WHAT FACTORS IMPACT BLACK ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM?

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ABSTRACT

WHAT FACTORS IMPACT BLACK ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM?

Sheila R. Harris

In the Black community, there is a paradox about how education is a key to success and a way out of a person's unfortunate socioeconomic situation (Mickelson, 1990). Over time, Black adolescents have continuously performed low academically (NAEP, 2019). According to the Nation's Report Card (2019), when viewed by racial/ethnic groups, the percentages of students performing at or above *Proficient* ranged from 18% for Black students to 46% for white students (NAEP, 2019). While holding such a vital belief in the "power of an education" (focusing mainly on literacy as reading), the current study seeks to understand what factors play a part in these adolescents' attitudes between their beliefs and actual classroom performance (Mickelson, 1990). Areas of concern would be adolescents' negative attitudes, which we define as a negative attitude as a disposition, feeling, or manner that is not productive, willing, or hopeful, and how it shapes academic performance. Curriculums are not set up for the success of Black students. Black students are not resonating with the lessons and literature that are present in the classrooms. We will find out what Black adolescents think they need for them to have a positive attitude in order to change the negative stereotype of them being low performers. The current study examined how adolescents' attitudes, either positive or negative, had a definite impact because of the different factors that affect the lives of adolescence.

DEDICATION

First, to GOD be the Glory!

To my dad up in heaven, I wish you were here!

I am eternally grateful to my mother, Rosa Harris, who is currently the oldest of what was 11 children. She gave up her education to help the family by taking care of the other siblings. I remember as a young child that she would always say that getting an education was important. She worked hard to keep us in a good school district, with quality schools far away from the housing projects. I will always love you, mom; your wisdom will always outweigh your book knowledge.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As if being Black weren't hard enough, according to Finn (2009), Black adolescents feel that they have to give up who they are to be accepted in the dominant culture. This leads to the question, what part of their Blackness (the factor) do they feel is not acceptable to the dominant culture? One such factor that may affect the attitudes of Black adolescents could be socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status (SES) is a combination of a family's social and economic position in relation to others; this mainly depends on income, education, or occupation. According to the 2010 US Census, 46.2 million people were living in poverty, which represents 15% of the population (2010 US Census, n.d.). Mostly included in these figures are African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans (2010 US Census, n.d.). Everyone in a Black community understands the struggle related to being Black; therefore, the perspective from which they view themselves differs from an outsider's view, that is, until they move beyond their socioeconomic status. The children are unaware of their position in society, that is until they move outside their social environment with their first eye-opening experience being in a classroom with people different from they are.

By the time children are in middle school, Black adolescents have somewhat of an idea about society's views and opinions of them. According to Hill (2013), teachers expressed issues with Black students' behavioral and achievement problems. Due to these pre-existing beliefs, Black students may not feel welcomed in the classroom, nor do they see themselves in the lessons or in the literature that is presented to them (Hill, 2013). For the purpose of this study, an attitude will be looked at in terms of the behavioral component, which reflects how an attitude affects the way a person acts or behave.

Attitudes are, in essence, like evaluative statements that are either positive or negative, depending on a preconceived notion of the degree of likes or dislikes for the situation in question ("3 Types of Attitudes", (n.d)). Having negative attitudes may possibly shape academic performance; therein lies the ***problem***. A common perception is that school curriculums are not set up with the success of Black students in mind. It is usually, with Black History Month, that teachers might bring out a book or two that may discuss the history of Black people. This is not devaluing the importance of this designated time in the curriculum. It wasn't until Woodson, also known as the "Father of Black History," 1926 developed African American Week, which later became African American History Month (History: Carter G. Woodson, n.d.). Following years of lobbying schools, as well as organizations, to participate in a special program to encourage the study of African American history, it was accepted and acknowledged in schools (Woodson, 2009). Prior to this, Woodson (2009) stated how the traditional curricula of the times did not take the Negro into consideration except to condemn or pity him.

Europeans have growing superiority over other groups, especially Blacks, that superiority generally contributed to the intellectual and mental marginalization of Blacks, thereby making them largely invisible and consequently irrelevant even to themselves (Lundy & Mazama, 2013). In the United States, curriculums taught in school are often based on a Eurocentric foundation. This Eurocentric teaching that is given to students of color is very detrimental to their self-development as students of color. As Ladson-Billings (1998) stated, these curriculums "legitimize white, upper-class males as the standard knowledge students need to know" (18). Many parents believe that having a Eurocentric curriculum is bound to seriously interfere with their children's self-esteem

and their sense of purpose. Parents also think that it leads to a deleterious effect on the psyche of Black students (Lundy & Mazama, 2013).

Woodson (2009) stated, “To help educate and instill racial pride within African Americans, introduce and integrate African American history into U.S. educational institutions, dispel racist stereotypes and prejudice within white society, and inspire African American youth (p. 674).” He realized that schools young Blacks attended had Eurocentric curriculums and was not conducive to such developments (Lundy & Mazama, 2013).

The Eurocentric curriculum also raised questions with Marcus Garvey, who was a Black nationalist and a leader of the Pan-Africanism movement; he sought to unify and connect people of color worldwide. Garvey feared that Blacks were made to believe notions of Black inferiority and white superiority. Of particular concern to Garvey was the perception that if the history of Blacks were made irrelevant, it would lead to the extremely incorrect and unjust misrepresentations of Blacks' contributions to the world. “The educational system of today hides the truth as far as the Negro is concerned,” wrote Garvey (p. 12) (As cited in Martin, 1986).

This study sought to find what Black adolescents think they need in order for them to have a positive attitude, as well as what do they need to change the negative stereotype of them being inferior and less likely to succeed and to improve teachers’ opinions. Can Black students resonate with the lesson and literature that is presented? According to the historians above, the answer would be no, not with the current Eurocentric curriculum. The instructional text needs to take into consideration the cultural, social, and emotional needs of Black students.

W.E.B. DuBois, one of the founders of the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), had concerns about the textbooks that were used by African Americans because they were not being depicted in the pages. Therefore, he created the Brownies' Book. It was one of the first magazines in 1920, created for African American children and youths. DuBois imagined The Brownies' Book as the beginning of an entirely new literary tradition. He looked to a brighter future, to a time when African American children, whom he called "the Children of the Sun," would regularly be able to see themselves reflected in the pages of the books they read and talked about in school (Du Bois, 1920).

According to a 2020 study released by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, which carries data on books written by Blacks and about Blacks, Indigenous and people of color published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, only 400 of the 3,299 children's books published in 2020 were about Black people, and only 252 of these were written by African Americans.

Table 1

Data on Books by Black and About Blacks

Year	Books Received at CCBC (US Pubs)	Black/African		Indigenous		Asian		Latino	
		By	About	By	About	By	About	By	About
2020	3,299	252	400	37	52	403	317	228	200
2019	4,035	232	471	46	65	429	357	243	236
2018	3,682	214	405	43	56	393	344	207	252

In 2019, the number of books by Black authors was 232 out of 4,035 books received. In 2018, there were 214 books written by Black authors in the US out of 3,682 books received. Although there was some growth, very few made it to classrooms (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020). According to the above statistics, there is a need for more Black authors as well as books that represent people of color. Texts that focus on the childhood lives of their heroes, thereby inviting gradual and easy identification within the lives of young readers. Positive Black male role models are notably scarce in most elementary schools. The absence of these role models, especially in the curriculum, can send children powerful messages about who school is for and whose experiences are relevant. This may leave children to wonder whether the school is a place for imagining one's future possibilities (Meier, 2015). A famous African American writer Walter Dean Myers, along with his remarkably talented son Christopher Myers, argued eloquently about the importance of Black literature. Educators make poor use of the African American literature that does exist, and they also under-intellectualize the power of these literary works (Meier, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to understand which factors impact Black adolescents' attitudes towards literacy in classrooms. It is important to know the influences on these adolescents so that we can change the negative attitudes; broaden curriculums to be more inclusive and understanding of Black culture. This study takes place in New York City, and the classroom demographics are more urban schools that are crowded and funded poorly with a mixture of Black, Brown, Latino, and other students.

Significance of the Study

Looking at life through the conceptual lens of Blacks and their academic status, typically literacy, and their below-average scores, the question came about as to why? Today's adolescents are not reading as they should, whether in text or leisure (Nation's Report Card, 2015). The National Report Card comes from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is the largest assessment on a continuous basis of what the nation's students know and what they can do in subjects such as mathematics, reading, science, and writing. Standards are implemented to provide a common measure of student achievement. Teachers, principals, parents, and policymakers all use NAEP results to assess progress, and they can develop ways to improve education (NAEP, 2019). They created it about 50 years ago, in 1969, for the first time to assess students' learning (NAEP, 2019). At the beginning of 1998, the reports were no longer in the trial period (NAEP, 2019). New York City has been taking part in this reporting yearly since 2002 (NAEP, 2019). According to the Nation's Report Card, 2015, when viewed by racial/ethnic groups, the percentages of students performing at or above *Proficient* ranged from 17 percent for Black students to 49 percent for Asian students (Nation's Report Card, 2015). The studies above all indicate relatively the same: and that is that some Black youths do not read well (Harris, 2009; York, 2013). Having a negative attitude shapes performance, so what are Black Adolescents' attitudes toward reading and literature? What perception do Black adolescents have about literacy instruction and literature? Do attitudes differ with gender? Do cultural and social environments have an effect on Black adolescents' attitudes about literacy? These are just a few of the questions my study will be looking to answer. By identifying the factors such as resonating with

texts as well as seeing Black potential in literature, we are able to develop a curriculum and provide relevant texts to foster a positive reading attitude and positive self-worth of Black students.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2014) did a national poll of over 1,005 African Americans and their opinions about the challenges they face in their daily lives and the struggle to make sure their children are properly educated. Parents know that it is with a powerful education that students will be able to get a decent job (2014). Of those surveyed, 66% of school-aged parents said they are receiving a quality education. Twenty-nine percent said they are not, and 6% said they do not know (2014).

The term Achievement Gap was first coined by a man named G. Walker in 1963 when he wrote an article about New Jerseys' desegregation and the educational gap between Black (Negro) students and white students. Although the achievement gap today still emphasizes the gap between Black and white students, since the modern-day classroom has become so diverse. The achievement gap now includes other racial groups (The Report Card, 2009). *State Education Department* released the Spring 2019 assessment results. However, they spoke about how well they believed they were doing with the "Every Student Succeeds Act" and how they use it to address achievement gaps and opportunities. Although the gap is narrowing, there is still little progress made between Black students and white peers between 2018-19, with a current gap of 1.4 percent (O'Hare & Beattie, 2019)

According to Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1986), there is a relationship (a transaction) between the reader and the text every time the event (reading) happens. Rosenblatt (1978) said, "*The reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an*

individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader"(p.923). A primary focus of this present study is to shed light on the factors that affect Black adolescents' attitudes toward literacy and literature so that teachers may be able to address some of their concerns in the classrooms while teaching.

Impact on Students

It is also believed that this study will help Black adolescents understand their feelings and see the outcome of a negative attitude and how it can affect their reading progress in school.

Research Questions

This study is focused on Black adolescents' negative attitudes and how it shapes their academic performance toward literacy in the classroom. The following research questions guided this study:

1) What are the attitudes of Black adolescents towards literacy in the classroom?
2) How does being Black in the classroom affect adolescents' attitudes toward literacy in the classroom?
3) What are the beliefs of teachers about factors and instructional techniques that contribute to Black students' motivation to read?

Assumptions

It is assumed that all participants will be open and honest about their attitudes towards literacy, as well as student-teacher relationships within the classrooms.

Definition of Terms

Attitudes: the behavioral component, which reflects how an attitude affects the way we act or behave. Attitudes are, in essence, like evaluative statements that are either positive or negative, depending on the degree of likes or dislikes for the situation in question ("3 Types of Attitudes", (n.d)), how students feel about reading (Estes, 1971).

Black Vernacular: or Black English, also known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (historically recognized as Ebonics) (Stephens, 2020), is often spoken by Blacks in urban and southern areas. Teachers should understand the meaning of students' language practices to avoid disdain (Fordham, 1999).

Paradox: two dimensions are considered in this study: 1.) Black dominant ideology signifies the attitudes, beliefs, values, and morals shared by the majority of the people in a given society. 2.) Opportunity structure refers to the way social structure and organization shape pathways to people's success (Mickelson, 1990).

Power of Literacy: it is a matter of justice to teach poor working-class students powerful literacy (Finn, 2012).

Self-hatred: is how adolescents can internalize the negative views of the dominant society (Phinney, 1989).

Self-concept: constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the responses of others. "a self-concept is largely a reflection of the reactions of others towards the individual."

Reading Motivation: is beliefs, values, and behaviors surrounding reading.

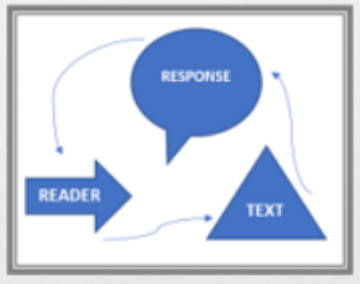
Achievement Gap: emphasizes the gap between Black and white students.

Theoretical Framework

Studies on adolescents' attitudes towards literature have been grounded in the fact that students need to be interested in what they read (Rosenblatt, 1986). Students no longer want to be told: "just do it." Black adolescent attitudes towards literacy and literature go beyond just interest. Rosenblatt's (1986) Transactional Theory is a framework closest to this study of adolescents' attitudes towards literacy. The theory involves the relationship between the reader and the text. Every reader brings his own ideas and attitudes to the text, which have an impact on the readers' interpretation of that text. The transaction between the reader and the text is what creates meaning. The text is merely markings on the page until the reader transacts with it (Rosenblatt L. M., 2013). Readers choose what they pay attention to based on their experience, expectations, needs, and their interests (Rosenblatt L. M., 2013).

Figure 1

Transaction Between the Reader and the Text for a Response



The transactional theory says that a reader has a selective attitude by taking a stance. A stance indicates a reader's purpose. The theory mentions two stances; the

efferent stance (to carry away), focusing on what is to be extracted or retained after reading and ignoring elements that do not serve the interest of the reader (In short, that which do not resonate). The other is the aesthetic stance (perception through the senses, feelings, and/or intuitions), where the reader takes on an attitude of readiness, focusing on what is being lived through during the reading event (Rosenblatt L. M., 2013). The aesthetic reader is known to pay attention to the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, and emotions that are brought forth (qualitative). This study shows the importance of having the reader be able to relate to the text and how text affects their attitudes towards reading.

Alfred Tatum (2000) said, "*Culturally relevant literature should be used to help African American students understand changes in history, substantiate their existence, and critically examine the present as a mechanism for political, social, and cultural undertakings that may arise in the future*" (p.60). Tatum (2000) also said that relevant literature increases students reading achievement, strengthens their cultural competence, and nurtures the identities of students. Doing this will allow students to use their cultural schema and also allow for using it as an additional cueing system (Tatum A. W., 2000). There are other forces that have an impact on their attitudes. Literacy and attitudes are grounded in Finn's (2012) belief that "literacy is power." He framed his argument, saying that it is a matter of "justice" to teach poor and working-class students powerful literacy. Attitude influences an individual's choice of action, responses to challenges, incentives, and rewards ("3 Types of Attitudes", (n.d)).

Providing justice in the form of powerful literature goes along with Meier's (2015) theory that children need to routinely see themselves reflected in the pages of the

books they read and talk about in school. Both Finn (2012) and Meier (2015) believe this will allow Black Adolescents to see who they are and what they can become. Building upon both of their theories by showing how the power of literacy and seeing oneself reflected in the books they read can change Black adolescents' attitudes towards literacy.

Figure 2

Wordle List of Critical Race Theory

Attitudes matter, as they can influence students' social, emotional, and academic experiences. This is informed by Edward's (2006) "Critical Race Theory," which discusses recognizing the issue and taking action. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an ideology that reduces people to a racial essence (whiteness or blackness). It is an identity-based hierarchy, dividing people based on group identity. It is anti-intellectual and denounces people, not on their individual character but their in-born identities (Report, 2020). When we say anti-intellectual, today's meaning is a social attitude that systematically denigrates facts, academic and institutional authorities, as well as knowledge (Huang, Dorsey, Mosteller, & Chen, 2020). The framework of critical race

theory has become a focal point as Republican officials across the country seek to prevent it from being taught in schools (Lati, 2021). It is a theory centered on the notion that racism is systemic and woven into the education system. Critics say that the theory will lead to negative dynamics, dividing people into “oppressed” and “oppressor” (Sawchuk, 2021). Critical Race Theory exposes racial inequalities in education, such as segregated schools based on zoning, underfunding of Black and Latino school districts, and curricula that reinforce racist ideas (Sawchuk, 2021). The suppression of Black history exposes white privilege, and if exposed, critics fear it could be damaging and self-demoralizing to white students (Sawchuk, 2021). I examined this theory by taking a closer look at teachers’ responses to attitudes and their effect on students in the classroom, having teachers look beyond the stereotypes and understand all their students (Kuehne, Ph.D., 2017). Tatum (2006) talked about African American youths coping mechanisms, as well as internal and external factors that act as barriers to students’ achievements and their relationship with texts. Little has been done to improve attitudes. It appears teachers teach texts; they stick to their curriculum with no idea of how to adjust it in order to meet the needs of their growing diverse classroom.

The next section reviews the literature that revealed the struggle with identity, the need to belong, misperception, and lack of understanding of Black adolescents. It may reveal hidden fears teachers may have with Black adolescents, especially males.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Ghetto Blacks are oppressed by the American system of literacy education."
(Stuckey, Winter, 1991).

The opening statement "*As if being Black was not hard enough…*" can be completed in so many ways, according to Finn (2009). In elementary school, due to their innocence, younger students may not recognize if they are confronted with any racism due to them being Black. Teachers are better able to handle young Black children in the classroom when they are younger. We use the word handle because, according to Finn (2009), due to teachers' perception of Black students, the conclusion is that they would need to be handled in the classroom. Some can agree that this accepting environment changes when that same young Black child enters middle and high school. Black adolescents are still looking for acceptance when they get to middle school. It is in middle school that they are aware of their blackness and how society views them (Finn, 2009). At this point, they can recognize any racism that the teacher may have. It is also at this point that they may be aware of their healthy or unhealthy situations at home and that school can be an escape for them. It is believed that you will see how students sit in the class, and no "seed" of goodness is being planted in them about their possible greatness; neither the lessons nor the literature resonates with who they are and their blackness (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The literature that was reviewed for this study discussed these issues. They have an overall theme of the "***power****"* of literature. Has anyone ever looked at literature and reading and thought it was powerful? What a profound word, "*power."* Teachers wield this power in the classroom, but this power needs to be distributed to all students, even

the Black ones. This can be done by letting them see themselves in the lesson, as well as allowing them to read about the power and good potential being Black can offer. As an outsider, they can see the negative aspects of being Black, yet the school should be a safe haven, a place that shows them opportunities. The literature that was reviewed included scholars that may believe there is a need to understand the factors that have an effect on the attitudes of Black adolescents when it comes to reading and literature.

Black Youth Attitudes

There are many factors that affect the attitudes toward reading amongst teenagers. Family members are instrumental in helping their children learn how to read (York, 2013). According to Anthony (2013), Black youths believe their learning experience is non-caring and non-supportive by most teachers. They are also aware that most people believe that being Black affects their potential to learn to read. They may feel that society views Black intelligence and that their ability to learn is on a lower level than other races (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018). Some students might see the discriminatory practices their parents experience and may feel higher education is a waste of time (Finn, 2009). This study aimed to reveal more of their concerns, as well as some of the factors that affect their attitudes.

A 2001 study by the Programme International Student Assessment (PISA) identified that the attitudes students have toward reading are considerably related to the amount of reading they do and reading achievement. It is those attitudes toward reading that affect their motivation to read and chances for academic success (Harris, 2009). Matthewson's (1994) construction model stated that positive attitudes create positive

behavior and that there is a relationship between attitudes and behavior (as cited in Harris, 2009). In order to have changes made in attitudes, Black youths may need to have their voices heard. This might happen with a change in curriculum and policies.

The Paradox Between Views on Education and Academic Success

The paradox of a consistently positive attitude toward education, coupled with frequently low academic achievement, shows that Black adolescents are not living up to what they believe the value of an education can do for them. Black adolescents believe that education is one of the few institutions that can lift them from poverty and oppression, but their actions are anything but that of high scholastic quality (Mickelson, 1990). Their belief in education does not match their actions, even though adolescents know it is for their betterment and upward mobility. Education is key to success in the future; also, the way for poor people to become middle class is through education (Mickelson, 1990).

The reason for the importance of education is that African Americans perceived that it was their passport away from the plantations and from material poverty and its far-reaching negative consequences. African Americans quite understandably aspired to a better life, and education occupied a central place in that new scheme (Lundy & Mazama, 2013)

What affects Black adolescents' change of attitudes? Their low engagement in school could be a result of getting negative feedback from teachers; they feel embarrassed, and they have low skill levels. Literacy instruction must have value in the eyes of adolescents in order to attract and retain their attention (York, 2013). According

to Anthony (2013), public education is failing Black students. Black adolescent literacy experience could be enriched through connections, relevance, and relationships. Learning should reflect students' culture. Teachers should use appropriate text to keep them engaged. This should build self-efficacy to help eliminate the self-sabotage attitude (Anthony, 2013; York, 2013).

Reading Socially Acceptable

Literature must address adolescent issues and concerns in a way that will lead them to examine their lives or at least reflect on them (York, 2013).

According to Mori (2003), some teens perceive book reading as "uncool," and those adolescent readers may wish to keep "a low profile" on their reading with boys, in particular, likely to view book reading as related to being a "nerd" (As cited in Merga, 2014; p. 472). According to the Institute of Education Sciences 2011, it is not known if older adolescents read books for pleasure or if they avoid them (Merga, 2014).

High School friends that openly discuss the books they have read generally support the development of positive attitudes toward reading (Merga, 2014). Friends have influence over reading choices by sharing what they have read and what is popular. Boys are less likely to share reading with friends or family; some also feel that reading is something that girls are known to do. Evidence suggests that books have become more socially acceptable among some adolescents with books like "Twilight" and others that interest adolescents and which also cross-racial lines (Merga, 2014).

I Wish I Were White: Identity Struggle

By the time adolescents reach middle school, they already have a notion that white is right and Black is terrible (Baker-Bell, 2020). In "*Black Skin, White Masks,"* the author infers that Black people are trained from early childhood to associate their blackness with wrongness (Fanon, 1952). This form of conditioning was also mentioned by Woodson (2009) when he said, "…to handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's aspirations." (p.6) Black adolescents experience this inadequacy in their everyday life, as well as what they see in the media reports. In her article, *Critical Conversations on Whiteness with Young Adult Literature,* Schieble (2012), believes teachers can combat the negative perception of Blacks by having conversations in the classroom with young adult literature. She also mentions the association between being white and being privileged.

Phinney's (1989) study of Ethnic Identity Stages spoke about how adolescents can internalize the opposing views of the dominant society with self-hatred. These adolescents could accept the negative views of themselves, or they could reject them and find their own identity. This is no easy task if a child is told they will never become anything; it is a conditioning that is hard to get away from. Phinney (1989) also did interviews and surveys where adolescents stated, "Sometimes I wish I belonged to the white race," showing a preference for the dominant culture and values instead of their own. Children grow up with no connection to "Barbie" or "GI Joe," with the desire to have "nice hair" and perfect shape, struggling to see themselves in a positive way through the eyes of society. In his work, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1990), Woodson stated

that “Blacks have a contempt towards their own people, and that Blacks (Negroes) are taught to admire other races and despise everything Black” (p 6) (Lundy & Mazama, 2013).

Oppositional Identity, as described by Fordham and Ogbu (2009), says there are resentment and anger that Black adolescents feel in reaction to their rising awareness of the meticulous rejection of Blacks from participating in the dominant society. Finn (2009) also says that Black adolescents can act defiantly, going according to the way society views them, or they become what is called “*Border Crossers*,” where they are eager to abandon their communities and adapt to the ways, interests, values, and attitudes of the dominant culture. The exception to this is the family that instills positive-ness in their children, creating better and sound values in them. This same mentality rolled over into the classroom and was confirmed with teacher interactions and expectations. Failure of minority adolescents to deal with their ethnicity could have negative implications, such as poor self-image, a sense of alienation, and withdrawal from the classroom, according to Phinney (1989).

Teachers’ Expectations of Their Black Students

“Teach me; I can learn.” In “Literacy with an Attitude,” Finn (2009) stated, “Powerful literacy is the education our children deserve because it fosters critical thinking about complex ideas and prepares young people to consider multiple perspectives and their own interests as they make life decisions” (as cited in Romano, 2012 (p.1). Finn (2009) exposes inequalities in the ways in which students are being educated in accordance with their social class. According to Finn (2009), poor working-

class students received functional literacy that taught compliance, while students from privileged backgrounds were taught powerful literacy that promoted independence and leadership. Romano (2012) reminds us that Finn stated that "Domesticating education is rote and fragmented, rather than conceptual and linked to the world in ways that help students understand relevancy to their lives" (p.2). Finn goes on to say how new teachers that get resistance from students turn emphasis on how to control students rather than helping them become critical learners of their world (As cited in Romano, 2012). Carter Woodson said, "When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it" (p. 4). For new teachers that feel overwhelmed, they may think that controlling students may be the first option.

There may *not* be outright racism in the classroom. However, it would be naive to think that there is not some sort of undertone involved. One can only assume racism would come into play because teachers have perceptions of their students. Based on their experience, what they have read, or what they have seen, they may be given a perception that Asians are bright and that Indians are good with Math. Black and Hispanics are struggling students, yet it is ok if they do not reach their goals. A teacher may be surprised when they do have that outstanding Black or Hispanic student. Teachers often say that they do not see color when they teach, yet in "The Dream-Keepers," Ladson-Billings (2009) inferred that if you don't see color, "*attempts at color blindness mask a "dysconscious racism" and uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given*" (p. 35). This does not mean that they are racist, but it may imply that they bury their heads in the sand; because

a teacher cannot help but notice the disadvantage and the privileged yet does nothing to change or tip the scale.

Edward and Schmidt (2006) addressed how racism in the classroom *"IS"* the elephant in the room that needs to be overcome. It exposes cultural conflict and struggles among students, teachers, and families. The theory legitimates and promotes the voices of people of color by using storytelling and integrating experiential knowledge drawn from a shared history. This may be used in the future as being a potential exploratory study to get students of color to share experiences of possible racism in the classroom. According to Critical Race Theory, low academic expectations allow the existing social structure to remain the same, with Blacks and Latinos being at the bottom of the structure. Students learn that the minimum is acceptable for the required work of the school, and with low expectations, it does not encourage them to explore their potential (Edwards & Schmidt, 2006).

How Teachers View Black Males

As socioeconomic climates change, Blacks and Latinos who are able to pull themselves out of lower-class neighborhoods are believed to be determined to put their children in the best schools; this action most likely leads to a diversification in the classroom. There may be no such thing anymore as an all "white" school, although there may still be a few in certain parts of the country, depending on geography and demographics. Who now enters this classroom but a young man of color? Despite his parents' good intentions for wanting the best for him, he enters the classroom with a feeling of isolation. On the other side, here now is a teacher who never taught Black

students before but may have heard that urban students' have behavioral issues (Hill, 2013). Then there is the class, who, because of their once upscale environment, never met or had a Black student in their class before. On the other hand, how about the white student that received her degree as a teacher and is now teaching in a Black area? Although we do not hear about these situations, and although it may not be this way in all classrooms, this is a common occurrence. Schools are staffed primarily by white teachers despite the ratio of Black students. There have been thousands of calls for effective teachers of color. Teachers unknowingly participate in the reproduction of racial inequality, yet they can minimize or exacerbate the racist effects of schooling for their students of color through their pedagogical (Hyland, 2005). Hyland (2005) described ways white teachers often view themselves as being good teachers to Black students. She mentioned hidden racism in metaphors, such as helper, benefactor, patron, all ways to describe how teachers see themselves with Black children and their families. "A good teacher of Black students is a helper" (p. 439), says one of the teachers, not necessarily as an educator (Hyland, 2005).

In a case study called *Welcoming Taye*, Taye was a transfer student in a predominantly white school system; upon arrival, the silent question teachers had was, what do we do now? One of his teachers, Mr. Lehrer, who was an English teacher, was more than willing to *Welcome Taye* with culturally relevant texts added to his curriculum (Hill, 2013). When schools experience this type of change or when new teachers are not assigned to their preferred district, they must adjust their pedagogy in a manner that is culturally relevant. As for Taye, providing culturally relevant text and connecting it to the

curriculum allowed him to feel part of the class lesson and also helped other students adjust and maybe see how Blacks contribute to society (Hill, 2013).

Black adolescent males experienced belonging in early elementary grades by their teachers, but once they get older, teachers tend to view them the way society does with stereotypes, and they assume that Black males are violent and aggressive. Many teachers admit that they fear them. Feeling like they do not belong can lead to what Hill (2013) calls a "cross-cultural discord" between Black males and their teachers. It is said that the way young Black youth dress, the language used, demeanor, and body language are often demonized in schools and viewed as oppositional, defiant, and intimidating by teachers and other school personnel; this must change (Meier, 2015). Teachers may unwittingly perpetuate a racist status quo. In order to see how racism operates in schools and is continued by teachers that mean well, Feagin and Vera (2001) defined white racism as; a "socially organized set of attitudes, ideas, and practices that deny African Americans and other people of color the dignity, opportunities, freedoms, and rewards that this nation offers white Americans" (p.17). It has often been said that institutionalized racism shapes the consciousness of Blacks. Ladson-Billings (2009) said rather or not the content of the curriculum would have a profound effect on the students depends on the "way" teachers teach; implementing culturally relevant teaching, she believes, will improve the educational lives of African American students. When talking about culturally relevant teaching, teachers need to take in how they perceive Black youths. Ladson-Billings (2009) also noted how a teacher she interviewed felt that African American students must be controlled, and because of her personal views about her African American students, she worked mainly on ways to control them. That teacher's attitude and behavior toward

her Black students revealed her belief about them and also showed other students where their position in the hierarchy lay. On another occasion, Ladson-Billings (2009) spoke about a teacher that determined the behaviors as “good Blacks” and “bad Blacks.” She believed “good Blacks” were the students with white attributes, thereby showing that she had no respect for their social class; also, she had very low expectations, which impeded Black students’ success.

Language Identifies Through Culture

Language identifies them through their culture; examples would be the music that is listened to, the television shows that are watched, or by teens’ social media. If reading is not in a language they can understand, how can they connect with it or anything critically? How can they resonate with it? To increase engagement with literacy is to introduce them to text that integrates their academic, social, cultural, and spiritual focus. Vygotsky believed the community plays a central role in making meaning. Vygotsky also said there is a connection between people's social and cultural approaches to cognitive development (As cited in Anthony, 2013).

According to Harris (2009), attitudes are learned from one’s culture, family, and peers. When it comes to language and culture, in his essay Kohl (1991) talked about how people decide not to learn or not-learning for fear of what is called the dissolution of culture. Not-learning is an active and willful act a person will make to successfully not obtain information that is being taught. It requires not paying attention and possibly acting dumb, closing off part of yourself. So much work goes into not-learning something that it could be misread as being a failure. Not-learning is the refusal of knowledge,

whereas failure can be seen as what a learner is or is not capable of doing. Have you ever wondered how some people can live in America for years and still do not speak English? Kohl (1991) mentioned how one of his students had a grandfather that refused to learn English. He said that the grandfather was afraid that if he gave up on his native language, the grandchildren would lose their culture and not speak Spanish as fluently. He decided that being in America for over twenty years and not learning English was his not-learning in order to keep his culture alive for his grandchildren. This same struggle can be seen in Black adolescents; they are expected to assimilate into the dominant culture in order to succeed, turning away from their culture. Those students that try to hold on to their Blackness by the way they talk, dress, and communicate are seen as a failure when they may well be just actively not-learning.

There is a cultural difference between school and community. Learning should reflect students' culture. Students should be able to resonate with reading. There should be an inclusion of African American history in the curriculum and not just one month out of the year. Teachers should be aware of Black learning styles and understand the importance of reading books with Black characters and themes (Harris, 2009) (York, 2013). Ladson-Billings (2009) stated that students should be grounded in their own culture before becoming versed in mainstream culture; this may give them an appreciation of who they are and a bigger respect as to why they need to assimilate into the dominant culture without losing who they are. Many may feel that in order to be successful, one might need to lose their African American identity. Black adolescents look at this as "acting white." "*The primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a "relevant Black personality" that allows African American*

students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture" (p.20) (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Effect of Two or One Parent Home

There is an assertion that families provide children's first educational experiences and that they also strongly influence children's development and school achievements. It is the structure of the family that helps determine the level of students' achievement. Research shows that students' achievements are correlated with factors of their family's background and structure, such as income, the level of parents' education, as well as its structure. Some relate the differences in children's achievements to their family status (Ford, Wright, Grantham, & Harris, 1998).

It is understood that education is the key to upward mobility and is valued in a single-parent home even more so than with a two-parent household. There is an underlying struggle in the Black community, and most believe that education is a way to succeed (Harris, 2009). However, there may also be an assumption and misperception that Black children come from "broken" homes with families that do not value education. It is said that a "broken" home ultimately causes behavioral problems and academic deficiencies (Harris, 2009). Studies were done on the effect of family structure, and student achievement had resulted in weak and inconclusive results when it came to the proposition that single parenting alone is, in fact, detrimental to their children's academic achievement (Ford, Wright, Grantham, & Harris, 1998). A single-parent home is not a detriment, nor is it demonized the way society portrays it to be, nor is it less powerful. Having a positive attitude can override missing skills, allowing the reader to excel

beyond what is usually expected of them based on past reading performance, according to Rubin & Optiz (2007) (as cited in Harris, 2009). Society is not blind to the uneven rewards and job advancement between Blacks and whites with the same education level. It leaves the question, why work as hard when the rewards are not the same (Mickelson, 1990)?

Changing My Vernacular: Changing Who I Am

You can teach them better if you understand them better. Some Black students are ignorant of standard mainstream vernacular, just as teachers are ignorant of African American Vernacular English (Black vernacular). Fordham (1999) advised teachers to understand the meaning of their students' language practices to avoid conveying disdain for discourse markers of Black identity and implying that academic success required "*a flight from the Black self*." Lawson referenced that teachers do not fully understand linguistic diversity and often assume dialects such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) are evidence of poor language abilities (as cited in Edwards, 2006, p.408). She confirms that teachers have low academic expectations for their students, which affects future educational opportunities (Edwards, 2006). Baker-Bell (2020) said, "The way a Black child's language is devalued in school reflects how Black lives are devalued in the world (p. 2). She also talks about Linguistic Justice and how it's a call for a world free of anti-blackness and to create an education system where Black students' language, literacies, and culture matter (Baker-Bell, 2020). Many students wonder why they are being forced to speak "white," and much of the communication in schools does not reflect their culture or linguistic background. Ladson-Billing (2009) stated that

"schools place little value on what is termed the "nonstandard English" that African American children bring to school even though that language is rich, diverse, and useful in both community and work settings" (p. 19). If reading were in the language of Black vernacular, Black students would be more interested and would relate to it. Students would have something to resonate with, and they will be more prompted to read because they would understand. Standard English vernacular may appear to Black adolescents as being associated with white society. The "*Oppositional Identity*" theory, where it may seem like they are abandoning their own identity, is somewhat of a betrayal to their *people* (Finn, 2009). If teachers understood African American (Black) vernacular, they might be able to teach the dominant standard vernacular, and students may be able to switch back and forth depending on their current situation without losing who they are (Finn, 2009). Gee's (1990) work tells us that each of us has what he calls an "identity kit." That kit is built on experiences, behavior, language, and social expectations of others. (As cited in (Fisher & Lapp, 2013) p.635). If teachers can show students the value and respect of having different registers, those used at home and in communities and those expected during school, it will allow the students to see how using both can benefit them during certain times. This is what Fisher and Lapp (2013) referred to as code-switching, which will allow students (speakers) to switch back and forth (vernacular) depending on their audience.

Getting Them to Read

I don't see myself in this book. "These books are dumb anyway. Why do we have to read these stupid books? I HATE reading!" (p.661) (Wood & Jocius, 2013). When

faced with Black students not wanting to read, Wood and Jocius (2013) referenced the "3 C's", which are culturally relevant text, collaboration, and critical conversation; all three of which they feel teachers need to incorporate when getting students interested in reading. When we talk about a culturally relevant text, it means they include characters that share a common experience with the reader. Also, they may be similar in appearance, language usage, or family structure (Hill, 2013). It is believed that text characteristics affect readers' comprehension (Snow, 2002). Meier (2015) stated that children need to see themselves in the pages of the books they read and talk about in school. It also mentioned that there are very few books published about African Americans each year; that said, many teachers use African American children's' literature only in February or within a set curriculum. He is also quoted in a New York Times essay, "Many Black boys don't read." Meier (2015) said that Black boys would read if the books used in school were more relevant to their lives and that incorporating more Black literature into the curriculum would make a difference. Like Finn (2012), Meier also believes literature has power. Meier (2015) said, "The virtual absence of a Black male presence, particularly in the curriculum, sends children powerful messages about who and what school is for, and whether a school is a place for being oneself and for imagining one's future possibilities" (p. 337). Finn (2012) talked about the difference between Powerful literacy and Functional literacy. In order to get to positions of authority and power, Powerful literacy is essential. Finn (2012) also said, Functional literacy, which is the literacy taught to Black and poor adolescents, is meant only to meet the daily demands of reading and writing to make a person productive, dependable, and not be troublesome, thus leaving

them in the status quo and not giving them the tool to excel. It is a matter of justice that every human being has access to Powerful literacy. There is work to be done.

Motivation, Engagement, and Relevance

What makes a person do what they do? For the purpose of this study, motivations are beliefs, values, and behaviors surrounding reading. There are two types of motivation systems. The first is intrinsic motivation or sometimes looked at as an interest because it is something a person would do for the sake of doing it, just because they have an interest (Guthrie, 2013). This interest or intrinsic motivation is internal gratification (Tatum, 2006). The other is a reward for success, which is extrinsic motivation, external rewards which someone gives another for accomplishments. An extrinsic reward is not a lasting reward for reading; it only allows students to be more interested in the reward itself, not the learning (Guthrie, 2013). Extrinsic motivation can be in the form of a good grade, a future job, or a reward for money, but if the motivation is not intrinsic, it will not increase achievement in the long term (Guthrie, 2013). The Common Core State Standards are set up to ensure every child is prepared for college and careers. It requires that students read more challenging instructional text (Association, 2017). With the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), students are expected to cope with complex text. Complex texts are challenging, and in order for students to meet that challenge, they must be motivated (Guthrie, 2013). It may be time for us to take a look at the text that might be meaningful and significant to students, the kind of books that will be remembered years into the future (Tatum, 2008).

It is believed that Black adolescents are disengaged and that some do not read. But Kirkland (2011) says, “Youths are not failing to engage texts; many of the texts we teach in schools are failing to engage youths” (p. 201). Texts students find meaningful and that they remember are the ones that move them to feel differently about themselves or move them into actions (Tatum, 2008). Teachers have the ability to motivate when emphasizing good interpersonal relationships. Students who feel their teachers think they are essential may participate more in the classroom (Guthrie, 2013). There may be a need to shape text that will restore students’ belief that books are a tool for development (Tatum, 2014). Teachers believe that students experience literacy growth more rapidly if they become “agents” of their own literacy development (Quirk, 2010)**.**

Chapter Conclusion and Transition

In this chapter, I formed eleven themes (topics) from the literature that was reviewed. Each theme explained its’ association with Black adolescents' attitudes and how certain factors played a role in the development of their attitudes. Factors like beliefs, reading engagement, identity struggles, teachers' expectations, and motivation were all connected and supported through the literature. The next chapter explains my Methodology road map with my layout and intentions, which allowed me to dive deeper and seek out the answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study focused on factors that affect Black adolescents' negative attitudes and how it shapes their academic performance toward literacy in the classroom.

The research questions are:

- What are the attitudes of Black adolescents towards literacy in the classroom?
- How does being Black in the classroom affect adolescents' attitudes toward literacy in the classroom?
- What are the beliefs of teachers about factors and instructional techniques that contribute to Black students' motivation to read?

The study focused on outreach to adolescents between the ages of 14 to 18, those struggling to read, lacking both motivation and engagement, and to see what Black students have to say about their reading experience in the classroom. There is a segment on teachers' thoughts on how they may struggle with providing a curriculum to suit the needs of students' growing diversity, especially Black adolescents.

Research Method

A qualitative Phenomenology Design method was used to address the research questions. The Descriptive Phenomenological Method provides the lived perspective of the participants by focusing on their perspective without the use of deception (Giorgi, 2009). The method allowed me to keep the "voice" of the people involved in the research without removing their viewpoint through analysis. It is the subjective-psychological perspective of the participants that captures the interest of the researcher (Giorgi, 2009).

It was not only the “reactions” and “behaviors” that were included in the data but also the thoughts, impressions, feelings, interpretations, and understandings of the participants’ experiences that I analyzed. The aim of the researcher is not only to describe with accuracy but to refrain from any pre-given framework (Groenewald, 2004). The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method is a five-step system of research that holds Husserlian Phenomenology as its philosophical foundation (Giorgi, 2009). It studied several individuals who had shared an experience, and it enabled me to understand the "essence" of the experience (Giorgi, 2009). The study concentrates on consciousness and the objects of direct experience. It described the essence of the lived phenomenon through the views of the participants, using predominantly interviews with individuals and the Zoom focus group platform. The goal is to understand the issue or problem from an individual's point of view. It is meant to describe, not to predict, an outcome (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative because the approach explores and tries to understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to the "factors" (Creswell, 2014).

Research Design

It was believed that Phenomenology Design would work well. The phenomenology design would describe and interpret information from the culture-sharing group. It analyzes data for any significant statements, structural and textual descriptions, and a description of the "essence" of the phenomenon. It studies a group that shares the same culture, in this case, Black adolescents. It described and interpreted shared patterns of Black adolescents and factors that affect their attitudes towards literacy in and out of the classroom. The explicit process has five steps. 1.) Bracketing and phenomenological

reduction. 2.) Delineating units of meaning. 3.) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes. 4.) Summarizing each interview, validating it, and modifying it when necessary. 5.) Extract general and unique themes from all the interviews and make a composite summary. Details of each step are discussed below (Groenewald, 2004). This study analyzed data through a description of the culture-sharing group and themes about the group by giving a cultural portrait (Creswell, 2014). In this study, it is the first person "understanding(s)" of their experiences that are of interest to the researcher rather than objective interpretations of their behaviors. More information about how this process was achieved will be discussed in the "data analysis" section of this study.

Trustworthiness

In this study, the phenomenological research design contributed to the truth. I bracketed myself consciously in order to understand, in terms of the perspective of the participants being interviewed for the phenomenon that I studied, that is, "the focus that would be on an insider perspective" (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 70; as cited in (Groenewald, 2004). The audio recordings were made of each interview, and again I bracketed myself during the transcription of the interviews, and it further contributed to the truth. Afterward, the subjects received a copy of the text to validate that it reflected their perspectives regarding the phenomenon that was being studied. Phenomenological psychological analysis is a mode of discovering the psychological meanings as they were lived and how they inform our understanding of such experiences on a deeper level (Broome, 2011). The participants in this study had control over the information and the way it was given. I pursued the most full and honest descriptions from the participants

that they could have provided. I had no reason for skepticism about getting anything but the truth from the participants. I took no actions to manipulate or control the participants into providing information they did not freely want to give. Informed consent agreements secured a clear understanding of the relationship between the participants and myself as the researcher (Broome, 2011).

Recruitment of Participants

The researcher obtained permission from St. John's University Institutional Review Board in order to protect human subjects while conducting this study. A letter requesting permission to participate in this study was mailed (or given) to the parents and guardians of said students.

The sample population used in this study had the following characteristics:

A.) The sample was taken from the area within Brooklyn, New York.

B.) The scales were designed for students in grades 9 through 12.

C.) Only Black students were sampled, so their views/experiences were portrayed.

D.) Both genders were used in the sample, so there was no gender bias within the scales.

The researcher protected the anonymity of the students. The information is stored and secured on a USB drive and placed under lock and key.

Participants Selection

While looking at factors that affect Black adolescents' negative attitudes and how it shapes their academic performance toward literacy in the classroom, I began in Brooklyn, New York. A church in Kings County that had one of the largest youth populations in the borough. The youth group does activities by age groups from pre-K to high school. The group that interested me was the "Girls First" group. The group program offers girls a safe place to share their struggles, fears, and hopes with other girls. Studies deal with gritty, real-life issues like dating, pre-marital sex, and school. They met every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month from 4 – 6:30 pm. Looking at high school adolescent groups between ages 14-18, which is grade 9th-12th, permission was acquired first from St. John's University IRB, then from the organization. Another group that was looked into is the general youth group population, which consists of both high school boys and girls. It involves leadership development for boys and girls, a highly relational and fun environment.

A letter was sent (or given) to parents stating that the focus groups will be taking place via Zoom. Due to Covid-19, the data source for this method started with a recorded "Zoom" focus group. Each group had up to 4 participants taking part in the conversations from the above groups. If the pandemic restrictions were lifted by Summer 2021, a masked interview would have been performed. If not, individual recorded Zoom interviews would be conducted. Examples of questions were, "How do you feel about what you read in class?"; "When it is your turn to read in class, how do you feel?" "What do you like to read?" and what usually motivates you to read?" Each session was no more than 40-minutes long. I had each session recorded with two different recording devices,

one tape recorder and one cell phone, to make sure the recordings were not lost; while I took notes that I later transcribed and coded for themes. The information is stored and secured on a USB drive and placed under lock and key.

I then move on to interview two teachers from grade levels 9 through 12th grade. The types of interview questions were, "How many years have you been teaching?"; "As a teacher, how do you feel your instructional techniques contribute to Black students' motivation to read?" "What factors do you believe contribute to students' motivation to read?" and "What types of attitudes were you faced with when it came to Black students reading aloud?" Teachers were also asked about students' involvement and experiences when it came to literacy.

Positionality of the Researcher

As an African American female researcher, it may be presumed that I would understand the types of experiences Black adolescents have and why they may have the attitudes that they do regarding literature and reading. The fact that I am Black places me as an insider for this study. Being a Black researcher might make me relatable and hopefully put the participants at ease and give them a sense of comfort when they relay their own experiences. I am culturally aware of my participants' background and religion, but that is where our similarities may end. I grew up in a predominately white elementary and junior high school, which was a struggle within itself, but the transition to a predominantly Black high school due to zoning restrictions was an altogether different experience. I fully intended to bracket [set aside] my own experience and everything the world showed me to believe. I focused only on the "given" of the participant's experiences.

Data Collection

The phenomenological design involved interviewing, transcribing, coding, analyzing, determining meaning units, and determining the overall meaning of the phenomenon for up to ten participants over a three-month period. Two recording devices were used, and all data collected was retained on a USB drive and placed under lock and key for security. The raw data for this study was the "naïve description" of Black adolescents as they brought to light the reasoning for their attitude. The naïve description is the first-person account of the experience as it was lived and understood by the participants' everyday mode of understanding (Giorgi, 2009). Since no other person can co-experience the subjective psychological perspective of any lived experience with the participant, such an experience exists (only in part) within the memory of the person who experienced it from the subjective position (Giorgi, 2009). Therefore, I captured an audio recording of Zoom interviews with each of the participants about their experiences. If Covid restrictions were lifted, then masked interviews took place with the safety of being six feet apart. To begin the telling of their experiences: the initial question for the participants was very simply presented, for example, "In as much detail as possible, tell me what it was like for you to be called on to read during class?" This general question is open-ended and intended to offer the participant a wide range in which they were able to verbally describe the experience.

If I sense more could have been said about something or that the participant veered away from that which naturally occurs when people are speaking, then I brought them back on track. When the participant reaches a point where they said all that can be said spontaneously, then I would ask one or more follow-up questions like, "You spoke

about…., and can you tell me more about that?" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Any follow-up questions are meant to direct, not to lead, in the sense of trying to "pull out" of the participant information of a kind. Rather, it is an interviewing technique intended to "re-open" the door to an aspect of the account that was not fully and expressly described by the participant. I acquired a verbal "re-living of the experience" expressed by the participant to the greatest possible degree (Giorgi, 2009). Getting an account of the experiences based upon the memory and report of the participants carries with it a certain degree of ambiguity about its accuracy. Data acquired through self-report methods (questionnaires and interviews) are always subject to memory decay, alterations, or participant response errors (Giorgi, 2009).

Interview

The interviewing approach is not intended to "spur" or "jog" the participants into remembering some "buried details" but rather help them to simply relate as much as possible to what it was like for them during their experiences. I trust that the data provided by these interviews would be sufficient to acquire the most relevant and personally important aspects of the experience because they have been stored in memory. It was through the phenomenological psychological analysis that both the explicated and implied meanings of the experiences would be accessible to be elucidated (Giorgi, 1985). The naïve descriptions provided by the participants were recorded for later transcription. Two digital voice recorders were used to capture the interview contents, and I transcribed the interviews into text within 24-hours for further analysis. It was the transcribed text that was used as the raw data for analysis. As part of the data collection process, all

identifying information that would have revealed the participants' and other people's identities, places, or things that could make such identities easily known was replaced with pseudonyms or other fictitious representations to maintain the privacy of the individual parties. Only the participants and I know their identities and other private details.

Upon completion of these three stages, I analyzed all recordings twice; interviews with open-ended questions were transcribed, coded, and observational notes were read twice, studied, and coded as well. I used "NVivo" coding, which according to Saldana (2009), is also called "Literal Coding" or "Verbatim Coding." Its' root meaning is "in that which is alive" for qualitative meaning, "terms used by the participants themselves" (Saldana, 2009). NVivo coding uses indigenous terms that participants use within a particular culture that is being studied; it honors the participant's voice and keeps it from being marginalized, as often happens when it involves a child or adolescent. When coding with their actual words, it hopefully enhances and deepens an adult's understanding of their culture and worldviews because the participants used their everyday way of speaking rather than in terms derived from the academic discipline practices (Saldana, 2009).

Data Analysis

The Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology uses a five-step method of data analysis based on some principles of phenomenological philosophy by Amedeo Giorgi (1985). In each step, I explained the procedure and the corresponding concept that supports its purpose and character. The data analysis is done once the interviews have been transcribed and the text has become the "empirical evidence" to be

analyzed for its psychological meaning. The first step of the phenomenological psychological method is for the researcher to assume the phenomenological attitude. The phenomenological attitude is different than the natural attitude or everyday way of understanding the world. In the phenomenological attitude, the researcher "brackets" their everyday knowledge to take a fresh look at the data. I put aside any presuppositions, theoretical, cultural, experiential, or otherwise. The concept of "bracketing" comes from Husserl's (Giorgi, 2009) epoché, in which the researcher allows themselves to be present in the data without positing its validity or existence (Giorgi, 2009). Merely being present means that the researcher allows themselves to "see" the data as it appears in itself and in its own context without doubt or belief. In this way, the researcher can remain true to the phenomenological slogan "back to the things themselves" by Husserl (as cited in (Giorgi, 2009). Because it is given to consciousness, the researcher takes the object as it presents itself rather than judging its truth from an objective perspective (Giorgi, 2009). Each object is included in the analysis because it was part of the participant's consciousness. That is why the bracketing and withholding of existential positing allow the researcher to see and then describe what was present in consciousness from the participant's first-person perspective. I assumed the phenomenological attitude and then proceeded to the next step. Step two in the data analysis requires that the researcher read the entire "naïve description" to get a sense of the whole experience (Giorgi, 2009, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The "naïve description" provided by the participant was taken in the natural attitude in the way that they would experience things in the way of everyday living from a sound perspective. This was done without a critical reflection on the experience. It was in the phenomenological attitude that I presented the data as it was given. Step three in

the data analysis is the differentiation of "meaning units" within the narrative so that the data can be dealt with in manageable portions (Giorgi, 2009, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). I went through the narrative text in a subsequent reading(s) with the purpose of determining where places of meaning shift within it. As I read the text through and after getting a sense of the whole, another reading was done with the idea of marking where meaning-shifts occur, which are like the "landmarks" or changes in the flow in some way (Giorgi, 1985). Step four, while still within the scientific Phenomenological Reduction, then intuits and transforms the participant's lifeworld expressions into expressions that highlight the psychological meanings lived by the participants. This required using free imaginative variation and rendering implicit factors explicit. In the final step, step five, based on the transformed meaning units and still being in the scientific phenomenological reduction, I used the transformed meaning unit expressions as the basis for describing the psychological structure of the experience (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley, 2016).

Ethical Consideration and Summary

It is the overall goal of this study to find a deeper and richer understanding of what it is like for Black adolescents regarding their experiences with reading and literature. One of the benefits to the participating Black adolescents is a richer understanding of the personal meaning. Giorgi (2009) points out that oftentimes when someone says something, there is a chance that there is always more meaning in what was said than even the speaker is aware of, in the natural attitude. The natural attitude may cause a lot of the aspects of experience to be taken for granted. It is my hope that this study brought out some clarity and maybe new insight concerning the psychology of

Black adolescents. I believe that it is important to maintain the participants' voices in the research as much as possible. One of the ethical advantages of the descriptive phenomenological approach is that no deception is required to get the data in its real-world context. Giorgi (2009) points out that falsified memories (by various distortions) can/might be more interesting for psychology because they might reveal more about the psychological life of the individual due to their subjective origins. There was no deception, changing of contexts, or meaning twisting placed on the adolescents' experiences or the recounting of them (Broome, 2011). An overarching end result is to find out the main factors that affect Black adolescents' attitudes toward reading and literature and to bring those facts forward so that maybe educators and students can take these factors into account when discussing and administering instructional techniques that will benefit all.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Black adolescents' attitudes towards literacy as it relates to the research questions. The questions studied were (a) what are the attitudes of Black adolescents towards literacy in the classroom? (b) how does being Black in the classroom affect adolescents' attitudes toward literacy in the classroom? (c) What are the beliefs of teachers about factors and instructional techniques that contribute to Black students' lack of motivation to read?

This study was conducted to help literacy specialists and researchers recognize the role lived experiences play in regard to Black adolescents reading in class. Since a students' ability to understand is regularly based on the cultural information they are exposed to, using phenomenology gives life and exposes the voices of Black adolescents through their lived experiences because their voices often go unheard. By using individual interviews of high school-age Black adolescents, data was collected, coded, and analyzed.

The instruments that were used to collect information for this qualitative study used the Zoom communication platform for its video and audio conferences, allowing the use of a semi-structured interview protocol. At the conclusion of each interview, I reviewed them by listening and watching the video recording a few times and transcribed the students' responses verbatim to gauge relevant statements. The phenomenology process required me to Brackett all personal responses, analyze all the significant data for statements regarding the students' attitudes towards literacy, group the statements into

themes, turn the themes into descriptions of the experience, and create structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of those experiences.

I reviewed all the students' statements, which provided insight into the rationale for their attitudes towards reading and what key factors had an influence on those attitudes. In this chapter, there is (a) an overview of the qualitative procedure, (b) bracketing by the researcher, (c) student's demographic information, (d) a description of the students, (e) data collection structure, (f) themes that emerged for this study, and (g) conclusion.

Bracketing

I used a field journal to log in my own responses to the interview questions based on my own literacy experiences. This allowed me to make a note of any anticipated responses based on my own statement. I am a product of the public school system. While taking notes from my own interview responses, one theme or factor that had an effect on my literacy development was my parents' involvement or lack of involvement. My mother was illiterate and was unable to read to me or assist me with my homework. Reading was not a priority in our home; she did not show interest either way if I completed my homework. There was certainly a disconnection between my home literacy experience, which was basically none, and my in-school experience.

Although I went to a mixed school, during those times, all of my teachers were white, using a curriculum of Eurocentric literacy. The texts the teachers selected were not culturally relevant. I don't recall ever reading about positive Black people since Black history month was not a thing at the time. The only reference to Blacks in literature was to slavery. It was not until I became an undergraduate in college that my literacy pool

opened up. I remembered the era of the "I'm Black, and I'm proud" movement. Black radicals like the Black Panthers were a thing heard of but never seen. I never heard how great it was to be Black or of the wonderful accomplishments and potential I could have. I had to bracket all of my experiences and thoughts to be able to present only the lived experiences of each student. I kept journal notes on each students' interview, recording my thoughts and observations. This data triangulation process of setting aside personal experience and opinions was an essential part of my data collection and increased its trustworthiness.

Demographics

Since my experience was bracketed, it allowed me, the researcher, to present the students' experience through the lens of how they see the world giving way to a descriptive phenomenology that emphasizes the pure description of people's experiences (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley, 2016). To ensure students identified with the phenomenon and to reduce limitations, only Black adolescents were chosen for this study.

A total of seven students and two teachers were selected from a church in Kings County, New York. Each of the students' parents was given a letter of participation explaining the purpose of the study, its length, and its requirements. There were two sophomores, two juniors, as well as three seniors in this study. *Table 2* displays the background information for each student. In *Table 3*, the education levels of each of the students' parents can be found. In order to protect the rights, privacy, and confidentiality of all students involved in this study, pseudonyms were used.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Students

Name	***Gender***	***Age***	***High School Level***
Jay	Male	18	Senior
Pinky	Female	15	Sophomore
Lucy	Female	18	Senior
Christy	Female	15	Sophomore
Izanie	Female	19	Senior
Mickey	Male	16	Junior
Jazz	Female	16	Junior

Every parent plays a role in their children's literacy development. A lot has to do with the level of education that the parents received.

Table 3

Parent/Guardian Educational Background

Student	**Parent 1**	**Parent 2/Guardian**
Jay	College	College
Pinky	High School	High School
Lucy	Mom/College	Dad/High School
Christy	High School	High School
Izanie	Mom/College	Dad/High School
Mickey	Mom/College	Dad/High School
Jazz	High School	High School

Table 4

High School Teachers Interviewed

Teacher	Grade	# of years teaching
Ms. Kelly	High School	17 years
Mrs. Saundra	High School	13 years

Students Description

Student #1: Jay

Jay is an 18-year-old African American male. Jay is a senior in high school. He is the only son with both parents having gone to college. Although he said that his parents read to him as a child when considering his reading development, he does not remember how frequently. Jay does not remember the last time he has been in a library but states that he has a reading app on his phone.

Student #2: Pinky

Pinky is a 15-year-old high school sophomore. She is also an African American female. Both of her parents went to high school. She recalls that her parents tried to help her with her homework. She only goes to the library when her class goes. She does not like to read but will if she has to read.

Student # 3: Lucy

Lucy is an 18-year-old senior. Lucy is the oldest of four children. Her mother went to college, and her father went to high school. When recalling her reading development, she said she read to herself; her parents would help only sometimes. Lucy cannot recall the last time she went to a library, and she does not have a favorite book to read. She said she knows how to read but chose not to if she had the choice.

Student # 4: Christy

Christy is a 15-year-old African American female. Christy is a sophomore in high school. Her mother and father completed high school. She recalls that her parents never read to her when discussing her early reading development. Christy does not like to read and does not go to the library.

Student #5: Izanie

Izanie is a 19-year-old senior in high school. She is a female African American student. Izanies' mother graduated college, while her father graduated high school. She said her mother read to her all the time and told her she could adventure anywhere just by picking up a book. Izanie considers herself an avid reader. She has a home library as well as frequents the local library regularly. She also likes to write her own stories at home. Izanie does not mind reading in school but prefers to stay in the shadows.

Student #6: Mickey

Mickey is a 16-year-old Junior in high school. Mickey is an African American male. Mother went to college, and father went to high school. Mickey cannot remember his parents ever reading to him. Mickey said he likes school and likes to read, but only in school, so he does not go to the library or engage in reading outside of school.

Student #7: Jazz

Jazz is a junior in high school age 16 years old. Jazz is a female African American, and she is the oldest child of two children. Jazz's household was run by her single mother. Her mother and father graduated high school. Her mother encouraged schoolwork but was unable to assist with homework due to her trying to provide for the family.

Data Collection

Each of the students was interviewed using the Zoom platform for a duration of 30-40 minutes. All of the interviews were done using the same process. Each interview had a video and audio recording that was reviewed a few times as well as transcribed. Once the transcription was completed, I reviewed it against the recording to make sure the content was accurate. After careful review and edits, transcripts were placed in a password-protected folder kept online.

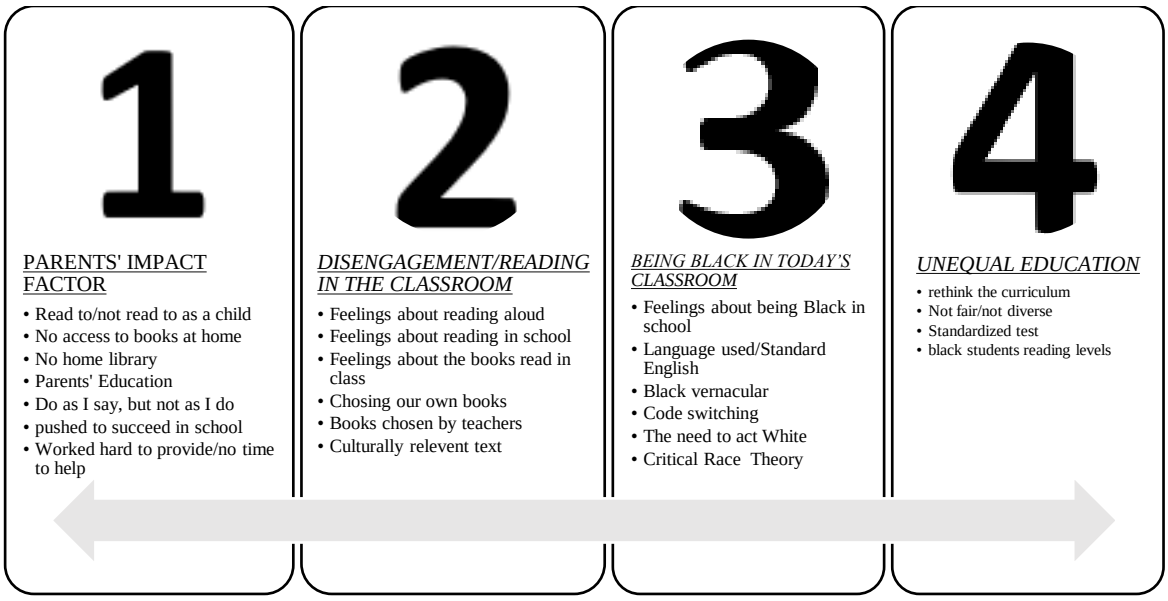
After receiving confirmation from each student regarding recording the interview, I began the coding process and acknowledged and verified its contents. The coding foundation used the research questions for all interviews. After several rereads of each

individual interview, several significant statements came to light. These statements became codes.

Each student was asked the same question, and each question had a different reaction to each student showing their passion for the subject. Each transcript was given a color, and each statement was categorized. Statements that were significant, several codes emerged. Figure 3 shows the codes that are listed under four emergent themes: p*arents' impact factor, disengagement/reading in the classroom, being Black in today's classroom, and unequal education*.

Figure 3

Categorized Codes and Emergent Themes



Emergent Themes

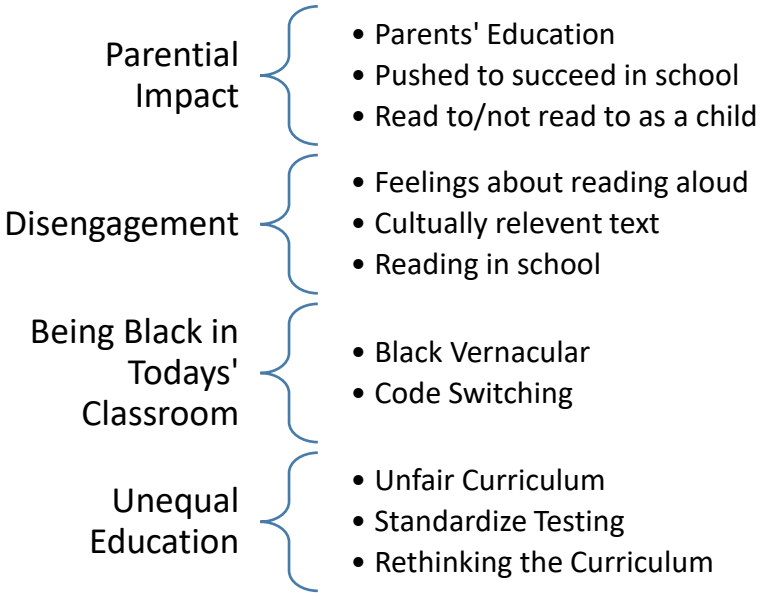
The themes that emerged were determined by the most creative statements made by the students in relation to this study's research questions. The questions we seek to answer are:

- What are the attitudes of Black adolescents towards literacy in the classroom?
- How does being Black in the classroom affect adolescents' attitudes toward literacy?
- What are the beliefs of teachers about factors and instructional techniques that contribute to Black students' motivation to read?

The first theme, which is the *parents' impact factor* connected to research question number one because it is believed that parents have the first impact on children's reading development. *Disengagement/reading in the classroom* goes towards motivation in the classroom. *Being Black in today's classroom* is linked to question three, how do Black adolescents feel about being Black in today's classroom. Finally, *unequal education*, hear what Black students and teachers have to say about it not being fair nor diverse.

Table 5

Themes and Subthemes



The *parents' impact* factor theme shows how parents' involvement has on the development of children's perception of literacy. This involvement leads to the assertation that families provide children's first educational experiences and how they strongly influence children's development and achievement (Ford, Wright, Grantham, & Harris, 1998). This involvement includes having books in the home and the show of parents reading within the home. This theme goes into practices such as reading bedtime stories, helping with reading and homework, as well as adolescents' behaviors toward literacy. The factors in the theme are based on the students' observation of the literacy principles instilled and the behaviors modeled by the parents. This theme also shows the push by African American parents and the pressure imposed on their children to succeed, believing that education is the key to success in the future and a way for the poor to become middle class (Mickelson, 1990).

The disengagement theme relates to the lack of identity found in the texts presented to the students in their classrooms. In this theme, students share the lack of culturally relevant texts. This theme shared the desire for culturally relevant works the students would like to experience in their classes. There is also a reading disconnect and frustration with reading in school and with reading aloud in class. Also, there is frustration with the normalizing of the white experience over the reality of Blacks. This brings us back to Wood and Jocius (2013) when they reference the "3 C's", culturally relevant text, collaboration, and critical conversation; they believed all three are needed to get students interested in reading. A culturally relevant text is a text that includes characters that share common experiences, similar appearances; languages usage; or

family structure as the reader (Hill, 2013). Blake (1998) mentioned the creation of the reading transaction and how it is formed by both the readers' stance and the authors' stance; it is stronger when the text is appealing to readers (Blake, 1998). This is supported by Kirkland (2011) when he spoke about youths not failing to engage in texts but that the texts taught in schools are failing to engage youths. Blake (1998) said about African American students' common perspective, "*There was no sense bothering to respond—to "talk"—to this literature because it did not and could not "talk" to the*m" (p. 238).

Being Black in today's Classroom theme expressed the confusion and frustration the students felt regarding speaking, Black vernacular, code-switching, and critical race theory. Students spoke their concerns about where they felt the way they spoke was considered inappropriate and how they had to result in code-switching to appease their audience. This theme presented a suppression of vernacular the students use at home. Baker-Bell (2020) stated that a Black child's language that is devalued in school is a reflection of how Black lives are devalued in the world. Ladson-Billings (2009), little value is placed on non-standard English. Black adolescents feel that the language used, their dress, and behavior are often demonized in schools; this belief is supported by Meier (2015). Fordham (1999) advised teachers to stop being ignorant about African American Vernacular (Black vernacular). If teachers try to understand AAVE (African American Vernacular English), then they may see that AAVE is not a sign of poor language abilities as some now assume.

Code-Switching falls under this theme because it was a part of Black adolescents' experience in the classroom. It reaffirms how they are taught to suppress who they are, which can sometimes develop into internalizing the opposing views of the dominant society's self-hatred (Phinney, 1998). This can be changed by instilling their importance, so they won't lose who they are, according to Finn 2009). With the growing number of diverse classrooms, it is important that teachers understand that each student has what Glee (1990) called an "Identity Kit," which is built on language, behavior, and social expectations. It would make a tremendous difference if teachers could show students the value and respect of different registers (codes), meaning those used at home, communities, and school, and the importance of code-switching due to the dominant society way. This may show that code-switching is to devalue who they are, but the way to adjust in today's society according to their audience.

The next portion of this theme is Critical Race Theory and the importance of having a conversation about social and institutional racism. These conversations are important because Black adolescents experience inadequacy in their everyday life and, at the same time, witness the privilege of being white (Schieble, 2012). Critical race theory is systemically woven into our education system. It expresses racial inequalities in education. Is it damaging to explain Black history in the class, which may expose white privilege? Some say yes (Sawchuk, 2021).

The fourth theme, *unequal education,* has three points of interest; unequal education, rethinking the curriculum, and the standardized test. When it comes to discussing the point of unequal education, it is known that schools of very diverse students do not receive the same funding; and students of color do not receive the same

education even while in the same classroom as whites (Finn, 2009). It was troubling to learn about two different types of literacies; Powerful literacy is taught to white students backed up by positive literature and text resonating with the white experience. Then there is Functional literacy, believed to be taught to the Black and Brown students; Functional meaning giving them just enough to function in the dominant society and not have them become a burden. It is solidified by not having culturally relevant text and by showing them in the text that they do read their history of slavery and text that does not represent them nor their possible greatness. They are forced to witness the demonizing of their culture and see the privilege that white society experiences (Finn, 2009).

Rethinking the curriculum would be a step in the right direction as it is not working the way it is now. Linguistic Justice calls for a world free of anti-blackness and creates an education system where students' language literacies and culture matter (Baker-Bell, 2020). We need to expose the disparities in the aims and means of educating students according to social class, teaching the poor compliance, and the privileged leadership (Finn, 2009). There is a need for teachers to adjust their pedagogy to include cultural relevance. Providing culturally relevant text and connecting it to the curriculum allows students to feel part of the class lesson (Hill, 2013). It is not only the way teachers teach but the contents of the curriculum and culturally relevant teaching that can improve the learning of Black students. Relating to the character in the text makes it easier to comprehend and gives students a sense of belonging and feeling like a part of the class.

Are the Common Core State Standards unknowingly failing Black adolescents? The core is to deal with more complex text and to read more instructional text. To do this, students need to be motivated and to get them motivated, students should find text

meaningful and significant. Black adolescents should resonate with some of the literature they are faced with in school (Guthrie, 2013) (Tatum A. W., 2008).

The *parental impact* theme, *disengagement* theme, *being Black in the classroom* theme, and *unequal education* are the structures with which the results of this study are presented and discussed. Data from interviews were used to support the themes and exemplify the students' experiences.

Parental Impact Theme

Children's first experience with language, reading, and literature is usually first developed with the help of their parents or guardians. This experience can be good or bad depending on the parents' educational background, as well as socioeconomic level, which helped to shape the students' experience and was told the importance of reading, writing, and speaking; there was an expectation, a push to succeed in these areas.

When speaking about their parent's education, all but three knew of their parents' highest completed level of education. While this is an important factor that influences Black adolescents' attitude toward literacy, little was shared with the students about the parents' educational background.

Jay: Both my parents graduated college, but I don't know where,

Although it was important to the parents that Jay is successful in school, their own school experience was not something they shared and discussed often.

Lucy: My mom went to high school and college; my dad went to only high school.

Pinky: Both of my parents went to high school

Christy's parents only went to high school as well, while Izanie and Jazz's mothers went to college, and their dads went to high school. The majority of those interviewed had African American males that attended high school only, yet they tried to instill the value of a good education in their children.

Time spent reading at home for most did not involve being read to as a child. When asked, "Did your parents read to you as a child?" most said yes but could not elaborate or give details.

> ***Briana***: Yes, mam, my parents read to me during homework time only.
>
> ***Christy***: Well yeah, like if I couldn't get some words, they would help; but they did not read to me.
>
> ***Jay***: Yes, my parents read to me when I was a child. Um, I'm trying to, but I really cannot remember how frequent.

Some of the students in this study began their reading journey solo with very little parent help.

> ***Lucy***: Yes. But I used to read to myself, like for a reading log; they would help me out with that sometimes.

The exception was Izanie, whose parents' socio-economic status was considered middle class.

> ***Izanie***: Yes, it was very important for my mom to keep us in education. Reading was one of the main things that she encouraged.

Since there was not a clear recollection of if parents read to them as a child or how much time was spent reading to children, they were asked if reading was encouraged in the home.

Pinky: Yes, mam, reading was encouraged; it's kind of in-between, every now and then.

Jay: I can't say I was encouraged to read, but I was reading.

Although most of the parents did not read or read very little, the students said reading was encouraged. The students shared how, if they had a reading time, space, or personal library of books, they were encouraged to read.

Izanie: Yes, I had a very large personal library. As a child and as a teenager growing up, my mother would bring home books for me to read, and a lot of the books that I've grown to, even as an adult, were based on that.

Jay: I had like Dr. Seuss books and stuff like that.

Lucy: I had a collection of books a long, long time ago, but nothing recent.

Mickey: The only books I had were the ones I got from school.

Other students expressed that they had small reading books with alphabets and picture books they liked to look at and read.

Disengagement

When talking about disengagement, we are talking about a process by which people gradually stop being involved in an activity or organization (schooling). Psychological disengagement is a temporary withdrawal strategy that individuals make use of when they feel treated negatively on the basis of certain criteria like race (Laplante, Tougas, Beaton, & Bellehumeur, 2011),

Reading in School. While trying to understand the factors that affect student attitudes towards reading, students were asked how they felt about reading.

Mickey: I do read a lot on my own and like school and stuff, but never really outside of school.

Pinky: Kind of like, to me when it comes to reading is like in between like I'm ready to read, and I'm like not ready to read. Only when I want to.

Christy: I get distracted sometimes, like if the book is not interesting to me and I have to read it, so I would get more distracted and book I would want to read for myself, not very often.

Lucy: Um, I would read sometimes, not too often, to be honest. Like I read for school, and then if I find a good book, then I'll continue reading. I'd probably read every few months. Maybe. There is not much motivation or inspiration to read.

Once again, it was Izanie, who came from a different background and strong parental involvement that had a different approach to reading.

Izanie: As a reader, I feel that I'm very diverse in the things that I read; I take great pride in a lot of the books that I read. I'm very passionate and diverse about literature as a whole.

When it came to finding out about their engagement in school, students were asked about their feeling about reading in school

Pinky: I feel forced. Like if I know if we are doing like in order, then I'm fine with it because I know like I'm going next. It's like I feel embarrassed like, because like, it's shocking to me because I don't be ready to read sometimes.

Jay: Um, in class? I don't know; it's like, it's like a difference, I don't, I really can't put a word on it because, like when I'm in class, I be trying to read faster. I read faster than my words come out. It's not pressure; actually, it's just that it's not like a speech problem, it's that I read while I talk, so I'd be reading faster than when my words come out, which makes me mess up; and I feel like I have to start over again because I mess up and I have to slow down.

Christy: If the book is interesting, then I'd be more into the book, and I'd be able to like read it, but as I said before like if it's not really in my interest, I get distracted more. But like when we read in a class, I think it's better because that's how I stay focused better.

Mickey: I don't mind reading in class, I think reading is a part of school, so it's to be expected. That was one thing I was good at. Um, I know some teachers they like to call on people just because I know they can't read, and other kids like to make fun of them, and they be shy because they know they can't read; or they read slower.

The students seemed to share similar feelings about reading in class, even Izanie.

Izanie: I wasn't really happy to read in class due to the fact that you know it's different when you can walk in and pick up a book and say ok, this is what I want to read versus being told that you're going to read a certain type of book, especially when you don't really hold much interest to it.

This brings us to the next section on the types of books students are given to read.

The Books We Read. As part of the *disengagement theme*, we discussed how students felt reading aloud in class and how they felt about reading in general in school. It was also important to discuss how students felt about the types of books they are given to read in school; are they books of interest? Are they culturally and personally relevant, and do they resonate with the students?

> ***Pinky***: I don't feel anything about the books we are given to read in school. But mostly, I ask, what's this book about?
>
> ***Christy***: Um, usually in school, I just read the books that are given to us during the year; they don't mean anything to me.
>
> ***Jay***: It's like a mixture of like, like, I don't mind reading, but at the same time it be like, "Oh, my God, can I read these without messing up?

When asked if they were given culturally relevant books and if those books resonated with them, they responded:

> ***Pinky***: Culturally, no, and I don't connect, but yes, we read about Black people in school; well, sometimes.
>
> ***Christy***: Um, only some books I've read, not a lot. Oh yeah, during Black History Month, they give more books related to Black culture. So yeah.
>
> ***Jay***: I'm gonna say it's a little bit of both. I cannot remember any; I don't know. I think "To Kill a Mockingbird." If I remember, I think that was Black literature. Ok, well, maybe we need more Black culture in schools instead of once a month during Black history, then we need to validate ourselves instead of thinking that we are less than the other students in school.

It is interesting how Jay talked about the need to feel validated in school and how some students have a feeling that they are valued less than other students. This will be covered in the next theme.

> ***Izanie***: No, I do not feel that they connected to me personally or for my culture because I felt they never really wanted to or decided to touch on the different types of things that would connect to my culture.

Here Izanie references how the curriculum was never meant to connect with her on a cultural or personal level.

> ***Izanie***: I do believe that there should be, and there was a lack of diversity with certain types of literature that was presented in the classroom, more so I feel like there was not enough Black literature in the classroom because they would highlight or glorify a certain type of culture and yet when questioned on why we don't read enough Black literature or not studying more into Black culture it was always excuses, and it was very offensive to me about why we couldn't read about our culture, but we're reading about everyone else's.
>
> ***Lucy***: No. I didn't really connect with them, not really culturally or anything. Some of them may be depends if it's like Black History, you know, of course, or I remember one time in my AP literature class we read about an African kid. So, we did that, and then, like, actually the last semester I took African American literature, that was my English class, so that was all African American Studies.

Lucy also mentioned To Kill a Mockingbird.

> ***Lucy***: for me, I think we should have a more diverse set of books because I know in basically high school, there is always like the classic books that we read, like

standard readers like Romeo and Juliet, or To Kill a Mockingbird that's like eighth grade, ninth grade or the Outsiders. I think that we should try more diverse books, or we could keep those books but try to enforce other books that is inclusive for everybody.

Lucys' answer led to the next section in this theme: would Black students read more if they were able to choose the books they read or if they had a say as to the types of books they could read in class.

Jay: yes, because like a lot of books don't spark my interest like that. There are only certain ones, and so I'll be having to be like force myself to read books that don't catch my attention.

Mickey: yes, because I would have picked books that I like, not books they tell me to read because I will get distracted reading something I am not interested in.

Izanie: Definitely. I feel like because of instead of being talked at or told that this is what you have to read, when there's more freedom to choose a book that interests you or a piece of literature that interests you, it gives you more room to be like you know what, I'm going to get up and actually read this because it's something that I'm interested in and not that I have to be interested in it.

Both Lucy and Pinky agreed; however, Pinky also shared that she would like to read comics, which brought to light possible future studies in graphic comics in literary education.

***Motivation*.** What motivates these students to read? For the purpose of this study, motivation included behaviors surrounding reading. Guthrie (2013) went into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is internal gratification, and extrinsic are external rewards for accomplishments. Looking at the students' responses, it appears they all lean towards wanting intrinsic motivation.

> ***Pinky***: By telling me that like, it's a book you like and like it's a fun book, that would motivate me to read it.
>
> ***Jay***: See, um, my whole thing of reading is, I want to know how a character look. So, I can put a face on the character, so I can understand what's going on. Facial expressions out like the whole platter.
>
> ***Izanie***: Um, my motivation is books that interest me. So, my mom would always say that, you know, by picking up a book, you can basically travel the world or any version of the world, especially like in fantasy books and stuff like that.
>
> ***Lucy***: If a book is interesting, then I'll take it upon myself to read, but I'll just have to be motivated to read by myself.

Tatum (2008) said it is time to look at the text that might be meaningful and significant that will be remembered. It is believed that these students see what is missing from their instructions and are eager to have that experience. Each student shared their disconnect and struggle with text and not being able to see themselves in the characters and overall plot. They were constant with the need for culturally relevant text.

Black in Today's Classroom

Being Black in the classroom poses a challenge for both Black students as well as teachers who are trying to teach a race where they cannot understand their struggles

(Cokley, 2016). Students in this study were asked about their experiences as Black adolescents in today's classroom.

> ***Jay***: Being Black is not bad; they make it out to be bad and want us to think that Black is bad. They don't give us a lot of options; we don't see a lot of good Black options. They make it seem like Blacks are not intelligent. Like we don't got the education, anything. It just makes Black people feel bad and stuff because, like, it just deteriorates their Black friends to feel like they don't do good; it's like it's always something bad behind it.
>
> ***Lucy***: I think that some teachers, I guess it depends on your school, but some teachers may look down on you. I mean, they haven't really shown it towards me, but in general, they may look down on you and may look down on your education and your upbringing. So, like, you're like, even white or Asian friends may seem to have. They may view them as a higher standard, I guess, than the Blacks, or even other minorities, like that Black and Brown kids, but Black kids for sure.
>
> ***Mickey***: I would say it makes me mad, but I just wish things would change, and people just accept us for how we is and not looked at as looking different: because I honestly, it is sad that like you have to change yourself for someone else when you feel like you should be treated equally as everyone else because you just like everyone else just because your voice or color is different you should be treated any differently.

Mickey mentioned voice and color and how students should not be judged because of how they look or speak.

Black Vernacular and Code-switching. In this section of this theme, students were asked about the language they use in school and if they feel their teachers treated them differently by trying to get them to change the way they speak.

> ***Pinky***: Yes, Ma'am. They correct the way I speak. I feel like I'm doing something really wrong; it's kind of like embarrassing a little. Like speaking with, like people that I really know and with people I don't know, really, it's like uncomfortable. It makes me nervous.

Pinky is made to feel like the language of African American vernacular (Black vernacular) is unacceptable and is made to feel bad and embarrassed about the style of language used by her culture. So many others feel the same way.

> ***Christy***: Um, yeah, sometimes, like sometimes you know the slang and d accents and stuff kind of come out sometimes.
>
> ***Jay***: No, they see, it's not that they say is not appropriate, they say it's not professional of you.

Unprofessional, according to the rules of the dominant society, and no appreciation or value in cultural differences.

> ***Jay***: It don't make me feel a type of way, but it does like put a halt on the way you talk around certain people. Because you just never know how to really talk to people because you don't know if they okay with how you talk or if they're not ok with it, so you really can't put, be specific about it.

Jay continues.

> ***Jay***: it's not that I don't; I feel uncomfortable; it's just that I've been taught that it's best to speak professional because you never know what may happen because,

like, when getting a job or anything. It might be like, oh; he talked this type of way we're not gonna get him this job, you know? Code-switching, it's kind of like the norm for me, but it also kind of bothering is sometimes at some points. Normal speaking is like for me is speaking like how you regularly speak on a day-to-day basis. No matter the situation, like no matter who you around. Like you messed up a word, or something is like okay because you will normally speak like this.

Izanie: I personally have never been told that the way I speak or the language that I use was inappropriate, but I did on more than one occasion see that kind of thing being pushed on to other students because of the way they would speak.

Lucy: Not really, my teachers, it just depends on who I'm talking to. Yeah, like I know how to just know my audience, if anything, for example, like I wouldn't use "yo" towards a teacher or a grown-up, but my friends definite.

Mickey: Well, I know they were just expressed it, but I know sometimes we might say something like in the writing something in class might say something that we say, in our mouth does not be grammatically correct. I guess they would consider that street talk, but that's the way we talk. And like teachers will say something about that.

Do teachers not understand Black vernacular or the culture of Black and Brown adolescents?

Mickey: I don't know. I feel like people look at Black people as we just ghetto and just dumb, and we're below everyone else because other people talk different from us. I guess it just like sometimes when we go around people, we have to

make ourselves sound proper and everything. We have to try to make ourselves seem more properly and everything because if we don't, people might look at us differently. It's not about looking at us differently, but I guess I don't know; it just makes it seems like it's better to talk how other people talk instead of how we naturally talk.

The students were asked if they felt their teachers treated them differently from other students in the class.

Pinky: No, I don't feel that way because majority of students are Black.

Jay, Mickey, and Jazz all said that they are in a predominately Black school, and they do not see a difference in how they are being treated. However, Mickey said she did notice or felt prejudice from some teachers but did not pay it much attention because the majority of the students were Black.

Izanie: Yes. On some occasions, my teachers would definitely tell me that sometimes you know, the way I speak wasn't the appropriate way to speak, you know, to fit the classroom dynamic.

Lucy: Yeah, like maybe a Black student is being a distraction to themselves. It's not the place you blame, right, like blaming Johnny, who is white and would say, "Maybe Johnny just will take an extra push for like he really doesn't understand something that I'm saying." But with Raheem, it would be like, "Oh, he not really paying attention then, or he is doing something that he shouldn't be doing during the class; that's why he doesn't understand."

What the students are referring to is called code-switching, which is alternating between two or more languages; the language used at home and in their communities, in

comparison to the language they are told to use in school to fit in with the English language, the dominant society uses.

Unequal Education

In our fourth theme, *unequal education,* we share answers from teachers about unequal education, rethinking the curriculum as well as standardized testing. Two teachers were interviewed to get their perspectives on research question four. Ms. Kelly has been teaching adolescents for over 13 years. Ms. Sandra has been teaching adolescents for over 17 years. Both teachers work in a diverse school; they share their experience and concerns with the education and treatment of Black adolescents. The teachers were asked their opinion of Black students' reading habits.

> ***Ms. Kelly***: For whatever reason, Black students are not good readers; they lack the skills that are necessary; they are just not interested. I felt that because of the resources in the elementary school because it's not working for middle school, they come very unprepared.

She continued.

> ***Ms. Kelly***: I think, but that also goes to the teacher doing their research with finding out each child's life because if you don't have a book that they're interested in, then how do they resonate with the reading.
>
> ***Mrs. Saundra***: Most of my kids don't like to read. Because they have difficulty with it, they don't understand like this is difficult for me, but reading magazines on their level is still reading, or knowing their reading level and actually taking that into consideration because we'll tell them their reading level, but they don't go to the library. They're not going to the library and telling them they are on

Reading Level B. Can they find their books on Reading Level B in their interest area; they are not as motivated to do that.

Mrs. Saundra continued.

Mrs. ***Saundra:*** It depends on the child; I have some motivated kids who love Science and want to find stuff that they are interested in, but then I have students that just do not care about school, you know? So, it varies.

A person might read her statement and decide so much is wrong with her comment, yet so much could be correct in it as well.

Ms. Kelly: Independent reading is absolutely important; that is why it is good to have a diverse classroom library.

Unequal education or educational inequality, for the purpose of this study, was the unequal distribution of resources that can affect academics, school funding, textbooks, and technology. The communities lacking these resources are generally populated with groups that have been historically oppressed Black and Brown people. Community wealth disparities are largely due to property taxes to fund schools, which is a significant difference between wealthy and poor areas (United4SC, 2019).

The disparity within State Standardized Testing is obvious and not geared to consider people with a minority background. Let's see what the students have to say about it since it is a factor that affects their progress and their attitudes.

Christy: At times, the teachers would teach things in the classroom that might not be on the test, or they won't teach students things that are on the test. So yeah, sometimes it's like confusing.

Jay: My answer to State testing is it's more on the standpoint of is not interesting to people because like we took our State tests last year, and I was actually lucky, my classmates like did not do well. They were like, to be honest, it wasn't interesting like I could focus on the past, and I couldn't catch on to it.

Lucy: Test scores are very difficult, and I don't think it's even. Well, it could be the language because sometimes the question may ask something, and we as a student don't think that the question is actually asking; we think of something else. So that's why we may get it wrong, and a lot of people feel pressured by test; there is also a lot of factors with testing. Like for SATs, white and Asian kids are leading and excelling, and like minorities, we aren't. Yeah. I personally do not know why. Maybe I really don't know, but standardized tests are difficult; it's part the questions and part like the curriculum, and I guess lack of understanding.

Mickey: Um, I won't say they are not interested, but sometimes we may not be taught to the level of the tests that we are given because it seems like we are taught the same thing every year, and when we get the test, it'd be still way more advanced than we actually learn. So, I don't think it's like they're just trying to make Black people look bad; it's just that they don't consider us.

Teachers have their own opinions and views about standardized testing as well; here are some comments.

Ms. Kelly: It's just so unequal. Yeah, the level of education is unequal, but they want all students to be on the same level, yet how does that happen?

Mrs. Saundra: I'm totally against it, and the reason why I'm against it is because when you're a teacher, and you're teaching, when they come to observe you, they

look at the differentiation. You ask them to do everything for 180 days; you have to implement differentiation into your lesson, but they have to take a standardized test that was nothing differentiated. If I'm teaching one way and scaffolding, the standardized test is different than what's being taught; that's a setup for failure.

Rethinking the Curriculum. Reading books that are of interest to Black adolescents; having books that tell of the true events of Black history and that resonate with Black students are essential. Students shared the importance of having characters in books whom they can connect with. Here is what some teachers have to say.

Ms. Kelly: I feel education has to be revamped, and it has to stop being depicted as Black people just came over here as slaves, that Black people were just slaves or you know I just feel that if you're going to try to quote-unquote "Teach," then teach the truth. The racist institution can pick and choose what they want.

Mrs. Saundra: I didn't teach the real Black History.

Ms. Kelly: I don't think the government and politics should be involved in education, but systemic racism is definitely in education.

What do teachers feel might can help students?

Ms. Kelly: They need to figure out a way to incorporate the students' interest in the book that they choose. You have to grab their attention. As you know, the teachers' library is extremely important.

Ms. Saundra: Choose books, texts, and magazines that are relatable. How do you stay relatable? By providing reading materials, magazines, a book, a chapter book, but it has to be of interest to them. If they like cars, make sure you encourage them to read more books about cars; if they like animals, make it of

interest to them. You don't give them Shakespeare; they will only pretend to read it.

Ms. Kelly: I felt that because of the resources in elementary school, it's not working for middle school; they come very unprepared. They are below level, almost everyone, it shows in their work. We have a teaching track, but a lot of them, they lack the basic skills.

Ms. Saundra: I talked to a lot of teachers, you want to do something, and yet our hands are tied. You basically have to do what your administrators tell you to do. I need to have the freedom to create whatever to get kids on board, but I don't.

The *unequal education* theme described the impact on Black adolescents when it came to unequal distribution of money to school districts and the effect of that lack of resources. It also explained how unfair the curriculum and standardized tests are for Black students. This theme is directly connected to the argument of Finn (2012) when he exposed disparities in the aims and means of educating students according to their social class.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presents and discusses the finding of this study. There were 61 codes that emerged from the interviews that were transcribed, which formed the four themes for this study: *the parental impact theme, disengagement theme, being Black in todays' classroom theme, and unequal education theme*. The parental impact theme described the parents had on students' literacy development. This involvement included having books in the home and parents' involvement with those books. Within this theme, students

shared their experiences regarding their parents' influences, past and present, as well as their attitudes towards literacy.

The disengagement theme revealed the students' frustration with the text they were given to read and their lack of connections to the reading or the characters. The students spoke about being so uninterested in the readings that they found themselves distracted. They shared a hunger or need to have culturally relevant texts. The students also spoke about being embarrassed when it came to reading aloud in the classrooms.

Another factor that had an effect on students' attitudes was being *Black in the classroom theme*. Students shared their confusion and frustration in the fact that they are looked down on due to the color of their skin. They have a feeling of being inferior to others in the classroom, having been corrected for how they speak, and the fact that African American Vernacular was a language style used at home and in their communities but not an acceptable language to be used in school. Some students were taught that code-switching was the only way they would be accepted as being intelligent in the dominant white society.

The last but in no way the least of the themes is the *unequal education theme*. This was a theme that discussed unequal funding of public school systems and how underserved the Black communities were. Students and teachers spoke about how the curriculum was not set up with Blacks in mind and how it needed to be revisited and revised to consider today's classrooms' diversity. Teachers shared their limitations and how unjust standardized tests are for Black and Brown students.

Chapter Transition and Summary

Let's review; Chapter 1 was to identify why this study should have been addressed with the introduction. Chapter 2 gave the foundation with similar and relevant research for this study. Chapter 3 was the how of the study, how would the research design worked for this study, what was the process for selecting participants, and what was the steps of the interview process for collecting and analyzing the data were. This chapter is where the findings and results were discussed. The findings bought forth emergent themes, *parental impact*, *disengagement*, *Black in today's classrooms*, and *unequal education*. Along with the themes, this chapter presented verbatim quotes from the participants. Finally, the emergent themes in this chapter are further discussed in-depth in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the analyzed data that was collected was presented. A phenomenological study was conducted to describe and understand what factors affect Black adolescents' attitudes towards literacy and literature. The research questions that were addressed were (1) *What are the attitudes of Black adolescents towards literacy in the classroom? (2) How does being Black in the classroom affect adolescents' attitudes toward literacy? And (3) What are the beliefs of teachers about factors and instructional techniques that contribute to Black students' motivation to read?* Within this chapter, I discussed the findings that were generated from the data collected.

In this chapter, I made connections that answered the research questions. I also established the connection by reviewing the significance, purpose, and research methodology. The descriptive descriptions presented the experiences of the students and teachers. They brought forth meaningful emergent themes that determined the essence of meaning, cognizant of the study's general conclusion, conversation, recommendations, and future research contemplations.

Based upon Giorgi (2009), descriptive descriptions in a phenomenological method are not about the researcher telling the participants what they have seen, felt, heard, or tested. Rather, I got to describe the participants' own experiences through carefully chosen words, providing a voice to the lived experiences of Black adolescents. There is plenty of research regarding Black adolescents' functioning in school (Blake, 1998; Bowman, 2018; Cokley, 2016; Edwards, 2006; Harris, 2009; Hyland, 2005; Kirkland, 2011), there is a sparsity of literacy specific to Black adolescents' attitudes

towards literacy and literature. The voices of Black adolescents' have been silenced or ignored for so long. Teachers needed to be trained to deal with diversity in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The lack of understanding of Black culture is extended into the curriculum that does not consider Black adolescents' experiences. The essence of meaning from Black students' lived experiences may shed light on literacy experts, giving them a better understanding of the changes that need to be made to the curriculum. This study paved a path to allow the students' voices to be heard.

The research questions in this study were answered using semi-structured interviews with students at the high school level. Using an interview guide and protocol (Appendix F), data was collected on the students' lived experiences. The transcription of the data and analyzing the interviews were done on an individual basis and not with software. The students' precise transcripts analysis presented 61 noteworthy statements, which were made into structural descriptions. The result of this synthesis was the emergence of four themes. The themes are *parents' impact factor theme, disengagement/reading in the classroom theme, Being Black in today's classroom, and unequal education theme.* These themes were the foundation for the discussion of the data that was collected.

This chapter confers the associations and configuration made from the findings to the theoretical framework and the literature that was researched regarding Black adolescents' attitudes toward literacy and literature. The emergent themes and the research questions about what factors affect Black adolescents' attitudes towards literacy and literature are discussed in this chapter so readers will have an understanding of what those factors are for this demographic. Topics for discussion in this chapter consist of 1.)

A summary of the findings, 2.) A discussion of the findings, 3.) Implications from this study, 4.) Limitations, 5.) Recommendations for future research in this area, and 6.) Conclusion.

Discussion of Findings

The desire to explore this topic was due to my personal experiences with literacy and by working in higher education and witnessing the experiences of first-year students entering college having to take remedial reading courses. In order to explore this topic, I looked into Giorgi's (2016) descriptive phenomenology, which required me to give a complete description of my personal experience and then bracket those feelings to ensure trustworthiness. My overall purpose for this study was to provide a voice to Black adolescents so they can express their experiences and what factors express their attitudes towards literacy and literature.

Research Question #1

Research question number one; *what are the attitudes of Black adolescents towards literacy in the classroom?* The emergent theme that was an apparent response to this research question is the *disengagement theme* because it captured the essence of Black adolescents' attitudes. Within this theme, three different connections were used to unpack Black students' experiences: students' feelings about reading aloud, culturally relevant text, and reading in school.

Black students expressed their experience reading in class as feeling forced and embarrassed (Pinky and Jay, Chapter 4, p.65). Jay said, "…when my words come out

which makes me mess up" (Chapter 4, p.66). Mickey commented how some kids like to make fun of other kids. Reading aloud can make students become distraught. It is counterproductive and unreliable (Warner, Crolla, Goodwyn, Hyder, & Richards, 2016). When a student silently read, they have the opportunity to reread and give some thought to what they are reading. Yet as these Black students expressed, when a student reads aloud, the outcome is uncontrolled as words are out in the air, leaving them embarrassed and possibly made fun of.

We've learned that reading aloud is not the only concern within the disengagement theme. Another profound connection to why there is a disconnect would be not having culturally relevant text available. The students shared their experiences with Eurocentric texts (white literature) and how they could not connect with them. Pinky said, "I don't feel anything about the books we are given…" (Chapter 4, p.67). The students expressed their opinion that the books they were given had a minimal representation of color and how they desired more books that related to their culture. When asked if the books they read at school connected to them personally or culturally, responses like "I do not feel they connected to me personally, or to my culture, I felt they never really wanted them to" (Izanie, Chapter 4, p. 67).

They showed no meaningful relationship between the reading and the reader. This brings us back to Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory (Chapter 1, p. 15); this theory shows the importance of having the reader be able to relate to the text. Tatum (2000) said, "Culturally relevant literature should be used to help African American students understand changes in history." We also remember Tatum (2000), stating the relevant

literature increases reading achievement, strengthens students, cultural competence, and nurtures their identities (Chapter 1, p.15).

The statements given by students expressed their disconnect from the texts; they further expressed the importance of this theme when they explained the desire for character and story depiction that reflects their lived experiences.

Jay said, “I want to know how a character looks, so I can put a face on the character; so, I can understand” (Chapter 4, p. 70). He also said he needs to see how the characters and story relate to him. He said, “We need to have more Black literature in school; we need to validate ourselves instead of thinking that we’re less than the other students in school” (Chapter 4, p. 67). This connected to Hill (2013) when she spoke about culturally relevant text and how it should include characters that share a common experience with the reader. Also, they should be similar in appearance, language used, or family structure (Hill, 2013). Snow (2002) was referenced in Chapter 2 as commenting that text characteristics affect readers’ comprehension.

Christy made her frustration over being disconnected sufficiently clear when she said, “I get distracted…like if the book is not interesting to me and I have to read it,” and Pinky said, “I feel forced” (Chapter 4, p.65). The disconnection from white literature was consistent with all of the students. The lack of Black representation and the disappointment in the teacher-selected books was apparent. This belief was an example of how students felt withdrawn and disconnected from their readings.

Jay mentioned, “seeing more people like him….”

He also said that he needed to see how the characters and story relate to him.

Jazz talked about being distracted when reading because she did not find interest in the text that was given to her to read.

The disconnect from white literature was consistent with all of the students as well as the literature in chapter 2, which tells of the need to have text that resonates with students. Ladson-Billings (2009) stated that neither the lessons nor literature given to Black students resonated with who they are and their blackness. Hill (2013) spoke of how a teacher Mr. Lehrer had to add culturally relevant text to his curriculum when he had his first Black student enter the classroom. This further supports the fact that as classrooms become more diverse, it is essential to consider each student in lesson planning. If the idea is for all students to succeed, they need to somehow relate to the text.

Research Question #2

Research Question two; *how does being Black in the classroom affect adolescents' attitude toward literacy in the classroom?* The emergent theme that was an apparent response to this research question was being *Black in todays' classroom theme.* Within this theme, there are two connections to this research question, the first was Black vernacular, and the second was code-switching, showing the confusion and frustration of Black students in regard to speaking. This theme described the essence of the students as they told of their interactions with the teachers in class. Students expressed their feelings of being corrected when speaking in school and having a sense that they need to reject the language they use at home and in their communities.

Pinky said, "Yes, Ma'am, they correct the way I speak. I feel like I'm doing something really wrong. It's kind of like embarrassing" (chapter 4, p. 71). Pinky went on to say how uncomfortable and nervous it made her. And that she preferred not to read or

be called on. African American vernacular (Black vernacular), as Pinky knew it, was unacceptable in the classroom. Jay experienced teachers telling him that it's not that Black vernacular is not appropriate, but it is unprofessional (Chapter 4, p. 72). The language he uses is only unprofessional in the white-dominated society. Woodson (2009) touches on the fact that the educational system handicaps a student by teaching and showing him that their Black face is a curse and how it kills a student's aspiration. He goes on to say how Black adolescents experience inadequacy every day of their lives.

Mickey said, "I feel like people look at Black people as we just ghetto and dumb" (Chapter 4, p.73). Fordham (1999) suggested that teachers understand the meaning of their students' language practices to avoid disdain for Black identity. Jay shared that he knew he would not be able to get a job speaking the way he did because white society is the dominant culture and that takes denying a part of who he was; this is considered code-switching, which is switching between two vernaculars. Code-switching is a learned behavior. If students are not shown to appreciate their language and culture, it can lead to self-hatred, confusion, and a desire to blend into the background and not participate in the classroom. After realizing that their language is unacceptable, their negative attitudes presented feelings of hurt and discomfort associated with Black language: and being told that to fit into white-dominant society; there would be a need to code-switch. These same feelings of despair had an effect on student-teacher relationships.

Students may have been reluctant to read outside of the classroom because of the negative attitudes toward reading that students formed within the classroom. According to Mori (2003), some adolescents perceive book reading as uncool, so they may not share if they read outside the classroom with other peers. Many of the interviewed students said

they did not usually read outside of class. So they had no intentions of sharing a book with other peers due to being embarrassed and made fun of in school; taking that outside the classroom was something they were not going to do.

Research Question #3

Research question three; *What are the beliefs of teachers about factors and instructional techniques that contribute to Black students' motivation to read?* The emergent theme that was an apparent response to this research question was *the unequal education theme.* There were three connections to this research question within this theme: unfair curriculum, standardized testing, and rethinking the curriculum. Teachers were interviewed to give their opinion.

There should be a school environment that centers on Black voices, recognize Black Communities, and see what kind of assets Black students bring to the classroom. The Black experience should be represented in the curriculum all year round, not just in February for Black History. It needs to show Black people's diversity and recognize what Blacks contribute while dismissing Black stereotypes (Jones, 2021).

Classrooms act as a battleground with struggles between inferior groups and the ideology of the dominant white group. Black adolescents are expected to assimilate within the classroom, which the curriculum is devoid of their culture or characteristics. Yet these same Black adolescents are expected to achieve the same level of success as white students. Finn (2009) suggests that when it comes to functional literacy and powerful literacy, there may be a hidden curriculum that may be introducing Black students to a subservient life within the dominant society. Fordham (2009) talked about

border crossers in chapter two. They argued that only through the process of assimilation while as they turn their backs on their own culture are Black adolescents able to find their way within white society.

Teachers can help by building relationships with their students; knowing their stories will allow teachers to be more mindful of their reading instructions by modifying the text they use during their instructions in the hope of motivating and engaging students (Walker, 2020). Love (2019) stated that for teachers not to understand their Black students is equivalent to killing their spirits. The teachers' interviewed for this study expressed their frustration with how the curriculum does not serve Black students. Ms. Kelly said, "*…the teacher should do their research with finding out each child's life because if you don't have a book that they're interested in, then how do they resonate with the reading*" (Chapter 4, p. 75).

Not all communities are created equal. When it comes to school funding, textbooks, and resources, the Black and Brown communities suffer due to the distribution of wealth. Because institutional racism exists as a barrier to blocking Black advancement, standardized testing is another way to secure those barriers. Standardized tests are created with the notion of testing the knowledge of white students. Jay said, "*to be honest, it wasn't interesting; I couldn't catch on to it*" (Chapter 4, p. 76). Lucy said, "*Test scores are difficult…it could be the language because sometimes the question may ask something and we don't think that the question is actually asking something else*" (Chapter 4, p. 77). Mickey said, *"…sometimes we may not be taught to the level of the tests that we are given because it seems like we are taught the same thing every year, and when we get the test, it'd be still way more advance than we actually learned*" (Chapter 4,

p. 77). Mickey also said, “They don’t consider us”; what a powerful statement; what white society may not realize is that students are noticing the inequalities. Teachers feel the same way; Ms. Kelly said, “*It’s just so unequal. But they want all students to be on the same level,*” and Mrs. Saundra admitted that standardized tests are different from what is being taught in the classroom, which sets Black students up for failure (Chapter 4, p.77). Both teachers agree that the curriculum needs to be revamped. Ms. Kelly said, “It has to stop being depicted as Black people just came over here as slaves, teach the truth.” She went on the say that this racist institution picks and chooses what they want students to learn. Ms. Kelly feels that government and politics should not be involved in education. Ways to help would be to incorporate Black students’ interest in the books that schools choose and allow parents to have a say in the teacher-selected texts. Teachers can update their classroom libraries, and at the top of the list for teachers is to stop tying their hands; give them the freedom to create whatever is necessary to get the students on board.

Essence of Meaning

The essence of this study’s result resides within the four emergent themes that assisted with answering the research questions. First, the attitudes of Black adolescents toward literacy in the classroom, the students voiced that they “get distracted” because the book or text they are reading “is not interesting” to them (Christy, Chapter 4, p. 65). Attitudes expressed were that they “feel forced” to read in class, that they “are not ready sometimes,” and that they feel “embarrassed” when called on (Pinky, Chapter 4, p. 65). The students expressed that they do not resonate with the books and that they cannot relate to the characters.

Second, beliefs about being Black and its' impact on reading in the classroom. There were many statements from the students about their language and how teachers make them feel that the way they talk to communicate with others is inappropriate or, as Jay said, "Not professional" (Chapter 4, p. 72). When white teachers do not take the time to understand the Black culture, they look at it as needing to be corrected. Jay commented that although he feels uncomfortable and embarrassed when they correct him, he understands that he needs to switch up in order to fit into white society to get a job. This correcting of students is an expectation that students need to fit into white society because it is the dominant culture, and to some, that means turning away from their blackness.

Finally, teachers' belief about factors involving instructional techniques (curriculum) that contribute to Black students' lack of motivation to read was reviewed. The teachers interviewed said, "Black students are not good readers" and that they are "just not interested" (Ms. Kelly, Chapter 4, p. 75). They also believe that all teachers should know their students and provide them with reading that interests them and that will resonate. The teachers spoke about the disparity within the State Standardized Tests and how it is not developed with Black students in mind (Chapter 4, p.75). There is inequality in education with unequal distribution of resources and lack of school funding. Teachers feel their hands are tied, and they cannot teach to their audience of Black students; they have to stick with the curriculum. When asked, Mickey said, "They just don't consider us" Black students (Chapter 4, p. 77). Consideration is what the current curriculum needs; it needs to take into account all students and their backgrounds. Multiple implications have been drawn based on the essence of the students' experiences;

according to Giorgi (2009), it is by that essence that we can fully understand their lived experiences.

Implications

Many of the findings from this study were the same as previous research relating to Black adolescents and reading. For the most part, there was agreement on how the students felt and their experiences with literacy. The exclusivity of this study is the fact that the data collected was offered from the viewpoint of Black adolescents. The implications in this section are described through two different lenses: The Equity lens and the Critical Race Theory lens.

Equity Implications

For the purpose of this study, we look through an equity lens, which confirms the significance of recognizing systemic, institutional, and discriminatory barriers and practices (Lenssen, 2016). It is believed that EVERY student is given the necessary resources they need to thrive individually; this is not true with underserved students, mostly students in communities of color (Lenssen, 2016).

There is a difference between equality and equity. According to the Center for Public Education (2016), with equality in education, all students are treated the same and have access to all resources. With equity, it is achieved when all students receive the resources that they need to graduate (N/A, 2016). For equity to be successful, it needs to take into account the individual needs of students. As the students in this study shared, they felt left out and overlooked when it came to text and literature that was shared in the

classroom. They also expressed that they were not considered when it came to standardized tests. When we talk about achieving equity, we need to understand what these students are saying and decide how do we make education equal? How do we get them the resources required to put Black youths on the same playing field as other students?

Critical Race Implications

Looking through the Critical Race theory lens would suggest that the educational institution is inherently racist. For me, this involves not putting what Finn (2009) calls *Powerful Literacy* in the hands of Black students—not giving them what they truly need to succeed. There should not be a surprise that out of the 245 years of existence, 72%, which is about three generations, were under slavery (McLaughlin, 2021). The early years consisted of not having the desire to teach Blacks to read; then, it was not giving them the resources needed to succeed. To keep Blacks suppressed, they are taught that they are still inferior. With Critical Race Theory, they are now trying to erase history and not teach it in the schools, when only selected events were portrayed in schools, like slavery and oppression. Mclaughlin (2021) said, “Kids of color need honest information about society as much as white kids do, so they’re prepared to deal with racism. Scholars of critical race theory like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams all share an interest in recognizing racism as a standard component of American life that manifested in textual sources such as the ones in literature, film, and law. They attempted to confront the beliefs and practices that enable racism to persist while also challenging those practices to seek liberation from systemic racism (Lab, n.d.).

Concerned parties claim that whites are only willing to change the power gap when there is a clear benefit for the interests of whites. The power held by whites results from their control of material resources and their capital. While working-class people do not share these resources, they obtain mental benefits from the existence of a lesser racial group. (Bowman, Rocco, Peterson, & Adker, 2009). Critical race theory scholars argued that race not only matters, but it will always matter. Yosso (2005) said that racism is an important fundamental feature of America. He stated that critical race theory starts with the premise that racism and race are widespread and permanent in our society. He, too, said critical race theory looks at the social, political, and economic inequity among groups acknowledging that race crosses with other attributes such as gender, sexual orientation, and class (Yosso, 2005). Critical race theory declares that the dominant racial group cannot understand what it is like to be nonwhite. Storytelling is a strong part of critical race theory; it is powerful because it reveals the racist acts people of color face on a daily basis while questioning the beliefs collectively held by the majority. The analysis of the experience of racism is very different based on the degree of power and authority a person holds in this society. The stories and lived experiences of Black adolescents need to be told, listened to, and analyzed in a way that shows its' connection to critical race theory to make a change (Bowman, Rocco, Peterson, & Adker, 2009).

Limitations

This study focused on the factors that affect Black adolescents' attitudes toward literacy and literature, told through the lived experiences of Black youths. Because this research study recognized a broad range of experiences over the course of these Black

adolescents' lives, one of the limitations of this descriptive phenomenological study was the trust in students' recall of their experiences. Human memory is limited with the passing of time. Because of the youthful nature of the students in this study, they did not have to rely on distant memories when discussing their literacy experiences. Due to Covid-19 and because of the sample of students interviewed, the transferability of this study to a broad range of urban youths was limited. The Covid pandemic provided limited options for engaging and recruiting efforts. It was more difficult conducting this study virtually because it was hard to retain interest, as well as have a timely communication turnaround. Due to this study being virtually done, I was restricted from having access to the students' environment as well as being able to fully observe their body language as a nonverbal form of communication. Finally, due to researchers' bias in qualitative studies, descriptive phenomenology requires the bracketing of my personal opinions and thoughts. It is my hope that areas of limitations presented in this study will be addressed by future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is necessary to have the voices of Black students heard, and I recommend that multiple studies be conducted across the states to gain a broader understanding of this phenomenon. By using this studys' methodology, this can be done applying it to students in the public school systems. Further research that is relevant to this study would be to look closely at Black culture and how it is represented in schools, along with critical race theory and its true impact on the education system. This research can be broadened by using a mixed-method approach such as an explanatory method in order to generalize the

study better. Schools can build on this study by diving deeper into the curriculum that is provided to Black students to revisit its' contents to make it culturally relevant.

Conclusion

I want to start my conclusion with a quote from Suzanne Carreker. She said, *"With literacy comes academic success, informed decision-making, improved self-esteem, personal empowerment, greater economic opportunities, and active participation in local and global social communities. Ultimately, it is the gateway to lifelong learning… Without equity in literacy education, achievement gaps will persist, and too many students will not reap literacy's innumerable benefits"* (As cited in Literacy and Equity in Education, p.1 (Sedita, 2020). The goal of this study was to determine what factors affected the attitudes of Black adolescents when it came to literacy and literature. The interviews conducted determined that those factors created four themes that helped explain the commonality and its effect on the Black student in this study. The factors included the impact parents had on their children's reading development. Students talked about being disengaged with the readings and texts that were presented to them in school. There was also talk about how students felt about being Black in the classroom and how it affected them when it came to reading aloud, and the language they felt they had to use while suppressing part of their culture. Teachers were also interviewed that they noticed that the curriculum is unfair to Black and Brown students and that standardized tests did not take Blacks into consideration when developing them. Comments and concerns were made that there should be a rethinking of the curriculum to be inclusive of all students regardless of their backgrounds.

It is true there is “Power” in literacy, and without equity in literacy, the gap in achievement will continue to grow (Finn, 2009). I hope this study showed that there is a need to provide “Power” to all students regardless of culture and diversity.

APPENDIX A

Contact Letter

Dear Bishop John:

Your permission is being requested to conduct a study with your church youth to learn more about *What Factors Impact Black Adolescents' Attitudes towards Literacy in the Classroom*. This study will be conducted by Sheila Harris as part of her doctoral dissertation. Her faculty supervisor is Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, Ph.D., St. John's University School of Education, Department of Education Specialties.

Participants will be asked to do the following in this study:

(1) Take part in an interview(s) concerning their beliefs and attitudes towards reading and factors that may affect them. All the interviews will be conducted virtually.

Interviews will be audiotaped. Participants may review these tapes. All of the recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Participation in this study will involve approximately 40 minutes for each interview.

There are no known risks associated with participation in this research. Although participants will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator understand how to help teachers better promote successful literacy instruction.

Confidentiality of participants' research records will be strictly maintained by using only pseudonyms and/or codes for participants' responses; keeping consent forms separate from data to make sure that the subject's name and identity will not become known or linked with any information they have provided. All data collected will be kept under lock and key. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews, participants have the right to skip or not answer any questions.

If there is anything unclear or that you do not understand about the study or participation; if you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Sheila Harris at sheila.harris17@my.stjohns.edu (email), The School of Education, Sullivan Hall, 4th Floor, Queens, NY 11439

For questions about the rights of research participants, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu. 718-990-1440.

Agreement to Conduct Study at Your Site

Subject's Signature: _____ Date:_____

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Colleague,

My name is Sheila Harris. I am doing my doctoral research study entitled: *What Factors Impact Black Adolescents' Attitudes towards Literacy in the Classroom?* The purpose of this Phenomenology study is to explore how attitudes affect reading motivation and teachers' perceptions of instructional practice impact Black adolescents' attitudes and reading motivation in the classroom.

Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated. Additionally, your assistance in facilitating the recruitment of participants is also greatly appreciated. Participants should be high school classroom teachers who teach reading.

The total time commitment for participation is estimated at 30-minutes. You will be asked to class participate in a survey that assesses students' reading motivation and attitude.

If you would be willing to participate or know of potential participants or colleagues who may be interested in sharing this recruitment letter, please contact me at sheila.harris17@my.stjohns.edu.

Thank you,

Sheila Harris, Ph.D. Student
St. John's University, School of Education Specialties

APPENDIX C

Participant Consent Letter

Dear Participant:

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about students' attitudes and motivation toward reading. This study will be conducted by Sheila Harris, Department of Education Specialties, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Her faculty supervisor is Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, Ph.D., Department of Education Specialties.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: (1) participate in a focus group. Your interviews will be audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. You may review these tapes and transcripts and request that all or any portion of these be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve approximately one hour of your time:

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research project beyond those of everyday life.

Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator better understand the instructional contexts and techniques that change attitudes and foster literacy motivation.

Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by using pseudonyms for all proper names. Consent forms will be kept separate from data to make sure that your name and identity will not become known or linked with any information you have provided. Your responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. In the case of focus group interviews, your responses will be kept confidential by the researcher, but the research cannot guarantee that the others in the group will do the same.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews and surveys, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

If there is anything about the study or participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem,

you may contact Sheila Harris at sheila.harris17@my.stjohns.edu (email), The School of Education, Sullivan Hall, 4th Floor, Queens, NY 11439

For questions about the rights of research participants, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu. 718-990-1440.

Agreement to Conduct Study at Your Site

I consent to the following:

I agree to complete surveys. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to allow the interviews to be audio-taped. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to make myself available for a further interview if asked. Yes ☐ No ☐

Subject's Signature: _____ Date:_____

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep. Yes ☐

APPENDIX D

Parent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian(s),

My name is Sheila Harris, a doctoral student in the School of Education at St. Johns University. I am conducting a study to learn more about "*What Factors Impact Black Adolescents' Attitudes towards Literacy in the Classroom?" T*o see what affects students' attitudes and what motivates them to read, and the instructional practices that can change negative attitudes and foster positive reading motivation. My faculty sponsor is Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, School of Education at St. John's University.

If you allow your child to participate in this study, the study involves having your child participate in a brief interview to discuss their attitude and reading motivation. I will be the only person to look at this work.

Confidentiality of your child's research records will be strictly maintained by using anonymous codes instead of names and keeping consent forms separate from data that is collected to make sure the participant's name and identity will not become known or linked with any information they have provided. All data will be under lock and key. Your child's responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. Your child also has the right to skip or not answer any questions he/she prefers not to answer.

If there is anything about the study or your child's participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Sheila Harris at sheila.harris17@my.stjohns.edu (email), The School of Education, Sullivan Hall, 4th Floor, Queens, NY 11439. For questions about the rights of research participants, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu, 718-990-1440.

Sincerely,

Sheila Harris, Ph.D. Student
St. John's University, School of Education Specialties

Parent Signature: _____ Date_____

APPENDIX E

Child Assent Form

Adolescent Assent Form

I am doing a study to learn about *What Factors Impact Black Adolescents Attitudes towards Literacy in the Classroom?" T*o see what affects students' attitudes and what motivates them to read, and the instructional practices that can change negative attitudes and foster positive reading motivation. Your parent(s) and/or guardian(s) gave me permission for you to be in my study. If you agree to be in my study, I am going to ask you some questions about your attitude toward reading and your reading habits.

If you decide that you do not want to finish the survey, you can stop answering the questions at any time. The questions I ask you are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in my study. If you do not want to be in my study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and I will not be upset if you don't sign this paper.

Your grades in this class do not have anything to do with your participation.

Print your name: _____

Sign your name: _____ Date:_____

APPENDIX F

Interview Questions

(McGhie, 2015)

Literacy Exposure Prior to Start of School

1. When you were a child, did your parents read to you? How Frequently?
2. Was reading encouraged in your home? How?
3. What type of education did your parents have?

Literacy Exposure at Home and School

4. How do you describe yourself as a reader?
5. How often do you read? If not often, why?
6. Do you like to read?
7. Do you have a library at home (a collection of books)?
8. What types of books do you like to read?
9. Do you go to the library?
10. How do you feel when you read in class?
11. How do you feel about reading aloud in class?
12. How do you feel about the books you read in school?
13. Did the books you read at school connect to you personally/culturally?
14. Do you feel you would read more if you were able to pick your own books (text)?

Literacy Socialization

15. Do you talk about what you read with your friends (peers)
16. What motivates you to read?
17. How do you speak with your friends?
18. Have your teachers ever told you that your use of language (speaking black) was not appropriate or incorrect in school? If so, how did this make you feel?
19. Do you remember having any conflicts with your teachers related to the way you spoke (used language) at school?
20. What do you consider normal speaking? How do you feel about that?
21. Thank you for sharing your experience with me. Do you have anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to share about your literacy experience?

APPENDIX G

Teacher

Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. In your opinion, what is the number one thing that a teacher can do to get students motivated to read? And why?
3. How would you describe your students' motivation to read?
4. What makes you believe this is so?
5. How do your beliefs about engaging students in text and instructional practices impact students' reading engagement in the classroom?
6. How engaging do you find Black adolescents with in-class reading?
7. Do you feel current instructional text and readings strike an intrinsic motivation from Black adolescents?
8. How do adolescents respond to opportunities for self-selecting texts in the classroom?
9. Do you feel it is important for students to have a choice in picking the text read in classrooms?
10. How much of an impact will students have a say on the texts they read in class affect their reading experience?
11. How involved are Black adolescent students with literacy in your classroom?

APPENDIX H

Focus Group Questions

1. How do you describe yourself as a reader?
2. How often do you read?
3. If you do not read often, why not?
4. Do you talk about what you read with your peers?
5. What is your favorite book?
6. How do you feel when you read in class?
7. What do you like to read?
8. What motivates you to read?
9. How do you feel about reading aloud?
10. How often do you read at home?
11. Do you own many books?
12. How often do you go to the library?
13. Do you believe you would read more if you were able to pick your own text?
14. How do you feel about the books you read in school?

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