Daring to care: the role of culturally relevant care in mentoring Black and Latino male high school students

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This study seeks to challenge the uni-dimensional way care in school is written about by highlighting an often overlooked aspect of care – the kind that students do for each other. Data is drawn from focus groups conducted with the youth participants and founder of Umoja Network for Young Men (UMOJA), an all-male, school-based mentoring program for over-aged and under-credited (OA/UC) high school students. The authors draw on theories of culturally relevant pedagogy, care, and critical pedagogy to present the findings and propose a form of culturally relevant care (CRC) that entails warm demanding and building mutual trust. This study highlights the humanizing experiences of the Black and Latino male transfer students and their mentor. This focus on the experiences of young Black and Latino male participants seeks to shift the discourse from one focused on deficits to one that recognizes their agency and capacities for social and academic success.

Keywords: culturally relevant care; Black and Latino males; race; mentorship; over-aged and under-credited

Introduction

The literature on Black and Latino male students speaks of a crisis in communities and of a public education system that is incapable of rectifying the ills of society at large (Brown and Donner 2011; Halx and Ortiz 2011; Noguera 2009). Scholarship has given much attention to various factors for why young men are failing in school. The theories of 'acting white' (Fordham and Ogbu 1986), 'stereotype threat' (Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002) and adopting a 'cool pose' (Majors and Billson 1993) are but a few of the many reasons given for a lack of academic achievement by young men of color. Much of this discourse, which is pervasive in the literature, focuses on the barriers Black and Latino male students face rather than contributions to their success. The underlying assumption of these perspectives is that the problems are not societal but individual, and the results often negatively impact students in the classroom (Noguera 2009).

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Such discourse surrounding male youth of color in schools often drives adults to want to 'fix them,' return to teaching the basics, and equip them with White middle class norms. Given such an educational climate, a standpoint of culturally relevant care (CRC) has the potential to expand educators' awareness of the various assets possessed by Black and Latino males. The focus of this study on CRC is one attempt at 'parsing out the part of the students' problems that we as educators have some control over' (Ladson-Billings 2011, 8).

CRC can be characterized by a strong sense of community, rigorous demands, an integration of different cultures, and a general affirmation of one's humanity. Students experience such forms of care in various settings, often outside of traditional classroom spaces. For example, some community and school-based programs address the unique needs of Black and Latino male students from a perspective of hope and not despair (Duncan-Andrade 2009; Haddix 2009). They strive to build high self-esteem and academic achievement among participants in their programs. Rather than focusing on changing the individual, some after school manhood development programs have chosen to grapple with more ecological concerns such as racism, health issues, and entrepreneurship (Harvey 2001). Research has pointed to the impact that mentoring and building relationships with Black and Latino males can have on their academic and socio-emotional growth (Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2011; Fashola 2003; Gordon et al. 2009; Hall 2006).

While empirical studies exist to document the impact that community and school-based mentoring programs have had on Black and Latino male students, more work needs to center students' perceptions of CRC and definitions of effective mentorship. Moreover, studies must be deliberate about capturing the voices of youth who experience this care so that more can be learned about what they need and what they actually receive. Such scholarship will inform capacity-oriented and social justice approaches to educating these young males. Capacity-oriented and social justice approaches (Adams 2010) attend to the emotional, cognitive, and personal needs of young people while addressing systemic issues. These approaches also strive to shift social dynamics based on youths' perceived status, build on the youths' experiences, and emphasize transformation as an important aspect of growth. Capacity-oriented approaches foreground the concerns and lives of young people, and therefore are culturally relevant. An element of care is present because in order to genuinely accomplish these goals, deep relationships must be built between and among individuals involved in such learning processes. Operating from the standpoint that education should be a humanizing process in which young people gain a heightened awareness of their capacities and a will to enhance their lives and the lives of those around them, makes it necessary to disseminate more research that documents promising approaches in which adults and youth are able to

experience a form of 'education as the practice of freedom' (hooks 1994). Our research endeavors to contribute to such work.

Specifically, we position CRC as a form of liberatory education marked by acts of reciprocal love (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Watson 2014) and a mutual engagement in a process of reflection and action (Freire 2007). This study highlights the experiences of Black and Latino male transfer students working with a Black male mentor in a school-based mentoring program characterized by CRC. It remains important to note that participants attended an alternative high school for over-aged and under-credited (OA/UC) students, which creates a specific context and perspective. Given this, we sought to address the following questions: What are the experiences of the mentor and Black and Latino male participants in an all-male, school-based mentoring program? How are these experiences mediated? The data informed our thinking about the relationships between Black and Latino male students and their mentor and one another as involving CRC.

Culturally relevant pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy focuses specifically on teaching and learning exchanges that attend to and utilize the cultural assets that students of color bring into classrooms (Ladson-Billings 1995; Milner 2010; Stovall 2004). Ladson-Billings (1995) conceptualizes culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition committed to both individual and collective empowerment. According to Ladson-Billings, the goals of culturally relevant pedagogy are to ensure that students are academically successful, develop and maintain a cultural competence, and build a critical consciousness that allows them to disrupt the status quo. Ultimately, youth 'develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities' (Ladson-Billings 1995, 162). Irvine (2010) articulates similar features of culturally relevant teachers and discusses the importance of knowing the students well, building a caring relationship, and drawing lessons from students' actual experiences.

Similarly, researchers have explored how students' 'funds of knowledge,' or household strategies and knowledges can foster interdependency and an exchange of resources within a community (Greenberg 1989; González, Moll, and Amanti 2005; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992). These exchanges help to build a form of *confianza* (mutual trust), which contributes to an enduring form of *reciprocity* that enables learning to occur (Vélez-Ibáñez; as cited by González, Moll, and Amanti 2005). Yosso (2005) also brings a theory of *community cultural wealth* that takes a capacity-oriented and social justice stance towards including students' home and community knowledges into the learning space. Such approaches actively debunk deficit notions of marginalized youth cultures and value the multiple

levels of cultural capital youth of color have, which can assist in challenging institutional racism. hooks (1994) presents the idea that teachers and students need to learn 'cultural codes' and accept multiple epistemologies within diverse settings. These modes of incorporating students' cultures, experiences and knowledges into their educational process are able to move beyond maintaining the status quo by building mutual trust, maintaining high expectations, and striving for justice.

Care

There exists a wealth of theory and research that explores the role care plays in the educational experiences of youth. In Noddings' (2005) germinal work, she emphasizes an *ethic of care* that is relational, involving a *caregiver* who initiates and builds connections with his or her students and a *cared-for* party who is responsive to and accepting of such care. Within this theory, the caregiver becomes *engrossed* with the cared-for and the cared-for *reciprocates* in a way that meets the expectations of the caregiver and maintains the relationship (Noddings 2005). This ethic of care can be distinguished from a *virtue of care* in which the caregiver determines what is best for the cared-for. The caregiver either employs an *authentic* form of caring in which they strive to better understand students personally and culturally or an *aesthetic* form of care that prioritizes concepts and objects over people (Noddings, cited in Valenzuela 1999). Such work helps one begin to understand the dynamics of caring relationships and how care can effectively be employed in ways that impact student motivation. However, Noddings' work has been critiqued for privileging White notions of care that do not consider variance among different groups (Thompson 1998). Furthermore, this form of caring in education constructs a linear approach for how teachers and students foster interpersonal relationships. This contrasts with the theories of culturally relevant pedagogy and funds of knowledge that emphasize community and interdependency.

Valenzuela's (1999) explication of *educación* provides one nuanced look at how Mexican youth and their families understand the role that care plays in education. From this perspective, educators consider the social and interdependent nature of ensuring that students develop a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility. Her explication of the 'politics of caring' also adds a critique of how the institution of schools devalue students' cultures and cause divisions among social, linguistic, and cultural groups. Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) put forth a theory of *critical care* that emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students within a small school community. In these settings, the goal of caring moves beyond meeting standards and passing tests toward building relationships that contributes to a more caring humanity. Although these previously theorized frameworks of care involve a relational theorization of

caring, they remain unidirectional and do not acknowledge the dynamic and complex ways in which a community of students can share the roles of carer and cared-for in an effort to disrupt social inequities.

Some theories on care emphasize the importance of building a community where members are deeply invested in and supportive of each other. For example, teachers who enact such care often play the role of counselor, encourager, benefactor, and racial cheerleader in order to meet the needs of the whole student (Siddle Walker and Tompkins 2004). Building trust becomes a critical step in establishing an atmosphere conducive to a co-constructed learning experience. While not based on work done with Black and Latino youth, Kleinfeld (1975) presents a form of care in which roles are shifted from one that is hierarchical to one that is warm and friendly. She found that when Indian and Eskimo students from her study developed informal bonds with adults outside of class, they were more responsive in class. Such closeness resituates both adults and youth as humans. Such care goes beyond simply sympathizing for youth of color and instead involves teachers who demand high academic achievement among youth (Kleinfeld 1975). Youth did not view such demands as demeaning, but rather trusted that they were made out of genuine concern for their well-being. A trusting community developed as a result of the time teachers spent at the beginning of the school year on developing relationships, and building relationships among the students. Furthermore, these educators were explicit about the cultural assumptions embedded within 'Western' classrooms (Kleinfeld 1975). Educators enacting this form of care may foster a *bicultural* environment in which marginalized and middle class ways of being are integrated into an educational setting (Vasquez 1988). Warm demanders (Ware 2006) value interpersonal relationships between everyone within a community, demand high performance, and grapple with cultural issues. These bodies of work highlighting the importance of trust and warm demanding within a community of learners play a critical role in uncovering the sociological and human factors that contribute to the social and academic success of youth. Nonetheless, more work is needed that focuses specifically on the experiences of students of color and looks holistically at the dynamics present within such caring communities.

In order to understand the process and impact of warm demanding more complexly more work needs to be done that looks at how it interacts with various facets of identity such as race, gender, and class. Delpit (2012) begins this work by looking at how warm demanding is used with young people of color, in poverty, and with Black men. She notes how the African American men she interviewed believed that their success was due to the teachers who *pushed* and *demanded* that they work beyond what they believed their capacities were and provided them with the supports they needed. When issues arise due to the conditions of poverty, warm demanders help students find solutions rather than making excuses. She notes that a

combination of high expectations, strong demands, and care and concern help young people recognize that their teachers care and they strive to do well.

This study builds on this line of work to look more complexly at how a process of building trust, brotherhood, and care combine to influence the lives of young Black and Latino men. An environment of care is one that fosters open dialogue and a communal sense of trust. There is healing and wholeness that takes place in care-filled environments (Parker, cited in hooks 2003). It becomes a space where liberation, transcendence, renewal, and vitality of life are the focus. It is a place where the young men of color who participated in our study claimed themselves and their place(s) in the world. Like Valenzuela and other scholars, we acknowledge the complexity of care and warm demanding, and how it influences and is influenced by externally constructed factors such as race, class, ethnicity, age, and educational status. However, an analysis of the myriad ways to better understand the complexity of care extends beyond the scope of this paper. We have chosen to focus on gender as it is a factor most prominent in the mentoring literature involving youth of color and salient in the experiences of our participants.

Culturally relevant care

Many theorists have examined the relationship between justice and caring in classrooms (Clement 1996; Katz, Noddings, and Strike 1999; Strike 1999; Tanner 1996). Parsons (2005) in her study on bridging relationships between a white teacher and her Black students, building on Noddings' theory of an ethics of care, constructs a theory of CRC in which justice and caring work concomitantly to protect the rights of students. Within this framework of CRC teachers are expected to recognize the inequities faced by students based on race and work to challenge them. CRC is present when everyone shares a commitment to improving the community (Pang 2001). Explained another way, a form of kinship is formed among youth characterized by listening, support, and collaboration (Siddle Walker and Tompkins 2004). In order for genuine care to be present there must also exist an understanding of or an attempt to recognize the cultures enacted and possessed by young people. Howard (2001) sets forth the notion of *culturally connected care*, which entails creating a community with rituals and practices similar to students' home lives. Such culturally connected care is characterized by 'a display of caring that occurs within a cultural context with which students are familiar. Behavioral expectations, nurturing patterns, and forms of affection take place in a manner that does not require students to abandon their cultural integrity' (p. 435). Roberts (2010) offers the theoretical construct of *culturally relevant critical care* that brings forth the intersection of caring theory, critical race theory, and African American caring pedagogy. Her work

can be distinguished from traditional theories of care based on her findings that African American teachers emphasized a concern for the futures of their students and strove to provide political clarity as it relates to race. While this work brings forth critical concerns it is done solely from the adult perspectives and excludes the voices of Black and Latino males. This study builds on extant scholarship by defining CRC as a process in which one's humanity is affirmed by building community, trust, warm demanding, and integrating the cultures and experiences of community members. What we found in our data is not only is this form of care enacted by the adult involved, but how it is possible to create a community in which young Black and Latino males exhibit such levels of care for each other that help them challenge the status quo of what is expected of them.

CRC as a practice of freedom

CRC as a practice of freedom recognizes that students' backgrounds impact them on a systemic level. Therefore, what happens within the community, the trust and warm demanding that is present serve as one way to mitigate institutional barriers. For the participants of this study, being Black and Latino and male, were key aspects of their identity, which affected how the community came together in dialogue and reflection.

CRC as a practice of freedom involves a process of building mutual trust in which all community members not only recognize each other's humanity and full capacities, but work collaboratively to tackle injustices big and small, encountered by community members. Mutual trust allows individuals to open up to each other in ways that prompts sharing their knowledges, cultures, and experiences with the understanding that others authentically care about their well-being. A reciprocal and interdependent relationship forms in which community members depend on each other for resources, guidance, and sources of knowledge. The adults involved in the community are not simply making demands of the young people and providing them with care, they reciprocate in a way that exposes their vulnerability and positions them as a learner alongside other community members. Therefore, liberation does not occur when one group creates an agenda for another, it truly requires collaboration and an understanding of a person's concrete situation (Freire 2007). Although community members strive to develop equitable relationships this does not mean that demands and criticism are absent from their interactions. In fact, the trusting relationships allow for a level of critique and warm demanding that helps push all community members to attain their highest potential. These high expectations impact the academic, social, and emotional well-being of community members in ways that are freeing, if even only momentarily.

This study applies the notion of CRC as a framework to explicate the transformative and meaningful relationships fostered among and between

the Black and Latino male participants and their mentor. The data captures how a mentor and participants of a school-based mentoring program for Black and Latino males create and respond to a community characterized by mutual trust, warm demanding, and moments of humanization and freedom.

Guiding methods

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of the mentor and Black and Latino participants of an all-male, school-based mentoring program. Specifically, this study examined their experiences as mentor and participants of UMOJA Network for Young Men, a mentoring program designed to develop the academic and social skills of over-age and under-credited Black and Latino youth. Phenomenology makes it possible to understand the essence of an experience (Merriam 2009) and allows for participant descriptions that include their perceptions, beliefs, thoughts and actions. It is an approach to qualitative research that seeks to understand how a participant experienced an event, situation or phenomenon. Data for this study were collected from participant observations during UMOJA group sessions, one-on-one interviews with the mentor who is also the founder of UMOJA, and focus group interviews with 14 male participants. Data were collected over two years (September 2009 to June 2010 and September 2010 to June 2011) at two school sites that hosted the UMOJA program. The researchers visited both research sites and gathered data using observation protocols, and kept field notes over the course of the study. Three semi-structured (Bogdan and Biklen 1992) focus group interviews, ranging in length from two hours to two hours and forty-five minutes were conducted with the 14 participants. Two focus groups were held in June 2010 and the other in June 2011. The mentor and founder of UMOJA was interviewed twice – once in 2010 and again in 2011. Interview and focus group topics included high school experiences and what it means to be a mentor, or member of UMOJA. Member checks were conducted with each group of participants during a final class meeting when all of the participants were present. During the member checking process, the mentor and the young men were asked clarifying questions and encouraged to ask questions about the data that was shared with them. Member checks were conducted in order to ensure that participants' ideas were accurately presented and summarized.

Data analysis involved elements of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) which allowed the research team to begin making sense of data from our initial questions and then follow the data to more specific lines of inquiry as themes emerged from preliminary coding. The research team transcribed the initial interviews verbatim and line-by-line coded (Charmaz 2006) to identify elements of CRC. These line-by-line codes were

later collapsed into overarching focused codes such as mutual trust, warm demanding, and moments of humanization and freedom.

Participants and setting

The 14 youth participants in this study are characterized in the literature as OA/UC (Cahill, Lynch, and Hamilton 2006). They were, as most OA/UC students are, at their current school because they had been pushed out of at least one other traditional school setting for various reasons including over-crowding, school shutdowns, discipline issues, violating academic probation, or a general lack of fit. Participants in this study attended either Sunset Hills Academy-East (SHAE) or Sunset Hills Academy-West (SHAW), two of four East Coast public transfer high schools in a consortium that serves OA/UC, mostly Black and Latino, students. Both sites are dedicated to providing students with more intimate student-centered learning experiences. UMOJA group sessions were 90 minutes and took place twice a week in each site. Seven of the youth identified as follows: Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Mexican, and the other seven identified as Black. The founder and mentor of UMOJA Network for Young Men identified as a Black male. Youth participant ages ranged from 16 to 20 years of age, and the mentor was 40 years of age at the start of the study in 2009 (Table 1). Each youth participant and the mentor selected their own pseudonyms.

Positionality of researchers

When considering methods of data collection and analysis, we believe it is important to recognize our positionality as the researchers in this study. We

Table 1. Participants.

Participant Name	UMOJA School Location	Age of Participant	Race/ Ethnicity
AJ	SHAW	18	Black
Andres	SHAE	16	Dominican
Antonio	SHAW	17	Black
Carlos	SHAW	19	Puerto Rican
Craig	SHAW & SHAE	40	Black
Donte	SHAE	19	Black
Geno	SHAE	18	Puerto Rican
Johnny	SHAE	17	Puerto Rican
Joseph	SHAW	17	Black
Mario	SHAE	18	Mexican
Matthew	SHAE	17	Dominican
Melo	SHAW	17	Puerto Rican
Randy	SHAE	20	Black
Richie	SHAE	17	Black
Rodney	SHAW	18	Black

acknowledge that our experiences and beliefs have shaped the research questions and methods. This work is aligned with the Feminist and Critical Race Theorist notions that: (1) such research cannot be impersonal and objective (Ladson-Billings 2000); and (2) critical-reflexivity on the part of the researcher is an imperative (Asher 2005). We are three Black women who have over 35 years combined teaching experience. We entered this study, as with all of the work we do involving Black and Latino youth, embracing the tradition of Black women researchers and laypersons who have taken interest in the children in their community. These women seek to understand what is required to properly meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of the children that can propel them toward success, and they hold schools accountable for the success of these children. Two of the researchers have experience teaching in all-male classes of Black and Latino students, and the third researcher mentored in a 'rites of passage' program for Black and Latino youth. Our epistemological orientations, which are informed by our various intersectionalities, our teaching experiences, and research interests, have influenced the research questions for the present study, informed the decisions we made regarding the observation and interview protocols, and guided our understandings of CRC. The focus group interviews capture the viewpoints of the young men involved in the study, yet we note that our own epistemologies influence the interpretation and meaning making process. We engaged in *reflexive subjectivity* in which the researcher considers how (s)he influences and is influenced by the data and participants (Lather 1987). We engaged in member checks with the participants and dialogue with each other based on our own research journals in order to confront our biases in data analysis. What follows is our analysis of the study's findings.

Findings

The transcripts indicated several ways in which a culturally relevant caring atmosphere contributed to how the mentor and participants' viewed themselves, each other, their educational experiences, and hopes for their lives and communities. As they began to build their community at the UMOJA group sessions, the young men gradually deepened their sense of mutual trust, which allowed them to share their knowledges and experiences within their community. Because they formed trusting relationships with each other they were able to maintain high expectations for one another and demand that their brothers live up to these expectations. The combination of trust, openness, and warm demanding contributed to humanizing moments when the participants acknowledged their capacities and exhibited commitments to living up to their potential. The perspectives of the young men of UM-OJA contribute to a much-needed discourse that recognizes the centrality of a form of caring that is culturally relevant, rigorous, and one that creates

the space for the young men to bear witness to their potential. As mutual trust was built, the young men responded well to the warm demands of Craig, and each other. In these humanizing moments the young men shared details about their lives that made them feel both vulnerable and free.

Mutual trust: developing the openness to share experiences

Our data reveal that the young men of UMOJA experienced care that facilitated the development of mutually beneficial relationships. The pedagogy of the mentor centers student voices and experiences as an integral part of the UMOJA program. UMOJA group sessions often began with a free writing activity that included sharing thoughts and feelings with the group. All participants (mentor and mentees) took part in this activity. Such experiences encouraged open expression and fostered a sense of bonding within the group.

CRC requires community members to bring their experiences into the community. Such openness facilitates a process where participants see their cultures as valued and helps to maintain 'cultural competence' (Ladson-Billings 1995). Craig's honest articulations of his experiences as a graduate of SHAW helped the young men relate to him. Melo for example, noted how he came to see the founder of UMOJA as someone with whom he could connect. He states:

> Craig is somebody that cares about young Black youth, young Latino youth, and he's teaching us, he's showing us the way that he, the way that he made it. He went through the same process we went through. (Interview, June 4, 2010)

Melo bears witness to Craig's care by describing how he is 'teaching us, he's showing us the way that he, the way that he made it.' For these young men, making it is important particularly because they have been unsuccessful in other school settings. As a result of witnessing a caring mentor who took interest in their specific experiences as young Black and Latino youth, the young men began to reciprocate and share aspects of their lives, which mostly revolved around how they got to Sunset Hills, and how difficult the journey has been for them. The trust that Craig was able to build with the sharing of his story about being a student at Sunset Hills, led the young men to embrace his advice and work to meet the academic and social expectations he outlined for them as a group in their respective school sites.

For many of the young men, trusting others was an issue for them. Some had experiences with the juvenile justice and foster care systems, and all had been kicked out or transferred out of other schools. Many of the young men did not trust adults and with good reason. They viewed most adults in their lives as people who were trying to control them, get them into trouble,

or take them away from their family. The UMOJA group sessions were a space for them to discuss this mistrust and process their initial discomfort with talking about their lives. Johnny explained:

> I'm not the type of person that shares my feelings, like to talk to other people [about] what's going on in my life. I'm not that type of dude, alright. But with [UMOJA members] I feel comfortable and I feel like, it's like I told Craig last week, I feel like when I talk these people listen and they give me good advice. …I just feel like we trust each other, you know. We can talk when we need to talk, and we, we gain a whole lot of respect. (Interview, June 13, 2011)

The fact that the participants felt heard and respected remains a humanizing experience that they said was often missing from their traditional school environments where control was sought and assumptions were made without getting to know them. While the process was uncomfortable at the beginning, the young men recognized that their participation in UMOJA created a space for authentic caring and trusting relationships to enhance the learning environment (Valenzuela 1999). This type of culturally relevant caring environment with the young men of UMOJA in particular, and with Black and Latino males in general, provides opportunities for them to re-imagine relationships with adults in general, and specifically with adults they interact with in the various systems they have to negotiate, including school settings.

Through establishing trust with Craig, the researchers, and each other, UMOJA participants experienced CRC that created a space for open dialogue. Within this environment the young men were willing to share thoughts they often kept to themselves. AJ explained:

> I feel like I can, you know, the word 'trust,' trustworthy is in this room because whatever I feel or whatever I feel like I should say, nobody passes judgment. Everybody has their own opinions or, or you never even know if somebody's going through the same thing and they, they feel like they want to be outspoken about it too because they can probably be intimidated to say something about that, but if I, I was to take the courage to say or speak about it, then somebody would also be like take a stand too, like you know, I can relate to that man, you know. Like they wouldn't be so scared anymore. (Interview, June 4, 2010)

There appeared to be a ripple effect in that once more of the participants were courageous about sharing their experiences, others noted how they could relate and became more outspoken as well. Therefore, they began to build reciprocal relationships with each other and with Craig. A key factor in developing such reciprocity was realizing that others could relate and not pass judgment. Brian, another participant, built on this sentiment as he discussed the impact that free-writing at the beginning of the sessions had on him. He notes:

You hear what everybody else has got to say and you realize that the person across the table from you is sharing the same experience, the person next to you, the person next to him. Everybody is all going through the same thing, you're going through that same struggle of just trying to be a man. (Interview, June 4, 2010)

What made this experience so freeing for the participants was that they were able to bond over their struggles with manhood as Black and Latino young men. This speaks to the importance of CRC that provides space for young people to grapple with their experiences due to race, gender, class, and other elements of their identities. The young men openly talked about the young ladies they wanted to date, as well as the challenges they faced with not having a job, and having to attend school often times without money to eat.

The level of mutual trust established within UMOJA led to relationships that were communal. The reciprocal nature of these relationships was characterized by an interdependent sharing of knowledge and resources (González, Moll, and Amanti 2005; Nunley 2011). This spirit of oneness was highlighted in the reflections of several participants. As Richie, one of the participants, explained:

To be a brother in UMOJA is like to be *one* (italics added), to come together as one, to communicate, to share thoughts and feelings, and to learn.…Like Craig, the found[er] of UMOJA, even though it was only a year ago, but like it felt like we knew each other for like so long and it's like we connected, like we came together as one, and basically taught us what a brotherhood should really be like. You know, support each other and just be there, you know, don't let anybody down, you know. (Interview, June 7, 2010)

The oneness experienced by the members of UMOJA, who oftentimes referred to each other as 'brothers,' allowed the community to grow strong. It was common for them to share money, and food. Because Craig understood that they were growing boys, he and one of the researchers often had pizza delivered during UMOJA group sessions. This atmosphere of mutual trust, and breaking bread together created a space where the brothers could make warm demands of each other without sacrificing any one's sense of self and dignity. During the sessions Craig would announce complaints teachers in the school may have had about one of the young men. This issue was brought to the entire group, and the brothers would listen to, and if need be, admonish the brother who was being discussed. It was embraced by the group that if one member of UMOJA was not representing himself well in the school, that all members were not being represented well.

Warm demanding

Warm demanding (Ware 2006) is usually discussed as a unilateral approach whereby the adult makes warm demands of the young person. Within a framework of CRC enacted by UMOJA members, warm demanding was more reciprocal in nature. Craig was able to develop healthy bilateral relationships with the young men of UMOJA because of the balance he maintained between being firm and supportive (Kleinfeld 1975) and the way in which he openly shared his challenges and frustrations. As a result, the young men followed his example and demanded things of him as well. For example, Craig often talked during group sessions about the policies at the Sunset Hills that frustrated him or how a colleague had upset him. He used group sessions as a space to talk about how he would resolve a conflict or his feelings about an issue. If the young men felt that Craig was not 'living up to UMOJA standards' in his approach, they would offer him advice and alternative approaches to consider. The supportive nature of their reciprocal relationship is apparent in Craig's remarks: 'One thing I realized about having little brothers, you don't let people abuse them. You don't let people do anything to them that's going to cause them all harm. I look out for them and they have my back too' (Interview, June 13, 2011). Craig does not take a paternalistic protective stance in which he dictates the young men's actions. In fact, he refers to them as younger brothers instead of sons and describes them as his equal. Craig's protective stance is a selfless one illustrative of his genuine interest in the brothers' well-being.

Speech and actions of the mentor and young men within this culturally relevant caring community were guided by an awareness and appreciation of each other's backgrounds. Demands were not made without considering the needs and home and community situation of the young men involved. Craig's philosophy around creating a vision for an educational program based on an awareness of who the young men are is summed up when he states:

> So if you're going to educate someone, you have to invite them into the education…to educate somebody, you have to know where they are, you have to know where they are psychologically, you have to know where they are mentally, you have to know where they are emotionally. And while the Board of Ed is very much hard core on credentials and licenses and all those things make sense, but in the same token, you have to like teach from the heart. You have to have a vision for the students that you're working with. Where do you want these students to be? Where do you want them to go? What kind of outcomes do you want? And I think that's what a lot of people are actually missing. Just teaching a person to the point where they can pass the class, that's really nothing. (Interview, June 4, 2010)

Here, Craig articulates an important element of CRC in which adults get to know youth before setting expectations and asking them to commit. This

approach is indicative of how 'problem-posing' educators do not simply impart their own agenda, but instead plan learning based on the interests of community members (Freire 2007). Starting with one's understanding of youth and taking an inquiry stance helps educators ensure that their work is truly responsive to the people with whom they work.

Taking a collaborative stance towards working with young men of color does not mean one does not foster a sense of discipline. Craig articulates how 'as a leader, sometimes I have to make some decisions because there has to be boundaries, there needs to be discipline in the group, okay?' (Interview, June 4, 2010). In this sense, vision without structure and boundaries does not guarantee execution. Establishing discipline within the group helped participants follow through on demands and experience a sense of empowerment. Expectations without support and encouragement do not guarantee execution. Not only did Craig set expectations for the young men, but he and many of the youth participants made warm demands and encouraged each other to attain them. As articulated by Craig in the previous quote, such teaching needs to happen from the heart. The effects of such discipline and warm demanding are apparent when Matthew jokingly says:

> But after Craig gave me a chance to be in UMOJA, I became totally different. I started coming to school early, he was always in the front. Any time I see his shoe popping out the door, I knew that was him (laughs). So no, I started, I became more responsible. (Interview, June 4, 2010)

Not only did the young men take responsibility for themselves, but they also looked out for each other, and held each other to high standards. Carlos explains:

> I never felt like where I could just come to school and I have, I have brothers watch my back. I didn't have someone who if they see me slacking was on top of me. Like some of us have, like some of us have the same classes together. Like I got a class with AJ, I'm not going to allow AJ to fail, Rodney to fail, or anyone, any of my brothers to fail. Like if I see, if I see we're together in one class, like there should be no reason why any of us should be failing that class. And there's just, there's just unity here, like we're all united, and no matter what, no matter what each and every one, no matter what each and every one go through, I got your back, that's how it is. (Interview, June 4, 2010)

AJ echoes this sentiment when he states that 'They wouldn't let me fall, and that's one thing I'm like happy about, like they will never let you fall' (Interview, June 4, 2010). This attitude of not allowing their brothers to fail remains significant given the common discourse labeling Black and Latino males as violent, in constant conflict with one another, or disengaged from school. Carlos' sentiment highlights the element of

culturally relevant pedagogy in which high academic achievement is sought (Ladson-Billings 1995). What remains unique about this mentoring program is that not only were the adults around them encouraging their success, but the young men were also demanding productivity from each other. By fostering mutual trust and warm demanding, members of this mentoring community engaged in a form of democratic education in which the bonds they formed contributed to the holistic development of their well-being (hooks 2003).

Culturally relevant care as a humanizing pedagogy

During the UMOJA sessions the young men were encouraged to reflect on their capacities as possibilities. This work particularly acknowledges the importance of a form of culturally relevant pedagogy that draws on the knowledge and experiences of youth in ways that recognize their cultures as dynamic assets that are a conduit for learning and transformation. This construct also espouses a form of care that is communal and challenges inequities. Educational spaces such as mentoring programs that foster CRC can equip Black and Latino males with the community and resources necessary to attain their academic, social, emotional, and political goals. Parker; as cited by (hooks 2003) notes that 'Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world.' The ways in which UMOJA participants enacted and responded to mutual trust and warm demanding was re-humanizing and freeing. This process of humanization is summed up when Craig reflects on his purpose in the program:

> I believe my role in education is pretty much to educate the whole child, and I think that educating the whole child could mean, pretty much means that you have to give the students, first of all, some change, not only the way other people see them, but the way they see themselves, 'cause once they see themselves as learners, then they'll see themselves as teachers. Once they get to that point, then they're able to navigate to be renaissance men, they could be in any environment, and they can excel, you know, they can propel (laughs), you know, they can pretty much, you know, educate, stimulate, motivate, they can do all those other things. (Interview, June 4, 2010)

This statement affirms how crucial it is for young men to recognize their capacities. Once they have reclaimed their self-confidence it is easier for them to maintain a better sense of vision and purpose (Pitre 2007). As Craig noted, such sense of direction helps young men of color navigate various environments. Having an awareness of their assets plays a significant role in helping them live with purpose. Craig articulates:

> So everybody has to know their place because it's not our weaknesses that divide us, it's really our strengths that bring us together. And everybody has their own strength. You have to find your place. When I look at the group, this is a body, and this is a very strong group. Different personalities, so everybody plays a role, so if I need this done, I'm going to Carlos; if I need that done, I'm going to AJ. You have to have a body of people, just like our physical bodies, everybody plays a different role. (Interview, June 4, 2010)

Craig's discussion of the strengths of the group points again to the power of a form of education in which community members utilize their knowledges, skills, and resources to enhance the lives of themselves and those around them (González et al. 1995).

As the young men of UMOJA experienced and enacted forms of CRC, it became apparent that they gained a deeper sense of their capacities and aspirations for the future. In this sense UMOJA stands as an example of education as a practice of freedom which affirms a healthy self-esteem in students and promotes their capacity to be aware and live consciously. An example of this self-actualization was displayed when Craig and eight UMOJA members (four from each school site) presented the panel 'Wait A Minute, We've Got Something To Say.' This panel presentation occurred during the UMOJA end-of-year dinner celebration. Family members, many teachers from SHAW and SHAE, the principal of the Sunset Hills consortium, and other UMOJA supporters attended. The young men of UMOJA discussed their thoughts on issues that they believed impacted the lives of young men like themselves. They decided to have the panel because they were 'tired of never being asked what they thought about important issues.' (Interview, June 4, 2010). The issues they discussed at the panel presentation included: teen pregnancy, school reform, government policies, and health care. The panel provided the young men with an opportunity and an audience to share their ideas and engage in thoughtful conversation on issues that impact their lives, and the lives of other young people. This experience, as hooks (1993, 73) notes, '…teaches them to reflect and act in ways that further self-actualization, rather than conformity to the status quo.' Such self-actualization is also evidenced in Matthew's decision to want to become a better man. He realized that he 'learned how to be, to become more respectful, responsible' (Interview, June 4, 2010). Several participants described how their sense of self and aspirations shifted. Mario notes:

> Me, I went from not knowing who I was, wanting to be like I said, the guy in the street getting the respect…to wanting to go to college to wanting to have a better future. Like every one of us, even [Craig], brings out stuff. Like each one of us has something to bring to the group. (Intervew, June 13, 2011)

During his time in UMOJA, Mario decided to apply to college and began to look for free SAT prep classes. This became a goal after attending one of UMOJA's college campus visits. Similarly, Matthew describes his motivation to plan for his future:

> I'm actually planning my future now. Before I had the plans but I wasn't doing anything to get my plans solved. And now that I have the motivation like I could actually say that I'm moving towards making my father proud. I'm actually moving towards one of the graduates, I wanted to go to college, go to military, actually, do something with [my] life and, you know, what [Craig] is teaching…that was tough, it's exposing your life. (Interview, June 13, 2011)

Here, Matthew notes how reaching this sense of self requires him to expose aspects of his life to his brothers. Not only did participants describe their shifts in goals and approaches to achieving them, but they also emphasized the responsibility they felt to their communities. As Freire (2007) notes, such *totality* or unity are critical in the striving for liberation. Mario illustrates this belief that others contribute to his humanization when he states:

> Now I'm saying it with meaning like, I want to go to college. Whatever I become, like I'm still thinking about that, but whatever it is I know I'm going to do something and that feeling that I want to be a man that people, as soon as you mention off the bat, 'Yeah, I know him.' like, 'Oh yeah, he's a powerful person…' If ever I become something big I'm not going to forget where I came from and the people that was there for me. (Interview, June 13, 2011)

For participants, the importance of unity and community is not limited to their participation in UMOJA; the young men articulated a connection to the broader community. The experiencing and enacting of CRC within UMOJA helped shape a positive approach towards life that was already present within the participants but went uncultivated in many other spaces. Carlos sums up this approach when he affirms the program's motto by saying, 'I learned to live with a purpose, learn with morals, and lead with integrity' (Interview, June 14, 2010).

Ways of showing care: Johnny's arrest and Craig's illness

During the two years of the study we witnessed various expressions of care. In addition to the examples already shared in this article, there were two separate events in which the young men showed care for another UMOJA brother and Craig: (1) when Johnny was a victim of a 'Stop and Frisk' search near the school; and (2) when Craig developed vertigo.

A reality that most Black and Latino youth must endure in American society is the criminalization and policing of their bodies. Aggressive 'Stop and Frisk' policies most active in Black and Latino neighborhoods subject

young males of color to verbal harassment and physical mistreatment by police officers who are looking for suspects. Proponents of the policy assert that 'Stop and Frisk' has been effective in deterring crime, but many in communities of color do not share this same sentiment. In the neighborhood surrounding SHAE, police officers routinely performed sweeps' on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Sweeps included randomly stopping and questioning pedestrians who passed through the neighborhood that fit the profile of suspects. When Johnny was stopped one day a few hours after school, he made known his frustration to the police officers, which led to mistreatment by the officers and his arrest. Craig was the first person Johnny called. Craig then contacted the young men of UMOJA to tell them Johnny was in custody. Craig reached out to Johnny's family to offer help, and also attended his court hearing the day he was released. When Johnny returned to school, the next UMOJA session was dedicated to discussing what happened to Johnny; he shared his story and then led other participants to talk about their own experiences with 'Stop and Frisk' policies and the disrespectful officers who hung around the school and walked the beat in their neighborhoods. The young men did their best to comfort Johnny about the incident by sharing their own traumatic experiences.

When Craig developed vertigo shortly after spring break, the young men of UMOJA spent a group session discussing how they could let Craig know that they missed him and hoped he would recover soon. The young men enlisted the help of Miquel, the technology specialist in the school to create a group video message and send it to Craig. The video message, which was shared with one of the researchers, was titled 'we miss you.' In the message five of the UMOJA participants at SHAE laughed, showed bravado by playfully pushing one another; each tried to command the full attention of the video camera. In the message they told Craig that they missed him, and they hoped that he would recover and 'come back to us soon.'

Implications for teacher education

The viewpoints of the young men of UMOJA should not be taken lightly, especially given the negative discourse around their abilities and interest in leading productive lives. They have articulated repeatedly the impact that CRC has had on their interpersonal relationships, desires, and academic and life goals. Unfortunately, much research and policy centered on teacher quality ignore the important role of a caring pedagogy (Irvine and Fraser, 1998). The insights of this study's participants serve as a reminder that educating Black and Latino males goes beyond the standards and curriculum, and requires a humanizing culture of mutual trust and warm demanding. This work becomes especially important within the context of alternative schools for the OA/UC as well as male-focused mentoring programs. Given the additional challenges and stigmas that go along with

being a young Black and Latino male who is OA/UC, noting the promising practices and environments that contribute to their success remains critical.

The experiences of the youth participants and their mentor point to a form of cultural relevancy and care that goes beyond superficial representations of their cultures and paternalistic caring relationships. Participants spoke of genuine recognition of each other's wholeness and being able to identify with each other's experiences. They also fostered bonds of brotherhood characterized by mutual trust and warm demanding that were more equal in nature than traditional caring research has articulated. Each participant took an active role in looking out for their brothers in ways that contributed to their overall well-being.

This close examination of the culturally relevant caring nature of a school-based mentoring program can help those in the field of education re-imagine what it means to educate Black and Latino males. Given the focus in many urban schools on routine, discipline, and back to basics, this study serves as a reminder that mutual trust, high demands, and care are huge factors in the success of young Black and Latino men. These most critical factors are often the ones considered last or not at all. Teachers must explore their own biases and get to know their students in order to begin creating spaces for these relationships. In order to maintain high expectations they cannot continue to see their students through a deficit lens. Teacher education and teacher professional development need to foster spaces for examining such biases and reflecting on barriers and successes to enacting CRC. There must be a continued, concerted effort among education researchers to document processes that complexly examine how multiple facets of identity (on the part of teachers and students) influences experiences and enactments of CRC.

It is our hope that this work will offer a counter to the deficit perspectives often projected onto young Black and Latino men, like the participants of UMOJA, and spark new conversations around the critical role care plays in creating capacity-oriented learning environments and positive student outcomes. This study points to the important role of developing mutual trust when working with young Black and Latino men. It also highlights the necessity of holding high expectations for them, and providing spaces for them to act as agents of their own success. We believe this study highlights a need for more work that centers the voices of young Black and Latino men to be heard, and to take on an important part of building their capacities for individual and communal improvement. Specifically, there exists a need for further education research that examines the contributions young Black and Latino men make towards their own success in alternative school environments. Too often these conversations and the decisions that follow happen without them at the table, it's past due time to include them in the discussion.

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