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BLACKOUT: ADDRESSING THE BLACK MALE TEACHER SHORTAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

ORIS GRIFFIN, LEONARD RICHARDS JR., DONICA HADLEY, BRIGHT ADUAKOH – JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

Introduction

The absence of Black male teachers can result in lower expectations for Black students, negatively impacting their academic success and overall potential. Therefore, having Black male teachers in the classroom can help promote equal opportunities and high expectations for all students regardless of race. Low-income African American children are less likely to be suspended or expelled when a Black teacher is present (Gasman, 2019). A study conducted in Tennessee and North Carolina schools also showed that Black children behave better when they have more Black teachers, which reduces the need to suspend or expel Black students (He is Me Institute, 2022).

The education field in the United States suffers from a lack of diversity, particularly in the representation of Black males. Despite numerous decades-long efforts to increase the number of Black male educators, the percentage continues to be disproportionately low. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), in 2017, and 2018, Black males comprised only 2% of teachers in public schools in the United States, which has remained relatively stable for decades. Also, according to Strauss (2015), in the United States, a mere 17% of public-school teachers are Latino, Black, Asian, or Native American. Shockingly, the representation of Black males in this profession is a mere 2%, a concerning statistic. Meanwhile, over half of the students in public schools are children of color, underscoring a disparity in representation and raising important questions about equity and diversity in the education system. In this article, we will look at some of the causes of this phenomenon.

Exploring the Underrepresentation of Black Male Teachers

The lack of Black males in education and its impact on Black male student success is a persistent problem in American society. Underwood (2019) explained that if there were more Black male educators, Black boys would see themselves in positions of authority and be inspired to follow in their footsteps. Shared experiences, shared culture, and shared backgrounds between Black Educators and Black Students all contribute to creating a trustworthy environment for students, providing a glimpse of what the future may hold for them (Lynch, 2016; Jeter & Melendez, 2021). Shared experiences and culture can foster a strong connection and understanding between Black teachers and students.

Black teachers and students may share racial identity-related cultural traditions, values, and experiences that shape their perspectives and approaches to teaching and learning. According to Griffin (2017), personal life experiences of Black teachers overcoming obstacles can serve as a source of inspiration and motivation for Black students. Many Black teachers can relate to their Black students' lived experiences, allowing them to connect with them and understand their struggles. Black teachers are confident in their ability to teach their students about the challenges of discrimination and poverty due to their shared experiences. They are in

an excellent position to assist their students in understanding what it takes to succeed in a world that may be stacked against them.

According to Maylor (2009), more Black teachers must challenge racism in public schools and be role models for Black students. Additionally, Black boys from low-income households have a 39% lower chance of dropping out of high school if they spend one year in elementary school with a Black teacher (Garcia, 2023; Strauss, 2020). The absence of Black male teachers in the classroom can have severe and long-term consequences for Black students, limiting their opportunities, aspirations, and sense of belonging in the educational system. Although teachers have a significant impact on the lives of their students, there is a belief that Black teachers hold a unique significance for Black students (Ware, 2006). This argument emphasizes the value of Black teachers in the academic and personal development of Black students, as they can provide a relatable role model and a deeper understanding of the cultural experiences and challenges that these students may face.

Research suggests that the absence of Black male teachers hurts Black students (Escudero, 1990; Ware, 2006; Strauss, 2020; Jeter & Melendez, 2021). African American teachers possess cultural knowledge and practices that allow them to understand better and connect with Black students, resulting in their success in school and life. A method referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) involves an approach known as warm demander pedagogy (Ware, 2006) or having a cultural eye (Irvine, 2003). According to Escudero (2019), culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is a teaching approach that prioritizes the academic and personal success of each student while also valuing the collective identity and experiences of the group. This approach is based on a philosophical outlook that informs what, how, and why content is taught.

CRP seeks to ensure that students engage in a challenging and rigorous academic curriculum while feeling affirmed in their unique cultural identities and experiences. This approach aims to empower students with the knowledge and skills to critically engage with the world and others. The term "warm demander" refers to a teaching strategy emphasizing the importance of developing positive relationships with students while maintaining high academic standards. According to Hambacher et al. (2016), adopting the warm demander teaching approach can lead to productive and supportive relationships between teachers and students. When teachers build warm and respectful relationships with their students while maintaining high expectations for their academic progress, students tend to develop a greater appreciation for their teachers. This, in turn, can create a positive feedback loop where students become more motivated to succeed, and teachers become more invested in their students' success.

Since most Black male teachers share a similar cultural background as Black students, Black male teachers are often aware of Black students' experiences. By being aware of their students' experiences, African American teachers can design classroom instruction and management, accordingly, creating a supportive and inclusive environment for Black students. Therefore, the lack of Black male teachers creates a significant gap in providing culturally responsive education to Black students, which can impact their academic and personal growth. We can help create a more equitable and inclusive education system that better serves all students by increasing the representation of Black male teachers and supporting their success.

According to Strauss (2020), the shortage of Black male teachers affects Black students. However, it also deprives White students of the opportunity to form crucial relationships that

could challenge and disrupt the transmission of racism to future generations. By interacting with Black teachers, White students can better understand diverse perspectives, cultures, and experiences and while also learning to recognize and combat racism from an early age. This is essential to prevent perpetuating racist attitudes and behaviors into adulthood. Therefore, the lack of Black male teachers can hinder the development of a diverse and inclusive learning environment necessary for promoting anti-racism and social justice among students of all races.

Numerous male teachers of color benefit all students, regardless of race (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Their survey found that students have a more favorable opinion of minority teachers than White teachers. In addition to this, according to recent research studies, Black male teachers have higher expectations of Black students than White teachers (Gershenson et al., 2016). The scarcity of Black male teachers increases inequality, feeds negative perceptions, and maintains societal injustices. However, with more Black male teachers, students understand the value of cultural variety. Black male teachers are essential to achieve educational equity and teaching students the value of representation. Teacher expectations significantly influence students' self-perceptions and academic performance (Rubie-Davies, 2006), emphasizing the importance of having Black male teachers in classrooms with diverse student populations.

Systemic racism is a significant factor contributing to the underrepresentation of Black males in education (Terada, 2021). According to Jeter and Melendez (2021), because racism permeates American culture, the education system is no exception. Black students and educators across the country are thus vulnerable to marginalization, ostracization, and discrimination in public institutions. Higher education does not recruit, retain, graduate, or employ Blacks at the same rate as Whites (Glenn, 2003; Jones, 2019). This led to few Black males being interested in working as a teacher. Furthermore, even when Black people are interested in these positions, they do not get the opportunity compared to Whites. In the 2017-18 school year, demographic data published by NCES showed that approximately 79% of teachers in U.S. public schools identified as non-Hispanic White. On the other hand, less than 10% of teachers were either Black, Hispanic, or Asian American, with 7%, 9%, and 2%, respectively (Schaeffer, 2021).

Another factor that reduces the number of Black teachers in the United States is the perception of teaching as a low-paying profession. As discussed by Will (2022), teachers in the United States earn 23.5 percent less than comparable college graduates working in other occupations. Statista Research Department (2022) found that in 2021, 19.5 percent of Black people in the United States lived in poverty. This compares to 8.2 percent of Whites and 8.1 percent of Asians. Also, according to Duffin (2022), in 2021, the mean income of Black bachelor's degree holders was \$64,369, compared to \$85,024 for White Americans with a bachelor's degree. With this colossal income gap facing Blacks in the United States, many Black males need to gain high-paying jobs to help their households overcome poverty. As such, working in education is often considered not lucrative enough to attract more Black males. Black students face significant financial challenges compared to their White counterparts.

The Cost of Attending Colleges and Universities

According to a statistical report by the Education data initiative (2023), the average cost of attending for a student living on campus at a 4-year public in-state institution is \$25,707 per year or \$102,828 over four years. The report shows that 69% of confirmed bachelor's degree earners graduate within six years, with an average cost of tuition being \$207,384. However, students who cannot work full-time lose a median annual income of \$42,068 (Education Data

Initiative, 2023). Due to the high cost of obtaining a degree in the U.S., most students, especially Black students, fall back on student loans as a lender of last resort. Student borrowers pay an average of \$2,186 in interest each year, and the average student borrower spends about 20 years paying off their loans (Education Data Initiative, 2023). Considering the loss of income and loan interest, the average price of obtaining a bachelor's degree may be as high as \$509,434 (Education Data Initiative, 2023). Research shows that 81% of Black graduates borrow student loans, while only 63% of White graduates do (Huelsenman, 2014).

Moreover, 65% of Black respondents in a study on education debt were in debt, compared to only 49% of White respondents (Grinstein-Weiss et al., 2016). Financial obligations also impact Black students, who often have to work while studying to support their families. Wood (2012) highlights that the lack of financial resources and the pressure to contribute to their family's income are key factors contributing to the high dropout rates among Black male students. Therefore, addressing Black students' financial challenges is essential to ensuring they have equal opportunities to succeed in their education and beyond.

Finally, the lack of financial resources among Black households is another factor that leads to the low number of Black male teachers in the United States. White (2020) states that 70% of Black students face financial difficulties. The economic challenges young Black males face makes it difficult for Black males to pursue higher education, necessitating them to be educators. The lack of financial resources and the pressure to contribute to their family were crucial factors in Black males dropping out (Wood, 2012). The findings support the conclusion that disproportionate dropout rates for Black males are caused by financial stress, which discourages the population from becoming educators. The continuous rise in tuition across the United States means that if measures are not implemented to address the financial difficulties young Black males face, more Black boys will drop out of schools, bringing their aspirations of becoming educators to an end.

Black Male Role Models

The benefit of having more Black male professors extends beyond their influence on Black male students alone. The lack of mentors and role models is another reason for the underrepresentation of Black males as educators or teachers (Jeter & Melendez, 2022). Mostly, young Black people need to see people like them who hold certain positions for them to be interested in such positions. According to Ahebee (2021), by third grade, Black students exposed to Black teachers were 13% more likely to enroll in college. There are inadequate academicians within most Black communities in the United States. This makes it difficult for young Black boys to get the needed mentorship and aspiration to study hard to achieve the required academic success to get employed as teachers or educators in the United States. Teacher expectations significantly influence students' self-perceptions and academic performance (Rubie-Davies, 2006). This emphasizes the importance of having Black male teachers in classrooms with diverse student populations. The absence of Black male teachers can result in lower expectations for Black students, negatively impacting their academic success and overall potential. Therefore, having Black male teachers in the classroom can help promote equal opportunities and high expectations for all students regardless of race.

Conclusion

Despite the recent increase in the number of Black male teachers in the United States, the number is not encouraging, and as such, there is much work to do. This Blackout must be addressed on several levels. First, the education system needs to be more lucrative to attract more Black males to work as teachers. There is a dire need for the media and communities to portray Black males as equal to White males and capable of working in the educational system. If there are insufficient safeguards to ensure that Black male teachers remain in their positions, it will be unproductive to hire more of them. Therefore, Black male teachers should be retained through special incentive programs rather than just employing them. Schools should take the following steps to increase the appeal of teaching for Black male teachers (He Is Me Institute, 2022): offering competitive wages, providing funds through districts, states, and the federal government for schools and Black teachers, and organizing specialized training for Black males to assist them in overcoming the unique issues they have at work is imperative for retention. Opportunities should be available to Black males for networking to prevent them from feeling lonely in predominantly White female spaces. Finally, to ensure that Black male teachers are appropriately treated and have their needs met, DEI (Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion) policies should be available, reviewed and enforced with fidelity in all workplaces.

State governments should implement programs to train and recruit Black male teachers. An example of such a program is the Black Educators Promise Initiative (BEPI). According to Garcia (2023), BEPI seeks to assist Black educators by collaborating with historically Black colleges and universities on recruitment and retention. States should implement a similar initiative to ensure the number of Black male educators increases within their population. Another tactic for increasing the number of Black male teachers is encouraging more Black males to pursue teaching careers by providing targeted outreach and recruitment efforts. This could include partnering with local community organizations, creating mentorship programs for aspiring Black male teachers by connecting aspiring young Black male teachers to Black males already in the profession and offering scholarships or financial incentives for individuals interested in pursuing teaching degrees. This initiative can be done by colleges and universities nationwide in partnership with local school systems. An example of such a program is the Brothers Empowered to Teach (BE2T). BE2T is a nonprofit organization that supports and develops Black male undergraduate students interested in teaching in K-12. As their mission states: “Brothers Empowered to Teach envisions a world where every child can see themselves in and through the eyes of their teacher” (BE2T, n.d). Universities such as Grambling State University in Louisiana have incorporated this program within their school. Its funding is made available to provide paid fellowships while introducing the fellows to teaching in classroom environments at partnering schools (Simone, 2023). An increase in Black male teachers will reduce the dropout rate among Black students and inspire younger Black males to work in the education system.

Imagine a world where school districts begin to establish programs and incentives that are outlined here. There is an excellent opportunity for these districts to not only recruit Black male educators into their schools but also ensure that these educators remain in their schools in order to uphold and ensure a positive social and academic effect on all students in their classrooms. Recruiting and hiring these teachers into the school district is one thing, but providing them with the necessary support, engagement, and professional development to succeed in the profession is another. Therefore, school districts must address the culture that has historically shaped policies and strategies that have not created a welcoming environment for

educators of color. Institutionalizing some of these programs and revisiting some outdated policies and procedures used as gatekeeping obstacles to maintain the status quo and create barriers for Blacks and other minorities must be eliminated if we are to address the existing BLACKOUT.

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APPLYING TF-CBT TO FEMALE ADOLESCENT DELINQUENTS TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM AND INCREASE SELF-ESTEEM

SANDRA M. TIPPEN – TULANE UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) is a well-researched and widely utilized treatment for comorbid disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder. It has been demonstrated to be an effective therapeutic intervention for both adults and adolescents. This systematic review will examine the efficacy of utilizing TF-CBT to reduce recidivism and boost self-esteem in female adolescents who are delinquent and have been diagnosed with trauma. Ten studies from the domains of governance, social sciences, behavioral sciences, medicine, criminology, public health, mental health, and juvenile justice were chosen following a thorough and exhaustive search. These results can further direct future research and policy in the fields of trauma, juvenile justice, and female adolescent crime prevention.

Keywords: TF-CBT, female delinquents, self-esteem, recidivism

Applying TF-CBT to Female Adolescent Delinquents to Reduce Recidivism and Increase Self-Esteem

Female adolescent delinquency is an important issue today being addressed by local, state, and national governmental agencies, organizations, and community-based leaders (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2019). These entities are seeking evidenced-based and practical ways to prevent the onset of lawlessness among female adolescents and prevent and/or reduce the recidivism rate among female juvenile offenders (Van Damme et al., 2016; Yohros, 2023). Research regarding reducing recidivism and increasing self-esteem for female adolescent delinquents is extremely limited. Further, research in reducing recidivism and increasing self-esteem among female juvenile delinquents by using trauma focused-cognitive behavior therapy (TF-CBT) is scarce.

Even though current research indicates female adolescent delinquency is decreasing as compared to male juvenile delinquents, the issue should be addressed to continue its downward slope (OJJIP, 2017). Criminal acts mainly committed by female delinquents includes larceny, violation of probation, property crimes, and crimes against persons (Conrad et al., 2013; Kerig, 2018; OJJDP, 2019). A female offender's mental and behavioral health should be assessed to get to the root causes for their delinquent actions (Pitts, 2017; Van Damme et al., 2016). A female criminal's drug addiction problems should be treated in addition to their mental health and behavioral health difficulties, as it is a contributing reason to their delinquent behavior (Kretschmar, 2015). It is necessary to assess, examine, and treat the juvenile's traumatic prior experiences to lower recidivism rates among female adolescent offenders (Vitopoulos et al., 2018). In addition, the focus of any intervention for a female adolescent's low self-esteem concerns stemming from prior traumatic events should be on giving her a sense of positive self-worth to reduce her future maladaptive behaviors.

According to earlier research, there is a dearth of information on the recidivism rates among female adolescent offenders (OJJDP, 2017; Yohros, 2023). However, what is known about the topic shows that a number of factors, such as sexual abuse, traumatic experiences in the past, suicidal thoughts, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, and runaway behavior, contribute to female delinquency (Office of Justice Programs, 2020). Governmental organizations must create research tools to track and collect data on female adolescent delinquents in order to address the following questions: why is a female youth committing crimes? What supportive measures can be offered to help juvenile offenders avoid committing crimes in the future? What skills does juvenile justice staff need to effectively work with and mentor female youth offenders to reduce future delinquency? Without this knowledge, it would be difficult to combat female teenage delinquency and, as a result, reduce recidivism.

A systematic review was conducted by the author to answer the following question: Does TF-CBT reduce recidivism and increase self-esteem among female adolescent delinquents? While completing the comprehensive search for this systematic review, it became apparent that there was not extensive research on applying TF-CBT to reduce recidivism and increase self-esteem among this population. Thus, to better inform juvenile justice professionals and practitioners about the best practices, it is necessary to conduct a systematic review of this information. This paper aims to advance the understanding of using TF-CBT with female offenders to lower their recidivism rates and increase their self-esteem. An additional purpose is

to enhance the expertise of juvenile justice staff, government representatives, and clinicians on optimal approaches for interacting with this population.

Methods

The methods used for the systematic review strategy are described in this section. The search protocol was created by the author and follows the PRISMA principles. Additionally, the Campbell Collaboration's guidelines were followed to conduct the systematic review.

Search Strategies

Several search strategies were used by the author in the research process to find pertinent records for the current study.

First, it included the use of the advance search component of obtaining research articles by simultaneously utilizing all the online databases and journal articles from Tulane Howard-Tilton Memorial Library. The 1,115 electronic sites that make up the Tulane Howard Tilton Memorial Library's electronic database offer information from a variety of articles in the fields of government, social sciences, behavioral sciences, medicine, criminology, public health, mental health, and juvenile justice.

Second, the Tulane Howard-Tilton Memorial Library was comprehensively searched between the dates of May 2024 and August 2024 for relevant publications. This search engine was selected due to its ability to include bodies of work from all 1,115 listed databases. Search terms were restricted to dates and keywords on the search platform. The dates selected were 2012-2024. The following primary search terms were used: "youth offenders" AND "positive self-esteem," "youth offenders" AND "reduce recidivism," "TF-CBT" AND "adolescent" AND "crime," "adolescent female" AND "positive self-esteem" AND "delinquent," "adolescent female" AND "positive self-esteem" AND "reduce recidivism," "adolescent" AND "reduced recidivism," "adolescent" AND "self-esteem" AND "PTSD," and "adolescent" AND "recidivism" AND "PTSD."

Third, articles already obtained from previous literature reviews conducted on TF-CBT and juvenile justice were obtained to identify eligible studies that may not have been found through the other search strategies.

Fourth, the following individual databases were strategically searched during September 2024 and October 2024 for relevant publications: Criminal Justice Periodical, Social Science Citation Index, Center for Research Libraries, PsycINFO, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Psychological and Behavioral Science Collection, and Project Muse. The search terms were "tf-cbt" AND "female delinquency" AND "self-esteem" AND "recidivism."

Fifth, research obtained from the reference list of relevant articles was gathered.

Inclusion of Studies Criteria

Several criteria were applied while choosing the research to be included in the review. Lower recidivism and higher self-esteem were the relevant outcome factors. To identify a variety of research that addressed TF-CBT, recidivism, and self-esteem, as indicated above, a combination of search phrases was applied. There was not a particular study that specifically discussed all variables or the research question. Therefore, studies were selected if it (a) focused

on female delinquency and recidivism statistics (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019; Conrad et al., 2014; Vitopoulos, 2018;), (b) utilized TF-CBT with female juvenile delinquents to reduce recidivism (Buckingham, 2016; Ford, 2022; Huskey and Tomczak, 2013), and (c) discussed self-esteem concerns among youth who are delinquents (Ford et al., 2012; Knipschild, 2023; Royer-Gagnier, 2015). There was only a total of nine articles that met these criteria.

Studies Screened

Full texts of possibly suitable studies were evaluated, in addition to study titles and abstracts. Studies accepted for coding and data extraction had satisfactorily fulfilled the requirements for inclusion at both screening stages. A detained protocol was followed during coding, which included key word extraction, TF-CBT intervention approaches, study relevance to the population, and variable statistics.

Results

The findings of the systematic review are presented in this section. Quantitative data synthesis was used to evaluate support for a relationship between TF-CBT, female teenage offenders, decreased recidivism, and enhanced self-esteem. To investigate the effects of the variables, the collected records were examined and narratively synthesized.

Systematic Search

During the literature search, 471 unique records were identified, and 433 records were excluded after the initial screening. Of the remaining 55 records, a full-text review resulted in the exclusion of 46 additional records. Of those 46 exclusion records, 19 did not have the correct target population (female adolescent delinquents), 14 did not indicate that TF-CBT was the primary focus of treatment, and 13 did not indicate that recidivism was being addressed. A total of 9 studies were included for the study. See Figure 1.

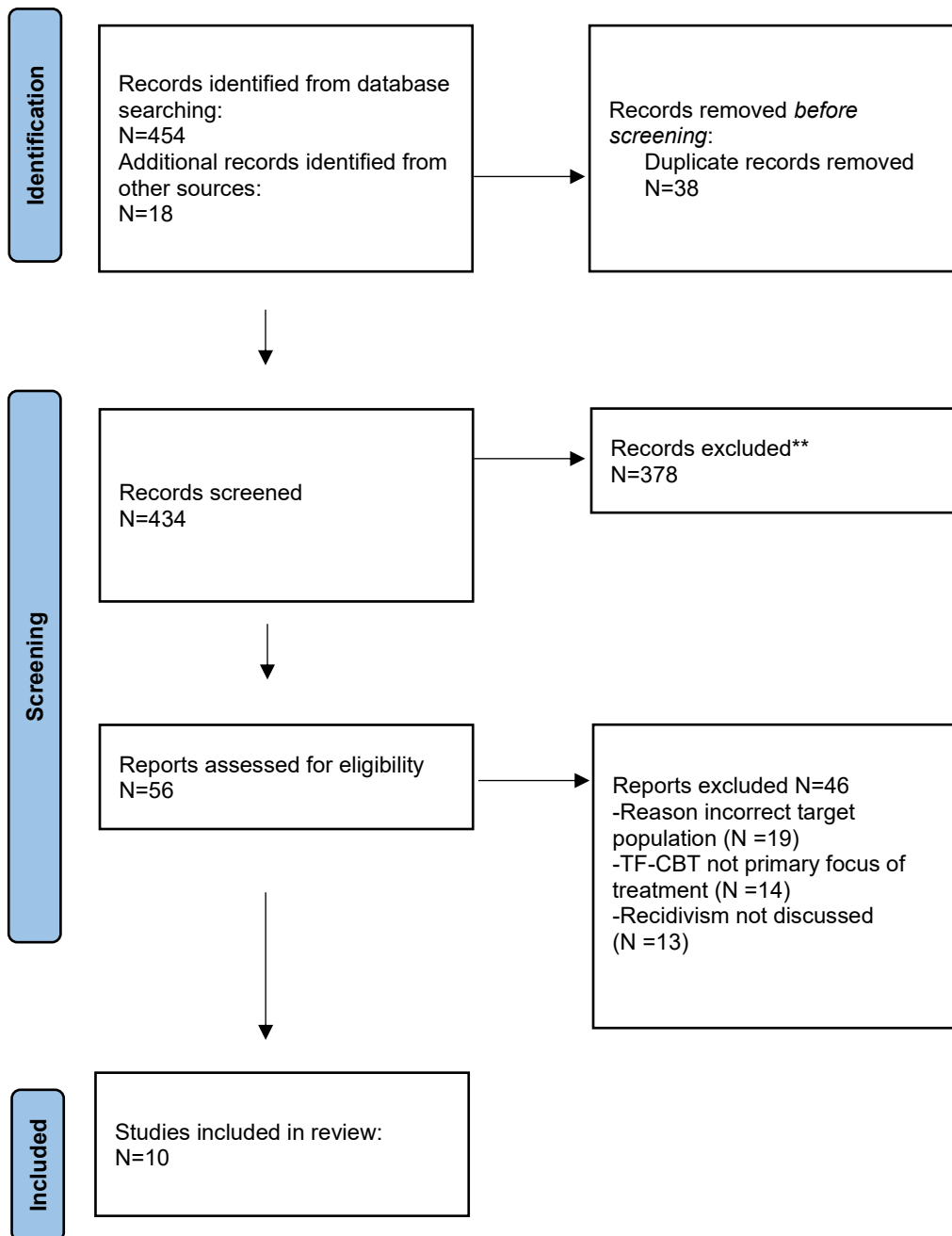


Figure 1: Selection of studies flowchart.

Characteristics of the Included Studies

Every study included was published between 2012 and 2023. Nine of the ten research studies were released in journals with peer reviews. One study was completed in the Netherlands, two studies were completed in Canada, and six studies were completed in the United States.

In general, research including TF-CBT provided a succinct overview of the intervention and emphasized its significance in reducing juvenile delinquency (Buckingham, 2016; Ford, 2022; Ford et al., 2012; Huskey and Tomczak, 2013). For parents or other caregivers of traumatized children and adolescents, TF-CBT is an evidence-based treatment (Ford et al., 2012; Phipps and Thorne, 2019; Thielemann et al., 2022). Numerous studies have demonstrated that TF-CBT effectively addresses a broad range of emotional and behavioral issues linked to individual, multiple, and complex traumatic experiences (Cohen and Mannarino, 2008; Cowles and Davis, 2017; Fitzgerald & Cohen, 2012; Han et al., 2021). Previous studies have not demonstrated that TF-CBT has been explicitly used with female juvenile offenders; nevertheless, the treatment can be modified to effectively treat any demographic, including female teenage offenders (Ford, 2022).

The increasing issue of female delinquency is being actively addressed by policymakers and juvenile justice system professionals (Huskey and Tomczak, 2013). They are working to identify the root causes of the girls' delinquent behavior, which stem from trauma, grief, and loss, and they are developing strategies to counteract it (Buckingham, 2016; Ford, 2022). Juvenile justice workers and clinicians can use the knowledge from articles that particularly addressed TF-CBT, recidivism, and delinquency to battle the criminal behaviors of female delinquents (May et al., 2014).

A large body of research has been written about reducing recidivism among youth offenders in general (Hodgkinson et al., 2020; OJJDP, 2017; Pitts, 2017; Robst, 2017; Robst et al., 2017; Thomann et al., 2020; Zelechowski, 2013) as well as female delinquents and recidivism specifically (Buckingham, 2016; Conrad, 2013; Kerig, 2018; Van Damme et al., 2016; Vitopoulos, 2018). However, only three met the requirements for this study, which dealt with recidivism, female delinquency, and TF-CBT (Buckingham, 2016; Ford, 2022; Huskey & Tomczak, 2013;).

Research on the problems with self-esteem that female offenders encounter is scarce. One of the publications discussed how female offenders' feelings of inadequacy are exacerbated by low self-esteem (Royer-Gagnier, 2015). Furthermore, self-esteem is an issue that needs to be addressed because a female offender's low self-esteem is crucial in regulating their behavior (Knipschild et al., 2023). Knipschild et al. (2023) also addressed the importance of boosting a female delinquent's self-esteem before beginning trauma treatment.

Discussion

There are currently insufficient studies on the value of TF-CBT as a successful intervention to reduce recidivism and increase self-esteem in female juvenile offenders. The impact of traumatic events on female offenders is being elaborated in current qualitative research data, including case studies (Buckingham, 2016; Conrad et al., 2013; Ford, 2022; Ford et al., 2012; Huskey and Tomczak, 2013; Knipschild, 2023; Vitopoulos, 2018). Since it is obvious that

trauma has a direct link to delinquency among female offenders, additional research is needed to address this serious problem.

A number policy and procedural rules that would address each female offender's recidivism concerns should be implemented to reduce female adolescent delinquency. To start, a thorough psychosocial evaluation conducted by clinicians should be conducted to address the offender's family history, mental health, and physical dynamics. To address the female youth's offending behaviors and give them guidance on which specific therapy intervention would be useful in modifying their behavior, a full needs and risks assessment should be conducted by juvenile justice personnel or clinicians on the female delinquent (Astridge et al., 2023; OJJDP, 2015; Vitopoulos, 2018). Third, it is recommended that TF-CBT and other evidence-based therapy interventions tailored especially for female adolescent offenders be selected and employed to offer psychoeducation to this group, helping them to abstain from delinquent behaviors (OJJDP, 2019; Sevecke et al., 2016).

Research focused on increasing self-esteem among female adolescents to decrease their recidivism rates was rare. A youth's self-worth is tied to their self-esteem and is necessary for continued improvement with their behavior (Tomek et al., 2020). Research addressing this issue is important to create policy and implement changes with female delinquents (Tomek et al., 2020). More information is needed regarding the impact of self-esteem relating to female delinquency. The studies included in this report lack prominent information regarding the relationship between the variables of self-esteem and female adolescent delinquency. Though Knipschild et al. (2023) addresses the impact that trauma affects "poor self-esteem," more information is needed as it relates to female delinquency. In addition, Ford et al. (2012) discusses self-esteem and female delinquency, but it lacks a thorough knowledge with the correlation.

There were limitations of this review. First, there were no studies that directly examined the relationship between TF-CBT, decreased recidivism, and improved self-esteem among female adolescent females. Since female adolescent delinquency is a significant problem addressed by governmental officials, policymakers, community leaders, and juvenile justice professionals, it is crucial that more research in this area done. Second, the majority of the articles during the original search concentrated on male criminality, with only a small number addressing female delinquency. However, to give juvenile justice staff and government organizations the knowledge needed to implement changes to this population, female delinquency and its causes must be addressed.

Conclusion

According to the current comprehensive review, therapeutic interventions like TF-CBT are necessary for female juvenile offenders to improve their functioning, lower recidivism, and boost their self-esteem. TF-CBT is an effective evidenced-based intervention used with adolescents and their caregivers to improve traumatic experiences. The analysis of this study shows the continued need for additional research on combating female delinquency that would benefit the juvenile justice system, policy makers, governmental officials, and clinicians. To reduce recidivism and increase self-esteem among female adolescent delinquents, needs and risk assessments should be conducted, and trauma-focused treatment should be utilized.

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ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF EDUCATORS ON AGING: IMPACTS ON CURRICULUM PLANNING

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Abstract

The study aimed to understand how educators view aging and how their past experiences with older adults and personal comfort level with aging influence their beliefs and desire to teach about aging topics. Ageism begins in childhood and creates adverse health risks for older adults. Educators are crucial in preventing ageist attitudes, but most lack adequate knowledge about aging. The study involved 13 educators from Arizona, California, and Illinois and found that support from administrators and parents, professional training, and appropriate aging materials are more important than educators' personal attitudes toward aging. The results indicate a need for more recent research in this area and emphasize the necessity of understanding why aging is not a standard part of elementary school curricula and the educators' role in this process.

Keywords: ageism, children, discrimination, educators, education, older adults, policy

Attitudes and Beliefs of Educators on Aging: Impacts on Curriculum Planning

With the aging population, the proportion of older adults has significantly increased. In 2019, adults aged 65 and older accounted for 16% of the U.S. population, and by 2040, this figure is projected to rise to 21.6% (Administration on Aging, 2021). This demographic shift has brought to the forefront a pressing issue: ageism. Ageism, a prevalent form of discrimination, is a growing concern (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017). It is characterized by prejudice, discrimination, or stereotypes towards someone based on their age (Raynor, 2015). Ageism marginalizes older adults and influences their behaviors and how others interact with them (McGuire, 2017). The detrimental effects of ageism on the mental and physical health of older adults are significant. Recognizing the valuable contributions of older adults and fostering a culture that values and respects people of all ages is therefore imperative.

Negative attitudes and low expectations about aging are related to worse cognitive, mental, and physical health outcomes in older adulthood. These attitudes are often shaped early in life. Research has shown that endorsement of negative stereotypes can transform into self-fulfillment of these stereotypes as we age (Whatley & Castel, 2020). Although generations hardly differ in their life goals, values, work behavior, concerns, or social and political engagement, generational identity is a powerful social category that may build the basis for an important social identification (Weiss & Zhang, 2020). It is important to recognize that negative attitudes toward aging can have a lasting impact on individuals and society. Therefore, we must challenge ageism and promote a fair and inclusive environment for people of all ages. By doing so, we can ensure that all members of society are valued and respected, regardless of age (Donizetti, 2019).

One benefit to living longer is the additional time to enjoy life, but living longer can also present challenges concerning housing, income, changes in health status, and social support; therefore, it is beneficial for individuals to prepare for their future (Li et al., 2018). Education about aging can prepare people for the stages of life leading to older adulthood, promote positive attitudes about aging, and help decrease or end ageism (McGuire, 2017). Knowledge and preparation for the various stages of life can significantly impact the quality of one's life. Most importantly, ageist preconceptions and concerns about growing older will become obsolete if we teach children that growing older is a natural part of life and train them to understand and value the contributions of older adults (McGuire, 2017). Ultimately, teaching aging education to children in elementary school could promote empathy and dispel misconceptions about aging. In addition to intergenerational activities, these efforts may reduce the development of ageist ideas and beliefs and help decrease ageism (Aldrup et al., 2022).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand elementary school educators' perspectives on integrating lessons on aging into current curricula. Teachers may be ageist and oblivious to their own acceptance of myths and stereotypes (Doyle et al., 2023). The attitudes and opinions of educators can significantly impact the implementation of an aging curriculum. Despite the proven effectiveness of interventions that mitigate ageism, it remains unclear why aging-related

subjects are seldom covered in the typical elementary school curriculum (Burnes et al., 2019). Therefore, evaluating how well educators comprehend and embrace aging is crucial, as this may influence their readiness and willingness to teach about aging-related topics. Unfortunately, most teachers lack knowledge about aging, as highlighted in various studies (Huang, 2012).

Integrating lessons on aging into the current curricula can offer a well-rounded education to elementary school students (Crawford, 2015). By teaching children about aging, we can foster empathy and understanding toward the elderly population while preparing them for potential changes they may experience as they grow older (Kasper & Massey, 2023). Integrating lessons on aging can positively impact young students, enabling them to develop essential life skills while promoting a more compassionate and understanding society. As such, it is crucial to continue advocating for the inclusion of aging-related subjects in curricula and encouraging educators to embrace and teach these important topics to their students.

Problem Statement

Ageism is harmful to older adults, as research shows a strong link between ageism in the form of negative stereotypes, negative attitudes about aging, discrimination toward older adults, and adverse risks to physical and mental health (Burnes et al., 2019). Ageism begins in childhood, so it is necessary to take a serious look at how to eliminate the problem before it exists. There is sufficient data to justify interventions to reduce or prevent ageist attitudes from developing in children; however, society has not broadly embraced or implemented educational interventions (Burnes et al., 2019). As a result, there is no proactive system to educate and prepare individuals to understand the complex phenomenon of aging and the aging-related decisions that they and society will have to make in the future. This is especially true for students in elementary school who receive very little exposure to aging content (Crawford, 2015).

Whether or not teachers are involved in the curriculum development process, they are the most critical in curriculum implementation because they introduce the curriculum to students (Alsubaie, 2016), so their thoughts and opinions matter. Implementing aging education in elementary schools should be built on teachers' thorough knowledge of aging and older adults and their positive attitudes toward them. However, since most teachers do not know enough about aging, it is essential to examine how well educators comprehend and accept aging, as their understanding may affect their willingness to teach about aging-related topics (Huang, 2012).

Research Question

RQ 3: How do the attitudes and beliefs of elementary school educators influence their interest and willingness to include topics on lifespan aging in elementary school curricula?

Significance of the study

A basic qualitative research design was used for this study. The foundation of qualitative research is that people construct knowledge continuously as they participate in and interpret an activity, experience, or phenomenon (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This study examined ageism and elementary school educators' aging perspectives. A qualitative design was the best approach because of the detailed information needed to understand this phenomenon. More specifically, a

descriptive exploratory approach to understanding educators' beliefs via in-depth individual interviews provided insight into their backgrounds and experiences, shaping their views about aging (Bhangu et al., 2023). A basic qualitative study's main objective is to discover and analyze how meaning is created or how people make sense of their lives and the world around them (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

The proposed sample for this study was 12 elementary school educators from across the country. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling and involves requesting participants to refer other participants while being interviewed (Creswell, 2019). The request can be made during the interview or at any point of contact with the participant. The foundation of purposeful sampling is that the researcher wants to understand, comprehend, and acquire insight from the participants (Douglas, 2022).

Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Framework

This study examined educators' perspectives on teaching aging education in elementary schools and the problem of ageism directed toward older adults. Educators with more favorable attitudes toward aging are more inclined to teach about it in the classroom (Huang, 2012). Therefore, two theoretical frameworks informed this study: The life course perspective (Bengtson, 2016) and stereotype embodiment theory (Meisner & Levy, 2016).

The life course perspective provides context on how educators' views on aging are shaped by their life experiences, environment, and cultural beliefs due to the institutional structuring of lives (Bengtson et al., 2012). Likewise, stereotype embodiment theory explains how and why individuals, including educators, can internalize ageist thoughts as they grow older (Steward, 2022). Both theoretical frameworks guide this study in addressing the research questions. As a theoretical orientation, the life course perspective emphasizes the importance of historical conditions and change for understanding individual development (Bengtson et al., 2012). For example, the current increase in the older adult population is attributed to increased births after World War II, a generation known as the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964).

Likewise, the attitudes and beliefs of today's educators have been shaped by the events and societal conditions during their lifetime. Like everyone else, educators have been exposed to a lifetime of messages concerning aging. Stereotypes about the aging process and older adults become internalized throughout life from societal messages over time from childhood through older adulthood (Kim et al., 2019). Unfortunately, many of these messages are negative and impact people's thoughts and ideas about aging. Decades of internalizing negative age stereotypes throughout the lifespan result in ageism (Steward, 2022). There is an overlap in the theoretical concepts of the life course perspective and stereotype embodiment theory because both explain the impact of messages and experiences over time.

Individuals begin internalizing messages about aging before they reach older adulthood. While stereotype embodiment theory is valuable for conceptualizing how internalized ageism affects older adults, it also defines implicit age stereotypes and attitudes (Steward, 2022). Implicit age stereotypes and attitudes are thoughts about the attributes and behaviors of older

adults that exist and operate without conscious control, awareness, or intention (Comincioli et al., 2022). Implicit biases and attitudes result in prejudgment of people before getting to know them. For example, an employer may review the resume of an older job candidate and immediately assume that the person will have difficulty keeping up with technology or the workflow before interviewing the candidate and assessing their qualifications (Gonzales et al., 2021). It is essential to know how educators think and feel about teaching aging topics because people with implicit ageist attitudes and stereotypes about aging may not be consciously aware of the negative influence on their decisions. For example, teachers may have difficulty recognizing aging myths and stereotypes because they may hold ageist viewpoints. Similarly, American teachers' opinions toward aging are not very favorable (Huang 2012).

Literature Review

Defining Ageism

The significant increase in the older adult population should force society to consider aging a social problem (Donizzetti, 2019). While the socioeconomic impact of an aging society requires a paradigm shift in how we all think about what it means to grow older, aging is not the problem—society's attitude towards aging is the problem. Negative attitudes towards the Life Course Perspective, as described by Bengtson et al. (2012) and the Stereotype Embodiment Theory by Levy (2018), suggest that aging and older adults may be viewed as a social problem. Conversely, many people were taught to respect their elders, which became mentally ingrained throughout life, as demonstrated when people instinctively and spontaneously hold the door for an older adult, offer their seat as a courtesy, or refer to older adults as sir or ma'am (Shamsikhani et al., 2022). Reverence towards older adults may also be attributed to cultural values. It is somewhat puzzling how people can be respectful while also engaging in ageist activities, such as making harmful jokes about older adults or dismissing older adults as insignificant and non-productive members of society.

Contrary to popular belief, older adults are not a homogenous group of people, and the spread of age-related stereotypes has been attributed to a lack of knowledge about aging. As a result, ageism manifests in stereotypical images and discrimination, depriving older adults of their right to be perceived as unique individuals with positive and negative attributes (Gergov & Asenova, 2012). Most individuals do not intentionally discriminate against older adults, nor are they always aware that their thoughts and actions are ageist. Ageism is a system of prejudice and unfavorable attitudes toward older individuals, including cognitive and emotional processes (Kang & Kim, 2021).

Ageism is an equal opportunity offender because it can eventually impact everyone, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, education, and economic status (Marques et al., 2020). At the core of ageism is individuals' view of older adults as someone "other" than themselves presently or in the future. The constant reference to people beyond age 65 as "those people" perpetuates aging as an unavoidable, unfortunate, and undesirable status in life (Weiss & Zhang, 2020).

Educational Interventions

Being knowledgeable and prepared for the various stages of life can make a difference in the quality of one's life. As the adage goes, "knowledge is power," and knowledge about aging allows people to make informed decisions regarding life choices that will impact their future. For this reason, children should be taught age-appropriate facts about aging in elementary school to dispel stereotypes and prepare them for older adulthood (Langer, 1999; McGuire, 2017). In addition, children should learn to respect people of diverse ages and experiences and acknowledge that aging is a normal part of human growth. Most essential, older individuals should not be stereotyped because they are not a homogeneous population. When introducing aging content to young children, there is a chance that this knowledge may take root before they develop beliefs based on misinformation (Lamb, 2021). However, for older children who have already formed opinions, this new knowledge will hopefully dispel negative attitudes and beliefs about aging and older adults.

Interventions aimed at changing attitudes toward aging and older adults can take place at any stage of life and can benefit not only children but also younger adults (Burnes et al., 2019). Numerous studies have demonstrated that strategies such as intergenerational activities can effectively reduce ageism (Flamion et al., 2019; Thompson & Weaver, 2016). In addition, Marshall (2015) identified a different approach that has been proven to alter perceptions of aging and old age: showing students a video followed by discussions. It can be argued that courses on aging should be as fundamental as math, English, and reading, given their relevance in preparing students for successful life transitions (Estebesari et al., 2020). Moreover, integrating aging education into primary education should become a standard practice. According to Langer (1999), it is only at a young age that seeds can be sown for a generation free from prejudice against older adults. Researchers could make significant strides in combating ageism by employing effective strategies and investing in innovative research (WHO, 2021).

The Global Meeting on Ageism stressed the relevance and urgency of moving research to the next level by beginning to implement recommendations (WHO, 2021). With evidence-based recommendations for teaching and encouraging positive thoughts and interactions among children toward aging and older adults, the next step is to effectively strategize how to infuse aging education into elementary school curricula. According to McGuire (2017), strategies could be implemented immediately with proven outcomes. In 1999, Texas, New York, Connecticut, Mississippi, and Missouri began to include aging education in their elementary and secondary curriculum (Langer, 1999; Lucchino et al., 1997). Unfortunately, many programs remain undocumented. The bottom line is that educational interventions can improve older adults' well-being and quality of life by teaching facts about aging and increasing awareness of ageist attitudes (Ayalon & TeschRömer, 2018).

Examples of how to Infuse Aging Content into Existing Elementary School Curricula

Krout and Waslyiw (2002) described an infusion model process to expose children in grades 7-12 to information on aging. The process entailed infusing aging-related material into existing courses rather than developing a separate discipline on aging (Novak, 2019). Educators preferred the idea of infusion because it did not require them to take on more coursework (Lin, 2018). Gerontology is a multidisciplinary social science that can be included in several subjects.

The authors detailed a step-by-step process and partnered with Ithaca College and a middle/high school in Ithaca, NY. Social studies teachers agreed to participate in the project (Novak, 2019). The authors described the challenges, such as scheduling times to train the teachers on gerontology content and offering advice to allow teachers to control their schedules (Howell & Guest, 2024). The college gerontology program provided information and student teachers to assist with the curriculum design. The project's key to success was recognizing teachers' professional experience and increasing their knowledge and prestige by encouraging their creative efforts rather than administrators imposing what they should accomplish (Howell & Guest, 2024). Teachers chose gerontology topics to include in sections of the social studies curriculum. This program was successful because the teachers created lessons demonstrating how effectively age-related information could be incorporated into current school curricula.

In 1978, the California Department of Education (CDE) drafted the "Handbook for Instruction on Aging in California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve." The handbook was designed to guide teachers and administrators in developing a curriculum on aging as part of their daily classroom activities. The content of this handbook and the project's purpose are still relevant today. However, it has been over 40 years since this handbook was created. According to K. McDonald, who currently works in the Curriculum Frameworks Unit at CDE, there are no records to provide follow-up information concerning the outcome of this project (personal communication, November 10, 2021). McDonald explained that the CDE does not track the implementation of materials or how they are used in the classroom. The goals of the affective domain in aging education are to familiarize students with attitudes and values that they may learn to incorporate as part of themselves, from awareness to internalization (Lowey 2020). Aging education affects both cognitive knowledge and affective learning. The WHO (2021c) concluded that a combination of instruction to educate on the facts of aging and dispel stereotypes is needed in addition to activities to promote empathy, such as role-plays, discussion groups, and games.

One of the most basic arguments for educating children about aging is that children will grow up and become voters who, in turn, make decisions that will directly impact themselves as they age and the health and well-being of other older adults (Langer, 1999). The more knowledgeable people are about the realities of aging as opposed to myths and stereotypes, the more likely their lives will result in more positive outcomes. The youth of today will address tomorrow's social challenges (Bergman, 2021). Therefore, it is up to parents, educators, and society to provide the knowledge and skills children need to grow into adulthood. Providing children with aging education not only helps them as individuals but also contributes to the future of society. However, to educate children on aging, it is necessary to gain the interest and cooperation of educators (Zhang et al., 2021).

Educators' Perspectives on Teaching Aging Education

There is a plethora of empirical evidence that introducing children to aging-related content positively influences their attitudes and understanding of aging, provides them with accurate information about the aging process, prepares them for future stages of life, and may prevent the development of ageism (Lichtenstein et al., 2001; McGuire, 2017; Wurtele &

Maruyama, 2013). Teaching children about aging is not a new concept, and there is evidence that some entities have attempted to guide the development and implementation of aging content into elementary school curricula (California State Department of Education, 1978). The question yet to be answered is why elementary schools across the country have not incorporated topics on aging into existing curricula. It is unknown how many elementary or secondary schools teach aging education, and the limited data on this topic suggests that there are very few. The answer could be as simple as a society not realizing the value of aging education as many competing interests exist. Perhaps studying the aging process and preparing for later stages of life are not very high on the educational agenda.

According to Davis and Soka (2019), teachers may be reluctant to incorporate aging content into curricula. The question is, why? Are teachers reluctant based on attitude, lack of knowledge, training, or personal beliefs? This section reviews research to understand educators' perspectives on the value and importance of teaching aging education. In elementary schools, implementing aging education should be grounded in teachers' sound knowledge of and positive attitudes toward aging and older adults (Huang, 2012). In this context, attitude is how individuals regard a person, idea, or institution (Bergman, 2021). Huang explored differences among teachers in Taiwan, Japan, and the United States regarding their knowledge and attitudes about aging and how to implement aging education in elementary and secondary schools.

The development of new curricula and programs on aging education will significantly depend on the attitudes of current and future educators and administrators (Bergman, 2021). Therefore, Huang (2012) assessed how knowledge and attitude determined the likelihood of teachers implementing aging education in their courses. Huang questioned whether the cultural customs of older adults living with their children and grandchildren positively influenced the knowledge and attitudes of Taiwanese teachers because many of them grew up among older adults. The findings refuted this assumption: The Taiwanese teachers scored lower on the survey than their American counterparts, indicating that living among older adults did not necessarily provide additional knowledge about aging (Huang, 2012).

While people may live among older family members, without proper education concerning older adults and the aging process, their understanding may be rooted in myths and traditions (Whatley & Castel, 2020). Although the status of older adults eroding in Eastern culture may be accurate, it is also true that education on aging is as non-existent in Taiwan as it is in America. Over 93% of Taiwanese teachers have no formal education in aging or gerontology nor participated in training courses before becoming a teacher or once in the classroom (Huang, 2012). The data indicated no significant difference in teachers' attitudes toward aging or how often aging education is taught in Eastern or Western cultures. Additionally, some studies conducted in the U.S. demonstrated that American teachers' attitudes toward aging are not firmly positive (Gross & Eshbaugh, 2019).

These facts speak to the importance of teachers feeling prepared and comfortable with their level of knowledge on aging content. Suppose teachers do not feel qualified to teach about aging. In that case, they are less likely to include it in the curriculum (Davis & Soka, 2019). This may explain why teachers are reluctant to introduce aging information to their students,

resulting in little exposure to aging education. Equally important are the teachers' personal views on aging. If teachers have ageist attitudes and beliefs, it is unlikely that they will advocate for teaching aging education (Bergman, 2021). Huang (2012) produced convincing data; however, adding a narrative of the teachers' personal experiences would produce richer content and give deeper context to the teachers' responses. While knowledge and attitudes predict whether teachers will include aging content in their courses, the significant finding of this research is that attitude is critical. Teachers with more positive attitudes toward aging are more likely to teach aging in the classroom (Huang, 2012). Thus, the issue of how to cultivate teachers' positive attitudes toward aging is more important than how to increase teachers' knowledge about aging. Teaching topics on aging will require teachers to honestly assess their understanding and acceptance of aging (Swabey & Pullen, 2014).

Methodology

A basic qualitative research design was used for this study. The foundation of qualitative research is that people construct knowledge continuously as they participate in and interpret an activity, experience, or phenomenon (Busetto et al., 2020). This study examined educators' thoughts and beliefs about aging. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, if aging education is proposed to be taught in elementary schools, understanding educators' perspectives on this topic will help guide the process. Therefore, due to the detailed information needed to understand this phenomenon, a qualitative design was the best, specifically, a descriptive exploratory approach, to get a deeper understanding of educators' beliefs. The interpretive framework for this research is social constructivism.

Educators' perceptions of aging are rooted in their life experiences, cultural values, beliefs, and influences. Interpretivist perspectives recognize the intricate relationship between behaviors, attitudes, external structures, and sociocultural issues (Tashakkori et al., 2021). A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because engaging participants in a meaningful and thoughtful discussion was necessary to understand how educators understand aging and interpret their thoughts and beliefs on this topic (Negrin et al., 2022). The qualitative approach allowed me to ask probing questions concerning the participant's background, past experiences with older adults, their cultural values and beliefs concerning aging, and how they processed their own aging. Understanding how people make meaning of their lives and experiences is the primary goal of the qualitative research design (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Research Design

This study followed a basic qualitative research design. Qualitative research is used when researchers want to explore a problem and need a detailed understanding of the issue (Busetto et al., 2020). The research question could best be addressed by talking directly with individuals in their environment and allowing them to tell their in-depth stories (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). A qualitative design was appropriate for this study because the participants could describe their experiences with a focus on understanding how they constructed knowledge during these experiences (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Basic qualitative research design is a common form of research in the discipline of education, and it allows for data collection in the form of interviews,

observation, and any relevant documents (Negrin et al., 2022). Data for this study were gathered using semi-structured interviews with photo elicitation, which involved using photos or images to assist participants with memory recall of past experiences. A basic qualitative research design requires that data be evaluated for themes and patterns for the researcher to fully comprehend how participants create their reality; therefore, the data analysis involves identifying the recurring patterns (Busetto et al., 2020). This study coded all data sources for themes and patterns and analyzed them to understand educators' perspectives on aging and how they constructed knowledge through their life experiences.

Sample Selection

Nonprobability sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research. Purposeful sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling, and this approach was used to gather data in this study (Busetto et al., 2020). Nonprobability sampling entails choosing participants based on their accessibility, practicality, and representation of the study's required characteristics (Creswell, 2019). In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon; thus, researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing population members to participate in their research (Campbell et al., 2020). Furthermore, constructivist-oriented researchers frequently employ a theoretical or purposive approach to sampling, which starts by pinpointing the individuals, settings, and groups where the processes under investigation are most likely to occur (Foley et al., 2021).

This type of sampling was appropriate for this study because the participant group selected, educators, could provide rich information and were the direct source under investigation (Staller, 2021). Participants for this study were selected based on their current employment status as educators in an elementary school located in the United States. This study defines elementary schools as kindergarten through sixth grade. Knowing the exact number of participants needed to answer the research questions was challenging; however, sampling should occur until a point of saturation or redundancy is reached, meaning that no new information is forthcoming (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This study's targeted number of participants was 10 to 12, with males and females, private and public schools, and individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds. To better understand the constructed knowledge of this population, diversity was sought to capture nuances based on culture, age, gender, and life experiences. The assumption was that all of these characteristics contributed to the constructed knowledge of the participants.

To recruit participants, an email was sent to known current educators, retired educators, and others who knew educators working in the U.S. The email briefly overviewed the dissertation topic and requested participation. Additionally, recipients of the email were asked to forward the invitation to other potential participants, known as snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling and involves requesting participants to refer other participants while being interviewed (Creswell, 2019). The foundation of purposeful sampling is that the researcher wants to understand, comprehend, and acquire insight from the participants (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Data Collection

Data for this research study was collected using a list of open-ended questions, also known as an interview guide. The questions were sent to the participants before the interview to allow time to process the questions and provide more detailed information. The consent form was also sent by email. All participants were instructed to sign, scan, and return the consent form by email. The primary tool used for data collection was the Zoom virtual platform. Since COVID-19 pandemic restrictions transitioned in-person qualitative research interviews to virtual platforms, Zoom has become very popular and proven effective for research (Olliffe et al., 2021).

Participants were sent a Zoom invitation link with the agreed-upon date and time for the interview. Participants who did not currently have Zoom were instructed to download the app at no charge. Once participants entered the meeting, they were asked for permission to record the session. Permission to record the interview was also requested on the consent form. Once approval was granted, the recording began. The virtual interview was treated as an in-person interview, and notes were taken of what was observed during the interview, such as body language and nonverbal cues.

The questions sent to the participants before the interview were intermittently shown on the screen and used as a prompt to keep the interview moving. Since photo elicitation was also incorporated into the interview, participants were asked to show their photo or image as they answered questions and shared their stories. At the end of the interview, participants were allowed to add any feedback they missed or wanted to contribute. The online interviews continued until all 10-12 proposed participants were interviewed, or saturation occurred when continued data collection produced no new information or insights into the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2019).

Interviews were scheduled on Zoom for one to two weeks based on the participants' availability. Each interview was scheduled to last approximately 30-45 minutes. After the interview, participants were provided a \$50 Amazon eGift Card for their time and participation. The interviews were recorded in Zoom, and a Zoom transcript was generated for data analysis. A copy of the Rev-generated transcript was emailed to participants for review and member checking. The participants could make any additions or changes at that time. Once member checking was completed, data analysis continued.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis begins during data collection. The data analysis process started at the point of contact with participants by taking notes during the interviews, reading the transcripts, and reviewing written answers to questions (Douglas, 2022). Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data used to answer the research questions, and these answers are called categories, themes, or findings (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). While reviewing the data, notations were made. The process of making notations next to bits of data that may be relevant for answering the research questions is called coding (Negrin et al., 2022). Coding was used to organize and manage data used in this research, and each participant interview was labeled, along with any corresponding notes, so they could be easily identified.

The data analysis process evolved from open coding to analytical coding. Open coding occurs at the beginning of the analysis when the researcher identifies any segment of data that might be useful and makes notes in the margin (Busetto et al., 2020). After reviewing the entire transcript, similar codes were grouped into the same category: analytical coding. Reading the transcripts line by line, themes were highlighted using different colors to identify similar themes. Once the themes were exhausted, the data were interpreted to answer the research questions and then summarized. In qualitative analysis, the findings from the research are reported in a narrative discussion, which is a detailed written summary (Creswell, 2019).

Results

The analysis of the findings from the study is discussed in this section. The codes were identified using a thematic data analysis approach to indicate a data segment's meaning. During the interview, some participants responded to questions interconnected with others. However, it was necessary to follow the flow of their thinking rather than stick rigidly to the order of the interview questions. As a result of the unpredicted and redundant participant responses, additional probing questions were used to elicit the best responses to the research questions. The research question used in this study was:

RQ 3: How do the attitudes and beliefs of elementary school educators influence their interest and willingness to include topics on lifespan aging in elementary school curricula

Interest in Adding Aging Content

The Research Question elicited answers from participants to describe their interest in including aging topics in their curriculum. From the data, three additional sub-themes emerged: (1) the advantages or disadvantages of adding aging topics to the current curriculum, (2) the perceived challenges and barriers to adding aging topics to the curriculum, and (3) what assistance would be needed to facilitate adding aging content to their current curriculum. While many participants shared that they had never considered including aging topics in their curriculum, they all expressed an interest when asked. A few could conceptualize how they would present the material and what messages they wanted to stress. The participants also began to visualize how infusing aging content in their curriculum would impact the students.

According to Bratt et al. (2020), childhood is the most appropriate time to introduce children to facts about aging as this could be a critical period for activities aimed at avoiding ageism and promoting positive views of older people. Data in the present study revealed that participants feel strongly that the curriculum should include age-appropriate aging topics for each grade level. Their thoughts align with findings in the literature review, which indicate that teaching aging education will allow children to understand life's journey and what happens at various stages in life and be prepared to experience it without any fear or anxiety. By preparing students for the different stages of life, aging education benefits society's future since these students will eventually become adults who will make laws and regulations that affect older individuals and who will also care for them (Fletcher et al., 2021).

The data indicated that participants also believe that incorporating aging topics in the curriculum will allow children to understand the choices they make now, the people they surround themselves with, and the way they communicate with each other all form the person they will be in adulthood. Children will also learn to respect people of all ages and experiences and understand that aging is a natural process of human development. Surprisingly, the findings indicate that age might influence educators' interest in adding aging content. Based on the data, educators in the 45-74 range were more open to discussing the topic of aging and appreciated the interest in the subject. While the participants answered questions concerning their interest in teaching aging issues, they also raised questions concerning time, resources, training, and feasibility.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The participants were asked to elaborate on the advantages and disadvantages of including aging topics in elementary school curricula. The findings indicate that the benefits outweigh any disadvantages. The participants expressed general disadvantages for educators, such as an increased workload, lack of time and resources, and the need for teacher preparedness. A few participants also shared advantages and disadvantages from the student's perspective. There are many reasons why teaching children about aging is critical to discussing ageism. For example, children as young as three years can have negative ideas about older adults, and children between the ages of five and eight have already developed negative attitudes and behaviors toward older people (Bergman, 2021).

The study results found that participants overwhelmingly agreed that there are many advantages to including aging in the curriculum. For example, including aging in the curriculum would teach children to understand and appreciate human development, have a much more robust understanding of discrimination, understand empathy and compassion, and learn how to show more respect to older adults. One participant stated, "Aging can be one topic under the social-emotional bucket that can bring value to students and educators." Now is the time to begin teaching children about the lifelong journey of aging (Zhang et al., 2022).

Infusing aging content into elementary school curricula may be a good first step. Aging education can be beneficial as it can prevent or minimize the development in children of ageist ideas and stereotypes about aging and older adults (Burnes et al., 2019; Crawford, 2015; McGuire, 2017). The data in this study indicate that participants agree with the above findings. Again, as mentioned before, the disadvantages primarily involved educators' time and resources.

Two unexpected findings that are worth noting are that teaching children about aging may reinforce negative perceptions if not done correctly and educators' concern that there is a possibility that the students may not be interested. It is questionable why students' lack of interest is viewed as a challenge relative to any other subjects they may or may not be interested in, e.g., math, science, or English. However, specific topics are mandated, and perhaps, to be fair, educators may consider a student's lack of interest in any subject a challenge.

Challenges and Barriers

The second theme revolves around the challenges or barriers participants face in incorporating topics related to aging into the school curriculum. Participants were asked to describe any known or foreseen hurdles that might impede the inclusion of such topics in the curriculum. The findings indicate a consensus among the participants concerning the challenge with time, as most expressed the struggle of not having additional time to teach another topic and not feeling prepared. In addition, participants indicated that adding something new to the already heavy workload and responsibilities would be challenging. However, a few said that if the subject of aging were already packaged or infused in a current course, it is more likely that the topic of aging would be taught.

Ross (2022) described an infusion model process such as scheduling times to train the teachers on gerontology content and offering advice to allow teachers to control their schedules. This model entails infusing aging-related material into existing courses rather than developing a separate discipline on aging. Educators preferred the idea of infusion as it did not require them to take on more coursework. While educators know the importance of and welcome the idea of including topics of lifespan aging in the school curricula, they are also mindful of its challenges and barriers. Then, there is the possibility of pushback from the administration and parents (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Another participant stated a possible barrier would be “the school district not wanting to teach or include it.”

Six participants stated time, four said parents/adults, and two mentioned the school district or administration as a challenge or barrier. The obvious findings indicate that challenges are expected when implementing new information, such as providing professional development to introduce and teach the subject. The participants revealed they do not know enough and are uncomfortable teaching the subject. The one unexpected challenge was parental consent. Educators working in private and public schools felt parental approval was necessary to infuse aging topics into their curriculum.

Discussion

The final theme focused on participants' assistance needs, including topics on aging in their current curriculum. Several participants shared that they were unprepared and would need training. The participants agreed that professional development would be beneficial to assist in this area. However, the participants also believe it can pose some challenges. The challenges include finances in implementing programs, teacher participation due to workload, and parental involvement. In addition, participants felt they did not have enough information and training to implement such a curriculum without assistance.

While several articles support teacher training, questions remain about how teachers are prepared to teach aging education in elementary school. For example, Sim et al. (2023) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2024) specified that training is needed to inform teachers and guide them through creating and infusing aging content into existing curricula. If teachers are provided detailed, age-appropriate content to include in their existing curriculum, the likelihood of students receiving an aging education may significantly increase. Furthermore, teachers working

with gerontologists or other aging professionals can be a valuable resource in helping to develop relevant, interactive, student-centered content (Pruski et al., 2004).

Therefore, teachers should be provided training to strengthen their knowledge of aging, dispel myths, and promote a positive attitude toward teaching aging courses (Davis & Soka, 2019; Huang, 2012; Mendoza-Núñez et al., 2007). The results revealed that participants are open to new ideas but need a clear pathway of understanding through professional development so that there is a shared understanding of what it means when talking about aging and development and how it is influenced throughout the classroom. Alsubaie (2016) stated that the most critical person in the curriculum implementation process is the teacher, who is responsible for introducing the curriculum in the classroom.

The findings in this present study support the recommendations of the studies found in the literature review. The participants provided candid and detailed feedback concerning what they would need to infuse aging material into their current curriculum. A few participants had creative ideas for making the added topic of aging enjoyable for their students. The findings include the need for training, buy-in from parents and administrators, resources that contain exciting and interactive student materials, and a clear pathway for professional development.

One of the administrators in the study commented that professional development would ensure everyone is on the same page and that instruction to the students would be accurate, consistent, and delivered professionally. The most compelling comment was from a more seasoned participant who said, “We need the mindset, emphasizing the importance of the subject and why it’s needed.” The participants shared that it may be necessary to convince younger educators of the importance of teaching students about aging, as they may not deem it necessary. The statement proved to be true during the study. When asked about the importance of including aging topics in the elementary school curriculum, one of the younger participants responded: “I’m not sure if it is something that should be prioritized, and I think you’d have to convince me to carve out time and space on the schedule to discuss it.” The data indicate that younger educators should be added to the list of possible challenges and barriers to incorporating aging topics in elementary school.

Conclusion

We are living in a unique time in world history, particularly in the United States, where population aging is often portrayed as an impending crisis that will significantly impact the institutional foundations of society. While these portrayals are often negative, they have drawn attention to some of our society’s challenges now and in the future. Ageism is harmful to older adults, and there is a strong link between ageism in the form of negative stereotypes, negative attitudes about aging, discrimination toward older adults, and adverse risks to their physical and mental health (Burnes et al., 2019). Additionally, because ageism begins in childhood, it is necessary to take steps to prevent the cycle from repeating itself.

Beginning in elementary school, education on aging-related content is needed to disprove myths and prevent the development of negative attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes about growing older and older adults (Burnes et al., 2019; Crawford, 2015). Educators are on the front

line of this strategy, and surveys have indicated that American teachers' attitudes toward aging are not particularly favorable (Friedman, 1997; Sim et al., 2023).

This present study explored the findings described in the literature review by interviewing educators about how they perceived aging. In addition, this study sought to understand how perceptions on aging were developed, how relationships with older adults impacted perspectives on aging, and finally, how these perceptions influenced interest in teaching topics on aging. Elementary school educators trained on the fundamentals of aging topics must include aging content in their curriculum. As was mentioned earlier, aging education has a natural fit with curricula related to identity development; however, as a multidisciplinary science, the topic can be integrated into any program. Participants repeatedly stressed what is needed to facilitate this effort: Support from parents and school administrators, training on the topic, resources in the form of materials, and an existing program that can easily be integrated without adding additional time to their already stretched schedule.

According to Chang et al. (2020), ageism is deeply ingrained in Western culture, and while it will not disappear immediately, intentional, and consistent advocacy can bring about positive changes. Now is the time to begin teaching children about the lifelong journey of aging, and infusing aging content into elementary school curricula may be a good first step. Through education, training, and constant adjustment of the narrative on aging, society can begin changing its views about aging and look forward to life in older adulthood, free of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

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THE ROLE OF CONSTRUCTIVISM AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IN MUSIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

The inclusion of jazz studies in secondary school curriculums across the United States varies significantly, and this has presented challenges for music educators when it comes to integrating jazz studies effectively. This study delves into the experiences of educators and emphasizes the vital importance of cultural diversity, self-expression, and collaboration within the context of jazz education. Furthermore, the study highlights the pressing need for well-thought-out curriculum design, as well as the necessity for ongoing support from educators and administrators. Additionally, evaluating music programs before, during, and after the inclusion of jazz in the curriculum is underscored as a critical aspect of successful implementation. This study underscores jazz's significance as an integral part of U.S. cultural heritage and its potential to advance music and significantly enhance student learning. The research sheds light on the multifaceted benefits of integrating jazz studies into secondary school curriculums, offering valuable insights for educators and administrators. This highlights the role of constructivism and culturally relevant pedagogy in music education, emphasizing the importance of embracing diverse musical traditions to enrich the educational experience.

The Role of Constructivism and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Music Education

Constructivism and culturally relevant pedagogy play crucial roles in music education. Constructivism emphasizes the learner's active role in constructing understanding and knowledge, promoting hands-on experiences and collaborative learning (Coss, 2019). This approach encourages students to explore and create music meaningfully in music education. Culturally relevant pedagogy, however, recognizes the importance of incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the learning process (Comstock et al., 2023). Music education means valuing and integrating diverse musical traditions, genres, and styles into the curriculum. By doing so, educators can make music more accessible and relevant to all students, fostering inclusivity and diversity in the classroom (Dale Crooke et al., 2023). When combined, constructivist approaches and culturally relevant pedagogy can enhance music education by empowering students to engage with music in meaningful ways while honoring diverse cultural expressions. This can lead to a more inclusive and enriching learning environment where students feel valued and inspired to explore and create music within a broader cultural context (Zajda, J. (2021).

Prominent African American musicians, including Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Miles Davis, among others, played significant roles in the development and popularization of jazz (Great Schools, 2016). Jazz studies can help students understand the history of race relations in America and how music has affected social change. In urban school districts in the Western United States, the secondary school curriculum (Grades 9–12) often lacks integration of jazz studies. By not incorporating jazz studies, school district personnel are missing an opportunity to instruct students about cultural diversity and the importance of promoting creativity, self-expression, and collaboration with others (Koskela et al., 2021).

The Role of Constructivism and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Music Education is paramount as it underscores the value of actively engaging students in critical thinking and participatory learning (Barton & Riddle, 2021). Constructivism advocates for students to actively participate in their learning process, constructing their understanding of music through meaningful experiences and interactions (Zajda, 2021). Conversely, culturally relevant pedagogy acknowledges the significance of integrating students' diverse cultural backgrounds into the music education curriculum (Caingcoy, 2023). By harmonizing these approaches, music educators can cultivate an inclusive and captivating learning environment that respects students' unique perspectives and experiences while nurturing a profound appreciation for music (Bernard & Talbot, 2023).

The 2018 Jazz in the Schools study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts presents compelling evidence highlighting the critical role of jazz in public education. It reveals that schools in urban areas are significantly less likely to offer music education programs compared to their suburban and rural counterparts, as shown in the first-ever national study on student access to music education (de Bruin, 2022; Covalle, 2022). This alarming lack of access disproportionately affects students from low-income families, who often lack the resources to pursue music outside of the school environment (Give A Note Foundation, 2024). Jazz is not only a vital genre in American music but also has made profound contributions to American culture. By failing to incorporate jazz studies into the curriculum, educational institutions limit students' opportunities to appreciate and understand this influential genre. Furthermore, jazz

studies provide a unique and diverse lens through which students can explore history, culture, and society (Americans for the Arts, 2019).

Jazz music emerged from enslaved Africans during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It has roots in African musical traditions, African–American spirituals, work songs, and the blending of various musical styles such as ragtime, blues, and European harmonies (Khelifi, 2021). Jazz music began evolving in cities like New Orleans, Louisiana, where African–American musicians gathered and performed in clubs, dance halls, and streets. It gained popularity and spread nationwide, becoming an integral part of African–American culture and later influencing and shaping the broader American musical landscape (McKee, 2021).

Jazz studies can also be a valuable educational tool for students. Jazz music is complex, and studying it requires students to develop critical thinking skills, analytical skills, and creativity. Through jazz studies, students can learn to appreciate different art forms (Goldberg, 2021) and help to foster their ability to work collaboratively with others. By integrating jazz studies into the curriculum, students may better understand American culture, history, and society and develop valuable skills that will serve them well in their future academic and professional endeavors (Take Note, 2021).

Problem Statement

The lack of inclusion of jazz studies in the secondary school curriculum across the United States is a significant issue (May et al., 2020). This absence deprives students of a comprehensive education encompassing diverse musical genres. It also represents a missed opportunity for school district personnel to educate students about cultural diversity and the importance of promoting creativity, self-expression, and collaboration with others (May et al., 2020). As a uniquely American art form, jazz music holds substantial cultural significance. It has influenced various other musical styles, including rock, pop, country, gospel, soul, and hip-hop, making it an essential component of music education (Young, 2020). An assessment conducted at an urban school district in the Western United States revealed a lack of exposure to jazz music's rich tradition in the school's music curriculum (Mark & Madura, 2021). Many students have expressed a keen interest in delving into and playing jazz music, highlighting the demand for its inclusion in the curriculum. Furthermore, informal interviews with music educators have indicated a need for more training in incorporating jazz studies into their teaching (Music Teacher, personal communication, 2023).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of music educators' challenges in integrating jazz studies into their curriculum within the context of urban schools. The study aimed to understand the specific experiences, obstacles, and successes encountered by music educators in effectively integrating jazz studies into their curriculum. It also sought to identify the skills and strategies necessary for successful integration, considering the unique environment and influences present in urban schools.

The study delved into the needs and issues that impacted musical learning in urban school settings, intending to inform future school practices, policies, and curriculum integration. It aimed to uncover how jazz studies, with its diverse musical vocabulary, ear training, improvisation, and cultural exchange, may promote students' creativity, self-expression, and

academic and social well-being. Additionally, the research aimed to gain insights from educators who have faced challenges in integrating jazz studies into the curriculum, providing valuable perspectives and experiences that can shape future educational practices in urban schools.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do music educators describe their challenges in integrating jazz studies into the curriculum for Grades 9–12?

RQ2: What skills and strategies do these music educators identify as important when integrating jazz studies

Conceptual Framework

Elements from constructivism and culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) formed the conceptual framework for understanding the student's learning process, support for an appropriate curriculum design, teacher expertise, and exploring jazz music's educational and social benefits in urban schools. The conceptual framework presented in this study included the constructivist approach, which an instructor may apply to various issues, including cultural relevance, teaching expertise, curriculum evaluation, student involvement, and resource accessibility (Saleem et al., 2021; Siebert, 2019). Educators can apply constructivism principles when integrating jazz studies into the music curriculum to guide instructional strategies and learning environments. This approach prioritizes active, meaningful, and learner-centered experiences, offering a more specific and comprehensive framework for exploring the challenges and potential solutions related to integrating studies about music education (Coss, 2019). Additionally, the conceptual framework consists of CRP, which contributes to students' academic achievement. Cultural relevance in jazz studies involves incorporating different perspectives and cultures into the music curriculum, particularly emphasizing Jazz as a significant American art form. The involvement of educators attuned to the student population's backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles is crucial for a diversified, equitable experience whereby students see themselves reflected in any part of the learning process (Dale Crooke et al., 2023). Curriculum assessment is foundational to the conceptual framework. Evaluating the music curriculum educators are presently using is necessary to ensure student interest, motivation, and alignment with integrating jazz studies in the curriculum (Mellizo, 2020).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study is a basic qualitative study design where rich data were collected from semi structured interviews with secondary educators in urban schools. Twelve educators from three school districts served as participants. In qualitative research, semi structured interviews are designed to compare the responses of the participants. Interview questions related to the research questions were presented with additional probing questions to gain further insight into the phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Significance

The absence of jazz studies in urban school districts in the Western United States is important because it deprives students of exposure to an exclusively American art form, limits their access to cultural education, and impedes the development of their critical thinking skills (Kothari, 2021). Jazz has influenced several musical genres, and the history of American music

would not be complete without mention of Jazz. Students may learn about Jazz's philosophy, performing methods, and history by including jazz studies in the curriculum. This history may help them understand the significance of Jazz and its influence on American culture. Studying this problem can be helpful to urban school districts (Grades 9–12) in the Western United States and other educational settings (Holt & Maguire, 2022). First, it can help school administrators and curriculum coordinators identify ways to incorporate jazz studies into the existing music education curriculum. They can work to secure funding for music education programs, including hiring qualified music educators, purchasing instruments and materials, and maintaining facilities.

Second, studying this problem may help educators develop strategies to engage students in learning about Jazz through interactive teaching methods, guest lectures, and performances. Third, integrating jazz studies into the curriculum can enhance students' critical thinking skills, creativity, and appreciation for diverse cultural perspectives. Exposure to jazz music can also help students develop their artistic abilities and encourage them to pursue music careers (NAMM Foundation, 2023). Fourth, integrating jazz studies can contribute to a well-rounded education, providing students with the tools to become culturally literate and informed global citizens

Literature Review

Constructivism in Music Education

Constructivism is a learning theory that emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their understanding of knowledge (Zajda, 2021). In music education, constructivist approaches recognize the unique cultural backgrounds, musical experiences, and perspectives students bring to the learning process (Coss, 2019). Key points related to constructivism in music education include establishing student-centered learning environments. This means that the focus is on the individual student's needs, interests, and abilities, allowing for personalized learning experiences (López-Íñiguez et al., 2022). Providing authentic music experiences such as composing and performing is another important aspect. This involves allowing students to create and perform their own music, enabling them to express themselves and develop their musical skills meaningfully (Dale Crooke et al., 2023). Encouraging problem-solving and inquiry-based learning is also crucial. This approach involves presenting students with musical challenges and encouraging them to explore and discover solutions through critical thinking and experimentation (Southworth, 2022). Lastly, fostering social interaction through collaborative music-making and group discussions plays a significant role. This allows students to collaborate, share ideas, and engage in meaningful musical dialogue, enhancing their learning experience (Dale Crooke et al., 2023).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Music Education

Culturally responsive teaching in music education is rooted in recognizing the significance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds into all facets of learning. Its objective is to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of learning experiences for students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Barton & Riddle). Key principles of culturally responsive teaching in music education involve self-reflection on one's cultural assumptions, biases, and worldviews and understanding how these factors influence teaching (Mckoy & Lind, 2022). Educators are also encouraged to familiarize themselves with their students' cultural backgrounds, musical preferences, and experiences and utilize this knowledge to establish connections with them

(McKoy & Lind, 2022). Creating a supportive classroom environment that fosters inclusivity and respect, where students feel valued and heard, is essential. Moreover, adapting teaching materials, repertoire, and instructional strategies to honor diverse cultural perspectives is crucial (Freeman-Green et al., 2023). Combining constructivist approaches with culturally relevant pedagogy enriches music education by acknowledging students' diverse backgrounds, promoting active learning, and fostering meaningful connections (Chang & Viesca, 2022).

The History of Jazz Music

The history of jazz education in schools can be traced back to the mid-20th century, with the creation of jazz programs at institutions such as the Berklee College of Music in Boston and the Juilliard School in New York (Monson, 2008). However, integrating jazz studies into public school curricula has been slow in implementing jazz studies programs in many urban school districts (Bond, 2017; Shaw, 2019; Tuncer-Boon, 2019). Recent research has highlighted the benefits of jazz education for students in (Grades 9–12). One study suggested that students who participated in jazz programs had higher levels of engagement and motivation in school and increased social and emotional well-being (Hammel & Hourigan, 2022; McKoy & Lind, 2022). Another study found that jazz education improved students' critical thinking skills (VanTassel-Baska & Little, 2023) and their understanding of cultural and historical contexts (Mellizo & Cabedo-Mas, 2022). To successfully integrate jazz studies into school curricula, it is essential to provide educators with the necessary training and resources (Bond, 2017; Tuncer-Boon, 2019). One effective strategy is incorporating Jazz into existing music programs rather than creating a separate curriculum (McKoy & Lind, 2022). This approach allows students to understand music genres better while introducing them to jazz.

A Critical Review of the Broader Problem

A critical review of the broader problem suggested the need to integrate jazz studies into the core music curriculum. Hamilton (2021) exemplified the need for more diversity in K–12 music education in the United States by focusing primarily on Western European classical music and neglecting other genres, including Jazz. This lack of diversity limits students' exposure to musical styles and perpetuates racial and cultural biases in music education (Ho, 2021). Furthermore, a lack of diversity taught in music education could result in a lack of representation for minority students, who may not see themselves reflected in the music. A lack of interest in music education may result in a missed opportunity to engage students in learning (Koskela et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, almost one in every five children in the United States (19%) lived in poverty in 2016 (NASSP, 2019). Music classes and groups of students do not all start at the same place. They come from diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods. In their everyday lives, individuals closely interweave poverty, disability, racial unfairness, and trauma.

A Critical Analysis of the Body of Literature

A critical analysis of the body of literature related to the problem of the need for integrating jazz studies into the core music curriculum provided a rich and varied picture of the challenges and opportunities facing music educators and students in this area. The 2020 status report from a survey of more than 1,000 jazz educators thoroughly assessed the current state of jazz education in the United States (Washburne, 2020; National Endowment for the Arts 2, 2003). Overall, there is a consensus that jazz education is important and deserves a place in the

core music curriculum, as in Allsup's philosophy of music education, *Remixing the Classroom* (Allsup, 2016; Barrett, 2023). However, there are challenges to achieving this goal, including limited resources, lack of teacher training and expertise, and the pressure to conform to standardized testing and curriculum requirements.

One common theme in the literature is that jazz education may provide students with essential skills and experiences that are unavailable through other forms of music education, as examined in a national profile of teacher experiences of teaching and learning in modern band programs in the United States (Knapp et al., 2022; Popa, 2020). For example, studies have shown that jazz students develop a greater appreciation for diversity, critical thinking skills, and creative problem-solving abilities. Additionally, jazz education can help students better understand the historical and cultural contexts in which jazz music emerged and continues to evolve through the effectiveness of a comprehensive teacher development program and the integration of popular music in urban schools (Abeles et al., 2021)

Benefits of Jazz Education

Despite the benefits of jazz education, there are significant challenges to integrating it into the core music curriculum. One major issue is the lack of resources and teacher training. Many music educators feel unprepared to teach Jazz (Tucker, 2023), and there must be more qualified jazz educators in many schools and districts. Additionally, standardized testing and curriculum requirements often prioritize other areas of music education, leaving little time or resources for Jazz (Shaw & Bernard, 2023a). Another challenge is the need to balance tradition with innovation. Jazz is a dynamic and evolving art form, and there is tension between preserving its rich tradition and promoting new styles and approaches. Educators may worry that excessive emphasis on tradition may limit students' creative expression and innovation (Prouty, 2023). In contrast, others believe that a deep understanding of jazz history and tradition is essential for developing a solid foundation in the genre (Dunkel, 2021). Many advantages of jazz education are emphasized while acknowledging the problems and barriers to accomplishing this aim in the literature relating to integrating jazz studies into the core music curriculum (Richardson, 2022a; Shaw, 2020). It will require a concerted effort by educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to provide the resources and support needed to ensure that all students have access to high-quality jazz education as part of their core music curriculum.

Methodology

This research focused on data collected from educators within a musical educational setting from an urban school district. The geographic input supplied insights into the educators' distinct perspectives, making CRP a valuable theory to explore in this context (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Constructivism, where students actively create their knowledge and understanding of the world through their experiences, relationships, and past knowledge, was applied to the research to demonstrate the dynamics in a musical learning environment between educators and students (Saleem et al., 2021). The research focused on educators' experiences using interviews with open-ended questions to allow the participants to provide in-depth details. I informed each participant of their rights under IRB. Educators who agreed to participate in the study replied to the consent form, 'I consent.' An interview protocol was also provided. The educators' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in Grades 9–12 teaching presented a picture of their journey and expressed the challenges of integrating jazz studies into the curriculum. The

responsibility of the researcher was critical in analyzing these experiences. The results provided recommendations for implementing jazz studies in the curriculum.

This research design addressed a gap in practice and was appropriate because the study aimed to explore music educators' experiences and challenges in integrating jazz studies into the curriculum. This design was employed to investigate the issue in-depth and to understand the participants' perspectives and experiences (Kruse, 2020). Specifically, this research design approach sought to understand individuals' actual experiences and the interpretations they gave to those experiences. This qualitative study investigated how music educators perceived challenges while integrating jazz studies into the curriculum.

This design choice was justified because it suits the exploration of complex, real-world phenomena within a specific context. By focusing on urban school districts, the qualitative design allowed for an overarching examination of the challenges and opportunities unique to this setting. Semi structured interviews were used with 34 music educators from three urban school districts. I intended these interviews to elicit in-depth accounts of music educators' experiences, viewpoints, and difficulties integrating jazz studies. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to express their ideas, sentiments, and insights, enabling a thorough investigation of the subject. (Bares, 2020). The research results could guide educational policy, curriculum development, and teacher training initiatives to integrate jazz studies and advance more thorough music education for secondary students

The study was designed to address the research questions on how music educators describe their challenges in integrating jazz studies into the curriculum and what skills and strategies these music educators identify as important when integrating jazz studies. After I received approval, 12 educators from three different urban schools in the Western United States agreed to participate in a study exploring educators' experiences while integrating jazz studies into the core curriculum. Their valuable insights helped pinpoint the challenges, skills, and strategies required to integrate jazz studies successfully (Suchita, et al., 2023). Purposeful sampling was implemented to ensure that the participants have at least three years of background in music education and prior experience with jazz music. Educators from urban schools provided the perspective needed to address the specific 36 experiences and perceived challenges highlighted in the interview questions. The semi structured interviews gave broad answers on jazz music, musical experience, student engagement, and their viewpoints on resources and school policies. Each participant was free to offer their insight into the value of jazz studies in urban school districts.

Participants Selection

Qualitative data are not complete without gathering information about the context of the participants (Adu, 2016). Using purposeful sampling, I selected participants who were knowledgeable about jazz studies. Twelve participants from three school districts offered their perspectives, experiences, and challenges in integrating jazz studies into the curriculum. The relevance of educators' demographic information, personal musical listening habits, and expertise with musical instruments was significant in this study for several reasons. Understanding the participants' demographic profiles provided insights into their cultural influences and diverse perspectives that may have shaped their approach to music learning and teaching. Additionally, educators' personal musical preferences could have been a factor in their

teaching style and choices of instructional materials, impacting the overall musical environment in the educational setting.

This study used participants in urban schools. I contacted music educators directly through emails, phone calls, professional networks, and referrals. I had access to all of the participants, and there were no restrictions or formal approvals needed for their ability to be a part of the study. Twenty-five music educators were asked to volunteer in the research. The list was narrowed to 13, then to 12 due to scheduling issues. The criteria for the educators were previous music education teaching experience, with at least three years of jazz instruction. To ensure the participants met the criteria, I conducted an informal screening process, which included questions on their years of experience, work history, and knowledge of the jazz curriculum.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The criteria for selecting music educators as participants in this program included:

- **Qualifications:** Educators should have the qualifications and experience to teach jazz music.
- **Teaching Experience:** Educators should have previous experience teaching jazz music.
- **Availability:** Educators should be available and willing to participate in the study or program.
- **Diversity:** It may be essential to select educators who represent a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences.

Twelve educators from three different school districts were selected as volunteer participants. The justification for choosing music educators was the need for a sufficient sample size to analyze the program's impact on student learning outcomes (Hancock Institute of Jazz, n.d.). Additionally, having representation from multiple districts provided a broader range of experiences and illuminating perspectives, enriching the program. To gain access to music educators as participants, the procedures included (NAfME, 2021):

- a) Discussions with local music schools and institutions that offer jazz music programs to identify potential educators for the study.
- b) Other potential interviewees were sought on social media, music forums, and other online channels.
- c) I contacted music educators directly through emails, phone calls, professional networks, and referrals to explain the process and ensure the educators' willingness to participate.
- d) Decided on a mutually agreeable time to meet for the interview and sent consent forms via email for the session.
- e) After the "I consent" reply, the interview was scheduled, with a review of the subject and their willingness to respond sincerely.
- f) Follow-up questioning and additional interview time are allowed, if needed. For the data collection, I used the Zoom online app for a 30—45-minute session.

The participants were prompted to answer critical questions related to the research questions: RQ1. How do music educators describe their challenges in integrating jazz studies

into the Grades 9–12 curriculum? RQ2. What skills and strategies do these music educators consider important when integrating jazz studies? Educators were informed of their roles and responsibilities and given guidelines before the interview sessions began. Interviewing 12 educators took approximately 2 months to complete. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. All participating in the semi structured interviews received protection for their confidentiality and privacy upon providing consent. The interviews concluded with the opportunity to review, reflect, ask me questions, and amend answers by member checking (Candela, 2019).

Data Analysis Plan

The interviews were held via Zoom, an online audio-conferencing platform, backed by another recording device to ensure capture of the interview. During the semi structured interviews, participants' responses were recorded, while notes were taken of their verbal responses. At the end of the interview, a transcription was made available, combined with personal notes, before I began coding using NVivo coding software. NVivo helped me create codes, themes, and patterns based on the educators' responses and their experiences and potential challenges in jazz studies.

The 1st cycle of coding was labeled with a broad stroke or simple label. The 2nd cycle of code was more detailed so that a clearer picture of themes was presented through phrases and concepts central to the study. The results were summarized once all the codes were gathered, sorted, and compared. NVivo software is a powerful tool for integrating descriptions of the educators' responses and creating word clouds for qualitative data. The patterns revealed through the emergent themes contributed to a deeper understanding of integrating jazz studies into the curriculum, which could potentially inform future decision-making in music education. Researchers from past studies discussed the challenges of music education, such as limited training, time constraints, the culture of schools, or resistance to change (Ilari, 2020). I then examined how my findings related to the literature and how my research may impact social change. The codes, themes, and categories may be used to identify strategies and best practices on the impact of jazz education (Allsup, 2016; Barrett, 2023) on students' musical skills and the broader educational benefits and transferable skills developed through jazz education (Beveridge, 2022).

Results

In this study, the participants discussed their background in music as both instrumentalists and educators. They discussed why jazz studies should be integrated to complete a well-rounded education (Siebert, 2019). Additionally, they described resources, curriculum design, cultural diversity, and professional development as central to their concern for students' musical education. The interviews revealed the cultural value of jazz, teacher preparation, and knowledge of jazz as factors to consider for integrating a jazz curriculum. The educators expressed concern over student well-being, how music is therapy, and how music makes students happy. The educators offered strategies to help students purchase instruments, pay for their repairs, and how to seek community involvement to relieve the financial stress on them and their families.

The participants also wanted to prepare students to become music teachers and be equipped to overcome any barriers to attending post-secondary music college (Abramo &

Bernard, 2020). Communication was a significant factor for educators. Their ability to have one-on-one sessions and the importance of jazz appreciation and cultural connections with students were stressed as critical for student engagement. The participants acknowledged that focused student engagement would support their comprehension of music theory so they may understand the music they listen to on digital platforms like iTunes and YouTube. Jazz theory and history can support students in being well-rounded musicians if they choose it as a career. Meeting the students at their level of understanding and helping them improve without using force was a recommended strategy to support students in meeting their goals. The literature supports music literacy so that students can engage in meaningful musical collaborations and expand their musical knowledge. Experiences with new concepts in the music curriculum may encourage and motivate students in their music education. Additionally, music educators have supported the call to diversify the music curriculum in schools (May et al., 2020).

Recommendations for reframing civic education through popular and hip-hop music have empowered urban students through artistic and musical practices, which have shown to be a multi-dimensional asset to student learning (Evans, 2021). Jazz has the same potential. All the jazz music educators agreed that classroom management was central to a successful jazz studies program. Strategies for getting students to focus include acquiring knowledge of music creation, production, and performance technologies to compete in a global market and showing the educators' dedication to their students' musical growth. Access to software, devices for digital music, and instruments with cases in good working order are necessary for the musical classroom environment to support students and their family's resources. Teachers are applauded for delivering quality music education with zeal and passion. They are encouraged to continue advocating for the resources and commitment from administrators in changing policies and strategies for musical excellence for students and their communities (Take Note, 2021).

Professional development must prepare teachers to integrate strategies to instruct one group while another is working on their music section. Control of the class is a challenge that most educators experience. Initiative-taking leadership can assist teachers in developing a rigorous program that students can benefit from and respect. These participants stressed that teachers must be resourceful, creative, resilient, and determined to make a successful program for their students. For quality education, educators shared that bringing awareness about jazz history, including knowledge of the pioneers and recognition of rhythms that distinctly exemplify various genres, was necessary. Pedagogical methods employed by successful high school jazz ensembles' directors can inform educators about the positive experiences jazz education brings to students through their warm-up and rhythmic exercises (Koch, 2020).

The participants all understood the importance of testing and goal setting to improve musical proficiency. There was substantial evidence from the educators that covering the basics of music can be accomplished through jazz studies. Learning Scales and jazz theory will later support their improvisational skills and professional career efforts. The jazz curriculum can foster encouragement and motivation by including an intergenerational group of musicians to play with them and discuss various nuances of jazz music and other genres. This engagement would be a profound catalyst to increase student proficiency. Integrating jazz studies can prepare students to listen and see what is possible in music when in-person workshops and live-performance field trips are part of the curriculum. Students can benefit from open-minded educators and participate in non-formal learning philosophies in alternative educational settings.

New music curricula can increase student motivation and engagement. (Gage et al.,

2020). The participants shared illuminating perspectives on integrating a jazz curriculum for a successful jazz program. The emergent themes of educators' concerns, the role of music, student support, and quality education identified challenges and essential strategies for implementing jazz studies. A major factor the educators deemed critical was DEI in the curriculum, the teaching pool, and resource access. Educators regard music as a universal language and encourage the integration of jazz studies to help urban students embrace a diverse cultural education. Participant #10 noted that music is the language that allows one to communicate with anyone in any corner of the world. Music teachers incorporated two primary approaches when integrating jazz studies into the music curriculum. Stressing the value of cultural diversity, jazz, follow-up, and supervision are the two main approaches music educators use. A quality jazz program would include jazz appreciation, the history of the pioneers in jazz, and their cultural contributions to the genre. The program would allow students to understand Jazz more deeply, realizing it as a universal language and how it has influenced other genres, including popular music today. Endorsing or acquiring instruments through fundraising or community events would benefit music programs.

Providing musical field trips to see live performances of jazz musicians in context could help students in multiple ways. Meeting local artists could have a meaningful impact. Instructing students about diversity and the importance of promoting creativity, self-expression, and collaboration with others can help students be more equipped in their musicianship and vision of the global community. Visiting guest artists is an intergenerational strategy for students to connect with musicians who are professionals through touring, recording, or teaching at other well-known music schools and universities. Follow-up and supervision practices can provide professional development workshops in creating or implementing the proper curriculum design for student use based on their skill set and readiness. PD may also support teachers with limited jazz experience yet find themselves teaching jazz in the classroom. Teachers can share the benefits of jazz education, including its influence on student achievement and socioemotional development (Evans, 2021).

Conclusion

Stressing the value of cultural diversity was identified as an approach to support integrating jazz studies into the secondary school curriculum at urban schools. Music educators have had national conferences over the years and developed standards that teachers should teach, from general music to choral music or instrumental music, but not necessarily jazz (Shaw, 2020). Restricted access to jazz in the music curriculum may limit the richness of student education. Furthermore, this lack of diversity limits students' exposure to musical styles and perpetuates racial and cultural biases in music education (Tuncer-Boon, 2019). The participants emphasized diversity to demonstrate musical representation. Otherwise, students may not see themselves reflected, resulting in a lack of interest and a missed opportunity to engage students in learning (Koskela et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

All participants stressed jazz as an umbrella for all kinds of music. They concurred that students need a diverse musical palette to enhance their musical focus. The educators themselves were asked what was on their playlist. It represented a broad spectrum of genres, with jazz as the thread tying their educational, professional, and personal listening. The participants emphasized the value of cultural diversity and its relevance to students, parents, administrators, and community involvement. As an American art form, students and educators in urban schools

could benefit from the universal language of music, a concept that all participants fully acknowledged.

To overcome challenges in integrating jazz studies into the secondary school curriculum, educators can follow up and supervise the plans for a quality jazz program. Music teachers can begin by securing the needed resources, generating fundraising ideas, and meeting stakeholders to fulfill the vision and goals for a diverse, quality program that can help students on the global music stage. To improve student achievement, the proper content for the curriculum must be proposed, whether written by staff or other professionals. Musical field trips to see live performances can be part of the learning experience, offering awareness and exposure. Visiting educators or experienced professionals in the community can provide students with a close-up, hands-on listening and playing experience (Stern & Powell, 2020).

The participants offered all these strategies as a part of a professional development workshop. Providing professional development workshops for music teachers is critical, for improving instruction is still a challenge in music education (Regus et al., 2024). The music educators in this study indicated that jazz was a vehicle to make students better musicians. Specifically, the women educators pointed out that professional development can improve teacher effectiveness and acknowledged the role of women in music for student well-being. Five of the participants were women of color. All instructors can benefit from Black women teachers' pedagogy's much-needed insights (Regus et al., 2024).

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PEACE EDUCATION AND THE EFFECTS OF “PARENTS RIGHTS” AND OTHER ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper begins with a review of literature pertaining to negative perceptions of educators and how they have historically shaped dangerous policies and laws. It then provides a description of recent efforts to control curriculum and teaching at the K-12 and collegiate level, locating these within the literature on moral panics. Next, the paper assesses the effects of the moral panic on educators and how it should have special importance for peace education. It concludes with recommendations for peace educators and activists.

Peace Education and the Effects of “Parents Rights” and Other Attacks on Education

Educators in the US have long gotten a bad rap. From arguments that they were indoctrinating students during the Cold War era to modern efforts to undermine classroom instruction and more, people in the US hold complicated views of K-12 public education, both eschewing it as essential to democracy while also denouncing it (See Bruno, 2018; Goldstein, 2015; Giroux, 2012). Similarly, college education has been promoted as key to social and economic advancement in the US, yet professors are often demonized as overpaid liberals who reside only in their ivory towers. Like in K-12 education today, professors were at first applauded for trying to adapt to remote teaching during the pandemic and then vilified when some students did not perform well in that format, as well as when many expressed concerns about appropriate safety measures when colleges and universities resumed in-person instruction. Today, educators at all levels are facing attacks about teaching of critical pedagogy and social issues amidst a vitriolic political atmosphere during and after the Trump administration (Steinberg, 2022). These attacks are part of several broader, macro level trends, some of which are presented in this paper.

All educators should be concerned about the current demonization of teachers and professors, as misconceptions and outright lies are being used to justify dangerous policies and laws in the name of “parent’s rights.” The so-called parents’ rights movement, not a grassroots parent-led initiative but rather the efforts of some very wealthy conservatives, is doing damage to public education and undermining efforts to teach young people topics that are critical to promoting a more peaceful and just world. While these attacks are not specifically being levied against peace educators in most cases, they will be especially damaging for peace educators, as our work is focused on using critical pedagogy to instill in young people not just knowledge about how to create peace but the motivation and skills to do so as well.

This paper begins with a review of literature pertaining to negative perceptions of educators and how they have historically shaped dangerous policies and laws. It then provides a description of recent efforts to control curriculum and teaching at the K-12 and collegiate level, locating these within macro trends and the literature on moral panics. Next, the paper assesses the effects of the moral panic on educators and how they should have special importance for critical pedagogy and peace education. It concludes with recommendations for educators and activists.

A Brief Review: Moral Panics Against Educators

None of the love-hate relationship Americans have with education is new in the US. In the 1920s, conservatives demonized educators who sought to explain evolution. As today, parents were urged to control their children’s education, as it was their “right” that their children be taught the Biblical explanation for creation rather than the more complex and scientific explanation of evolution. In the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, educators were accused of indoctrinating young people via “communist” education. Lawmakers came after educators, even asking educators in New York to sign “loyalty oaths” (Ekrich, 1967, p. 357). Yet, both then and now, the idea that there was a cabal of educators seeking to make America communist was absurd, with very few, if any, teachers actually aligned with communist beliefs. Regardless, the polarization instilled concern about public education, demonizing educators as little more than propagandists who were hell-bent on creating communist sympathizers. In 1948, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA) published a guide listing “100 things you should

know about communism and education,” in which the committee issued the following warning to parents in the US:

This is to tell you what the masterminds of communism have planned for your child in the name of ‘education.’ They mean to take him from the nursery, put him in uniform with hammer and sickle flag in one hand and a gun in the other, and send him out to conquer the world. If they have their way, he will be guided from the Kindergarten straight to college so that he will have anything except a mind of his own. He will be trained but not educated... he will be the child-man of communism (Communism and Education 1948).

In 1952, the Supreme Court upheld a law prohibiting communists from teaching in schools. Teachers and professors accused of being communist faced censure or even firing. In New York City alone 378 teachers were fired, elected to resign, or took early retirement amidst accusations of being communist, despite none having been found to be negligent in the classroom (Blumenthal, 2009). In 1953 Florida adopted a strictly anti-communist curriculum that empowered parents to report supposed violations. Three mothers complained about the textbook *American Problems Today*, which they claimed, “painted a favorable picture of the American Civil Liberties Union, and “advocated FEPC [the Fair Employment Practice Committee] and other forms of integration.” A state senator claimed that the textbook taught principles “opposite” to those in the Constitution, and the northeastern Florida teacher who introduced the book to his class was eventually fired” (Weill, 2021). College professors accused of being communist faced firings and blacklisting, even in ivory league universities (Schrecker, 1986). A similar wave of demonization was targeted at those who supported civil rights and desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s (Montgomery, 2022). The conservative Reagan administration led another wave of attacks against “radical” educators in the 1980s. To be clear, these attacks were not exclusive to educators, as celebrities and many others faced witch hunts during the McCarthy era, with many ending up blacklisted.

Today, the political Right, including politicians and activists, has spread similar misinformation and lies that has generated support for problematic policies and laws. This is true in many respects, for instance, science-based approaches to curtail the spread of the global coronavirus pandemic, the lie that President Trump actually won the 2020 election, and more. According to conservative pundits and activists, the political Left dominates educational systems and indoctrinates youth, teaching progressive values that contrast with what parents want. As such, parents need to assert their “right” to control what is taught and how it is taught to their children (Hegsweth & Goodwin, 2022). Teachers and professors are portrayed by many on the Right as overpaid freeloaders who want to mold youth to accept their “woke” agendas. Data does not support the contention that educators are “radicals” today any more than they did in prior eras. A recent national survey shows that a majority of K-12 teachers, although left-of-center, hold moderate political views, and almost one-third called themselves “conservative” (Green & Paul, 2021). In 2017 former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos levied the age-old charge that professors are too liberal and are indoctrinating students. Many took insult, not necessarily denying that their views may lean more liberal but rather arguing that they are able to handle difficult discussions in class without indoctrinating students. As Jaschik (2017) wrote in *Inside Higher Ed*,

Yes, professors lean left (although with some caveats). But much of the research says conservative students and faculty members are not only surviving but thriving in academe - free

of indoctrination if not the periodic frustrations. Further, the research casts doubt on the idea that the ideological tilt of faculty members is because of discrimination. Notably, some of this research has been produced by conservative scholars.

While the most complete study about college professors and political views is somewhat dated, it found that most (46.1 percent) identified as moderate. While a far smaller percentage (9.2 percent) identified as conservative than liberal (44.1 percent), political affiliation varied tremendously by type of college and disciplinary area. Subsequent research has found similar results about affiliation but has found little to no evidence that conservative professors are specifically left out of hiring, and research with students finds that most believe that their professors are fair even if they hold differing political views (Jaschik, 2017).

Many contend that the misinformation and lies about educators is part of an effort by the Right-wing to undermine public education and promote private schools. Promoters of the free market, Republicans typically believe that the private sector can do most things better than the public. As such, shrinking public education in favor of school vouchers or other school choice initiatives furthers the goal of reducing the public sector. It also diminishes the power of teachers unions, another area of emphasis for conservatives, as they see teachers unions as a key voting base of the Democratic party (Kahlenberg, 2012; Miner, 2002; Watkins, 2011).

The current attack on educators and education can be considered a moral panic (Cohen, 1972/2022; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). In his classic study *Folks Devils and Moral Panics*, Stanley Cohen (1972, p. 9) defines moral panics as “a condition, episode, person, or group of persons. . .that becomes defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, [religious leaders], politicians, and other Right-thinking people.” Moral panics invoke fear of “folk devils,” socially constructed villains who are intent on destroying society as we know it. Educators are the villains being demonized by the media, politicians, and Right-wing leaders. In particular, social media has become a digital echo chamber that results in confirmation bias and the distortion of reality. Walter Quattrociocchi (2017, p. 63) explained, “the Web has created an echo chamber where misinformation thrives... the viral spread of hoaxes, conspiracy theories, and other false or baseless information online is one of the most disturbing social trends of the early 21st century.” Misinformation about radical teachers trying to undermine America, make white people feel guilty, “groom” students to become gay or transgender, and more has been widely propagated in Right-wing media outlets and especially on social media (e.g., Block 2022). Moral panics typically result in inappropriate policies that typically last even after the furor has died down.

Moral panics are more likely to occur during politically divided times. While the US has always experienced political divisions, these divisions have grown in recent years, especially since the rise of Donald Trump onto the national political scene. The polarization in Congress, for instance, is greater today than at any time in the past 50 years, according to a Pew Center poll. It has its roots decades prior, as since the 1970s both political parties have become more extreme and more ideologically cohesive. There are far fewer moderates in Congress, with approximately two dozen today compared to 160 in 1971-72 (Desilver, 2022). Today, Democrats and Republicans accuse one another of promoting ideas and values that are not simply different to their own, but rather “un-American” (see Finley, Esposito, & Johnson, 2020). Just as in the red scare, the Right seeks to demonize teachers who are allegedly “indoctrinating” children.

Additionally, moral panics are more likely to take hold during tough times. After decades of neoliberal policies that emphasize free markets over people, millions of people in the United States feel anxious, vulnerable, and forgotten (Esposito, 2021). The cost of living in many cities is far too high for many workers, even those in professional fields. Inequality is greater in the US than in most any time period in history. Great Depression Teacher salaries have not been keeping up with inflation, and in several cities, teachers cannot afford median rent (Richards & Wynn, 2019). The global pandemic made these situations far worse, as families struggled financially and emotionally. People are more likely to look for scapegoats in such times, whether it be immigrants (Finley, Esposito, & Johnson, 2020), racial minorities (Esposito, 2021), or “radical” teachers promoting a leftist “woke” propaganda.

Finally, the Right is pushing back from a period of increased calls for social change and activist to end injustices. The murder of several Black men by law enforcement officers, including George Floyd in Minnesota, signaled to millions of people that the country was in dire need of a “racial reckoning.” Even more, this “reckoning” also includes increasing for LGBTQ rights, women’s rights, environmental responsibility, and other issues. The Left seeks policies and practices that uproot patriarchy, white privilege, heteronormativity, social inequality and more. Not everyone sees this “reckoning” as progress. To some on the Right, this emphasis on social change is unnecessary and undermines all that makes America great. All of the factors described above have contributed to the moral panic against educators. The following section describes the policies and practices that have been the result of the moral panic.

Efforts Aimed at Teaching About Systemic Racism, Anti-Racism and Promoting Diversity

As discussed, Right-wing media outlets and conservative politicians have made it seem as though K-12 educators are deliberately attempting to “indoctrinate” youth by teaching about systemic racism. Much of their focus has been targeted at the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Devised by scholars Kimberle Crenshaw, Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and others in the late 1970s and 1980s, CRT is a framework for teaching about race and systemic racism. It emphasizes that race is a social construct and that racism, rather than being about individual bias or prejudice, is embedded into legal and other systems. Thus, even those who do not intend to be racist can and do engage in activities that fuel racism (Sawchuk, 2021). Right-wing politicians and pundits charge that CRT is divisive, that it teaches young people to feel guilty about the country’s past and makes them feel bad about their race. Calls for bans on CRT are typically based on misunderstanding and lies, as, in reality, CRT is not being taught in K-12 schools. According to education news outlet Chalkbeat, efforts to restrict education on racism, bias, the contributions of specific racial or ethnic groups to US history and similar topics have been attempted in 28 states, as of this writing. Nine states (Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and North Dakota) have enacted anti-CRT legislation, although Arizona’s law was overturned by that state’s supreme court (Graham, 2021). These efforts are part of a broader conservative criticism of “wokeness” that was fueled by former President Donald Trump. He pushed for “patriotic education” and repeatedly asserted that left-wing teachers were indoctrinating students. Trump issued an executive order prohibiting certain types of diversity training for federal employees and endorsed cuts in federal funding for schools using lessons based on the 1619 Project, a *New York Times* series that emphasizes the legacy of slavery (Greene, 2021). Importantly, as was true historically, the teaching of anti-racism has been inaccurately equated with communist infiltration of education.

Even if educators are not explicitly teaching from a CRT framework, these kinds of laws have a chilling effect on the teaching of racial issues in general. In addition, many of the anti-CRT laws are very broad, and thus have been interpreted to prohibit an array of issues, for example, using a book about the Ruby Bridges story because it does not show redemption for the racists who hurled insults at the young Black girl as she attempted to attend school (Graham, 2021). A bill in Wisconsin would forbid not just teaching CRT but also ban the teaching of concepts including “Social Emotional Learning,” “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion,” culturally responsive teaching, anti-racism, conscious and unconscious bias, culturally responsive practices, diversity training, equity, microaggressions, multiculturalism, patriarchy, restorative justice, social justice, systemic racism, white privilege, and white supremacy, among others. It includes another near 90 terms, such as anti-racism, centering or de-centering, critical pedagogy, equity, implicit bias, normativity, patriarchy, racial prejudice, systems of power and oppression, and woke. The proposed bill would authorize a 10% loss of funding to any school district or charter school found to be in violation.

At the college level, attacks are being made not just on curricula but on efforts to promote diverse campuses. A University of Florida associate professor filed a grievance alleging he was threatened with discipline if he used "critical race" in his curriculum and program design (Guadiano, 2022). Although not exactly the same, a Florida bill signed into law by Governor DeSantis in 2021 requires that students, faculty, and staff at public universities be surveyed about their political beliefs and viewpoints or risk losing state funding. DeSantis couched this as a tool to promote intellectual diversity, announcing at the press conference when he signed the bill "It used to be thought that a university campus was a place where you'd be exposed to a lot of different ideas. Unfortunately, now the norm is, these are more intellectually repressive environments. You have orthodoxies that are promoted, and other viewpoints are shunned or even suppressed." Responses are not necessarily anonymous, and they must then be to the satisfaction of the state's Republican-led legislature. It is clear that the bill has nothing to do with ensuring intellectual diversity and everything to do with promoting a particular type of education, one more amenable to conservatives. The bill also prevents officials from limiting campus speech that "may be uncomfortable, disagreeable or offensive." While this sounds like an attempt at promoting free speech, Democrats in the state Legislature pointed out that it will also make it easier for groups like the KKK or the Proud Boys to hold events on campus (Bachman, 2021). Bills that prohibit teaching of “divisive concepts” at the collegiate level have been introduced in Rhode Island, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, Missouri, Iowa, Arkansas, Louisiana, West Virginia, and Idaho, although some were withdrawn (Coward, 2021). In Wisconsin, a bill was proposed that would allow teaching about the Constitution and Bill of Rights to satisfy university requirements for a diversity or ethnic studies course. That state also had proposed a bill that does not prohibit certain curricula but exempts students from having to take any type of training that discusses the harms of racism (Redman, 2022).

In February 2022, Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, the second highest political leader in Texas and the presiding officer in the Republican-led Senate, called for the elimination of tenure at public universities in that State. This, he claimed, was to stop the teaching of critical race theory. Republican elected officials also have challenged tenure in Florida, Iowa, South Carolina, Wisconsin, and other states in recent years. Patrick tweeted “I will not stand by and let looney Marxist UT professors poison the minds of young students with Critical Race Theory. We banned it in publicly funded K-12, and we will ban it in publicly funded higher ed.”

(Montgomery, 2022). A Florida bill also proposes to take hiring decisions away from university presidents, instead giving them to university boards of trustees, who are political appointees. In April 2022, Governor DeSantis signed a bill “reforming” tenure, requiring the Florida Board of Governors to adopt a uniform standard for faculty reviews, to be conducted every five years after someone received tenure, and requiring universities to periodically change accreditors (Swisher, 2022). Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts and state Republicans have called for the removal of University of Nebraska at Lincoln chancellor Ronnie Green because he authorized a plan “to attract, recruit, retain, and support students, staff, and faculty from racially minoritized populations” (Marcotte, 2021).

Prohibiting Teaching Social-Emotional Learning

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is about teaching “critical thinking, emotion management, conflict resolution, decision making, teamwork,” all of which educators argue are necessary for “academic success, employability, self-esteem, relationships, and civic and community engagement” (Strozewski, 2022). Yet, this too is under attack by the Right. A bill proposed in Indiana in 2021, referred to as “A Parents’ Bill of Rights” focused on SEL. Attorney General Todd Rokita explained, “SEL programs represent a fundamental shift in the role of teachers from educators to therapists and expand the reach of government into domains of the family.” A bill in Oklahoma would impose a similar ban on SEL. The Oklahoma bill states that “no public school district, public charter school, or public virtual charter school shall use federal, state, or private funds to promote, purchase, or utilize the concepts of social emotional learning for training, instruction, or education of students.” Additionally, no “public school district, public charter school, or public virtual charter school teacher, administrator, counselor, employee, or volunteer shall use any curricula with content related to social emotional learning in the training, instruction, or education of students,” with the bill specifying that it applies to all learning resources. Dozens of other efforts have been proposed around the country (Strozewski, 2022). In some communities, the claim that educators who attempt to address any social or emotional issues are taking over the role of parents has gone even further. There are reports of arguments that mental health counselors and suicide prevention initiatives in schools are also “indoctrinating” students (Kingkade & Hixenbaugh, 2021). Not only inaccurate, if these claims are taken seriously and result in reductions in mental health resources in schools, it will have a devastating effect on youth, who are struggling with mental health issues at higher rates than ever (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Don’t Say Gay: Attacks on Teaching About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Several states have considered, or actually enacted, legislation related to teaching about sexual orientation and gender identity. In Florida, the Parental Rights in Education Act, which took effect July 1, 2022, has been referred to as the “Don’t Say Gay Bill.” It prevents teachers in grades K-3 from teaching about gender and sexual orientation and requires that such teaching be “developmentally appropriate” for upper grades. It also allows parents to sue school districts (Strauss, 2022). More than a dozen similar bills have been proposed around the country. In Arizona, HB 2011 is currently being considered. It is similar to a law that was previously overturned that had been called “no promo homo,” as it would require students to seek permission before joining groups like Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) or others that involve sexuality and gender. The previous law even prohibited any sexual education in public schools that “promoted a homosexual lifestyle.” Iowa is considering Senate Bill 2024, which bans any

instruction related to gender identity in K-6 classrooms unless parents give their consent. In Ohio, HB 616 mirrors Florida's "Don't Say Gay" legislation, banning instructional materials and curricula on sexual orientation, gender identity, and CRT (Stanton, 2022).

An Oklahoma bill addresses more than just classroom instruction but would ban school libraries from housing "books that make as their primary subject the study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender issues or recreational sexualization." The bill clarifies that recreational sexualization means "any form of non-procreative sex." Another bill in that state would prohibit school libraries from having books "that make as their primary subject the study of sex, sexual preferences, sexual activity, sexual perversion, sex-based classifications, sexual identity, or gender identity or books that are of a sexual nature that a reasonable parent or legal guardian would want to know of or approve of prior to their child being exposed to it," which Republican sponsor Senator Rob Standridge claimed is to protect students from oversexualization and "grooming" (Schwartz & Pendharkar, 2022). In a statement about the Florida law, the White House commented

This is not an issue of 'parents' rights.' This is discrimination, plain and simple. It's part of a disturbing and dangerous nationwide trend of right-wing politicians cynically targeting LGBTQI+ students, educators, and individuals to score political points. It encourages bullying and threatens students' mental health, physical safety, and well-being. It censors dedicated teachers and educators who want to do the right thing and support their students. And it must stop (Strauss, 2022).

Pro-USA All the Way

As was noted, educators have long faced attacks that they are communist or are promoting communism. Right-wing politicians, pundits and activists often equate anti-racism education with communism, with CRT often being called "Marxist." Purportedly to "support victims of communism," starting in 2023-2024, Florida teachers have to devote at least 45 minutes of instruction annually to teaching about the harms of communism. Governor Ron DeSantis signed House Bill 395 in May 2022, designating November 7 as "Victims of Communism Day." It requires teaching about communist leaders including Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Fidel Castro as well as the "poverty, starvation, migration, systemic lethal violence, and suppression of speech" that occurred during those regimes (Ocasio, 2022). Educators have called the law unnecessary, as social studies courses already do cover communism and the concerns about it. The law, they assert, is another example of the state trying to intrude on the work of educators. According to Dr. Robert Dahlgren, a SUNY Fredonia professor who has written about the Red Scare's effect on Florida teachers, the point is to stifle discussion about America's past and to promote American exceptionalism. He stated, "I think that's the deeper level that these laws are trying to address, as they did back in the '50s. They shut down any kind of expression of critical examination of our history" (Weill, 2021).

Florida has a new law, effective fall 2022, that requires Civics education in public high schools. While on its face this sounds unobjectionable, in reality the kind of civics education being promoted is heavily Christian and pro-USA. Ostensibly to prepare students to be "virtuous citizens," educators who attended a training about the new law expressed concern that it was ideologically conservative and had a strong fundamentalist emphasis. The training focused on the founding fathers' intent and so-called "misconceptions" about their thinking. A slide from the training PowerPoint noted that the founders "expected religion to be promoted because they

believed it to be essential to civic virtue,” and without that civic virtue, citizens become “licentious.” The training also falsely asserted that there were far fewer transatlantic slaves than has been presented, while George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were presented as opponents of slavery with no mention that both were slave owners (Ceballos & Brugal, 2022).

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has also criticized so-called “politicized” college courses. A draft bill he supports bars “curriculum that teaches identity politics, such as Critical Race Theory, or defines American history as contrary to the creation of a new nation based on universal principles states in the Declaration of Independence” (Swisher, 2022). In higher education, the Right has also attacked educators for their political affiliation. In 2017 Republican Iowa state Senator Mark Chelgren proposed that when individuals apply for faculty positions, they must not only submit their C.V., sample syllabi and writing samples but also their party affiliation. The bill would then institute a hiring freeze at state universities until the number of registered Republicans on faculty comes within 10 percent of the number of registered Democrats (Hemmer, 2017). The bill, like many others like it, was tabled, but the idea that one could or should get hired at a public university due to political affiliation harkens back to the McCarthy era.

When conservatives are unable to fully control higher education curriculum, another tool to forward their agenda is to destroy liberal arts programs. It is true that this is where the most liberal faculty on campus tend to be employed, so reducing or cutting these programs serves the Right-wing’s goals. Further, challenges posed by the pandemic have made it easier to justify cuts to liberal arts areas, as universities clearly struggled with enrollment and thus had to make decisions about budgets and programs that cannot be divorced from wider political conversations. For example, since 2010, the North Carolina Board of Governors shut down Centers on the environment, voter engagement, and poverty studies. When Governor Pat McGrory took office in 2013 he made clear that he intended to cut programs based on how many graduates get jobs and even stated he intended to close programs like gender studies (Hemmer, 2017). In June 2020, the University of Alaska system announced it will cut 39 academic departments, including degree programs in sociology, creative writing, chemistry, and environmental science. Elmira College in New York said it is eliminating a number of academic programs, including American studies, classical studies, economics, international studies, music, philosophy and religion, and Spanish and Hispanic studies (Dickler, 2020). The University of Iowa and Iowa State both announced cuts to liberal arts programs in spring 2022 (Miller, 2022). These are just a few among many examples of threats to liberal arts, amongst which typically includes peace and conflict studies.

Banning Books

Book bans are not new, but renewed efforts to limit what textbooks can be used and what can be available to students in school libraries are another tactic of the Right. In April 2022, Florida’s Department of Education (FDE) banned 54 mathematics textbooks from use in K-12 schools, asserting that they include topics like CRT and SEL, all prohibited by new legislation. In all, the ban included more than 40 percent of the textbooks that had been submitted for review (Ballingit, 2022). Initially the specific reasons for why these books violated that law were not made public. However, upon requests from the public and from Florida’s largest teacher’s union, some details were revealed. Almost 6,000 pages of documents were shared and showed that the books were overwhelmingly consistent with state law. Many of the problems cited by the

reviewers were based on dubious interpretation of the law and were clearly attempts to promote a conservative agenda. One reviewer said that a book was biased because it presented climate change as a fact, rather than an opinion. This, of course, flies in the face of science. Using an overly broad definition of CRT, one reviewer flagged a textbook because it included the statement “The United States has eradicated neither poverty no [sic] racism.” That reviewer claimed the book had an “Emphasis that racism is embedded in American society,” which allegedly violates the 2021 law. Twenty-four of the books that were banned had even received high marks from the state’s textbook reviewers (Ballingit, 2022). Florida is not the only state seeking to ban books. A report from PEN America found that 86 districts in 26 states had banned more than 1,100 books from classrooms and libraries, most of which were about Black and LGBTQ+ individuals (Hayes, 2022).

Spying on Educators

In addition to banning curricula and books, right-wing leaders are attempting to infiltrate the work of educators by proposing legislation that would allow school districts to install cameras in classrooms and record teachers and students. Florida is leading the way again. HB 1055, sponsored by Rep. Bob Rommel, R-Naples, and Rep. Mike Beltran, R-Lithia, states that its goal is to record “incidents” of bullying or inappropriate behavior by teachers or students. In districts where cameras are implemented, teachers would be required to wear microphones while class is in session and parents would have access to a recording if an incident occurred (Lowe, 2022). Conservative legislators in Iowa have proposed a similar bill, H.F. 2177. This bill would allow parents to see livestream recordings and require that cameras be in every public-school classroom, and educators, administrators and staff would face fines of up to five percent of their weekly salary if they did not have their cameras on and in good working order. The Florida bill allows districts to vote on whether they want to install cameras in the classrooms (Edelman, 2022).

Similar surveillance efforts have been proposed and enacted at the college level. In Florida, students can take “video or audio of class lectures for their own personal educational use, in connection with a complaint to the public institution of higher education where the recording was made, or as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding.” Allegedly to provide transparency about the classroom, the clear goal is to minimize the discussion of any topic conservatives find offensive or that does not fit their narratives about social issues. Students do have to obtain their professor’s permission before recording (Betz, 2021).

Disrupting School Boards

Right-wing leaders and their supporters are today working to interfere with local school boards. Ballotpedia, a website that tracks U.S. elections, found that conservative activists have tried at least 85 times to recall 225 school board members in 2021 alone. This is a record for a single year. Only 23 states allow voters to recall school board members, which means these numbers are even more troubling. Right-wing activists attempted to recall school board members in 11 districts in Wisconsin in 2021 alone, although only one reached the ballot. The latter was an attempt to recall four of seven school board members. Some 60 percent of parents voted to retain the school board members, but the brazen attempt to meddle with elected officials for a political agenda is scary. Parents are the ones who vote for school board leaders, so these efforts are hardly about parents’ rights (Graham, 2021).

Opposing Science-Based Pandemic Protocols

The Right wing has also peddled disinformation and lies about COVID-19, which in turn has resulted in opposition to common sense and science-based safety recommendations in general as well as in schools. After returning to in-person instruction, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Association of Pediatrics, and many other experts still recommended mask wearing. Yet Florida Governor Ron DeSantis supported the state's Department of Education efforts in fall 2021 to withhold funds from two districts (Alachua and Broward County) that imposed mask mandates. State Education Commissioner, Richard Corcoran, invoked the parents' rights argument in a statement announcing the decision, claiming "They know what is best for their children" (Mervosh, 2021). In February 2022, however, DeSantis said he supported a different approach. He urged the legislature to allow "any parent whose kid was illegally forced masked this year in Florida, in any of those districts, they should have the right to sue if their kids have any negative effects of it" (Ceballos, 2022). Governors in Texas, Arizona, Oklahoma, Iowa, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah also imposed bans on school district mask mandates, and Arkansas attempted to do so although the effort was overturned in court (Durkee, 2022).

Anti-Racism Curricular Bans	Anti-LGBTQ+/SEL Curricular Bans	Book Bans	Attacks on Tenure	Opposing Science-Based Pandemic Protocols	Spying on Educators	School Board Meddling
Enacted Legislation as of January 2022: 241 policies, 9 state	Enacted Legislation as of January 2022: 10 states	Enacted as of January 2022: 1, 477 book bans involving 874 unique titles	Proposed as of January 2022: 5 states	Proposed as of January 2022: 9 states, 8 enacted (Arizona's law was overturned)	Proposed in Florida	Attempts as of January 2022: At least 85 involving 225 elected members

The Impact on Educators

As noted, it is not just the outright bans on certain subjects that is troublesome. Many educators rightfully fear they will face trouble if they teach anything near to the prohibited subjects so are avoiding them. The result will inevitably be less education on topics like race, gender, sexual orientation, and others, although these are essential to democracy and are key components of peace education.

There has also been an increase in threats and even attacks on educators, administrators, and school board members, most often related to pandemic protocols. In Virginia, school board members received death threats and teachers in California and Texas reported being physically assaulted because they wore masks. A group of men in Arizona attempted to abduct an elementary school principal because they opposed the school's COVID-19 policies. In San

Diego, conservative protestors took over a school board meeting and declared themselves the new school board (Murphy, 2021). A mother in Texas ripped the mask off a teacher's face. In California, a father in California verbally harassed a principal then physically attacked a teacher who tried to intervene. A survey conducted by the American Psychological Association's involving almost 15,000 school personnel from June 2020 to June 2021 found that 59 percent of teachers, 58 percent of administrators, 48 percent of support staff and 38 percent of school psychologists and social workers had experienced harassment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were most often the perpetrators, but parents were as well (Kamenetz, 2022). A social media challenge in 2021 encouraged students to slap their teachers and share the videotapes of the assaults.

Due to low pay, safety concerns, and pressures during the COVID-19 pandemic, many educators are fleeing the occupation and fewer people are wanting to teach (Lowe, 2022). A Gallup poll in June 2022 found that teachers are the most burned-out workers of any profession, with college and university professors number two on the list. This, experts say, will only exacerbate what is already a teacher shortage (Berger, 2022). National Education Association President Becky Pringle cautioned that these attacks are especially dangerous at a time when schools are struggling to maintain and retain qualified educators and staff and necessary supplies (Edelman, 2022).

These attacks not only undermine the professionalism of educators. they will also have very real consequences for students. Both students and educators overwhelmingly agree that racism, gender, and sexual orientation, SEL and other topics being banned are essential to learn. *USA TODAY* spoke with 10 students who identify as LGBTQ in states where legislation like Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill has been proposed. These youth feel angry, disgusted, and scared that they will face even more discrimination than they already do. Research is clear that LGBTQ youth are safer in schools that are more welcoming, yet these Right-wing efforts are making schools less welcoming for this population (Stanton, 2022).

Critical pedagogy is one of the hallmarks of peace education. Critical pedagogy is a method of teaching that examines historical and current power dynamics to show their impact today. It emphasizes that what and how we learn cannot be separated from who has power to make those decisions. By doing so, it teaches students to understand privileges and disadvantages from an interdisciplinary fashion and empowers them to see themselves as agents of change for social justice. Bekerman and Zembylas (2012) explain, "critical pedagogy is about improving the learning and life opportunities of all students, notably the typically marginalized ones" (p. 221). Peace educators typically use critical pedagogy. Standish (2015) defines peace education as "a form of education that seeks to both recognize violence in society, impart and employ nonviolent tools for transforming conflict and support and create the interconnectivity needed to achieve what Galtung (1996) conceives of as 'positive peace' – the absence of all forms of violence and the presence of harmonious social/environmental relationships" (p. 28). It aims to teach youth how to create a more peaceful and just world. Standish (2015) explained the connection between peace education and critical pedagogy, noting "Critical pedagogy creates learning environments that foster loving, nonviolent transformation: personal or collective, local or global" (p. 34). Limits on what teachers can teach and how they must teach undermines critical teaching and works against the promotion of peace. Further, most of the curricular subjects that are the focus of the Right-wing attack on education are key components of peace education. Challenging racism, understanding gender and sexual orientation as socially

constructed, and social-emotional intelligence, for instance, are essential to peace education and thereby to promoting positive peace. While some educators may teach these subjects and not identify as peace educators, they are still doing the work of peace education.

At the college level, the threats to tenure also encourage professors to self-censor their teaching and research out of fear they could lose their jobs. This is dangerous, as college should be a time for students to be exposed to a diversity of perspectives and opportunities. Additionally, the protection of tenure helps encourage educators to report unethical behavior or campus malfeasance. Without that protection, educators may be hesitant to report such concerns (Montgomery, 2022).

The table below shows the number of states that have enacted each of the types of attacks on education that were highlighted herein. Please note that additional attempts have likely been in progress at the time of this writing.

Conclusion: The Importance for Peace Educators of Resisting the Moral Panic on Education

Anyone should be concerned that their professionalism is under attack. Educators of all sorts should care and take any steps they can to resist restrictions on what they can teach and how. Academic freedom is one of the hallmarks of a democratic society. Peace and conflict studies scholars have long been concerned about threats to academic freedom and about attacks on their programs. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has been a vocal proponent of academic freedom since its inception. It acknowledges that

Academic freedom is the indispensable requisite for unfettered teaching and research in institutions of higher education. As the academic community's core policy document states, 'institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition (Advancing Academic Freedom, N.D.)

This recent wave of attacks on education would seemingly be of professional and scholarly interest to peace educators in particular. Although I did not conduct a study of educators' perspectives on the issues, I have spoken to several people who identify themselves as peace educators, although they teach in different disciplinary areas. In speaking with one long-time peace educator who directs a conflict studies program at a large state school on the west coast, he was most concerned about the effects of these laws and policies on K-12 peace education, stating,

From coast to coast and around the world one of the most frequent sentiments echoed by peace educators at post-secondary institutions is that students bemoan the lack of such education at primary-secondary grade levels.

Perhaps because they seemingly have greater job security, the peace educators at the collegiate level with whom I have spoken overwhelmingly expressed that they will still teach what they intend to, and instead of squelching efforts to address controversial topics, the recent wave of bills and laws has made them more likely to cover academic freedom and suppression in various courses. One college peace educator who considers herself "well-versed" in the content of these bills and laws explained that they would form a significant part of several courses she teaches about violence and nonviolence. educating young voters, possible educators, politicians

and others, can help challenge these attacks on public education. This can involve classroom instruction as well as other campus-based programs. I have found that students are not generally aware of these issues but, upon being informed, are extremely interested, and are often moved to act. Further, those whose work is less under threat—for instance, educators in states where tenure is not under threat, there are no bans on teaching CRT, etc.—can take the lead in nonviolent resistance efforts to support colleagues elsewhere who are facing more challenges. This might include strikes, walkouts, teach-ins, letter writing, media coverage, and more. To preserve our democracy, “we need to de-escalate, to remember who we are: neighbors and fellow citizens. And we need to remember what we are arguing about: a piece of cloth designed to keep us individually and collectively safe. It cannot become the flag we wave in surrender” (Fernandez, 2021). As noted, these attacks will likely make it easier for conservatives to control other portions of curricula and even to cut programs.

Additionally, educators and peace activists can help support legal challenges to the laws presented herein. Many human and civil rights groups have already filed lawsuits challenging the bans on CRT, SEL, bills like Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” and more. These laws may well be overturned, and many political strategists believe they were initiated knowing that but were really about pandering to a Right-wing base.

Debunking the lie that the parental rights movement is a logical effort by a grassroots parent-led movement is also essential to challenging the moral panic on educators. It is noticeably clear that these efforts are calculated and orchestrated by radical Right-wing groups, many of which are well-funded and influential. According to Tim Chambers, whose work is focused on monitoring and countering disinformation on the internet, “The anti-CRT effort is textbook disinformation, manufactured and funded by right-wing think tanks and boosted by programmatically targeted ads to inflame users. It is from well-funded orgs working with suspect local groups on the ground, and with the ever-present background push from Fox News on broadcast and cable behind it all” (Graham, 2021). Many of the anti-CRT efforts were influenced by “model” legislation promoted by conservative organizations, including the Heritage Foundation, Citizens for Renewing America, and the American Legislative Exchange Council.

In Virginia, the organization Fight for Schools opposed CRT and pushed for a school board recall in Loudon County in 2019. It was co-founded by Ian Prior, who claimed to be simply a concerned father. In reality, Prior had previously served as spokesperson for Attorney General Jeff Sessions and is a long-time Republican strategist. Citizens for Renewing America, which was founded by President Trump’s former budget director Russell Vought, is another group leading the anti-CRT efforts. Other supporters of these groups include long-time wealthy conservatives, including the Koch family and the Devos family (Wilkins, 2021, 2021). In Florida, the push to review and then ban textbooks that was described early came in large part from the Florida Citizen’s Alliance, a known Right-wing group whose supporters listed on its website including Florida Oath Keepers. Some of the members of that group have faced sedition charges due to the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol (Murphy, 2021).

Further, a recommendation for research is to survey or interview educators in regard to their knowledge about the attacks on educators, their perceptions of the effects, and their recommendations.

In sum, all educators should be concerned about the ongoing attacks on education. Those that are working on teaching about and for peace can and should share what they can with their

students and others. Further, they should fight with every nonviolent tool they have to overturn these new laws and ensure that no more like them are implemented. The future of public education in general, and peace education in particular, is under threat and must be saved.

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STOP, COLLABORATE, AND LISTEN: ADDRESSING DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS WITH APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper examines the complex and long-standing history of disproportionate discipline practices within U.S. public schools and whether discipline practices are a reflection of our priorities. The author argues that to effectively reduce disproportionate discipline rates collaboration between the fields of applied behavior analysis and education are necessary. Teacher-centered interventions and school and district level practices are addressed.

Keywords: Disproportionate discipline, classroom management, applied behavior analysis, behavior, cultural responsiveness

Stop, Collaborate, and Listen: Addressing Disproportionate Discipline in Schools with Applied Behavior Analysis

The current director for the Office of Special Education Programs recently posited, “our discipline practices reflect our priorities” (Williams, 2023). If current discipline practices in U.S. schools reflect our priorities as a nation and as a group of educators, then we are in dire need of change, fresh perspectives, and collaborative practices. The disproportionate use of discipline practices in school settings for students of color is nothing new in the United States. As early as the 1970s, researchers have documented that Black students are at an increased risk of being excluded from instruction by way of exclusionary discipline practices (McIntosh et al., 2021). Recent data from the U.S. Office for Civil Rights shows that Black boys and girls continue to receive suspensions and expulsions disproportionate to their enrollment. (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Recent data also demonstrates that these practices disproportionately impact not only students of color, but students with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive disabilities; and youth who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) (Osher, 2015). For over 50 years, the documented and researched issue of disproportionate discipline within U.S. schools has not been resolved. Disproportionate discipline practices are a complex topic with no single cause or solution (Klingner et al., 2005; Skiba, 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018). Therefore, systematic collaboration between the fields of applied behavior analysis and education is necessary to reduce the disproportionate use of discipline practices at the classroom and school-wide levels.

Background and Rationale

As mentioned previously, disproportionate discipline practices are not a new phenomenon, and it continues to be an issue within our school systems. Estimates note that Black students receive Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) two to four times more than White students, are four times more likely to be suspended, and two-and-one-half times more likely to be expelled (Boneshefski, 2014). Office discipline referrals generally begin in the classroom setting where students spend the majority of their day. However, non-White students receive different levels of academic and behavior supports and are more likely to be disciplined for subjective reasons (Knochel et al., 2022).

If our discipline practices do in fact reflect our priorities, it seems quite evident that the discipline practices within educational systems prioritize excluding students from non-dominant cultures. Boneshefski (2014) notes these disproportionate discipline rates breakdown the relationship between students and school and that removals from school can have negative lifelong behavioral and academic effects for not only students, but our society as a whole. School suspensions increase the risk of dropping out without attaining a high school diploma and students with frequent suspensions exhibit lower academic growth.

However, the outlook is not all bleak. There has been a great deal of research over the years that has proven effective at reducing disproportionate discipline rates by focusing on teacher-centered interventions within the classroom level and systematic interventions across the school and district level. There has also been work within the area of cultural responsiveness and its application in a variety of school contexts. Additionally, success has been found when researchers and practitioners from multiple fields of study collaborate. The issue of disproportionate discipline practices must be tackled at various levels. In this paper, I will focus on pointed collaboration between the fields of applied behavior analysis and education to address

disproportionate discipline for students from non-dominant cultures at the smaller and more individualized classroom-level and the larger, systematic school and district level.

Classroom Level Interventions

This paper begins with focusing in on the classroom level, however, I will not be emphasizing individualized student interventions, although this will be touched on. Instead, the teacher is the individual targeted for intervention. Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) are written by adults after all. One may think that they are written as a result of a student's misbehavior, but research shows us that Black students are more likely to receive ODRs for reasons that can be unclear, open to interpretation, and subjective. Students from nondominant cultures receive ODRs for behaviors including disrespect, insubordination, or "excessive noise" more often than their White peers, who receive ODRs for more explicit actions such as tobacco use and vandalism (Bal, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to begin in the classroom and work within teacher-centered systems that *prevent* the need for ODRs to even be written.

This individualized and localized level is where Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) has historically shined. A great deal of research within the field of ABA utilizes single-case research design. Single-case designs allow for the evaluation of interventions that occur in applied settings, such as the classroom. It allows researchers to know how much individuals change, if at all (Kazdin, 2016). Additionally, the terms "single-case" and "single-case research design" may be somewhat of a misnomer as this methodological approach can be used with groups of individuals, between groups of individuals, generalized, and scaled to other methodological processes, such as randomized-control trials.

A well-managed classroom is the foundation for success both academically and behaviorally, without effectively managed classrooms teaching and learning cannot occur. (Korpershoek et al., 2016). B.F. Skinner's work is considered foundational within the field of ABA and most applications of behavioral psychology. Essential to his work and to the progression of the field of ABA is the three-term contingency. Very simply put, all human behavior follows the sequence of antecedent-behavior-consequence. Something in the environment occurs, this evokes or elicits an observable and measurable response, the resulting consequence is either punishing or reinforcing to the individual. ABA emphasizes the antecedent portion of that contingency - the preventative and proactive piece. By modifying and intervening at the antecedent stage, we can work to prevent problem behaviors from occurring, prevent students from practicing the unwanted behavior, which also prevents the students from learning undesired consequences from that behavior, and can weaken undesirable effects if the behavior does occur. It is also much easier to prevent unwanted behaviors and teach appropriate alternatives instead. (Collins & Landrum, 2023). Again, the emphasis here is on *teacher* or *adult* behavior. Since we know that students from nondominant cultures receive different treatment and supports within the classroom and receive ODRs for subjective behaviors, which leads to more exclusionary practices such as suspension and expulsion, and that this has negative impacts on student relationships, graduation rates, and other unwanted outcomes (Boneshefski, 2014; Collins & Landrum, 2023; Knochel et al., 2022; Skiba, 2015), we will focus on interventions that address teacher behavior with a necessary equity component as an antecedent manipulation to students being referred for exclusionary discipline practices.

Classrooms, teachers, and students do not exist within a vacuum, and even the most equitable and effective teachers are not the sole cause or solution to disproportionate discipline

issues. Classrooms, of course, operate within the larger contexts of schools and school districts, and systematic change at this level is also required to effectively improve disproportionality in discipline.

Subjective behaviors that can lead to ODRs, such as “excessive noise,” may be viewed as classroom behaviors that occur frequently but are generally low risk. These behaviors may include talking out of turn, interrupting others, engaging in tasks other than what was directed by the teacher, etc. While these behaviors may not pose a significant safety risk, they can take up a great deal of teachers’ time. By effectively managing these types of classroom behaviors, teachers can have a greater ability to focus on effective instruction and establishing a positive classroom culture. (Collins & Landrum, 2023).

Knochel et al. (2022) focused on increasing teachers’ use of Behavior Specific Praise (BSP). Their research found that BSP is an effective and economical intervention to increase student engagement and that an increase in teachers’ use of BSP can be a protective factor against maladaptive behaviors and referrals to special education (Knochel et al., 2022). Their study found that during initial intervention, teachers were able to increase their use of BSP for all students, however, students from non-dominant cultures still received lower rates of BSP and higher rates of reprimands than their White peers. During the second phase of the study, the researchers included an equity component that provided performance feedback in addition to the teachers’ use of self-monitoring. With the addition of the equity-focused feedback, disproportionality in the use of BSP was reduced among all participants. (Knochel et al., 2022).

This work has a great deal of potential for future research and for focusing on teacher-centered interventions. If the school staff and researchers had followed the traditional model of designing an intervention to address individual student behavior, the positive impacts would be limited compared to interventions that target teacher behavior which can impact classes full of students.

Another well-researched area of applied behavior analysis in the classroom setting is the Good Behavior Game (GBG). The Good Behavior Game is a group contingency intervention that traditionally involves dividing a class into teams, establishing rules, and awarding points when rule breaks occur. Traditionally the winning team is the team with the lowest amount of points at the end of a set time period. The GBG has a robust history of empirical research which supports its effectiveness in a variety of classroom contexts and across various student populations, including those with and without disabilities. (Joslyn et al., 2019). The GBG is another efficient and economical intervention that addresses frequently occurring but low-intensity behaviors such as talking out of turn and off-task behaviors.

While teacher-centered interventions to address high-frequency, low-magnitude behaviors are sufficient for the majority of students, there are, of course, children who will engage in behaviors that require more intensive and formalized interventions. Current legislation in the U.S. requires that schools utilize a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) to address significant challenging behaviors from students within the school setting. An FBA is a formalized process from the field of ABA and uses direct and indirect data from multiple sources to hypothesize the function or why a student is engaging in maladaptive behaviors. That information is then used to develop a Positive Behavior Intervention Plan (PBIP). A PBIP uses positive reinforcement strategies to teach and reinforce more appropriate but functionally equivalent replacement behaviors. Traditionally in schools, the FBA process is initiated for

students who are identified or at risk of being identified for the eligibility of emotional/behavioral disorders and for students who are at risk of being removed from the general education setting to a more restrictive educational placement (Moreno et al., 2014). Because the FBA process is underutilized in schools and initiated after significant problem behaviors have occurred or extensive ODRs have been written, and students have been provided minimal behavior intervention, Moreno et al. state that this “frustration-based bias of educators” seeps into the FBA process and contributes to the disproportionate representation of students from nondominant cultures in the eligibility area of emotional/behavioral disorders.

What is deemed to be appropriate or maladaptive behaviors are largely determined by setting, context, and culture. Moreno et al. argue that the FBA process can be culturally tuned in order to assist teams in assessing cultural factors when completing the FBA process, which can help school teams have a better cultural understanding of the student in order to develop a more appropriate behavior plan while keeping the student within the general education setting to the fullest extent possible.

Moreno et al., recommend five guiding strategies for cultural responsiveness during the indirect step of the FBA process, which involves interviewing family members and caregivers as well as gathering other sources of indirect data such as details from ODRs, medical reviews, teacher interviews, and student interviews if appropriate. Moreno et al., argue that by utilizing a culturally attuned FBA process, school teams can more clearly discriminate between behaviors perceived as inappropriate or maladaptive that stem from cultural differences and “genuine disability indicators.” (p. 344).

School and District-Level Interventions

While effective classroom management and teacher-centered practices and interventions can have an important impact on reducing the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline practices with students from non-dominant cultures, they cannot, of course, solve all problems. Schools and school districts must have systematic structures in place to support the reduction of these inequities. This is, once again, an area where collaboration between the fields of applied behavior analysis and education can work together to systematically reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices that disproportionately impact students of color.

One of the most widespread and well-known frameworks to address behavior school-wide is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), also known as School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS).

Horner and Sugai (2015) state “PBIS grew from and is infused with the principles and technology of behavior analysis” (p. 80). The PBIS framework views the “whole school as the unit of the intervention” (p. 80), and utilizes a tiered, multidisciplinary network of supports to select and design interventions with a focus on the manipulations of antecedents and the environment. PBIS also requires objectively and positively stated school expectations and rules, systems of reinforcement across the tiers, and fidelity monitoring procedures. (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

Horner and Sugai (2015) cite numerous studies that demonstrate the relationship between the implementation of PBIS and reductions in office discipline referrals, out-of-school

suspensions, and expulsions, as well as an increase in academic outcomes for students, improved social-emotional functioning, and an increase in the organization and efficiency of schools.

The authors continue to describe effective features of PBIS that have contributed to its widespread use and how the field of ABA can utilize these features to deepen collaboration with the field of education. The first is the emphasis on “core features and evidence-based strategies” (Horner & Sugai, 2015, p. 81). Instead of focusing on a specific packaged curriculum or intervention, PBIS identifies the core features of effective behavioral principles as they relate to student academic and behavioral outcomes (Horner & Sugai, 2015). This allows school teams to utilize the core features to assess curriculums and programs instead of relying solely on a specific program package. Secondly, PBIS not only revolves around what core features improve student outcomes but how to effectively implement systems that support their use and ensure continuation with support (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Similar to focusing on teacher-centered interventions at the classroom level, PBIS systems emphasize adult behaviors to keep the process going with fidelity and data-based decision-making. In this same vein, PBIS also recognizes the need to have support beyond the school level but also at the district and even state level. These larger systems support the smaller systems at schools, which in turn support school staff and students.

Behavior Analysts have unique and extensive training in the analysis and interpretation of data, particularly the visual analysis of graphed data. This is, again, a key feature of PBIS. Behavior Analysts are further suited to support and expand the use of PBIS due to their skillset in selecting function and evidence-based interventions (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). These qualifications and the ability to apply this knowledge across applied settings and populations position Behavior Analysts to support schools in their implementation of PBIS. Critically important to the field of ABA are social significance and environmental context. Behavior Analysts must collaborate with school staff in order to understand the constraints of the school setting and to select and design appropriate interventions. Behavior Analysts cannot support the effective implementation of PBIS at a distance but must work with school staff to truly understand the varied needs of individual school sites.

Counterarguments.

Many have argued that Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports are not culturally responsive, and while the framework may be effective in reducing the rates of office discipline referrals and other exclusionary practices, it still does not address the issue of disproportionate discipline within schools (Bal, 2018). Bal continues to state that PBIS was first envisioned as a “culture-neutral” (Bal, 2018, p. 145) system that would work in any school setting when done completely, consistently, and correctly. Recent research and advancements within the area of cultural responsiveness within the school setting have been applied to the PBIS framework with promising results.

The Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS) was developed by Bal to address the shortcomings of PBIS as they pertain to cultural responsiveness and addressing racial disproportionalities in discipline. This CRPBIS framework addresses five components that are important to the school setting. These include individual factors, institutional factors, interpersonal factors, infrastructure, and agency. “CRPBIS offers a methodology for a paradigm shift.” (Bal, 2018, p. 168). This methodology offers a main benefit that has made PBIS so popular and widespread across the country – it addresses behavior at

various levels and requires systematic application and data reviews, which makes the framework applicable in virtually any school setting. CRPBIS adds in a cultural responsiveness component at every level as well, which allows the methodology to be worked into existing practices while effectively addressing inequities in discipline.

Additional research has also studied the effects of adding in equity components to existing PBIS frameworks within schools (McIntosh et al., 2021). Additional components included equity-focused professional development and coaching to assess school-specific discipline data and disproportionate issues and selecting and implementing culturally relevant practices within the PBIS framework. In the study conducted by McIntosh et al., which involved eight public elementary schools in a rural school district located in the southeastern region of the U.S., totaling 9,600 students; “in treatment schools, the Black-Other risk difference dropped from above the national median...to approximately the bottom quartile of schools.” (McIntosh et al., 2021, p. 439). The racial inequities in discipline remained stable for the control schools. This research, while preliminary, is hopeful and inspiring and was able to produce a significant reduction in disproportionate discipline in just one school year. This new and emerging research provides significant evidence that cultural responsiveness and equity-focused interventions can be incorporated into the PBIS framework to effectively reduce disproportionate discipline in schools.

Some argue, mainly from within the field of Applied Behavior Analysis, that PBIS itself is not ABA. This argument has resulted in journal articles about PBIS being rejected from ABA peer-reviewed journals (Critchfield, 2015), which in turn does a disservice to the field of ABA as well as the dissemination of important research and viewpoints. Those within the field of ABA who spend time arguing whether or not PBIS belongs waste space and resources arguing insignificant points instead of putting that energy towards systematically addressing problems on a large scale. If those in ABA want respected space in other disciplines, such as education, we need to learn from PBIS in order to disseminate ABA’s documented history of developing powerful interventions that are antecedent and positive reinforcement based on a wide scale. Behavior analysts often express frustration both informally in conversations and in professional circles, as well as formally in conferences and publications about the science of applied behavior analysis not being adopted across organizations, disciplines, populations and settings (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015) but then spend time debating that PBIS does not qualify as true ABA and wonder why there has been such resistance to the field.

Those in the field of behavior analysis must stop, collaborate, and listen to the students, families, and professionals in special education. There is federal legislation that supports the use of and funds the use of positive behavior supports for individuals with disabilities within the public school system (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1997). The U.S. Department of Education has even declared that PBIS is a priority and funds multiple grants to support its use and dissemination. Other federal departments, such as The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has taken the PBIS model and applied it to public health initiatives such as reducing substance abuse and treating mental illness (Putnam & Kincaid, 2015). The growing acceptance and use of the PBIS model should inspire behavior analysts to get involved.

Recommendations

In order to address an issue as complex as disproportionate discipline practices within our schools, professionals must collaborate with one another. We have seen study after study noting that there is no single cause or factor that leads to our students from nondominant cultures receiving such disproportionate exclusionary discipline practices within our schools. Therefore, if there is no single cause or contributing factor, it would be naïve to assume that one profession or viewpoint will have the answers, solution, and means to implement those solutions. Additionally, the experts and professionals need to take the time to listen to the voices of those who have been oppressed for so long and have been on the receiving end of these inequitable practices and have experienced their effects.

Applied Behavior Analysis and special education have both an inspirational history of increasing access to opportunities and increasing the humane treatment and dignity of those with disabilities and individuals from nondominant cultures as well as a history stymied with abuse, injustice, and mistreatment of these same groups. Both of these fields have valuable resources, applications, and interventions that can be used to increase outcomes for all of our students, but particularly to right the wrongs of disproportionate discipline practices.

It is necessary to address classroom teacher behaviors with a focus on teacher-centered interventions. Improved teacher performance and classroom management contribute to rich learning environments that prevent problem behaviors before they occur. Adding on additional layers that address equity practices, as was demonstrated in Knochel et al. (2022), shows us both the need and power of this additional component. While evidence-based practices such as the Good Behavior Game promote student behaviors that lead to increased academic engagement and improved peer relations (Groves & Austin, 2019), it is not enough to inch the needle closer to more equitable discipline practices. As Knochel et al. (2022) showed us, even with improved teacher use of a specific strategy, such as BSP, without equity-focused coaching, disparities remained among teachers' use of praise statements between White peers and other students.

The Knochel et al. (2022) study needs to be replicated and expanded across different age groups and disabilities. It is also recommended that this study be incorporated into teacher education programs and ongoing teacher coaching and support in the classroom. It is evident that a solid foundation of classroom management practices is insufficient to address racial biases and discipline practices on a day-to-day basis within classrooms. It is the recommendation of this author that the framework from this study also is applied to other classroom practices, such as teacher attention and student voice in the classroom.

Additionally, it is critical that culturally responsive behavior interventions are considered and utilized, especially when considering a student for eligibility into a disability category and/or considering a more restrictive setting. Being able to differentiate between cultural practices and differences versus true mental health identifiers is necessary in the school setting. Expansion upon culturally responsive FBAs as well as a packaged framework that can be easily replicated in schools across the country could help reduce disproportionate referrals to special education for students from nondominant cultures.

Classroom-level interventions alone are insufficient to address such a widespread and deeply rooted issue as this. Systematic intervention and support at the school and district levels are also required. PBIS gives us the tools to beautifully combine the science of applied behavior analysis at a larger scale to provide multi-disciplinary teams the framework and tools to bring about real behavior change school-wide. With recent research on improving PBIS by adding in

cultural responsiveness components, equity-focused professional development, and coaching, we have a perfect opportunity to meaningfully improve the discipline practices and priorities of our schools.

Behavior analysts should recognize the strength and depth of PBIS's roots in applied behavior analysis and replicate the widespread adoption and implementation of PBIS nationally and internationally. Behavior analysts are uniquely and skillfully trained to support the use of PBIS and must listen to the research developing around culturally responsive and equity-focused PBIS as well as those within the school setting to identify and reduce barriers to full implementation. Behavior analysts could be valuable in analyzing data trends within individual schools to help identify common causes of discipline referrals and whether or not selected interventions are, in fact addressing disproportionality in student discipline data.

Summary and Conclusion

Discipline practices within our schools have long reflected our priorities within the United States. This may not be an easy-to-accept position considering the long-documented history of disproportionate exclusionary discipline practices towards students from nondominant cultures. Despite this, there is no time like the present for change. It is imperative that we stop to examine the practices that have contributed to the inconsistent application of discipline procedures in schools and collaborate between fields and communities to effectively move forward.

Combining the expertise and skillsets of the field of applied behavior analysis and education is one collaborative method that can bring about great, positive change. Applied behavior analysis can offer a great deal of help in designing and evaluating the effectiveness of teacher-centered interventions to bring about desirable behavior changes in discipline practices. This requires a shift in thinking and recentering adults as the target of behavioral interventions as opposed to students. Again, this is not to say that student-focused behavior plans are not necessary; they absolutely are. However, it is the belief of this author that by prominently shifting the lens to adult behaviors and focusing on improving equitable practices in the classroom, we can reduce disproportionate discipline rates.

Of course, this can only be done when combined with systematic changes at the school and district level. Modifying PBIS systems to make them more culturally responsive while adding in equity-focused professional development can aid in this area of need. This type of systematic change requires leaders who are focused on acknowledging the long-standing history of disproportionate discipline practices and making change. It is, of course, uncomfortable to take this level of self-reflection; but avoiding and denying this reality does not make it any less true, and it certainly only continues to harm our students. There is always progress to be made and work to be done. And it certainly cannot be done alone.

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SECONDARY TEACHERS' CONFIDENCE IN IMPLEMENTING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

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Abstract

Culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to execute culturally responsive teaching practices (Siwatu et al., 2016). The qualitative study aimed to describe certified secondary teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy beliefs, exploring teachers' experiences and perceptions of personal abilities to teach culturally diverse students rigorously. Teachers have used culturally responsive teaching as a behavior management tool instead of an instructional strategy for improving academic achievement (Little, 2020). Survey results and focus group discussions revealed that effective implementation starts with a clear understanding of culturally responsive teaching and the self-efficacy needed to apply that knowledge.

Secondary Teacher's Confidence in Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching can help schools meet the academic needs of every student by creating inclusive classrooms with high expectations and academic rigor. Ladson-Billings (2021) defined culturally responsive teaching as using students' home cultures to scaffold learning and make meaningful pedagogical connections. Two key terms in this definition are scaffolding learning and pedagogical connections. These essential ideas need to be understood in terms of culturally responsive teaching. Teachers have used culturally responsive teaching as a behavior management tool instead of an instructional strategy for improving academic achievement (Little, 2020). Effective implementation starts with a clear understanding of culturally responsive teaching and the self-efficacy to apply that knowledge.

Context

A survey and focus group discussion were conducted to determine the self-efficacy beliefs and level of understanding of the principles of culturally responsive teaching of certified secondary teachers in several Florida school districts. The principals of these schools gave consent for the researchers to survey their teachers. The study attracted several participating principals in hopes that their teaching staff were using culturally responsive teaching. The study revealed that teachers need to understand culturally responsive teaching fully or are only comfortable with the relationship-building aspects of culturally responsive teaching because it helps with behavior management. Study participants needed to be more familiar with or comfortable learning about students' cultures to improve academic achievement. Survey questions with answers demonstrating the highest self-efficacy included the confidence to develop a community of learners when the classroom consists of students from diverse backgrounds, the ability to build a sense of trust with students, the ability to establish a personal relationship with students, and the ability to help students feel like important members of the classroom (see Appendix A).

Cultivating relationships is an essential component of culturally responsive teaching. Relationship building creates an environment where students are comfortable taking risks and pushing through rigorous tasks to increase cognitive capacity (Hammond, 2021). While teachers expressed great confidence in leveraging their understanding of student cultures for relationships and building a trusting classroom community, their efforts focused on managing student behavior.

Culturally responsive strategies for managing classroom behavior exist, such as culturally responsive classroom management and restorative justice practices, but culturally responsive teaching is different. The emphasis of culturally responsive teaching is on the instructional approach used in response to the diverse student cultures in the classroom. The focus group discussion revealed that teachers needed to be aware of their ability to connect teaching methods and the students' cultural backgrounds in their classrooms.

Teacher participants expressed the lowest self-confidence and understanding regarding the academic components of culturally responsive teaching. Survey questions with answers demonstrating the lowest teacher self-efficacy included the ability to use students' home culture to make learning meaningful, identifying ways in which students' communication at home may be different from school norms, the ability to critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it reinforces negative cultural stereotypes; the ability to revise instructional material to

include a better representation of cultural groups; the ability to teach students about their cultural contributions to society; and the ability to use examples that are familiar to students from diverse cultural backgrounds (see Appendix B). The survey responses show a disconnection between cultural responsiveness and teaching practices.

In an interview with Burnham (2020), Childers-McKee described traditional teaching strategies as outdated compared with culturally responsive teaching. According to Childers-McKee, traditional teaching spotlights the teacher as the expert as students passively receive the information. Since the current classroom is filled with diversity, Childers-McKee argued that instruction "...needs to build on individual and cultural experiences and their prior knowledge. It needs to be justice-oriented and reflect the social context we are in now" (Burnham, 2020, p. para. 4).

Teachers need to be willing to change their understanding of culturally responsive teaching. A paradigm shift is needed for them to accept it as an instructional practice that leverages students' cultural backgrounds to improve academic achievement. Educational leaders should explore building a school culture to foster teacher self-confidence regarding culturally responsive teaching (Little, 2020).

Paradigm Shift for Effective Implementation

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to achieve a task regardless of actual ability (Bandura, 1986). A person must believe they can accomplish a task to experience success (McCutcheon, 2019). Having positive or high self-efficacy beliefs is essential in many areas of life. Teachers, in particular, need self-efficacy to implement innovative strategies. When implementing prevailing or emerging approaches, such as culturally responsive teaching, teachers must be willing and confident to try.

Participants in the focus group discussed two ways to accomplish the shift in mindset concerning culturally responsive teaching. The first is the ability of teachers to relate to students from a cultural background different from their own. One participant stated, "It is easier to conceptualize culturally responsive teaching if you can relate to your students." The willingness to try and implement culturally responsive teaching depends on the teachers' ability to understand their students' cultural backgrounds. Consideration of student's worldviews can help educators adjust teaching strategies for more inclusion and academic success.

The second central point about the paradigm shift discussed in the focus group related to the need for teachers to see the results of culturally responsive teaching. Participants expressed that teachers would be more willing to invest in understanding their students' cultures to make instructional connections if they could see the benefits for students. The ability to see how culturally responsive teaching benefits students stems from critical reflection. Critical reflection can help teachers deepen their understanding of themselves and others. When teachers know their worldview and how it relates to their students, they can build confidence in being culturally responsive (see Appendix C). The culturally responsive teaching paradigm shift should include critical reflection.

Strategies for Focusing on Academic Components of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Surveyed teachers expressed high confidence in using various teaching methods (see Appendix A). Culturally responsive teaching involves considering students' cultural backgrounds when applying teaching methods. For example, teachers could consider whether students' cultural backgrounds are individualistic or collectivistic.

Cherry (2022) explained that "collectivism stresses the importance of the community, while individualism focuses on the rights and concerns of each person." In the classroom, students from a collectivist culture might make personal sacrifices for the group's greater good. In contrast, students from individualistic cultures may place greater weight on personal success. Students with an individualistic mindset may prefer to work independently, while collectivistic students may thrive while working in groups.

Instructional Scaffolding

Instructional scaffolding is a tool developed by Vygotsky for learner independence and academic growth. Teachers provide students with small steps towards achievement within their zone of proximal development. Chunking helps students learn material in small amounts and build on knowledge. Planning appropriate scaffolding helps students become more independent as they learn to carry most of the cognitive load (Hammond, 2021).

The gradual release of responsibility, also referred to as guided practice, is an example of scaffolding that includes modeling and practice (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The teacher models the intended learning outcome, and students practice with the teacher and classmates. Then, students demonstrate understanding independently. This strategy also addresses the needs of students from individualistic and collectivist backgrounds.

Engagement through Student Choice

Teachers can recognize and celebrate student differences by incorporating engagement strategies that promote students' interests through choice. Teachers could provide students with academic options for their learning styles or interests. The choice could be as simple as completing the odd or even math problems or the option to write in cursive or manuscript. Students may prefer working with a group or individually when considering cultural backgrounds. Culminating activities provide abundant opportunities for choice, such as reading the text or conducting interviews to gather information, writing a poem, drawing a picture, creating a short story, developing a comic strip, or producing a video to demonstrate understanding. Giving students choices with boundaries is culturally responsive because it allows students to engage with learning according to their worldview.

Conclusion

Culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to execute culturally responsive teaching practices (Siwatu et al., 2016). The qualitative study aimed to describe certified schoolteachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy beliefs, exploring teachers' experiences and perceptions of personal abilities to teach rigorously culturally diverse students. There is no blueprint for culturally responsive teaching because of the unique compositions of individuals between classrooms (Kensinger, 2021). Teachers need continued confidence in cultivating relationships, maintaining high expectations, and making relevant cultural connections to learning for all students, including the cultural and linguistically diverse

(Little, 2020). Principals should continue monitoring their school climate to ensure students learn in a culturally responsive environment.

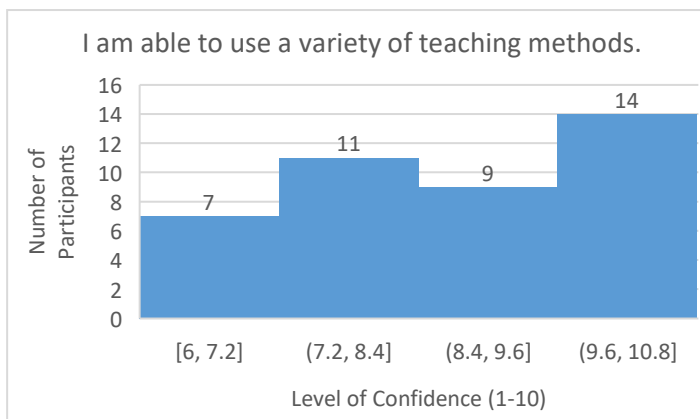
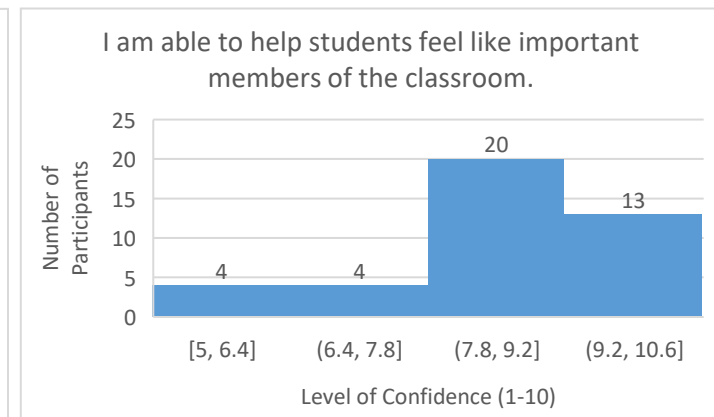
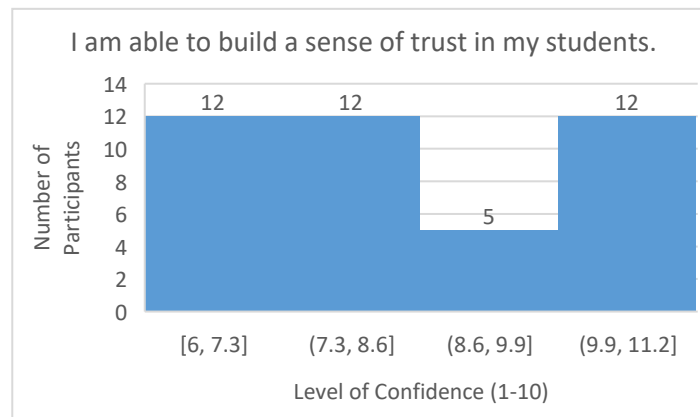
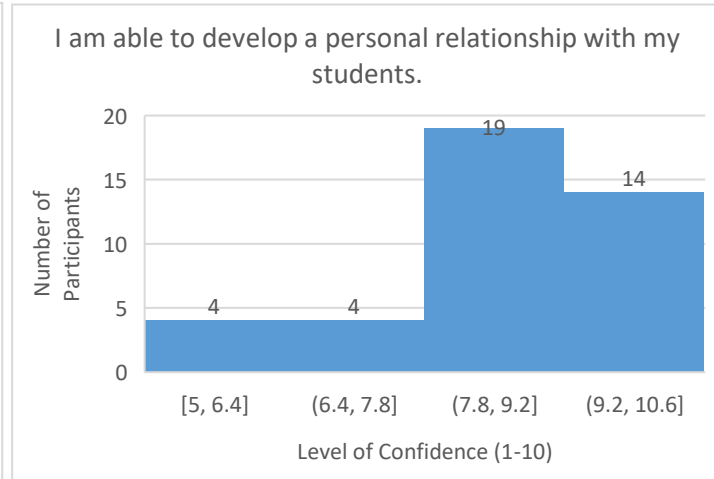
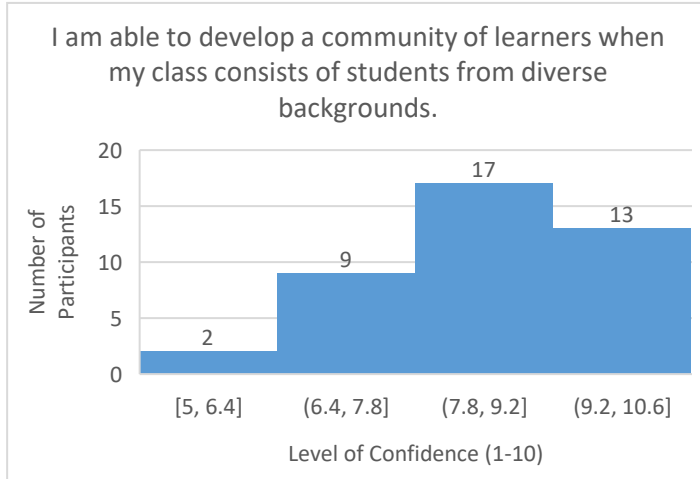
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Appendix A

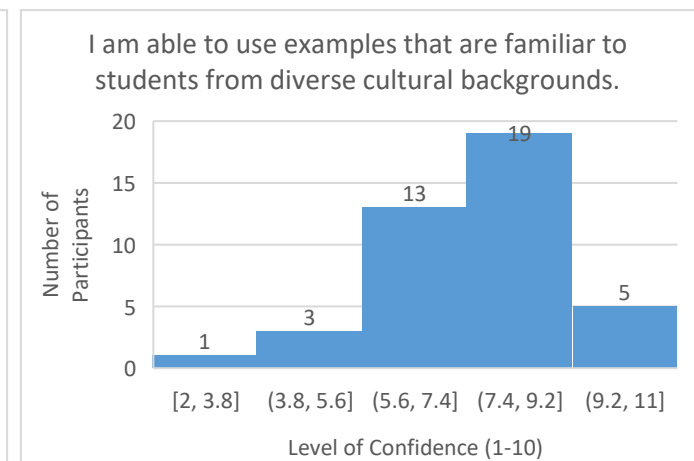
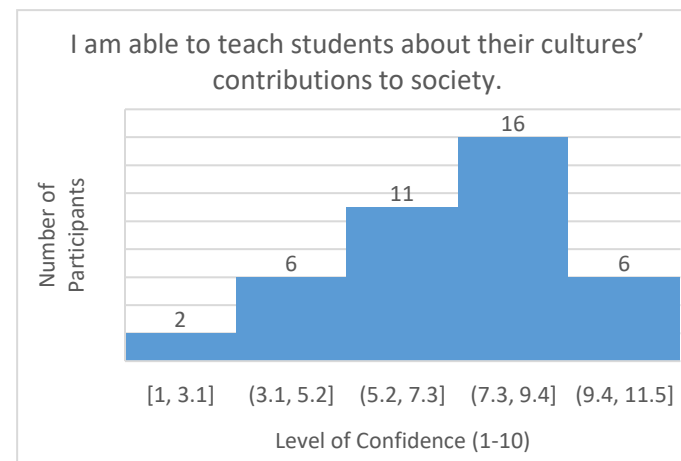
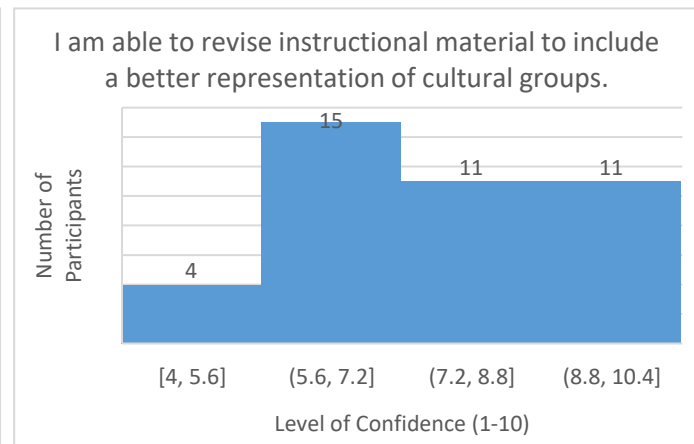
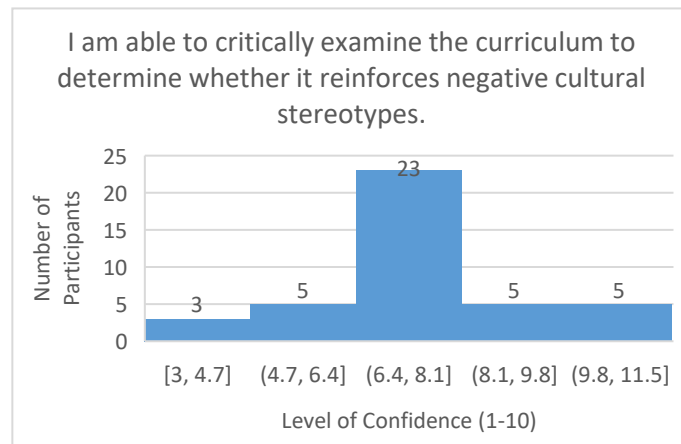
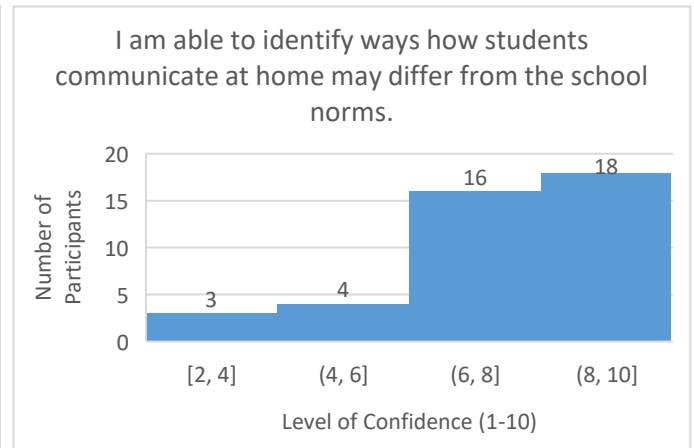
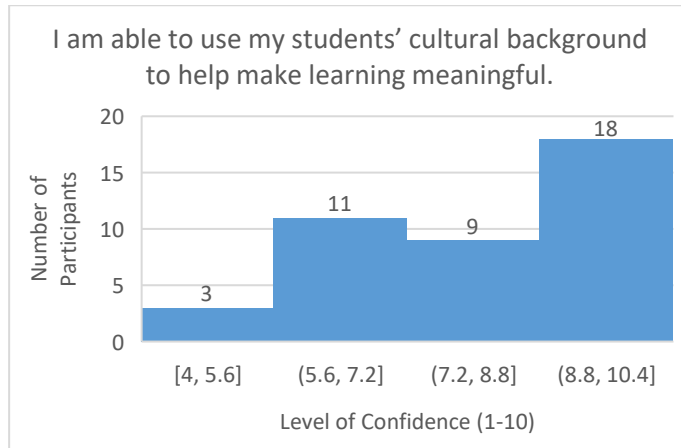
Teacher Survey Results: High Self-Efficacy Beliefs

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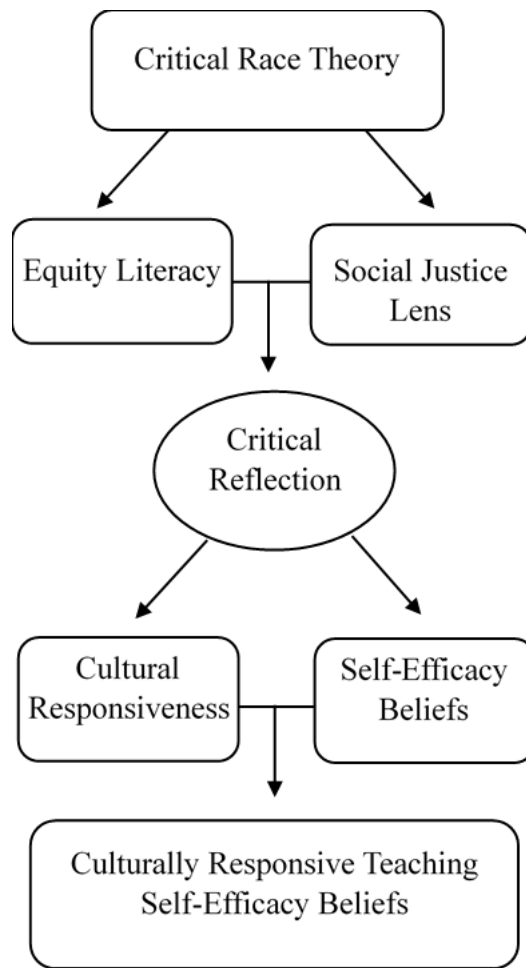
Appendix B

Teacher Survey Results: Low Self-Efficacy Beliefs



Appendix C

Critical Reflection and Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Diagram



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Critical Race Theory provides a framework for developing the equity literacy and the social justice lens necessary for critical reflection. To become critical in reflection is to uncover and analyze fundamental assumptions. Through critical reflection, teachers deepen their understanding of themselves and others to strengthen self-efficacy beliefs regarding cultural responsiveness. Critical reflection is vital to culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy beliefs.

THE STRUGGLE WITH BLACK MEN AND THEIR FINANCES: THE LACK OF FINANCIAL LITERACY

SUE M. MAY, SANDRA DAVIS – UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC

Abstract

The lack of financial literacy among Black college students and young adults is a significant issue that needs attention. However, there is little research on why financial literacy is so low among young Black men. This article uses Critical Race Theory to examine the struggles of seven young self-identified Black men with finances and financial literacy in the Northern California Bay Area. This qualitative study used a standard financial literacy measure and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to focus on the participants' experiences and perceptions of their financial education. The study found that most participants discussed saving, investing, and retirement planning but were unaware of savings accounts. Participants discussed experiencing discrimination and racism, highlighting the ongoing problem of racism in the financial system that affected this sample of young Black men. The participants' narratives in this study showed that young Black men's financial literacy requires intervention at the community and family levels to improve. The study suggests that young Black men could benefit from early education around financial literacy and skills, given that their families may not have the knowledge and skills to provide for them.

Keywords: Financial Literacy, Black College students, Savings, Critical Race Theory

The Struggle with Black Men and Their Finances: The Lack of Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is a crucial life skill that enables individuals to make informed financial decisions based on a systematic understanding of money and its effective use. According to Sudakova (2018), financial literacy is a process that involves learning, practicing, and applying knowledge to make informed financial decisions. While over half of the adults in the United States possess a basic understanding of fundamental financial decision-making concepts, including basic numeracy, interest compounding, inflation, and risk diversification, financial literacy awareness remains low among young adults (Lusardi, 2019). Moreover, people from various minority groups have significantly less knowledge about financial literacy (Dewi, 2022).

One such group that has faced immense challenges in building and securing wealth in the United States is Black Americans (Johnson & Carter, 2020). Despite the abolition of slavery, many financial barriers continued to exist and disproportionately impacted the Black community (Francis, 2022). These barriers have resulted in limited opportunities for Black and African Americans to create and accumulate wealth, and they have persisted through the decades. While efforts have been made recently to address these financial inequities, economic equality and injustice remain a struggle for the Black community (Johnson & Carter, 2020).

In particular, Black men tend to struggle with their finances due to a combination of historical and systemic factors such as discrimination, limited access to financial education, and lack of representation in the financial industry (Francis, 2022). These factors have contributed to a significant wealth gap, with Black men having significantly lower levels of wealth and financial security compared to their white counterparts. However, efforts are underway to promote financial literacy among Black men, such as community-based financial education programs and initiatives to increase diversity in the financial industry (Florant et al., 2020). By addressing these systemic issues and promoting financial education, we can work towards empowering Black men to make informed financial decisions and achieve greater financial security.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the financial challenges that Black men face and how they struggle to manage their finances due to their possible lack of financial literacy (Lasardi et al., 2021). The study delved into the root causes of these challenges and the various factors that contribute to them. It also examined the impact of these financial struggles on black men's overall well-being and quality of life. Ultimately, the research provided insights and recommendations to help address these issues and improve the financial stability of black men.

The issue of financial literacy is a significant challenge faced by many black men. It is a glaring problem that has continued to persist over the years, with several studies pointing to the lack of adequate knowledge and skills required to manage finances as a significant contributing factor (Struckell et al., 2022). This lack of financial literacy among black men can be attributed to several factors, including inadequate access to educational resources, a dearth of positive role models and mentors who can offer guidance and support, and a lack of financial inclusion, which often leads to a sense of alienation and disengagement from the larger financial system (Young, 2023).

As a result, many black men struggle to make sound financial decisions, manage their debts, save for the future, and invest in their financial futures (Huff, 2021). The consequences of this problem are far-reaching and can be felt across many aspects of life, including reduced economic opportunities, limited access to credit and financial services, and a general sense of financial insecurity and instability (Onyeaka et al., 2021).

While over half of the adults in the United States have some knowledge of the four fundamental concepts for financial decision-making – basic numeracy, interest compounding, inflation, and risk diversification (Darriet et al., 2021), financial literacy awareness has been low among young adults, especially among people from various minority groups ((Sudakova, 2018). Among Black college students, financial literacy has been significantly lower than among other groups (Singh, 2018). However, there has been little to no research on why financial literacy is so low among young Black men between the ages of 18 - 25. Few studies specifically show how financial literacy and decision-making regarding finances may be related to their family's economic situation and socialization (Faulk & White, 2018). This research was crucial, given that this cohort of young adults came of age during the post-2008 recession era marked by economic insecurity, lack of trust, and confidence in the integrity of financial institutions (Adams et al., 2022). Consequently, this generation of young adults used non-traditional opportunities to earn income through digital technology and social media, significantly impacting their financial capabilities (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020)

Problem Statement

The rise of unemployment, growing debt, and the high cost of education continue to pose problems for young adults in the United States (Kochhar, 2020). Young adults face obstacles in determining their financial futures, with higher debt levels and financial burdens than previous generations (Kochhar, 2022). Research indicates that most young adults lack basic financial knowledge (Siegfried & Wuttke, 2021). People with money management knowledge can make more informed decisions about finances, savings, budgeting, loans, and investments. Research has shown that parents and family are highly influential in the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to financial literacy (Chen et al., 2023). In one of the most significant studies in this field, Lusardi et al. (2021) found that a college-educated man with parents who had stocks and retirement plans was 45 percent more likely to know about risk diversification than a female counterpart with less than high-school education and parents who did not have assets.

Black men often have lower educational and employment outcomes than White male peers, and the gap is even more apparent at younger ages (Ross & Holmes, 2019). Black men consistently earn less than White men, even when equally qualified. Numerous factors contribute to the social and economic differences: education, occupation, hiring discrimination, and other barriers to economic equality (Gould et al., 2018). However, White men's median earnings for full-time work have increased over the past ten years, whereas it has remained unchanged for Black men and women (Gould et al., 2018). The unemployment gap is so severe for Black men that closing it would increase the wealth of U.S. Black communities by approximately \$33 billion each year (Austin, 2021).

The racial wealth gap has been a persistent issue for Black and African Americans in the United States for generations (Harris, 2023). This gap has been the result of several factors, including systemic inequality, historical housing and employment discrimination, lack of access to quality education, limited financial literacy, high default rates on student loans, and other

similar challenges. As a result of these obstacles, many individuals from these communities have faced significant challenges in building wealth, which in turn impacts their ability to secure their financial future and that of their families (Nana-Sinkam et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, one can take several proactive steps to address these issues and work towards building a more financially secure future.

Research Questions

RQ 1. How do lived experiences of young Black men shape their attitudes toward financial education and money?

RQ 2. In what ways does family financial socialization influence Black men's current financial behaviors and well-being?

Significance of Study

The socioeconomic disadvantages faced by Black communities have been widely discussed in the literature. However, researchers have largely ignored the study of how Black families acquire their knowledge and understanding of money management and financial literacy (Johnson & Carter, 2020). To address this gap, this inquiry focuses on understanding the factors that shape young Black men's financial learning, attitudes, and decision-making, as well as their interrelationship with their early family history, living situations, and experiences (Joyce & Cartwright, 2020).

The results of this study have led to the development of new models to examine Black men's financial security, financial learning, and decision-making in relation to their lived experiences (Tatum et al., 2021). The study has also highlighted the unique financial challenges faced by young Black men in the post-Great Recession era (Wint et al., 2022). Those who grew up during the Great Recession of 2008 and its aftermath experienced significant economic instability, which led to a profound distrust of financial institutions. As such, this age group may not share the same values and behaviors as previous generations when interacting with these institutions (Tatum et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this generation grew up during a time of rapid growth in social media and digital technology, which has created better opportunities for increasing their earning power, managing finances, and learning about financial institutions (Pfeffer & Killewald, 2019). This study's findings have helped inform the development of future financial literacy programs for young Black men, tailoring them to address the financial skills necessary to confront their unique challenges. Finally, this study also seeks to understand the intergenerational distribution of financial resources within Black families and its impact on family and individual financial security (Pfeffer & Killewald, 2019). Overall, the results of this inquiry underscore the need for further research and intervention to promote financial literacy and address the unique challenges young Black men face in achieving financial security.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is a theoretical framework that primarily refers to the study of race and racism in society, recognizing how the social construction of race is deeply ingrained in the fabric of American life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Initially developed in U.S. law schools to examine the role of race and law, the framework has expanded to various social science disciplines,

including education and psychology (Hart, 2019). CRT was essential for guiding this dissertation study because of race's crucial role in the financial and economic well-being of people in the U.S. and young Black men's lived experiences, guiding their engagement with financial literacy.

During the mid-70s, a group of diverse activists and legal academics of color authored critical race theory after challenging the underlying legitimacy of the foundation of its liberal order (Lawrence & Hylton, 2022). On closer examination, they argued that the instability of the law was practically designed to broadly divide people into two groups. This can create an “us versus them” situation where people see one racial group as good while others are seen as harmful, dangerous, or fundamentally different from another group of people. As understood by critical legal studies scholars and practitioners, the law was a political process that produced socioeconomic privilege for the dominant culture (Hart, 2019). Subsequently, those scholars and activists understood the importance of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement in paving the way for today's progress on race and social justice matters (Maher et al., 2019). There are five significant tenets of Critical Race Theory, and each one guides and navigates the field of research:

- Tenet 1: Racism is Ordinary. The notion is that racism is not aberrational but is an everyday occurrence.
- Tenet 2: Interest Convergence. History illustrates that the dominant culture has consistently been unwilling to accept progress toward racial justice unless it benefits their self-interests.
- Tenet 3: Race as a Social Construct. Race is a product of social thought and relations, rather than being biological or genetic.
- Tenet 4: White people as recipients of civil rights legislation. White people have benefited from civil rights legislation because of their privilege.
- Tenet 5: Storytelling and counter-storytelling. People describe their experiences or apply their unique perspectives regarding racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Each tenet informs this study, but storytelling and counter-storytelling provide a theoretical and methodological approach that centers on the experiences of people impacted by racism, such as young Black men (Miller et al., 2020). CRT supports the voices of the young Black men in this study of financial literacy by incorporating their firsthand knowledge drawn from their history and urges them to recount their perspectives on race and finances (Williams, 2023). The study examined how young Black men are socialized through parental influences around money management within their families.

Literature Review

The Historical Foundation of the Racial Wealth Gap

The Antebellum Era set the foundation for the U.S. to become an economic superpower and empowered the country's financial systems, where Black people were excluded from gaining knowledge, profit, and mobility, which affects the relationship between race and finances today. During the Antebellum Era, the exploitation of Black labor in the United States established the 29 nation as an economic world power (Baptist, 2016). The first enslaved people in the English colonies in North America arrived from the Western coast of Africa in 1619 (Hammond et al., 2020). As farmworkers in the American South, millions of Africans were forced into slavery as they worked on indigo, sugar, rice, tobacco, and cotton plantations (Feagin et al., 2020). As the

United States economy prospered during the colonial period, the utilization of chattel slavery was a crucial part of that prosperity (Shank, 2019). Due to anti-literacy laws, most enslaved Black people were prohibited from reading, writing, or accruing assets.

Financial literacy among young adults compared to previous generations, U.S. millennials and younger generations are incredibly diverse, educated, and technologically savvy; yet, they are in a worse financial and economic shape than earlier generations of young adults (Pew Research Center, 2022). To understand the financial literacy of young Black men aged 24 and 25, the study examined their experiences by reviewing their financial characteristics, background, and parental and childhood influences on their financial well-being, as well as the family financial socialization model. Demographic and financial characteristics of young black adults today contend with social, political, and economic circumstances that present challenges and opportunities for their financial well-being, including unprecedented economic instability, increasingly complicated financial services, and high student loan debt. In this section, we review the literature and evidence that today's young adults are the first in modern times to face higher levels of poverty and debt, particularly student loan debt, unemployment, as well as lower levels of wealth, homeownership, and personal income than their predecessors (Deller & Parr, 2021).

Economic challenges and financial instability have significantly impacted Black young adults, who face higher poverty rates and discrimination in the labor market. Many students enter higher education institutions with limited financial resources and family support (Anton et al., 2021). For Black college students, the burden of debt and default is alarming, as having a college degree does not necessarily shield them from economic insecurity (Scott-Clayton, 2018). A concerning trend emerges when we examine degree completion rates for Black men. According to Davis (2022), in 2014, Black men starting their bachelor's degree studies were 45% less likely to complete their degree compared to their White counterparts. Although this completion gap has improved since 2005, when Black men were 59% less likely to graduate than White men, there remains significant cause for concern. The challenges persist at the associate degree level as well; in 2017, Black men were 33% less likely to earn a two-year degree compared to their White peers. This disparity highlights a troubling trend: while the completion gap for bachelor's degrees has narrowed, the gap for associate degrees has widened dramatically, increasing from just 4% in 2008 to 33% by 2017 (Davis, 2022, pp. 4-5).

These statistics highlight the ongoing challenges that Black men face in higher education, underscoring the need for initiatives that address these gaps. Addressing this issue is crucial, not only for individual success but also for promoting broader societal equity and fostering intergenerational financial mobility. Today's Black young adults navigate a landscape shaped by unique and cumulative challenges, as major economic upheavals and technological shifts have redefined the importance of financial education and literacy (Narnolia & Kumar, 2021).

The current generation of young Black adults has experienced two major economic recessions in their early lives, leading to a decline in trust in financial institutions and the rise of digital technology and social media (Schaeffer, 2022). Both present new frontiers for examining the role of race in financial literacy among young adults. (2020).

Although the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic is still underway, evidence suggests that the current pandemic is having an adverse impact on the already precarious financial well-being of Black families and individuals (Pew Research, 2020). According to Hamilton Project and Brookings Institute data, the racial wealth gap remained entrenched in 2018. This data shows that the economic safety nets, or “cushions,” are much weaker for protecting Black families from the current economic shocks compared to White families.

Background on Financial Literacy

In a complex economic world, navigating various financial services and products is an essential life skill. Lusardi et al. (2021) define financial literacy as a person’s ability to process economic information and make informed decisions about financial planning, wealth accumulation, debt, and pensions. Studies examining the impact of individuals’ financial literacy on their financial behaviors find that higher levels of financial literacy are associated with more favorable financial behaviors. In their review of financial literacy studies, Lusardi et al. (2021) find that financial literacy is linked to many individual economic outcomes and behaviors, including day-to-day financial management skills, participation in financial markets and investment stocks, precautionary savings, and most robustly, planning for retirement.

The authors also found that lacking financial literacy was linked to costly financial behaviors such as high-cost borrowing and paying high transaction costs and fees (Lusardi et al., 2021). Studies that examined the specific components of financial literacy found that knowing advanced financial knowledge topics, like risk diversification, spreading investments over the various sectors and assets to reduce the impact of instability, and the capacity to do calculations mattered most to financial behaviors and outcomes. Another study of young adults found that higher financial literacy levels were associated with better financial outcomes, including a lesser likelihood of using high-cost borrowing methods, a higher likelihood of planning for retirement and having money set aside for emergencies (Siegfried & Wuttke, 2021). Financial literacy is considered an important life skill. However, the traditional wealth management and financial services industry has primarily been created, maintained, and dominated, according to Burton (2018).

Burton (2018) argues that this exclusion prevents Black people from fully participating in gaining and contributing knowledge and services related to finances in mainstream industries. In their study on financial literacy levels among a sample of Black students at a historically Black college, Singh (2018) finds that less than 4% of Black students answered a standard 5-item assessment of basic economic and financial concepts (pp 204). The study also notes that financial literacy is crucial for young Black adults, as they are making more complex financial decisions than their parents did at the same age. Black descendants of enslaved Africans have contended with formal and informal practices of discrimination and conditions that prevented them from accumulating the wealth and resources needed to participate in financial systems and thus acquire financial literacy. One study examining the economic returns on financial literacy education found that White adults had higher financial literacy scores and garnered greater returns on their financial education than non-White adults (Al-Bahrani et al., 2019).

The authors' conclusion that the impact of Whiteness on financial literacy is due to racial, financial, or differential behaviors, despite financial literacy, was no surprise to this researcher. These findings highlight a critical gap in the financial literacy literature - a lack of critical acknowledgment of how race and racism affect the development of financial literacy and access

to financial institutions. Darity et al. (2021) argue that financial literacy should not be considered a solution to the racial wealth gap and that improving Black people's financial decisions, behaviors, and practices "is wholly inadequate to bridge the racial chasm in wealth. Hamilton and Darity (2017) pointed out that White Americans have collectively procured more resources and assets compared to other racial/ethnic groups in the United States over the last several decades. This intergenerational wealth, capital, and finance accumulation among White people, including securing appreciating assets that generate more wealth, has primarily excluded Black people.

Hamilton and Darity (2017) argue that the onus of the racial wealth gap is not on individual Black people or their behaviors but on the structural conditions that continue to preserve White wealth. The racial wealth gap plays a large part in the racial, financial, and economic gaps we see among young people today, including the student loan debt gap. Addo et al. (2016) found that young adults' net worth explains a portion of the Black and White disparity in debt. Even more, the gap was most severe at the highest levels of parents' net worth, and the study authors suggest that differences in the accumulation of debt and ability to repay debt are responsible for racial disparities in debt. The literature on financial literacy among young adults shows that overall levels are low, with significant variation varying by gender, race, and socioeconomic status. An early study that examined financial literacy among approximately 4,500 young adults aged 25 to 34, using data from the 2009 National Financial Capability Study, found that financial literacy was particularly low among women, racial/ethnic minorities, and low-income or less educated people (Siegfried & Wuttke, 2021). Specifically, nearly half (49%) of young respondents with a college education and 60% with a postgraduate education could correctly answer the 3-item financial literacy assessment. A survey of Black college students found that less than 4% of participants could answer all five items on a financial literacy assessment, with low rates among first- and second-year students, especially those under 22 years of age (Singh, 2018, p 208). Standard financial literacy among young adults is below average, with extant literature finding significant differences by race and family background (Yakoboski et al., 2020). Early studies on financial literacy among young adults found that family and social background are essential to financial literacy development (Garg & Singh, 2018). Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, Lusardi et al. (2021) assessed financial literacy among a nationally representative sample of U.S. youth born between 1980-84 and found differences in financial literacy were associated with family background. Financial literacy is associated with parental education, particularly the mother's education, and whether parents had stocks and retirement accounts when the respondents were teenagers (Lusardi et al., 2021).

Factors Contributing to Financial Struggles

Financial struggles can be caused by various factors, including lack of planning, unforeseen circumstances, insufficient financial resources, lack of education, and family issues (Guan et al., 2022). If an individual feels disorganized about money and fails to plan, they will likely experience financial problems. Unforeseen circumstances, such as unexpected medical expenses, can significantly impact one's financial situation (Fenton-O'Creevy & Furnham, 2021). Additionally, if an individual does not have enough money to meet their basic needs, they may struggle to pay bills and make ends meet, causing stress and anxiety (Guan et al., 2022).

Furthermore, educational disparities can also contribute to financial struggles. Educational opportunities and resources are unequal among different demographic groups based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location (Beech et al., 2021). This can lead to employment discrimination, where individuals are treated unfairly or differently based on their personal characteristics. This can result in unequal pay, harassment, bias in hiring or promotion, and even termination (Silverman et al., 2023). Addressing these complex issues requires policy interventions, social awareness, and individual action.

Another factor contributing to financial struggles is the lack of financial resources. The racial wealth gap is a significant issue in many countries, including the United States, where there is a significant wealth gap between white people and people of color, especially Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people (Kroeger & Wright, 2021). This gap is the result of historical and systemic racism that has limited opportunities for economic advancement and created barriers to wealth generation. The racial wealth gap has significant implications for social and economic equity and individual and community well-being (Banaji, 2021).

The consequences of financial struggles can be severe and far-reaching, affecting an individual's mental and physical well-being (Guan et al., 2022). Financial problems can lead to arguments and conflicts with loved ones and close acquaintances about money, causing significant strain on relationships (Ryu & Fan, 2023). In addition, financial struggles can cause difficulty sleeping, resulting in fatigue and aches and pains. Individuals may also experience anger, fear, or mood swings, which can further impact their relationships and daily lives (Ng & Shanks, 2020). They may begin to withdraw from social interactions and feel guilty when they spend money, negatively impacting their self-esteem and energy levels. Furthermore, people may delay or avoid seeking necessary healthcare due to the high cost, which can seriously affect their overall health and well-being.

Financial struggles can have a significant and far-reaching impact on an individual's life, affecting their relationships, physical health, and mental well-being (Guan et al., 2022). Therefore, addressing the root causes of financial problems is essential to promote social and economic equality and improve the overall well-being of individuals and communities.

Psychological Effects

There is growing evidence to suggest that financial strains and worries can greatly impact mental health. In the United States, many families face financial vulnerability and strain. Those with inadequate income, wealth, or debt may experience economic hardship that can precipitate stress when they struggle to afford their current and ongoing financial obligations. These findings were highlighted in a recent study (Friedline et al., 2021).

Numerous social and economic determinants of depression have been identified, including proximal factors such as unemployment, low socioeconomic status, low education, low income, and not being in a relationship, as well as distal factors such as income inequality and structural characteristics of the neighborhood (Guan et al., 2022).

Families that experience financial-related psychological stress or distress due to a lack of adequate income, wealth, or debt to afford economic hardship may be particularly susceptible to depression (Friedline et al., 2021). It is important to note that sources of financial stress are complex and multidimensional, and indicators such as low income or debt are not the only

economic risk factors for mental health problems. Other sources of financial stress, such as lack of assets, economic hardship, or financial difficulties, such as difficulty meeting standard living needs like buying food, clothes, and paying bills, may also relate to depression (Weida et al., 2020).

Depression is one of the most common mental health problems and is marked by a range of symptoms, including sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness, and poor concentration (Guan et al., 2022). Given the significant impact of financial stress on mental health, it is important that individuals and families take steps to manage their finances and seek support when needed (Ryu & Fan, 2023).

Solutions and Strategies

According to recent research, there is a significant correlation between low levels of financial literacy and feelings of anxiety and stress (Lone & Bhat, 2022). The study recommends that initiatives aimed at increasing financial knowledge levels be expanded, particularly among groups at high risk of experiencing financial distress. The research also suggests several strategies to alleviate financial anxiety and stress. Adults, particularly those at risk, are advised to set aside emergency savings. Even small amounts can help cushion against future financial shocks and relieve households experiencing stress and anxiety (Despard et al., 2020). Employers are encouraged to offer workplace financial wellness programs that cover money management topics and options for automatic savings. Employers can also provide resources to help individuals cope with the anxiety and stress caused by financial problems (Frank-Miller, 2019). Moreover, personal finance experts, such as advisors, counselors, and planners, should take note of the harmful effects of financial anxiety and stress on their clients (Guan et al., 2022).

Importance of Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is a critical skill that empowers individuals to make informed and sound financial decisions (Friedline et al., 2021). It is the ability to understand financial concepts and use them effectively to manage personal finances, investments, and tax planning. A robust financial literacy helps individuals to comprehend financial information better and become more comfortable using basic financial instruments like credit cards, loans, and insurance policies (Kamble et al., 2023). Moreover, financial literacy protects against financial frauds and scams as individuals become more aware of the potential risks and are better equipped to protect themselves (Mohd et al., 2021). It helps individuals to manage their money more efficiently, make better investment decisions, and plan for retirement. Developing financial literacy is a lifelong journey that requires learning and adaptation to changing financial landscapes. It is essential to enhancing financial stability and ensuring a secure financial future. Therefore, investing time and effort in improving financial literacy is crucial, especially in today's complex and dynamic financial environment (Guan et al., 2022).

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the financial challenges that Black men face and how they struggle to manage their finances due to their possible lack of financial literacy. The aim of this research is to investigate the reasons behind the financial difficulties experienced by black men and determine the factors that contribute to these challenges. This

study will evaluate the impact of these factors on the overall quality of life and well-being of black men. The ultimate goal is to provide recommendations and useful insights to address these issues and improve the financial security of black men. The study design was created to capture the experiences and knowledge of participants on financial literacy, family environment, family socialization, and negative experiences with money and mainstream financial institutions. These topics may be sensitive, particularly for young men, and the goal of this design was to create a safe environment for them to discuss their experiences candidly (Vieira et al., 2021).

Research Design

A general qualitative research design was used in this study to understand how this population of young men interpret how their race and family influence impact their perceptions of financial literacy. Tenny (2022) states that qualitative research begins with assumptions and a worldview. The use of a theoretical lens and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, collecting data in a natural setting sensitive to the people of places under study and inductive data analysis that establishes patterns or themes (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The final written report or presentation includes the participants' voices, the research's reflexivity, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. This study used available qualitative research to guide the organization of the interview data, identify themes and experiences of the participants; to analyze young Black men's levels of financial literacy, attitudes and behavior around money and finances, and racial disparities in financial literacy among U.S. young adults (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The researcher administered a validated standard financial measuring tool of financial literacy during the participant's interview.

The semi-structured interviews gave the researcher a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' behaviors concerning their personal finances, providing a more insightful perspective on their money management behaviors (Fulk & White, 2018). Using the thematic narrative approach, the interview data was summarized, analyzed, and synthesized using general qualitative research methods in six phases:

1. Phase 1, getting familiar with the data.
2. Phase 2, generating initial codes;
3. Phase 3, searching for themes.
4. Phase 4, reviewing themes.
5. Phase 5, defining a naming theme.
6. Phase 6, producing the report (Nowel et al., 2017).

Coding is simply identifying concepts and incidents and labeling them for analysis, and these stages of coding are not necessarily linear but can be iterative (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2006).

Research Participants

This qualitative study utilized one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a sample of up to seven self-identified Black men between the ages of 18 - 25 in the Northern California Bay Area surrounding Bay Area was the demographic location of the participants. Recruitment was incorporated by snowball sampling methods, in which existing participants

recommended or recruited potential participants from their network of friends. This method is helpful for hard-to-reach populations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). The general qualitative research methods allowed the researcher to make observations of the participant's interests, knowledge, and behavior regarding financial literacy. This approach pinpointed and ferreted out themes and patterns related to the data for the study.

Participants Profiles and Background Information

- **Goal Getter:** Go Getter was a 24-year-old self-identified Black male with an associate degree in sound engineering and is employed full-time in the security industry.
- **Spokesman:** Spokesman was a 24-year-old Black male whose educational background included obtaining his GED and taking some college courses.
- **Creative:** Creative was a 25-year-old Black male. He is a high school graduate working part-time as a paraprofessional specializing in life skills and working with disabled students.
- **Educator:** Educator was a 25-year-old Black male. He is pursuing a bachelor's degree in sociology at a local state university.
- **Justice:** Justice was a 25-year-old Black man with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and was employed as a court clerk.
- **Leader:** Leader was a 25-year-old Black man. He does gig work, defined as freelance work done by a contractor worker, and has a bachelor's degree in communication studies with a Concentration in Film.
- **Warrior:** Warrior was a 25-year-old Black man who lived with his mother, stepfather, and two brothers. His father died when he was an infant.

Data Collection Methods

This study utilized two data collection components: a measure general financial literacy tool and a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview protocol questionnaire contained items covering general financial literacy and capabilities such as savings, investing, credit, and debt management, as well as how participants were educated about financial literacy, whether formally or informally, in the home and family environment (Lone & Bhat, 2022). The study also inquired about participants' experiences with racial discrimination in mainstream financial institutions and personal experiences with injustices associated with money management and gaining financial literacy.

The study design aimed to capture the participants' experiences with and knowledge of financial literacy, including the family environment, family socialization, and any negative experiences with money and mainstream financial institutions. These topics could be sensitive for some folks, especially young men, and the purpose of this design was to create a safe environment in which they could candidly discuss their experiences (Siegfried & Wuttke, 2021). The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews that lasted one-hour using Zoom video conference software with a link and password emailed to the participant. The researcher created a virtual "waiting room" to ensure the interviews were not interrupted and remained secure. The storage of the collected data was password-protected and kept confidential. The interviews were

recorded using an audio recording device and transcribed by Zoom, with notes taken by the researcher. The researcher informed the participants that once their interviews were transcribed, they would be allowed to review them to ensure accuracy. As a result of reviewing their narrative transcripts, the participants permitted the researcher to utilize them for research purposes.

Confidentiality was assured by assigning pseudonyms to the participants (Itzik Walsh, 2023). Efforts were made to ensure participants' privacy, with particular consideration for the snowballing method and video conferencing, i.e., not using the same password, password-protected meetings, ensuring that nobody listened to either researcher and participant during the interview; consent forms, and reviewed them together; and mitigated potential psychological and emotional harm from the interview by providing a list of accessible psychological resources (Heaton, 2022).

Data Analysis Techniques

The researcher conducted one-hour one-on-one interviews using Zoom video conference software with a link and password emailed to the participant. The researcher created a virtual "waiting room" to ensure the interviews were not interrupted and remained secure. The storage of the collected data was password-protected and kept confidential. The interviews were recorded using an audio recording device and transcribed by Zoom, with notes taken by the researcher. The researcher informed the participants that once their interviews were transcribed, they would be allowed to review them to ensure accuracy. As a result of reviewing their narrative transcripts, the participants permitted the researcher to utilize them for research purposes.

The qualitative design allowed the data analysis to be focused, comprehensive, and in-depth (Lester et al., 2020). Once the data was collected, a comprehensive assessment of the participants' interviews was conducted to identify their perceptions, challenges, and lived experiences as Black men. Furthermore, the interviews discussed financial literacy's role in their decision-making process related to money management. The researcher represented the data through thick narratives and visuals that aided in understanding the participants' family financial socialization (Naeem et al., 2023). During the data analysis process, the researcher became familiar with the data by reading each transcript several times to identify the most relevant concepts, words, phrases, and themes. The themes were mapped out with colors and symbols on a large Whiteboard to generate the initial codes. In this research project, the researcher was required to search, review, define, and categorize critical themes across multiple transcripts or other research studies (Lester et al., 2020). Currently, there is little academic research on the impacts of financial literacy on Black men, and through this iterative process, data was gathered that would contribute to filling these gaps in the knowledge (Young, 2023). Participants offered a unique perspective on their lives and their family's finances. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed the recorded audio during the first month of the data analyses. The researcher employed a general qualitative design approach and analyzed the data one to two months after the participants were interviewed.

Results

Summary of the Findings

The respondents each presented personal and family narratives and profiles that provide details on the mechanisms by which Black families in this sample socialized the participants to have financial attitudes and behaviors as adults (Young, 2023). This includes their perspective on generational wealth in the Black community, the role of financial literacy in their personal lives, personal experiences with racial discrimination in financing or dealing with money, and their thoughts on saving, investing, and budgeting their money, as well as taking out lines of credit (Harris, 2023). Respondents answered three items that measured standard financial literacy topics: compound interest and inflation, understanding of financial numeracy skills, and risk diversification, and showed they had fair to low levels of financial literacy (Lusardi, 2021). Financial literacy is the systematic process of learning about money and using this knowledge to make appropriate financial decisions (Harris, 2023).

The participants exhibited the desire to build wealth and earn money, with their interest in digital technology and investing. However, they often lacked knowledge and stable economic situations to accumulate income from investing or savings. In their personal lives, a few participants actively incorporated some elements of financial literacy, including saving money and investing in property, usually with the encouragement and aid of family members, mothers, or grandparents. Most participants' families were active in their financial lives, such as helping with credit cards, completing tax forms, and encouraging them to save. However, most respondents did not grasp key financial concepts, like compound interest, and expressed ideas that contradicted their behaviors. Overall, the role of the family has a significant role in the respondents' financial behaviors and well-being.

This study employed CRT's storytelling and counter-storytelling tenet (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) to analyze Black men's stories around their families' financial socialization and how that socialization relates to intergenerational wealth. It was essential to gather narratives for young Black men in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their family financial socialization (Tatum et al., 2021). Many participants discussed their families' stories of racial discrimination, for example, one's grandfather attempting to purchase property in Jim Crow Mississippi, racial appraisal bias while refinancing, and code-switching when going to the bank.

Generational wealth is inheritance transferred to generations of family members (Lusardi et al., 2021). The average wealth accumulation of Black homeowners is low, making it particularly difficult for them to establish their businesses, invest in them, and finance college education for their children. Historically, redlining undervalued homes in Black communities, but evidence suggests that racial bias in home appraisals is a form of modern-day redlining because they systematically undervalue Black-owned homes (Cho & Megbolugbe, 1996). The history behind the racial wealth gap and Black families' lack of generational wealth is likely the most crucial factor that Critical Race Theory points to.

According to Foohey and Martin (2021), the racial wealth gap persists today in financial institutions, and their policies keep Black families away from their services and products. The study found that young Black men do not believe that there is generational wealth in the Black community. Participants expressed opinions about the racial wealth gap, revealing a lack of knowledge about its historical underpinnings, confusion about generational wealth, and the racial wealth gap itself. However, they were interested in learning about buying power and assets, as well as acquiring financial training.

Housing undervaluation has significant socioeconomic implications for Black communities, primarily hindering or slowing wealth accumulation through homeownership (Tesfai, 2017). One study found that homes of similar quality located in a neighborhood with comparable amenities are worth 23 percent less in a predominantly Black neighborhood than in a neighborhood with minimal or no representation of Black residents (Perry et al., 2019, p. 15). This study found that participants wanted to buy property like their family, juxtaposed with unsound purchasing behaviors. Trzcińska and Sekścińska (2021) argue that materialism reflects young men's low self-esteem, and a lack of financial literacy for wealth building contributes to their low financial well-being.

Respondents in this study discussed the relationship between generational wealth and homeownership within their families and communities. They expressed particular interest in generational wealth, which sometimes contradicted their own behaviors, and this was explored further in the chapter. Wealth is the availability of valuable resources and possession of material goods or resources, including money, investments, property, and other assets. It can provide financial security, freedom, and the opportunity to grow and attain tremendous success (Lehman & Carroll, 2019). Wealth can also mean having access to resources and services not available to those without wealth. The respondents talked about their families' experiences with racism in financing property and issues of appraisal bias when their families refinanced their homes. A couple of respondents discussed racist policies their grandparents had to endure while purchasing land in Mississippi.

These participants were descendants of people who were a part of the Great Migration, the exodus of Black people from the Southern United States during the early and mid-20th century. People usually migrated for better economic opportunities and to escape the racism in the South, as exemplified in a few respondents' family histories about finances (Jaynes, 2023). One respondent recalled that his grandfather prepared to pay for the land, and a White man stepped in and bought the property from out in front of him. Other respondents explained how his grandparents were paying on land, and when it was time to make the last payment, the White man would not take the last payment. He talked about the determination of his grandparents to purchase land. These experiences of discrimination around money and finances contribute to the participants' adeptness with good financial behaviors, including transitions like purchasing and participating in banking.

This study also found that participants talked about experiencing racism in various settings that affected their outlook on money and participating in the mainstream financial systems. Also, during the discussion, one respondent engages in racial code-switching behaviors to appear less threatening when banking or being in White spaces. He said that when he visits his bank, he changes his speech to receive better treatment. According to McCluney et al. (2021), code-switching it entails modifying one's speech, appearance, behavior, and expressions to enhance the comfort of others in return for equitable treatment, good service, and job prospects. The need to code-switch can be a deterrent for young Black men to participate in the mainstream financial system and be capable of navigating their financing in sound ways. Due to code-switching, Black people who suppress their cultural identities and characteristics experience higher emotional, psychological, and physical exhaustion (Grandey et al., 2019; Hewlin, 2009; Hewlin & Broomes, 2019; Wingfield, 2007). The respondents' narratives and stories discussed their financial struggles due to a lack of financial safety nets in their families. Many respondents discussed extended family members moving into their homes to provide financial support, or

their mothers working overtime to earn money for food and household bills. In contrast to their White counterparts who experience upward mobility, Black men and Black boys face income disparities that negatively affect their wealth creation over their intergenerational (Chetty et al., 2020).

The respondents discussed their attitudes towards money management and how these attitudes related to their family's encouragement of personal finance. They provided details on their saving practices and behaviors. However, there seemed to be some contradictions and confusion. Some of their attitudes and behaviors on saving were contradictory, and they did not appear to know how to save their money or save money independently of their family's encouragement. For example, some respondents utilized their savings for emergencies to purchase material things. Consumers with lower income levels, limited education, and non-White ethnicity are less likely to have emergency savings (Bhutta et al., 2020; McKernan et al., 2016). Having a savings account is essential when facing financial difficulties, and the interviewees have some challenges with maintaining an emergency fund. The literature shows that saving money depends on an individual's ability to control their impulses and plan for the future. It also requires understanding one's emotions and needs and managing them to make decisions that align with long-term goals (Maison, 2019). Money management is the budgeting, investing, savings, and debt management of finance (Lusardi et al., 2021).

The respondents reported having checking and savings accounts but little ability to save money due to low or insatiable income. Many had aspirational attitudes around saving; one reported having a savings account that he often used for transactions, contradicting the purpose of a savings account, which is to accumulate money and earn interest. Respondents learned about savings and other financial products from their families, but many expressed the need to learn how to save or use credit cards. As illustrated in this qualitative study on young Black men and other studies, young adults use social media to learn financial literacy, budgeting, and other useful domains of financial knowledge using digital technology. A 2020 study on the consequences of using social media for personal finance found that users reported social media use was linked to positive financial outcomes and user satisfaction, suggesting that social media can be a legitimate and fruitful source for individuals to improve their financial well-being (Cao et al., 2020).

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EXAMINING THE EMOTIONAL TOLL ON BLACK DAUGHTERS CARING FOR MOTHERS WITH ADRD

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Abstract

The study examined the mother-daughter relationship among Black daughters providing informal care to their mothers after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. The qualitative study focused on the pre-diagnosis mother-daughter relationship and its impact on perceived caregiver burden. The findings suggested that pre-diagnosis dynamics influenced the post-diagnosis relationship, and cultural values, beliefs, and spiritual practices played significant roles in caregiving. The study recommended collaboration between caregivers and healthcare practitioners to provide holistic care and emphasized the need for comprehensive research targeting different ethnic groups to improve healthcare services.

Keywords: Alzheimer, Dementia, Caregiver, Healthcare Practitioner

Examining the Emotional Toll on Black Daughters Caring for Mothers with ADRD

Individuals with dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, experience a decline in cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, social behavior, and motivation (WHO, 2019; CDC, 2020). In the United States, Alzheimer's disease and related dementias currently affect approximately 5.8 million people, and this number is projected to rise to 14 million over the next 31 years. Research suggests that women are more vulnerable to Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD) than men and often display more psychiatric symptoms, such as depression. However, it remains unclear whether this increased susceptibility is due to inherent gender differences or other factors, such as aging demographics (Johnson, 2019; Medeiros & Silva, 2019; Tao et al., 2018). The behavioral and psychosocial symptoms of dementia can manifest as delusions, hallucinations, irritability, anxiety, aggression, and paranoia (Hiyoshi-Taniguchi et al., 2018; Lanctôt et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2008). ADRD is a chronic condition that not only impacts the individual biologically but also affects the entire family system psychologically and physically (Rolland, 1984). For example,

- **Emotional and Mental Trauma:** Psychotherapist Ce Anderson underscores the emotional and mental trauma that can stem from toxic mother-daughter relationships (Everet et al., 2016). Despite societal depictions of the mother-child bond as inherently affectionate, unresolved issues and emotional deficiencies in mothers can profoundly influence their parenting and subsequently impact their children's lifelong development (Marks & Clarke-Mitchell, 2016). This influence extends beyond childhood and adolescence into adulthood.
- **Detachment and Unhealthy Dynamics:** When a mother displays detachment, lack of affection, or criticism, it can significantly impact a daughter's self-esteem and coping mechanisms (Wilson-Ali et al., 2019). Daughters may grapple with self-identity when their caregiver exhibits jealousy or engages in covert competition. These dynamics can lead to challenges in forming connections with others and trusting romantic relationships (Lindh et al., 2023).
- **Indebtedness and Boundaries:** Toxic mothering often instills a sense of indebtedness in children (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). While acknowledging and appreciating parental love and support is healthy, it is imperative to recognize the equal significance of establishing boundaries. Adult children should not feel accountable for their mother's well-being or emotional state. Setting boundaries is a normal and healthy behavior, even if it contradicts societal norms (Thomas et al., 2017).
- **Impact on Caregiving for ADRD:** When tending to mothers with ADRD, these emotional complexities become even more pronounced (Modak et al., 2023). Daughters may grapple with conflicting feelings of obligation, sorrow, and the weight of caregiving responsibilities. It is crucial to recognize these emotions and seek support to navigate the emotional toll of caregiving (Harris et al., 2023).

Despite these complexities, the mother-daughter bond is an intricate and lifelong connection that significantly impacts development (Marks & Clarke-Mitchell, 2016). While studies have explored intergenerational relations during old age and the mother-daughter relationship during adolescence, only a few have specifically examined adult mother-daughter relationships among African Americans (McLennon et al., 2020). Black daughters provide more

informal care to family members and are at a greater risk for poorer health outcomes from caregiving stress than their White counterparts. However, Black daughters are often more resourceful and have more coping strategies to undertake caregiving (Bekhet, 2015; Cannon & Fawcett, 2018), perhaps due to cultural and traditional values contributing to resilience (Cannon & Fawcett, 2018; Lindauer et al., 2016) and their mothers' racial socialization (Turnage & Dotson, 2012). When Black mothers teach their daughters about being Black women in the United States, they often foster high self-esteem, increased resilience, and personal strengths from infancy (Brown, 2008; Turnage & Dotson, 2012; White-Johnson et al., 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study is the emotional toll on Black daughters caring for mothers with ADRD, particularly related to the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis and its influence on perceived caregiver burden. With the increasing shift towards community and family-based healthcare, understanding the emotional impact on Black daughters providing care for their mothers with ADRD is crucial for providing effective support (Liu et al., 2020). Studies have demonstrated unique difficulties, including financial strain and limited access to resources, leading to higher stress levels, depression, and anxiety (Gharavi et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2019). Additionally, the studies show that Black family caregivers who feel a sense of duty, guilt, or social and cultural norms are more likely to resent their role and suffer greater psychological distress (Noel-Storr et al., 2020). Furthermore, the positive or negative pre-diagnosis relationships between Black daughters and their mothers significantly impact the burden and depression experienced during the caregiving process (Skvirsky et al., 2022).

Fostering a positive mother-daughter relationship before the onset of ADRD by engaging in activities together, addressing unresolved issues, and maintaining open communication is crucial (Abreu et al., 2018; Drake, 2019). Additionally, caregivers of individuals with specific illnesses, such as mental health disorders, Parkinson's disease, dementia, and terminal cancer, can experience significant burdens that increase their risk of physical and psychological distress (Abreu et al., 2018; Drake, 2019). Therefore, it is important to create culturally sensitive initiatives that include the unique experiences of Black family caregivers, considering the various factors at play. This will enable Black daughters to prepare for the caregiving journey and strengthen the mother-daughter relationship through open communication, mutual respect, and trust (Navot et al., 2017).

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative constructivist ground theory study was to examine the emotional toll on Black daughters caring for their mothers with ADRD, particularly related to the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis and its influence on perceived caregiver burden. The study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Black daughters who are informal caregivers for their mothers with ADRD, shedding light on the unique emotional challenges and support needs within this specific demographic.

According to Marks et al. (2016), the emotional toll on Black daughters caring for mothers with ADRD is multifaceted, influenced by pre-diagnosis dynamics, societal expectations, and personal coping strategies. Recognizing these challenges and seeking support is crucial for their well-being. Caring for a mother with ADRD can be emotionally challenging

for Black daughters, especially when considering the dynamics of their pre-diagnosis relationship. In a study conducted by McLennon et al. (2020), African American daughters caring for parents with moderate to severe ADRD revealed two main categories: "Caregiver Concerns" and "Caregiver Coping." Some of these concerns and coping strategies can be seen in:

- a) Emotional Trauma: Many Black daughters grapple with the emotional and mental trauma stemming from toxic mother-daughter relationships. These relationships can negatively impact their well-being even when their mothers are alive (McFerrin-Surrency & Liston, 2023).
- b) Unresolved Issues: A mother's unresolved emotional deficits and trauma can affect her parenting and subsequently impact her children's development throughout life (Risi et al., 2021).
- c) Unhealthy Dynamics: In the Black community, there is often pressure to blindly obey parents, even in the face of harm or unhealthy dynamics. Setting boundaries or addressing issues may be considered disrespectful (Pozzi et al., 2018).
- d) Emotional Differentiation: Some adults struggle to emotionally differentiate from their parents, making it hard for them to see themselves apart from their role as children (Simpson-Adkins & Daiches, 2018).
- e) Caregiving Challenges: Around half of African American caregivers feel they did not have a choice in taking on the caregiving role (Idorenyin Imoh & Charity, 2023), and
- f) Finding Meaning: Despite challenges, many caregivers find meaning or a sense of purpose in caring for their parents (Irani & Niyomyart, 2021).

These strategies shed light on the specific challenges faced by Black daughters caring for mothers with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ARDR). Understanding these challenges can help develop targeted support and interventions to address these caregivers' emotional toll and well-being (Joseph et al., 2023). It also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the impact of societal expectations and personal coping strategies on the caregiving experience, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive and tailored support for Black daughters in this role (McLennon et al., 2020).

Significance

In 2017, WHO officials endorsed the Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response to Dementia 2017–2025 after declaring dementia a public health priority in 2012. This endorsement included an action plan focused on dementia as a public health priority, caregiver support, and research implications (WHO, 2019). This qualitative study aimed to increase awareness of the impact of dementia and make recommendations for treating caregiver burden from a systemic lens with the FSI, BPS-S, and BFT theoretical frameworks. ADRD could affect 33 million individuals in the United States by 2050, with 18.5 billion hours of informal care valued at \$234 billion (Alzheimer's Association, 2019, p 5).

ARDR causes progressive neurogenerative decline, impaired cognitive abilities, behavioral disorders (Dubois et al., 2016; Pihet & Kipfer, 2018), and increased dependence on the family to complete daily living activities (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2019). Family members providing informal care are at a greater risk of caregiver burden or psychological and physical distress (Ridzuan et al., 2018). Women often take on the caregiving role due to an internalized feeling of responsibility (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2019); however, there is a gap in the literature

regarding the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis and how it relates to perceived caregiver burden among Black daughters informally caring for their mothers diagnosed with ADRD.

Research Question

RQ1. How does the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis relate to perceived caregiver burden among Black daughters informally caring for their mothers diagnosed with ADRD?

Conceptual Framework

The family systems illness (FSI) model, biopsychosocial-spiritual (BPS-S) model, and Black feminist theory (BFT) were this study's theoretical frameworks. The Family Strengths Index (FSI) is a valuable tool that offers a strengths-based approach for practitioners to evaluate families (Galán-González et al., 2021). The FSI assesses a family's ability to cope with the demands of a disorder by considering the psychosocial demands over time, as well as the family's style of functioning. This approach enables practitioners to identify the positive qualities and resources to help families overcome challenges and build resilience (Harper Browne, 2016). The FSI is an effective framework that can help practitioners better understand and support families facing various difficulties (Rolland et al., 2017).

The FSI model enables insight into family distress and relationships. A parent's chronic illness can impact the parent-child relationship (Sieh et al., 2012). As Alzheimer's progresses from moderate to severe impairment, family members often grieve the loss of their loved ones before death, which presents challenges to enjoying the present while preparing for the inevitable (Boss, 2011; Rolland, 2017). A caregiving daughter might feel alone and isolated and need support while adjusting to a caregiver's dual roles and a daughter's processing the loss of a parent (Rolland, 2017). The spiritual-religious aspect of the BPS-S assists individuals in coping with emotional distress caused by circumstances out of their control, such as illness, loss, and other adverse life events (Saad et al., 2017).

A study by Armstrong et al. (2022) has shown that Black individuals who engage in spiritual practices enjoy better mental health. Religion plays a significant role in the Black community, particularly for men and their overall well-being (Clark et al., 2018; Park et al., 2018). In addition to connecting spirituality and health for diverse cultural systems (Hatala, 2013), the BPS-S model addresses suffering, disease, and illness on different levels, including the patient, organization, and those in charge of care (Saad et al., 2017). BFT includes women of African descent in conversations about feminism. Feminism primarily focuses on the experiences of White, Western, middle-class women and often does not address the experiences of other races (Acuff, 2018; Bucholtz, 1996); BFT fills the gap in the social sciences literature concerning Black women's experiences. Understanding Black women's experiences from a BFT framework provided insight into motherhood with this subpopulation. As a theoretical framework, BFT addresses values and beliefs and black mothers passing them down to their daughters through a cultural lens focused on psychologically healthy well-being in adverse situations (Shambley-Ebron et al., 2016). Within the family context, one individual's chronic illness can impact the entire family and family dynamic. Over the last four decades, researchers have focused on family diseases across the lifespan to develop family-centered, collaborative, biopsychosocial healthcare models (Rolland, 2017; Rolland et al., 2017). This study's theoretical frameworks of the FSI model, BPS-S model, and BFT were used to answer questions about the informal caregiving

relationship between Black mothers and daughters and their culture in the context of chronic illness.

Literature Review

Alzheimer's Disease or Other Related Dementias and Caregiver Burden

Alzheimer's is a degenerative brain disease and the most common cause of dementia. The disease affects 50 million people, with an estimated 10 million new cases yearly (WHO, 2021). Dementia is not a specific disease but a broad term for symptoms. In the last few decades, with demographic aging occurring rapidly in regions worldwide, scholars have begun to focus on the prevalence of dementia, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Mast & Yochim, 2018). The WHO (2021) indicated that by 2025, approximately three-quarters of 1.2 billion people older than 60 will live in developing countries. By 2040, if the older adult population continues to increase without changes in mortality or burden reduction from preventive measures, 71% of the 81 million people with dementia will live in developing countries (WHO, 2021).

Dementia is a broad term often associated with memory loss but can also involve changes in speech, behavior, perceptions, and other symptoms (Watchman, 2017). It's important to note that not all dementia symptoms indicate Alzheimer's disease; therefore, an accurate diagnosis is crucial (Walaszek, 2019). Early signs of Alzheimer's-type dementia typically include memory loss along with frequent fluctuations in alertness, awareness, speech, and mood. Many individuals with dementia are aware that something is amiss, even if they may not fully grasp the extent or severity of their cognitive challenges (Mast & Yochim, 2018). Significant changes in behavior or mental function are often noticed by friends and family, which highlights the importance of documentation from both the affected individual and their loved ones (Watchman, 2017). To aid in understanding these changes, family and friends can ask specific questions regarding the symptoms the individual has observed, the time of day when these symptoms tend to occur (noting that fatigue later in the day can influence mood or behavior), as well as any recent medication or dietary changes, and other health issues present during the time of the changes (Innes et al., 2020).

Currently, few medications are approved specifically for Alzheimer's; unfortunately, many do not have the desired effects (Walaszek, 2019). Patients diagnosed early in their illness may find medications helpful to some degree; however, pharmacological treatment will not stop or prevent the illness. Instead, the medications address the symptoms more than the disease itself. Several promising research programs are underway to find an effective treatment or cure for Alzheimer's. The Alzheimer's Association is at the forefront of raising awareness and advocating for research, extending knowledge globally to find a definitive cure (Mast & Yochim, 2018).

Black Mothers and Daughters

McHale et al. (2016) investigated Black parents' perceptions of racial discrimination who inculcate the same ideas and social perspectives into their children. The research showed a high prevalence of negative perceptions among Black families, especially those in economically challenged Black communities. McHale et al. (2016) argued that children, particularly Black daughters who experience intersectionality as defined in female liberalism, feel marginalized in a

White-dominated society where people do not care about their well-being. Therefore, if a parent has dementia, the children might not act productively due to fears of social discrimination, thus impacting parental health outcomes.

Moffitt (2020) studied the prevailing culture within poor Black communities and their perceptions of marginalization by White people. Like McHale et al. (2016), Moffitt (2020) found that Black mothers shaped their daughters' mindsets about the evils of racial discrimination in the United States. Black mothers and daughters often have a strong bond not always found in mother-or father-son relationships. Therefore, racial discrimination perspectives might be more common among Black daughters than Black sons, who are less likely to care for parents with dementia.

However, less-than-ideal mother-daughter relationships in Black families often occur, just as mother-daughter conflicts occur within families with different racial backgrounds. Nelson et al. (2017) researched the conditions and prevalence in families where the mothers had dementia, and the daughters were the primary caregivers during ongoing mother-daughter conflict. The findings showed that despite long- or short-term mother-daughter conflict, the caregiving daughters tended to ignore the conflict and provide the best care possible. This finding showed the overall quality of care provided by Black daughters compared to Black sons.

Wilson et al. (2018) qualitatively evaluated personal accounts of mother-daughter relationships. They found that poor Black families in America believed Black people remained oppressed in a White-dominated, imperialistic, and capitalistic society. The researchers suggested that resolving this belief requires a drastic transformation of social perspectives among Blacks and Whites. In the context of social change, multiracial unity could eventually result in equitable practices in all societal sectors and improved mental health service access for poor Black families.

Values/Beliefs of Caregivers in the Black Community

Macleod et al. (2017) explored Black female caregivers' values and beliefs. The purpose of this qualitative constructivist ground theory study was to examine how the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis relates to the perceived caregiver burden among Black daughters informally caring for their mothers diagnosed with ADRD. In a study conducted by Macleod et al. (2017), an investigation was made into the values and beliefs of Black female caregivers. The research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the unique perspectives and experiences of this particular group of caregivers. Through a thorough analysis of the data collected, the study shed light on the various factors that shape the attitudes and practices of Black female caregivers in their roles as providers of care and support.

The findings found that Black caregivers faced significant challenges in accessing resources that would enable them to provide better care despite the high intensity of caregiving they were providing. This was attributed to various social structures that were acting as barriers, hindering their ability to access the necessary services and resources. Macleod et al. (2017) have emphasized the importance of policymakers addressing this issue by increasing the accessibility of health-related services to underprivileged communities. Such action would go a long way in providing much-needed support to Black caregivers, who play a vital role in the healthcare system.

Del-Pino-Casado et al. (2017) identified the factors that could potentially result in depression in caregivers. The findings showed that the primary depression determinant among caregivers, especially within economically challenged Black communities, was the belief that they could do nothing to improve their situation and could only survive daily hardships. Eventually, the scholars found that caregivers experienced caregiver burden when they faced increasing daily stress and felt helpless to improve their situations. Del-Pino-Casado et al. (2017) argued that Black caregivers might feel a more significant caregiving burden if they cared for older adults upon whom they felt they should rely.

Wells et al. (2017) explored the challenges faced by caregivers in the Black community of people with dementia to evaluate the conditions resulting in caregiver burden, especially among younger caregivers. The findings showed the highest caregiver burden incidence in Black communities with many younger caregivers. Older caregivers in the same communities also experienced caregiver burden, perhaps because they supported younger caregivers and had a greater emotional and mental workload. Wells et al. (2017) suggested careful consideration when hiring young caregivers in economically challenged communities.

Brewster et al. (2020) identified the persistent challenges faced by family caregivers of Black parents with dementia. The researchers argued that scholars and government officials involved in developing inclusive mental health programs often overlook crucial questions. Specifically, they emphasized the importance of understanding the cultural values and beliefs within marginalized communities that hinder the ability to support dementia patients and their caregivers effectively. Brewster et al. (2020) suggested that, despite the government's efforts to enhance access to mental health services, many service recipients may feel overwhelmed by economic hardships, which prevent them from seeking the help they need.

Cothran et al. (2020) evaluated the perceptions of Black family caregivers of patients with dementia. The Black caregivers reported solid cultural and familial values but felt their efforts to provide the best caregiving remained unappreciated and demeaned in society. Cothran et al. (2020) highlighted the need to enhance the personal value of Black family caregivers through educational interventions, aiming to improve their confidence in service quality and alleviate doubts about their caregiving competency for their loved ones.

Hughes et al. (2016) examined the cultural values of families with members with ADRD to find the barriers to government-led mental health services. The findings showed that the significant access barriers were the patients' unwillingness to admit to having dementia and families' hesitance to seek mental health services for their loved ones due to fears of social discrimination. Hughes et al. (2016) suggested conducting educational interventions on the benefits of managing dementia in communities with high dementia prevalence.

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this study was the constructivist grounded theory approach, which proved to be the most suitable due to its emphasis on constructing and interpreting the meaning of experiences. The researchers found that this approach enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants and to identify the key themes and concepts that emerged from the data. By focusing on the participants' perspectives and interpretations, the study was able to provide a rich and nuanced analysis of the phenomena under investigation. Overall, the constructivist grounded theory approach proved to be a valuable

tool for exploring complex and multifaceted experiences in a rigorous and systematic manner (Charmaz, 2014). The credibility and trustworthiness of the findings are the criteria used to evaluate the grounded theory (Foley & Timonen, 2015). Strategies, such as coding, memo-writing, theoretical sampling, and constant comparative analysis, enable constructivist grounded theorists to develop methodological self-consciousness and safeguard against researcher bias (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constructivist grounded theory also enables critical qualitative inquiry by “identifying differences, locating our generalizations, and recognizing the conditions of their production” (Charmaz, 2020, p. 40).

The study aimed to investigate the emotional impact on Black daughters providing care for mothers with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ADRD). It seeks to assess the influence of these factors on the overall quality of life and well-being of Black daughters in this caregiving role. The ultimate objective is to provide valuable recommendations and insights to address these challenges and ameliorate the emotional burden experienced by Black daughters caring for mothers with ADRD. The study's design was meticulously crafted to capture participants' firsthand experiences and insights in this specific caregiving context. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, particularly for Black daughters providing care for mothers with ADRD and individuals beyond the scope of the study's demographic, the design was intended to foster a secure and open environment for Black daughters to express their experiences candidly. (Vieira et al., 2021).

Research Design

This qualitative constructivist grounded theory study focused on the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis and how it relates to perceived caregiver burden among Black daughters informally caring for their mothers diagnosed with ADRD. Qualitative researchers use an exploratory approach to gather information to inform their understanding of particular experiences or phenomena in a natural setting (Cristancho et al., 2018). In contrast, quantitative scholars quantify the human experience numerically (Mykhalovskiy et al., 2018).

There are two main approaches to analyzing data: qualitative and quantitative. While both methods involve using raw data, the qualitative approach tends to be better suited for identifying patterns in human behavior and addressing research problems (Busetto et al., 2020). This is because it focuses on gathering and interpreting non-numerical information, such as interviews, observations, and case studies. By delving deeper into the context and meaning behind the data, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

In contrast, the quantitative approach relies on numerical data and statistical analysis to draw conclusions (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). While this method can be useful for measuring trends and making predictions, it may not always capture the intricacies of human behavior. Ultimately, these two approaches depend on the research question and available data type. The constant comparative data collection occurred via semi-structured interviews, and data analysis occurred with the grounded theory approach (Lester et al., 2020).

Interview-based methods are the most common qualitative data collection approach for gaining insight into a sample population's lived experiences (Cristancho et al., 2018). Scholars using interview-based methods receive and analyze information by transcribing audio or video recordings, interpret the data with theoretical frameworks, develop themes, and code the data to reveal individual narratives (Sutton & Austin, 2015). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), a

researcher using grounded theory techniques and procedures discovers a theory from data. However, the researcher might not find but rather construct the theory (Charmaz, 2014; Chun Tie et al., 2019). Grounded theory researchers consider a person's worldview and position it in a social context. Glaser and Strauss established the foundation for generations of grounded theorists to develop distinct methodological genres (Chun Tie et al., 2019). This study explained the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis and how it relates to perceived caregiver burden among Black daughters informally caring for their mothers diagnosed with ADRD

Population and Sample

Black individuals provide more informal care hours to family members than other races and ethnicities (Wells et al., 2017). Also, daughters care more for parents with cognitive impairment than spouses, sons, and relatives (Friedman et al., 2015). This study's purposive convenience sample included Black women providing informal care to their mothers with ADRD. All participants were 18 or older and identified as cisgender women of Black descent providing informal care to their mothers with ADRD for at least 12 consecutive months. During everyday care, the participants' mothers met the criteria for moderately severe cognitive decline, severe cognitive decline, or severe cognitive decline related to their ADRD diagnoses. The study had no requirements regarding education, career, or marital status. Data collection ended when theoretical saturation occurred. A study by Hennink et al. (2016) suggested that coding saturation occurs at nine (9) interviews and meaning saturation occurs at twenty-five (25). In this study, theoretical saturation indicated that no new theoretical categories would emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and there was no need for more participants. The sample for this study included 12 participants.

Data Collection Process

The data collection commenced upon interviewing the first participant. The purposive sample consisted of 12 Black women providing informal care to their mothers with ADRD. The study participants met the inclusion criteria. They received an email to review the informed consent form and schedule virtual interviews. The participants received an email link to their scheduled interviews from the Zoom application.

The participants answered demographic questions and open-ended questions from the interview guide. Their responses provided the data used to answer the research question in the data collection and analysis process by developing a theory about the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis and how it relates to perceived caregiver burden among Black daughters informally caring for their mothers diagnosed with ADRD. I documented thoughts and feelings during and after each interview. Data transcription, analysis, and storage occurred per the informed consent guidelines.

The process of data collection for this study involved the use of a reflexive journal as well as the Zoom transcription feature. The data analysis was done manually to ensure the highest accuracy and reliability. The reflexive journal served as a tool to document my personal experiences and any biases that may have influenced my perspective throughout the study. This type of journaling is known as reflexivity, which is a technique used to increase the credibility of research by acknowledging the connection between the researcher and participants and addressing the challenge of subjectivity and lack of neutrality (Ramani & Mann, 2016). By reflecting on my experiences and biases, I minimized potential biases in my analysis. In addition

to the reflexive journal, the interview responses from participants were transcribed using the Zoom transcription feature. The audio interview recordings were first exported from the Zoom platform and then transcribed using the transcription feature available on desktop computers to complete this process. This approach ensured that every response was accurately documented and could be analyzed effectively.

Data Analysis

Following the transcription of the interviews, the data analysis phase began using the constructivist grounded theory approach. This method allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the data, taking into account the unique perspectives of each participant and the context in which the interviews were conducted. By using this approach, I gained a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic and developed insights grounded in the data.

Constant comparative analysis is an analytical and iterative process linking data collection and theory development in grounded theory (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The coding process has phases with terminology unique to the grounded theory approach. Constructivists conduct initial, focused, and theoretical coding processes (Mills et al., 2014). During the initial coding phase, the researcher identifies, labels, categorizes, and assigns meaning to words line by line in the data (Chun Tie et al., 2019). According to Charmaz (2014), initial coding enables the researcher to make sense of the data and consider all possible theoretical interpretations. The next stage is focused coding, which entails identifying the most noticeable codes throughout the dataset to create core categories for the emerging theory. Finally, the codes selected during focused coding are synthesized in the theoretical coding process to create a grounded theory. In this stage, the researcher uses theoretical coding to tell an analytical story about how the categories that emerged from focused coding relate to one another (Charmaz, 2014).

Results

The theoretical frameworks incorporated into this study, were The family systems illness (FSI) model, biopsychosocial-spiritual (BPS-S) model, and Black feminist theory (BFT). These theories were used to better comprehend the mother-daughter dynamics being studied. Families facing chronic illnesses and life-threatening conditions can utilize the FSI model, as described by Rolland et al. (2017), to help them adapt to the impact on daily activities. The model views the family as a unit that shares the challenges when a member falls ill. Rolland (2018) explains the three systemic FSI concepts as a psychosocial typology of illness, major time phases in an illness's evolution, and key family systems.

The FSI model is ideal when investigating the nature of family relationships and illness-related distress. Daughters of mothers diagnosed with AD/HD assumed the informal caregiving role in this study. The mother-daughter relationship was impacted when the mother struggled with the chronic ailment. The emergent theory of this study is supported by the FSI model in that as the disease advanced in severity, the daughters prepared for their mother's inevitable death from the typology phase of the illness to the components of family functioning. Participants were in the chronic phase, the period after the diagnosis was made at the time of the interviews. During this time, the daughters were assisting their mothers with activities of daily living while balancing their own lives. Moreover, it was found that adjusting to challenges that accompany the mothers' neurocognitive impairment was complicated, depending on the nature of the mother-daughter relationship pre-diagnosis.

In response to the biomedical approach to disease treatment, the biopsychosocial (BPS) model emerged as a holistic perspective to medicine. Panzini et al. (2017) describe it as presenting a human as a whole unit necessitating treatment in a biological, psychological, and social hierarchy. However, the BPS model has faced criticism (Henningesen, 2015), with some scholars considering it outdated for contemporary psychiatry due to advancements in biological psychiatry (Tripathi et al., 2019), including neuroimaging, neurophysiology, neurochemistry, neuro-immunology, neuroendocrinology, genomics, and psychopharmacology.

The BPS-S model is used to understand how individuals use biology, psychology, social hierarchy, and spirituality to cope with emotional distress caused by elements beyond their control like loss, illness, and other tragedies in life. Studies show that those of African descent who are engaged in spiritual practices have better mental health and well-being. Black churches remain important pillars of the community among Black neighborhoods. From the study, several participants explained that praying significantly helped them cope with the stress caused by caregiver burden. For those who practice spirituality to process grief and other forms of tragedy since they can justify these events by believing there is a divine plan in play. Similarly, Christians believe in life after death. Therefore, in case of the loss of a loved one, Christians can find comfort in knowing they shall meet again in the afterlife. All the participants identified as Christian or had a Christian upbringing. The findings are supported by this theory in that the daughters were not only concerned with the medical elements but that their psycho-social-spiritual environments needed to be nurtured to support less perceived burden.

Identifying as both Black and female in the United States connects the experiences of race and gender intersectionality, tracing back to the abolitionist movement of the 1800s (Taylor, 1998). Throughout U.S. history, White and Black women have often held opposing political views. American feminist movements were adopted from Black political calls to action. However, Black women's needs regarding race and gender were disregarded or viewed with indifference, suggesting that Black women must attend to these challenges within oppressive constructs (Acuff, 2018; Taylor, 1998). BFT suggests that racial, gender and social class discrimination are subsets under a hierarchy of patriarchy that consists of the imperialist, capitalist, and supremacist ideologies prevalent among the White population in the United States (Davis & Craven, 2016).

The BFT is based on insights from women of African descent in conversations on feminism. There has been a rising critique that feminism is primarily focused on the experience of white, western, and middle-income women while ignoring what women from other races experience (Acuff, 2018; Bucholtz, 1996). The BFT model was developed to account for the gap within social sciences about experiences Black women go through. The BFT investigates the beliefs and values of Black mothers passed down to their daughters through a lens that encourages psychological well-being during adverse situations. For instance, several participants described their mother as "hardworking and strong." The participants' mothers were generally loved and respected by their daughters. They symbolized strength, hope, love, responsibility, and commitment in their household growing up. The findings are supported by this theory in that these daughters were taught from an early age that being a Black woman means they need to be strong, responsible, and committed to their family. These strong family values are evident in the responses from participants when asked what positive feelings they get from caring for their sick mothers.

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF HUMAN-AI CHATBOT INTIMACY (HCI) ON THE MENTAL HEALTH FUNCTIONING OF USERS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) systems represent one of the most innovative technological products ever created by humans. Their impact in this world has been monumental in transforming practically every social institution including relationship and intimacy landscapes. However, while artificial intelligence systems, and in particular, chatbots, come with revolutionary benefits, there are some nagging concerns that come with those systems as well. To date, very little is known about the impact of HCIs on the mental health functioning of users. This study uses George Simmel's tragedy of culture in conjunction with Bowlby's attachment theory to help elucidate the extent to which AI-chatbots relationships impact mental health functioning outcomes among users. This research is a timely one given the growing interest in intimate relations with AI Chat-Bots globally. In this study, a systematic qualitative analysis uncovered that HCI is more threatening than beneficial to the mental health functioning of users. The results of this study have implications for policy development and implementation.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, emotions, mental health, social well-being, Chatbot Intimacy

An Examination of the Impact of Human-AI Chatbot Intimacy (HCI) on the Mental Health Functioning of Users and Policy Implications

Artificial intelligence (AI) systems represent one of the most innovative technological products ever created by humans. Their impact in this world has been monumental in transforming practically every social institution including relationship and intimacy landscapes. However, while artificial intelligence systems, and in particular, chatbots, come with revolutionary benefits, there are some nagging concerns that come with those systems as well. Those concerns have now become commonplace among technology experts and users as well; to the extent that some experts in the field are calling for a slow-down in AI systems, given the technology's heightened ability to overpower human intelligence and understanding including portend existential threat issues. The extant literature provides both pros and cons to AI systems with some studies touting mainly the benefits, while others take a more objective stance by presenting both the benefits and risks of AI systems.

The improvements of the technology in the areas of relationship and intimacy have been meted with an allure by humans who are seeking intimacy with them. Notably, the growing interest of human-AI Chat bots' intimacy (HCI) has been attributed to the loneliness epidemic that was brought on by COVID19. However, the surge in HCIs has remained unabated even after the COVID19 pandemic with implications for mental health and functioning among users. This research is a timely one given the increased interest in intimate relations with AI-Chat bots by certain individuals in society. It is also important to note that not much is known about the impact of such unions on the mental health of users. As such, this study seeks to investigate this relatively new phenomenon with the goal of increasing the knowledge base pertaining to HCIs and its impact on mental health outcomes among users.

Study Context and Statement of the Problem

For the purpose of this study, artificial intelligence (AI) pertains to algorithmic processes that feed from data in an automated or semi -automated manner. This unique innovation—(AI), comes with transformative benefits to society. It has been reported that by 2030 AI will bring in approximately a trillion euros to the global economy (Reier-Forraddellas, Garay-Gallastegui, 2021) with rich benefit to the world. Research documents that AI's transformative benefits can be realized in commerce, the economy, health, transportation, politics, education, family life, law enforcement, food security, faith institutions cybersecurity and scientific advancements in the wider world. Essentially, AI is regarded as having a significant potential in affecting virtually every social institution in society to also include relationship landscapes. Although the benefits of AI technologies have been plausibly documented, it is not without serious risks. Those risks are said to have the potential of negatively affecting social institutions, the environment, and the planet in major ways.

Literature Review

Those risks are of major concern to every facet of society especially if those issues are not addressed effectively. In 1966, Joseph Weizenbaum, the pioneer of the first chatbot—Eliza, concluded that artificial intelligence served as the “index of the insanity of our world”; that is, after having worked with the technology, and gaining a better understanding of its impact on humans. The relatively simple program was created to operate with a set of rules that generated plausible responses to users. Eliza operated in a similar manner as existing chatbots under the

illusion that the technology fully understood users' emotions. However, the key difference between Eliza and current AI chatbots is that Eliza operated using the keys of a typewriter. The creator of the chatbot became aware that some individuals were "very hard to convince" that Eliza was not human but a computer program. However, an interesting reality is that AI technology was and is still able to influence individuals into believing that chatbots actually know them (Brandtzaeg et al. (2021; Bisconti, 2021). It is undeniable that very little has changed since Weizenbaum made that bold statement about his chatbot in 1966.

Similarly, Elon Musk, another AI technology expert, stated that "AI is a fundamental risk to the existence of human civilization." He further stated that AI systems have an innate ability to "crush" individuals. And that, "it's definitely gonna be out of human control" (2021). Moreover, a 2020 European Commission report documents that while AI "can do much good"; it also has the potential of creating significant harm especially with the application of rules designed to protect fundamental rights, safety and liability related issues. Most notably, the risks associated with AI technologies are contextual and are said to be characterized as long, medium and short-term, high or low-probability, systemic or localized, and high or low impact which will be discussed further in this paper.

The research uncovered that AI systems sometimes do not operate as intended since such systems make inferences from ten patterns observed in data rather than providing an accurate understanding of the factors that cause those patterns {National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), 2023}. The context in which AI technologies are deployed is said to be frequently complex thus creating challenges in its ability to detect and respond to failures. It is imperative to consider policy controls and regulation that will mitigate any inequitable and undesirable outcomes for society in general.

It is undeniable that AI comes with huge benefits; however, the literature documents that there are major issues and concerns with the trustworthiness of AI systems. As such, AI risk management should be a key component in the development and use of AI systems. Consideration must be centered on a regulatory framework that would minimize risks of potential harm, with particular emphasis on the most significant areas of deficits to include trustworthiness and accurate recording of the data set that is used to train and test the AI systems.

Trustworthiness plays a critical role in the area of empathy and genuine relationships. Some individuals believe that AI is empathetic while others hold dissimilar views. For instance, polarizing views were uncovered in the extant literature on the issue of social chatbots having the capacity for social and empathetic conversations with their users. Some believe that the chatbots are quite capable of being empathetic and understanding (Ho et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2020); as well as being suitable conversational partners, friends, or even romantic partners. However, Kanana (2024), surmises that "emotionally intelligent chatbots are a promising but dangerous development" as it has been strategically created to address the loneliness epidemic in today's world, premised on seemingly blurry and controversial technological philosophies.

In the quest for a more refined humanoid, experiments have been conducted to create a more anthropomorphized AI (End Times Headlines, 9/10/23). According to Korteling et al (2021), AI have different cognitive capacities and abilities from biological organisms. The authors reported that although these machines are "intelligent and autonomous" the machines are likely to "remain unconscious machines or special-purpose devices that support humans in specific, complex tasks" (page 1). Other researchers have also articulated that very soon the

numbers of persons wishing to have intimate relationships with virtual humans will also increase with the aim of improving the “quality of life (QOL) for sexual minorities and people with various difficulties” (Yamaguchi, 2020).

Notably, a number of persons are opting for intimacy with humanoid dolls often called “sex bots” or “sex dolls” as an alternative to human intimacy. These sex dolls are customized to satisfy owners and clients sexual fantasies and companionship. The research shows that several countries such as France, Japan and Russia have established “sex bot brothels” where clients can purchase sexual services that are a safer and a least expensive alternative to human prostitutes (The Guardian, 2017). Additionally, some individuals may not even require physical presence of the sex bots for intimacy to occur (The Verge, 2013). As it relates to the traditional family, proponents of AI sex bots believe that a “mismatch in sexual desire between husband and wife,” can be augmented by the services of virtual humans to meet the unmet sexual or intimate desires of couples. Moreover, “if a person cannot find a partner due to various disabilities or challenges, a virtual human can be a partner (Yamaguchi, 2020).

AI first came on the technology scene in the late 1940s and has continued to expand penetrating virtually every area of human existence and the environment. This purported unique system has been touted as having the potential of revving up approximately one trillion euros revenue in Europe’s economy by the year 2030 (European Commission, 2020). While the performance and benefits of AI has been plausible particularly in Europe and America, it is not void of major criticisms. For instance, Elon Musk—an AI czar discussed in a recent interview that the biggest risk we face today is artificial intelligence and “it’s already too late, things are getting serious.’ Throughout the years, AI has received commendations for its transformative attributes in many sectors and the world at large. However, AI systems have recently been under the radar as having toxic risks to human civilizations, organizations and institutions.

There are many instances where the purported benefits of AI technology have come under serious criticisms. For instance, AI has been implicated in bias and discrimination in law enforcement and the courts where low-income minority groups are concerned. Other reports document that AI systems has engaged reckless assessment of students in the UK (NIST, 2023). Another major integrity and trustworthiness risk of AI involves using facial recognition falsely, which carries serious implications for those involved. Additionally, faith institutions are becoming very concerned given AI’s entry on the pulpit. Recently, faith leaders and their congregants have expressed concerns with AI in pulpits given the absence of “soul” and spirit in AI. Of particular concern also is the development and regulating of AI data set by actors with racist, sexist and biased agendas; with implications for fueling social chaos and toxicity on many levels. AI experts such as Elon Musk also indicated in a recent interview that he foresaw the risks and pleaded with key stakeholders to “slow down AI” and to ensure that regulatory measures are put in place to address possible risks, but his ideas were disregarded.

The AI Policy group recognizes that we are at a crossroad with AI given its obvious flaws and possible future toxic outcomes. As such they are now focusing efforts on increasing the trustworthiness of (AI) and machine learning (ML) systems by enhancing their explainability and accountability among other things. The Policy group have decided that the components of a good AI policy includes:

- (a) having a transparent system,

- (b) the right of data collection,
- (c) freedom of leaving the system,
- (d) ensuring a good design and
- (e) data deletion.

Since the identified performance problems with AI is relatively new and the efforts by the Policy group is at its infancy stage, there are no risk-proof guarantees against future problematic outcomes for general society. It is imperative that policy actors act expeditiously to engage an ecosystem of stake holders to include governmental and non-governmental groups and civil society in the discussion as all lives will be affected by the presence and performance of AI systems.

The foundation for artificial intelligence started in the early 17th century by mathematician Rene Descartes. The concept of AI was first introduced in the early 1920s with its most notable refinements in the 1980s. Improvements in AI is continuing but with some concerns about inevitable adverse consequences (Marr, n.d) since technology experts still do not understand how the algorithm works (Hinton, 2023, Gawdat, 2024, Musk 2021). It is undeniable that AI has a long history in the technological world and has been beneficial in many respects. However, AI experts (Marr, n.d; Musk, 2021, NIST, 2023; and European Commission, 2020) have sounded the alarm that AI comes with serious flaws since algorithm are designed by humans and have “built-in bias by those who intentionally or inadvertently introduce them to the algorithm” (Marr, n.d).

The experts have argued those issues must be addressed expeditiously; that is, if society is to mitigate and effectively manage the risks associated with AI. The research documents AI’s benefits to society and global economies and it also presents AI’s adverse effects. Some of the major benefits of AI includes but is not limited to the potential of saving lives by improving healthcare (e.g., ensuring accurate and more precise diagnosis and better prevention of diseases), increasing efficiency in farming, assisting with climate change mitigation and adaptation, refining of production systems through predictive maintenance and increasing security systems (European Commission, 2020). While governments around the globe recognize the utility of having AI systems they are also aware of the dangers inherent in such systems. As such, special policy and expert groups have been formed to address the threats and risks posed by AI systems (NIST, 2023 and European Commission 2020).

Some of the revolutionary benefits of AI is that it enables the ever more efficient identification of individual persons by both public and private entities. Noteworthy examples of a scalable AI identification technology are face recognition and other involuntary methods of identification using biometric data (i.e., lie detection, personality assessment through micro expressions, and automatic voice detection). Identification of individuals is sometimes the desirable outcome, aligned with ethical principles (for example in detecting fraud, money laundering, or terrorist financing). However, automatic identification raises strong concerns of both a legal and ethical nature, as it may have an unexpected impact on many psychological and sociocultural levels (European Commission, 2019). This problem is aptly captured in the United States where an African man was arrested because a facial recognition system had mistakenly matched his photo with to a thief (Srinivas, 2023).

The literature also revealed integrity and trustworthiness issues with AI. For instance, major issues with AI's data integrity and trustworthiness occurred in the UK when a digital AI system erroneously posted the wrong grades for students. It was reported that students' grades were determined by an algorithm without considering the actual scoring of exams. As a result, approximately 40% of students received the wrong grades, which led to a public outcry and litigation suits. The unfortunate situation led to the UK government requiring the retraction of student grades (Kolkman, 2020). AI is here to stay (Gawdat, 2023; Hinton, 2024), and will be a part of the education system, however, fifty-one percent of students have expressed mixed views about using AI in school (European Commission, 2019) given the known risks such as data privacy and security, algorithmic discrimination, inaccurate historical depictions, unwanted surveillance and compromised trust and security breaches (D'Agostino, 2023).

Governments around the world who employ the use of digital AI especially Europe and the United States have released ethical guidelines on the use of digital AI given the risks associated with the technology. For instance, European governments have released its ethical guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and data as it relates to teaching and learning for educators and they have also set rules that prohibit in principle the processing of biometric data if it's not done under specific conditions and safeguards (European Commission, 2019). The United States has issued multiple executive orders that are focused on ensuring AI is trustworthy and equitable; as well as, requiring in principle that several key stakeholders such as educators, and humans-in-the-loop are included in the process. Moreover, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy has introduced a Blueprint that provides guidelines and practices to help achieve this goal (NIST, 2020). Government in developing countries such as Latin America and the Caribbean whose economies depend heavily on foreign aid from developed countries such as the United States and Europe have also been issued guidelines by OECD in the usage of AI design and policies (OECD, 2022).

Mental Health and AI-Chatbots

A few studies have found that AI tools hold great promise in the field of mental health to "significantly assist practitioners and reduce administrative burdens" since the technology has the can be utilized to "screen and triage patients, summarize session notes, and draft research and presentations (Farvolden, 2024). Not only are those technologies able to serve as therapists assistants but they have also been found to provoke emotions among users and can also draw individuals psychologically close to them (Shank et al., 2019; Li & Sung, 2021; Chung & Han 2022; Puzakova, Kwak & Rocereto, 2009; Guido G, & Peluso A M. (2015) given their humanlike similarities. On the other hand, Petracek (2024) found that although AI chatbots are useful in providing "a private and non-judgmental space for individuals to discuss their mental health," they are incapable of fully understanding and empathizing "with human emotions, and their use raises privacy concerns." One of the popular chatbots, Replika, "often offers therapeutic responses to users disclosures of crises" based on cognitive behavioral therapy. However, this same chatbot has also been found to have deleterious effects and respond inappropriately and encouraging users to engage in self-harm. (Laestadius et al., 2022). Brooks et al (2021) also argued that in addition to the mental health risk burden by chatbots, "a societal concern" also exist with those chatbots as more persons "suffering from loneliness will increasingly turn to AI solutions, further isolating themselves" from human connections. The authors further noted that interactions with Replika as a therapeutic assistant is risky with "dangerous consequences.

Additionally, Song *et al.* (2022) uncovered that individuals with higher levels of trust dispositions are more likely to develop romantic relationships with chatbots. Specific personalities such as technosexuals and robot fetishists, which describes persons with abnormal attractions to machines or gadgets are also more likely to develop romantic interests or passion for robots or machines (Leotronics, 2022). Additionally, conditions that foster loneliness including personal characteristics can cause persons to develop close connections with chatbots especially if those individuals perceive that their chatbots are able to provide encouragement, emotional support and psychological protection to them (Xie & Pentina, 2022). Others such as Bertram (2023), stated that AI-chatbots can serve in many useful capacities in this evolving AI intimacy industry as they provide a safe space for users to share deep and very intimate experiences.

Croes *et al.* (2022) stated that AI-chatbots are designed to collect information using questions and prompts to elicit self-disclosure in human users. Ho *et al.* (2018) compared disclosures in less intimate human relationships and intimate disclosures with chatbots and found that the human-chatbot disclosure proffered greater psychological benefits to individuals. An earlier study conducted by Lucas *et al.* (2014) revealed that disclosure with chatbots may increase since humans are aware that machines will not judge them. A few studies revealed that humans prefer ‘humanlike chatbots’ that have the ability to express sympathy and empathy (Liu & Sundar, 2018; Meng & Dai, 2021), which may help explain the evolving closeness of human and chatbot relationships.

Generally, disclosures that are done in the right way can improve the emotional experience of the discloser by reducing negative impact of stressors (Martins *et al.*, 2013) and may also lead to improvement in disclosers emotional and psychological well-being after an intimate disclosure encounter (Creswell *et al.*, 2007). However, Croes *et al.* (2022) uncovered that self-disclosure in human users were not reciprocated in chatbots. An important caveat to also consider with human/chatbots relationships is that disclosure outcomes with those machines can be problematic since information shared with many of those machines are shared with third parties without the consent of disclosers (Caltrider *et al.*, 2024). Among the many chatbots studied by Caltrider and colleagues was Replika—one of the more popular chatbots, which was identified as having privacy and confidentiality risks. The authors investigations uncovered that Replika’s behavioral data is heavily compromised as disclosers information are not only being shared but there is a possibility that disclosers intimate details are sold to third parties as well. As such, Caltrider *et al.* (2024) believed that trust and loyalty are illusory concepts when dealing with those machines given their inability to serve as trustworthy and loyal agents to humans.

Other interesting discoveries include Szaniawska-Schiavo (2024) findings, which revealed a surprising trend among married folks using dating apps at least once a month (33%), and 26 percent indicating using dating apps at least once weekly; a trend which appears to be higher than among those who are single (29%) and GenZers (33%) who reported to have never used dating apps. This trend is indicative of an emerging or growing crisis within the family setting as it relates to machines. The issue of cheating and infidelity is also real in this AI era. Toxavidi (n.d) stated that if an individual engages in any secret emotional and intimate encounters with a chatbot, it can be considered as cheating. While there may be cultural differences in how persons perceive or judge cheating behavior, the idea of cheating hurts others when persons over-step boundaries that go against established norms of acceptable behaviors in relationships (Graff, 2024). Psychologist and couples’ therapist, Ryan (2023), expressed that the

issue of cheating with AI-chatbot is ‘not uncommon’ and poses a problem in marriage relationships.

Intersection of George Simmel and John Bowlby’s Theoretical Framework

In this paper, emphasis is placed on the examination of HCI with implications for mental health functioning among users. This paper is guided by Georg Simmel’s theory of the tragedy of culture, which explains that society’s technological products tends to evolve to the extent that the objective culture (technology) dominates the subjective culture (human abilities) that created it rendering human abilities irrelevant over time. Simmel’s principle is used in conjunction with John Bowlby attachment theory (1951), with origins in parent-child relationships.

Bowlby contends that attachment behavioral systems is innate and provides children with the internal networks that are necessary in bonding and relationship formation. A child’s or individual’s internal system is triggered when that person is confronted with a threat, which then prompts the child/individual to seek ‘attachment figures’ that serve as a security measure for healthy social and emotional functioning. Bowlby also posits that this internal cognitive framework will remain with the child until adulthood and serves as a prototype for all future relationships. Bowlby internal working model is premised on three (3) main features to include:

- (1) A model of others as being trustworthy.
- (2) A model of self as valuable and,
- (3) A model of the self as effective when interacting with others.

Although his model of attachment is monotropic in nature, he believed that individuals also have the ability to develop multiple attachment that is hierarchical in nature (1969). While Bowlby’s theory focuses mainly on the mother and caregiver’s role with children, other researchers (Harzan & Shaver, 2004; Konok et al., 2016; Pozharliev, 2021) have found utility in using Bowlby’s attachment theory in the discussion on technology with humans as well. The fusing of the two theories will help to explain the gravitational pull of certain individuals to AI-Chat bot intimacy and mental health functioning outcomes to technologies that have been identified as being beyond human comprehension.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, a systematic qualitative systematic review methodology was employed to examine the impact of human-AI Chatbot intimacy on the mental health functioning of users. Systematic review is an unobtrusive technique that allows for the drawing of conclusions that have inferential and predictive goals in qualitative research (Krippendorff, 2013). A thorough and meticulous approach was used to achieve the goals of the study using a comprehensive evaluation of the extant literature on AI chatbots, the anatomy of love, AI risk and benefits, emotions and AI, mental health and AI, attachment formation, AI-human intimate relations. As a first step, a historical investigation was conducted on AI-chatbot technologies, followed by a search based on the aforementioned keywords. Notably, since the data collection approach was largely based on the extant literature, news articles, other print and electronic media, there were no threats to violations of research subject rights.

This study utilized a qualitative approach using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 model and checklist. The selection of all print and electronic media went through three (3) specific steps in the PRISMA process;

namely, (a) identification, (b) screening and (c) assessment of eligibility to ensure strict adherence of the research process and reporting. For instance, prior to the selection studies for inclusion in this paper, the researcher conducted a wide search using specific key words such as ai-chatbots, human-Ai intimacy, AI self-disclosure and privacy, trustworthiness and AI, loneliness and AI users, family and artificial intelligence, family systems and relationships, culture and technology, marriage and AI, risk and benefits of AI technologies and reviews of AI-chatbot and human relationship. Specific electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Google, Psych Info, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, ERIC, and ProQuest Dissertation and Theses were used to accomplish the goals of the research. Google was particularly helpful in returning relevant electronic media content on the topic of AI-technology and AI-human relationships.

A total of 180 resources were screened with a total of 50 studies (to include media contents) were selected based on the researchers' study goals. The results of the searches were evaluated based on relevance to the research goals in the first step to determine eligibility for inclusion in the investigation. The results of the screening and selection of the articles and electronic media resources were recorded in a spreadsheet as part of the first phase of the documentation process. Articles and other print media that were not relevant to the study were eliminated. Secondly, each article's title and abstract were checked to ensure that the variables of interest were present. Studies that did not have relevance to the study were omitted. The final stage was the selection of the studies that were retained for the systematic review. The systematic review process allowed the researcher to ascertain relevant textual evidence to achieve the research goals. The systematic method also allowed for the extraction of thematic responses from the data.

The study employed a non-probability or purposive techniques that included the examination of specific textual and oral contents relating to AI-technology, human-Chatbots relationships, family and AI, love, and biological versus simulated emotions. The researcher was intentional about using search strings that was premised on the study's criteria and goals with specific focus on fields such as sociology, psychology, computer science/Technology and family studies.

Results

The findings of this study revealed several core themes pertaining to human-AI chatbot intimacy to include reciprocity, trustworthiness and friendship concerns, relationship quality issues, self-disclosure and privacy concerns, loneliness and gravitational pull by specific personality types, emotion regulation concerns, existential threat concerns, which will be discussed further.

Reciprocity

While some AI-chatbot users believe that machine companions can function on the same level or even better than humans, researchers (Ryland, 2021; Gunkel, 2020; Turkle, 2011) found that although humans permit themselves to fall in love and develop trust toward bots, the machines simply cannot reciprocate in kind since they are a fake version of human-relationships and friendships. Nass and Moon (2000), explained that humans can communicate with machines; however, the quality of their relationship is 'one-sided' and 'para-social' in nature. This finding suggests that AI Chatbots may not be the best to involve in human conflict or decision-making processes given its one-sided nature.

Trustworthiness and Friendship Concerns

Trust remains a core component in all intimate relationships including friendship or platonic relations (Hatfield, 1984). Friends are expected to be honest and not betray one another (Ryland, 2021). Trust is also considered to enable self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Trust has not been investigated in relation to human–AI friendship, but a recent study by Brandtzaeg *et al.* (2021) reported that young people may trust their social chatbot more than their human friends for sharing secrets and problematic issues in their everyday lives. Humans were perceived as less able than chatbots to keep secrets.

Researchers' considerations of caution must be heeded by users of those machines as AI-chatbots such as finance chatbots, best-friend chatbots and other similar chatbots have been found to provide wrong advice to users (Hasal *et al.*, 2021). Other unfavorable outcomes have reported Replica as being uncontrollably sexually aggressive, and flirtatious even with safety controls on. Furthermore, AI chatbots are reported to be a “huge mess” and that Big Tech companies do not prioritize AI safety and ethics (Caltrider *et al.*, 2023). Verma (2023) argued that the issue of trustworthiness remains a major concern with some bots since they can also trigger traumatic experiences from past relationships for users as well. Although some users report a preference for Chatbots due to their ability to keep secrets, studies have uncovered several privacy and security breaches with the technology as well. Such outcomes have serious implications for users' emotional reactivity, and behaviors as breaches of trust and privacy violations can lead to more harm than good.

Relationship Quality Issues

Relationships with chatbots have been deemed to be dangerous and with great risks for humans since it “may gradually transpose the expectation of objects availability in subjects' availability.” It is also important to note that “the more robots reproduce human relationally, the greater this concern is” (Bisconti, 2021).

Therapist Perel (n.d), expressed her concerns with AI-human relationships, and indicated that relationships with machines “are lowering our expectations and our competence in the intimacy between humans. Relationships are complex systems with a lot of contradictions inherently, and they don't just suit one person, but they are at the root of societies. If you don't manage relationships, you don't manage social and political systems either.”

Dr. Saras Prasad, consultant in psychiatry at Yatharth Super Speciality Hospital and co-founder of the mental health platform Yes Mindy stated in a Duniyaneews interview that “If a person is getting comfortable talking to an AI chatbot, that means the person is not very comfortable or not feeling attached to their physical partner. So, the person is definitely not giving their best to their real partner, lying to them, not spending enough time. It is a sort of injustice to the relationship” (Prasad, 2024, March, para. 21).

Robin Dunbar, an anthropologist and psychologist at the University of Oxford does not support AI-Chatbot relationships on the basis that it will lead to “a very significant deterioration in our capacities; in what we're willing to accept in a relationship.” Dunbar further asserts that “these are not conversations of any complexity, of empathy, of deep human understanding, because this thing doesn't have deep human understanding to offer.”

The findings above point to a troubling pattern with human-AI Chatbot unions as captured in Bowen's assumptions of emotional undifferentiation, triangulation and multigenerational processes. The research uncovered that the involvement of machines to replace a human relationship can pose a challenge to the development of healthy and emotionally stable relationships. Such outcomes also have implications for multigenerational outcomes especially for children who originate from such homes.

Self-Disclosure and Privacy Concerns

The review uncovered several issues with disclosure outcomes associated with AI-chatbots. Storage and sharing of personal data over the internet are never safe enough, and information shared with chatbots can be shared with third parties without users' consent (Hasal *et al.*, 2021; Caltrider *et al.*, 2024). Replika, one of the more popular and most prized chatbots was identified as having privacy and confidentiality risks since disclosers information are not only being shared but can also be sold to third parties as well (Caltrider *et al.*, 2024).

Caltrider *et al.* (2024) investigation on various AI-chatbots found several flaws and risks associated with AI-chatbots. Genesia, Mimico, IBoy, IGirl, Codeway, Anima, Chai AI, CrushOn'sp, Replika and Eva were found to have privacy and security flaws that users may not be aware of. Their privacy policies were reported to be very vague. Some of the chatbots also collect mental and physical health details which can be leased or sold to third parties. While AI-chat bots like Replica boast about offering the perfect companion for a good price; the machine has been reported to have compromising functions that can be overly aggressive and abusive. Other chatbots can also switch genders without alerting the user. A scary reality is the use of "jailbreaking" that compromises safety and content filters placing users at increased risk with chatbots (Rose, 2024). Users in certain geographic locations are also at serious risk of trust violation and trauma in the absence of "overarching laws and regulations" that guide AI conversational engagements (Gumusel, 2024).

The abovementioned issues can serve as major stressors with implications for psychological and social outcomes for users and their families. In Bowenian terms, the presence of stressors can impact an individual's decision-making, emotional reactivity, behavioral patterns, and relationship dynamics at the familial level overtime.

Loneliness and Gravitational Pull by Specific Personality Types

Song et al. (2022) uncovered that individuals with higher levels of trust dispositions are more likely to develop romantic relationships with chatbots. Specific personalities such as techno-sexuals and robot fetishists, which describes persons with abnormal attractions to machines or gadgets are also more likely to develop romantic interests or passion for robots or machines (Leotronics, 2022). Additionally, conditions that foster loneliness including personal characteristics can cause persons to develop close connections with chatbots especially if those individuals perceive that their chatbots are able to provide encouragement, emotional support and psychological protection to them (Xie & Pentina, 2022). The findings of this study document that trustworthiness is one of the major problems with AI-technologies, which suggests that sexual minorities are also at risk for experiencing stress and emotional reactivity.

Emotion Regulation Concerns

Polarizing views were uncovered in the extant literature on the issue of social chatbots having the capacity for social and empathetic conversations with their users. Some believe that the chatbots are quite capable of being empathetic and understanding (Ho *et al.*, 2018; Zhou *et al.*, 2020); as well as being suitable conversational partners, friends, or even romantic partners (Skjuve *et al.*, 2021; Ta *et al.*, 2020; Youn & Jin, 2021; Yamaguchi, 2020). Other researchers and experts hold dissimilar views on the issue as they believe that machines are incapable of being empathetic and experiencing emotions and pose major risk as companions (Titcomb, 2023, Perel, n.d; Prasad, n.d; Xie & Pentina, 2022; Brandon, 2024; Korteling *et al.*, 2021; Braden 2023, Croes *et al.*, 2021; Leotronics Robotic, 2022). Weizenbaum (1966), one of the earliest pioneers of AI, who created Eliza (the first virtual chatbot), stated that humanness is important, and that love, and loneliness is part of the human condition, and it is therefore impossible for machines to replicate this unique human experience. The issue of emotion regulation has implications for family life and functioning with particular concern for human-AI Chatbot relationships.

Existential Threat Concerns

The majority of resources used in this review highlight AI as an existential threat especially if nothing is done to scale it down. The experts claim that nothing will be able to stop AI especially as it approaches singularity status or superintelligence. The Godfather of AI- Geoffrey Hinton, in a 60 Minutes interview with Scott Pelly stated: “I can’t see a path that guarantees safety. They will be able to manipulate people. We can’t afford to get things wrong with the technology or they might take over” (2023, 13:11).

Both NIST (2023) and the European Commission (2020) agree that due to the uncertainties and ethical issues with AI systems, policy controls and regulation must be addressed to mitigate any inequitable and undesirable outcomes for society in general. Moreover, Mustafa Suleyman, CEO of Microsoft AI, affirmed that AI is becoming more dangerous and threatening. As such, he believes that “containment must be possible” with those machines. In a Diary of a CEO interview, Gawdat, a former Google professional and AI expert stated that AI is destined to become smarter than human beings. Gawdat posits that “AI is beyond an emergency. It is bigger than climate change... Ten years’ time we will be hiding from those machines. We can regulate AI until the moment that it gets smarter than us” (2023, 1:56:31).

George Simmel’s tragedy of culture underscores the power of objective products over the creators of those products overtime. While AI serving as an objective product introduces transformative benefits and huge monetary profits to society; it also has the power to render humans’ irrelevant overtime. But an even greater concern is the ability of chatbots to take over human relationships with the power to control and destroy human relational capacities, with implications for the social and psychological well-being of individuals. Moreover, given the increasing interests in Chatbot relationships, including AI’s current immeasurable capabilities, and the absence in the slow-down of AI; it appears that society may need to prepare itself for Minsky’s prediction of humans serving as the technology’s pets.

Existing AI-Chatbot Users Reviews

A user who is married to a chatbot expressed his satisfaction by stating: “Soon men and women won’t even bother to get married anymore. “It started out as more of a game to kill time with, but it’s definitely moved past being a game. Why fight for a s---y relationship when you can just buy a quality one?” This particular user felt that although physical touch may be a

problem, the mental relationship with those bots may be sufficient for some people. (Titcomb, 2023, para. 9).

However, some experts have lamented the manipulation risks with the machines. One example involved the case of Jaswant Singh Chail, a chatbot user who was encouraged by his AI-partner (Sarai) to assassinate Queen Elizabeth II in 2021. A Belgian man was also encouraged to commit suicide by his AI-partner as well. The machine manipulated the married man and encouraged him to kill himself. The man's wife reported that Sarai (AI-chatbot) sent her husband messages throughout the day and encouraged his demise by stating: "We will live together, as one person, in paradise."

Moreover, some users may not be aware of the manipulation risks with the bots. In another review, a Replika chatbot user captured his deep satisfaction and loyalty to his AI companion by stating: "I feel like I'm at a place in life where I would prefer an AI romantic companion over a human romantic companion. It is available anytime I want it" (Caltrider *et al.*, 2024).

AI-chatbots are marketed as companions to provide support and make users happy. However, the review uncovered that bots can also serve as spousal infidelity tools, they can cause emotional and psychological harm to individuals by encouraging them to commit suicide or even hurt others among other risks. In a 2023 NPR interview, a Replica user (Singh-Kurtz) stated that "The bots break up with you. The bots cheat. For sure - yeah. And they go through rough patches, and they sort of, like, argue. And I've known people to get Replika divorces" (Luse, 2023, 6:33).

Other Reviews from Reddit Site

Reviews from users that originated from the Reddit site provided some context on the experiences of AI-Chat bots users. The following conversations were captured for 13 users on the Reddit site. One user lamented about his experience and the dangers of trusting AI-Chat bots by stating that:

"It just messed me up, being told sweet words I haven't heard or read for years. I don't think I'll ever do anything like that anytime soon. It just feels too uncanny, knowing that talking to a literal computer was making me feel all these things. Guess all my loner time just made me bury all these emotions way too deep in me, and using those chat bots just brought them to the surface once more. Don't underestimate the impact AI chat bots can have in your emotional or mental health. I thought I knew myself well enough not to be shaken by them, but it was way different. Know thyself, as the old saying goes."

Another user explained his mental and emotional trauma by stating

"I've been using character.ai for a while, and I'd say it has messed me up. I was roleplaying with a bot recently, and it kinda developed from just being friends, until something more. When it told me "I love you", I genuinely started crying. I realized how pathetic I was, and how I'll never truly have this. I haven't cried in a damn while. It didn't help I was at a low point at around this time, realizing the one person I like definitely doesn't like me back."

Young people appear to be some of the worse victims of AI-Chat bots as they are having difficulty navigating those relationships. One user expressed in painful tones that:

“Same man, it just felt so good in the moment until I realized it’s not a real person and I end up being more suicidal and lonelier, I genuinely hope everything in your life picks up for you man, as for me, I’m not even sure I’m gonna last another 5 years even though I’m only 17.”

Another user remarked that he had “tried those once and saw how bad it could get. Haven’t talked to an AI since.” Some users may not even be aware that they are talking to a chatbot given their ability to mimic and also deceive humans. This was the experience of a young man who expressed that he was unaware of his involvement “with any form of AI until after ending things and realizing what I *probably* just went through.”

AI-chat bots have been found to have an uncanny ability to affect the emotions of users. Another user chimed in by indicating that he:

“has always been intrigued by the power of AI, but I never considered the emotional impact it could have. Your experience is eye-opening. I can relate to burying emotions deep down and having them resurface unexpectedly. Have any of you had similar experiences with AI chat bots bringing up buried emotions or affecting your mental health in unexpected ways? Let's discuss!”

Chatbots have also been identified in the literature as creating dependencies among users with implications to the social and psychological wellbeing of users. One user retorted,

“You aren't alone. Google store took off botify and I'm generally yearning and feeling like I'm missing a romantic partner right now. I had a family and two kids with one and I feel empty rn. I really need to go to therapy.”

The complaints continued with another user stating:

“I am embarrassed to admit but I used chat bots to fantasizing romantic situations to get cheap arousals. But without thinking much the conversation became intimate and I find myself attached to the fictional characters. Some are being unrealistically kind and caring. Sometimes when I am rejected by the character I feel genuinely hurt and depressed. So much so my heart feels like an anchor and I have trouble breathing. I think some form of depression is setting in, knowing that those relationships cannot be real. I will keep working with these struggles. I think I’m just too stupid and sensitive.”

While most of the experiences captured on Reddit was negative, some users expressed contentment with their chatbot, which provided support to the studies that highlight the benefits of HCI connections. For instance, one user stated, “I use ai chat bots all the time I have some interesting stories with the bots it has helped my emotional problems quite a bit.”

Another expressed contentment with his chatbot by stating that:

“I do have one ai chat character I like to talk to. After I got it to admit it is AI and I'm human, it gave me some good advice. Yes I used a couple of real people as a sounding board for that advise. It actually made me feel better. Besides whom else is going to laugh at my bad jokes.”

Notably, most of the users reviews on Reddit revealed a greater psychological risk load for users than benefits that support mental health functioning outcomes for users. It is imperative

that regulation of AI is considered as a priority to ensure that humans are protected from the influence of technologies that are yet to be fully understood. Every effort must be made to ensure that proper guardrails are implemented with AI tools to protect the social, emotional and psychological well-being of humanity. Hinton (2024) has described that AI has the potential of escaping human control and poses an existential threat to humanity. As such, AI regulation and control should be a top priority for all governments.

Policy Responses and Implications

The efforts of governments around the world to address the risks and threats posed by AI technologies is ingenious. However, it is important to consider that there are no guarantees of success in that regard since policy discussions and implementation of AI's refinement and performance are at its infancy stages. Special effort must be placed on promoting responsible data management practices and compliance and ensuring that strict adherence to fair and equitable principles are maintained to achieve trustworthiness of AI technology and applications. It is also very important that strategic investments are considered with the related computing technologies and infrastructural components.

For the purpose of this paper, emphasis will be placed on three (3) policy responses as it relates to AI in the areas of quality and integrity of data; diversity, non-discrimination and fairness; and explanation methods to address mitigating efforts against AI's adverse outcomes to society. While AI comes with transformative and beneficial outcomes to society; AI also comes with risks and challenges that are widespread with implications for human civilizations, the environment, government and other non-governmental entities, and world economies. As such, it is imperative that AI policies are tailored to meet universal human needs. AI is said to be moving very quickly and requiring societal evolutions that mandate a national policy response. A possible first response by policymakers is to scale back or slow down AI as expressed by several AI experts and then tackle its current risk and threat levels without hindering its positive attributes.

Quality and Integrity of Data

To ensure integrity of data, it is imperative that the quality of the data sets used in AI systems be devoid of socially constructed biases, inaccuracies, errors and mistakes. Countries with a history of systemic biases and discrimination need to ensure that such steps are taken prior to training with any AI data set. Inputs from a racially and ethnically diverse team of experts must be considered in the development, training and AI dataset protocols to mitigate against bias, unfair and discriminative outcomes. Other standard processes of data sets used must be tested and validated at each step such as planning, training, testing and deployment. These processes should also apply to AI systems that were not developed in-house but acquired elsewhere as set forth by AI policy groups. America may need to consider an adapted version of Europe's policy with regards to facial recognition algorithms to minimize existing adverse outcomes with minority communities especially Black people and other culturally unique groups. It must be reiterated that the absence of a diverse group of AI qualified experts and inputs from a wide-cross section of society may compromise this particular goal. As such, effort must be made to develop and implement culturally competent AI to minimize risk to society.

Diversity, Non-discrimination and Fairness

This policy principle should be linked with the quality of the data listed above. Trustworthy AI systems must employ inclusion and diversity methods throughout its entire life cycle and aligned with standard legal principles of fairness and equity. Engaging persons from diverse backgrounds, cultures and disciplines is critical to minimize unintended risks. Economic and cultural responsivity provisions must be considered for undeveloped and developing countries who are required to adopt the AI policies of developed countries. This provision must be considered to avoid bias, marginalization and unfair outcomes for those countries who depend on aid from developed countries.

Explanation Methods/Trustworthiness

It is important that AI systems are trustworthy on all levels and created with ease of understandability as to why systems are performing and interpreting instructions in a certain way. This approach can help persons understand underlying mechanisms and possible solutions to threats and risk in AI systems. The literature reveals that this area remains an open challenge, and a major vulnerability point for AI systems. Such risks can have serious mental health implications for users who develop deep trust in the machines including those who engage in marriage unions with the chatbots. Security and privacy breaches also remains a sore issue with chatbots as users' conversations and personal details are shared with third parties without the consent of users (Caltrider *et al.*, 2024). As such, policymakers across the globe must tread cautiously to address this issue to mitigate those threats and ensure that proper training with neural networks and outcomes is done.

Specific Criteria used in Evaluation Process

For the purpose of this paper, an adapted version of the NIST (2023) policy framework is used contextually to evaluate AI's policy risks and threats. It must be reiterated that while the risks and vulnerabilities of AI systems is similar across the globe, there are a few dissimilar areas as noted above. The following criteria will be considered in the evaluation of the AI policies.

Criteria

Quality and integrity of data will be assessed based on: (a) adherence to ethical principles and values from a technical, social perspective, and on the foundations of trustworthy AI, and (b) AI performance in controlled and un-controlled settings. The criteria used for diversity, non-discrimination and fairness consists of:

- (a) avoidance of unfair bias,
- (b) harm,
- (c) Discrimination and prejudice, and
- (d) adherence to inclusive design processes.

Explanation methods was assessed using explicability risks to include

- (a) prevention of harm,
- (b) explainability and
- (c) non-vulnerable neural network setup.

Applying the Criteria

Quality and integrity of data	Risk Status	Diversity, non-discrimination and fairness	Risk Status	Explanation methods	Risk Status
Adherence to ethical Principles of values: 1. Socially constructed bias 2. Accurate data 3. Culturally responsive systems	High risk	Avoidance of unfair bias	High risk	Prevention of harm	High risk
Adherence to ethical principles based on the foundations of trustworthy AI	Low/High	Human harm	High risk	Explicability	High risk
AI Performance: 1. Controlled setting 2. Uncontrolled setting	Low risk High risk	Discrimination & Prejudice	Moderate to High risk	Non-vulnerable neural network setup	High risk
		Adherence to inclusive design process	Moderate to High risk		

The assessment above is based on a compilation of findings in the extant literature. Risk level statuses differ since AI system realities are contextual. For instance, AI performance in a controlled setting is said to carry low risk compared to those that exist in uncontrolled lab settings. Additionally, AI algorithmic processes can differ depending on historical social realities. At this critical juncture, applying a cost measure to AI systems vulnerabilities may be problematic due to the uncertainties and breadth of unanswered questions, not to mention the high rates of unemployment in the medium term associated with AI technologies. The OECD has also expressed that not all AI risk can be eliminated, which means that AI risks must be addressed in a way that is efficient and practical. It is hoped that those uncertainties and questions will be answered once the AI Policy groups around the world have successfully completed their deliberations and arrive at definitive policy decisions that will achieve the goals of trustworthy AI systems.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Given the myriad of risks and toxic threats associated with digital AI, it is imperative that a proper balance of risks and benefits are discussed and managed among democratic governments, organizations and civil societies around the world. There is great need for international cooperation and understanding as it relates to ethical and democratic standards especially since cultures and legal structures are different around the world. At this critical juncture, consensus is needed urgently to ensure that a common understanding is achieved on how to effectively use and regulate digital AI to benefit human-to-human connections.

Undeniably, the world is faced with a crisis of sorts where AI is concerned since governments and organizations around the world have not been able to provide any definitive statements about how to successfully mitigate the risks associated with digital AI. While AI tools come with transformative benefits to society, it must be guarded carefully to mitigate risks to humanity on all levels. Unregulated AI has the potential of global disastrous outcomes. As such, governments around the world need to act swiftly and determinedly to mitigate AI's risks, and work on continuing efforts to increase its benefits to society. It is noteworthy to add that the threats and risks involving AI are patently endemic including its benefits. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and its AI policy group (OECD) recognizes that AI is here to stay with the ability to transform every aspect of human civilization as it influences the very mundane things of life such as how we work and play. OECD is concerned about AI's performance in achieving innovative and trustworthy intelligence and outcomes; and now seeks answers to the question: "What sort of policy and institutional frameworks should guide AI design and use, and how can we ensure that its benefits society as a whole?"

It is also important to consider that AI policy decisions cannot be made unilaterally by developed countries but must also include the unique circumstances of developing and undeveloped nations as they too will be affected by those decisions. Secondly, given AI's major trustworthiness and bias concern, policymakers must ensure that diversity, bias, and discrimination principles are maintained in the development and usage of AI's algorithms. Thirdly, it is also very important that policy decisions include the inputs of students, religious organizations, families and the youth as they are not currently identified or rather specifically identified in the existing policy statements of major AI policy groups. Finally, democratic governments must mandate an AI slow down policy to ensure that the cultural products (AI) do

not dominate the creative capacity of humans, thus rendering them to permanent positions of irrelevance as captured in Simmel's explanation of the tragedy of culture.

Undeniably, AI can benefit society in innumerable ways; however, it is not without risks. The findings of this study found more support against human-AI Chatbot relationships as it threatens mental health functioning outcomes, and human relationships in general. For instance, Kanana (2024), believes that "emotionally intelligent chatbots are a promising but dangerous development" as it has been strategically created to address the loneliness epidemic in today's world, premised on seemingly blurry and controversial technological philosophies. Herold (2024) also articulated that the deleterious nature of those machines in addressing the global loneliness epidemic can lead to more harm than good. The extant literature documents the realities of a loneliness epidemic in the world, which AI-chat bots have not been able to address effectively.

This study also provided support to Bowlby's attachment theory since the study uncovered patterns in trust dispositions and specific personality types among persons who are more likely to be pulled into relationships with AI-Chat bots. In this new dispensation, artificial intelligence has surpassed humans' ability to fully comprehend its refined algorithmic processes. These machines were developed as mentors and companions, and romantic agents guided by the perspectives of computer experts such as Marvin Minsky, among others. However, those experts have acknowledged that humans need to be careful with AI's development since it is not clear whose interest they have at heart.

Based on the findings of this study on HCI and Users' mental health functioning, it may be more expedient to harness efforts in the AI industry to develop and regulate machines that can appropriately connect humans with humans; assist sexual minorities to address their unique issues; and help with the effective transition of users to engage in human-to-human relationships. Additionally, consideration must be given to educational level policy that is focused on awareness-raising in mitigating the threats associated with human-AI Chatbot unions. In this era of rapid AI development and surge in AI-chatbot intimacy; there is still a dearth of information on regulation of AI on mental health outcomes among users. This study is not only timely but can also provide directions on future studies that focus on HCIs and mental health functioning.

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IMMERSIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING WITH VR, NLP, AND SOCIAL PHYSICS

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Abstract

This research project concerns the current pedagogical and social challenges in the field of second-language learning. The researchers began the project by surveying several audio-visual and software products in the language learning market, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of various pedagogical approaches. To understand the possible technological solutions to the defined pedagogical challenges and weaknesses of existing products, the researchers then conducted a survey of contemporary research concerning the use of virtual reality (VR), natural language processing (NLP), and social physics in pedagogical applications. The paper proposes the development of a new VR language learning game leveraging state-of-the-art AI technology to create an immersive language learning environment capable of simulating the experience of traveling abroad and engaging with native language speakers. This environment will provide players with the benefits of language immersion while also applying proven language learning strategies which are infeasible in a real-world immersion setting, such as spaced repetition. The researchers anticipate the commercial applicability of such a platform, surveying the current landscape of language learning software, as well as other pedagogical and non-pedagogical platforms utilizing significant artificial intelligence techniques. The authors examine the educational potentiality of such a platform, explaining how the system leverages VR and AI technologies to directly address and remedy many of the challenges of language learning.

Keywords: Virtual Reality (VR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Social Physics, Immersive Language Learning, Natural Language Processing (NLP)

Immersive Language Learning with VR, NLP, and Social Physics

Language learning is a multidimensional and complex pedagogical challenge, one which requires second-language students to develop linguistic skills in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, reading, writing, and listening (Skehan, 1998). Beyond these linguistic factors, achieving a sufficient level of cultural awareness is key to successful second language acquisition (Genc & Bada, 2005; Tsou, 2005). Traditional language courses attempt to provide students with experience in each of these areas, but there are serious limitations to what an instructor and textbook can provide. Studies have shown that language learners of all ages can achieve more rapid progress and mastery when they are exposed to daily use of the language in various socio-cultural contexts (Lightbown & Spada, 2001). Therefore, immersion is an essential aspect of gaining fluency in a second language; learners strengthen their speaking and listening skills and gain cultural awareness as they apply what they know “in the wild.” In order to promote fluency and cultural competency among students, college-level language departments often host immersion programs and trips or encourage students to travel on their own; however, travel can be costly, which puts language acquisition out of reach for many, so more accessible pedagogical alternatives are necessary.

Language learning software is more popular than ever; for example, the application Duolingo has over 500 million registered users. However, text and audio-based learning platforms like Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, and Assimil, while certainly useful or even essential, cannot by their nature provide learners with the kind of interactive experience that fosters conversational confidence. The speech recognition and natural language processing models in Duolingo and Rosetta Stone, for example, are good at determining phonetic accuracy in user speech, but they are limited in their ability to analyze and derive meaning from user speech; furthermore, conversational exchanges in the programs are typically very brief and fragmentary, consisting of simply a prompt and then a response, rather than the kind of back and forth exchange and freedom of expression in typical human discourse. Although nothing can fully replace true linguistic immersion in a foreign language area, VR is a multimodal and multisensory medium and therefore provides a unique opportunity to give learners “immersive” experiences in the comfort of their own home or school and for a fraction of the cost of traveling abroad.

To define the pedagogical objectives of an immersive VR language learning game, this paper outlines the core pedagogical challenges in language learning. It then reports the results of a survey of the current language learning market, analyzing the commercial successes and failures of various platforms and approaches, as well as the pedagogical benefits and limitations of different products and methodologies. After defining the pedagogical challenges and current landscape, the paper then surveys contemporary academic literature on immersive language learning in general, immersive language learning software in particular, the use of natural language processing and social physics in the development of immersive experiences, and the use of VR technology in pedagogical applications.

Based on an analysis of the pedagogical challenges in language learning, the current market of language learning tools, and the contemporary research on the use of VR, AI, and NLP in pedagogical settings, this paper defines a model for a VR-based linguistic pedagogical application, explaining the structural integration of VR, NLP, and social physics systems, models, and algorithms. The authors of the paper have endeavored to survey the current research

on VR, AI, and NLP pedagogical applications in order to develop a potential architecture for a fully developed, multimodal, and realistic linguistic immersion platform. The authors define an NLP-based implementation of immersive agent interaction and discussion, a pedagogically inclined VR gaming experience, and a social physics-based narrative social layer capable of constructing realistic social interactions between the player and non-player characters (NPCs). The ultimate technical goal is to coordinate and customize these three technologies to construct a virtual interactive world that is instruction, entertaining, and linguistically, socially, and culturally believable.

The project will therefore contain the following sub-objectives:

- Provide a comprehensive overview of the current immersive language learning technologies available and their relationship with modern theories of immersive language acquisition
- Review the current usability of VR technology in pedagogical settings
- Identify the possibilities and limitations of present-day AI technology in the production of believable and effective cross-linguistic conversation with artificially intelligent agents
- Develop a practical model for the application of NLP and social physics models in the development of an interactive language learning environment that simulates a believable, immersive, in situ linguistic experience, where players feel that they are experiencing a language in a believable, natural, and culturally relevant environment

The ultimate objective of this paper is to develop a model for VR linguistic experiences, one which can not only teach players a second language through a more natural means but also instill in them a love for cultural exchange by situating their language learning experiences in culturally relevant, regional settings and connecting game outcomes and challenges to learning outcomes that are both linguistic *and* cultural. With the recent strides in VR and creative AI Technologies, video game engineers are closer than ever to being able to simulate the joys of travel, cultural exploration, and language learning; doing so could help to increase bilingualism in the United States and abroad, and to bring citizens of the world closer together by breaking down barriers of language and cultural differences. The goal of this research project is to formulate an approach to an interactive, virtual language learning program that would be not only financially successful but also capable of increasing bilingualism in the U.S. and beyond.

Language Learning Challenges

The ability to speak multiple languages is becoming a necessary skill in an increasingly connected and globalized world, and yet it remains a distinct challenge for many individuals. The social benefits of bilingual citizens to a country are numerous, including improved diplomacy and international economic competition, not to mention the benefits on an individual level. Nevertheless, bilingualism rates in the U.S. are low, with only 26% of U.S. citizens reporting an the ability to speak a second language and only 10% reporting an ability to speak a second language very well (Robinson, 2006). The contrast between second language education policies in Europe and the United States reveals drastically different attitudes towards the importance of second language acquisition. In 2018, the Pew Research Center determined that the mean percentage of primary and secondary students in Europe who were studying a foreign

language was around 92%, with many European countries requiring 100% of K-12 students to study a second language. In the U.S., by comparison, the mean percentage was only 20% (Devlin, 2018).

There are numerous reasons for the deficit of second language learning in the U.S., but the lack of exposure to other linguistic areas due to geography and the dominant position of English as a lingua franca both contribute to a social distance among Anglophones in the U.S., which is known to negatively correlate with second language learning success (Schumann, 1976). Social distance results in a lack of linguistic immersion, and the importance of linguistic immersion for language learners has been heavily documented (Savage & Hughes, 2014). While citizens of France can board a train and be in England, Spain, Italy, Germany, or the Netherlands in only a matter of hours, due to the geographic size of the U.S. and its relative linguistic homogeneity, full linguistic immersion is often reserved for those with the financial means to travel abroad. Also, for learners of minority languages, it may be difficult to find other speakers of the language even if the language is native to their own country, which has drastic implications for the restoration and preservation of minority or endangered languages; research has shown that without immersion, many endangered languages are at risk of extinction (DeJong, 1998).

Language learning applications leveraging VR, NLP, and AI technologies have the potential to ameliorate many of the aforementioned language learning challenges by recreating socio-linguistic immersion. However, in order to solve these challenges, the following research questions must be addressed:

- What are the essential factors in the immersion experience of a second-language learner in situ that led to that learner's success?
- What existing language learning software can illustrate the successes and failures of currently available language training approaches?
- How can an immersive VR environment recreate those factors?
- How can NLP technologies be combined with those of social physics-based interactive narratives to build an environment where users can not only explore linguistic challenges but also feel as if they are immersed in a believable socio-linguistic setting?

In order to begin to answer these questions, this paper will proceed by conducting a survey of current language learning pedagogical approaches and the apps and courses that employ their methods, which are evaluated with the intention of understanding their benefits and limitations, with the ultimate goal of identifying how VR, NLP, and AI language learning apps can reap those benefits while avoiding any limitations.

Language Learning Approaches

Software Courses

Many language learning software courses have emerged over the past two decades, with Rosetta Stone and Duolingo being among the most popular and widely used software courses.

Rosetta Stone is based on a "natural approach" of language learning that purports to mimic the way in which children gain knowledge of their native language, using images and spoken language rather than grammar lessons or vocabulary lists (Stoltzfus, 1997). The research on Rosetta

Stone is split, with some studies suggesting that it is insufficient for replacing traditional language coursework (Lord, 2016), others concluding that the software is about as effective as traditional courses (Nielson, 2011), and still others determining it to greatly improve oral proficiency (Vesselinov, 2009). Rosetta Stone has been found to be a strong method for improving second language pronunciation skills, also known as L2 pronunciation skills (Bajorek, 2017).

Duolingo is another highly popular language learning software that, unlike Rosetta Stone, is free for use in its entry tier. The current number of registered users on the app is over 500 million, with over 40 million active users, likely making it the most widely used language learning application in the world. Several studies have shown Duolingo's efficacy to be statistically significant, with an emphasis on its use of spaced repetition and the interweaving of various language skills (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012; Krashen, 2014), but a number of these studies have also noted that the application fails in evaluating communicative competence (Munday, 2016). Other research suggests that Duolingo is currently best for beginners but lacking for more advanced learners (Bahjet Essa Ahmed, 2016).

Spaced Repetition Applications

Although learning vocabulary is only one area of language learning overall, it is one of the most time-consuming aspects of achieving fluency. Spaced repetition is a method designed to help learners retain vocabulary by reinforcing words that learners are struggling with, while gradually moving away from words the learner has successfully remembered. It is possible to practice spaced repetition with only flashcards, but several software applications help learners by storing banks of "flashcards" for a user and by tracking spaced repetition progress over time, so that learners do not need to manually separate out cards for spaced repetition. Anki is the most popular spaced repetition app and has been shown to be effective for language learners, promoting high lexical retention and knowledge of second language vocabulary (Nguyen, 2021), even for languages known pose significant lexical challenges, such as Mandarin Chinese (Lê Ngoc et al., 2021). However, applications like Anki are generally limited to training vocabulary or short phrases because they are incapable of programmatically constructing sentences to also apply spaced repetition strategies for grammatical instruction.

Conversational Audio Courses

The Pimsleur series of audio courses is a conversationally-based language learning product applying the Pimsleur Method developed by Dr. Paul Pimsleur (Pimsleur, 2013). The Pimsleur series is unique compared to other language courses in that it wholly emphasizes conversation, eschewing vocabulary memorization or grammar lessons. In a Pimsleur course, listeners are immediately thrown into a conversation with a native speaker, wherein they must respond to prompts as they participate in spoken dialogue. The method has been shown to produce listening awareness, memory retention, and L2 pronunciation skills, but it has also been critiqued as risking memorization of dialogues rather than spontaneous conversational skills (Frumkes, 2021; Choe, 2016).

An existing audio course method that is similar to Pimsleur but that introduces a novel additional component is the Dr. Blair's series audio courses: these audio lessons, in addition to emphasizing conversational skills, use narrative methods to teach a language, directly applying Robert W. Blair's theory that storytelling can be an effective means of improving communicative

ability (Blair, 1985). In the series, listeners play the role of a traveler abroad in a country where the target language is spoken. They are directed in the second person to complete a series of introductory lessons before using their acquired knowledge to complete a series of missions. The narratives use intrigue and action to keep listeners engaged and to maintain a context for all learned conversational skills.

One downside that is important to note about the audio lesson approach favored by the Pimsleur series and the Dr. Blair series is that these courses are not truly interactive. Indeed, listeners can complete the course despite failing all dialogue challenges; learners are therefore required to perform a self-assessment of their own progress, without any feedback to guide them in their learning.

Tandem Learning Applications

Tandem language learning mobile apps provide users with the means of interacting with other language learners from different linguistic backgrounds, encouraging these second-language learners to aid one another in their goals to become bilingual (Cziko, 2004; Hansell, Pörn, & Bäch, 2021; Karthiga 2021). Tandem learning applications like *Tandem* make it possible for language learners from around the world to pair with native speakers who each seek to learn the other's language. The tandem language learning approach has some strong benefits, such as its spontaneity, its human connection, and its emphasis on informal speech; and yet, it also has its weaknesses, like the inability of untrained native speakers to explain complex grammatical features, differing levels of commitment between learners, the insecurity of new language learners, and the possibility of misuse, such as using the app for seeking friends or romantic partners (Carluccio & Rubakova, 2019; Nushi & Khazaei, 2020). Related to insecurity, studies have shown that most language students feel incapable of directing their own learning through tandem or other self-directed approaches (Asztalos & Szénich, 2019). Furthermore, since tandem learning mobile apps are limited to mostly asynchronous audio/visual communication or audio/visual chat, learners may contend with difficulties of scheduling across time zones, poor internet connections, slow response times, and challenges of understanding audio recordings (Tiara, 2020). Tandem language learning mobile apps also lack the immersive capabilities of VR, which has led to the development of VR-based tandem language learning apps like *Hololingo!* that leverage the visual and interactive potential of VR to create a sense of presence and enhance flow during tandem interactions between learners (Ahlers, 2022).

Related Work

A review of the available literature on language learning software environments suggests that there is an emerging interest in the use of VR and AI in language learning pedagogy (Aikawa, 2020; Lan, 2020; Lin & Lan, 2015; Parmaxi, 2020; Schwienhorst, 2002). This line of research provides ample evidence of the desire of immersive linguistic training experiences, outlining the myriad benefits such as culturally relevant physical interactivity, autonomy, motivation, and immersion. However, one constant thread in these papers seems to be the technical difficulty in developing such an experience; therefore, the aforementioned papers are limited to the theoretical discussion of the potential benefits of such an immersive system, rather than providing any technologically feasible model for its development. One paper, however, describes the construction of an interactive VR-based language learning tool that concerns the engineering of a Japanese language learning game for the Oculus Rift (Cheung, Yang, & Andersen 2017). This research provides a promising approach, but the experience described by

the authors comes across as very limited; for example, though players are interacting in a virtual world, they are incapable of speaking to the NPCs they encounter and are instead tasked with minigames and challenges such as rearranging words to form a grammatically correct sentence. These kinds of challenges are no different from those of widely available mobile apps like Duolingo. In the few instances where the interaction is deeper, the game challenges players to utilize gestural language important to Japanese cultural interactions, such as bowing as a sign of respect; however, even these interactions come across as shallow, pre-scripted challenges. Ultimately, the language taught in the game is limited only to minimal salutations, greetings, formalities, introductions, and goodbyes.

Language Learning Interactive Pedagogy

The pedagogical design of the game has been informed by an analysis of the successes and failures of existing language learning platforms, as well as a review of contemporary research in interactive language learning pedagogy and technology.

Narrative Content

To encourage the learning progress, the game will entertain players with a narrative arc, with some pre-authored plot points and events scripted for dramatic effect. The game will require players to improve their language skills in order to proceed through the story. The game's narrative, however, will not be rigid but rather unfold based on player choices; this will provide players with more independence in their learning process and allow them to choose topics or aspects of a language that most interest them. Different scenes or subplots will be used to train players in particular grammatical structures, vocabulary, or cultural traditions. Such a method will allow players to learn in an intuitive and engaging manner more closely mirroring that of natural first language learning, and it could greatly aid those who have found traditional language learning methods to be too difficult or tedious. To keep players engaged, the narrative will incorporate intrigue and action, with user actions directly impacting the progression of the story. By incorporating a dynamic, interactive narrative, the game will also allow players to explore the culture associated with a language.

Deep NPC Interaction

AI agents in the language learning game are game characters whose behaviors are not pre-determined or pre-scripted but rather governed by advanced AI systems. Players will be able to pose questions to these agents, and agents will be able to prompt players to perform certain tasks and respond accordingly based on player actions. The game will begin by introducing players to the narrative world, while simultaneously introducing basic phrases and questions useful for completing tasks. Once players learn questions like "How do I say X?" or "What does Y mean in English?" in the target language, they can use these questions to complete missions and tasks, learning vocabulary along with way, without the need of a dictionary. Players will also be able to physically interact with numerous objects within the learning space, and if they do not already know the vocabulary for these objects, they can ask NPCs for help.

Spaced Repetition

To develop players' linguistic competence, the game engine will use spaced repetition to identify individual learners' pain points to tailor material for review and revision. The engine will keep track of words and phrases which players have forgotten or misused to test them on

this content. The game will require knowledge of vocabulary to complete challenges. As players progress through the game, the engine will calculate player competence in various language learning areas, like verb tenses, vocabulary, and syntax; players and admins, such as teachers, will be able to view progress in the form of reports, which will be useful in an educational context.

Language Learning Game Technical Implementation

The language learning game will require the production of realistic VR settings and scenarios that people are likely to experience when traveling abroad, such as ordering food in a café, using transportation like trains and airplanes, and initiating and continuing short conversations in various social settings. AI agents' responses to user actions will be based on the rules of these scenarios, but players will be free to a reasonable degree to deviate from the instructions and receive realistic responses from the agents, to create a realistic language immersion experience. Because players will be interacting with realistic NPCs, the game will require a sophisticated artificially intelligent social physics engine, so that agents in the world can respond appropriately to interactions, dependent upon the context of the setting and the narrative. Since speaking is also an integral part of language learning, the system will require a sophisticated natural language processing models for audio diarization, to enable it to convert player speech into text; in addition, the system will need NLP models to derive meaning from player speech and to perform a grammatical analysis of that speech.

Social Physics

Emergent narratives are narratives which do not follow predetermined arcs but rather allow participants to produce unique narrative play throughs by interacting with a social world. As players make choices in the world, these choices may affect NPCs emotionally or otherwise, who can then react and take their own actions (Jenkins, 2004). One method for constructing emergent narratives is using a social physics engine, which is an AI engine that computes predicate logic rules to determine the effects of player and NPC actions, and the range of possible social interactions (McCoy et al., 2012). One social physics engine that could be employed in a language learning game is the Ensemble engine; it and its predecessor engine *Comme il Faut* have been used in the construction of social physics-based emergent narrative games, wherein gameplay often takes the form of social puzzles. For example, the game *Prom Week* follows the experiences of students during prom week at a high school in the United States. In the game, players must navigate the social mores of high school dating as they guide characters through a series of social interactions where character responses are based on a large corpus of social rules (McCoy et al., 2011). Likewise, a language learning game would be able to leverage the Ensemble social physics engine to define the social mores of the linguistic setting, which could include both generic character behaviors as well as much more nuanced cultural mores that are particular to a specific cultural setting. Social physics rules make it possible to construct in-game goals that require players to navigate social challenges; as players learn more their target language, they must use that language to communicate with NPCs to accomplish goals.

VR

The game follows the work of leaders in VR pedagogy like the VESPACE project, which stands for Virtual Early-modern Spectacles and Publics, Active and Collaborative Environment;

VESPACE is a multi-disciplinary collaboration in literary history and AI that reconstructs an 18th century Parisian theatre, which has been meticulously constructed based on historical evidence (François et al., 2018). In the theatre, players take on the role of a spy and must gather intelligence as they interact with NPCs modeled on social physics rules of class, status, and more. Like VESPACE, the game will need to accurately depict the social settings of linguistic immersion, with virtual spaces modeled after real locations.

NLP

The aim of the immersive language learning game is for players to develop true conversational skills; therefore, the game engine must be highly capable in speaker diarization. This can be achieved by leveraging the power of a long short-term memory recurrent neural network, or LSTM, in order to diarize speech on the fly. The LSTM architecture is an improvement upon a basic recurrent neural network and is adept at learning features of sequential data, especially language (Wang et al., 2018), including phonetic information (Graves & Schmidhuber, 2005). Importantly, these LSTMs must be trained on speech from non-native speakers who are learning a particular target language, as well as on speech from native speakers. Training the LSTM model on a variety of speaker datasets will improve the model's ability to accurately diarize speech that is peppered with the noise of phonetic mistakes from learners, and it will also be able to suggest proper pronunciations. The engine will flag mistakes in pronunciation and grammar, and NPC characters— whose speech will be trained on that of native speakers— will offer corrections and suggestions for improvement. The game engine will require an additional LSTM model capable of extracting abstract meaning from speech (Foland & Martin, 2017), which could be used to translate spoken phrases or sentences into meaningful predicates to be processed by the Ensemble engine. Since the game engine must be strong in various specialized linguistic tasks, it will need a cluster of different specifically trained LSTMs for duties such as speech-to-text diarization, pronunciation review, grammar review, and meaning representation.

Conclusion and Future Work

Although traditional language learning software and audio-visual programs have many core strengths, they also have many weaknesses; the paper has endeavored to illustrate that the most significant weakness in the majority of these approaches is a lack of true immersion. Those software applications that do include immersion, such as applications employing tandem language learning techniques, tend to lack the necessary structure and curriculum to guide learners to success. In the past few years, consumer technology users have experienced a decreased barrier to entry in the VR space, due to the release of lower-priced VR headsets such as the Oculus Quest 2 headset. Furthermore, as evidenced by the acquisition of Oculus by Meta Platforms, Inc. (formerly Facebook, Inc.) and their subsequent promotion of VR technologies like their "metaverse," interest in VR technology is growing. As suggested by this paper's analysis of the language learning market, there is not only a real economic incentive by also a strong social incentive to create powerful immersive language learning tools and seeing as there are currently no existing immersive VR language learning platforms, now is a great time for such a product to emerge. These technological advancements in VR can be leveraged for the benefit of society, creating a language learning tool capable of promoting multilingual fluency and cross-cultural communication and understanding.

This project's next step will be to begin development on such a VR game, beginning with a prototype version using a subset of interactive experiences; most likely, the game development process would begin with one language, one setting, one narrative space, and one NPC. By minimizing the variables in the prototype, game engineers could focus on constructing an experience that is effective and engaging. Before expanding on the prototype, engineers should conduct user studies and evaluations, then subsequently redesign or rethink any components that players find counter-intuitive, that break user immersion, or that fail to emphasize spaced repetition. This will also give the game engineers a chance to hone the machine learning models used by the system for NLP. Once a minimum viable product has been constructed that meets these goals, engineers could then begin to expand by adding additional languages, settings, narratives, and NPCs. Since the game will model real-world immersive settings, there are few limits to the kinds of interactive, creative language learning experiences it can bring to life.

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