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the alternative education experiences of Black, Indigenous,
People of Color (BIPOC) youth**

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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

DISCONNECTED YOUTH: THE JOURNEY TO EDUCATIONAL RE-ENGAGEMENT:
THE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION EXPERIENCES OF BLACK, INDIGENOUS, PEOPLE
OF COLOR (BIPOC) YOUTH

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

LaToya L. Brown

October, 2021

Barbara A. Mather, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

First I'd like to give thanks to the Lord, for he is good and his love endures forever. He is my creator, protector, and the leader of my life. It is through him that ALL things are possible. To my mother Fran, who paved the way as a critical race advocate before the term was defined. Thank you for fighting and protesting in the streets of North and South Carolina for the rights of Black people. Thank you for the courage to integrate the Baltimore Public School District as one of the first Black teachers. Thank you for modeling life-long learning and a commitment to serving the community. Thank you for being my first love, my first teacher, and my biggest cheerleader.

To my father Marion, thank you for a lifetime of unconditional love and support. Thank you for enriching my life with an unapologetic sense of self-love and Black pride. Thank you for introducing me to the sounds of Miriam Makeba, Gil Scott-Heron, The Watts Prophets, and Nina Simone, to name a few. Thank you "Daddy" for your daily text messages of love.

To my son, Sean, my critical thinker, my artist, my entrepreneur, my LOVE- Thank you for your passion, insight, creativity, and resilience. You are my reason WHY.

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I am because we are- Ubuntu

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ABSTRACT

Over 2.5 million youth remain disconnected from education or the workforce well into their adult lives. Nearly one-third of youth who remain disconnected are Black, Indigenous Persons of Color (BIPOC) from low-income communities. The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of what systems and processes support re-engagement for formerly disconnected, and subsequently re-engaged, BIPOC students from alternative high school programs in the State of California. The following research questions guided this qualitative narrative study: How do former disconnected youth ages 19-26 years of age describe their experience in traditional public schools compared to that of alternative public schools? What factors led formerly disconnected youth 19-26 years of age to successfully reengage and complete alternative education programs at various entry and exit points throughout their journey to program completion? The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was comprised of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the conceptual framework is Self-Determination theory (SDT). This study used the storytelling tenet of CRT and narrative inquiry to share perceptions of BIPOC youths' alternative education journey. An a priori coding scheme was used to identify initial primary themes for this study. Additional themes were identified through an iterative analysis of the interview data for descriptors that emerged throughout the narratives and that aligned with the CRT in K-12 education, literature on alternative education and disconnected youth, and self-determination theory.

Keywords: alternative education, BIPOC, disconnected youth, dropout, re-engaged youth, anti-racist curriculum and pedagogy, culturally relevant curriculum, devaluation, personal/group discrimination discrepancies (PGDD), critical race theory (CRT), self-determination theory

Chapter 1: Introduction

The high school graduation rates in the United States reached a significant high of 85% in 2017 (Sable & Young, 2017). In spite of the steady increase in national graduation rates, there are still over 4 million youth between the ages of 16-24 years of age who have disconnected from the K-12 education system at some point during their schooling before graduating from high school (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2013; Lewis, 2020; Kuehn et al., 2009). According to research, youth who are Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), male, live in poverty, English language learners, incarcerated, homeless, in foster care, pregnant or parenting, have an incarcerated parent, have low academic achievement, and with cognitive and physical disabilities are most “at risk” for educational disconnection (Alspaugh, 1998; Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2013; Driscoll, 1999; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2015; Hynes, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lewis, 2020; Rampey et al., 2016). According to Bohn et al. (2020), youth who experience racial segregation are also at a higher risk for disconnection. BIOPC youth are more likely to disconnect from education than their white and Asian peers (Baldridge et al., 2011; Bowers et al., 2012; Ginder et al., 2017).

Youth disconnection costs taxpayers over \$300,000 per youth throughout a lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Belfield et al., 2012). Youth who remain disconnected throughout their adult lives are more likely to experience negative health, societal, and economic outcomes such as incarceration, poverty, unemployment, a greater reliance on public assistance, and death (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Rumberger, 2011; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017; Wood et al., 2017).

During the 2007-2008 school year the percentage of public school districts in the United States that offered alternative education programs and schools offering pathways to earn a high school diploma or certificate of completion increased to 64% compared to 39% of public school

districts during the 2000-2001 school year (Carver et al., 2010; Kleiner et al., 2002). Alternative education provides equitable access and learning experiences to students whose academic and social needs have not been met by traditional school environments (National Alternative Education Association, 2020); Students attending alternative education schools and programs have faced school-related and individual risk factors such as absenteeism, family adversities, teenage parenthood, low achievement, credit deficiency, and grade retention (Bowers et al., 2012; California Department of Education, (CDE), 2020; Porowski et al., 2014; Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Alternative education provides this population with an opportunity to meet graduation requirements through innovative and student-centered educational approaches to learning (NAEA, 2020).

Despite facing social and academic barriers many disconnected BIPOC youth demonstrate self-determination and resiliency by successfully reengaging in education (Atwell et al., 2019) Research in the field of education and motivation indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators serve as factors leading to re-engagement (Deci et al., 1991; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). There is also substantial research that identifies evidence-based practices that support the educational re-engagement and school completion among disconnected youth (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012). However, there is limited research that captures the perspectives of BIPOC youth and describe their experiences navigating through alternative education.

Many scholars believe that the high rate of disconnection among BIPOC youth is related to educational policies and practices that are grounded in racist ideals and values serving as structural barriers impeding their engagement and academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1997). Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) 2002, create added pressure for students and schools to meet standards that widen the achievement gap and create a “push-out” system for unattached, low achieving BIPOC youth to disconnect from

education or to be taken out of traditional school environments (Clarke et al., 2000; Freques et al., 2017; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). Understanding this subgroup's unique experiences can help to determine what policies, processes, and systems will create equitable educational practices that motivate and reengage the 10% of youth who remain continuously disconnected from education (McLarty & Moran; 2009).

Background

In 2018, the California graduation rate reached 83%. However, more than 515,500 youth in California disconnected from education before completing the state's high school graduation requirements in the expected four-year completion time (Lewis, 2020; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Youth ages 18-24 who disengage from education are identified as dropouts, disconnected, opportunity youth, and at-risk students (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2015; Lewis, 2020). In 2017, BIPOC youth, English language learners (ELL), foster and homeless youth, and those living in poverty experienced the highest rates of disconnection (Burd-Sharps and Lewis, 2013; CDE, 2018). Poverty is a common factor among disconnected youth in California (Bohn et al., 2020; CDE, 2020). According to the Bohn et al. (2020), 25% of children ages 0-17 years of age live below the federal poverty lines, and 172,615 youth live in deep poverty. Black and Brown youth experience higher poverty and disconnection rates in California (Bohn et al., 2020; Lewis, 2020).

The link between race, poverty, and youth disconnection is seen in metropolitan counties throughout California (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2013; CDE, 2018; Data, 2020; Bohn et al., 2020). In Los Angeles County, 29.5% of youth live below the federal poverty lines compared to 20.85% of youth state wide. According to Burd-Sharps and Lewis (2013), BIPOC youth in Los Angeles County experience a disproportionate disconnection from education. In 2018, 18.7% of Black youth disconnected, 12.3% of Latino youth disconnected, and 25.4% of Native American youth

disconnected compared to 9.1% of white youth in L.A. County (Lewis, 2020). Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest district in the United States, had 48,453 disconnected students during the 2017-2018 school year, which was a 0.5% increase from the previous school year (CDE, 2018). To address declining enrollment and educational disconnection, LAUSD's personnel for pupil services partnered with the City of Los Angeles and Employment Development Department (EDD) to develop a comprehensive dropout model to support the enrollment, engagement, and on-track graduation of LAUSD highest needs students (Alferes, 2017). The city partnership plan established 13 youth source centers where pupil services personnel and attendance counselors identify youth who are at risk, provide educational assessments, place youth in appropriate educational setting, and provide service referrals as needed. In 2016-2017, the City Partnership program successfully re-engaged 1,342 disconnected youth. The specialized populations who were serviced included foster youth, homeless youth, youth who are parents, and youth on probation.

The rate of youth disconnection also varies within metropolitan areas. Communities with high poverty rates and large populations of BIPOC experience higher youth disconnection (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In 2018, the urban neighborhood of Watts which is located in South Los Angeles had a disconnection rate of 25.1% compared to the more affluent West LA community's 3.5% disconnection rate (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Watts is comprised of 80% Latinx, 18% Black, and 0% white compared to the 67.8% of whites, 8.3% of Latinx, and 1.9% of Blacks who make up the population in West Los Angeles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). For purposes of this dissertation, any mention of the term "white" for the white race will be identified in lowercase as a means to denounce white supremacy and challenge systemic racism. The poverty rate among persons living in the Watts neighborhood is 26.7%

which is more than double the state poverty rate and the United States poverty rate compared to the 12.6% poverty rate of West Los Angeles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

In 2018, San Bernardino County had a disconnection rate of 16.9% and was identified as having one of the highest rates of youth disconnection among the 25 largest metropolitan areas in the United States (Lewis, 2020). Located 60 miles east of Los Angeles, San Bernardino is situated in the Inland Empire of California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Among the youth living in San Bernardino 63.6% are Latinx, 8.2% are Black, 0.3 are Native American, and 19.4% are white. In 2017, 22.5% of Black youth were disconnected and 19.4% of Latino youth were disconnected compared to 17.5% of white youth (Bohn et al., 2020). The poverty rate among children in San Bernardino is 25.8% compared to 20.8% statewide (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2013). To address the high rate of youth disconnection San Bernardino City Unified School District created a college preparation program, established career pathways at each school, and created a responsive culture that addressed family and community needs (San Bernardino County, 2017). San Bernardino County's disconnection rate decreased .06% as a result of the implementation of the above mentioned interventions (Lewis, 2020).

According to Warren and Lafortune (2020) and Noguera et al. (2019) the student enrollment for California has been on a steady decline since the 2016-2017 school year while the percentage of disconnected youth rises. Enrollment for English language learners has decreased over 3% statewide. San Bernardino and Los Angeles Unified School Districts (LAUSD), two of the state's largest school districts, have experienced a decline in student enrollment (Warren & Lafortune, 2020). Experts suggest that an increase in alternative charter school enrollment has contributed to the decline in traditional public school enrollment (Warren & Lafortune, 2020). Since 1991 the alternative charter school enrollment has doubled in the United States serving more than 1.8 students in K-12 school system (Chapman & Donnor, 2015).

Alternative public charter schools are public schools that operate under a “charter” contract that waives many of the state and federal regulations and guidelines for traditional public schools (Blazer, 2010). Charter school enrollment has increased from 0.4 million to 3.1 million between 2000 and 2017 (NCES, 2020). Public Charter schools are known for their flexibility, curriculum choices, and smaller class sizes (O’Brien & Dervarics, 2010; Zimmer et al., 2009). A large amount of Charter schools service BIPOC, low performing students, in high poverty communities (Kern et al., 2012).

During the 2013-2014 school year 500,000 students enrolled in alternative education programs and schools increased. According to the California Department of Education (CDE; 2020), there are 430 alternative public programs and schools that service 133,000 at risk youth throughout the state. Experts credit years of low academic performance by BIPOC youth, the implementation of policies and practices, such as the NCLB (2001), Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), and rigid graduation rate formulas as key educational factors that led to the increase in alternative education enrollment (Freques et al., 2017; Kern et al., 2012). Alternative schools include alternative charter schools, vocational schools, continuation schools, behavior modification schools, independent study programs, community day school, credit recovery programs, and GED programs (Porowski et al., 2014; Romshek, 2007).

Established in the late 1960s, alternative schools were developed to meet student needs that were not being met in traditional learning environments by providing different or alternative pathways for students to meet grade-level standards. Alternative schools offer flexible programming and individualized and small group learning (CDE, 2020; Porowski et al., 2014; Raywid, 1995; Romshek, 2007). Students who did not meet grade level benchmarks, have behavioral issues, or those who have been identified by staff in the traditional school setting as someone who could benefit from an alternative school environment, are recommended for

alternative education (Aron, 2006; Roderick, 2003). According to the California Department of Education (2020), there are 693 alternative public schools that service 10,9037 youth throughout the state. Alternative schools and programs are charged with meeting students' needs by providing different pathways for meeting grade-level standards through flexible programming and individualized and small group learning (CDE, 2020; Porowski et al., 2014). Even with multiple alternative education options available to youth, the increase in alternative public charter school enrollment, and the success of many alternative education programs and schools, 11.5% of youth ages 18-24 remain disconnected (Lewis, 2020).

In summary, high school disconnection rates vary based on characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, and cognitive functioning, physical ability, and environmental factors such as poverty level (Chetty et al., 2020; Fernandes-Alcantara et al., 2015; Fortin et al., 2013; Lewis, 2020; Wood et al., 2017). As a state California had some success in reengaging disconnected youth in education (CDE, 2019). Between 2012-2018 LAUSD has increased graduation rates, reduced the amount of disconnected youth, and was recognized the U.S. Department of Education as a national model for youth re-engagement (CDE, 2019; Sublett & Rumberger, 2018). However, countless former youth across the state remain disconnected throughout their adult lives, and for BIPOC youth, the chances of disconnection remain much higher (Lewis, 2020; Noguera et al., 2019).

Problem Statement

Although 30% of disconnected youth successfully reengage-engage in education before reaching 24 years of age, over 2.5 million youth remain disconnected from education or the workforce well into their adult lives (Lewis, 2020; Varga et al., 2019). Youth who remain disconnected are more likely to engage in violent behavior, drugs, and substance abuse, suffer from mental health challenges and enter the criminal justice system (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012;

Lewis, 2020). Nearly one-third of youth who remain disconnected are BIPOC from low-income communities and are twice as likely to remain in poverty throughout their lifetime (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Lewis, 2020).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of what systems and processes support re-engagement for formerly disconnected, and subsequently re-engaged, students from alternative high school programs in the State of California. This study targets BIPOC youths who were disconnected from education but have since reconnected and re-engaged in alternative education at various intervals leading to the successful attainment of a high school diploma or equivalent. This study seeks to address such factors as current policies, practices, and pedagogy that led to disconnection and those factors that contributed to the educational re-engagement of disconnected BIPOC youth. As a critical race advocate, the researcher will advocate for the eradication of educational racism and racist educational policies in the American public school system that are exclusionary of BIPOC youth, creating, safe, caring, and equitable learning environments for BIPOC learners.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this qualitative study are:

1. How do former disconnected BIPOC youth ages 19-26 years of age describe their experience in traditional public schools compared to that of alternative public schools?
2. What factors led formerly disconnected BIPOC youth 19-26 years of age to successfully reengage and complete alternative education programs at various entry and exit points throughout their journey to program completion?

Methodology

Chapter 3 covers the design of this qualitative, narrative research study. Participants were sought using purposive sampling to target a sample of 10 Southern California BIPOC youths, 19-29 years of age, who were formerly disconnected and subsequently re-engaged, and then successfully completed their alternative education programs. One-hour interviews using semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were used to gain an understanding of what factors promoted formerly disconnected youth to reengage and complete educational goals. Data were analyzed using a combination of a priori (Iachini et al., 2013) and narrative analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is comprised of Critical Race Theory (CRT). The theory is discussed below.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that was introduced in the 1970s as a branch of Critical Legal Studies (CLS). CRT was initially used in legal studies to examine the role that race and racism have in legal, social, and economic inequalities between the dominant culture and BIPOC in the post-civil-rights-era (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In education, CRT examines policies and practices grounded in racist social ideologies, values, structures, and are barriers to educational equity (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate IV, 1997). CRT is grounded in five main themes: the first theme is that racism is an ordinary part of the everyday functioning of American society and because of its ordinality, it is difficult to acknowledge, address, or cure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Second, CRT acknowledges the notion of whiteness as property that places whites as the dominant subgroup within a racial hierarchy (Harris, 1993). Third, CRT identifies the systemic and purposeful racial placement as “interest convergence” which is a term used to describe how

the continuation of racism supports the material and psychic interest of whites (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995;). The fourth theme in CRT is the ideology that race is a social construct used to support the continuation of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hiraldo, 2010). The fifth theme of CRT is the use of storytelling as a counter-narrative is used to examine race and racism in the United States through the lived experienced of BIPOC (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The application of CRT in education also requires a historical understanding of racism to support the collective goal of supporting racial and social justice through the sharing of “counter-narratives” describing the lived experiences of oppressed people (King, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The storytelling tenet of CRT supports the qualitative narrative research approach of this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that underpins this study is Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The theory is discussed further.

Self-Determination Theory

SDT is a conceptual framework developed by psychologist Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1991). This theory is grounded in the assumption that humans are inherently curious about their social surroundings, and they desire to increase their knowledge through interacting with the environment (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). SDT proposes that intrinsic motivation is based on three inherent psychological needs; relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Relatedness refers to an individual’s ability to interact, connect, and develop close relationships with others that are built on trust and mutual respected and satisfaction. Competence is the level in which an individual can effectively achieve goals (Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Autonomy is a human need to initiate and

experience behaviors independently (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). SDT seeks to explain how social environments can support and negate self-motivation, social functioning, and life outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

In education, self-determination theory is used to understand what environmental factors within the school walls and beyond the school house that hinder intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, and psychological wellness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The application of SDT within this study supported the identification of educational practices that support intrinsic motivation among students resulting in connection, engagement, and learning (Deci et al., 1991; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Significance of the Study

This research is significant to the field of education because it addresses the current gap in literature that examines the intersectionality of race, racism, oppressive educational characteristic, and BIPOC youth disconnection. This study is also significant because it seeks to identify what systems and processes help to support the continuous re-engagement and completion of alternative education programs among BIPOC youth within a large metropolitan location. As researchers, practitioners, and policymakers increase their understanding of how race, racism, and other forms of oppression contribute to educational disconnection, policies and systems of support can be developed to change the life trajectory of currently disconnected youth and prevent any future occurrences.

This study's findings may provide educational agencies, policymakers, practitioners, parents, and other child-serving agencies with a description of the academic and environmental needs and factors that should be addressed to support the continuous re-engagement and program completion of disconnected BIPOC youth 18-24 years of age. The findings of this study will be disseminated through a mix of written, electronic, and personal communication including a

summary report, publishing program briefs, presenting at conferences, and disseminating findings to various stakeholder.

Assumptions of the Study

One assumption was that all participants graduated from a large urban alternative educational program in the state of California. Additionally, it was assumed that the participants' journey toward program completion may not have been linear but included various entry and exit points. This study assumed that all participants were identified as disconnected youth not engaged in education between 17-24 years of age. Lastly, the researcher assumed that all participants provided true and accurate narratives of their lived experiences.

Key Definitions

For the purposes of this research, the following terms are defined for the reader's reference:

- *Alternative Education.* For the purpose of this study, alternative education was broadly defined as any educational activity or program that utilizes instructional best practices and pedagogy other than what it used in traditional school settings to support at youth who are at-risk of academic failure or who have disconnected from education. Alternative programs and schools support students in attaining credit that is grade-level equivalent to local district standards (Aron, 2006; Carver et al., 2010; CDE, 2020; Kannam & Weiss, 2019; NCLB, 2002, 2020; Porowski et al., 2014).
- *At-Risk Youth.* A term used to categorize an individual or group of youth who has an increased likelihood of educational failure and disconnection due to failing grades, low basic skills, chronic truancy, behavioral and disciplinary, and pregnancy (Carver et al., 2010; Moore, 2006). At-risk youth also have an increased likelihood of experiencing

negative outcomes based on societal factors such as Adverse Childhood Experience, low SES, and poor mental and physical health (Moore, 2006).

- *BIPOC*. An acronym used to describe Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color and their relationship to white supremacy and racism (The BIPOC Project, 2020).
- *Critical Race Theory (CRT)*. The relationship between race, racism, and power through an examination of the United States historical social, economic, and political foundation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).
- *Disconnected Youth*. Youth ages 16-24 who are not actively engaged in education or employment (Lewis, 2020). For the purpose of this study, disconnected youth refer to youth ages 16-24 who are not actively engaged in educational programming.
- *Educational Policies*. Rules and procedures that reflect organizational values and are used to standardize the functioning of a school system (Vega, et al., 2015).
- *Homeless Youth*. A young person between the ages of 15 and 24 who is without a permanent, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The term homeless youth is also used to describe youth who live in temporary shelter or who have left domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, or any other life-threatening conditions (Youth.gov, 2020).
- *Intersectionality*. The interconnectedness of race, economic class, gender, sexual orientation and oppression (Crenshaw, 1991).
- *Personal/Group Discrimination Discrepancies (PGDD)*. A phenomenon identified by Crosby et al. (1989) that seeks to describe how groups who are discriminated against process the experience. According to the literature there is often a discrepancy in how members of oppressed groups identify group discrimination compared to personal discrimination. According to the phenomena oppressed individuals oftentimes minimize the appearance of personal discrimination for self-perseverance although they hold

membership within a group that faces discrimination (Crosby et al., 1989; Taylor et al., 1996).

- *Persons of Color*. A person who is not of white racial origin including Native Americans, Asian, Latinx, Black, Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern (Oxford University Press, n.d.). The acronym BIPOC, Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color is a common acronym used to describe persons in this racial category.
- *Primary Education*. Commonly referred to as elementary and middle school, primary education is the basic education level from kindergarten through sixth grade. Primary education teaches students the basic skills necessary to transition to secondary school (Britannica, 2016).
- *Public Charter School*. An alternative public school providing free education to eligible students at the primary or secondary level. Public charter schools operate under a “charter” agreement and adhere to regulations set by the authorizing agency (NCES, 2020).
- *Push-out*. The implementation of policies and practices that contribute to educational disconnection and the low achieving students many of whom are minorities into alternative education settings (National Clearinghouse, 2020).
- *Racism*. An action or system of oppression that is grounded in the belief that one race is superior to any other race (Lorde, 1981; Marable, 1983).
- *Re-engaged Youth*. Previously disconnected youth who has enrolled in alternative education programming (Lewis, 2020).
- *Resilience*. The positive adaptation of adversity (Herrman et al., 2011).
- *Secondary Education*. The second stage of basic education following elementary schooling.

- *Self-Determination Theory (SDT)*. A conceptual framework that supports the study of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and how social and cultural factors help determine the degree to which motivation occurs (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
- *Socialization*. The development and practice of accepted cultural norms and shared beliefs and values within a society (Arnett, 1995).
- *Standard Diploma Type*. A high school diploma of completion satisfying the minimum requirements necessary in a state (Zinth, 2018).
- *Stereotype*. A fixated belief or opinion about a whole group. A stereotype assigns a specific behavior or characteristic to the entire group (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996; Steele & Aronson, 1995).
- *Stereotype Threat*. When individuals feel that they are faced with a social situation that may cause them to act out in a way that reinforces a stereotype that is associated with their social group (APA, 2006; Steele & Aronson, 1995).
- *Youth*. Persons between the age of 15 and 24 years of age (United Nations, 1981).
- *White*. Persons with racial origins in Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa including those referred to as Caucasian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). For the purpose of this study any mention to the white race will be identified using a lower case “w” to challenge systemic racism and to denounce white supremacy (Bauder, 2020; Lanham & Liu, 2019).
- *White Supremacy*. The idea that the white race holds a dominant power over all races. Characteristics of white supremacy related to CRT in education include; colorblindness, meritocracy, deficit thinking, and post racialism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research objectives, a brief description of youth disconnection, alternative education, critical race theory, and self-determination theory. The chapter also presented the reader with an introduction to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided the study and their connection to the topic. Although the national graduation rates have increased over the last nine years, there is still a significant percentage of youth ages 18-24 who disconnect from education never to return. Research shows that race, gender, socioeconomic status, and cognitive ability are indicators used to determine the probability of high school graduation. Poor BIPOC youth disconnect from education at higher rates than white youth. Many disconnected youth become motivated and are successful in building relationships and systems of support to reengage and complete alternative education programs. However, youth who remain disconnected and unmotivated are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, and become incarcerated.

A more in-depth understanding of the disconnection and re-engagement of formerly disconnected BIPOC youth can help identify systems and processes that support continuous engagement and help to promote program completion. Additionally, gaining a more in-depth understanding of the intersectionality of race and oppression within the American education system can serve as a tool to create equitable learning experiences for BIPOC youth.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review and synthesis of existing literature on traditional high school graduation, alternative education, disconnected youth, critical race theory, race relations in the American public school system, racist educational policies and practices, and self-determination theory. The theoretical framework of critical race and the conceptual framework of self-determination theory perspectives guided this research. The following section discusses the frameworks.

High School Graduation in the USA

In the 2021 school year, 3.3 million students are estimated to graduate from U.S. public high schools (NCES, 2020). High school is a term used to describe the secondary education that youth receive during the last phase of basic education including 9th through 12th grades (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Youth enter high school typically after completing six years of primary education before entering higher education or vocational training (CDE, 2020). The primary and secondary school system in the United States is compulsory and, therefore, all youth between the ages of 6 and 18 years of age are required to attend by law.

The requirements to graduate from public high school vary by state (NCES, 2020; Gao et al., 2017). In California, students must complete both state and local school district requirements to earn a standard diploma type (CDE, 2020). During the 1986-1987 school year, the CDE established a minimum set of required classes all students must complete to attain a high school diploma:

- three years of English,
- two years of mathematics including a year of Algebra 1,
- two years of science,

- three years of history or social science including American government and civics, and economics,
- one year of visual or performing arts, foreign language, or career technical education,
- two courses in physical education (CDE, 2020).

In addition to the state requirements, students must also meet their local school district's course requirements to attain a high school diploma. School boards can adopt alternative graduation requirements that demonstrate skill competency through collaboration with stakeholders including parents, students, administrators, and teachers. Documented and supervised work experience, completion of career-technical courses and pathways, interdisciplinary studies, independent studies, and approved courses completed at post-secondary institutions are examples of common alternative course requirements (CDE, 2020).

Students who complete the state's minimum course requirements can matriculate to community college and private in-state and out-of-state colleges and universities. However, to be considered for California State (CS) or University of California (UC) admissions, students must complete additional courses that exceed the State's minimum graduation requirements (CDE, 2020; Gao et al., 2017). Both the CS and UC university systems require the completion of an additional year of mathematics and English in addition to the minimum state requirements (CDE, 2020). CS and UC course requirements are known as the "A-G" sequence. Admission requirements for incoming first-year students require an earned grade of C or above in all A-G courses.

According to Gao et al. (2017), 51% of the nation's largest school districts have adopted the A-G course sequence as a graduation requirement. Even with a statewide effort to prepare high school graduates for college readiness in 2016, only 45% of high school graduates completed the A-G course requirements (Gao et al., 2017). However, in school districts where

more than 75% of the student population is BIPOC the A-G course completion rate is 20% compared to school 34% in low minority school districts (Gao et al., 2017).

High school graduation rates are indicators or metrics used to measure school effectiveness. Alspaugh (1998) and Lewis (2020) reported that, traditionally, schools with high graduation rates are viewed as effective, while schools with low graduation rates—and subsequently high dropout rates—are identified as ineffective. Research indicates that high school graduates have greater career opportunities, financial stability, and greater health outcomes than those without a high school diploma (Lewis, 2020). Youth who fail to graduate experience a host of negative health and social outcomes (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2018; Lewis, 2020). A study conducted by Balfanz and Legters (2004) investigated the scale and scope of public high school disconnection based on race and geographic location. They reported that half of all Black students and 40% of Latino students in the United States attend public high schools where high school graduation is not a typical student outcome. The results of the study revealed that many U.S. high schools with large populations of BIPOC not only experience high rates of disconnection but also experience less than 51% of incoming freshman advancing to the next grade-level.

Alternative Education (to Traditional High School Education)

There is a considerable amount of literature on the history of alternative education (Aron, 2006; Duke & Griesdorn, 1999; Kannam & Weiss, 2019; Miller, 1995; Young, 1990). Most researchers report that alternative education has existed within the American public school system since the late 1700s (Duke & Griesdorn, 1999; Miller, 1995; Young, 1990). Alternative education programs and schools serve students whose academic and social needs have not been met by the traditional K-12 public school system (Aron, 2006; Kannam & Weiss, 2019).

Alternative programs and schools provide short term and long-term academic options (Aron, 2006; Kannam & Weiss, 2019; Porowski et al., 2014). States define alternative education based on the specific programs and curriculum offered, the pedagogy used, and the population served (Deeds & DePaoli, 2017; Kannam & Weiss, 2019; Porowski et al., 2014). As noted in a study conducted by Carver et al. (2010) that examined the national estimates of alternative schools and programs in the United states, the report shows that 64% of school districts in the United States offer alternative education programs, and 37% are located within public school districts. Snyder et al. (2019) reported that 79% of alternative schools in the United States are standalone schools that operate as traditional schools compared to 21% of alternative charter schools. Examples of alternative education schools and programs include day schools, continuation schools, alternative-charter schools, independent study schools, magnet schools, community schools, behavior modification schools, and programs inside juvenile detention centers and state residential facilities (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Porowski et al., 2014).

Experts report that most alternative schools and programs in the United States are operated by state agencies such as school districts, charter school organizations, juvenile justice system, and health and human services (Carver et al., 2010; Momentum Strategy Research, 2018). In 2018, Momentum Strategy Research provided a review of the various types of alternative schools and programs in the United States through examining and cross-referencing reports from the National Center for Education Statistics' database. The report shows that 48% of alternative schools serviced high school students, 31% serviced middle and high school students, and 14% serviced K-12th grade students. Research up to this point has suggested that while most alternative schools and programs seek to serve at risk youth, many alternative schools serve other special needs populations such as the gifted and disabled youth (Carver et al., 2010; Momentum Strategy Research, 2018).

Kleiner et al. (2002) conducted a statistical analysis of alternative education demographics among public school districts across America. The results of the research report are based on the analysis of questionnaire data from 1,534 U.S. public school districts. The school districts included in the sample population included those that offer alternative education program and schools designed for students at risk of academic failure. The results of the analysis showed that urban school districts with student populations that exceed 10,000 students, districts serving Black and indigenous people of color (BIPOC), and districts in high poverty communities are more likely than other districts to offer alternative programs and schools. The results of the Kleiner et al. study also shows that 12% of students attending alternative public schools and programs are special education students with an Individualized Learning Plan (IEP).

Researchers investigating the structure and program models of alternative education schools and programs found three main types of alternative school settings (Aron, 2006; Raywid, 1995; Research Momentum Group, 2018). The first alternative school model targets youth at risk of disconnection and those who have already disconnected but are seeking re-engagement. This school model operates on a full-time schedule, provides flexible alternative educational pathways to any student seeking an individualized learning plan, utilizes a challenging curriculum, are sponsored by school districts or lead educational agencies, and are the most common type of alternative education setting (Raywid, 1995). Examples of this type of alternative school and program include magnet schools, schools within schools, charter schools, experiential schools, and dropout recovery schools (Aron, 2006; Lewis, 2020).

The second alternative school model is focused on discipline and behavior modification and is known as “last chance schools” and “in-school suspension programs.” Students who attend discipline and behavior modification alternative schools and programs have experienced disciplinary infractions in traditional schools; these students are placed into the last chance

school for a specific amount of time to fulfill the behavior requirements to transition back to the traditional school environment (Aron, 2006; Raywid, 1995). The third alternative school model focuses on mental health and academic support for students who have experienced social and emotional barriers to learning (Aron, 2006). Students enrolled in this type of alternative learning environment can choose to opt-out of the counseling, social service, or academic remediation services.

According to experts in the field of alternative education, the diverse alternative school and program options and the targeted student population make developing a singular definition of alternative education problematic; currently, no standard definition has been developed or accepted within the field of education (Aron, 2006; Deeds & DePaoli, 2017; Lewis, 2020; Morley, 1991; NAEA, 2020; Porowski et al., 2014). The inability to singularly define alternative education makes it clear that alternative education is grounded in two beliefs. The first belief is that the current public education system has failed to address specific student challenges in a way that provides fair and adequate education to all learners (Roderick, 2003). Secondly, education is not a “one size fits all” model, and multiple curricular choices and learning environments are necessary to serve all learners (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2018; Morley, 1991). Therefore, this study defines alternative education as an educational activity or program that utilizes instructional best practices and pedagogy other than what it used in traditional school settings to support youth who are at risk of academic disconnection and failure or who have disconnected and are seeking educational re-engagement.

The Foundation for Modern Day Alternative Education

Experts suggest that the alternative education movements of 1890-1940 and 1960-1975 were catalysts for modern-day alternative education schools and programs (Deal & Nolan, 1978; Semel & Sadovnik, 1999; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Because this study seeks to describe BIPOC

youths' experiences within present-day alternative schools, this review covers literature focusing on the modern alternative education movement that began in 1964 to recent literature on alternative education. Experts concluded that BIPOC students continued to receive inadequate educational resources, although segregated education was outlawed (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Young, 1990). According to Young (1990) policymakers, educators, and students continued to speak out against the lack of resources and the racist and exclusionary policies and practices within the public educational system.

A decades-long concern, earlier research findings show that many educators shared first-hand accounts of racist educational practices and demanded educational equity for BIPOC students (Hentoff, 1967; Holt & Fromme, 1964; Kozol, 1967). The alternative movement of 1960-1975 provided the foundation for modern-day alternative education. And highlighted the fact that the one size fits all public education model does not serve the needs of the diverse student population in America (Young, 1990). According to Lange and Sletten (2002) and Deeds and DePaoli (2017), the alternative education movement of the 1960s resulted in establishing two alternative school models: alternative education programming within the traditional public school system and alternative programming outside of the traditional public school system. Alternative schools during the 1960s provided high-quality education to BIPOC students in anti-racist learning environments that were free from racism, genderism, and inequities within the traditional public school system (Adickes, 2005; Jackson & Howard, 2014; Perlstein, 1990; Young, 1990).

Freedom Schools

Many authors have recognized Freedom Schools in the south as the first modern alternative schools and programs (Adickes, 2005; Jackson & Howard, 2014; Perlstein, 1990). In 1964 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee developed the first Freedom School

during the Civil Rights Movement (Adickes, 2005). Freedom Schools sought to counter the oppression and substandard education that BIPOC students received in traditional school environments (Adickes, 2005; Perlstein, 1990). Freedom Schools followed a community school model to provide southern Blacks a quality education. Local church basements and storefronts served as the location for many of the Freedom Schools. (Perlstein, 1990; Jackson & Howard, 2014). According to the literature, the curriculum centered around civic participation and local political engagement (Adickes, 2005; Jackson & Howard, 2014; Perlstein, 1990).

Freedom Schools provided opportunities for disconnected BIPOC students of all ages to re-engage in education and learn skills needed to achieve social and economic freedom. In addition, Freedom Schools set the path for countless other alternative education school models that followed. Between 1964 through 1969, 41 documented Freedom Schools serviced nearly 2,500 students and were considered one of the first modern-day alternative schools (Adickes, 2005; Jackson & Howard, 2014; Perlstein, 1990; Young, 1990).

Traditional Public Education vs. Alternative Education

Research investigating similarities and differences between traditional public education and alternative education has revealed four key differences (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Iachini et al., 2013; Momentum Strategy Research, 2018). These differences include the populations they serve, the program or school's location, structure, and state and local accountability measurements (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Iachini et al., 2013; Momentum Strategy Research, 2018). An exploratory qualitative study conducted by Iachini et al. (2013) examined the disconnection and re-engagement of thirteen youth enrolled in a drop out recovery charter school. The researchers sought to identify factors that supported the students' success in alternative education settings. The findings revealed that traditional school settings did not widely adopt

individualized learning pathways. In contrast, most alternative schools' curriculum and structure focus on meeting the learners' individual needs through individualized learning.

Critics of alternative education argue that alternative schools are less rigorous than traditional public schools and do not adequately prepare students for higher education (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Aron and Zweig (2003) noted the need to develop high quality accountability systems, data collection processes, and analysis for alternative education that would accurately measure program and school effectiveness. A study conducted by Chapman and Donnor (2015) compared the state math and reading test results between traditional public school students and charter school students. The findings suggest that just 25% of charter school students outperform traditional public school students in math and 56% of charter schools test results showed no improvement in student reading levels. The data suggest that although charter schools service a large majority of BIPOC students, there is no proof that they offer a better quality of education.

Aron (2006) suggests that the term "alternative" typically describes an educational setting for at risk and vulnerable students who experienced academic disengagement and failure in traditional schools. However, as previously mentioned alternative education includes a wide range of school and program types including non-traditional magnet, charter, and gifted. Deeds and DePaoli (2017) examined the accountability systems, measures, and continuous improvement plans for alternative education programs and schools across the nation. According to DePaoli et al. (2017), states with self-identified alternative education schools engaged in more stringent systems for accountability as compared to states with alternative education programs where accountability measures were typically compliance-based and indicators were aligned to program components. The report highlighted accountability measures tied to the allocation of federal funds as one tool to enforce the accountability of alternative schools and programs (Deeds & DePaoli, 2017). DePaoli et al. (2017) also examined the progress and identified

challenges to increasing the national graduation rate to 90% by the year 2020. The report indicated that although charter schools only make-up 6% of U.S. high school student enrollment, they account for 30% of schools identified as having low graduation rates.

Measures for alternative education accountability varies across each state (DePaoli et al., 2017). According to De Velasco, and Gonzales (2017) CDE has developed an alternative school accountability model (ASAM) to identify performance standards for alternative schools and programs. The state of Colorado requires alternative schools and programs to undergo an annual qualification process whereby the school's performance is evaluated based on several key indicators including; academic achievement, student engagement, and career readiness (Colorado Department of Education, 2018).

Critics also suggest that alternative education settings are punitive solutions for students who display undesirable behavior and serve as low academic holding tanks or warehouse for students who have been "pushed out" of traditional public school with no real plan to address student needs (Cobb et al., 1997; Dunbar, 1999; Slater, 1990). Several researchers take the position that students who attend alternative schools often receive negative social identities and are seen as troubled or "bad." This stigma can serve as a barrier to student success (Aron, 2006; Goffman, 1963; Lewis, 2020; Morrisette, 2011). McNulty and Roseboro (2009) reported that the transition from traditional public school to an alternative school is often one of isolation due to removing any form of normalcy during the schooling experience. Critics argue that instead of providing academic and environmental alternatives to meet student needs, many alternative schools and programs promote the exclusion of BIPOC youth from mainstream education (Dunbar, 1999). According to Dunbar (1999) alternative education serves as a pipeline into the judicial system for many BIPOC youth and often is the last stop before entering the juvenile court system.

Although some researchers argue that alternative education is highly fragmented (Sliwka, 2008), many researchers concluded that modern alternative education is designed to support students in attaining grade-level credit that is equivalent to local district standards (CDE, 2020; Porowski et al., 2014). However, according to Atkins et al. (2005), most modern-day alternative schools and programs are not acknowledged as high-quality institutions of instruction because of the reactive approach to education and because most service at-risk youth.

Alternative Education Schools' Benefits

Several researchers have found that successful alternative education schools and programs have common characteristics that support academic success (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Bland et al., 2008; Carver et al., 2010; Morrisette, 2011; Porowski et al., 2014). Researchers continue to reveal that alternative schools are known for offering flexible class schedules, smaller class sizes, individualized learning plans, non-traditional assessments to track student progress, and for providing social and emotional support (Carver et al., 2010; Iachini et al., 2013; Porowski et al., 2014). According to Bland et al. (2008) and Morrisette (2011) effective alternative schools create a physically and emotionally safe environment built on mutual respect and positive relationships between students and staff. Iachini et al. (2013) found that 61% of the youth surveyed during a focus group discussing school characteristics that support re-engagement appreciated the individualized approach to learning offered at alternative education schools.

Several experts suggest that alternative schooling options are necessary to meet the unique and diverse academic and social needs of all learners (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Natriello et al., 1990; Raywid, 1995; Wehlage & Rutter, 1985; Young, 1990). Aron (2006) reported that many alternative schools receive praise for motivating and educating disengaged and disconnected youth in a safe and welcoming learning environment (Aron, 2006). Carver et al.

(2010) found that 63% of alternative education programs and schools establish individual learning plans for all students enrolled. Carver et al. (2010) also found that 30% of alternative education schools have additional requirements in addition to traditional teaching credentialing requirements to better support alternative education students. Alspaugh (1998) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study between 1998 and 1993 to examine common characteristics among schools in Missouri that have high rates of disconnection. The findings concluded that schools with a small enrollment size that offer large grade spans of 7th through 12th grades have lower disconnection rates compared to schools with large enrollment and grade spans of 10th - 12th grade. According to Alspaugh, students who attend schools with a small enrollment size developed long term friendships with peers and staff who served as a support system to the students, increasing the likelihood of high school graduation.

Students Who Attend Alternative Education Schools

Researchers investigating the characteristics of students who attend alternative education schools and programs revealed that most programs and schools serve at-risk youth who are credit deficient, in danger of academic failure, have behavioral problems, and have been “pushed-out” of traditional education (Aron, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Momentum Strategy Research, 2018). According to Momentum Strategy Research (2018), 22 states in the U.S.A. identified unsatisfactory academic progress as key characteristic of the alternative education student population. The study also revealed that 17 states reported that students enrolled in alternative education have a history of intermittent disconnection.

According to Aron (2006), four types of students attend alternative education schools: those who are seeking reentry after complete disconnection or after chronic absenteeism, those who are seeking reentry after being disconnected from the traditional education system, and students with severe credit deficiencies. The first type of student has disengaged from education

because of behavioral infractions and is seeking short term academic and behavioral remediation. The end goal for this student is reentry into the traditional high school environment. The second type of student has a history of chronic absenteeism and has disconnected from traditional school settings. According to Aron and Zweig (2003) this type of students includes those who are parenting, are immigrants who have taken on the responsibility of caregiving for siblings while their parents are working, and those who have transitioned out of the juvenile justice system.

The third type of student enrolled in alternative schools and programs has aged out of the traditional public school system and ranges from 18-24 years of age and older (Aron, 2006). Roderick (2003) identified this student group as the most enrolled subgroup in alternative education. Disconnected youth who fall into this category are not severely credit deficient and typically only needs a few credits to obtain a high school diploma and transition into community college (Aron & Zweig, 2003). The fourth and final type of student who attends alternative schools and programs is severely credit deficient, below grade level, and has low literacy skills. According to research, many students fall within this category and are at high-risk of disconnection (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Lewis, 2020).

Disconnected Youth

Youth between the ages of 16 and 24 that are not in school or employed are identified as disconnected (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2015; Lewis, 2020; White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015). Disconnected youth are also known as dropouts, opportunity youth, idle-youth, at risk, and at-promise (Belfield et al., 2012; Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2018; Hynes, 2014). However, this research study refers to youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who are not in school and have not yet completed high school equivalent education as disconnected. Several empirical-based conceptual models exist to help better understand disconnection among specific populations (Alexander et al., 2001; Finn, 1989; Garnier et al., 1997; Ou, 2005; Rumberger &

Lim, 2008; Temple et al., 2004; Wehlage & Rutter, 1985). Some models focus on personal characteristics such as beliefs, values, self-esteem, and behavior (Finn, 1989; Wehlage & Rutter, 1985). Other models seek to describe contributing ecological factors such as parental involvement, school characteristics, and socio-economics (Alexander et al., 2001). For example, Wehlage and Rutter (1985), developed a model that illustrates how disconnection is influenced by school membership and educational engagement. School membership reflects the social aspects of schooling such as peer and teacher relationships, engagement in social activities, and personal beliefs and values. Educational engagement reflects the level of influence extrinsic factors such as grades and graduation and intrinsic factors based on curriculum and learning experiences.

Finn (1989) developed two models to explain how youth disconnection involves behavioral and emotional withdrawal. The frustration self-esteem model identifies early school failure as a catalyst for decreased self-esteem and delinquent behavior that subsequently leads to academic failure and disconnection. The participation-identification model identifies the lack of school engagement as a catalyst for academic failure and disconnection. Finn's models are grounded in the idea that youth disconnection is a continual process that begins with early withdrawal before secondary education. The findings from several empirical longitudinal studies support the idea that disconnection is a long-term continual process (Alexander et al., 2001; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Garnier et al., 1997; Ou, 2005; Temple et al., 2004). For example, Ou (2005) conducted a longitudinal study that followed urban BIPOC youth during their K-12 education experience to examine relationships between early intervention strategies and educational attainment. The study revealed that when environmental factors were controlled, early intervention strategies supported long term educational achievement.

Existing models may identify some of the factors that contribute to youth disconnection. Still, many models fail to address gender, race, and racism that also influence youth disengagement and disconnection. Moreover, the models do not specifically address racist educational policies, school characteristics, and practices that affect BIPOC students' decision to disconnect. Poverty, disability, family structure, housing insecurities, institutional racism, and biased justice systems are common challenges among disconnected youth across the nation (Hynes, 2014; Lewis, 2020). Disconnected female youth are four times more likely to be mothers and 20 times more likely to be living in an institutionalized residence such as a correctional facility or residential treatment center. In a study conducted by Hynes (2014) that examined youth disconnection from the perspective of disconnected youth, the researchers found that 87% of homeless youth and 79% of youth with incarcerated parents are more likely to disconnect from education before completing high school compared to youth with stable housing and parents who are not incarcerated. Parental involvement and expectations are factors that can impact a youth's decision to disconnect (Hynes, 2014). Low parental expectations, the lack of parental supervision, and the absence of educational support are early indicators of the possibility of disconnection (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Fortin et al., 2013, Hynes, 2014).

School level factors that lead youth to disconnect from education include behavioral and disciplinary infractions, a lack of teacher support, the feeling of alienation, retention, school size, age span of the students, school culture, and the number of credits earned (Alspaugh, 1998; Iachini et al., 2013; Schulz & Rubel, 2011; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007; Vega et al., 2015). Penna and Tallerico (2005) conducted a qualitative study that examined the relationship between grade retention and youths' decision to disconnect from education. The researchers met with 25 youth from school districts in New York and held a focus group to gain a deeper understanding of their schooling experience. The data revealed that 83% of the youth surveyed indicated a strong

correlation between grade retention and disconnection. The findings from this report echoes prior quantitative research tying youth disconnection to academic failure and grade retention.

Although many disconnected youth re-engage in education some youth remain disconnected, Kuehn et al. (2009) found that while 90% of disconnected youth re-engaged with educational programming by the age of 24, 10% continue to be disconnected well into their adult lives. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reported that youth who remain disconnected from education experience a 14.3% unemployment rate and earn \$8,000 less annually compared to high school graduates. Disconnected youth are twice as likely to live in poverty, three times more likely to be incarcerated compared to high school graduates, and three times more likely to be unemployed as compared to high school graduates (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; DeBaun & Roc, 2013; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2015; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

School Environment and Disconnected Youth

School climate is one factor that can contribute to youth engagement or disconnection (Alspaugh, 1998; Bridgeland et al., 2012; Fortin et al., 2013; U.S. DOE, 2017). The U.S. Department of Education (2017) conducted a longitudinal study that examined over half of disconnected youth stated that they disconnected from education due to a school-related issue; 51% did not like the school; 35% stated that they could not get along with the teachers; and 30% identified unsatisfactory academic progress as the reason for the academic disconnection. Bridgeland et al. (2012) found similar findings when studying factors leading to educational disconnection among youth 16-25 years of age. Bridgeland et al. (2012) found that 47% of participants identified the learning environment as the primary catalyst for disconnection, while 69% quoted a lack of motivation as the reason for disconnection.

Researchers suggest that school size is a factor that impacts disconnection (Alspaugh, 1998; Lewis, 2020). Alspaugh (1998) investigated the relationship between a school size

impacted and student disconnection. The data from the study demonstrated that schools with large student bodies showed higher rates of disconnection compared to the schools with smaller student populations. According to Alspaugh (1998) found that schools with smaller student populations created more positive school climates that supported social engagement, student learning, and connection.

Low teacher expectations also contribute to low academic achievement and increase the likelihood of disconnection (Bridgeland et al., 2009). A study conducted by Morrisette (2011) explored the experiences of alternative education graduate. The findings of the study revealed that when school staff increased the emotional safety of students by adopting positive and welcoming attitudes, the students felt a sense of belonging and, therefore, became comfortable discussing personal issues that negatively impacted their learning. According to Purkey and Novak (1992) policies and practices such as out of school suspension that youth perceive as unjust and negative can serve as catalyst for the development of negative feelings towards the learning environment.

Poverty and Youth Disconnection

Researchers investigating youth disconnection found that there is some relationship between youth disconnection and poverty (Belfield et al., 2012; Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2013, 2018; Hynes, 2014). The results of several studies show that poverty is closely related to low academic achievement and school disconnection (Hynes, 2014; Lewis, 2020). A study conducted by Balfanz and Legters (2004) examined the graduation rates among U.S. high schools and reported that poverty is the most common characteristic between public high schools where 50% or less of freshmen graduate with their cohort in the expected timeframe. Fernandes-Alcantara (2015) found that 44% of disconnected youth lived below the federal poverty guidelines. Youth who live below the federal poverty line are four times more likely to disconnect from education

(Lewis, 2020). Black and American Indian youth are seven times more likely to live in poverty as compared to white youth. Latino youth are five times more likely to live in poverty as compared to white youth (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). Research studies reveal that Blacks who lived in poverty early in life tended to remain in poverty throughout their lifetime (Chetty et al., 2020; Mazumder, 2011). Youth who remain disconnected are more likely to receive social services, and have negative health outcomes (Belfield et al., 2012; Haynes, 2015; Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2020).

Racial Factors and Youth Disconnection

A growing body of researchers suggests that there is a relationship between race and youth disconnection (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2018; Driscoll, 1999; Hussar et al., 2020; Hynes, 2014; Joseph et al., 2016; Lewis, 2020; McFarland et al., 2018; Radford & Budiman, 2018; Vega et al., 2015). A qualitative study by Vega et al. (2015) that explored the perceived academic barriers of 18 Black and Latino high urban school students found that 66% of the participants expressed that negative relationships with the teaching staff, administration, and school led to disconnection (Vega et al., 2015). A qualitative study by Schulz and Rubel (2011) examined the relationship between alienation and disconnection among BIOPC males in an urban high school setting. The findings revealed that a high level of alienation in school can lead to youth disconnection. According to Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) alienation in a school environment is the inability to build meaningful relationships, resulting in academic and social disengagement from school. Behaviors associated with alienation include hostility, poor quality work, lack of involvement, and behavioral issues. According to Bridgeland et al. (2012) and Johnson and Johnson (2015), students from different cultures and speak in native languages may feel like social or academic outcasts and, subsequently, are at-risk of alienation.

Several studies point out that Native American youth disconnect twice as much as their U.S.-born peers (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2018; Driscoll, 1999; McFarland et al., 2018). An analysis by Burd-Sharps and Lewis (2018) examined youth disconnection rates across the United States, and the results revealed that Native American youth disconnect from education at the highest rate compared to any other subgroup. A qualitative case study was conducted by Wilcox (2015) that examined school processes and practices that related to the graduation outcomes of Native American youth. The results of the study revealed that traditional school educators are challenged with finding culturally relevant ways to engage Native American Youth. Brady (1996) suggests that “cultural discontinuity” is a factor that leads to the disconnection of Native American youth. Cultural disconnection is the lack of interrelatedness between two or more cultures (Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006).

Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) conducted a meta-analysis study that examined teachers’ expectations, discipline referrals, and teachers’ language towards BIPOC students. The study found that teachers offered more positive and supportive feedback to white and Asian students as compared to the feedback given to BIPOC students. Jackson (2009) found that teachers held higher expectations for white and Asian students compared to their expectations for BIPOC youth.

Re-Engagement of Disconnected Youth

Many disconnected youth demonstrate resiliency and successfully reengage and graduate from alternative programs and schools in spite of experiencing significant social, economic, and educational barrier (Iachini et al., 2013; Vega et al., 2015). Zaff (2018) conducted a multiple mixed methods study to investigate the lived experiences of disconnected youth to better understand what programming would best support their needs. The findings revealed that programs and schools focused on youth re-engagement should center around relationship

building, career readiness, and provide comprehensive support to students and families. Iachini et al. (2013) found that 38% of disconnected youth re-engaged in education because of a referral from friends and family, 38% described self-determination as the factor that led to re-engagement, and 15% identified the school design and structure as the reason for re-engagement. Iachini et al. also found that 61% of disconnected youth who re-engaged in alternative schools identified the use of individualized learning plans as a tool that supported their re-engagement and academic success.

Researchers who study school characteristics that lead to youth re-engagement find that community-based and flexible alternative education programs are successful (Andersen, 2017; Baldrige et al., 2011; Bloom et al., 2010; Iachini et al., 2013). Alternative education programs that are connected to the labor market, grounded in adult-youth relationship building, and offer targeted intervention, are successful in the re-engagement and program completion among disconnected youth (Andersen, 2017; Baldrige et al., 2011; Bloom et al., 2010; Iachini et al., 2013; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009; Varga et al., 2019). Bloom et al. (2010) found that alternative education programs that created pathways by combining academics, career awareness, training, paid work experience, and social and mental health services had a 42% success rate in comparison to the 27% success rate of alternative programs that were mandated or court-ordered and offered no student choice or support services. Providing students with multiple options for program completion, research also suggests that creating strong teacher-student relationships increase alternative educational programming success (Baldrige et al., 2011; Bland et al., 2008). Smaller class sizes, flexible scheduling, independent learning plans, and developing the student's sense of value may also support disconnected youth's re-engagement (Iachini et al., 2013; Wilcox, 2015). According to Englund et al. (2008) and Fortin et al. (2013), supportive

educational relationships between youth and family can increase the likelihood of re-engagement and school or program completion.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is a theoretical framework used to examine the relationship between race and racism and the social, political, economic, and educational power structures to eliminate all forms of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT begins and ends with the idea that racism is endemic to American society (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Derrick Bell and Allan Freeman are credited with developing the framework which draws from critical legal studies, radical feminism, and the conventional civil rights movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Racial realism, interest convergence, social construction of race, storytelling and counter-storytelling are the framework's main theoretical tenets. Researchers apply the conceptual framework of CRT within multiple disciplines, including sociology, history, ethnic studies, women's studies and education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Ladson-Billings (1995) introduced CRT to the field of education as a tool used to examine educational policy and practice by highlighting the continuation of racism within education to increase educational equity and justice for BIPOC youth (Bell, 2019; Closson, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ledesma and Calderon, 2015; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), CRT in education attempts to challenge the traditional educational structures methods, and literature through an examination of race, gender, and class in education and highlighting their impact on BIPOC youth. Historically literature that focuses on CRT in the K-12 school system has been categorized into one or more of the following themes: curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning, schooling, policy and finance, and community engagement (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Many scholars believe that educational system reform efforts must focus on social and racial justice to create equitable

opportunities for BIPOC students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Research applying CRT in education can be used to evaluate the impact of educational policies and practices such as; high stakes testing, hierarchy in schools, school discipline, bilingual and multicultural education, alternative and charter schools, and the overall academic success of BIPOC students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Although there are several tenets of CRT, this research study explored the following concepts to examine the lived experiences of BIPOC youth in alternative education schools and program: racial realism, intersectionality, and storytelling as a counter-narrative.

Racial Realism

CRT is grounded in the idea of racial realism which is the understanding that race and racism in America is an ordinary part of how society operates and therefore racial experiences are a normal part of life (Bell, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT acknowledges the racial hierarchal structure that leads American political, social, and economic systems (Ladson-Billings, 1998). According to Marable (1983) critical race theorist acknowledge that racism is systemic and permeates the collective culture, beliefs, and individuals' actions. Several scholars support CRT's concept of racial realism (King, 2017; Lindsey et al., 2018). According to King (2017) racism hinders human freedom and consciousness. Lindsey et al. (2018) suggest that racism is based on the assumption that one primary race is superior to all other races and that the superior race has the power to create environments where this assumption is manifested.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1991) introduced the concept of intersectionality as a way to connect CRT and feminist legal theory. Crenshaw defines intersectionality as a concept used to describe the interconnectedness of racism and social categories such as race, class, gender, and other social categories. In education CRT and the concept of intersectionality is used to examine barriers that

are created for BIPOC student as a result of overlapping social constructs (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Many researchers have documented the schooling experience of BIPOC students in the American public school system (Benner & Graham, 2011; Berry, 2005, Brown & Donnor, 2011; Duncan, 2002; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011; Huber, 2011; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015). For example, Howard and Flenbaugh (2011) conducted an ethnographical study to analyze the social and academic experiences that contributed to the attrition and retention of Black male students at an urban high school. The findings reported a strong relationship between experiences of racial microaggressions and the inability of Black male students to academically and socially excel. Benner and Graham (2011) examined the perception of discrimination and the educational outcomes of 668 Latinx students within the first two years of attending high school in the United States. The findings suggest a relationship between experiencing racial discrimination and negative academic outcomes when racial discrimination among Latinx students increased during the first two years of high school. The researchers also found that an increase in discrimination is often associated with a negative perception of school climate resulting in an increase in absenteeism. According to Benner and Graham, Latinx youth who are English language learners and who serve as translator for non-English speaking parents and family members identify instances of discrimination at high rates. Pérez Huber and Solórzano (2015) found similar results when examining the relationship between the experience of perceived microaggressions in public high school and language acquisition.

Storytelling and Counter-Storytelling

Storytelling is a key component of CRT in education. The sharing of stories and counternarratives of experiences outside of the white Eurocentric norm adds value and authenticity to the experience (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). One goal of CRT in education it to better understand the various forms of discrimination and identify their origins in an effort to

give voice to the victims and serve as a tool for empowerment (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2013). CRT utilizes the art of storytelling to create counternarrative to share BIPOC students' experiences of racial oppression in an attempt to support liberation (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling allows for the recounting of historical events through the voice and perspective of marginalized people (Yosso, 2013). For example, Joseph et al. (2016) used counter-storytelling to examine Black female students' experiences with racism in the public school system. Through the use of counter-storytelling, Joseph et al. challenged the myth of a colorblind society through sharing the reality of the study's participants.

Race and Racism in the American Public School System

CRT theorists suggest that institutionalized racism in the American public school—as a result of systemic beliefs, policies, and practices—is one contributing factor to the academic challenges faced by BIPOC (Chetty et al., 2020; King, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Mazumder, 2011). The application of CRT in education is intentional and highlights the role of race and racism in BIPOC educational experiences. Literature on race and racism in the American public school system identifies racial inequalities in school funding, the distribution of highly qualified teacher, and in the availability of college preparatory curriculum (Alemán, 2007; Fruchter et al., 2012; Holzman, 2004; Lee, 2012; Orfield et al., 2008). A longitudinal study by Joseph et al. (2016) found that 50% of the Black female youth participants from varying socioeconomic communities experienced segregation, institutional discrimination, and racism in the school setting that impacted their learning experience. Chetty et al. (2020) found that when Black and white male students shared a similar socioeconomic background, 70% of Black male students graduated as compared to 78% of the white male students. Additionally, the study reveals that Black students who lived in low-income communities compared to their white peers underperformed on standardized math and reading exams.

Studies have shown that BIPOC youth experience racial microaggressions in various academic settings. Racial microaggressions are subtle, verbal, and non-verbal assaults that intentionally or unintentionally communicate derogatory, hostile, or negative racial insults (APA, 2020). Davis (1989) suggests that the use of racial microaggressions stems from the unconscious belief in white privilege and white superiority that is grounded in cognitive habit, history, culture and the belief that BIPOC are inferior. Examples of racial microaggressions in school settings include setting low academic expectations for a group of students based on race, and complementing non-white students on their use of “good English.” Racial microaggressions can have a negative if not harmful psychological effect on the target group impacting school performance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

A study conducted by Pérez Huber and Solórzano (2015) found that 100% of the Latinx immigrant participants experienced racial microaggressions that placed English as a dominant language and left them feeling alienated, shamed, humiliated, and colonized. The findings from this empirical study align with CRT’s theme that racism serves as a normal part of America imbedded into the educational system and can lead to educational disconnection among BIPOC youth (Huber, 2011).

Steele and Aronson (1995) found that many BIPOC youth experience racial stereotype threat in schools and that this experience can result in poor academic performance and disconnection. Racial stereotype threat can negatively impact BIPOC students’ academic performance and lead to disengagement and disconnection (APA, 2006; Gonzales et al., 2002; Klem & Connell, 2004; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Racial stereotype threat occurs when individuals feel that they are faced with a social situation that may cause them to act out in a way that reinforces a stereotype that is associated with their social group (APA, 2006; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Individuals who experience racial stereotype threat often reduce effort and

expectation of performance (Schimel et al., 2004). Examples of a racial stereotype threats that can lead to the disengagement and disconnection of BIPOC includes the idea that Black students perform poorly on standardized academic test and the idea that students from high poverty communities are less intelligent than students from low poverty communities (APA, 2006, Harrison et al., 2006).

Educational Policy and Practices

The American public school system has a long history of implementing racist policies and practices that are exclusionary of BIPOC students. Racism is upheld in the American public school system through the development and adherence of exclusionary policies and practices that are discriminatory to a specific racial group (Lorde, 1981; Marable, 1983). During Jim Crow, racist policies and practices existed that denied Blacks the right to attend school (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lorde, 1981; Marable, 1983). Racist policies in education were further seen during the period of segregation from 1865 through 1954 where separate schools were required by law for white and Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Modern examples of exclusionary policies and practices in education that negatively impact BIPOC students include high stakes testing, school choice, disciplinary policies, attendance policies, grading policies, and school vouchers.

Landmark court decisions such as *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954), *Roberto Alvarez v. Lemon Grove* (Alvarez, 1986), and *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) ruled racial segregation unconstitutional in public schools, outlawed racial segregation through educational practices, and established that schools must provide English Language Learners (ELLs) with instructional material to support language acquisition. These landmark decisions sought out to create educational equity for all learners regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or language proficiency. However, regardless of these reform efforts, achievement gaps remain, BIPOC

youth continue to graduate at lower rates and disconnect from education at higher rates compared to their white peers and they continue to experience racist exclusionary educational policies and practices (Noguera et al., 2019).

According to research, there is an inequitable use of disciplinary policies and practices that bear heavier penalties for BIPOC students as compared to white students (Skiba & Knesting, 2002; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). Noguera et al. (2019) suggest that inequitable disciplinary approaches such as out of school suspension and expulsion serves as barriers to the academic success of BIPOC students. An analysis conducted by U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2019) found that Black youth attending pre-school in the United States were 3.6 times more likely to receive out of school suspension compared to their white peers, 18% of Black boys and 10% of Black girls received school suspension compared to only 6% of the total K-12 student population received school suspensions. Black students are 1.9 times more likely to be expelled from school compared to their white peers.

The high-stakes testing requirements that were born out of NCLB (2002) and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) brought a new set of academic challenges for BIPOC students (Koretz, 2008; Solórzano, 2019). Standardized testing has served as the base for educational policies and practices designed to increase academic achievement. However, the academic and social needs of BIPOC students are rarely taken into account during the development of such policies (Solórzano, 2019). According to research, BIPOC youth experience racism and instances of internal segregation within school environments (McKinney & Sengupta-Irving, 2019; Joseph et al., 2016). Joseph et al. (2016) conducted a survey examining instances of racism experienced by 18 Black female adolescents at an urban high school. According to the results, 50% of the participants reported experiencing racism in the form of prejudice, racism, and differential treatment by teachers and support staff. Participants also described low teacher academic

expectations of Black students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses that left them with a sense of devaluation and ultimately led to the student dropping the course (Joseph et al., 2016).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

A significant number of research studies have investigated the relationship between motivation, youth disconnection, and academic success (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Loewenstein, 1994, Ryan, 1995; Sliwka, 2008). At the foundation of human natures lies the innate curiosity to explore and become involved in one's physical and social surroundings (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). SDT is a conceptual framework developed by Ryan and Deci (2000) to examine intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, and the psychological health of individuals. In addition, SDT is grounded in the assumption of three basic psychological needs of every learner: the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017). Unlike the motivation theories of Bandura (1977), Dweck and Leggett (1988), and Wigfield (1994) that examine motivation from the direction that led to a specific goal or outcome, SDT approached motivation from the behavior and psychological need that is being met though achieving the goal or outcome (Deci et al., 1991)

Intrinsic Motivation

According to Ryan and Deci (2000) intrinsic motivation involves behavior that is guided by internal rewards. Studies of intrinsic motivation and its relationship to academic engagement and success reveal that intrinsic academic motivation typically declines as youth progress through schooling (Lepper et al, 2005; Gillet et al., 2012; Gottfried et al., 2009; Scherrer & Preckel, 2019). Iachini et al. (2013) examined factors that led disconnected students to re-engage in education. The findings reported that 38% of participants were intrinsically (self) motivated to reengage in education. The participants cited the need to support children, wanting to change

their lives, and the desire to prove to themselves that they could successfully complete school as a self-motivating factor for re-engagement.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation involves behaviors that is guided by external rewards which become the incentive for behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Iachini et al., 2013; Ryan, 1995). Examples of extrinsic motivation in academic environments include meeting school and family expectations, and achieving a desired grade or college acceptance. Experts suggest that controlling environments decreases motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In contrast to the 38% of participants that reported self-motivation as a factor that led to their educational re-engagement, Iachini et al. (2013) also found that 61% of the participants studied were extrinsically motivated to reengage in education. The results of this study revealed that social relationships with family, friends, and school staff serves as extrinsic motivation for the re-engagement of disconnected youth.

Self Determination Theory in Education

In education, SDT is used to illustrate how self-determined motivation can be affected through classroom practice (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). SDT in academics assumes that self-initiated (autonomous) motivation will increase student engagement, learning, and physical and psychological wellness. SDT in academics also assumes that when student's basic psychological needs are met by the school and family that intrinsic and extrinsic academic motivation is more likely to occur (Guay et al., 2010; Katz et al., 2014). A study conducted by Chirkov and Ryan (2001) found that autonomy support from school and family resulted in high intrinsic motivation and physical and psychological well-being. According to Reeve (2002) intrinsic motivation in students increases academic and psychological outcomes. Self-

determination is often used to help describe how youth develop academic resilience in spite of socio economic and personal barriers.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000) a relationship between teacher and student motivation and academic success and connection. Research in SDT reveals the critical need to support the basic psychological needs of learners to increase the likelihood of intrinsic motivation leading to engagement and positive academic outcomes. Experts suggest that when students' basic psychological needs are met intrinsic motivation can support academic achievement (Loewenstein, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2000). A number of authors have recognized that curiosity is a characteristic that could be used to direct learning (Loewenstein, 1994, Ryan, 1995; Sliwka, 2008) and that a lack of motivation, interest, and engagement are characteristics of disconnected youth (Fortin et al., 2013; Hickman et al., 2008; Janosz et al., 2008). One criticism of SDT is that the theory of autonomous motivation is not necessarily a driver for academic success in all cultures (Markus et al., 1996). Unfortunately, there is limited research that focused on understanding the lived experiences of targeted sub populations of disconnected youth. The existing literature does not provide sufficient insight into the lived experiences of BIPOC who have successfully re-engaged and graduated from alternative education schools and programs. This research study explored those processes and systems to motivate and reengage the 10% who remain continuously disconnected from education.

Chapter Summary

This literature review provided a comprehensive review of research associated with alternative education, disconnected youth, youth re-engagement, race and racism in the American public school system, critical race theory, and self-determination theory. Disconnected youth are identified as youth ages 18-24 who have disconnected from school. BIPOC are disconnected from education at a disproportionate rate compared to whites. At risk youth who

are in danger of academic failure, have experienced multiple disciplinary challenges, are credit deficient, are more likely to disconnect. Poverty is a common factor among disconnected youth. Critical race theory allows for the examination of educational policies and practices from a critical race lens to identify how race and racism has continued to oppress BIPOC in education. SDT is a framework that allows for the examination of how motivation can be impacted by classroom practice. According to the literature, there is a relationship between race, racism, gender, poverty, and youth disconnection. Youth who live in poverty experience higher rates of disconnection compared to youth who live above the poverty line (Lewis, 2020). BIPOC youth disconnect at higher rates than white youth (Burd-Sharps & Lewis, 2018; Lewis, 2020). Racist educational policies and practices such as internal program segregation, institutional discrimination, and teacher-directed microaggressions were also identified as factors contributing to BIPOC youth disconnection (Joseph et al., 2016). The literature review identified the need for a more thorough understanding of the alternative education experiences of BIPOC youth to prevent youth disconnection and support successful re-engagement and completion of alternative education schools and programs (Driscoll, 1999; Wilcox, 2015).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological approach that guided this qualitative narrative study. This research plan supported the investigation of factors that led to the disconnection, re-engagement, and subsequent graduation of disconnected BIPOC youth in alternative education schools and programs. The data gathered during this study helped the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of how alternative education schools and programs can better support BIPOC youth in their alternative education journey. Included in this chapter is an overview of the research design, sources of data, data collection, and data analysis process, a description of the study's participants, the setting in which the research took place, and the rationale highlighting the importance of the research topic and approach to the existing body of literature. Additionally, this chapter will discuss any ethical concerns, the researcher's role, human subject considerations, and the measures to ensure the study's validity.

The literature review identified the need for a more thorough understanding of the alternative education experiences of BIPOC youth to prevent youth disconnection and support successful re-engagement and completion of alternative education schools and programs (Driscoll, 1999; Wilcox, 2015). The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that lead to disconnection and the factors that serve as motivation for BIPOC youth re-engagement and to understand how these factors influenced or shaped the participants' journey through alternative education. More specifically, the research sought out to address the following research questions.

Restatement of Research Questions

This qualitative, narrative study examined the following research questions:

1. How do former disconnected youth ages 19-26 years of age describe their traditional school experience compared to their alternative school experience?

2. What factors led formerly disconnected BIPOC youth 19-26 years of age to successfully re-engage and complete alternative education schools and programs at various entry and exit points throughout their journey to program completion?

Research relating to BIPOC youth, racism in public education, youth disconnection and re-engagement, and alternative education are critical areas of study. As discussed in Chapter 2, one-third of youth who remain disconnected from education are BIPOC from low-income communities (Lewis, 2020; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The results of this study will inform alternative education programs and schools on how to prevent youth disconnection and inform the design of learning experiences that better fit the needs of disconnected BIOPC youth.

Research Methods and Rationale

This research study was grounded in a transformative worldview. A transformative worldview is a meta-physical framework that seeks to increase human rights and further social justice advocacy by challenging cultural norms and acknowledging the oppression of historically marginalized populations (Mertens, 2009). A transformative worldview analyzes the linkage between politics and social action. This worldview assumes that research should be paired with politics as a tool to address social oppression. Because of the transformative paradigms' focuses on ethics and the research study's emphasis on social justice, a transformative worldview aligns with the purpose of this qualitative narrative research. This research approach also applies to the specifics of this study.

A qualitative, narrative research approach was used for this study. Qualitative research seeks to understand how the observer interprets their experiences and how they attribute meaning to their experiences within the world (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers attest to the value of gathering diverse perspectives of human subjects and how they view the world (Taylor et al.,

2015). A qualitative narrative research approach was used to gain insight into the journey of youth disconnection and re-engagement among BIPOCs through gaining an understanding of their alternative education experiences and opinions by gathering in-depth information from the participants. In contrast, quantitative research is used to test or confirm hypotheses through identifying a variable, testing a hypothesis, and carrying out an experiment. The results of quantitative research are numerical data that are statistically analyzed which is not relevant for this study where the researcher will collect information using participants' responses to interview questions (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative inquiry utilizes the art of storytelling through spoken and written text to understand individual lived experiences of chronologically related events (Czarniawska, 2004). Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method used to analyze stories by gathering data, reporting experiences, and applying meaning to the experiences through shaping the narratives into chronology (Riessman, 1993). A narrative inquiry approach to this study provided in-depth information regarding BIPOC youths' perceptions of their experience with educational disconnection, re-engagement, and any connections to alternative schools and programs. Narrative inquiry is used in various disciplines and does not conform to a particular field of study (Kohler Riessman & Speedy, 2006). This research method was used to make meaning of participants' stories. This form of research requires the researcher to understand that narratives and storytelling through mirroring real-life experiences, sharing individual truths, and serving as a form of self-expression (Andrews et al., 2013; Hendry, 2009; Lieblich et al., 1998). Therefore, by capturing the narratives of BIPOC students who were previously disconnected from education and then subsequently re-engaged, this research was able to provide insight into possible areas such as school settings or characteristics that support re-engagement, along with what factors

served as barriers or motivation contributing to the decision to disconnect and then to subsequently reengage.

This study was also grounded in CRT's tenet of counter storytelling to support a narrative inquiry approach. Storytelling is a strategy used in CRT's framework that uses the counter-narratives of marginalized people to understand the role of race and racism within their daily experiences (Love, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Storytelling is a communication device used to transfer knowledge and experiences, preserve culture, and communicate shared values (Benjamin, 2006; Poulton, 2005). The art of storytelling has been traditionally used by BIPOC to connect to the world and share lived experiences that counter existing, primarily non-BIPOC historical narratives (Bell, 2019). The application of storytelling allowed the researcher to capture and examine the narratives of participants as they interpret their experiences as BIPOC throughout their alternative education journey.

Through spoken and written text, storytelling provides an opportunity for researchers to understand individual lived experiences of events that are chronologically connected (Czarniawska, 2004). CRT and narrative inquiry both require the gathering of data through gathering stories, reporting experiences, and applying meaning to the experiences through shaping the narratives into chronology (Hendry, 2009). The application of narrative inquiry allowed participants to share their reality and experiences and align with the counternarrative focus of CRT to share the voices of marginalized populations through a racial lens to challenge and change discriminatory educational policies practices (Andrews et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings 1998; Riessman, 1993; Yosso, 2006). Previous research found a clear alignment between the application of narrative inquiry and the counter-storytelling tenet of CRT (Miller et al., 2020).

Therefore, the use of a narrative inquiry research approach grounded in the storytelling tenet of CRT allowed this study to emphasize racial ideas and differences, stereotypes, and racist

policies and practices within the public school system that may serve as barriers to the academic achievement of BIPOC youth. As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature shows that BIPOC students disconnect from education at disproportionate rates as compared to white students (Lewis, 2020). This methodological approach also allowed the participants' racial identities to be the focus of their narratives. This research can help identify culturally relevant practices and systems to support the continuous academic engagement of BIPOC students.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a critical component of qualitative research that allows the researcher to examine the relationship between their life experiences, values, and philosophical view and the research topic, participants, and data (Cunliffe, 2003; Gill & Johnston, 2010). According to Hibbert et al. (2010), reflexivity is a continuous process of reflection by the researcher that encompasses questioning one's beliefs and interpretations that create an increased self-awareness. Reflexivity places the researcher inside the study, allowing for a precise examination of the research design and outcome (Bryman & Cassell, 2006; Hibbert et al., 2010). Therefore, to remain transparent and practice reflectivity throughout the research process, the researcher provided biographical information below that supported her position for choosing the research topic and the approaches that were used to conduct the study.

The researcher is an African American woman who attended one of the lowest-performing secondary schools in Los Angeles County. During her attendance, the student population was 99% BIPOC, and 25% of the incoming freshman cohort disconnected before graduating. Additionally, during the time of the research study the researcher worked as a school administrator for an alternative charter school in Los Angeles County. Her experiences as a BIPOC student, and now as an educator, played a large part in her development, values, and decision to conduct this research study. The researcher understood the severity of BIPOC

students' educational disconnection in Los Angeles county and its overarching impact on the community.

As a Black woman and a parent, the researcher has experienced racism in the educational system. During her schooling, she recalls several instances of microaggression whereby school staff made public comments about her hair, clothing, or intelligence and often compared her to other Black students. As a parent, the researcher has witnessed her teenage son withdraw from academic engagement at different stages during his post-secondary education after several experiences of stereotyping and microaggressions due to his choice of hairstyle, clothing, and laid-back demeanor. Therefore, the researcher wanted to deepen her understanding of the experience of BIPOC students who disconnect and subsequently re-engage and how they describe their journey to graduation from an alternative education school or program. Finally, the researcher acknowledges that her racial identity and educational background may be similar to some of this study's participants. As a critical race advocate, the researcher will advocate for the eradication of educational racism and racist educational policies in the American public school system that are exclusionary of BIPOC youth, creating, safe, caring, and equitable learning environments for all learners. The researcher believes that commonality can serve as a tool to create a safe and trusting relationship with the participants. The researcher does not foresee any personal conflict of interest. However, to minimize biases the researcher practiced objectivity by developing a keen awareness of her biases and conducted each phase of the research objectively, paying careful attention to personal emotions, experiences and prejudices (Pajo, 2017).

Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedure

Criteria for participant selection for this study included having graduated from an alternative education program or school within Southern California within five years of the study

date; candidates must be Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color (BIPOC); they must have been between 17 and 24 years of age when they graduated; both genders, male and female BIPOC were included. A criterion sampling was applied to recruitment efforts for this research study. Patton (2001) defines criterion sampling as the process of selecting cases based on the identification of a set of predetermined criteria. Criterion sampling is often used to assure qualitative assurance within a study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Criterion sampling ensured that the research participants accurately represented the larger population the study sought out to address (Taylor et al., 2015).

Recruitment

BIPOC participants for this study were recruited through posting the recruitment flyer (see Appendix A) on social media outlets, as well as distributing recruitment emails seeking candidates (see Appendix B) and by word of mouth. The researcher's Pepperdine University email address was used for all email correspondences related to this research study. The email account was password protected and email messages were stored on the University's dedicated server.

To reach potential candidates the researcher posted the recruitment flyer on Facebook using the researcher's personal Facebook account. The recruitment flyer was also be posted to the following Facebook group pages where the researcher holds membership; Qualitative Research in Education, Critical Race Studies in Education, Eye on Inglewood Community, and Gardena California Neighborhood Page. The post was also submitted to the administrator of each page for approval. Upon approval the post appeared on the groups Facebook page.

The researcher sent a recruitment email to the following professional organizations, National Alternative Education Association, Junior League of Los Angeles, and Black Educators Rock, Inc. This email included a description of the study, the targeted population, the duration of

the study, a summary of the interview process, and the contact information for the researcher should any of the participants need any clarification. As a member of each organization the researcher had the privilege of disseminating information to each network. The email also included an attachment of the recruitment flyer and a link to the participant screening questionnaire, an interactive Google Form that was used as the participant screening questionnaire (see Appendix C). The data received from candidate form responses were used to select participants for the study. Candidates were asked to provide the following demographical information to determine their eligibility to participate in the study: name, age, email address, and phone number. Subsequently, the candidate was prompted to answer the following questions related to the research study:

- Do you identify as BIPOC?
- At any point during your K-12 schooling did you disconnect (drop out) from traditional public school?
- Did you graduate from an alternative education program or school?
- Were you between the ages of 17 and 24 years of age when you graduated?

Once the questionnaire was returned, the candidates received a message thanking them for their interest in the study and informing them that they will be notified by the researcher if they have been selected to participate in the study.

The researcher reviewed the BIPOC participant survey questionnaire submissions. Once all submissions were screened, the first 10 candidates who met the criterion received an email invitation to participate in the research (see Appendix D). The participant invitation email provided an overview of the study and the interview procedure. The informed consent form was also attached to the email. The informed consent form described the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the participant's right to refuse participation at any

point, benefits and risks, the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and data security, and contact information for the researcher and chairperson. The participants were instructed to read the document and either sign the consent form and return it to the researcher. If a participant was unable to sign and return the consent form prior to the interview session the researcher would then ask the participant to verbally say their name and state that they willfully agreed to participate in the study. The participant was also asked to acknowledge that they understood that the study was voluntary and at any time they had the right to not continue as a participant. The data collection process included providing the participants with a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix E). Candidates who were not selected to participate in the study received an email thanking them for their willingness to participate (see Appendix F).

Methods of Data Collection

Due to the current coronavirus pandemic, all participant interviews occurred through Zoom virtual meetings using the audio recording feature. Qualitative research is conducted through the collection of data in a natural setting and requires the researcher to collect data through observation, interview, or the examination of documents (Creswell, 2013). The researcher collected data through facilitating a semi-structured interview with each participant. Each participant was contacted to schedule a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The Zoom video conferencing platform was used to facilitate the semi structured interviews using the predetermined interview script (see Appendix G) to collect the participants' narratives. The interviews were conducted starting Feb. 25, 2021, and concluding March 23, 2021.

BIPOC Participant Interviews

The interview protocol for this study was adopted from the Iachini et al. (2013) research study to fit the current study's need. Participants engaged in a 45 minute to one-hour, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions related to the study (see Appendix H).

Validity of Interview Protocol. To establish the content validity of identified themes, three leading experts in alternative education in the area of disconnection and re-engagement reviewed the content of the predetermined interview questions (Barker & Pistrang, 2005). The researcher solicited the help of fellow board members of the National Association of Alternative Education to review the interview questions. The researcher reviewed the recommended changes and made adjustments as needed prior to the first participant interview session. The following table (Table 1), illustrates the alignment of the research questions and the interview questions. The interview questions were developed to help the researcher gain an understanding into the unique experiences of BIPOC youth in traditional and alternative education settings from a critical race perspective.

Table 1

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
Background/Demographic Questions	1. How old are you? 2. Where are you from/where were you born? 3. How old were you when you graduated from high school/earned equivalent? 4. What year did you graduate from high school?
RQ1 How do former disconnected BIPOC youth ages 19-26 years of age describe their experience in traditional public schools compared to that of alternative public schools?	IQ1: Can you describe your experience as a (insert participant's race) student in a traditional school setting? How many traditional schools did you attend? If more than one, can you explain? IQ2: How much time did you spend in a traditional school setting?

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p>IQ3 What types of challenges did you face as a (insert participant's race) while attending a traditional school?</p> <p>IQ4 While attending a traditional high school, did you ever feel unwelcome, undervalued, or treated unfairly because of your race? Please explain.</p> <p>IQ5 How was your experience at an alternative education school or program different than what you experienced at a traditional high school?</p> <p>IQ6 What types of challenges did you face as a (insert participant's race) student while attending an alternative high school?</p> <p>IQ7 Did the alternative school help you to overcome the challenges, and if so, how?</p>
<p>RQ2 How do formerly disconnected BIPOC youth 19-26 describe years of age to successfully reengage and complete alternative education programs at various entry and exit points throughout their journey to program completion?</p>	<p>IQ8 Can you recall what motivated you to reengage and subsequently graduate from an alternative education school or program?</p> <p>IQ9 Can you think of any changes that alternative schools should make to attract more disconnected minority youth?</p>

Synchronous interview sessions were scheduled at times convenient for the participants. The interview timeline remained flexible and adjusted as needed to meet the researcher and participants' needs and demands. The researcher established credibility by creating a safe, caring, trusting, and empowering environment where the participant was comfortable and encouraged to share their real thoughts and feelings. Participants engaged in the interview through Zoom video conferencing platform. The researcher established a sense of trust and safety with each participant by engaging in social conversations before the interview.

The interview protocol was read to each participant at the beginning of the interview to highlight the purpose of the study and to reinforce the voluntary and confidential nature of the study. Predetermined open ended questions captured the participants' narratives related to their experiences in traditional and alternative schools and programs. Probing questions were asked as needed to clarify responses. Zoom video conferencing platform was used to conduct the interview as a tool for data collection and is an easy to use, free peer-to-peer video conferencing platform with secure data management features and security options.

The researcher also created field notes during each interview. The field notes were reviewed by the researcher during the transcription process to support greater accuracy and understanding of the participants' experiences in alternative and traditional schools and programs. The use of these field notes highlighted important details related to the conversation, tone of the participant, and any emotions detected throughout the interview. The use of field notes also supported methodological and theoretical reflection (Pajo, 2017). For example, during the interview process the researcher noted that when asked directly if they ever felt unvalued because of their race while attending traditional public high school, nine of the participants answered "no." However, at some point during the conversation, all participants shared experiences that were grounded in systemic racism exposing instances of microaggressions, stereotyping, and racist educational policies and practices. The researcher found this of importance and made note of the occurrence as it speaks to PGDD and is consistent with the CRT tenet of racial realism; racism is a part of American culture that is so ordinary and common that it can sometimes be difficult to recognize. Another example of field note taking during this study involved the researcher noting changes in the participants voice or tone when asked certain questions. The researcher found this to be of importance because a change in voice, tone, or pitch can identify a change in mood.

Interview Transcription and Member Checking

Shortly after the completion of the interview, the Zoom video file and transcript were downloaded and stored onto the researcher's password protected laptop. To establish confidentiality pseudonyms were assigned to participants; school names, cities, and any other identifiable characteristics was redacted or removed from all data and reports of this study. The researcher reviewed each interview transcript while listening to the audio recording of the Zoom interview to ensure accurate transcription. Any changes to the transcript were made by the researcher using a laptop and word processing software.

The transcribed interview results were emailed to each participant following the interview to provide member checking. The participants were asked to review the transcription to ensure that their responses were captured accurately and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pajo, 2017). If there were any discrepancies between the transcript and the actual narrative provided the participants were instructed to provide the researcher with corrections.

Data Management

The interview recordings, transcripts, and field notes were stored electronically in a password protected cloud-based file storage system to ensure confidentiality. A dedicated sub folder was created for each participant to store identifying data using the associated pseudonym. Clear and consistent file-naming was used to manage data. Each file was named using the pseudonym given to the participant, using a unique audio file number, and the date of the interview. The confidentiality of the data was maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. All files related to the study were stored on a password protected personal laptop to maintain confidentiality and to avoid the exposure of sensitive information to the public. The researcher was the only person with the password to retrieve the stored data files. The research

data will be retained for a minimum of three years following the completion of the study, after which all files will be permanently deleted from the researcher's Google Drive.

Data Analysis

The participants' interview transcripts and field notes were reviewed, and singular ideas and themes were identified until saturation occurred (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe saturation as the point in data analysis, where no new data or themes can be identified. Once the analysis reaches a point of saturation, the study is considered grounded in data (Charmaz, 2006). An a priori coding scheme (see Appendix I) was adopted from a similar qualitative study conducted by Iachini et al. (2013). This 2013 study explored academic disengagement and re-engagement from the perspective of students enrolled in a dropout recovery charter school. The pre-determined themes include behavioral and discipline challenges, lack of support from teachers, and lack of individual planning for graduation (Iachini et al., 2013).

Participants' individual stories and experiences were analyzed consistent with CRT approaches. The data analysis process involved an analysis of the participants' narratives. Although the research study employed an a priori coding scheme, additional themes were included as needed to address the limitations of preconfigured codes and accurately capture the participants' views (Creswell, 2013). The researcher assigned meaning to data using the preexisting coding scheme to identify reoccurring themes, language, and patterns to achieve this goal.

The results of qualitative research are presented in a way that adopts the BIPOC participants' language and voice (Creswell, 2013). Storytelling is used to counter the existing narratives of BIPOC youth's transition from traditional public school to alternative schools and programs. The use of counter-storytelling is interwoven within this study to increase the

understanding of culture, social meaning, and lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Patton, 2002).

Human Subject Considerations

The researcher applied for IRB exemption status from the human subject regulations, category 2 (Exemption 2). Once exemption status was granted and approved from Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology (see Appendix J), the recruitment process began. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic all interviews were carried out virtually. The researcher submitted this research proposal as an “exempt” review and requested permission to conduct this study through the Pepperdine Graduate and Professional Schools IRB process. The Department of Health and Human Services decision tool was used to determine if this research involves human subjects. This research study was exempt from the human subject regulations, category 2 (exemption 2) based on the following responses to the decision tool.

- For the purpose of this study, at some point there was an intervention or interaction with subjects for the collection of biospecimens or data (including health or clinical data, surveys, focus groups or observation of behavior). Or identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens was be obtained, used, studied, analyzed, or generated for the purpose of this study.
- This study involved only the collection of information via surveys, interviews, or educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement). No biological specimens were to be collected.
- The information that the investigator obtains for the study was recorded in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers (i.e., subject and numbers) linked to the subjects and the investigator did contact the subjects nor try to re-identify subjects.

Informed Consent

The researcher asked each participant to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix F) that describes any risks associated with participation in the study, the measures taken to ensure the participant's confidentiality, and the process for securing data. Participants had the option of returning the signed consent form via email or verbally consenting to voluntary participation in the study prior to the start of the interview. Participants were informed of their right to discontinue participation in the study at any time without any negative consequences. The participants were also informed that participation in the study is voluntary. They had the right to deny answering any questions. Any information gathered during the study was for the sole purpose of the study.

Risks. No physical risks were associated with participation in this study. Minimal risks may have included the brief occurrence of unpleasant thoughts while recalling past, educational experiences. To minimize the possibility of negative feelings, the researcher remained aware of verbal and non-verbal cues given by the participant that may be signs of discomfort. The researcher verbally checked-in with the participant at various intervals throughout the interview. If at any moment the participants showed any signs of possible discomfort, the researcher suggested stopping or pausing the interview.

Benefits. BIPOC participants of this study may have gained a sense of empowerment, an increased knowledge of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that supported their decisions throughout the alternative education journey. Lastly, participants may have experienced a sense of accomplishment by contributing to research to help other disconnected BIPOC youth successfully re-engage and complete alternative education schools and programs.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative methodology used thematic coding and narrative analysis aligned with the CRT conceptual framework that served as the foundation for this research study. The methodology used in this research helped the researcher to examine current policies and practices that hinder and support alternative education completion among BIPOC youth. Interviews with alternative education graduates captured previously disconnected BIPOC youths' perceptions of their alternative education journey and what factors led to disconnection and subsequent re-engagement. The storytelling tenet of CRT was used to share the retold stories of the BIPOC participants' lived experiences.

Chapter 4: Findings

This purpose of this qualitative narrative research study was to gain an understanding of what systems and processes support the re-engagement of formerly disconnected youth from alternative high school programs in the State of California. Nearly one-third of youth who remain disconnected in the United States are Black, Indigenous and Persons of Color from low-income communities. To further understand these lived experiences, this qualitative narrative research study grounded in CRT sampled BIPOC youth 19-26 years of age who at some point during their educational journey attended traditional school, disengaged, and re-engaged and graduated from an alternative school or program in Southern California. The study aimed to answer the following research questions (RQs):

1. How do former disconnected BIPOC youth ages 19-26 years of age describe their experience in traditional public schools compared to that of alternative public schools?
2. What factors led formerly disconnected BIPOC youth 19-26 years of age to successfully reengage and complete alternative education programs at various entry and exit points throughout their journey to program completion?

Research Design

This narrative inquiry research study was grounded in CRT and, therefore, the researcher critically analyzed the data and reported the findings through a critical race lens placing the BIPOC participant's racial identity at the forefront and immediately calling out any instances of oppression. The study utilized a semi-structured interview process and open-ended questions to capture data and relied heavily on storytelling to emphasize racial elements including: ideas and differences, concepts, stereotypes, and policies and practices, within the public school system that served as barriers to the academic achievement of BIPOC youth. The participant's voice was

placed at the center of the study to counter common narratives and provide a new lens in which to understand the BIPOC participants' lived experiences. An a priori coding scheme was used to identify primary themes for this study. Additional themes were identified through an iterative analysis of the interview data for descriptors that emerged throughout the narratives and that aligned with the literature review.

Demographics

Purposive sampling was used to select ten young adults 19-26 years who met the minimum criteria for inclusion outlined in Chapter 3. All BIPOC participants graduated from an alternative education program or school within Southern California within five years of the study date. Participants identified as:

- Black or Latinx (no other race was represented)
- Were between 17 and 24 years of age when they graduated
- Both genders, male and female.

Noteworthy is that, although this study focused on the experiences of BIPOC youth, the researcher could not examine the lived experiences of the sample population without acknowledging and taking into account the intersectionality of the multiple social groups in which the participants hold membership. Crenshaw (1991) defines intersectionality as the interconnectedness of race, economic class, gender, sexual orientation and oppression. Therefore, to fully understand the lived experiences of the BIPOC participants in an educational setting, the researcher acknowledged and took into account during the data analysis the various social identities of the BIPOC participants: race, age, gender, and social class and how having multiple social identities (Brewer, 2010) may have impacted their experience in traditional and alternative school settings. According to Abrams and Hogg (2010) and Kite and Whitley (2016) this examination of a human relationship with multiple social identities and how membership can

lead to intergroup bias, prejudice, and discrimination is known as social identity theory. Social identity theory supports the idea that educational disconnection by BIPOC youth may be the result of the adoption of curriculum and pedagogy, and a school climate is based on the dominant group's culture, values, and beliefs that leave BIPOC youth feeling socially unacceptable in tractional public schools (Kelly, 2009; Kite & Whitely, 2016).

Originally, this study sought to recruit 10-14 BIPOC participants and resulted in ten participants who contributed to this research study. The total number of alternative schools and programs attended varied among the ten BIPOC participants within the sample ranging from one to three. Two participants attended one alternative school or program; two participants attended two alternative schools or programs; and three participants attended three alternative schools or programs. Of the 10 participants, six identified as male, while four identified as female.

The sample population attended traditional and alternative schools and programs in Southern California within the boundaries of El Segundo, Hawthorne, Inglewood, Lancaster, Moreno Valley, San Bernardino, and South Central Los Angeles. Table 2 describes BIPOC participants' demographic data which include racial identity, gender, age at graduation, current age, and the number of alternative education schools and/or programs attended by the sample.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Racial Identity	Gender	Alt/Ed Schools	Age of Graduation	Current Age
Participant A	Black and Latinx	M	3	18	22
Participant B	Black	M	1	18	23
Participant C	Latinx	F	3	25	26
Participant D	Black	M	1	19	23
Participant E	Latinx	M	1	21	22
Participant F	Latinx	M	1	19	21
Participant G	Black	F	1	17	22

Participant	Racial Identity	Gender	Alt/Ed Schools	Age of Graduation	Current Age
Participant H	Latinx	M	2	18	19
Participant I	Black	F	2	23	25
Participant J	Black and Latinx	F	3	23	26

The following section contains the findings of the data analysis gathered from the semi-structured interviews with the participants.

Data and Analysis Process

The data captured from the BIPOC participant interviews were transcribed, checked for accuracy by each participant, and then analyzed iteratively using NVivo 12 software. Selective coding emerged throughout the data as singular ideas and themes were identified. Illustrated below, next, common themes were grouped and classified into three general, higher order themes: (a) experiences in traditional public school, (b) experiences in alternative schools and programs, and (c) motivation for re-engagement and high school completion. In addition, five lower order themes emerged that represented the lived experiences of the sample BIPOC population while attending traditional public school which were:

- behavior and discipline challenges,
- feeling undervalued,
- low academic achievement,
- lack of academic support and,
- positive opportunities for socialization.

Moreover, five lower order themes emerged describing the participants' experiences within alternative education schools and programs which were:

- positive and negative school design,
- increased academic support,

- behavior challenges (mental health issues),
- desire to transition back to traditional public school and,
- negative connotation associated with alternative education.

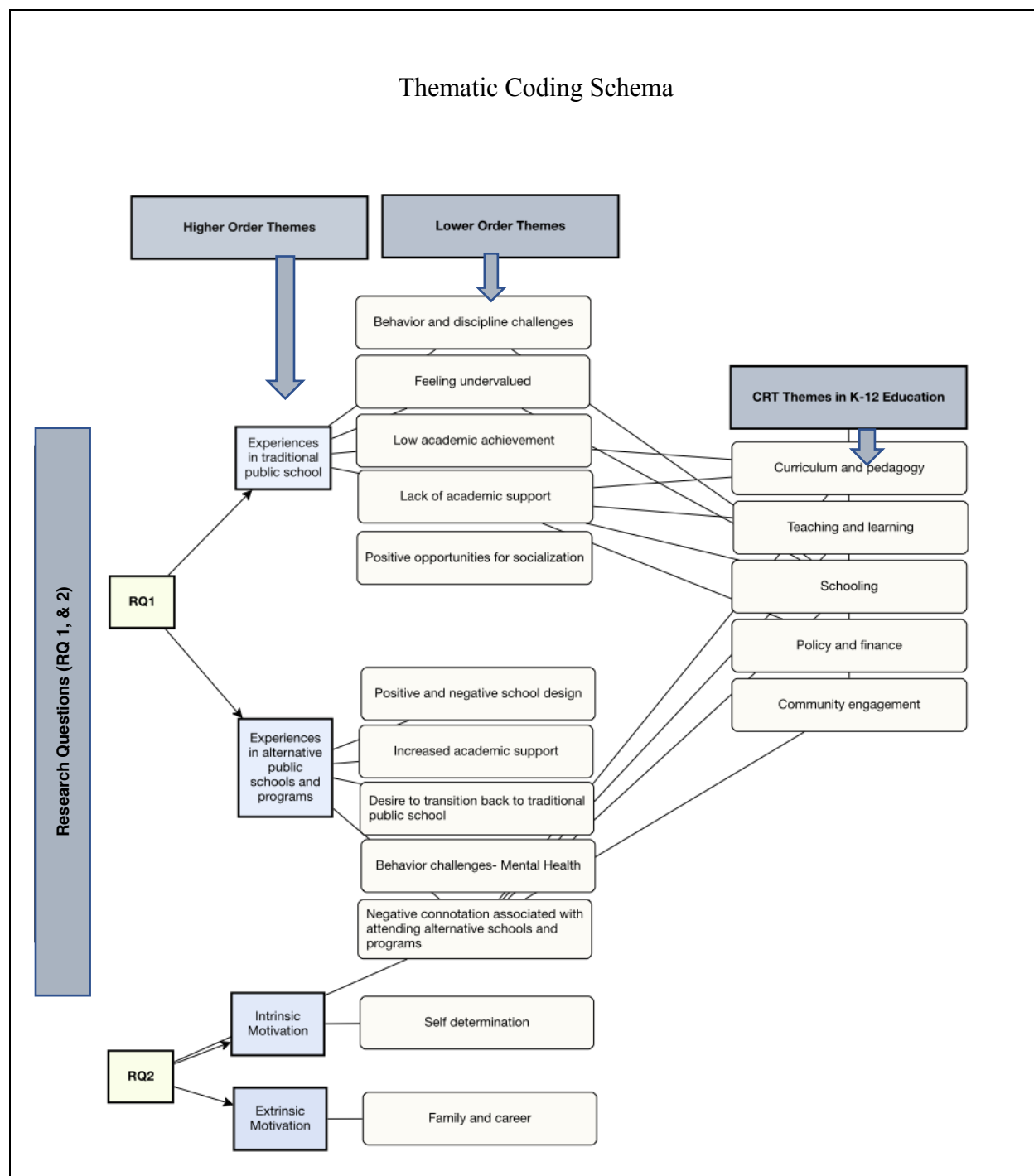
Lastly, when the participants discussed “motivation for reengaging and completing high school in an alternative school or program” two higher order themes emerged as:

- intrinsic motivation and,
- extrinsic motivation.

Once the lower order themes were identified, a second analysis was conducted to determine if any of the themes corresponded with one or more of the CRT in K-12 education themes that were presented throughout the literature review: (a) curriculum and pedagogy, (b) teaching and learning, (c) schooling, policy and finance, and (d) community engagement (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). As a critical race advocate, the researcher was mindful with identifying and calling out instances of educational racism and racist educational policies that are exclusionary of BIPOC youth within this study. Figure 1 represents the thematic coding schema that was developed and illustrates the alignment of the higher and lower order themes and their relationships to CRT themes in K-12 education.

Figure 1

Thematic Coding Schema - Alignment of RQs to Higher- and Lower-Order Themes



Note: CRT in K-12 Education. Adapted from “Critical Race Theory In Education: A Review Of Past Literature And A Look To The Future.” by M. C. Ledesma & D. Calderón, 2015, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(3), p. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557825>).

Findings for Research Question 1 (RQ1)

The first research question asks, how do former disconnected BIPOC youth ages 19-26 years of age describe their experience in traditional public school compared to that of alternative schools and programs? RQ1 focused on capturing the BIPOC participant's perspective of their lived experience as a BIPOC student in both a traditional and alternative learning environment. The findings from RQ1 are the result of a thorough analysis of data collected that were aligned with RQ1. Interview questions one through four (IQ1-IQ4) are related to the BIPOC participant's experience in traditional school settings while IQ5-IQ7 are related to their experiences in alternative schools and programs. Table 3 provides an outline of RQ1 and the corresponding interview questions.

Table 3

RQ1 and Aligned Interview Questions

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Questions	
RQ1 How do former disconnected BIPOC youth ages 19-26 years of age describe their experience in traditional public schools compared to that of alternative public schools?	Traditional Public School	<p>IQ1: Can you describe your experience as a (insert participant's race) student in a traditional school setting? How many traditional schools did you attend? If more than one, can you explain?</p> <p>IQ2: How much time did you spend in a traditional school setting?</p> <p>IQ3: What types of challenges did you face as a (insert participant's race) while attending a traditional school?</p> <p>IQ4: While attending a traditional high school, did you ever feel unwelcome, undervalued, or treated unfairly because of your race? Please explain.</p>
	Alternative schools and program	<p>IQ5: How was your experience at an alternative education school or program different than what you experienced at a traditional high school?</p>

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p>IQ6: What types of challenges did you face as a (insert participant's race) student while attending an alternative high school?</p> <p>IQ7: Did the alternative school help you to overcome the challenges, and if so, how?</p>

Results: Experiences in Traditional Public School

Five lower level themes emerged from the data analysis of IQ1-IQ4 that described the BIPOC participants' experience in traditional school settings are shown below. Table 4 represents a summary of the lower level themes represented in the findings related to the BIPOC participants' experiences in traditional public schools.

Table 4

BIPOC Youth's Experience in Traditional Public Schools

Themes Related to Traditional Public School	Number of Respondents (n=10)
I. Behavior and discipline challenges (Iachini et al., 2013)	9
a. Peer related issues (Iachini et al., 2013)	7
i. Fights	4
ii. Bullying	2
iii. Racist school policies and practices	5
iv. Racial tension among peers	2
b. Difficulty paying attention (Iachini et al., 2013)	4
c. Mental health issues	1
II. Feeling undervalued	8
III. Low academic achievement	7
a. Failing Grades	6
b. Testing difficulty (Iachini et al., 2013)	3
c. Challenges with math and reading	4
IV. Lack of academic support from teachers and counselors (Iachini et al., 2013)	7
V. Positive opportunities for socialization	6
a. Diversity of student population	5
b. Sports	1

Behavioral and Discipline Challenges.

When asked to describe their experience in traditional public school, nine participants mentioned experiencing some form of behavioral or discipline challenges. This theme was also highlighted in the Iachini et al. (2013) study and is consistent with the literature on student disengagement. However, when describing behavior and discipline challenges, most of the existing literature focuses on peer related issues such as fighting and breaking school rules and regulations. Surprisingly, the data analysis of this research study revealed the need to include behavioral challenges related to mental health issues and racial-trauma discussed below. As a result, three lower level themes were highlighted as being related to behavioral and discipline challenges in traditional public school: peer related issues, difficulty paying attention, and mental health issues.

Peer Related Issues. Peer related issues emerged as the most common theme related to behavior and discipline challenges. Peer related issues was mentioned by seven participants; four participants shared stories of being involved in or witnessing fighting on campus, while two participants experienced some form of bullying and racial tension among peers respectively.

Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male stated:

When I got to high school [there was] that added element of sticking to one group or another just dealing with overall pettiness coupled with [the] general frustration I had with just the schooling [and] the way schooling was structured, and I just ended up leaving.

Several other participants shared similar experiences of behavior and discipline challenges. For example, Participant D, a 23-year old Black male commented that he would get “in trouble a lot” and shared that “fighting” was a common behavior while he attended traditional public school.

Bullying was another peer related issue mentioned among the BIPOC participants.

Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male who was quoted above discussing

the pressure to conform to a social group, further explains how peer related issues and fighting played a factor in his educational disengagement:

For a while there was one instance where I wasn't going to school every day, so that made it easier for me to just not feel like I was being pressed into any one group or another, not having to deal with the people I didn't like on a daily basis.

Similarly, Participant E, a 22-year old, Latinx male shared that he “learned” to “stay quiet” and to himself, “[because] I was quickly picked on you know, or [would get] even more bullied.”

Participant J, a 26-year old Black and Latinx, biracial female also described being bullied because of, “the way I dressed, the way I spoke, how I handled myself and things like that.”

Likewise, Participant J shared how bullying and fighting created a school environment where she could not focus on learning. Participant J commented:

The one thing at school that bothered me was [that] girls would pick on me and start fights with me [and] provoke me and then when I would finally try to defend myself it would come out [that] I'm being volatile and I had to keep going to the school court. I'm basically saying that I'm always fighting. It was to the point where sometimes I felt like I didn't fit in so I would ditch my classes so that I can, you know, avoid certain situations.

Racist School Policies and Practices. In addition to experiencing peer related issues involving fighting and bullying, five participants stated that the discipline policies and practices implemented by the public schools they attended were unfair and at times racially biased. Two participants spoke about school policies and practices that they believed yielded negative consequences only for BIPOC youth. Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male described an experience in traditional public school classroom where Latinx males were “singled” out for behavior that was displayed by all students regardless of race:

She (teacher) had a tendency to single out a lot of the Latinx male students, and it wasn't simply from my class though there were a good number of us that went through it. Like there were numerous kids from all of her teaching blocks that had the same complaints about her that we did. She would usually sort of kick us out a lot for the simplest of mistakes or slights, one of which was talking while she was reviewing the material, or another one was if we came in late, even if it was immediately after the bell just rang, she would have us wait outside.

Participant I, a 23-year old Black female also spoke about being singled out as well as being labeled “loud” and “aggressive,” two common stereotypes associated with Black females (Morris, 2007). Participant I stated the following:

Sometimes, it'd be like, okay, I'll get into the office, and I know I'm louder, and you know I'm very outspoken, and I have a mouth so I speak on things a lot. But I honestly felt like at that school I was being picked on to the point that I actually had to get my mother involved because I got to a point where some days I would go to my class and do my work and I might whisper one thing to someone, and I'm getting yelled at. It actually got to the point where they were singling me out. And it was like, I'm almost the only black kid in the class, [me] and like maybe two others. And it's like, why aren't any of the other [non-black] kids getting in trouble. They're loud, they're on their phones and texting, they're chewing gum, they do all kinds of things [and] it's like it goes unnoticed.

Similarly, Participant E, a 22-year old Latinx male also makes mention of how he observed that students who were identified as “loud” or “aggressive,” and those who “stood out” were often singled out and disciplined.

Usually if you're different from like anybody else, if you are the more aggressive or you spoke too loud, they were quick to show you that you stood out, and that wasn't okay. So [in traditional school] they will call you out on it and try to, I guess, fix it. So sometimes they will kick people out of the school or detention, you know.

One participant, a 22-year old Latinx male discusses how he felt that it was always a lot of detention “especially, you know, freshman year sophomore year.” He continued on to state that detention was given for “pretty much anything.”

Participant E, a 22-year old Latinx male English language learner who migrated to California from Guatemala during elementary school shared the following experience as his first year experience in traditional public school, “Like I remember even getting in trouble for like drinking water after the bell rung because I guess I was like, thirsty, you know, and the principal caught me and like I was in big trouble.” He discusses how it was “difficult” to become accustomed to the school rules and regulations. Participant E discusses “unfair” disciplinary policies related to school mandated uniforms:

I remember, you would have to call your parents even if you forgot like your belt, or your shirt was not tucked in, for, like, the smallest things you would have to call your parents at work you know and kind of tell them oh like I didn't have my shirt tucked in. You know, so it was like extreme. I guess like it was way too extreme for me. It wasn't helpful you know. I don't feel like that was helpful, being like super strict. I feel like it just added even more stress about, you know, trying to learn because you were more focused on, you know, getting you uniform ready, you know you're more focused on that coming home than actually your studies. You were so worried about them finding the smallest thing to kind of get you in trouble.

Racial Tension Among Peers. In addition to fighting and bullying, two participants shared stories describing experiencing racial tension among peers while attending traditional public school. Both participants stated that racial tension on campus was a factor that led to their disengagement. Participant G, a 22-year old Black female, recounts how she often experienced racial tension between students on campus.

I went to school during the period of the Black versus Mexican. So every day was something, whether it was a fight or the school [had] been shut down because of a riot or something. It just wasn't a safe place for me. Similarly, Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male shares that “mistrust” and “aggression” was common between various racial groups on campus. He shares that “there was a good month where at least one fight broke out every day.”

Difficulty Paying Attention. Difficulty paying attention was the second theme that emerged as a behavior and discipline challenge experienced by the BIPOC participants while attending traditional public school. Four of the participants shared that they encountered “distractions” inside and outside the classroom that made learning difficult and challenging. Participant G, a 22-year old Black female commented:

It was always, you know, the crowded classrooms with at least 25 to 30 kids in one class...it was just so many of us in there that, you know, it was always a distraction. And I just got to a point where I just didn't want to go to school anymore, like I just didn't have the desire to finish.

Similarly, Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male also acknowledged that the crowded classrooms served as a distraction. Participant A shares, “But it was difficult [for the teacher] to [help] when they were the only adult in the in a classroom of 30 kids.”

Mental Health Issues. The last theme that was identified by BIPOC participants as a factor contributing to behavior and discipline challenges while attending traditional public school was that of mental health issues. Participants shared stories of mental health issues related to peer, family, and personal challenges that served as factors contributing to disengagement. Similarly, the following by Participant J, a 26-year old Black and Latinx, biracial female highlights the impact that mental health issues played in her disengagement:

I ended up not going to school for a while so I was pretty much out of school for about, maybe six to eight months. I had a boyfriend, and he was pretty much like my best friend, somebody that [who] was always there for me...he ended up leaving to college...one summer, I ended up drinking [a lot], and I had a mental breakdown so I had to go to the county mental health [facility].

Feeling Undervalued. It should be noted that when asked directly if a participant ever felt undervalued as a BIPOC in a traditional public school, only two participants answered yes. However, indirectly, every participant shared at least one experience of feeling undervalued at some point during the interview. Seven participants shared feeling excluded due to racist Anglocentric curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning, school culture, as well as disproportionate school discipline policies. For instance, Participant B, a 23-year old of Black male commented that he:

...never liked his “history class” because there was not that much about Black people, you know it’s only about slavery and then that’s it. [The lack of culturally relevant and racial inclusive curriculum] made me feel like I didn’t want to be there.

According to Lindsey et al. (2018), the teaching of history in the United States public school system has historically supported White privilege and entitlement. This privilege is often displayed through the adoption of history curriculum that exclude teachings centered around

defining caste systems and immigration status in the United States, and the role that the United States government has played in the historical oppression of BIPOC U.S. citizens.

Several other participants shared that they “didn't really feel like a fit in at a traditional school.”

Participant F, a 21-year old Latinx male illustrates how challenging it was to “fit” into the school culture because of his social class. Participant F commented:

All these schools that I went to after elementary school... were mostly... more privileged and I didn't really have that when I was younger. So, what I was doing [there]? I felt like it was easier for me [in elementary school] because I was, like, I don't have to prove myself to anybody, but when I went over here [traditional high school number two]. I felt like all these kids were more privileged; they had more than me, and I always had to prove myself to the teachers, to the people that [who] were there. It was just... I was just [getting] frustrated because I was like, I shouldn't have to feel like this. I shouldn't have to prove myself with my grades or the way I talk or the way I dress.

Additionally, Participant J, a 26-year old Black and Latinx, biracial female shared, “I kind of felt left out in regular high school because I went through a situation, it made me feel unsafe. It made me feel unsafe and made me feel like I was just there to be laughed at.”

Two participants shared experiences of racial microaggressions from teachers and school staff who led to feeling undervalued. Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male speaks about a teacher who used language that was belittling to the students:

It was always kind of difficult to get her [teacher] to talk in a way that wasn't condescending when she wasn't teaching up front, and even when she was teaching, she was simply droning on. [The teacher would] literally recite the material that was already in our textbooks and simply tell us [to] get into groups and figure it out.

During their interviews, several participants stated that the negative and unsupportive behavior of the school staff was normal. Some of the participants also answered “no” when asked if they had ever felt undervalued because of their race while attending traditional school. For example, Participant D, a 22-year old Black male stated that, “I feel like everybody was pretty much treated fairly and equally.” Several participants attempted rationalizing the negative school staff behavior and racist policies and practices. Three participants stated that the teachers

could not provide specialized academic support because of “crowded classrooms,” a phenomenon identified by Crosby et al. (1989) that seeks to describe how groups who are discriminated against process the experience. According to Arnett (1995), there are several responses to various forms of oppression. Personal/group discrimination discrepancy (PGDD) is a phenomenon that seeks to describe how groups who are discriminated against process the experience. Crosby suggests that groups rationalize the discriminatory experience while acknowledging that the discrimination exist.

Several of the BIPOC youth participants described the above mentioned experiences of racial microaggression and racist policies and practices as “normal.” For example, Participant G commented on the normality of not being able to “be” himself in the traditional public school environment, “because our society is built like that.” This finding is consistent with the idea of racial realism, the first tenet of CRT. Racial realism is the understanding that race and racism in America is an ordinary part of how society operates and, therefore, racial experiences are a normal part of life and can be difficult, if not impossible, to identify and resolve (Bell, 1980; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Additionally, the narratives shared by the BIPOC youth participants highlight the traumatic impact that systemic racial oppression has on BIPOC youth. According to Hardy (2013) and Hardy and Laszloffy (2007), the racial oppression that BIPOC youth experience in various societal settings including school often lead to interpersonal violence, internalized devaluation, internalized voicelessness, resulting in the display of negative behavior, hopelessness, low academic achievement, difficulty paying attention and an assaulted sense of self.

Low Academic Achievement. Low academic achievement was mentioned by seven of the BIPOC participants. This theme was also highlighted in the Iachini et al. (2013) study relative to the literature on student disengagement. The factors mentioned by the sample that

represented the lack of achievement were failing grades, low math and English skills, incomplete assignments, and the inability to pass standardized tests. The following excerpt from the interview with Participant C, a 26-year old Latinx female provides an example of low academic achievement and the role it played in disengagement from traditional school:

The standardized state high school exit exam [was difficult] because I always have trouble with the reading and writing. I struggle so much [and] I didn't pass none of them. The reading [was difficult]. I will say [that I] took that standardized state high school exit exam six times, maybe, or no I'd say five times... That was just stressing me out.

Several participants also spoke about “struggling” with math and English. Participant J, a 26-year old Black and Latinx, biracial female shared that

...and at that time, I really didn't know how to count money, and I suffered. Also, I don't comprehend the way that I'm supposed to. And I always had frickin' frequent ear infections. So I didn't quite understand the math problems; you know I could do basic math, but when it came to division, it was a very big struggle for me.

Similarly Participant G, a 22-year old Black female shared her experience attempting to complete Algebra 2 in a crowded classroom, “Cuz math isn't really my strongest suit. So, trying to learn Algebra 2 in a classroom that you just can't possibly learn anything, it just wasn't working out for me.” The narratives shared by the BIPOC youth participants are consistent with CRT in K-12 education that calls out issues with racist Anglocentric curriculum, standardized testing, and school discipline that serves as barriers to the academic success of BIPOC youth in the United States education system.

Lack of Academic Support. The lack of academic support is a theme that was also mentioned by seven of the participants. This theme was also highlighted in the Iachini et al. (2013) study and is consistent with the literature on student disengagement. Factors that emerged throughout the coding related to a lack of academic support included not having enough “one-on-one” time and the unwillingness or lack of care from teachers. Several participants mentioned experiencing “crowded classrooms” with “at least 25 to 30 kids in one class.” Participant G, a

22-year old Black female is quoted saying, “teachers weren't able to, you know, teach because it was just so many of us in there...” she continues on to express that the lack of academic support made her feel, “Not confident. Cuz math isn't really my strongest suit. So, trying to learn Algebra 2 in a classroom that you just can't possibly learn anything, it just wasn't working out for me.”

Several participants spoke of teachers having a lack of “motivation” or “care” to support students. Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male stated, “...because some of the teachers didn't want to help out others, [the teachers] didn't have that drive and motivation to help out the students.”

The lack of academic support was also highlighted when participants spoke about not being provided a clear roadmap of classes needed for graduation. Participant C, a 26-year old Latinx female shares:

I didn't receive much support and I kept going back to the counselors and teachers asking them what am I supposed to take? What classes do I really need? They just placed me in classes they thought I needed and they kept switching me from class to class. The last choice was just to send it to the next door to the alternative school.

Participant E, a 22-year old, Latinx male shared a similar experience of not being given an accurate individual plan for graduation,

Basically, I was told that by following that path [give] I was going to graduate senior year. [I was told] that if I follow through with that, that I was going to be able to graduate, but, you know, unfortunately, it wasn't like that.

The experiences described above include examples of microaggressions, stereotyping, stereotype threat and racist Anglocentric curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning, and deficit schooling of BIPOC youth.. According to the literature, BIPOC students face microaggressions in various academic environments. These subtle non-verbal assaults stem from the unconscious belief in white privilege and white superiority that is grounded in the historical and cultural belief that BIPOC are inferior (Davis, 1989). Examples of microaggressions in a

school setting include setting low academic expectations for a group of students based on race, making assumptions about how a student performs academically or behaves based on race, gender, or language, singling out a group of students based on their race, and establishing policies such as dress codes that ignore the difference in socioeconomic class and resources.

Microaggressions towards BIPOC can often manifest through the application of stereotyping and results in stereotype threats: when an underrepresented group is aware of existing societal stereotypes associated with the group in which they have membership, the knowledge of the perceived stereotype can present a “threat.” The underrepresented group then becomes concerned with confirming the stereotype through their actions. This threat can become so manifested within the underrepresented group that it interferes with their ability to academically succeed creating a negative academic self-concept (Kite & Whitley, 2016; Steele, 1995).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002), suggest racial microaggressions can have a negative, if not harmful, psychological effect on the target group impacting school performance. Students who experience microaggressions at school often feel undervalued, experience heightened anxiety, aggression, and frustration. The findings of this study add to the existing body of literature that show a strong relationship between the experiences of racial microaggressions, low academic, and disengagement. Many CRT in education scholars also suggest that the application of racist Anglocentric curriculum and pedagogy not only leaves BIPOC youth feeling undervalued but it also creates deficit thinking and an inequitable systemic approach to the schooling of BIPOC youth (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017)

The subthemes that emerged throughout the analysis of RQ1 described factors that contribute to the devaluation of BIPOC youth. According to Hardy and Laszloffy (2007) there are two forms of devaluation, societal and situational. Situational devaluation is related to a

specific event that attacks one's dignity and self-esteem whereas societal devaluation occurs as a result of one's membership into a particular group such as race, gender, or socio-economic status. BIPOC youth who experience racial microaggressions and racist policies within the United States education system may experience situational and/or societal devaluation.

Positive Opportunities for Socialization. Although BIPOC participants shared negative and challenging experiences while attending traditional public school that seemingly contributed to their disengagement, several participants highlighted positive aspects of the traditional school environment. Four participants identified the opportunity to socialize with friends, meet diverse people, attend social events, and participate in sports as positive experiences while attending traditional school. Participant I, a 23-year old Black female shares:

I don't like traditional school, only the social situation. The traditional school setting was fun. I feel like it's always been fun. It was cool, I got to learn a lot of different things, I got to meet a lot of different people.

In addition to being afforded the opportunity to “meet” and “connect” with peers, the ability to participate in sports was also highlighted as a positive attribute of traditional public school. Participant D, a 23-year old Black male who participated in high school athletics while attending traditional and alternative school shared, “I played football in high school all four years, so I mean I didn't really have too much of a bad experience, and I wanted a traditional school. Lastly, one participant shared that he enjoyed the opportunities to socialize with a diverse set of peers in traditional public school and saw it as an “opportunity to express myself.”

The experiences described above all express the need and desire for positive opportunities to socialize with peers outside of the classroom. According to sociologist Jeffrey J. Arnett (1995), there are three primary purposes of socialization: develop impulse control and consciousness, learn societal expectations and social-roles, and to establish cultural norms and shared values and beliefs.

Results: Experiences in Alternative School and Programs

RQ1 was designed to solicit input from the BIPOC participants to describe their experience and challenges while attending an alternative education school or program. Interview questions IQ5-IQ7 are related to their experience in alternative schools and programs. Table 5 provides an outline of RQ1 and the corresponding interview questions related to alternative education schools and programs.

Table 5

BIPOC Youth's Experience in Alternative Schools and Programs

Themes Related to Experiences in Alternative Schools and Programs		Number of Respondents (n=10)
VI.	Positive and Negative Alternative school design (Iachini et al., 2013)	9
	a. Student Centered	7
	b. Local Public School District alternative school	2
	c. Lack of structure	2
VII.	Increased Academic Support	8
VIII.	Behavior challenges (Mental health issues)	1
IX.	Desire to transition back to traditional public school	4
X.	Negative connotation	3

Five lower level themes emerged from the data gathered from IQ8-IQ10 that described the BIPOC participants' experiences in alternative school and program settings: positive alternative school design, increased academic support, behavior challenges, the desire to transition back to traditional public school, and the negative stigma associated with alternative attending alternative schools and programs. and the lack of structure. When prompted to discuss their experiences as BIPOC students in alternative education environments, nine of the participants mentioned the positive student centered school design, eight mentioned receiving individualized academic support, and, surprisingly, seven participants stated that at some point while attending an alternative school or program they had a desire to transition back to

traditional public school. Table 7 illustrates the alignment between the lower level themes represented in the findings related to the participants' experiences in alternative schools and programs.

Positive Alternative School Design

When asked to describe their experience in an alternative school or program, nine participants spoke about the alternative school or program's positive school design including a student centered environment, culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy, and a welcoming and supportive school climate and culture. This theme was also highlighted in the Iachini et al. (2013) study, consistent with the literature on student disengagement. Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male commented:

You got the feeling that they all genuinely wanted to see every person who came into their classroom graduate. They would say what you did after high school was entirely up to you, but you can tell that they act really wanted to see you graduate.

Similarly, Participant F, a 21-year old Latinx male discussed how "nice" and "comfortable" the alternative school staff was. He went on to state that, "the staff members are, like, great; all the teachers are great too. And I really enjoyed being there."

Throughout the interview process, the words "care," "genuine," "comfortable," and "family" were used by the participants when describing their experience in an alternative school or program. For example, there were ten references to the word "care" when participants described in the alternative education school environment. Participant E, a 22-year old, Latinx male commented:

...people [staff] checked up on you. You know they do. They want you to succeed. So they basically show, caring [care] towards the student. It wasn't just towards me but everyone. I've noticed [the staff cared for] even students who weren't the best work with. Some students are more hostile. Some people don't even want to be there but the alternative school staff were still helpful [which is] different from the traditional high school.

One participant expressed, “It was definitely way more comfortable. I was definitely at home. It was a little bit more free.” Similarly, Participant F, a 21-year old Latinx male also spoke about how the alternative school created a sense of family among the students and staff and shares the following:

So, we had, like, we were, like, our motto was, we're a family, because we were so small. The school was, like, what the graduating class was only 180 students. So it was easy to adapt to that school, like, I really liked going there. Yeah.

He goes on to speak about the alternative school’s commitment to create an inclusive, student-centered and culturally relevant environment that is reflective of the student population:

The first alternative school I went were LGBTQ safe, and they really pushed, like, our cultures, like they had everyone take a language class, we learned everything about, like, Hispanic [Latinx] cultures, like Argentinian cultures we learned, we would do, like, this whole thing for every month, like, like for Black history month we had, like, a whole, like, like, like a pep rally. They [the school] wouldn't ever let us feel, like, like bad. It was a really diverse school.

Other students discussed the flexible schedule that was provided at alternative schools and programs. Two students shared how having the option to decide what times to attend class supported their reengagement. Participant B, a 23-year old Black male recalls how the flexible school schedule made it easier for him to attend class, “at 12 o’clock in the afternoon compared to getting up at 6 o’clock a.m.” While Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male states that the alternative school:

...was a lot more flexible. I didn’t feel as pressed to conform to any one standard. For a while there was one instance where I wasn’t going to school, every day, so that made it easier for me to just not feel like I was being pressed into any one group or another, not having to deal with the people I didn’t like on a daily basis and all the teachers there in that [alternative] environments were almost always like hopeful.

Similarly, Participant A also shared that he appreciated attended alternative school for less hours a day compared to traditional public school. He comments:

...on top of that, the hours [at the alternative school] weren't as long. I'm pretty sure we had two hours less or at least an hour less [at the alternative school] than our day than a traditional school. The alternative school required less hours of attendance.

Although most students found the flexible schedule to be an asset, several found that "there wasn't as much structure" at the alternative schools and programs. Participant I, a 23-year old Black female shares her thoughts that personal accountability was the most challenging issue for her while attending an alternative school or program, "The most challenging part was it being on my own. Like me, me coming when I could and me leaving when I could. That was the most challenging thing." She describes what she sees as the difference in traditional and alternative public schools as it relates to structure and accountability:

The only difference is pretty much you're on your own when you go to alternative schools, it's like you're an adult. You bring yourself, you check in on your own, you come at on your own, you do the work on your own, everything is on your own, this really shows you who you are and your focus, and what you really want. Traditional school is eight o'clock. You be there or you get a called home, or you get some type of notice you know since home to let your parents and things know you know what's going on. You have no choice of, you know, coming and going in doing your work and all these other things you do your work, you come on time and be there.

Lastly, one student highlighted a difference in school structure and climate between the local public school district alternative schools and non-district public alternative schools. Participant I, a 23-year old Black female stated:

And when it comes to the [local public school] district's alternative school, I feel like it was just a, you know, a school for bad kids, it's like okay you guys are bad; you guys didn't graduate, or you guys didn't do what you're supposed to do, so now it's like, you know, come on up here do your work and be quiet sit down and get to it. Like you need help okay, but I really don't want to help you, but I will because that's my job.

She goes on to describe how the negative and unsupportive nonverbal communication and racial microaggressions at the local public school district alternative school made her feel undervalued and eventually lead to her disengagement yet again, from public school:

[I felt like the staff believed that] Oh, that's another black girl another black kid not doing nothing with their life or, you know, slacking in life or a look at the little black girl didn't

graduate or something like that or, you know. Not even just a Black girl look at the Hispanic girl Oh she not doing nothing with their life, or, you know, different things like that. I felt like they didn't have to say it was a look on their face or the or the interaction between one another. And it just got to a point, I did not like that school so I left.

Increased Academic Support

In addition to experiencing a positive student centered school design, BIPOC participants spoke about experiencing an increase in academic support while attending alternative schools and programs. This theme of increased academic support was also highlighted in the literature and in the Iachini et al. (2013) study. Participants spoke positively about the curriculum and pedagogy, program choice, one-on-one support, opportunities for community engagement and career technical education. For example, Participant C, a 26-year old Latinx female stated:

She [teacher] was really supportive she was always in contact with me, she was always a phone call away or email... like anytime she would respond back quickly. I really like her teaching and her support. She made it really easy for me.

Another participant spoke about the teachers providing additional academic support through “skype, past school hours” and feeling as if “They [the teachers] wanted to make sure you understood the work whether you had to stay after school for a few hours or come in early for a few hours. Participant F, a 21-year old Latinx male expressed:

[If] we had any questions, [or] help studying, or like needed extra help the teachers were always there to help us. If we didn't understand something, you can just go with them [teachers] and they'll help you. The counselor was always there if I needed something. They were always there.

Similarly, Participant G, a 22-year old Black female recalls how a teacher from the alternative school would support her by providing additional academic support:

As far as, like, the tutoring outside of school, sometimes she'll help, you know, and I've never had a teacher that actually pushed me and wanted to see me do great. And now to this day she's still in my life, even though she's not my teacher anymore.

Several participants who struggled with math while attending traditional public school successfully completed the requirements at alternative schools and programs. Participant B, a 23-

year old Black male discusses how the smaller class size supported her academic success, “My math class in the alternative school only had, like, 10 people in there so there was a lot of one on one. I didn’t want to do the math course online because I needed support.” Another participant expressed that “the difference at an alternative school with learning math was that there were not many kids in the classroom. She comments:

Because it wasn't that many kids in the classroom the teacher was able to take their time and teach you. I think when [the] classrooms are full [the teachers] kind of rush through the lesson. So it's like you [students] get it or you don't.”

Similarly, Participant H, a 19-year old Latinx male also mentioned how their math teacher provided additional academic support during outside of normal school hours, “So pretty much my math teacher would stay the whole week after school for like an hour and 30 minutes to help me out with the lesson and everything else to make sure I completely understand it.”

One participant who failed Algebra 2 while attending traditional school spoke about her mathematic success at alternative school and how she transitioned into advanced placement (AP) courses:

So, when I started with alternative school, I was bored, like, with the work that was given me. I guess it just wasn't enough for me. So, the teacher suggested AP classes. So I started taking AP classes at the alternative school when I started, And from then on from the beginning I just started accelerating.

Additionally, Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male also describes a positive experience transitioning from general classes to AP classes traditional public school.

The only reason I started picking up AP courses was because one of my teachers recognize that, more than anything else, I was just bored. She went out of her way to try and make me more engaged by giving me more stuff [classwork] to do.

Fortunately, Participant A’s teacher recognized that his lack of engagement was not out of defiance or a lack of skill but his behavior was a response to not being challenged academically.

However, there is an underrepresentation of BIPOC students in advanced and gifted programming in the United States (Ford et al., 2008; Gallagher, 1985; Karnes & Lawrence, 2002). According to Ford et al. (2008) the lack of identification, recruitment, and placement of Black students in AP and gifted programming is largely due to overt and covert racial microaggressions and deficit thinking educators. Many experts believe that the United States education system has centered student achievement around standardized testing which was developed based on the values and beliefs of the dominant culture (Gallagher, 1985). This racist educational policy and practice discriminates against BIPOC students and their right to a fair and adequate education (Ford et al., 2008; Gallagher, 1985; Karnes & Lawrence, 2002).

In addition to receiving increased academic support, one BIPOC youth, Participant I, a 24-year old Black female, shared that the autonomy, provided at an alternative school through “flexible” scheduling and course assignments, sometimes served as an issue. She commented, “At an alternative school you're kind of on your own. You're like an adult you make sure you come you do your work.”

Mental Health Issues

Noteworthy is that, similarly to the shared traditional public school experiences, the topic of mental health issues was raised when BIPOC participants described their experiences in alternative schools and programs. The identification of this theme within the data analysis of both traditional public and alternative public schools and programs is consistent with the literature on youth disengagement and mental health. Youth who experience mental health challenges are more likely to disengage from education, and if untreated, are more likely to remain disengaged throughout their adult lives. Participant F shared the following, when describing his experience with mental health issues in an alternative education school, “So the main thing that made me stop attending alternative school, was[that] my grandma; she passed.,

She had like, stage two or three of cancer.” He also spoke about having difficulties dealing with a “breaking up” with his girlfriend while attending alternative school.

Desire to Transition Back to Traditional Public School

Surprisingly, four participants described a desire to transition back to traditional public school at some point during their enrollment in an alternative school or program. Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male expressed that, “I had originally intended to try to just build up enough credits to go back into a traditional school setting” and shares that the environment at the alternative school was so positive that he remained there and graduated. One participant shared that he transitioned back to traditional public school for a short period to participate in team sports. He said, “Yeah, I did go back, I went back for my junior year because I left sophomore year after football season; I left traditional school and went to alternative school to make up classes from my sophomore year.” However, he mentions that:

After the season was over, you know, my mom and pops said that I should stay at the alternative school. They thought it was a better move for me to go back to the alternative school, just so I can finish. I didn't want to slack off any of the classes, because my parents know they know me. They knew that if I stayed in traditional school, there'd be distractions and I probably wouldn't be going to classes, you know.

Findings for Research Question 2 (RQ2)

The second research question asks: How do former disconnected BIPOC youth 19-26 years of age describe their academic and social needs and experiences at various entry and exit points throughout their journey to alternative education program completion? Research question 2 (RQ2) focuses on capturing the participant's perspective of their social and emotional needs while attending an alternative learning environment. The findings from RQ2 are the result of a thorough analysis of data collected from ten interviewees that were aligned with RQ2. Table 6 provides an outline of RQ2 and the corresponding interview questions.

Table 6*RQ2 and Aligned Interview Questions*

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ2 What factors led formerly disconnected BIPOC youth 19-26 years of age to successfully reengage and complete alternative education programs at various entry and exit points throughout their journey to program completion?	<p>IQ8: Can you recall what motivated you to reengage and subsequently graduate from an alternative education school or program?</p> <p>IQ9: Can you think of any changes that alternative schools should make to attract more disconnected minority youth?</p>

Motivation for Reengagement and Completion

Two lower level themes emerged from the data analysis of IQ8-IQ9 that described the participants' motivation for re-engagement and high school completion from an alternative school or program: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Table 7 illustrates the lower level themes represented in the findings related to the participants' motivations.

Table 7*BIPOC Youth's Motivation for Re-engagement and Completion*

Themes Related to BIPOC Youth's Motivation for Re-Engagement and Completion	Number of Respondents (n=10)
X. Intrinsic Motivation (Iachini et al., 2013)	8
a. Self-determination (Iachini et al., 2013)	
XI. Extrinsic Motivation (Iachini et al., 2013)	4
a. Referred by others (Iachini et al., 2013)	
b. The need to support family (Iachini et al., 2013)	
c. The need for sustainable income (Iachini et al., 2013)	
d. To prove something (Iachini et al., 2013)	

Intrinsic Motivation

Eight participants expressed that self-determination was what led them to re-engage in school through alternative education and complete their high school graduation requirements.

Participant A, a 22-year old Black and Latinx, biracial male said:

...uhm, I built up enough self-discipline to just get myself up out of bed or make my way down there. I knew that I needed to graduate so it was something that I was willing to work for at that point.

One participant expressed that as he became older, his priorities and needs changed. Participant D, a 23-year old Black male, said, “And I guess as the as the years go by, you kind of mature into something else. You know it's kind of like a responsibility now, like, you got to get it done.” He stated that he was also motivated not “to be one of those kids you know... who are older than 18 you know still going there [alternative school].” Two participants shared that they “always” had the “idea” that they would “go back to school” and complete. Participant C, a 26-year old Latinx female shares:

I wanted to go back to school, I wanted to do something, but you know, like when you have a kid and you have a full-time job, you just can't, and I've been doing that for six, yeah about six years, and two years ago I went to the third alternative school because I really wanted to finish. I was still working, my kid was already going to school, and I say man, well, maybe I could probably fix out my schedule and go back to school and finish.

Similarly, Participant F, a 21-year old Latinx male discussed how he “stopped caring” what others thought. He states:

So, my main motivation was I stopped caring about what other people thought about me. I stopped caring about, like, what my parents wanted and what other people wanted for me, I did it for myself... I wanted to prove that I could finish... So I just wanted to prove something to myself that I could do it because I knew I could.

Extrinsic Motivation

Four participants spoke about extrinsic factors that motivated them to re-engage in school through alternative education and complete their high school graduation requirements. Two

participants shared that their family motivated them to re-engage and graduate. Participant G, a 22-year old Black female, shared, “My Mom. My mom more so, ‘cuz she wanting me to, you know, obviously graduate from high school. So just her actually taking the initiative to find something that would, you know suit my learning.” While one participant expressed that a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors led to his re-re-engagement and completion:

It was a culmination of things; it was the stress that I was putting on my family and this internal stress that I was receiving from them [family] for not being in a school setting. There was [also] the just the general apathy and constant state of aggression that I had during the period where I wasn't in school. I'd simply gotten tired of it. I was bored of not having anything else to do.

Lastly, two students shared that the motivation to re-engage and complete their high school requirements came from their children. Participant I, a 23-year old Black female, states:

Don't ever let anybody tell you education doesn't matter, because in this life that we live, we need an education. In everything you do, you need an education, and education helps you so much. I wanted my daughter to understand that you need a diploma to get a good job. You can't get a good job without a diploma, and even without a job, you need education, just to be a better you. I wanted her to understand and know, I went back to school for you. I couldn't dare continue on with my life without going back to school and getting a diploma because I had a fear of my child asking me or telling me, ‘well mom where's your diploma or you don't got a diploma so I don't have to get one.’ I couldn't have that on my heart. I couldn't carry that. So I, for sure, went back to school that was something that motivated me was my children.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that led to disconnection and the factors that serve as motivation for BIPOC youth re-engagement and to understand how these factors influenced or shaped the BIPOC participants’ journey through alternative education. This chapter provided insight into the lived experiences of ten BIPOC youth who re-engaged and graduated from an alternative school or program in Southern California. As a result of this study ten overall themes were identified that described the lived experiences of BIPOC youth in traditional and alternative public schools and programs. Five lower order themes emerged that

represented the lived experiences of the sample BIPOC population while attending traditional public school: behavior and discipline challenges, feeling undervalued, low academic achievement, lack of academic support, and positive opportunities for socialization. Additionally, five lower order themes emerged that represented the lived experiences of the sample BIPOC population while attending alternative public schools and programs: positive and negative school design, increased academic support, desire to transition back to traditional public school, behavior challenges related to mental health issues, and a negative connotation associated with attending alternative schools and programs. Lastly, two lower order themes emerged that represented the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that led the sample BIPOC population to re-engage and graduate from public alternative schools and programs; self-determination and family and career. The themes identified within this study included underpinnings of critical race theory, their narratives highlighted instances of racial microaggressions, stereotypes and stereotype-threat, PGDD, racist educational policies and practices, societal and situational devaluation, as well as describes positive interactions with teachers and peers. Chapter 5 presents the study's conclusions, implications for scholarship and practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In summary of information presented in Chapter 2, although 30% of disconnected youth in the United States re-engage before reaching 24 years of age, over 2.5 million youth remain disconnected throughout their adult lives. Black and Latinx youth, regardless of socioeconomic status, disconnect from education before obtaining a high school diploma at higher rates compared to their white peers. Disconnected BIPOC youth are more likely to engage in violent and criminal behavior, substance and drug abuse, and suffer from mental health challenges compared to their white peers. However, many alternative schools and programs are successful in serving BIPOC youth—whose academic and social needs historically have not been met by the traditional K-12 public school system—by providing short- and long-term educational options. Prior research has investigated the structure and program models of alternative schools and revealed its origin in the Civil Rights Movement as a way to counter the oppressive and substandard education offered to BIPOC youth in traditional school environments. Today, scholars continue to record first-hand accounts of racist Anglocentric curriculum, pedagogy, policies, and practices within the United States education system that serve as a barrier to the academic success of BIPOC youth. However, in spite of the various systemic racial challenges experienced by BIPOC youth, many participants exhibited self-determination and resilience through intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, and re-engagement and graduation from alternative education schools and programs.

Previous studies have examined the disconnection and subsequent re-engagement of youth within the K-12 school system but very few, if any, sought to examine the specific experiences of BIPOC youth in traditional public schools compared to their experiences in alternative education from a critical race perspective. Therefore, the researcher of this study sought to fill the gap in literature by gaining a greater understanding of the alternative education

journey of BIPOC youth from a race-based perspective. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to understand the factors that led to educational disconnection and the factors that served as motivation for BIPOC youth re-engagement and to understand how these factors influenced or shaped the participants' journey through alternative education. More specifically, the researcher sought to address the following research questions to add to the existing body of literature on BIPOC youth and alternative education.

This research study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do former disconnected BIPOC youth ages 19-26 years of age describe their traditional school experience compared to their alternative school experience?
2. What factors led formerly disconnected BIPOC youth 19-26 years of age to successfully re-engage and complete alternative education schools and programs at various entry and exit points throughout their journey to program completion?

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is comprised of CRT. In education, CRT examines policies and practices grounded in racist social ideologies, values, and structures that are barriers to educational equity. The application of CRT in education requires a historical understanding of racism to support the collective goal of supporting racial and social justice through the sharing of “counter-narratives” describing the lived experiences of oppressed people. The conceptual framework that underpins this study is SDT which proposes that intrinsic motivation is based on three inherent psychological needs; relatedness, competence, and autonomy. In education, self-determination theory is used to understand what environmental factors within the school walls and beyond the school house impact intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, and psychological wellness (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Purposive sampling was used to select ten participants who met the following criteria:

- graduated from an alternative education program or school,

- and were in Southern California within five years of the study date,
- candidates identified as Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color and,
- were between 17 and 24 years of age when they graduated.

Data were gathered through semi structured interviews where the researcher asked a series of nine open ended interview questions related to their experience in traditional and alternative education. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and then checked for accuracy. An a priori coding scheme was used to identify initial primary themes for this study. Additional themes were identified through an iterative analysis of the interview data for descriptors that emerged throughout the narratives and that aligned with the literature review, conceptual framework, and the theoretical framework.

Summary of Key Findings

RQ1 sought to describe the participants experience as BIPOC youth in traditional and alternative public schools and programs. Behavior and discipline challenges, feeling undervalued, low academic achievement, lack of academic support, and positive opportunities for socialization were identified as lower order themes related to the BIPOC youth participants experiences in traditional public school. Almost exclusively, the BIPOC youth participants of this study shared narratives of feeling undervalued and outcasted in traditional public schools due to racist educational policies, practices, racial microaggressions, racist Anglocentric curriculum and pedagogy, and issues with peers. BIPOC youth participants stated that they did not “fit in” in traditional public school and teachers “didn’t care” about their success. BIPOC youth participants also shared experiences of racist disciplinary policies “singling out” Black and Latinx male youth for infractions made by all students regardless of race. The participants shared that teachers displayed a “lack of regard towards my academic well-being” and commented that the classrooms were “over-crowded” creating a sense of “frustration” and an environment not

conducive to learning. Black youth participants stated that non-inclusive curriculum such as history courses neglected to include the rich, pertinent, and inclusive history of Blacks “that only [discussed] slavery.” The Black youth participants felt “like I didn’t want to be there.” Black female participants shared experiencing racial microaggressions and stereotypes of being “loud” and aggressive” that resulted in feeling undervalued.

Often sharing negative experiences in traditional public school, many of the BIPOC youth participants, however, shared that they enjoyed the positive opportunities for socializing with peers. BIPOC youth participants described participating in sports, attending pep rallies, and other social events as the “best part” of attending traditional school. Surprisingly, several participants stated that they desired to return to traditional public school at some point during their alternative education experience. This finding is consistent with CRT in K-12 education, racial realism, and PGDD all of which were highlighted throughout the existing literature.

RQ1 also sought to describe the BIPOC youth participants experience in alternative public schools and programs. Positive and negative school design, increased academic support, mental health issues, the desire to transition back to public school, and a negative stigma associated with alternative education were identified as lower order themes related to the BIPOC youth participants experiences in alternative public schools and programs. Almost exclusively, the BIPOC youth participants of this study shared narratives of “caring” staff, teachers who provided “one-on-one” academic support, “smaller” class sizes, a sense of autonomy through “flexible” scheduling and individualized learning plans, and a sense of “family” when describing alternative schools and programs. However, it is noteworthy to mention that one BIPOC youth participant, Participant I, a 25- year old Black female, shared that she believed that alternative education programs and schools should create more “structure” and that she found the autonomy given with “flexible” scheduling and assignment due dates sometimes challenging.

RQ2 sought out to understand what factors led the BIPOC youth participants to re-engage and subsequently graduate from an alternative school or program. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors were identified as lower order themes related to the BIPOC youth participants re-engagement and completion with underpinnings of Self Determination Theory (SDT). Intrinsic factors that emerged throughout the data analysis supporting BIPOC youth participants re-engagement and completion in alternative schools and programs included, self-discipline, maturity, and a desire to change. These findings are consistent with the three elements of self-determination as related to SDT, relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Subsequently, the extrinsic factors that emerged throughout the data analysis supporting the BIPOC youth participants re-engagement and completion in alternative schools and programs included, the need to support family, to obtain sustainable income, and wanting to prove something.

Lastly, several of the BIPOC youth participants stated that there is negative stigma associated with alternative schools and programs. The BIPOC youth participants used the descriptors “jail,” place for “bad kids” and only for “Black” and “Latinx” students who are “wasting their lives” as stereotypical to describe alternative public schools and programs, especially alternative schools within local public school districts. This finding is consistent with CRT in education and the existing literature suggesting that the negative stigma associated with alternative education can lead to stereotyping threat and serve as a barrier to BIPOC youths’ academic success and continued disconnection.

Conclusions

Based on the results from this study, four main conclusions were reached related to the alternative education journey of BIPOC youth and will be discussed in greater detail further:

- There is need to change the negative stigma associated with public alternative education in the United States to support the re-engagement and completion of disconnected BIPOC youth in public alternative schools and programs.
- BIPOC youth feel valued in public alternative schools because of the student centered nature and approach to curriculum and pedagogy, policies, and practices.
- BIPOC youth desire the social acceptance of going to traditional schools.
- Disconnected BIPOC youth are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to re-engage and complete public alternative school and programs.

Conclusion 1

The negative stigma that is associated with public alternative education in the United States to support the re-engagement and completion of BIPOC youth in public alternative schools and programs is real and present. Several of the BIPOC youth participants spoke about the negative stigma associated with public alternative schools and programs. For example, one BIPOC youth participants shared that “jail” and “prison” were terms often used to describe public alternative schools and programs. Often this negative stigma serves as a barrier keeping BIPOC youth from re-engagement and graduation for fear of stigmatization. Additionally, this stigma is associated with the BIPOC youths’ desire to be socially accepted and return to tractional public school, regardless of having negative experiences. Although this is a significant challenge, the need to change the perception of—or possible “rebranding” of—public alternative schools and programs at the state, local public district, school site, and community level will help to better support the re-engagement and completion of BIPOC youth in public alternative schools and programs.

Conclusion 2

BIPOC youth feel valued in alternative schools and programs because of the student centered approach to curriculum and pedagogy, policies, and practices. Almost exclusively, each BIPOC youth participant stated that they felt valued and supported while attending alternative public schools and programs. For example, Participant D, a 22 year old Black male, not only shared that she experienced more academic support from teachers in alternative school, but also felt a sense of value, “the teachers talked to the class” and were “willing to collaborate” with students. BIPOC youth participants expressed a feeling of belonging and often compared the alternative school setting to an extended supportive “family.” This conclusion is consistent with the literature related to alternative education and BIPOC youth.

Conclusion 3

BIPOC youth from this study expressed the desire for social acceptance in traditional public schools. Almost exclusively the BIPOC youth participants expressed a desire to be socially accepted within the traditional school environment, as they rationalized instances of racial microaggressions and racist policies and practices in an effort to be accepted by the dominant culture. According to Deutsch and Krauss (1965) and Kite and Whitley (2016) human relationships are built upon social interactions. As humans, we desire to be valued through respect and trust. Students who feel valued are free from stressors that lead to low academic achievement and behavior and discipline challenges. The confirmation of their personal value within the school environment is necessary for healthy psychological and physical development, and the academic success of BIPOC youth (Hardy, 2013).

Conclusion 4

BIPOC youth are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to re-engage and complete public alternative school and programs. SDT proposes that intrinsic motivation is based on three

inherent psychological needs; relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Relatedness refers to an individual's ability to interact, connect, and develop close relationships with others that are built on trust and mutual respect and satisfaction. Competence is the level in which an individual can effectively achieve goals (Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Autonomy is a human need to initiate and experience behaviors independently (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). SDT seeks to explain how social environments can support and negate self-motivation, social functioning, and life outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Recommendations for Practice

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that lead to disconnection and the factors that serve as motivation for BIPOC youth re-engagement and to understand how these factors influenced or shaped the BIPOC participants' journey through alternative education. The findings of this research study found that BIPOC youth experience racist policies and practices including racial microaggressions, stereo-type threat, mental health issues while attending traditional public schools, that result in feeling undervalued, low academic achievement, and educational disconnection all of which are consistent with the themes of CRT in education. The findings also found that BIPOC youth were able to successfully re-engage and complete alternative education schools and programs because of its student centered approach to school design, pedagogy and curriculum, and because of the supportive and nurturing culture.

Additionally, the data of this research study also showed that BIPOC youth are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to re-engage and complete alternative schools and programs; however, BIPOC youth acknowledge that there is negative stigma associated with alternative education. This negative stigma can foster a desire for many BIPOC youth to return to traditional schools to gain social acceptance. Based on the findings of this research study, the

researcher recommends the following four recommendations to better support the re-engagement and completion of BIPOC youth from alternative schools and programs within Southern California:

Recommendation for Practice: One

At the state level develop an intentional and inclusive definition of alternative education from a strength based perspective that is representative of all alternative programs and school in Southern California that seek to re-engage and serve disconnected BIPOC youth. Currently, there is no standard definition for alternative education in the United States. Each state has been charged with developing a definition that best describes the programming that is offered throughout the state. According to the findings of this study, consistent with the literature, terms such as “jail,” “prison,” and school “for bad kids” are used to describe public alternative schools and programs in Southern California. Therefore, there is a critical need to reexamine and define public alternative education from a strength based description to better support the re-engagement and completion of BIPOC youth from public alternative schools and programs in Southern California.

Recommendation for Practice: Two

Normalize the application of anti-racist, trauma-sensitive, and culturally inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, policies, hiring practices, and best practices that are inclusive of social, emotional, and academic needs of BIPOC youth in both traditional public and public alternative schools and programs in Southern California. According to Hardy (2013), racial oppression is seldom taken into consideration during the development, implementation, and evaluation of interventions targeting BIPOC youth. Therefore, to lessen the disconnection rate and to better support BIPOC youth in re-engagement and completion of alternative schools and programs in Southern California, discussions around race and racism must become normalized in

the K-12 sector. This critical approach will serve as a foundation to not only support the psychological and cognitive development of BIPOC youth but will also support the sustainability of a student centered and racially inclusive approach to schooling in California.

Recommendation for Practice: Three

Build stronger communication and pathways between traditional and alternative public to lessen the percentage of BIPOC students who disconnect and increase the number of BIPOC youth who re-engage and successfully graduate from public alternative schools and programs in Southern California. The establishment of intentional and effective communication between traditional public and alternative public schools and programs through guided roadmaps and pathways towards high school graduation can better support intervention, re-engagement, and high school graduation for BIPOC youth in alternative education schools and programs in Southern California. The reevaluation and adjustment of existing individual academic roadmaps that outline the requirements and pathway options for graduation can better serve as a tool to better support the graduation of BIPOC youth. Academic roadmaps not only provide BIPOC youth with a clear academic pathway in the event that they choose to reintegrate into traditional public school but can also assist with a stronger communication between the academic counselor and teacher, neighboring districts, and alternative schools who are charged with accurately evaluating re-engaged students' needs. Lastly, communication between traditional public and public alternative schools can serve as an intervention tool to identify and support students who may be in danger of disconnection through a soft handoff of students.

Recommendation for Practice: Four

Create safe spaces in all traditional public and alternative schools and programs in Southern California where BIPOC youth are encouraged to share positive and negative experiences within school environments in an effort to counter existing narratives, call out

racism, highlight inclusive, anti-racist, and culturally relevant best practices, and to increase BIPOC youth's sense of value and belonging and that serve as a tool for educators gain insight into the lives of those they serve. According to Kafele (2009), educators who are successful in facilitating the learning of BIPOC youth, especially Black males, develop a critical awareness of youths' daily experiences and realities associated with race inside the school environment and within society. This critical awareness is developed by educators through developing an authentic and intentional interest in the needs, interest, challenges, and barriers of BIPOC youth (Hardy, 2013; Kafele, 2009).

Future Study Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that lead to disconnection and the factors that serve as motivation for BIPOC youth re-engagement and to understand how these factors influenced or shaped the BIPOC participants' journey through alternative education. However, this study consisted of a small sample population of BIPOC youth from a specific geographic location, Southern California. Therefore, the researcher makes recommendations for future research.

Recommendation for Future Studies: One

The researcher recommends further studies to examine BIPOC youths' experiences in alternative education by geographical location. This research study examines a small sample of total population of re-engaged BIPOC youth from one geographical location within the United States. Therefore, future research should examine the experiences of BIPOC youth within a variety of geographical variations utilizing CRT as a theoretical framework. Additionally, these studies could include a comparative analysis of the lived experiences of BIPOC youth in various regions within the United States and compare the findings.

Recommendation for Future Studies: Two

The researcher recommends that future studies should examine the perceptions of K-12 educators on the impact of racist curriculum and pedagogy as well as on the devaluation and academic failure of BIPOC youth. Additionally, further research should also examine the relationship between BIPOC youth disconnection and the mis-identifying and programming for BIPOC gifted youth. This topic is consistent with the findings of this research and the literature that suggests that BIPOC youth and those in low socioeconomic communities are less likely to be identified as high achievers and gifted due to their social status and therefore do not receive proper educational programming (Karnes & Lawrence, 2002). For example, according to Karnes and Lawrence, the identification of Black gifted youth has historically been reserved for the highest achieving Black youth ignoring many Black youth who may not test well, are disengaged, or those who may need additional academic support. The findings of such research can support the expansion of services to identify and develop appropriate programming for BIPOC gifted youth who may have disconnected from traditional public school.

Recommendation for Future Studies: Three

Additionally, the researcher proposes that further research should be examined on public alternative schools and programs that have successfully adopted anti-racist and culturally inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, policies, and best practices. For example, the practices that support the re-engagement of BIPOC youth in alternative schools and programs can occur through developing their personal sense of value. The researcher recommends that future research examine the policies and practices of existing public alternative schools and programs that have successfully re-engaged previously disconnected BIPOC youth through the adoption of anti-racist and culturally inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, policies, hiring practices, and best

practices that support the re-engagement of BIPOC youth in alternative schools and programs through developing their sense of value.

Examining such schools and programs will highlight strategies that improve learning outcomes for BIPOC youth. The findings from such research may serve to also guide pre-service programs on topics to include in certification curriculum to support pre-service teachers in how to support BIPOC student success. According to Lindsey et al. (2018) cultural proficiency enables schools to continuously evaluate and adjust the school culture to meet the needs of all students and the community. This adjustment in culture supports student achievement, positive teacher perceptions, lessen racial issues among students, and promotes inclusive and anti-racist curriculum, pedagogy, and best practices (Karnes & Lawrence, 2002; Lindsey et al., 2019).

Study Limitations and Internal Study Validity

The sample size and participant location served as study limitations. First, the sample size of this study reflects a small number of BIPOC youth who, at some point, disconnected and subsequently re-engaged and graduated from an alternative public school or program. The experiences of this small sample population may not reflect the experiences of the total population of BIPOC youth who, at some point, disconnected and subsequently re-engaged and graduated from an alternative public school or program. Secondly, the participants geographical location served as a study limitation. The 10 participants of this study were BIPOC youth 19-26 years of who attended traditional and alternative schools and programs in Southern California, specifically in Los Angeles County. This geographical limitation, although helpful in identifying specific factors contributing to disconnection and re-engagement of BIPOC youth in Southern California, may have limited the application or quite different results other geographic areas in the United States.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative narrative study aimed to assist alternative education programs and schools in better supporting BIPOC youth as they navigate the alternative education journey. This research is significant to the field of education because it addresses the current gap in literature that examines the intersectionality of race, racism, oppressive educational characteristic, and BIPOC youth disconnection. The findings of this study are also significant because they identify systems and processes that help to support the continuous re-engagement and completion of alternative education programs among BIPOC youth within a large metropolitan location.

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature on alternative education, BIPOC youth, CRT in K-12 education, and SDT. For example, the findings suggest that BIPOC youth are self-determined to re-engage and complete alternative schools and programs. Motivation for the re-engagement of BIPOC youth is both intrinsic and extrinsic. However, the findings of this study also yielded results that have not yet been examined within existing literature, such as the relationship between BIPOC youths' success in public alternative school and programs, and the feeling of being undervalued in traditional school settings.

As researchers, practitioners, and policymakers increase their understanding of how race, racism, and other forms of oppression contribute to educational disconnection, policies and systems of support can be developed to change the life trajectory of currently disconnected youth and prevent any future occurrences. As a BIPOC critical race advocate, community member, parent, and educator, it is the hope of this researcher that this study will promote the findings, conclusion, and recommendations to guide professional actions towards better supporting BIPOC youth academically. The researcher will also continue to examine policies and practices within the K-12 education system in the United States and call out instances of racism that serve

as barriers to the social, emotional, and academic success of BIPOC youth. Lastly, the researcher believes that the findings of this study will not only add to the existing body of literature but serve as a catalyst to support effective change in the United States public K-12 system to provide equal and equitable policies and practices for all learners, regardless of race.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Flyer

If you graduated from an alternative education program or school in Southern California, and you are Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC) and at least 19 years of age, you may be eligible to participate in this important research study!

The purpose of this research is to assist alternative education programs and schools in better supporting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as they navigate through alternative education programs. The information gathered from this study may help to improve existing programs and be used for academic research publication. All information obtained within the study will be treated with confidentiality.

In order to qualify, you must:

Be the age of 19 or older

Identify as Black, Indigenous, or other Person of Color – (BIPOC) including Native Americans, Latinx, Black, Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern

Have graduated from an alternative education school or program in Southern California within the past five (5) years

Have been between the ages of 17-24 years of age at the time of graduation



If you're unsure if you meet the requirements or have any questions, please call or email:

LaToya Brown, Researcher & Doctoral student, Pepperdine University

Location

Virtual (Zoom) or telephone interview for duration of up to one hour

CLICK HERE TO COMPLETE THE SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Email

Email Invitation

Dear [name],

My name is LaToya Brown. I am conducting a study on the alternative education experiences of minority youth in alternative education. If you are 19 years of age or older, identify as Black, Indigenous, or other Person of Color – (BIPOC) including Native Americans, Latinx, Black, Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern, have graduated from an alternative education school or program in Southern California within the past five (5) years, and were between the ages of 17-24 years of age at the time of graduation, you may participate in this research.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

Over 2.5 million youth remain disconnected from education or the workforce well into their adult lives. Nearly one-third of youth who remain disconnected are Black, Indigenous Persons of Color (BIPOC). The purpose of this research is to assist alternative education programs and schools in better supporting BIPOC youth as they navigate the alternative education journey. The information used may be used for academic research publication. All information obtained within the study will be treated with confidentiality.

What will be done during this research study

Participation in this study will require approximately one hour of your time. You will be asked to answer a series interview questions. Interview data will be collected through audio/video recording the interview through Zoom video conferencing service and transcribed using a laptop and word processing software

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study.

Minimal-risk to the study include:

During the interview procedure participants may be hesitant to disclose negative feelings or experiences related to their alternative education experience.

What are the possible benefits to you?

The results of this study will be used to learn about the factors that may support the prevention of disconnection as well as those factors that lead to the re-engagement and completion of BIPOC from alternative education schools and programs. Through this data, the researcher also hopes to identify strategies that alternative education schools and programs may implement to better support the academic and social needs of their BIPOC populations.

Participants of this study may gain a sense of empowerment, an increased knowledge of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that supported their decisions throughout the alternative education journey. Lastly, participants may experience a sense of accomplishment by contributing to research to help other disconnected BIPOC youth successfully re-engage and complete alternative education schools and programs.

How will information about you be protected?

Participants responses to this survey will be kept confidential. I understand that the researcher will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identify will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. The researcher will be the only person with access to the study data. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used to for interview notes and transcripts. and recording file names to ensure data safety. All files related to the study will be stored on locked, encrypted hard drive and a password protected laptop. The researcher will be the only one with access to the data files.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s):

[PI/SI names and contact information].

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB): Phone: 1(310)568-2305; Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing and submitting your survey responses, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

All interested individuals will need to first complete the participant screening questionnaire in order to verify eligibility for participation. If they meet the criteria, they will be asked to participate in the study. The link for the questionnaire is listed below.

[Click here to complete the Participant Screening Questionnaire](#)

APPENDIX C

Participant Screening Questionnaire

Click here to view the [Google Form](#)

Disconnected Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC) Individual

If you are a BIPOC who graduated from an alternative education program or school in Southern California between the ages of 19 - 29 years within the past five years, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

Please complete the screening questionnaire below to determine if you qualify. This questionnaire will be used to collect basic data and purposefully select participants. More in-depth information will be collected during the interview.



1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Do you identify as Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color - BIPOC? (including Native Americans, Asian, Latinx, Black, Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Please identify your specific race. _____
5. At any point during your K-12 schooling did you disconnect (drop out) from traditional public school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. After enrolling in an alternative education program or school, did you at any time drop out of an alternative education program or school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Did you graduate from an alternative education program or school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Were you between the ages of 17 and 24 years of age when you graduated?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Submit

Page 1 of 1

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

APPENDIX D

Participant Invitation Email

[Date]

Dear _____

Thank you for your interest in this research study focusing on disconnected youth and their journey to re-engagement and alternative education completion. The research findings will be used to support alternative education schools and programs in better supporting Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) navigate alternative education.

Based on your response to the participant screening questionnaire, you meet the necessary criteria to participate in the study. I would like to formally invite you to participate in this research study.

Your participation in this study will include:

- A virtual or phone interview conversation that should last no more than one hour. The interview will be scheduled based on your availability. The conversation will be recorded, and I will also take written notes.
- You will be sent a transcript of the interview to check for accuracy after the interview.

If you decide to participate in this study, the interview will be audio/video recorded, and I would like to ensure I have your permission to do so. Your responses to my interview questions will be used to learn about the factors that led to re-engagement to better support BIPOC in alternative education schools and programs.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Your identity will be kept confidential and the information that you share will be referenced by a pseudonym to protect confidentiality.

You may decide not to participate in this research study, or you may decide you wish to stop ("withdraw") at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University, and any previously collected information will be destroyed.

If you would like to participate in the study please read, sign, and return my email the attached Informed Consent Form.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,
LaToya Brown
Doctoral Student of Educational Leadership
Administration, and Policy
Pepperdine University

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form

Disconnected Youth: The Journey to Educational Re-engagement

The Alternative Education Experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Youth
You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by LaToya Brown, M.A. and Committee Chair, Barbara Mather, Ph.D. at Pepperdine University, because you are at least 19 years of age, identify as Black, Black, Indigenous, or other Person of Color – (BIPOC) including Native Americans, Latinx, Black, Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern, have graduated from an alternative education school or program in Southern California (within the past five years), and were between the ages of 17-24 years of age at the time of graduation. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is...

The overall purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the factors that led to the disconnection and the factors that led to the motivation for re-engagement. The purpose of this research is to assist alternative education programs and schools in better supporting BIPOC youth as they navigate the alternative education journey. The information used may be used for academic research publication. All information obtained within the study will be treated with confidentiality.

Study Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to ...

Participation in this study will require approximately one hour of your time. Participants will be asked to answer a series interview questions. Interview data will be collected through audio/video recording the interview through Zoom video conferencing service and transcribed using a laptop and word processing software.

Confidentiality. Participants responses to this survey will be kept confidential. I understand and that the researcher will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. The researcher will be the only person with access to the study data. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for interview notes and transcripts, and recording file names to ensure data safety. All files related to the study will be stored on locked, encrypted hard drive and a password protected laptop. The researcher will be the only one with access to the data files.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study include...
There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study.

During the interview procedure participants may be hesitant to disclose negative feelings or experiences related to their alternative education experience.

Potential Benefits to Participants and/or to Society

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society. The results of this study will be used to learn about the factors that may support the prevention of disconnection as well as those factors that lead to the re-engagement and completion of BIPOC from alternative education schools and programs. Through this data, the researcher also hopes to identify strategies that alternative education schools and programs may implement to better support the academic and social needs of their BIPOC populations.

Participants of this study may gain a sense of empowerment, an increased knowledge of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that supported their decisions throughout the alternative education journey. Lastly, participants may experience a sense of accomplishment by contributing to research to help other disconnected BIPOC youth successfully re-engage and complete alternative education schools and programs.

Payment/Compensation for Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants will not receive payment of compensations for participation.

Confidentiality

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored on a password protected computer in the principal investigators place of residence. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years. The data collected will be coded, de-identified, transcribed, and stored on an encrypted external hard drive for three years after the study has been completed and then permanently destroyed.

Participation And Withdrawal

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

Alternatives to Full Participation

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items which you feel comfortable. Your relationship with Pepperdine University will not be affected whether you participate or not in this study.

Emergency Care and Compensation for Injury

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

Investigator's Contact Information

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact LaToya Brown, Researcher and Barbara Mather, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor, if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

Rights Of Research Participant – IRB Contact Information

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment the participants are knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed participation is voluntarily and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

APPENDIX F

Candidate Non-Selection Email

[Date]

Dear _____

Thank you for your interest in this research study focusing on disconnected youth and their journey to re-engagement and alternative education completion. Based on your response to the participant screening questionnaire, you did not meet the necessary criteria to participate in the study. I would like to thank you for taking time to complete the participant screening questionnaire.

If you have any questions about the selection process, feel free to contact me at my email account.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

LaToya Brown
Doctoral Student of Educational Leadership
Administration, and Policy
Pepperdine University

APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol for Participants

Introduction

“Good morning (afternoon). My name is LaToya Brown. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to assist alternative education schools and programs in better supporting Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), youth who became disconnected as they navigated alternative education. This study is also being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy at Pepperdine University.

This interview should take no longer than one hour. I will first ask you a series of questions about your experience as a student in a traditional high school. For the second part of this interview, I will ask you a series of questions about your experience as a student in an alternative high school. The goal is to get your perception of your experience in a traditional and alternative educational setting. Please know that there are no right or wrong or answers. The information generated may be used for academic research or publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially. My job is to create a safe interview environment where you feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel. “
“Do you have any questions?” (If no questions, proceed to next prompt)

Video / Phone Recording Prompt

“If it is okay with you, I will start the recording of our interview session now. The purpose of recording the session is to ensure that I capture all the details of your responses, allowing me the ability to engage in conversation with you. All of the information you provide during this recorded session will remain confidential. I will digitally record the interview for accuracy, but at any point, you may ask me to turn off the recorder or refuse to answer a question. I will also take notes during the conversation. The transcript of this interview will include assigning a pseudonym so that there are no references to your true identity. Once the audio file has been transcribed, the file will be erased and your identity will remain confidential.”
The researcher will then ask the predetermined set of questions (See Appendix H)

Wrap-up

“Thank you so much for your time. Your willingness to share your experiences will help to improve the alternative education experience of Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color youth. I will email a copy of the transcript from this interview. Please review the document to ensure that I accurately captured your response to each question. Please send any corrections to me within one week. If I do not receive any corrections within the given time frame, I will assume that the transcript is correct.”

“If you wish, once the study is complete and the findings have been reported, you will receive a copy of the final report. Thank you again for your time and participation in this research study.”

APPENDIX H

Interview Questions

Background questions: to repeat for the purposes of this recording, could we please verify the information you provided on [restate Appendix B]

- How old are you?
- Where are you from/where were you born?
- How old were you when you graduated from high school/earned equivalent?
- What year did you graduate from high school?
- Questions related to the traditional school experience
- Can you describe your experience as a (insert participant's race) student in a traditional school setting? How many traditional schools did you attend? If more than one, can you explain?
- How much time did you spend in a traditional school setting, and can you describe your experience, for example, what did you like, and what were your challenges?
- The next question I am going to ask you is relative to race and racism.
- Did you feel unvalued or treated unfairly because of your race while attending a traditional school? If so, please explain.
- Questions related to the alternative school experience
- Can you recall what motivated you to reengage and subsequently graduate from an alternative education school or program?
- How many alternative education programs or schools did you attend?
- If more than one, can you explain?

- How was your experience at an alternative education school or program different than what you experienced at a traditional high school?
- What did you enjoy in an alternative high school, and how would you describe your most challenging experiences?
- What type of academic support did you need while attending alternative school? Did you receive it? Please explain.
- What type of social support (shelter, food, job, counseling) did you need while attending alternative school? Did you receive it? Please explain
- The next question I am going to ask you is relative to race and racism.
- Did you ever feel unvalued or treated unfairly because of your race while attending an alternative school? If so, please explain.
- Can you think of any changes that alternative schools should make to attract more disconnected minority youth?
- Do you have any final thoughts before we end this interview?

APPENDIX I

A Priori Coding Scheme

Theme: Reasons attributed to lack of success in traditional school

Behavioral and discipline challenges

- In general
- Testing difficulty
- Peer-related issues
- Difficulty paying attending
- Lack of support from teachers
- Lack of individualized planning for graduation

Theme: Motivation for re-engagement

- Referred by others
- School design
- Self-determined motivation
- Wanting to graduate
- Support family / children
- Trying to change
- Wanting to prove something (Iachini et al., 2013)

APPENDIX J

IRB Approval Letter



Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 25, 2021

Protocol Investigator Name: Latoya Brown

Protocol #: 20-12-1498

Project Title: Disconnected Youth: The Journey to Educational Re-engagement: The Alternative Education Experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Youth

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Latoya Brown:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research