participants will be kept on a separate computer with a password. Your name and information that might point to you will not appear when we present this study. You will not be identified personally. Audio recordings will be destroyed sooner than 6 months from the date of each interview.

VII. CONTACT PERSONS:

If you have any questions during the research study, you may call Jason Hunter at 404-861-3558 or jason_hunter@gwinnett.k12.ga.us or Dr. David Stinson at 404-413-8409 or dstinson@gsu.edu. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, or get information about the study. You can call Susan Vogtner with questions about your rights in this study.

VIII. COPY OF CONSENT FORM TO SUBJECT:

We will give you a copy of this form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this study and be audio recorded, please sign below.

Thank you for participating.

Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher

Date

Appendix G

Parental Consent Form

Georgia State University
College of Education and Human Development
Department of Middle and Secondary Education

Title: THE MALE AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS: EXPLORING TEACHER INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHER CARE, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MATHEMATICS

Principal Investigator: Dr. David Stinson

Student Principal Investigator: Mr. Jason Hunter

I. PURPOSE:

Your child is invited to participate in a study. The purpose of this study is to explore the influence a "successful" African American male teacher has on 6 African American male students' perception of teacher care, and their attitudes toward mathematics. A total of 6 children will be asked to participate in the study.

II. PROCEDURES:

If you allow your child to participate, he will be observed and interviewed. The time will be based by his schedule. The interviews will take place once a month over one school semester (for a total of 3). Each interview will last 45 to 50 minutes. The location will be at his school. With your and your child's approval, we would like to audio record the interviews. This will make it easy to review your child's data.

III. RISKS:

In this study, your child will not have any more risks than he would in a normal day.

IV. BENEFITS:

If you allow your child to volunteer, there will not be a direct benefit. Your child will have the chance to talk about his successes. Your child will also have the chance to discuss his feelings on how his teachers have helped him succeed.

V. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child does not have to be in this study. Your child has the right to drop out at any time. Your child may stop participating at any time. Whatever you choose, your child will not be punished.

VI. CONFIDENTIALITY:

We will keep your child's records private to the extent allowed by law. Only Dr. David Stinson and Jason Hunter will see the records. The records may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, and/or Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)).

We will use a fake name and not your child's real name. The data your child provides will be kept on Mr. Hunter's computer under a password lock. The names of participants will be kept on another computer under password lock. Your child's name and other records that might point to your child will not appear when we present this study or its results. The findings will be reported in group form. Your child will not be identified personally. Audio recordings from interviews will be destroyed no later than 6 months from the date of the interview.

VII. CONTACT PERSONS:

If you have any questions during the study, you may call Jason Hunter at 404-861-3558 or jason_huner@gwinnett.k12.ga.us or Dr. David Stinson at 404-413-8409 or dstinson@gsu.edu. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions about your rights in this study.

VIII. COPY OF CONSENT FORM TO SUBJECT:

We will give you a copy of this form to keep.

If you are willing to allow your child to volunteer for this study and be audio recorded, please sign below.

Thank you for allowing your child's participation.

Child's Name

Parent of Minor Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher

Date

Appendix H

Teacher Consent Form

Georgia State University
College of Education and Human Development
Department of Middle and Secondary Education

Title: THE MALE AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS: EXPLORING TEACHER INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHER CARE, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MATHEMATICS

Principal Investigator: Dr. David Stinson

Student Principal Investigator: Mr. Jason Hunter

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence a “successful” African American male teacher has on 6 African American male students’ perception of teacher care, and their attitudes toward mathematics.

II. PROCEDURES:

If you choose to participate, you will be observed and interviewed according to your time schedule. The interviews will take place once per month over one school semester (for a total of 3), each interview will last 45 to 50 minutes and will be held at a location where you feel most comfortable (your school). With your permission, we would like to audio record each interview, as this will make it easy for us to review your responses during the interview.

III. RISKS:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. BENEFITS:

If you choose to participate, there may not be a direct benefit to you. You will have the chance to share your successes and your feelings on mathematics teaching and learning, and teacher care.

V. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. You can drop out of this at any time. You will not get in trouble for not participating.

VI. CONFIDENTIALITY:

We will keep your information private to the extent allowed by law. Only Dr. David Stinson and Jason Hunter will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, and/or Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use a fake name rather than your name on all study records. The information you provide will be stored on Mr. Hunter’s password- and firewall-protected computer. The key to names of everyone in this study will be stored in a separate file on a password- and firewall-protected computer. Your name and other information that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or its results. The findings will be reported in group form. You will not be identified

personally. Audio recordings from interviews will be destroyed sooner than 6 months from the date of the interview.

VII. CONTACT PERSONS:

If you have any questions or concerns during the research study, you may contact Jason Hunter at 404-861-3558 or jason_huner@gwinnett.k12.ga.us or Dr. David Stinson at 404-413-8409 or dstinson@gsu.edu. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, get information, or suggestions about the study. You can call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. COPY OF CONSENT FORM TO SUBJECT:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

Thank you for participating.

Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher

Date

Appendix I

Principal Consent Form

Georgia State University
College of Education and Human Development
Department of Middle and Secondary Education

Title: THE MALE AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS: EXPLORING TEACHER INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHER CARE, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MATHEMATICS

Principal Investigator: Dr. David Stinson

Student Principal Investigator: Mr. Jason Hunter

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this proposed study is to explore the influence a "successful" African American male teacher has on 6 African American male students' perception of teacher care, and their attitudes toward mathematics.

II. PROCEDURES:

If you allow your students to participate, they will be observed and interviewed according to their time schedules. The interviews will take place once per month over one school semester (for a total of 3), each interview will last 45 to 50 minutes and will be held at a location where they feel most comfortable (your school). With your permission and the students' and parents' permission, we would like to audio record our interviews as this will make it easy for us to review your students' responses during the interview. The interviews will not take place during instructional time.

III. RISKS:

In this study, your students will not have any more risks than he would in a normal day of life.

IV. BENEFITS:

If you choose to allow your students to participate, there may not be a direct benefit. Your students will have the opportunity to share their successes and their thoughts on how their teacher contributed to their success.

V. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your students do not have to be in this study. If you decide to allow your school to be in the study and if any participating student changes his mind, the student has the right to drop out at any time. The students may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

VI. CONFIDENTIALITY:

We will keep your students' records private to the extent allowed by law. Only Jason Hunter (and Dr. Stinson) will have access to the information your students provide. Information may also be shared with

those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, and/or Office for Human Research Protection [OHRP]). We will use pseudonyms (fake names) rather than your students' names on study records as well as the schools' and the participating teacher's name. The information your students provide will be stored on Mr. Hunter's password- and firewall-protected computer. The key to names of participants will be stored in a separate file on a password- and firewall-protected computer. Your students' names and other facts that might point to your students will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. Your students, school, or faculty member will not be identified.

VII. CONTACT PERSONS:

If you have any questions or concerns during the research study, you may contact Jason Hunter at 404-861-3558 or jason_hunter@gwinnett.k12.ga.us or Dr. David Stinson at 404-413-8409 or dstinson@gsu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your students' rights as participants in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. COPY OF CONSENT FORM TO SUBJECT:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to allow your students to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

Thank you for your school's participation.

Principal

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix J
IRB Approval Letter



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Mail: P.O. Box 3999 In Person: Dahlberg Hall
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999 30 Courtland St, Suite 217
Phone: 404/413-3500
Fax: 404/413-3504

December 17, 2015
Principal Investigator: David Stinson

Key Personnel: Hunter, Jason G; Mathematics Education; Stinson, David, PhD; Tinker Sachs, Gertrude, PhD

Study Department: GSU - Georgia State University, GSU - Middle & Secondary Education

Study Title: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS: EXPLORING TEACHER INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHER CARE, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MATHEMATICS

Review Type: Expedited 6, 7

IRB Number: H16272
Reference Number: 336659
Approval Date: 12/17/2015
Expiration Date: 12/16/2016

The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study in accordance with 45 CFR 46.111. The IRB has reviewed and approved the study and any informed consent forms, recruitment materials, and other research materials that are marked as approved in the application. The approval period is listed above. Research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the Institution.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. For any changes to the study (except to protect the safety of participants), an Amendment Application must be submitted to the IRB. The Amendment Application must be reviewed and approved before any changes can take place.

2. Any unanticipated/adverse events or problems occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Unanticipated/Adverse Event Form.

3. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is properly documented in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116.

The Informed Consent Form (ICF) used must be the one reviewed and approved by the IRB with the approval dates stamped on each page.

4. For any research that is conducted beyond the approval period, a Renewal Application must be submitted at least 30 days prior to the expiration date. The Renewal Application must be approved by the IRB before the expiration date else automatic termination of this study will occur. If the study expires, all research activities associated with the study must cease and a new application must be approved before any work can continue.

5. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.

All of the above referenced forms are available online at <http://protocol.gsu.edu>. Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Integrity (404-413-3500) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Ann Kruger, IRB Chair

Federal Wide Assurance Number: 00000129