

**BLACK VIRGIN ISLAND
HIGH SCHOOLERS'
SCHOOL MATTERING**

by

Kendell Daughtry

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Human Development and Family Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Black Virgin Island high schoolers matter but may find themselves questioning if they matter to their schools since the 2017 hurricanes. The current complementarity mixed methods study examined how Black Virgin Island high schoolers in St. Thomas, United States Virgin Islands perceived school mattering was associated with school practices (i.e., school discipline, teacher relationship, and culturally sustaining pedagogy). The study also explored how Black Virgin Island high schoolers experienced school mattering during academic disruption (a concept developed in the study), their engagement in street life, and get off the Island mentality. The final quantitative sample consisted of 120 participants completing a survey measure. The univariate linear regression and the multivariable linear regression revealed that only teacher relationship had a statistically significant association with school mattering ($\beta = .449$ $p = <0.001$). The qualitative results reveal that academic disruption causes stress and can negatively impact the student-teacher relationship. The qualitative data also revealed that students in street life most likely do not matter to their school, and that mattering to their school did not make a difference in whether a student desired to leave the Island after high school or not. Recommendations for stakeholders to give ear to the importance of the student perspective are given.

Chapter 1

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS HISTORICAL AND PRESENT CONTEXT

Introduction

Black United States Virgin Island high school youth¹ are important and they matter. School is one place where they spend majority of their weekdays and is where how they perceive they matter is impacted and subsequently, impacting other areas of their life. Mattering is a concept in which an individual perceives that they are important or of value to someone else (Elliot et al., 2004). Youth's experiences with their school, community and family may shape how they matter ethnically, in their community, academically and even as a law abiding citizen. U.S. Virgin Islanders are unique from other Black groups because of their dual identity as an Afro-West Indian and what some consider second class citizens of the United States of America (Boyer, 2010; Ernice, 2018; Hein, 2009; Murphy, 2020). The latter identity is what connects them to similar experiences of systemic oppression that Black youth in a city like "Philly", PA² experience.

¹ Youth in this study refers to high school age people, which is 13-19 years old.

² Culturally, the USVI is deeply rooted in Caribbean and African culture, yet it still benefits (and is disadvantaged) from being a U.S. colony. Western and U.S. cultural influence in the USVI makes the USVI unique in the Caribbean and causes tension with other islands.

Studying “mattering” within the contexts of predominately Black Virgin Island schools can help stakeholders shape better school-based interventions in USVI schools and reconceptualize how schooling is done in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Examining the factors that impact Black Virgin Island high schoolers’ perceived school mattering and how their school mattering may impact other decisions can be useful in developing strategies for reforming institutions that perpetuate inequity. This study examines the impact of school practices (i.e., school discipline, teacher relationship and culturally sustaining pedagogy) may have on Black Virgin Island high school youths’ perceived school mattering. It also explores how Black Virgin Island high school youth perceive academic disruption, street life, and “get off the Island” mentality to be shaped by their school mattering.

USVI History and Present Context

It is important to understand the historical and present day context of the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI; Navarro, 2010). The term territory is essentially a modernized term for “colony,” in which the United States of America³ (U.S.A.) owns five: American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (Burns, 2017). Puerto Rico and the USVI are located in the Caribbean with Puerto Rico located in the Greater Antilles region and the USVI located in the Lesser Antilles region (about 60 miles apart). The USVI is made up of three main islands: St. Croix (STX), St. John (STJ), St. Thomas (STT). The U.S.A gained control over the Islands and its people by purchasing this geographical space in 1917. It is important to

³ The term “American” or “America” is not used in this study to reference the United States of America and its people. This is a way to give respect to the many countries and people that make up the Americas.

underscore that, residents on these islands did not have a recognized voice or decision on their independence during the purchase (Boyer, 2010). Formerly known as the West Indies and owned by Denmark, the main economy was African enslavement (Hall, 1992). From 1733 through 1848, there were a series of enslaved rebellions, most notably on St. John and St. Croix, that eventually led to their emancipation from enslavement in 1848 but not from under Denmark's power (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977). In 1917, The U.S.A. purchased the West Indies for \$25 million in gold from Denmark and renamed the collective colony "Virgin Islands of the United States" (United States Department of State, 2009).

The effects of colonization are overwhelmingly apparent in the USVI. Colonization, as defined by Grande (2015), is a "multidimensional force underwritten by Western Christianity, defined by white supremacy, and fueled by global capitalism" (p. 18). Therefore, colonization is an ongoing project that seeks to oppress and consume non-white everything (e.g., voices, religion, identity, culture) and replace them with the value of whiteness and for capital gain. Examples of colonization in the USVI is there is no congressional power in having a non-voting delegate in Washington, D.C. and U.S. Virgin Islanders do not have the right to vote in federal elections – although federal officials make decisions that impact Virgin Island life. U.S. Virgin Islanders are treated as second class citizens as they are viewed by some as immigrants and not citizens (Jackson & Cothran, 2003) or as being owned by the U.S.A. (Murphy, 2020). In 2015, the USVI had a quarter of families with children under 18 years of age living in poverty while one-third of them lived in a household 100% below the federal poverty level (CFVI, 2019). Poverty, high illiteracy rates, crime, and low economic opportunity are all impacts of colonization (Knight, 2012),

as the U.S.A continues to benefit from owning the Territory while not addressing the issues. Mainlanders, predominately white, and individuals from Arab countries colonize the Territory by buying property, creating businesses, and not giving back to the community, all while using their businesses as tax write-offs and homes as vacation spots (Boyer, 2010; Navarro, 2010). Although Black Virgin Islanders are the majority, they do not control the systemic power and/or wealth in the USVI, therefore they remain at the systemic mercy of the “other” (Boyer, 2010; Ernice, 2018; Murphy, 2020)

Demographically, the USVI is made up of much ethnic diversity. It is a demographic mixture of people from surrounding islands, “Yankees”, descendants of the enslaved Africans, “Frenchies”, individuals from Arab countries, and a small Asian population. Haitians, Dominicans (dough-MEE-nee-cans; from the Dominican Republic), Dominicans (doma-NEE-cans; from Dominica), Kittitians, Anguillans, and Puerto Ricans are the main other-Caribbean people that live in the USVI. A Mainlander and “Yankee” refers to someone from the United States of America and at times also referred to as a colonizer. Yanking is speaking with a U.S.A. accent. Frenchies are white descendants of French migrants from the island of St. Barts in the 1800’s. They have a distinct history in the USVI and are considered part of the USVI community. They are not considered white like their white counterparts are. The total population of the USVI in 2020 was estimated to be 106,405 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The capital of the Virgin Islands is Charlotte Amalie located on St. Thomas, which is more mountainous and more urbanized compared to the other islands. St. Thomas is the site in which the current study takes place. The population of St. Thomas was estimated to be 51,634 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Schooling

There are two school districts in the U.S. Virgin Islands: St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. The site of this study is the St. Thomas/St. John school district. St. John does not have a public high school; the Island only accommodates K-8th grade. All youth that attend public high school and live in St. John (STJ) must take the 30-minute morning ferry across the sea from STJ to St. Thomas (STT) to attend school. On the small 32-square mile island there are two public high schools and a few private schools in STT. The public schools in the USVI are similarly underfunded and are “underperforming” compared to federal standards just as many urban schools are in the U.S.A (Ernice, 2019). The public schools have faced a shortage of teachers, reporting over 150 teacher vacancies—70 in the St. Thomas/St. John school district (Michael et al., 2019). Many students are living in single-family or multigenerational homes in impoverished areas. Similar to urban areas in the U.S.A, Black Virgin Island youth are surrounded by peers from whom schooling is a useless enterprise; even if they graduate from high school, they are hard-pressed to find an economy that can absorb them or a market for their interest (Payne et al., 2009; Simmons, 2018).

Unemployment and Incarceration

Black Virgin Island youth are at-risk for educators pushing them out of school, incarceration, and unemployment (Campbell, 2015a, 2015b; Marcotte, 2013; Martin, Jennifer|Smith, 2017; Ocen, 2015). Repeating a grade, disengagement with school officials, not having an adequate or healthy meal before school, and needing to make money are all common reasons why Virgin Island Black boys are pushed out of school (Browne, 2018). Simmons (2018) and Morris (2016) uses the term “pushed out” instead of expulsion or suspension because it places the responsibility on the school

system and how punitive schooling and non-inclusive curriculums have pushed out or removed Black boys and girls from schools; thus, teeing them up for the criminal justice system. Getting pushed out of high school increases the risk of unemployment (Campbell, 2015a, 2015b). In 2019, The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) reported of the youth (ages 16-19 years old; 765 youth) 46% were unemployed. Of the male youth that reported being in the labor force (those that are legally eligible to work), 47.5% (228 of 480) were unemployed compared to 45.6% of unemployed woman youth (130 of 285) in the labor force (CFVI, 2019). Truancy in the USVI continues to be an unresolved issue in the St. Thomas/St. John school district. In 2016, 90.8% of the 7,515 students enrolled in schools missed more than 10 unexcused days from school (CFVI, 2019). In 2015, 89 youth were detained at the Youth Rehabilitation Center (YRC) in which 85% (75) were boys. Of the 89, six-percent were pushed out of high school, 46% were arrested for a violent crime, 42% were repeat offenders and 12% reported having experienced some form of abuse in their lifetime (CFVI, 2019). Truancy increases the likelihood of educators pushing them out of high school (Jeynes, 2007), which may lead to higher risks of unemployment and incarceration in the USVI. The USVI is the only U.S. territory that is predominately Black, and it has the highest prison rate between all of the territories (Harney & Hawley-Ferrol, 2012), potentially increasing the risk that U.S. Virgin Island Black boys and girls of encountering law enforcement. Black Virgin Island youth are at-risk for educators and administrators pushing them out of school, experiencing unemployment and incarceration; therefore, it is critical that they receive attention and intervention.

Mental Well-Being

Community concern regarding the mental well-being of USVI youth is growing due, in part, to experiences of 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria (IrMaria) during their early adolescence. Three months after IrMaria, students (grades 7th-12th) took a Child Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Screening Scale (CPSS; Foa et al., 2001; Wevodau, 2016) and the results revealed that students in 7th and 8th grade were at greater risks for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than those in 9th-12th grade (Michael et al., 2019). Internalization of anxiety and depression were also found among the students after IrMaria (Pittman, 2018). Black youth that are susceptible to PTSD experience internalization of anxiety and depression including when they experience family members or friends experiencing trauma (Jenkins et al., 2009). It is possible that Black Virgin Island youth may have been susceptible to PTSD from multiple forms between experiencing the hurricanes and watching others experience trauma. Black boys and girls that suffer from PTSD are more likely to behave aggressively and suffer academically (Graham et al., 2017). No area was spared by IrMaria as both hurricanes devastated all of St. Thomas and St. John. Even for individuals and families that experienced minimal damage, they were surrounded by others that were greatly impacted, along with the visual devastation seen around the islands. The communal trauma of IrMaria leaves the people of the Virgin Islands with great need for mental health services (Michael et al., 2019; Pittman, 2018). Black youth that were in 7th and 8th grade then are now in 9th and 10th grade and are at-risk for long-term PTSD (CFVI, 2019). Taking into consideration the impacts mental health may have on academics, examining school mattering within a marginalized population can help identify intervention for this group of students.

Understanding the historical and present context of the USVI and their high school youth helps give perspective for the study and why it is of importance for the specific population. This study examines the relationship between school practices and perceived school mattering of high school students in the USVI that are impacted by the living conditions and colonization of the U.S.A. It also explores how students perceive mattering to their school may impact engaging in street life and leaving the Island mentality.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

The study had research questions that was answered quantitatively through a survey measure. The research aims were explored qualitatively through one virtual semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

Quantitative Research Questions

1. What is the association between school practices (i.e., culturally sustaining pedagogy, teacher relationships, and school discipline) with perceived mattering among Black Virgin Island high school youth?
2. Does gender moderate associations between school practices and perceived mattering among Black Virgin Island high school youth?

Quantitative Hypothesis

The hypotheses are that Black Virgin Island high school youth who perceive:

1. Better teacher relationships; 2. Fair school discipline; and 3. Greater culturally sustaining pedagogy will report greater perceived school-based mattering.

Qualitative Aims

1. Explore Black Virgin Island high schoolers' perspective on their school mattering and its role in their desires to either leave or remain in the USVI after high school.

2. Explore Black Virgin Island high schoolers' perspective on their school mattering and its role in their desires to engage or disengage from 'street life'.
3. Explore Black Virgin Island high schoolers' perspective on school mattering when discussing their experiences with academic disruption due to the 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria and COVID-19.

Chapter 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Mattering

People are social beings, and it is important that we find ourselves in a community and world that believes and demonstrates that we matter. In 2013, after the murder of Trayvon Martin, “Black Lives Matter” (BLM) was birthed. Black Lives Matter eventually became a movement that brought forth and demanded national conversations on how Black lives do not matter in the U.S.A. society. In 2021, BLM is an outcry against police brutality and other injustices; however, Black lives, Black history, Black thought and Black freedom do not matter unless it is beneficial to whites (Bell, 1980, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2013). In a society in which whiteness is the norm, Blacks cognitively navigate how we matter against constant reminders that we do not (Carey, 2019, 2020). In a society in which whiteness is the norm, Blacks have to cognitively navigate how individuals possibly give up their Black identity (even if it is temporary) consciously or subconsciously to adjust to whiteness (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991), which may be perceived as mattering only when they are associated with whiteness. For example, some companies implement policies that discriminate against Black people based on our natural hair styles such as braids, puff afros and dreadlocks. For a job interview, Black people have to decide whether to rock our natural hairstyle or wear our hair in a form susceptible to whiteness or risk not getting the job (e.g., straightened for women and cut low for men; Kroon & Miller, 2020). In the example, Black hairstyles do not matter and work against Black people in

“professional” white spaces. According to Carey (2019), who synthesized previously defined notions of mattering, mattering is “a social-psychological concept concerned with the way an individual develops thoughts and feelings that direct behaviors given the influences of the presence (actual or imagined) of others in society” (p. 371). The individual’s thoughts and feelings are the perceived mattering, which then direct their behavior. There are three fundamental components in mattering: awareness, importance, and reliance (Carey, 2019; Elliott et al., 2004).

Awareness is the cognitive process in which an individual believes they are relevant and that others pay individualized attention to them (Elliott et al., 2004). A foundational cognitive question that drives awareness is *Do teachers or my school realize that I exist? If so, how much do they realize that I exist?* (Elliott et al., 2004). A person’s ability to grab someone’s attention—this includes negative attention—contributes to a person’s awareness. The saying goes, “bad attention is better than no attention.” Mattering includes this ideology when considering how awareness impacts mattering. In the USVI, there may be students who misbehave because that is the only way they receive attention from their teacher (Menikdiwela & Vojtova, 2017). Elliot et al. (2004) argues the key to awareness is to not be ignored by others—even if that means behaving in undesirable ways.

Importance and reliance are considered the relational aspects of mattering as they are processed and developed through relationships. Importance is how an individual perceives others’ investment in them; it is the perception that they are significant to another person. Individuals perceive they are important based on the way’s others invest in them (Elliot et al., 2011). Such forms of investment include sharing and giving of tangible (i.e., money) or intangible (i.e., time) resources.

Reliance is the belief that others rely on or need us for their satisfaction (Elliott et al., 2004). That, too, can be fulfilled through being needed for tangible (i.e., finances; housework) and intangible (i.e., emotional care) support. Because adolescents are limited in what they *can* provide, how they perceive their reliance may be different than how an adult may report their reliance. For example, a teenager may not have an income, but they may have chores and their parents make the teenager the designated babysitter for their siblings. In this case, the adolescent may not report they are relied on because they are not relied on financially; however, they are relied on for sibling caregiving. Despite the differences in report, the example gives the adolescent an opportunity to feel they are relied on, which in turn impacts their mattering (Carey, 2019; Elliot et al., 2011). Adolescents and younger children may have difficulty with the importance and reliance aspects of mattering due to possible misperceptions that others do not care for or need them (Elliot et al., 2011). An example for how they may struggle to perceive their importance is, a Black Virgin Island girl may expect her parent to attend every one of her basketball games. The parent is capable of making only half of them due to a conflict with their work schedule. The Black Virgin Island girl may perceive that her parent does not care for her because the parent did not make every game. Notwithstanding, “mattering to others is an affirmation that [we] are alive...and provides the foundation for a healthy sense of self” (Elliot et al., 2011, p. 1008).

Schools play an important role in children’s socialization and is a place where mattering is processed, impacted and reinforced. Students have emotional, social and psychological needs and schools have the responsibility, or at the very least the space, to help students process and make sense of their mattering and the world around them

(Sefa-Dei, 2006). Scholars have found that in schools serving students from urban or low-income communities, administrators encourage teachers to focus solely on boosting students' academic outcomes, not their social or emotional needs (Bell, 1980; Rios, 2011; Simmons, 2018). Although schools could play a role in minimizing the effects of structural inequality their students face, they often continue the inequality by setting their students up for failure by means of culturally irrelevant curriculum, punitive schooling and neglecting the child outside of the scope of academics (Simmons, 2018). One form in which schools continues the set up for structural inequality for their students—particularly Black students—is academic failure, which is when a student meets the academic standard of failing (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). The term is problematic in that it assumes the child is completely responsible for their performance, not considering the barriers systems create that prevent, or make difficult, for students to do well (Carey, 2014; Milner, 2010). Educational failure is a term that emphasizes the responsibility of the education system and how it fails to provide space for all students to learn and perform well, particularly Black boys and girls. Educational failure has been associated with Black youth losing positivity and relevance as potential productive members of society (Simmons, 2018) which may impact their school mattering.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) argues that race functions as a means to maintain interests of the white population through racial inequity emerging from the systemic social, economic and legal differences white people create (Bell, 1995). These differences perpetuate economic poverty and criminality in many low-income and Black communities (Bell, 1980; Payne & Hamdi, 2009), while creating hostile

environments and negative experiences in suburban and white neighborhoods (Bentley-Edwards & Stevenson, 2016). Systemic racial inequity is relevant to the U.S. Virgin Islands because it remains under the colonial power of white United States of America. Although the USVI is a little more than 1,000 miles away from the Mainland and has a different history, it is still impacted by the Mainland's culture and policies.

One tenet of Critical race theory (CRT) used in this study is interest convergence. Bell (1980) asserts with his concept of interest convergence that Black interests will only be considered if whites can benefit from it as well. Bell (1980) uses the decision behind *Brown versus Board* as an example of interest convergence. An example of interest convergence in the USVI is one reason the U.S.A. government purchased the USVI was due to its geographical position in the Caribbean as a war strategy. Warfare has changed since 1917 and the USVI is no longer a strategic benefit in battle (Boyer, 2010). Since the arrival of colonizers such as Christopher Columbus, the USVI and its people have been under the rule of an external empire. For some in the USVI, there is a desire for liberation and decolonization from the U.S.A. ("Roach to attend conference on decolonization," 2019). Despite no longer needing the USVI as a geographical strategy for war, the U.S.A. continues to maintain its colonial power over the USVI, possibly to benefit the U.S.A.'s global capitalistic power (Sankaran, 2009). Therefore, the U.S.A. seemingly has no incentive to liberate the USVI, therefore, the USVI remains a colony under U.S.A. power.

The other tenet of CRT used in this study is counter storytelling, which is used to elevate the stories of Black people that unmask racism and counters negative stereotypical ideas about Black people (Bell, 1995; Sleeter, 2017; West et al., 1995). It is not that Black Virgin Island youth do not care about learning, but it may be that

what their school offers them *to* learn is not of interest to them—which is a fundamental difference (Paris, 2012). Critical race theory centers the experiences and voices of Black men and women that exposes racism and does not let the systems that perpetuate oppression off the hook. It is important to acknowledge that some policies and practices the schools in the USVI follow (from federal the level), create (on the local level), and implement have been impacted by colonization. Therefore, a CRT lens prompts examining the stories of perspectives on school practices and its impact on school mattering from the young men and young women students.

Critical race theory can be used to apply a critical race perspective in social phenomena, policies, laws and practices (Anderson, 2019; Letiecq, 2019; Sleeter, 2017) or used in new original studies (Banks, 2018; Gibson et al., 2014; Park et al., 2016). Recently, the U.S.A. federal government made an amendment on a 2018 farm bill ruling cockfighting illegal in all of its territories, once again making a decision that impacts the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands without their input (Gilbert, 2019; the first decision being purchasing the Island). Cockfighting is a longstanding sport in the Caribbean and was the livelihood of many Puerto Ricans and U.S. Virgin Islanders (Boyer, 2010; Gilbert, 2019). The U.S.A. 's federal government made their decision and disregarded the petition U.S. Virgin Islanders and Puerto Ricans created to fight the amendment. The decision to rule a historic and cultural sport as illegal, subsequently criminalized some people's livelihood. The amendment may position Black Virgin Islanders to consider going underground with their business or having to find a new field of work. If they choose to go underground and get caught by local or federal authorities, they risk facing fines and jail time. Such a ruling disproportionately impacts the lives of Black people, and a CRT lens helps to identify

racial disparity that may often go unnoticed when a policy goes in affect. As the federal government creates and enacts policies that goes against U.S. Virgin Island life despite cultural heritage and lack of input from U.S. Virgin Islanders, it may lead Black Virgin Island youth to question if they and their culture matter.

Racializing Mattering

Carey (2019) theorizes that Black boys can matter in three different ways: Partially, marginally and comprehensively. Each form of mattering takes into account experiences, systemic practices and messages that impact Black lives that set apart Black mattering processes from other groups. Partial mattering is the concept in which only parts of the Black boy matters. For example, Black boys typically matter as athletes and entertainers (Carey, 2019). Marginal mattering is the concept of mattering in the margins of society (Carey, 2019). Examples are mattering as criminals and thugs for Black boys and men. Although Carey does not theorize about Black girls and women, mattering as sex objects and angry women could be an example of marginal mattering for Black women and girls. Comprehensive mattering is the concept that Black boys' whole-self matters—that their full being matters in their worlds. Although the current study does not test or examine comprehensive, partial and marginal mattering, they provide a lens that mattering is fluid and can be experienced differently due to race and societal influences.

Black Virgin Island adolescents are exposed to the negative media messages that may contribute to their perceived partial and marginal mattering. Media messages transmit that Black male bodies are disposable or only useful for sports and

entertainment (Carey, 2019; Simmons, 2018; Thibodeau, 1989) and Black woman bodies are used for sex or having an angry complex (Epstein et al., 2017). Mass incarceration and police killings of unarmed Black men and women give the indication that our freedom and lives are disposable. Overwhelming media imagery of Blacks mostly as problematic to society as “thugs”, drug dealers, comedians, athletes, sex objects, single-mothers or entertainers suggest how Black boys and girls matter and also limit their perceived options for their future self (Harding, 2010). Those negative media messages can be interpreted as cultural models, which in turn may suggest how Black youth matter and limit their perceived options leading to partial and marginal mattering (Carey, 2019).

Cultural Models

Cultural Models are representations of a culture or identity that an individual believes is a retrievable, available and accessible option for their self (Harding, 2007). In the limited representation of themselves, Black Virgin Island boys and girls are exposed to stereotypical cultural models in different modes of media, which impacts partial and marginal mattering (Carey, 2019). Some cultural models that Black boys are able to observe (present and future) on mainstream media outlets are stereotypical portrayals of Black men as criminals, athletes and entertainment. For Black USVI girls, cultural models they are exposed to are dancers in music videos, the angry Black woman or the subjective Black women (Griffin, 2012). For example, Black boys view hundreds of Black National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Football League (NFL) players getting paid well to play a sport they love (Ferguson, 2000).

They can look at examples like LeBron James who was raised by his single-mother, poor and did not go to college, but is an NBA legend and has earned over \$234 million over his 18-year career as a cultural model and as something to pursue (Windhorst, 2019). In general, Black boys and girls do not often observe Black CEOs of a company, respectable lawyers, managers of stores, or positive lead acting roles outside of playing an enslaved African. Black children see children animated shows lacking Black representation in general, and more so they are lacking in lead roles. Black characters are typically the sidekick to the main white lead role (Barker, 2010; Glascock & Preston-Schreck, 2004; Pescosolido et al., 1997) such as Gerald from *Hey Arnold!* and Vince from *Recess*, both represented as athletes. Black girls typically see light skinned versions of themselves (e.g., Joya Barris from *#blackAF* and Grace Greenleaf from *Greenleaf*) or being the loud-mouthed friend such as Dijonay from the *Proud Family* or the many roles actress Tiffany Haddish plays. These messages convey that Black boys and girls do not matter or qualify for success or as leaders, but only as a commodity to whites, even as criminals (Alexander, 2020; Simmons, 2018). Considering interest convergence, positive representation of Black men and women benefits the Black community, while giving no benefit to whites. Therefore, according to Bell's (1980) interest convergence, there will be no change to that. Black Virgin Island youth have to navigate their mattering around these messages and try to make sense of it. The navigation process may be difficult for Black youth and the Black community overall, because when negative messages are repeated and affirmed through other institutions (i.e., family, school, media), they are in support of one

another and can become a perceived reality (Harding, 2010). In other words, systems can and do support the exploitation and criminalization of Black bodies, and Black people may have a difficult time finding a safe zone void of that support. Structural systems operate in ways that may be difficult to decipher the systematic support as negative depending on the level of the individual's consciousness (Jacobs & Taylor, 2012). Meaning, although exposed to these negative images, Black Virgin Island youth may internalize them without being aware they are, and they take them into their school that may or may not affirm those images and messages.

Chapter 3

SCHOOL PRACTICES, MATTERING AND LIFE OPTIONS

The current chapter defines variables used in this complementarity mixed-methods study. Perceived school mattering is the main variable examined and explored in the study. The quantitative aspect examines school mattering as a dependent variable. The qualitative aspect explores how school mattering is experienced during academic disruption, and how school mattering may play a role in life decisions (i.e., engagement in street life and get off the Island mentality).

Academic Disruption

Academic disruption considers concepts such as academic displacement and family disruption. Academic displacement is defined as occurring when a student enters or exits a school system due to an uncontrollable event (i.e. hurricane; Pane et al., 2008). High rates of this form of mobility put students at higher risk for emotional and behavioral problems (Pane et al., 2008a). Based on the concept of family disruption (Kiernan, 1992; Kinard & Reinherz, 1984), academic disruption is a concept developed within this study that represents the interference of the normal and stable processes of obtaining an education. Events include, but are not limited to, academic displacement, changing school buildings and communal trauma.

At the time of the current study in 2021, the USVI continues to rebuild from the devastation caused by the 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria. People lost their roofs, entire homes, businesses, power and running water for an extended period of time. Roads

and landscapes were destroyed, while school buildings were either completely or partly destroyed (Allen, 2019; Michael et al., 2019). Many of the schools were shut down. Hundreds of students had to relocate to a different school or into temporary modulars, which are temporary trailers with classrooms. Some of the school buildings that did remain became more damaged than they already were and needed extreme remodeling.

From 2017 to 2021, the youth of STT have faced many obstacles that have caused academic disruption. For some students, the 2017-2018 academic school year did not begin for months later after Irma. When school did begin, there were no after school programs available for the students (Michael et al., 2019). Due to the building being inoperable, one of the junior high school's building was reclaimed by its owner and no longer leased it for use to the Department of Education (DOE). The junior high school students (grades 7-8) had to share the building of one of the public high schools operating on a half-day block schedule (Michael et al., 2019; Allen, 2019). Junior high students went for the first half of the day, while high school students went during the second half of the day. For the 2018-2019 academic year, temporary modulars were built on one high school's football field, track and other areas of the high school ground (Michael et al., 2019; Allen, 2019). High school students did not approve of it; thus, they organized a protest march, Don't Steal De Field, to the DOE and demonstrated their frustration with the decision that would impact their education and extra-curricular activities (Allen, 2019; Rao, 2018). The other high school operated on a mostly normal schedule, but part of the building was inoperable, and students would have classes in modulars instead of having access to

that side of the building⁹. According to the Virgin Island's community needs-assessment (2019) there was an exodus of roughly 3,000 students leaving the Territory to the Mainland hoping that their education would not be disrupted. At the time, one high school principal reported a loss of about 200 students (A. Edwards, personal communication, November 4th, 2018). To reiterate, leaving was only possible for students that could afford to do so, which left those that chose to stay behind or could not afford to move off Island.

Academic disruption can be impacted by the absence of resources that are usually taken for granted. For example, electricity and generator power are not always reliable in the USVI. As a result, at times schools have to shut down and send students home because the power is not working or is unreliable, which contributes to academic disruption over time due to missed school time, days and lessons. Similar to academic displacement, academic disruption is likely to put students in higher risks for emotional and behavioral problems. Schools that have difficulty with and uncertainty regarding their ability to operate and provide a stable education are disrupting the student's right to an education (Michael et al., 2019). That raises concern for high school age boys and girls as disruption can lead to negative outcomes.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 virus became a global pandemic impacting families, businesses and education around the world. School administration and teachers in the USVI had to make decisions on how to continue schooling and keep

⁹ The high schools in St. Thomas have very few traditional hallways. Instead, they have covered walkways that allow for navigating around the school buildings. One high school also use what they call a ramp, which is a connection from one building to the next similarly built like ramps for people with disabilities.

the students safe amidst a global pandemic. Those decisions were considered while local government officials were calling for a shutdown and implementing a mandated quarantine. In mid-March, teachers gave students packets of work that covered three weeks of class material and used platforms such as email, Zoom and social media to communicate with their students (McKay, 2020a). There was no uniformity when it came to holding classes and communication between and within schools. Some teachers chose some methods of communication while other teachers chose different methods, while some did not communicate as much with their students (McKay, 2020b; Pennington, 2020). COVID-19 forced schooling to become virtual despite many students not having the technology (i.e., internet access and computer-like device) and were already behind in their academics, which begat great concern for the students' education (McKay, 2020b; Pennington, 2020). The 2020-2021 academic year was set to begin in early August but instead began a month later as teachers and administration were not ready to begin virtual learning—which made it four academic years in a row that a school year began later than was planned (Ernice, 2020). There continued to be great concern about teacher vacancies (119 Territory-wide; 58 in STT/STJ district) and the lack of technology to disseminate to students and families that did not have the means to do virtual school (Lee, 2020). In the end, the Department of Education decided that the school year had to begin and students would virtually learn whether they had the technology to do so or not (Gilbert, 2020). The 2020-2021 school year had more structure and uniformity regarding classroom times and modes of communication between teachers, students and parents than the end of the previous school year but left many students without viable WIFI and technology at risk for experiencing academic disruption and falling behind in their academic

journey—which may impact their school mattering. The DOE continued to expend effort in assuring every student had the technology needed to have a successful school year.

Academic disruption adds to the risk factors that marginalized Black USVI youth face in performing well academically which impacts intrapersonal processes about self and likely their mattering. High academic achievement is associated with high self-efficacy, self-esteem and a healthy self-concept (Tucker et al., 2010), all of which are at risk when academic disruption is infringing on the possibility of high academic achievement. Other risk factors Black Virgin Island youth face that may lead to academic disruption are poverty, housing instability, family stress, historical trauma, racism, misperceived masculinity and femininity, early substance use and sexual activity, mental health problems and punitive schooling (Monroe, 2005; Pilgrim & Blum, 2012; Simmons, 2018).

School Practices: Teacher Relationship

Relationships with teachers can either be helpful or harmful in meeting a students' needs. When considering school mattering, teacher relationships may reinforce whether students perceive they matter to their school or not. Teachers who display empathy, warmth, and encouragement in person-centered relationships contribute to fostering students' "positive" behavioral and cognitive outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). Since person-centered teaching underscores the importance of attending to the whole person and not just the academic part of them (Cornelius-white, 2007; Rogers, 1969), person-centered teaching can lead to what Carey (2019) defines as comprehensive mattering (i.e., when an individual believes that their whole-self matters). A positive teacher relationship also protects students from depression

and undesirable behaviors (Wang et al., 2013). The relationship between a student and teacher has the capability to foster students' school mattering as a means of intervention combating the depression. For example, a positive teacher relationship has shown to support Black boys coping with the pressures of succeeding in school, avoiding mistakes made by other family members and avoiding giving up (Tucker et al., 2010). However, teachers who believe Black students do not care about their education or will end up incarcerated at some point may not support Black students with the same kind of support they give students of other races (Noguera, 2008). Teachers often draw from preconceived ideas about certain students when determining which students to support. Students can identify if a teacher is supportive of them or not by the amount of attention they provide or by making them feel important/unimportant (Payne et al., 2009), which may impact their school mattering. Although the USVI is predominately Black and many of the teachers are from the Territory, those teachers can hold negative bias that impacts how they interact with and discipline their students (Huber et al., 2006; Kohli, 2014).

School Practices: Perceived School Discipline

School discipline, driven by school policies and sometimes enforced due to prejudices held by school staff and teachers, may impact the ways students perceive how they matter within their school. Scholars studying U.S.A. contexts continually find that Black students experience disproportional disciplining (Epstein et al., 2017; M. Morris, 2016; Simmons, 2018). Black students across grade levels are at least three times more likely than their white counterparts to receive some form of school discipline for similar behaviors (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015; Simmons, 2018; Wilson, 2014). Although most of the teachers are non-white in the USVI, subconscious biases

towards Black boys and girls stubbornly persists as non-white educators consume the same negative messages about Black boys and girls (T. Bailey et al., 2013; Kinsler, 2011). Similar to patterns seen in the U.S.A. , USVI educators may stereotype and disproportionately discipline Black youth experiencing public housing or pervasive community violence (Monroe, 2005). Schooling experiences such as these contribute to the low graduation rates seen for Black youth across the USVI (Michael et al., 2019).

Some of the stereotyping of Black USVI youth may be rooted in the misrepresentations of masculinity and femininity. Regarding masculinity, Black boys are likely to be perceived as aggressive; “adultified” or perceived more like a man than a boy; and perceived to be misbehaved (Carey, 2019; Ferguson, 2000; Simmons, 2018). The misperceptions of Black boys occur despite Black boys experiencing hypervulnerability characterized by depression, rejection, sensitivity and fear, which are the opposite of the hypermasculine rhetoric associated with Black boys (Cassidy & Stevenson, 2005). Black girls are also perceived to be angry, promiscuous, and are also “adultified” while white girls are perceived to be innocent (Epstein et al., 2017; M. Morris, 2016).

The (mis)perception of adultified Black boys and girls lead to schools disciplining Black boys and Black girls more frequently and harsher than those from any other demographic (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Forsyth et al., 2015; Monroe, 2005; Simmons, 2018; Winn, 2011), and these misperceptions also result in pushing these students out of school and away from traditional academic trajectories (M. Morris, 2016). Black Virgin Island high school youth are exposed to the same negative attitudes about them held by members of the USVI community, which may play a part

in their perceived mattering. Despite stereotypes of Black boys/men not desiring an education and being absentee fathers and criminals, these stereotypes do not hold to be true or even an embraced thinking in the Black community (Simmons, 2018; Harding, 2010; Carey, 2019). In fact, Harding (2010) argues that the Black boys in his study planned to be involved fathers when they have children and Simmons (2018) gives examples of Black boys that desired to do well academically but were pushed out of school for minor infractions. The boys continued to try to get into a school that would not physically let them back in. Black girls disproportionately experience being pushed out of school as well (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2007).

School discipline efforts in the USVI is modeled similarly to those in the U.S.A. while holding on to some traditional policies (i.e., corporal punishment). At a legislative hearing in 2020, St. Thomas' Senator Sarauw exclaimed that corporal punishment was tied to the history of enslavement—further reminding her colleagues and the rest of the USVI how colonization continues to impact their policies (Capeda, 2020). Although there has not been any recent event in which a teacher or staff used their right to inflict corporal punishment onto a student, the policy could be helping to set the precedence for the culture of school discipline in the public school. U.S. Virgin Island high schools could be considered urban where zero tolerance and corporal punishment policies are in effect (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2004). School systems work as a vessel that aims to teach and maintain social control, and disciplinary practices such as suspension, detention and expulsion are tools that assist in meeting that aim (Skiba et al., 2002), which may negatively impact a students' school mattering. School disciplinary rules give teachers, staff and students a guide of who is keeping in order and who can be considered disruptive (Skiba et al., 2002). Those that do not follow the

rules or become known repeat offenders run the risk of being stigmatized (Earnshaw et al., 2018; Simson, 2014), which may impact their school mattering.

Teachers bring with them their bias towards students of certain identities (i.e., race, gender, disability) into their classroom and are expected to suppress their bias and treat every student equitably; however, they are not above making errors and acting in prejudice. Also, students, who are coping with other external stressors (e.g., trauma, hunger, and poverty) may behave in a way that is considered disruptive at school. Teachers can misinterpret the source of these actions and instead of supporting the child, they reprimand them. Milner (2013), and Martin and Smith (2017) suggest that school administration in environments hire underprepared teachers who often operate from a deficit perspective. They have low expectations of their students which can lead to disregarding their needs and taking more disciplinary actions with students than need be. A deficit perspective is harmful because teachers with a deficit perspective use what is different as a negative trait or weakness instead of a strength (Gorski, 2011; Milner, 2010).

Collectivism is relevant in many eastern cultures and in some collectivist societies traditional views are valued. One area of tradition that is prevalent in the USVI is respect to your elders and one another. With the modern USVI high school student possibly navigating the invisible line between traditionalism that occurs in collectivism, and individualism, there may be behaviors that are interpreted as disrespectful that are not. This is considered subjective disrespect (Martin, Jennifer|Smith, 2017). The teachers and staff have power to make decisions on what is considered disrespectful; therefore, creating a culture of discipline that is partly enforced based on subjectivity. For example, Morris (2007) found that teachers

adultify Black girls when they perceive their actions (e.g. being loud) as un-ladylike or challenging authority, and instead of continuing to educate the student the teacher reprimands them. The process of getting reprimanded for something a student does not believe they are guilty of is not only frustrating for the student, but it contributes to distrusting the teacher (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Teachers perceiving normal actions as negative operate from a deficit lens. Black boys and girls experience school discipline more than any other group, which is why it is important to understand the relationship between school discipline and Black boys' and girls' school mattering. Using the critical race theory tenets of interest convergence, color-blindness and experiential knowledge (i.e. excluding non-white voices in education) reveals there are normalized processes (e.g. curriculum and school discipline) within the education system that perpetuates whiteness and negatively impacts non-white students (Sleeter, 2017; Stovall, 2013). Some policies and some social attitudes of the adults at predominately Black schools are susceptible to error when it pertains to school discipline. They may also have bias towards a group of students based on their racial ethnic makeup.

School Practices: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally sustaining pedagogy “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). It is important that students are exposed to a culturally sustaining curriculum, especially those that are marginalized, so that they see themselves in their learning environments as it cultivates a greater sense of self and confidence (McCarty & Lee, 2014) and possibly mattering. However, colonization presents realms where representation is lacking in the USVI. Although students in the USVI take USVI history, there remains a lack of representation throughout the K-12

curriculum in the Territory (Highfield, 2009; McMillan, 2019). Federal policies regarding education must be followed in the USVI, including policies impacting curriculum, which McCarty and Lee (2014) argue schools, regardless of receiving federal funds, should still be held accountable to emphasize native cultural practices over federal policies. In general, school systems implement curriculum that struggles to sustain Black identity and culture in a way where Black students can see themselves (Paris, 2012). Therefore, because of federal policy, the curriculum in the USVI is impacted by that same struggle. In the USVI, there are classes that teach USVI history, however, that is the extent to which USVI students may see themselves in the classroom. Some Virgin Islanders are calling for cultural sustaining pedagogy to have a stronger role in the curriculum in the USVI (Highfield, 2009; McMillan, 2019).

The U.S. Virgin Islanders speak a dialect of English that is unique to the Territory (referred to in this study as Virgin Island language; VIL). Students are not taught from textbooks written in their dialect, but instead they are given material written in Dominant U.S. English (DUSE). Language is an important aspect of providing a cultural sustaining experience of schooling. The presence of local or native language is important in preserving cultural and ethnic identity, however, with colonization comes the erasure of native language, identity and culture through schooling (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Paris, 2012). Speaking a native language or dialect gives the user a sense of membership that buys into the collective identity of the group and gives a sense of ownership of the language. Although there is a resistance among some youth to speak Dominant US English, there is an understanding that it is the language that is acceptable in U.S.A. professional spaces, therefore it is important to learn and speak it (Paris, 2009). In the USVI, to yank

(speak in the dialect of a Yankee) is not required in some professional spaces, it is—however—valued in the work force; particularly, in industries that interact with tourists. Educators in the USVI have the power and influence to create the acceptable linguistic culture in the classroom and at the general school. As the youth speak their native VIL while the schools require learning Dominant US English, the teachers are in the driver seat in forming the culture of language in the classroom. Most of the teachers are locals themselves, so they too may have to navigate the linguistic space in their classroom (McMillan, 2019). The use of native VIL in the classroom is one example of the presence of culturally sustaining pedagogy which may impact school mattering as it acknowledges and legitimizes an aspect of identity.

There have been many U.S. Virgin Islanders that have created art, music, and other forms of content and their work can be useful in Black Virgin Islanders seeing themselves in the school curriculum as a practice of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (2014) argues that the lack of culturally sustaining pedagogy in schools further marginalizes urban non-white students by requiring them to fit into a system that was not created for them and does not prepare them for meaningful work or prepare them for society. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is not merely dashing a few shakes of salt that is cultural references or people in the curriculum, but it is to fully season the curriculum in a way that it is represented in every aspect of the learning experience. Teaching Black and Brown students in high school sociological content that impacts their life (e.g., hegemony, intersectionality and microaggressions), while equipping them with a theoretical lens in critical race theory and giving them hands on experience with conducting relevant research has positive benefits. Those benefits being a greater sense of political voice, higher academic

achievement, and critical thinking of the preservation of culture and identity (Cammarota, 2007). There is a limited amount of research in understanding the impact culturally sustaining pedagogy has on students—furthermore, there remains a gap in research examining how culturally sustaining pedagogy may impact Black students' school mattering.

There is growing research in what we know about mattering (Marshall, 2001; Taylor & Turner, 2001; Vélez et al., 2020); however, there is a need to understand school mattering and how school practices (i.e., school discipline, teacher relationship, culturally sustaining pedagogy), along with academic disruption impacts the school mattering of marginalized students.

Street Life

Some youth see street life as an option even before high school ends. Street life is an option that is in the face of those that are systemically marginalized—street life *is* in the margins of society. Street life is a life that is centered on personal and economic survival including a range of modes of networking, bonding and illegal activities (Payne, 2008; Payne et al., 2009; Payne & Hamdi, 2009). Although Payne and Hamdi (2009) would argue that street-life has its positive intentions and is a site of resilience towards personal and economic survival, the media—and attitudes of people—normally stigmatize that lifestyle and view it as antisocial and undesirable. Certainly, street-life *is not* to be desirable, but within street-life there is positivity and street life is a phenomenon born from institutional inequity. Street life is not an option of choice but an option that people are pushed into as street life is most common in areas of high rates of unemployment, poverty, low funded and under-performing school districts and other social issues that are the consequences of systemic oppression (Payne,

2008), like in the USVI. In a classroom full of children, one would be hard pressed to find a child that says they want to be in street life when they grow up. Street-identified Black men and women must combat the negative messages of their social identity, while hoping to dodge the criminal justice system. They have to navigate around these messages even if they believe they *have* to “do what they have to do” considering the circumstances dealt to them—even if it goes against their own and their community’s desire.

School mattering may play a role in participating in street life. Street life comes with great risks such as drug use and homicide (Franklin, 2004; Mascaro, 2005; Payne, 2008). When educators push Black students out of school, they simultaneously increase the likelihood that those students will engage in criminal behavior that can lead to their imprisonment. Those who are street identified are likely to have been in prison at some point in their life and used or sold drugs (Payne & Hamdi, 2009). The experience or school mattering may have a role in preventing or pushing students into street life causing them to engage in those risky behaviors. As mentioned in the culturally sustaining pedagogy section, the requirement to assimilate into traditional school structures is ineffective and can be a root of contention between the teacher and student (Burton, 2007; Burton et al., 1996; Goff et al., 2014).

Students who experience educators pushing them out of school and are resilient through compounded hardships that come from living on a colonized island face difficulties in obtaining a diploma. A diploma is a currency that once obtained can be used to gain opportunity and privilege that may be harder to access without it. Just as a person with more money has access to more resources, the more education a person obtains comes with the possibility of more opportunity and upward mobility.

Some street identified high school Black youth understand the importance of getting an education and desire to go to college; however, many have a negative relationship with their teachers and feel the school was not a nurturing place (Payne, 2009)—which may negatively impact school mattering. That suggests that Black students—street identified Black students—may speak of current negative experiences with their school or teacher but does not mean they do not care about or see the importance of learning and obtaining an education, which may be the case with Black Virgin Island students as well. It may be that the students see their teachers infringing on their ability to gain opportune currency through education and because of that, they must not matter. For example, teachers can identify a street-oriented student and label them as “not caring about education,” and that deficit bias can be used to write them off instead of giving them the help and attention they need to know they matter.

Get off the Island Mentality

In the Virgin Islands there is a “get out of the ‘hood” or “get off the Island” complex due to the status as second-class citizens, limited mobility and career options, high cost of living, and the lure of living a perceived “better” life in the U.S.A. (P. Bailey, 2018). Some Black Virgin Island youth may have a “get off the Island” mentality as a way to either look forward to or for the opportunity to escape the hardships and limitations of the Island. Some that can leave the Island are either high academic performing students or those that have a family member living in the U.S.A. and have the resources to leave. Get out the ‘hood mentality is driven by the desire to escape poverty, violence, crime and low economic opportunities (Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009) all of which are present in the USVI. For Virgin Islanders that remain, their structural options are limited. Tourism, trade and rum production are the primary

economy in the USVI (*Virgin Islands Economy*, 2020). There is a strong representation of Black Virgin Island professionals that are politicians, police officers, lawyers and taxi-drivers. Black Virgin Island boys can visually see models of success, which may impact partial mattering, from the USVI in the media like Tim Duncan (NBA), Raja Bell (NBA), Julian Jackson (boxer), Pressure (singer), and Rock City (band). Black Virgin Island girls can read fictional literature written by Tiphonie Yanique and see Rashida Hodge the vice president of IBM's North America Global Markets and see creative art by La Vaughn Belle. However, becoming an NBA player or an internationally recognized musician or writer remains very difficult to do and most that do, leave the Island to gain that success.

Locally, there are limited Virgin Island Black men and women, who own their own businesses compared to the other racial-ethnic groups. Latinx are generally the Afro-Caribbean group that own businesses in St. Thomas. Those Black Virgin Islanders that do own their own business are more likely to be in the food service industry. This is most likely because white people and individuals from Arab countries predominately own most of the businesses in the Territory. They employ locals, but typically for specific positions. For example, for many restaurants owned by whites, have local Virgin Islanders working in the back as cooks, while lighter skinned or non-Blacks work in the dinning and bar areas—the visible to customers areas (Barbara Barnes, 2019). There is also a culture of politics amongst some business owners to weed out other competition on the Island. For example, in 2021 there are nine major grocery stores in STT, and many are owned by families from Arab countries. In 2017, the Government Employee's Retirement System of the Virgin Islands (G.E.R.S) loaned \$8.2 million in retirement funds to a group of Black Virgin Islanders to open

up a grocery store on the west end of St. Thomas, where there is only one grocery store (Carlson, 2019). The only Virgin Island Black owned grocery store lasted less than two years (Carlson, 2019). There were rumors that business families from Arab countries were blocking the importing freights preventing the grocery store from receiving their merchandise (Carlson, 2019). The store was unable to pay its rent and did not have the local support it needed, therefore it closed, which meant the G.E.R.S. loan would be very difficult to pay back. The impact of the loan has caused a questionable system to become unstable and possibly having negative trickle down effects on those desiring to retire in the future. Not only do Virgin Island Black youth see limited representation for career options, but if there is no fix to the retirement system in the near future they will likely have to worry about their ability to retire.

Virgin Island Black youth may have to navigate the cultural tension of being responsible to the group versus pursuing their own goals, which may impact the “get off the Island” mentality. Black culture in the U.S.A. is a mixture of both individualistic and collectivist lifestyles (Brown et al., 2013). The individualistic aspect comes from living in Western U.S.A. culture, while collectivist notions can be traced to our African heritage. The Caribbean leans more towards collectivism than individualism, thus Virgin Islanders are more communal culturally (Hunter, 2008). Though, because of U.S.A. colonization and competition for limited resources, there has been a shift towards individualism—creating that cultural tension. Virgin Island pride and collectivism extends beyond wearing the USVI flag and attending Carnival. Some forms of pride and collectivism that can be found in the USVI are the continued use of the dialectic language, greeting strangers in passing, seeing someone in need and offering help, sharing resources, multigenerational living, and remaining in the

Territory to contribute to the continued development of the USVI (Hunter, 2008). However, due to easy access to the U.S.A. where there is a wider range of economic opportunity and a “get off the Island” complex in the USVI, Virgin Island youth are faced with leaving that communal culture and embracing an individualistic mindset for their own benefit. There is a gap in empirical understanding of the “get off the Island” mentality and it is not clear how a high schoolers’ school mattering impacts the “get off the Island” mentality as the literature on the mentality is minimum (Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009; Massey, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000).

Chapter 4

METHODS

This chapter describes the methodology used in this mixed-methods study. It explains the quantitative measures used to answer the research questions and it explains the protocol used in the qualitative aspect of the study. The chapter also explains how participants were recruited for both aspects of the study.

Quantitative

Quantitative Procedures

The quantitative aspect of the study was conducted using an online survey distributed to Black Virgin Island high school youth in the St. Thomas/St. John school district of the U.S Virgin Islands. The sample consists of public high school students in 9th-12th grade. The sample included those students who experienced going to school on half-day schedules while either sharing a building with another school or placed in temporary modulars after the 2017 hurricanes. Black students who were born and/or raised in the Virgin Islands were eligible to participate.

In February and March 2021, the study was approved by the Virgin Island Department of Education and the University of Delaware's IRBs, respectively, to begin collecting data. Recruitment relied on collaboration with the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) and the public high schools' principals, teachers and staff. Parents were sent an email announcing the study and were given the opportunity to excuse their child from participating. Students were emailed a description of the

study and the link to the survey where detailed information and the opportunity to assent preceded the beginning of the survey.

Quantitative Measures

The quantitative survey measured sociodemographic characteristics, mattering and school practices.

Sociodemographics. The demographic items included grade level, racial and ethnic identity, and gender. Three of the questions aimed to determine what generation of Virgin Islander the student may be (See Appendix A). For example, “Were any of your grandparents born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands?” Two of the questions asked about the student’s experience with hurricanes Irma and Maria (IrMaria) in 2017 and how they think it impacted their school life (See Appendix A). Examples of options students chose from were: Went to school on a half day schedule, cared less about school, and grades dropped.

Two questions asked about the students’ perspective on how COVID-19 is impacting their school life, similar to the question asked about IrMaria (See Appendix A). One question asked if the student has ever been expelled and suspended from school. One question asked if they would advise another student to leave or stay on the Island. Finally, there is a question that asks if they plan to leave or stay on Island.

Mattering. The Mattering scale developed by Elliot and colleagues (2004) measures how a person perceives they matter to their family. The scale has three subscales that measure the three main components of mattering: Awareness (8 items), Importance (10 items) and Reliance (6 items). The scale was adapted to fit a school context (See Appendix A). For example, an Awareness item stating, “Most people do not seem to notice when I come or when I go” was modified to state, “Most of my

teachers do not seem to notice when I come or when I go.” The 24 items are measured on a five-point Likert scale of *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Items are averaged. The analysis includes the full composite scale of mattering. Cronbach alpha for the mattering composite scale was .68.

Teacher Relationships. Teacher relationship was defined as the level of support a student feels they have from a teacher, including support with matters beyond academics. Examples of support from teachers include, but are not limited to, actions such as answering a question, providing extra attention when the student needs help in a subject, giving a listening ear when a student reaches out to them about a personal matter, and reaching out to a student to see if they need help.

The Authoritative School Climate Survey (Cornell, 2019; ASCS) was developed to assess school climate and bullying in schools. The two subscales that were used were the Student Support subscale (Teacher’s Respect for Students, four items) and the Student Support subscale (Willingness to Seek Help, four items). The items are measured on a 4-point Likert scale of *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). The items are summed, and higher scores represent greater agreement with teachers having respect for students and students perceiving they have someone that they can go to for help. The two scales were combined to measure Teacher Relationship where scores were averaged between the eight items.

School Discipline. The perceived school discipline scale is from the 2017 School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The four items measure perceived fairness of school disciplinary practices including whether the rules and enforcement of them are well-communicated, fair, and consistently applied to everyone. The items are rated on

a four-point Likert scale of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Items are summed such that a higher score means the student perceives the rules and enforcement of the rules to be fair.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. The Black boy mattering curriculum subscale of a developing Black Boy Mattering scale (Daughtry et al., 2020) aims to assess, from the student perspective, whether the school curriculum reflects the culture, experiences, and history of the students in the class. Daughtry and colleagues (2020) developed the Black boy mattering curriculum subscale that included seven items asking students about the curriculum taught in class settings. As of November 2020, the scale went through one round of group cognitive interviewing with Black high school boys. The cognitive group interview revealed that the questions on the scale were clear and understandable for high school age participants. In the current study the culturally sustaining pedagogy subscale was modified to fit the context of the U.S. Virgin Islands. For example, one item originally stated, “In general, my classes talk about things important to Black people,” and was modified to, “In general, my classes talk about things important to Virgin Islanders.” These seven items are scored on a four-point Likert scale of *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). Items are summed and higher scores suggests that the school practices culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Qualitative

Qualitative Procedures

Qualitative data was collected to “complement the breadth of understanding the afforded by the quantitative data” (Palinkas et al., 2011, p. 47) by adding to the understanding of perceived school mattering for Black Virgin Island high school

youth. The sample included Black Virgin Island high school students. Recruitment was like the recruitment for the quantitative survey except parents had to give explicit permission for their child to participate. Fourteen one-on-one semi-structured virtual interviews were conducted with seven boys and seven girls exploring academic disruption, street life, and the “get off the Island” mentality. Interviews lasted between 45-minutes to 2-hours depending on how much the participant engaged in the interview. Participants were compensated with an Amazon e-gift card in the range of \$10-\$25 for their completed participation in a full interview (See Qualitative Results section for more information on the sample). The interviews were then transcribed by myself or a research assistant, and then reviewed by me.

Qualitative Protocol

Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted for the study. The qualitative protocol was used to gain insight into how students perceive the role of school mattering in academic disruption, street life and “get off the Island” mentality of Black Virgin Island high school youth (Palinkas et al., 2011). The protocol included mattering questions from the Black Boy Mattering Project (Carey, Polanco, Blackmon & Daughtry, 2020) and were constructed based on the theories used in the study. The protocol asked open-ended questions about the 2017 hurricanes and COVID-19, their school life, school curriculum, school discipline, perceptions of street life, life on the Island, and future life orientation (See Appendix B).

Chapter 5

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

In this chapter the results of the quantitative aspect of the study are presented. The steps for each round of analysis are explained and the quantitative hypotheses are revisited (See Research Questions, Aims, and Hypotheses).

Quantitative Analyses

Getting the survey disseminated to parents and students proved to be difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many attempts to recruit students through email communication with principals, teachers and staff lasted from March 2021 through the end of the school year in May 2021 resulted in 120 completed surveys. First, descriptive statistics were conducted (i.e., means, standard deviations, percentages, bivariate correlations, etc.). The sample consisted of 54 boys (45%) and 66 girls (55%) from 9th grade (14%), 10th grade (55%), 11th grade (17%) and 12th grade (14%). Most of the students identified as Black (109) with 11 students identifying as Biracial and having one Black parent. All the students identified as being a Virgin Islander. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation or frequency and percentage for each main variable.

Table 1**Table** Variable Descriptive Statistics

Variable Name	Mean	Std. Deviation	% (in percentage)	N
Mattering (Q22.1-Q26.6)	2.94	.44		
Discipline (Q19.1-Q19.4)	2.71	.53		
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Q11-Q18)	2.84	.51		
Teacher Relationship (Q20.1-Q21.5)	2.86	.53		
Sociodemographics				
School Attended				
School 1			62	75
School 2			38	45
Gender				
Boys			45	54
Girls			55	66
Grandparent's birthplace				
Virgin Islands			49	59
Non-Virgin Islands			51	61
Parent's birthplace				
Virgin Islands			72	86
Non-Virgin Islands			28	34

Mattering, an individuals' perception that they are important or of value to someone else (Elliot et al., 2004), was found to be positively correlated with teacher relationship ($r = .476, p < 0.001$) and was not correlated with any other variable. The results suggest that the more students perceive their relationship with their teacher as

positive the more they perceive they matter to their school and vice versa. Univariate linear regressions were conducted to explore associations between mattering with culturally sustaining pedagogy, school discipline, teacher relationship, what school the student attends, gender, grandparent birthplace, and parental birthplace. There were statistically significant associations between teacher relationship ($\beta = .476$ $p = <0.001$) and school participant attends ($\beta = .232$ $p = 0.009$) with mattering. No other associations were statistically significant. A multivariable linear regression was then conducted including teacher relationship and school participant attends on mattering. Teacher relationship remained significant ($\beta = .449$ $p = <0.001$), while school participant attended did not ($\beta = .139$ $p = 0.090$). According to the R^2 value, the teacher relationship and which school the participant attended accounted for 24.5 percent of the variance in school mattering. When tested by itself, teacher relationship accounted for 21.9 percent of the variance in school mattering. The results suggest that teacher relationship is associated with perceived school mattering for Black Virgin Island high schoolers and accounts for roughly 22 percent of the variance and the standardized B was relatively small at .45. Therefore, there is roughly 78 percent of variance unaccounted for in understanding what impacts school mattering for Black Virgin Island high schoolers. The unstandardized B suggests that the association between the two variables is small. For each unit of change in teacher relationship, mattering increases or decreases by less than half a unit.

Table 2

Univariate Linear Regression and Multivariable Regression Results

	Univariate			Multivariable		
	B (SE)	Beta	p-value	B (SE)	Beta	p-value
<u>Predictors</u>						
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy	.129 (.075)	.155	.086			
School Discipline	.032 (.076)	.038	.676			
Teacher Relationship	.401 (.068)	.476	<.001	.378 (.068)	.449	<.001
<u>Socio-Demographics</u>						
School	.021 (.080)	.232	.009	.127 (.074)	.139	.090
Gender	.040 (.080)	.045	.620			
Grandparents	.058 (.080)	.066	.467			
Parents	.105 (.086)	.110	.225			

A post-hoc power analyses was conducted to determine the amount of power that was achieved with the completed sample. With a sample of n=120, two variables,

and an observed medium effect size (.32; determined by *f*-squared), it was estimated that there was 0.99 power for the multivariable regression analysis. After running these analyses, my hypothesis that teacher relationship will positively impact mattering would not be rejected. The hypotheses on the relationship with the other variables on mattering are rejected.

There were a series of steps taken to determine whether gender moderates associations between school discipline, culturally sustaining pedagogy and/or teacher relationship with mattering. The first step was to center each independent variable. The second step was to create an interaction term that represented the new centered independent variable multiplied by the gender dummy coded variable. Finally, a linear regression was conducted including the centered independent variables, gender dummy coded variable, and interaction term predicting mattering. All interaction terms were not statistically significant; therefore, gender did not moderate the effects of any of the independent variables on mattering.

“Get off the Island” mentality was explored in the qualitative aspect of the study; however, two questions were used in the quantitative survey to help the qualitative analysis: 1. Do you see yourself living in the VI for the rest of your life (even if that means leaving for college/work experience and then coming back in the 20’s)? and; 2. What would you recommend to a young person in the VI today who wants a good life—should they move to another country or stay in the VI? The results of the first question, using a five-point Likert scale of definitely not to definitely yes, revealed that 63 out of 126 (50%) participants do not want to live in the USVI, 42

(32%) were unsure and 21 (16%) answered in some form that they see themselves living in the VI. The results of the second question show 80 out of 123 participants (65%) would recommend a young person to move off the Island.

Summary

A quantitative survey was disseminated to Black Virgin Island high schoolers through the public high schools and 120 surveys were completed measuring perceived school mattering, school discipline, teacher relationship and culturally sustaining pedagogy. The results from the quantitative survey suggest that students with more positive teacher relationships reported greater school mattering. School discipline and culturally sustaining pedagogy were not statistically significantly associated with mattering. Gender did not moderate any associations between the key variables of interest and school mattering.

Chapter 6

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

In this chapter the results of the qualitative aspect of the study are presented. The analysis process, the sample are described. The results from the data are organized based on the qualitative aims for the study.

Qualitative Analysis

Latent content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data (Greenwood & Habibi, 2014; Hruschka et al., 2004). The semi-structured virtual interviews were the unit of analysis. First, deductive codes (e.g., mattering to their school) were constructed based on the exploratory aims. Inductive codes were created as the interviews proceeded and recurring themes arose. The deductive and inductive codes were used to code the meaning units, which are excerpts from the data in which I coded all fourteen interviews. To ensure reliability of the analysis, another coder—committee member—reviewed the coded transcripts separately, made memos and then we came back together to compare (Greenwood & Habibi, 2014). After the data were coded and organized, the data were ready to be interpreted (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Qualitative Sample

There were 14 (seven boys and seven girls) one-on-one semi-structured virtual interviews conducted for this study. One participant identified as Biracial Virgin

Islander having one Black parent, and thirteen participants identified as Black Virgin Islanders. All participants were attending public high school and living in St. Thomas. Each participant chose their own pseudo-name to use for the study to protect their identity and each participant was present during the 2017 hurricanes IrMaria and their aftermath. The age range was from 15-18 years old. There was one 9th grader, seven 10th graders, and six 12th graders that participated in a qualitative interview. A tenet of critical race theory used in this study is counter storytelling (Bell, 1995; Sleeter, 2017). How counter storytelling is used in this study is by keeping the statements in their original form and language as it was presented in the interview. Only identifying information was removed from the excerpts. This is to center the quotidian and give voice and honor to their experience. (See Appendix C for participant introductions).

Academic Disruption

Academic disruption is a concept developed within this study that represents the interference of the normal and stable processes of obtaining an education. Since 2017, students in the St. Thomas/St. John school district have endured through events such as the aftermath of hurricanes IrMaria, the COVID-19 pandemic, and repeated power and WIFI outages that have seemingly interfered with the process of receiving an education. These events were experienced on a communal level, therefore, academic disruption in this study was explored on a communal—or general—level. Academic disruption can be caused by individual experiences (e.g., divorce, housing instability), but personal experiences were not explored in these interviews. Through this study, we can understand how fourteen Black Virgin Island students in the St.

Thomas/St. John school district perceive the impact communal disruptive events have had on their education and mattering to their school. Some words that were used to describe the flow of education due to IrMaria, COVID-19 and the power and WIFI outages were:

Table 3

Participants' Words to Describe the Flow of Education Due to Disruption

Name	Words to describe flow
Mia	Hot, annoyed, pissed, want to go home, 4/10 on ability to focus (when WAPA goes out), loss of motivation, unhelpful
Oscar Rose	Stress, forced and rushed
Thomas	Slows it down
Douglas	Feels like we are missing a lot of school (when WAPA goes out). Slow.
Ainsley	Negative attitudes expressed by teachers, more work, horrible, just a mess
Laila	Frustrating, unsettling, changing and anxious
Jahmila	Disoriented, slow and depressing
Stout	
Loki	Rushed, stressful
Amiyah	It stops (referring to WAPA and WIFI outages). More hard working and difficult.
CJ	Hard to stay focused
Pinky	Annoying, Slow, easy, then constricted
Marie	Unpredictable, unorganized
Velvet	Annoying as hell,
Victor	Inadequate, not enough education, insufficient.

The two most commonly used words to express how they perceived the flow of education due to the events are slow and stressful. The participants reported some of the stress came from the increase amount of work they were assigned after the hurricanes, during the pandemic and after WAPA disruptions. From their perspective,

schoolwork increased after the hurricanes because the school year began months later, and teachers felt the pressure from administration to meet curriculum goals in the short amount of time. Reasons the participants believe they received more schoolwork during the pandemic was because teachers believed students at home had nothing to do, therefore they assigned more work. Another reason for their stress was the uncertainty that came with experiencing disruption due to failing current and WIFI systems. Here is why Laila chose the words she uses to describe the flow (See Appendix D for Virgin Island Language Guide):

Laila: They will be unsettling, changing, and anxious. And the reason I chose these three words is because it is very unsettling to know whether or not you...I mean, to not know whether or not you're going to get a full education this day, or if you're going to miss out on days of schoolwork. Um, it's constantly changing, because within the whole um Covid, and powa going out so often ever since the hurricane, and still the two hurricanes that hit us, it's like we haven't had a stable environment that we had to do school in since. I know many schools in 2019 just got back up and running in their normal setting since the hurricane. Many schools just gotten fixed, just getting their people back. So, it's like they're starting all over again, ehno. So, now with Covid here it's like they kinda went back down the slope that they just struggled to come back on.

In this excerpt Laila expresses a common theme most of the students shared, which is they did not have a normal school experience since 2017 and just when it seemed they would get some sense of normalcy, COVID-19 hit. An explanation participants gave to explain what they meant by slow is that when school stopped, they could not continue onto the next thing—slowing their process down. However, when school resumed, even if it was the next day, the participants felt the teachers tried to cover too much ground. Douglas said, "...for me, is like ehno that's just...is like ya missing a whole month of school. Yeah, because at times they'da be like ehno, 'What I missed

one day is all dis wuk?”” Douglas essentially says that even after missing one day of school because of a WAPA outage there seemed to be an overwhelming amount of schoolwork and catching up to do once school resumed.

When it comes to the participants’ experience with WAPA turning off during in-person class versus virtual class, and normal courses versus honors courses, the experiences were different. Two out of five honors students reported that when current went out during in-person class the teacher would stop class very briefly, but then they would continue class relying on the sun—despite it being hot and current remaining out. While the other non-honors students reported that classes would stop completely while WAPA was out. Here is what Jahmila Stout, an honors student, and what Oscar Rose, a student in regular classes, said when I asked them to describe to me what happens when WAPA goes out during in-person school:

Jahmila Stout: Well, first you have teachers and student’s smart remarks ehno. We’re used to it so then we jus open up the windows, and then we jus...cuz we rarely use like ehno the technology anyway cuz different classes have ehno different experiences with the WIFI and stuff. So, we have textbook and stuff on hand to jus continue teaching, right. It rarely ever impacted our learning, but it did on the light, but then the sun. So, we would jus go and continue the lesson, geh a little hot maybe, but it doesn’t stop anything. (05/19/21)

Oscar Rose: Teaching is done. School is... the teacher stop teaching. Students, they wild. Um... School is basically... if it’s out for two hours, school is out because, simply you can’t do anything without light. You cyant see! And in our school it’s like...I mean you cyant. Just there’s no...no way there’s no...there’s nothing. No generator. Like we brought up, we don’ matter to them, to the school, to WAPA for dah. We don’ really matter. We don’t matter. They don’t care. They take out the light when they want to. They don’t think about the students or after even say the school or the government don’ think about us or don’ care about us. Cuz if they knew that WAPA was always be going out, why they don’ put generators strong enough to keep us on? Ehno, so they know that if WAPA is out for a certain period of time school is

out, or our students are missing out on something they should be learning. They don't care. WAPA goes out when it feels like ehno it goes out. It's gone. The day, the time goes, you miss out on something you should be learning. Well, "supposed" to be learning, cuz not all the time you should be learning somma da things... I feel as though we shouldn't have to learn somma da things we be learning, but to be on topic, yeah we don't matter. (03/24/21)

Regardless of the level of the course students are in, there was a common experience that when current failed, students made noise of some kind and teachers either competed with the noise or went to see what happened with the current. Another common statement was "we're used to it." These high school students have experienced power outages during school for most of their academic career. Pinky, a twelfth grader, reported her first time experiencing a power outage during school was in the first grade. Finally, another common statement was "too hot." When WAPA goes out it also takes away the air conditioning in the classroom. The participants reported the classrooms get hot very quickly. According to the participants, some teachers open the classroom door and windows to let the sea breeze into the classroom. Others move their class outside, but the students have to move the desks and chairs, which become burdensome for them. The classes that move outside are less likely to get work done as students are distracted or worksheets are flying around due to the sea breeze blowing. Oscar Rose elaborated on his comment about the students going wild when current goes out:

Oscar Rose: I mean we, we... I'm not even gon' lie ehno, we, we do what we want. Some students go outside cuz it's too hot in the classroom, which is true. I mean, what you want us to do? It's too hot in there. You know what I mean, so what you want us to do? So, we gotta be antsy...we be leaving. We out. Cuz it's too hot!

Teachers get irritated, so they start ehno telling us all kinds of stuff. And ehno teachers don't hide their emotions down here. They take whatever they feel...and I mean I feel as a Virgin Islander we don't

hold our emotions. Whatever they feelin' they puttin' it there, and you could tell. You could just tell. Ya ain't hidin' nuttin. Or nutting like, we wanna be outta dat. So, we gettin wild, or we just we...either leavin' the classroom or we keeping each other busy ehno we keeping each other busy or whatever, talking to one another, doing whatever. So, that's when I say we actin' wild, we wild.

The students repeatedly reported stories like Oscar Rose's in which the cutting off of power during in-person class stopped the flow of education. When asked what kind of impact they perceived that to have on their education there were a mix of emotions.

Some students reported that WAPA going out was partly a sigh of relief because

WAPA going out provided what they felt was a much-needed break from schoolwork.

Although those students enjoyed getting a break, they also expressed that having current cut off repeatedly had a negative impact on their education. They expressed feelings of not mattering to WAPA nor their school because of the frequent outages.

The two of the five students in honors courses did not feel that WAPA going out during in-person school had a negative impact on them because they were able to continue to do the work. Current and WIFI going out during virtual school produced more similar experiences and sentiments across the sample, which were negative.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schooling was virtual making the need for stable current and WIFI more important than before. Students, regardless of being in an honors course or not, were not able to join their class when WAPA or the WIFI was out. Unless a student had a generator, once current or WIFI went out, they were done with class until the resources came back on. Oscar Rose and Ainsley were the only participants that had a generator at their home, and they still had difficulties navigating

school. Ainsley mentioned having to ask his dad permission to turn it on, while Oscar Rose spoke about the limitations of using the generator. Some limitations with relying on the generator is that it does not last long because the cost to run a generator is expensive and generators are not allowed to run between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Another obstacle was if there was an island-wide outage or an outage where the teacher taught from, there would be no class to get into even if students had a generator to turn on. Some students reported having difficulties with teachers believing whether or not they were experiencing real outages, which added to a lack of trust between student and teacher. They also reported frustration with the Virgin Island Department of Education's (VIDE) policy that unless there was an island-wide power or WIFI outage, students were expected to be in class otherwise they would be marked absent. Students expressed they did not believe the rule was fair because there were times when certain areas of the Island were experiencing disruption in services while other areas were not. When they experienced an outage sometimes their teachers would enforce the rule and mark them absent, and some teachers would be lenient with them. This was an added stressor for the students as they tried to stay on top of their schoolwork. When asked how important their education was to them, each participant expressed that their education was important to them, which shows that the students do care about receiving a good education and participating in their learning. However, obstacles out of their control prevented them from a normative school experience.

Academic disruption caused by the hurricanes, COVID-19 and WAPA/WIFI outages seemed to have had different impacts on the relationship students had with their teachers and staff. The participants reported that during COVID-19 the communication with most of their teachers was not good or up to their standard. Some did report some teachers went out of their way to make sure their students had access to them by providing their cellphone number or being responsive through email. Teachers willing to provide access to them was interpreted as caring for the student and showing that they mattered. Teachers not providing that access was interpreted by the participants as either not caring for the student or “they are under a lot of pressure too.” An important note to make is that the students were not the only one’s experiencing disruption, but the adults were too. Some participants were perceptive of the adult experience and at times the shared communal experience came through in the data:

Interviewer: So, going back to that, like, thinking about your relationships with teachers during COVID and stuff like that, how do you think that COVID has impacted your relationship with your teachers? How have they been since COVID?

Loki: Um, somma da teachas dey feel what we feel. We feel stressed. Ehno, we can hear it in their voice sometimes in the morning...in the afternoon. We can see it on their face, because the camera is on. So, we, we know that is not easy for them too, cuz we know they want to be in a classroom, they want to see us, ehno physically interact with us. So, it's hard for them too. (03/19/21)

Here Loki, who expressed always having good relationships with his teachers, provides an empathetic statement about his teachers being negatively impacted by the abnormal circumstances brought on by the pandemic. The participants also reported

that some teachers seemed to care less in how they taught after the hurricanes and when the pandemic hit.

Ainsley: Um... my relations with the teachers from before...I was in ninth grade at the time, so I would say that our relationship, so our teachers are pretty okay. Again, more cared than others about our learning but as of now, I feel like there's such a great distance that some teachers just handout my work. In first quarter, I mean in first semester, because we have two semesters down here, in our first semester, I can, if I remember correctly, one of my teachers didn't come to class like she just literally sent out an email saying, "Here's the work, get it done," and then we never had to get a sign into her class virtually. But in second semester, some of our teachers have been a little bit more...a little bit more out...not outgoing...a little bit more responsive with us. Engaged, yes. They are a lot more engaged than the first semester, when the vaccine, I mean when the covid hit.

The data reveal that the participants had a mixture of experiences and level of care from their teachers. Some students, like Amiyah, reported that her bond with her teachers were not as great due to the pandemic. She mentioned that before the pandemic she and her teachers would crack jokes to one another before and after class, but since virtual learning does not offer that space, she missed having that bond with her teachers. Marie stated, "I feel like they wanted to get a lot done, but they know they couldn't get a lot done, so they jus was all over the place. Dah was my experience. For me, it wasn't horrible but when it comes to learning, I felt very...I didn't feel prepared at all for anything." The participants articulated well their perception of how academic disruption has impacted their education and their educational experience, including their relationship with their teacher.

In summary, the data reveal that all 14 students care about their education and desire to do well; however, the disruptive experiences of the 2017 hurricanes, COVID-19, and power and WIFI outages are perceived to negatively impact their academic process by causing them stress, over-working them and creating feelings of not receiving an adequate education. The disruption could also impact their relationship with their teacher depending on how the teacher responds to their own experience with the disruption. By high school, the participants have grown accustomed to the disruption and have learned the skill of being resilient through it all in hope that the disruption does not impact their future. Some participants reported grades dropping, while some grades remained the same, and some got better after the hurricanes and COVID-19. Despite how their grades were impacted, each of them reported the disruption having a negative impact on their educational experience. When asked how they think they matter to their school during the disruption, most students expressed that they felt they did not matter to their school, and some students expressed that they did. The students that expressed that they felt they mattered to their school believed that the simple fact that they still had school was enough for them to believe that the school thought they mattered. Students that felt that they did not matter to the school held their negative experiences with the disruption and their school closer to them. Oscar Rose felt that the disruption made no difference in whether students mattered to their school:

Oscar Rose: Naw, it wouldn't be a difference! I mean, the teachers still gonna treat us the same way they treat us. And when I say the way they treat us, the way they treat us...some of them, *some of them* treat us

like like like we just nothing. Like, whatever! Some of the principals, previous principals we had or ehno in certain schools they don't care about some of the students. As principal you should care about all the students, but I mean, as a principal....as a principal...some students, they don't care about. They have...it's almost like they have relationship with every student and if they don't like that one student they gonna feel it. Even if you have the best grades in school or you want the best grades in school and you're not a bad kid, if the principal or the teacher or the staff does not like you and you need them for something, you're going to feel it. You're gonna feel it. And I mean whatever happens, happens.

So, when I say that I say that to say this, even if we had no COVID or we didn't have no hurricane, WAPA wasn't going out going out, a person is a person. You have to change you. The person has to change themselves. We still won't matter. It's like, they're gonna have to do a lot of changin and stuff like that, for me, or I guess from my other peers to feel like we matter ehno.

Street Life

I explored the participants' perception of school mattering and its role in their and others' engagement with street life. Street life was defined as a life that is centered on personal and economic survival including a range of modes of networking, bonding and illegal activities (Payne, 2008; Payne et al., 2009; Payne & Hamdi, 2009). The participants defined how they generally perceived street life as people that sell and do drugs, engage in criminal activity, hangout on the street corner, a community of people, gangs, killing and hurting innocent people, people not caring about school and a life some are forced into. The participants reported that street life in St. Thomas is everywhere but happens in more places than others. Some of the places that repeatedly came up were Housing, the projects, Bovoni area and Smith Bay area. A recurring answer to what street life looks like in St. Thomas was innocent bystanders being hurt or killed by those in street life. Some of the participants shared having witnessed innocent bystanders being murdered or close to being murdered by a stray bullet.

Another recurring idea about street life was the perception that street life in St. Thomas is people hanging out with each other not bothering anyone unless they are bothered first. Oscar Rose believes street life in St. Thomas is silent:

Oscar Rose: Street life down here in St. Thomas is silent. Silent. It's not like in the States where you know where places not to go, what things not to do. It's very very... it's like a silent bullet. It's very silent. The Island is so small that I would even say that street life is everywhere. Everywhere! It's not like you got the Beverly Hills, or like those places or those places in the States where you just don't hear about street stuff. You don't hear about the guns. You hear it everywhere.

Everywhere you go is like we use the whole Island as the field...the war, it's like it's everywhere. Can be anywhere here and you just wouldn't know. It's silent and sometimes you young and you growin' up here and you don't even realize that you in it. You don' even realize it. You start hanging around some certain people ehno your family members, stuff like that, and you just happen to just get a touch of it. A touch of any...and you go with it, and you in it and you locked in. So, I mean that's everywhere and it's silent. Silent...very silent.

The participants' perception of why young people their age engage in street life varied. A common reason the participants believe young people engage in street life is because the person believes street life is cool because it comes with some form of respect in the street. Some participants shared a deficit tone in their perception of why young people engage in street life in their initial thought but realized the complexity as the interview continued:

Interviewer: So, these boys and girls in street life your age—young—what do you think their relationship with their school is like?

Mia: They don't follow the direction in the school. They don't like to say...respect the staff and faculty in the school. I feel like they think dey like, ehno, they think they better than people. Like, so dey would like, if you, they will take stuff from you and they won't give it back to you and dey tell you, "What you gon' do about it?" Um, they

like...they feel different from people in the school, they act different too.

Interviewer: Where do you get they get those feelings from?

Mia: Um, I'm not sure,. I guess by how dey being treated because of how dey are.

Interviewer: Yeah, treated by who?

Mia: The community I think.

Interviewer: Community, gotchu. So how do you think their teachers and staff treat them?

Mia: Somma dem, somma dem, think dey just like gangsta life or whatever so they would like...dey don' care about dem like dah but some of the teachers will sit down and talk to them. I have seen it happen at my school, I will sit down and talk to them, and like if they askin them like how dey doin', how everything goin' at home...yeah stuff like that.

Interviewer: Alright cool yeah. So how do you think they matter to their school? If you were to ask them, "Do you matter to your school?", what would they say?

Mia: Somma dem will say most likely will say no.

Interviewer: Yeah, why? Why do you think they feel like they don't matter?

Mia: Oh, because not everybody in the school friends with them. They...I mean they have friends, but like they don't feel like they fit in as much as other people do the school. They probably feel left out. Some of the teachers don't trust them like they do with certain students in the school.

This excerpt provides a common dialogue with the participants that initially focused on the negative action of their peers in street life, but then as the conversation continued, they admit that their peers in street life experience unfair treatment from

some teachers, possible feelings of being left out from their peers and teachers, and some teachers caring for them by encouraging them to get out of street life.

Although the participants rarely used the term mattering, some of their perceived reasons for others' engagement in street life was because they believe street life was where the youth feel they matter or get the attention they need:

Victor: I feel like they were raised in the street life by their fahda and mudda. Probably lack of parents, lack of family like, they live wit dey grandmudda. Dey cyant do what they wan. Parent's separations, stuff lik-dat. And they feel like they need somebody...yeah stuff lik-dat.

Interviewer: Yeah and you think they find what they need in the street?

Victor: Yeah, I tink dey do.

The participants shared their perception of the relationship their peers in street life have with their teachers and staff, which—with some of the participants—was different than how they perceived teachers and staff would treat *them* if they were engaged in street life themselves. Common themes participants shared regarding the relationship their peers in street life have with their teachers and staff is that the relationships are not good. There were more reports expressing the teachers treating the students unfairly than there were reports of students deserving how they were treated. The synopsis is that some teachers do care for young people in street life, but that most teachers do not. The participants often used the terms, “some teachers” or “somma dem” referencing that not all teachers care or not all teachers discriminate in their disciplinary practices. In general, participants reported that the negative relationship their peers in street life have with their teachers is to the fault of the teacher not caring for the student and having prejudice towards them because of the perceived life the student lives. When asked to describe the students that get treated

poorly the participants agreed that they were boys and girls that live in housing or the projects and students that do not do as well in school. The participants admitted that students whom the teacher and staff know their family members or is a high academic achiever as more likely to receive preferential treatment.

The preferential treatment due to high academic achievement was important to many of the participants' experience with teachers and how they perceived their teacher would act if they began to engage in street life. Most of the participants reported that they are A and B students—even if their grades dropped due to disruption. Students like Amiyah who expressed having close relationships with their teacher also had a higher optimism that teachers would be caring to them if they decided to engage in street life. For students whose grades were not as high or had negative perceptions of teachers, they believed the teachers and staff would begin to look at and treat them differently if they engaged in street life. Marie went as far as to express that she felt sad knowing that the teachers would treat her differently. One participant, Pinky, shared how her teachers and staff knowing who her family is would backfire on her if she engaged in street life:

Interviewer: So, what would the teachers and adults at school do if they found out that you were a part of street life?

Pinky: Well, knowing how most of my teachers know me now, I think a lot of them would be like kind of disappointed in me. Like, cuz I'm...like I said I'm a high honor roll student. High honors everything ehno. Pretty good at my work. They'd probably very, very disappointed. I know a lot of the teachers will try to convince me out of it. I know a lot of teachers would probably ehno, cuz my family member used to go to school and another one of my family members used to go to school. And one of dem never really finished dey education. So, they'd probably be like, "Oh, expected" basically.

Um, my mom was raised in the projects. She got outta there, but they probably have that ehno, “Duh, expected, because her family” ...cuz there's some people that still have that of me. They're surprised that I'm not into that actually. It's annoying. It's definitely annoying. Um...it's it's sad and disheartening to see that those people that are older than me that are supposed to be in those like teaching and guidance positions are thinking of students or of me like that, like that's that's not cool, and that shouldn't slide.

When asked if the students ever participated in street life, one participant reported formerly being part of street life. They engaged in street life when they were younger when they felt that school was not their “thing.” With the support of family members and coming to the realization that for him to meet his life goals, he would have to leave the street life, and that is when he decided to get out of the street life. Two other participants reported desiring to participate in street life at one point in their life but never did. One participant desired to engage in street life because they thought it looked cool and wanted the respect that came along with it. Eleven participants reported never engaging or desiring to be in street life due to having strict or supportive parents in their life that prevented them from engaging in or desiring to engage in street life. Other reasons were that they did not want to risk their lives, they are lazy and street life looked like a lot of work, and they did not hang out with peers who were in street life. Participants who did have friends in street life reported not feeling any pressure to participate in street life, but instead their peers would protect them from engaging in street life by not allowing them to participate in anti-social behaviors (e.g., selling and doing drugs) with them.

Most participants reported that teachers would care for them if the teacher found out they were in street life, while some said that the teachers would treat them differently. Concerning how their peers in street life matter to their school, most participants (10) believe that most of their peers in street life do not matter to the

school, while they perceive that some may feel that they matter. One participant did not answer the question, while three of the participants believe their peers in street life do not care about school, therefore, they would not matter to the school if they did not care about school themselves. When asked, “What would it look like if they did matter to their school,” the participants shared teachers would talk to them more, try to help them with their schoolwork more, get them more involved with school activities, and teach them things they would want to learn. When asked if the school played a role in whether their peers engaged in street life, 13 out of 14 participants believed that it does. Some participants believe because the school treats the students poorly the students choose street life. Two students shared how they perceived teachers endorsing the street life by either allowing the students to gamble in class or not reprimanding students when they came to class high or smelling like weed. Finally, one participant stated they did not believe the school plays a role in someone choosing to engage in street life, but that the impact comes solely from the home life.

Overall, the data reveal that the participants perceive young people in street life may have strained relationships with their school and complex relationships with their teachers where some teachers may care about them, but most teachers do not. Street life in St. Thomas is perceived to have the ability to happen anywhere, while also having a few certain places where it happens often. The participants believe that if the school wanted to show students in street life that they mattered, then the school would pay more attention to them and treat them fairly resulting in them leaving the street life.

Get Off the Island Mentality

In 2019, Virgin Island music artist Mic Love dropped the hit song “VI to the Bone” a song about Virgin Island identity and pride. Mic Love introduces the song by saying, “Welcome to the most beautiful island in the world; the Virgin Islands.” Although, the participants agree that the Virgin Islands, specifically St. Thomas, has beautiful scenery, great beaches, great community filled with nice people, festivals like carnival, family and everything is close in proximity, there remains a “get off the Island” mentality. A “get off the Island” mentality is equivalent to a “get out the ‘hood” mentality in the United States of America, which is driven by the desire to escape poverty, violence, crime and low economic opportunities (Hardaway & McLoyd, 2009). The participants reported the lack of job opportunities, not much to do, violence, issues with WAPA, poor conditioned roads, lack of trust in the government, and cost of living in St. Thomas as common negative aspects of living in St. Thomas.

Interviewer: So, on that note right. What are some of the worst parts about living in St. Thomas?

Oscar Rose: How people get treated. When I say that I say this; I feel like they give us half of everything that we actually need. They ehno people workin’ hard jobs and they give them half the paycheck. People doing...the Governor or whoever promising certain things, and only giving us half of the promise. Everything is half, half, half, half, half down here...living down here. Only thing it does not half is the items that they try to sell us in the stores. Ain’ nuttin half off; everything is expensive. But everything is...that benefits us is done half down here. We always half...and I can even say sometimes I half do stuff, but I think St. Thomas is well known for half doing stuff.

The excerpt from Oscar Rose stems from a sentiment that the participants feel they live a tougher life living in St. Thomas than in the United States of America due to the high costs of living and distrust of the government. When speaking about being

successful without any prompts from the interviewer, the participants did not associate a successful future with living in St. Thomas.

As previously mentioned in the Results section, the data from the quantitative survey suggests that most Black Virgin Island high schoolers desire to leave the USVI after high school and would recommend others to move off the Island. The qualitative data reveal some similarity in its data to the quantitative data. When asked, “If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?”, 10 participants (71%) initially said they would not live in the Virgin Islands, two students (14%) said they would live in St. Thomas, two students (14%) did not answer any definitive place they would want to live. The participants shared what they imagined a future good life would be for them and then was asked if they thought St. Thomas could be a place where they could live out their future good life. Two of the participants who initially said they would choose to move off St. Thomas changed their mind and said they wanted to live their good life in St. Thomas. Two participants said they *could* live their future good life in St. Thomas but that they did not want to. Ten participants said they did not believe they could live their future good life in St. Thomas. The participants who believed they could live their future good life in St. Thomas believed they could do so because they chose to be self-employed or work in an industry available in St. Thomas. The other participants continued to refer to success being attained off St. Thomas. Some participants wanted a career or wanted to major in a field in college that is not offered in the Virgin Islands. Loki and Amiyah mentioned that their teachers encouraged them that if he wanted to do things “big” he had to leave Island:

Interviewer: So that’s where you would want to live in the world. So, do you think that the adults at your school want you to stay on Island or leave Island?

Loki: Um...no. The majority of teachers will be like, “No, this Island... don't let your home hold you back from bigger opportunities, because different places they have bigger jobs, better opportunities for you to achieve your career choice,” ehno... Big don't think small...think big.” Ehno, so the Island is small, you would think small. Up there's much bigger you think big because there's more opportunity and more jobs for you to have. So they would tell us ehno “meen wan see you heh fah da next 10, five years. I wan you to be gone. I want you to be up in the States doin' I supposed to do” ehno.

Amiyah: Um...probably to find bettah opportunities in de States, ehno Wit down heh, it have opportunities buh it's like, if you wan to go BIG, den you have to remove yourself from dis situation...move forward.

The data reveal that the advice from teachers to stay or leave Island was determined based on the goals or life circumstances of the individual participant. For example, Loki desires to be an actor. He and his teachers perceive there to be a limited number of acting opportunities in the Virgin Islands. Therefore, the advice is for Loki to pursue his dream off Island where he will have the most opportunity to achieve his professional goal. Students with similar goals received similar advice. An overall recurring theme is that the participants desired to experience life outside of St. Thomas—even if it is briefly—because St. Thomas was all they knew, and some of their teachers shared the same desire. When asked about the advice he received from his teachers regarding staying on Island after high school Douglas shared the messages he received were, “Instead of just like staying here all the time ehno, venture out see what it is that you can do for the rest of the world.” Two participants expressed that the advice their teachers gave them regarding leaving or staying on Island did not impact their own decision. One of those participants received messages to stay but wanted to leave. The other received messages to leave but wanted to stay.

The participants were asked what they thought their school could do to encourage students to want to remain in the Virgin Islands and the common answers

were; providing more classes students are interested in, provide extra-curricular activities that are connected to VI culture, and a belief that recruitment to stay on Island was more so the responsibility of the government. Pinky believes the best way to recruit young Black Virgin Islanders to want to remain in the VI is to tell them the truth about life in the USVI, so that they can prepare for that life.

Interviewer: Gotchu. So, in what ways do you think your school can help or do better in helping young talented Black Virgin Islanders, like yourself, want to remain in St. Thomas?

Pinky: Well, I'd say start by telling the truth. Instead of giving us these beat around the bush stories of what life could possibly be like on St. Thomas, just say the truth. It's not easy. Okay, as much as people like to be like, "Oh, this is good here. You live here, you know everybody here." No. That's just one aspect of it. Just start by telling the truth. Start by giving actual information about things that we need to know about.

Overall, the qualitative data reveal "get off the Island" mentality is present with participants who perceive success to be obtained off Island due to perceived limited opportunities in St. Thomas, and desiring to escape the hardships (e.g., cost of living, constant power outages) that come with living in St. Thomas despite living in a beautiful geographical space. Some teachers encourage their students to stay on Island while others encourage their students to leave Island. The teachers give advice based on the student's own desire. If there is any role the school could play in recruiting students to desire to remain on St. Thomas, they should invest in their students' academic desires and USVI culture.

Summary

Fourteen open-ended semi-structural interviews were conducted asking questions on perceived school mattering, academic disruption, street life and “get off the Island” mentality. Academic disruption due the 2017 hurricanes, constant power and WIFI outages, and the COVID-19 pandemic produced feelings of stress and anxiousness, negative perceptions of the participants’ educational experience, and—for some—negative school mattering. None of the 14 participants were engaging in street life at the time of the study in 2021. Some of the common reasons were because of the relationship with their family and wanting to reach their future goals. There was a mixed perception of the relationship their peers in street life have with their teachers. Some reported that their peers receive support, while majority of the report revealed that their peers in street life most likely do not matter to their school because they are discriminated against and are rejected by their teachers and peers. Finally, the data show that most of the participants desire to leave St. Thomas after high school to pursue their journey towards success. Most of the participants did not feel that they could live their future good life in St. Thomas because of the limited options and tough living conditions. The participants reported receiving mixed messages from the teachers on whether to stay or leave the Island. Participants were given advice based on the participants’ aspirations. Although the participants gave suggestions on ways their school could recruit more young Black Virgin Islanders to stay home after high school, it is not clear that any advice given would change a students’ decision.

Chapter 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the study bringing the quantitative and qualitative data and results together. The discussion highlights the major findings that were similar and those that were contrasting. Suggestions are given that could help stakeholders understand where intervention or assistance could take place. Following the discussion, the limitations and future research is discussed.

Teacher Relationships

School is where students are under adult supervision who are most likely not their relatives. Developing and navigating relationships with those who make up the school system (e.g., teachers, staff, peers) is natural. It is important that the relationships with teachers and staff are positive because it could impact how the student perceives they matter to their school. As previously discussed, the univariate linear regression and multivariable regression analyses revealed that positive teacher relationship had a statistically positive association with perceived school mattering. Regarding the positive association between teacher relationship and school mattering, the more students feel they have a positive relationship with their teachers and staff at school, the more they perceive they matter to their school. Students' positive relationships with teachers and staff matter—they are important. Students' perception of mattering to their school is higher when students perceive they are supported by

their teachers and staff, that they have one of the teacher/staff they could talk to, are respected by their teachers/staff, and are relied on by their teachers/staff. Likewise, when students feel the opposite, their perception of school mattering is lower.

The results of the data from the interviews are similar to those from the survey. Participants who shared they had negative relationships with their teachers and/or staff, reported less school mattering than those who reported having positive relationships with their teachers and staff. Not only did the participants' own experience align with the quantitative results regarding the association between teacher relationship and school mattering, but their perception of their peers' relationship with teachers and staff and how they mattered was consistent with the results as well. The teacher relationship sub-scale (Cornell, 2019) and the mattering scale (Elliott et al., 2004) have items that allow for stakeholders to understand what specific actions from teachers that students perceive to impact their school mattering—both positively and negatively. Some positive actions include acknowledging the student by name, relying on the student to perform tasks, offering help to the student, caring for the student beyond academics, and carefully being honest with the student on where they could improve (See Appendix A). A positive student-teacher relationship can lead to resilience through trauma, and mental and emotional health problems (Cavanaugh, 2016; Korinek, 2021). Wang, Brinkworth and Eccles' (2013) study found that positive teacher relationships could help protect from depression. In the current study's qualitative interviews, four out of 14 participants mentioned having some form of mental health issue. Out of the four, three of them

reported having positive relationships with the teachers and feeling like they mattered to their school because of it.

The participants who reported dealing with mental health issues all shared having difficult relationships with their family members. They felt that school was an escape for them. Cases like the participants with mental health issues receiving care from their teachers may suggest that teacher relationship is possibly moderating the effect of negative familial relationships, mental and emotional problems, and mattering. An inductive code that was created in the study was “school family,” which was a code used to describe whenever a participant spoke about school life being like family. Marie expressed that her teachers were like second mothers (See Appendix C for Virgin Island Language Guide):

Interviewer: Can you tell me a specific time when you felt like you mattered?

Marie: Once I started high school, I became really close to like all my teachers. Like, dey were like...I could say dey were like my second mothers. All of my teachers and they really felt like I mattered. Like, the school was a place I really wanted to go to the most jus because of my teachers.

Interviewer: What did they do to make you feel like you matter?

Marie: Like, when dey saw I was struggling, dey really helped me the most. Like, dey would push me to de side and say, “Are you havin’ a problem?” And usually, I would really be havin’ a bad day, and they would jus lift my spirits cuz dey saw dah I was not really my best, cuz not everyone could see dah—or dey jus either ignore it—but my teachas don do dah.

Interviewer: Good. That’s good to know. How did that make you feel?

Marie: Made me feel good. Very good.

Interviewer: Did it make you do anything differently?

Marie: It made me appreciate teachers more.

The highlight of this excerpt is how the teachers' acknowledgement impacted Marie's school mattering. Acknowledgement is key in the awareness aspect of mattering (Elliot et al., 2004) as it affirms to the receiver that others know that they are alive; that they exist and share a world together in which they matter. Loki shared an action his teachers and staff do that makes him feel valued. He said, "...they would come to me, some teachers or principal come true like, 'Aye, we need you for dis, ehno ehno, 'You more in this...more known about this environment. So, we need you for dis. We know you could do this cuz you important to this,' and stuff lik-dah." In this statement, Loki not only shares an experience of awareness, but also an experience of relying on them—another key component of mattering (Elliot et al., 2004). Some of the participants shared having a positive relationship with teachers while leaving room for teachers to make mistakes:

Douglas: So, like I have teachers there who would always check up on me. They'da always ask if I'm struggling with in the class or anything. Once a teacher is able to ehno, take the time out and do dah, it just shows like they actually care like...I actually like going to school. They have...there times when they can be outta hand but at the end of the day, the teachers always show that they care about you.

Interviewer: When you say, "they're out of hand," who's "they?"

Douglas: There's some days where they're just upset with certain students and then they take it out on the rest of the students...So, it's like, I ca' understand where that come from, but at the same time we are in a professional place...but I know at times we can be frustrated.

The complexity of student-teacher relationships not operating in a vacuum is present in the data. The excerpt from Douglas provides is a prime example. Although he may

have had undeserving negative experiences from teachers from time to time, it was not enough to taint his perception of having positive relationships with his teachers overall. Regardless, teachers and staff should try to strive to create positive teacher relationships as much as possible by attending to the academic and personal needs of each of their students. Some of the participants who reported having positive relationships with their teachers mentioned their teacher giving special care and attention to them—which other participants perceived as preferential treatment. The perception of preferential treatment towards a group of students added to negative perceptions of teachers and school mattering.

Students live social lives outside of school and they carry that with them into the school. The school system could care for their students' academic and socio-emotional needs. Although some of the participants shared stories of teachers “cussin” their students out and responding to students in an unprofessional manner, it is possible that their behavior is acceptable in the small communal community of the Virgin Islands. As Oscar Rose mentioned, sharing of raw emotions at times is part of the USVI culture and is acceptable within certain contexts. However, teachers' assumed need for socio-emotional regulation aside, their students bring with them their socio-emotional needs at a stage in their life where they may lack the proper coping skills to manage their needs. A positive teacher relationship is helpful in showing a student they matter when attending to their socio-emotional needs. Velvet shared that she was in a dark depression and what helped her out of the depression was her teachers checking in on her and eventually assisting her with getting the proper mental health care she needed. Once teachers began to not pay her any attention, the depression—caused by her life outside of school—began to impact her negatively

again. Velvet expressed that she was looking for teachers who could be that support for her because she desires it. When asked to share their ideas of what a good school looked like, all 14 participants expressed that a good school has teachers and staff who care. All 14 participants expressed the importance of having positive relationships with the teachers and desired to have good communication, guidance and support from their teachers. Students likely go to school desiring to have positive relationships with their teachers and staff—to feel like they matter to the adults—and the teachers and staff may have one shot or multiple shots to make the student feel that they matter. It may be that teachers and staff should operate as if they only have one shot to help a student know that they matter. To do so, teachers and staff must evaluate their disciplinary practices and how it may impact students' engagement with their school and engagement in street life.

School Discipline and Street life

Although school discipline was studied in the quantitative survey and street life was explored in the qualitative interviews, the qualitative interviews provided some insight into the interconnectedness between school discipline and street life. School discipline was measured using the 2017 School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017) testing for fairness, communication of rules, enforcement and consistency of the rules. School discipline was not statistically associated with school mattering (See Table 2); however, the 14 participants that were part of the qualitative interviews presented a different perspective. Ten out of the fourteen students believed their school did not discipline students fairly and that the school rules were not fair, which made them feel like they—and those receiving the inequitable treatment—did not matter. All 14

participants noted there is one group of students who experience unfair discipline, and that group are students in street life. Street life was defined as a life that is centered on personal and economic survival including a range of modes of networking, bonding and illegal activities (Payne, 2008; Payne et al., 2009; Payne & Hamdi, 2009).

Although none of the participants said they were currently participating in street life, it is important that stakeholders in the educational process of Black Virgin Islanders and those focused on street life in the Virgin Islands understand how school discipline and school mattering are recognized to impact young Black Virgin Islanders choosing the street life.

Institutions typically have rules for its members to follow in which the enforcement of the rules ought to be just and equitable amongst the members; however, in many cases, school systems tend to discriminate in its disciplinary practices (Epstein et al., 2017; M. Morris, 2016; Simmons, 2018). Although the USVI is predominately Black and the public high schools have predominately Black teachers, staff, and students, based on the data there remains a perceived presence of some discriminatory practices in school discipline. There were three trains of thought when asking to comment on school discipline: 1. The initial thought that their specific teachers practiced or tried to be fair in their disciplinary practices, and the thought remaining the same throughout the interview; 2. The initial thought that their specific teachers practiced or tried to be fair in disciplinary practices, and the thought changing during the interview to their teachers being discriminatory against some students; and 3. The initial thought that teachers were not fair in their disciplinary practices and the thought did not change. The different trains of thought speak to the complexity of school discipline and how it is perceived from a student perspective. As mentioned

before, there are limited validated scales that test discriminatory school discipline practices from the student perspective. Without a sensitive measure or opportunities to interview students on their perspective, adults are likely to evaluate their own practices from their own perspective, which can be drastically different from the students. It is important those school policies consider the voices of the adults and the students that are impacted by them (Cook-Sather, 2006). The qualitative data allow the students' perspective and voice to be considered in understanding the complexity of school discipline and school mattering that the survey was not designed to capture. The study's qualitative data also further revealed the perceived connection between school discipline, street life and school mattering that the survey did not capture.

Gender did not moderate the association between school discipline with school mattering in the moderation analyses (See Results section). However, some participants reported gender bias in how teachers disciplined students in the interviews. Although Jahmila Stout and Pinky did not go to the same school, they reported witnessing gender bias in disciplinary practices at their respective schools. Jahmila Stout initially reported that her teachers were mostly fair, but there were three teachers with "hidden agendas against boys and certain types of girls." Pinky did not hesitate to share her belief that teachers was discriminatory in the disciplinary practices and that boys were treated harsher than girls. Pinky shared a few stories on how one teacher routinely embarrassed and harassed the male students. When asked how discriminating against students impacted those students, the participants said it impacted the students negatively by making them lose hope in the school and having less feelings of mattering. When asked how often teachers and staff mistreat students

or overreact, some participants did not believe it happened often, while others said it happened multiple times a week.

While there is complexity in the differences of perspective regarding school discipline, there are some similarities between the participants that shared a particular view. A similarity among four of the participants that reported not believing teachers treat other students unfairly was their admittance to having strong relationships with their teachers *and* witnessing teachers trying to talk to boys and girls in street life encouraging them to leave that life. Another similarity amongst the four participants is all of them considered their teachers and staff as “family” members. The positive relationship possibly prevents the students from perceiving acts of discrimination as such when it happens. One participant went as far as to say they believe some students deserved unfair treatment. The one common factor that participants who reported unfair disciplinary treatment is that they witnessed it and they find the rules to be unfair in general. Mia shared how she believes students getting in trouble for wearing a jacket when the air conditioning is too cold is not fair. She understood the school may have the rule in for safety measures (e.g., hiding weapons), but she believes the school could adjust the rule so that students are not “freezing” in a cold classroom. Students getting into trouble for perceived minor infractions such as wearing a jacket when they are cold can be problematic to the student-teacher relationship, which is associated with school mattering. Small infractions may end up being costly to students that are discriminated against. The small infractions, like non-uniform socks, have the potential to put a spotlight on them for perceived small things that presumably cause no harm to anyone and does not negatively impact their academics.

Students may end up facing disciplinary action for not following perceived mundane rules that may be counterproductive.

Most participants spoke about their own teachers and did not mention the other adults at school, while some of the participants spoke about discrimination that occurs from the principals and staff as well. Participants, like Amiyah, who have positive relationships with their teachers also had positive views of the monitors and principal—including how they discipline. Other participants, like Pinky, who did not have many positive views of their teachers, also did not have positive views of the other adults at their school. Pinky shared an example of how having a good relationship with the monitors would afford students leniency in breaking rules such as the strict dress code. Uniforms are mandatory at the public high schools in the USVI even down to the socks. Pinky shared how monitors would allow their favorite students to enter the school while flaunting their non-conforming to the uniform rules' socks. She took notice and decided to do the same, but because she was not a favorite student, she was stopped and told she had to change her socks. Pinky ended her story by saying, "Like, that's not fair. They pick who they want to discipline." Most of the participants reported they believed students in street life were typically picked on by their teachers.

It is not surprising that the students in "street life" are perceived to be picked on by teachers and staff. Street life is typically associated with negative social views (Payne & Hamdi, 2009), which could certainly operate as implicit bias in teachers and staffs' disciplinary behavior (Payne & Brown, 2017; Warikoo et al., 2016). While the participants mostly believe that street life in St. Thomas could be anywhere, they were certain street life most definitely happened in low-income and neglected

neighborhoods like Housing (government housing projects located in Town in St. Thomas). The qualitative data reveals that students perceive those students coming from these areas of St. Thomas were more at-risk of being stereotyped as being in street life, even if they were not, just because of where they live. Teachers and staff must find it important to explore and check their implicit bias (Batchelor et al., 2019) even in a racial homogenous community. Teachers and staff may not be aware they are treating certain students differently or have an implicit bias towards a type of student. Becoming aware of that bias and adjusting may be the difference in how that student engages in street life and how they perceive they matter to their school (Batchelor et al., 2019).

When asked, “what would it look like if they [their peers in street life] mattered to their school?” many of the participants responded with descriptions depicting positive teacher relationships that were initiated by actions from teachers and staff. Some examples include talking to the students about life, getting the students engaged in school activities, and treating the students fairly. The majority of the participants believe that their peers in street life do not matter to their school and part of the reason is due to how they are disciplined unfairly in school.

Interviewer: What do you think, young people in street life, what do you think the relationship with their school is like?

Velvet: I would say that their relationship with their school was not a healthy relationship. Probably had teachers that don't really pay attention to them. Teachers not really understanding what they were going thru and they cannot cope with what was goin on. Probably was gehhin in a lot of fights and allum stuff deh, and they're constantly being suspended and allum stuff deh. Probably dey were constantly being bullied and they didn't know how to say anything about it.

Interviewer: Gotchu. What would it look like if they did matter to their school?

Velvet: If the school...if those kids were to matter to their school I'da feel like teachas and counselors and the principal would try to get them as much attention they would need. Get them as much private classes whatever they would need to make sure they pass on to the next level. Work wit dem so they geh out...finding community service to their liking and have them do it so they can just relax and do whatever they want to do and stay out of trouble.

In this excerpt Velvet alludes those students in street life may be going through personal things and are lacking coping skills in which they may not say anything to teachers about. The teachers that are unaware of what is troubling the student may either neglect the student (e.g., not help the student) or discipline the student when instead they may need socio-emotional support. It is not clear why some students choose to trust teachers well enough to talk to them about personal problems and why some students do not. For example, CJ—although not in street life—mentioned he suffers from depression from time to time. When asked if his teachers knew, he said he did not tell his teachers because, “I feel like they would [be supportive] but I don't want them to be all into my situation, because I feel like it's really nothing to do with them, ehno I understand they trying to help but it's really none of their business. Not tryna be rude or anything.” CJ did not report having any strained relationships with his teachers, but he reported having both positive and negative experiences with his teachers. Meanwhile, Amiyah shares her personal life with her teachers easily. In both cases, teachers reached out to the student, but received different responses. It is not clear if or how teachers are giving the same empathetic opportunity to students in

street life. Teachers and staff should become aware of how students are perceiving them and make an increased effort in providing opportunities to build trust with students in street life and look for rehabilitative options in place of punitive options for students in street life (Ispa-Landa, 2018).

Students are missing out on class time when they are suspended or expelled; however, some of the participants argue that the school is not giving the students in street life anything worth learning anyway. Therefore, not only are they experiencing discipline disproportionately, but they are also going to a school that may feel like a waste of their time. Oscar Rose spoke on this when asking how his peers in street life matter to their school by stating:

Oscar Rose: Um, I would say not much. They don' matter much. They don' matter...the school don' really care. They don' really encourage them as much as they supposed to. They don' encourage them. They don' give them nuttin to be motivated about ehno. They don't really give them nothing to say, "Okay, do this and I promise you gon' get this." Student walks every day in school just like, "Why am I here?" Cuz I have friends like that ehno. Ehno I have people just like, "Why am I here? I should be home." They just...they don't have anything to motivate them or keep them going.

You gotta keep a person going so they can have the interest to keep going to a place that you want them to go. And they just don't have it. They don't offer it to them, and I could even set it for all the students, they just don' offer that to us. That interest, that want, that drive. A drive...all we need is a drive. Give us a drive and I mean, there's no stopping us there. I promise you, if you give us a drive, a want, ah interest, something to keep us goin'—yes, you sayin we gon' graduate and going to high school is the best thing, but what is driving? Give me something to drive me through it. To keep me going; keep me pumping. You just given me work, on work, on work that's making me feel like, "Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?" But give me the reason why you givin' me this work. Yes, you gonna say, "So you could have the knowledge" or whatever, or this and that.

But why do I need that knowledge? What is it going to do for me, drug dealer...whatever, that's going to me to where I want to go to so that I could get out of this situation? What is it gonna do for me? Why am I going home to study for that test? What is it gonna for me? What is driving me to go home and want to study that test?

Oscar Rose felt very convinced that what the school offers students is not beneficial to them and at the very least, the teachers are not helping the students understand the purpose of the material and how it *can* benefit them. The sentiment of those in street life not being cared for and reluctantly going to a place where they are forced to go because the place does not cater to their interest is an important sentiment to note. “They don’t care about learning” is a statement a small number of the participants felt about peers in street life. But the excerpt above and others highlight that education and learning are two different things. The school system is an education system that chooses a package of things to learn; however, learning is essentially all around us. A school that does not offer masonry will likely not interest a student desiring to learn masonry—a much needed skill in the Virgin Islands. Laila believes that the students she knows in street life do well academically, or could do well academically, but they do not see school as the only option to becoming successful and getting what they need to survive. She believes that students like that look to the streets for that reason. If their school provided classes of their interest and taught in a way they learn then those students would likely not choose street life anymore. Jahmila Stout referred to the street life students as rambunctious and creative thinkers:

Interviewer: This relationship between what you call rambunctious students and teachers, right. It's, “teachers don't motivate the students and the students in turn don't do the work.” How do you see this? It's like good, bad, like what is this relationship, this tug of war between the two?

Jahmila Stout: I'm leaning more towards the bad side cuz... I currently have an example of ehno, a student in mind. And she's very creative and stuff, but...and she was a very good student; like honors students until she reached those classes with the teachers that didn't really care about students learning.

Those few classes that they usually put the creative thinkers in because they're labeled ehno as deviant or something. So, it's more towards the bad side cuz these teachers are in turn drainin' the student's energy to...like go to progress to do something out of school. Like, they're so focused on ehno passing the class, the fact that they don't like the teacher...all that creative energy is kind of being drained and they're now becoming kind of grumpy.

From a few students' perspective, the rhetoric of street life adolescents not caring about learning is dismissed, but instead their learning is infringed upon by non-caring teachers and a curriculum that fails to meet their interest. The phrase "tug of war" was used in the above excerpt to explain the dynamic not only between what may actually exist between street life students and their teacher, but also the perception of those in street life and their care for school. Is it that they do not care and therefore they go into street life no matter what the teacher does or teaches? Or is it that the students do not care but if the teachers care and teach things the students care about, then the students would then take their education seriously? These two conflicting ideas go back and forth amongst the 14 participants in the study. Laila believes that the relationship and outcomes are not black and white but are a lot of gray area.

Laila may be correct in her analysis of there being much gray between the teacher relationship, students in street life, the curriculum, school discipline and school mattering. Based on the quantitative results, we can infer that teacher relationship is positively associated with school mattering (See Table 2), and extract from student interviews that some teachers discriminate against students in street life and discipline them more frequently. Also learned from the student interviews is that

students in street life are intelligent but are faced with a curriculum that does not interest them resulting in them choosing street life. It may be that a culturally sustaining pedagogy and trades may benefit all students and possibly increase students in street life engaging with the school.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

In this study, culturally sustaining pedagogy was defined as the fostering and sustaining of linguistic, literate, and cultural identity through schooling (Paris, 2012; See Methods section). Culturally sustaining pedagogy was not statistically associated with school mattering in the study (See Table 2). Since mattering is an interpersonal process of how a person perceives how other's show that the person is important, it is not unreasonable to think that a student seeing themselves in their learning would positively impact their school mattering. Culturally sustaining pedagogy in the USVI, theoretically, would center its curriculum around Virgin Island language, literacy and culture, but as mentioned in the literature review, there seems to be an absence of culturally sustaining pedagogy in the USVI and community members are calling for it (Highfield, 2009; McMillan, 2019). The likelihood of the students experiencing culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom may be low.

The current study is the first to use the Black boy mattering curriculum subscale (Daughtry et al., 2020) measuring culturally sustaining pedagogy. For those that participated in the survey, the mean leaned towards belief that their school had a culturally sustaining curriculum (mean=2.8 out of 4; $n=120$); however, in the qualitative data there were participants that did not see themselves in the curriculum. Some participants made complaints of the school teaching the students things they do not want to learn or will never need in their future. One participant, a senior, said they

learned more about their culture in primary school but by high school the most they learned about was Transfer Day. Virgin Islanders dispute over whether to celebrate Transfer Day, a holiday on March 31st, because it is in remembrance of being purchased from one power (Denmark) into the metaphorical hands of another (The United States of America) instead of gaining their own independence. There is an apparent disconnect between the quantitative data, and the qualitative data and the efforts from community members.

Jahmila Stout: The curriculum doesn't do anything to emphasize ehno VI culture. It's it's kind of downplayin' the part VI culture has cuz I know...I really didn't never understood how certain parts of VI culture will get banned from a Virgin Island school. Cuz...again, the marbles example. I know I remember children used to go play marbles in the dirt ehno lunchtime and whatever. And then there was a point in time marbles got banned from school.

Okay, but then those same adults that banned marbles from school are the ones in turn complaining that children no longer enjoy to do the things ehno they did once upon a time. So, like ehno, "Playing outside... the same chirren always on their phones and stuff. They don't want to play outside anymore," but who was the one that got the children the phone? Who was the ones that took outside away? Took away the toys and stuff lik-dah. It kind of...they're kind of like taking away the culture themselves and then complaining that the culture is slowly fading away.

Cuz they don't... especially in the school system cuz when they try to host events ehno stuff that they would have liked to do, they don't realize they're already killed the joy for the students. So, even in the curriculum stuff, like when those examples I ehno named earlier about climbing, pitch mango stuff lik-dah, it's becoming less effective as the ehno classes progress. So, I know, like the classes under me it's not workin' the same.

Jahmila Stout feels that some of her classes tried to incorporate USVI culture and identity in the curriculum, but fears that the adults are taking away the little that was

there and because of that the younger students are missing out and USVI culture may be lost. The idea that adults take away the culture was not greatly presented in the data, but Jahmila Stout was a participant who said her teachers tried to incorporate culturally sustaining pedagogy but noticed it is disappearing. In the above excerpt, there is the notion that the adults make decisions that impact the students and then judge the students' outcome from their decision, which may lead to disconnect between the adults and the students. It also reveals that there is a desire for students to experience the things the adults experienced as young Virgin Islanders, but the adults may fail to see how their decision making prevents students from partaking in those experiences.

When asked, "how do you feel about the things you learn in school and whether they are important to Black Virgin Islanders?", two participants mentioned it was "good for everyone." When delving into the meaning of a broader good for everyone, the participants believed that the curriculum obtains necessary education that everyone needs to know and that it is not specific to Black Virgin Islanders. The perception of a generalized curriculum that is beneficial for all could seemingly omit the existence of a culturally sustaining pedagogy. While Jahmila Stout mentioned that she appreciates that her history teachers teach from the Black side of history, and local culture and content are sometimes used as examples in learning in other classes like math, it is usually when teachers go off on tangents that she experiences learning about USVI culture and identity. Pinky said she saw herself in her business class but nowhere else in her academics. Two participants mentioned learning about Carnival, Thomas mentioned learning about his environment, and Victor mentioned learning about Caribbean and African dances, and his school having a Caribbean month.

Despite a few examples of cultural contextual content in the curriculum, most of the participants experienced learning about USVI history before high school and mainly in the context of enslavement. The participants wanted to know more:

Interviewer: How do you feel about the things you learn in school and whether or not they are important to Black Virgin Islanders?

Ainsley: I would feel that the English department, because we had a book to read for our English department, as I said that it was a Korean book instead of a Virgin Islands book, so instead of. We reading something local we're reading something on the other side of the world that has nothing to pertain with us or deal with us whatsoever and it's nothing that I can relate to so. I didn't understand why we had to read that instead of reading something local or made by one of us.

Ainsley, along with most of the participants, did not believe what the school is doing is enough to help maintain Virgin Island culture. The participants did have ideas of ways their school could better maintain USVI culture such as reforming the curriculum, assigning books about the USVI created by USVI authors, create clubs that emphasize the culture (e.g., marbles club), include current local events often, and focus less on U.S.A. history including less Black U.S.A. history. Marie mentioned learning about Carnival, and she believed that was enough cultural curriculum for her—if students want to learn anything else she believed the student could look it up on their own time.

In this small sample of qualitative data, social media posts and news articles, the perception is the public high schools are lacking in culturally sustaining pedagogy, but the sample of 120 public high school students tend to lean towards there being culturally sustaining pedagogy at their school. The difference in the data is conflicting; however, the study sought to answer if culturally sustaining pedagogy impacted

matter, which quantitatively culturally sustaining pedagogy was found not to be statistically significant. Qualitatively, although the participants had much to say about the lack of culturally sustaining pedagogy in their schools, there was bare minimum connection to school mattering.

Academic Disruption

Stress and WAPA

Academic disruption is an experience of events interfering or disrupting the normal flow of obtaining an education. Since 2017 Black Virgin Island students have experienced many events that contributed to the possibility of academic disruption, including frequent power and WIFI outages, COVID-19 and the 2017 hurricanes. While all 14 participants used negative descriptors to describe the overall flow/process of their education since 2017 due to the events, there were some positive experiences in the moment of the disruption. Some students expressed being happy when current went out because it allowed them to get a break from school. The participants reported stress and being overwhelmed by the amount of work that was given to them during the aftermath of the hurricanes and during COVID-19. Current going off in the moment provided some of the student's relief, although the break would eventually cause a feeling of more stress because the work had to be made up. Four of the participants believe that some teachers were under pressure to meet certain academic curricular goals for their classrooms but felt that the goals were unreasonable to meet given the contexts of the disruption (e.g., 2017 hurricanes, COVID-19). The unreasonable goals came with feelings of pressure and stress. One possible form of coping through the stress was sleeping. Many of the participants mentioned enjoying sleeping and sleeping often being a fun hobby for them. Daytime and excessive

sleeping can be a symptom of anxiety (Alvaro et al., 2013) and depression (Slater & Steier, 2012). Considering the stress the participants reported, along with experiencing the 2017 hurricanes and being at-risk for long term PTSD (Michael et al., 2019), the school system could play a role in intervening and promoting resilience within their students. As mentioned previously, the adults at school are also experiencing the communal events (e.g., 2017 hurricanes, recurring power outages) and when teachers reflexively check-in with how they themselves are coping with stress, they can in turn be a better help to their students dealing with stress and foster resilience and healthy coping strategies (Baum et al., 2013). A recommendation is for administration, principals and teachers to meet and sift through federal and local policies on curriculum and sort through what is necessary for instruction while finding where they could decrease the academic load in a way that is less stressful on the teachers and the students while meeting the required goals.

The qualitative protocol used in the study brought up possibly disruptive events to the participant and allowed them to share their experience and feelings about the events. The participants shared whether they believed the events were disruptive or not. The disagreement on whether WAPA going out was disruptive or not was contextual. Two of the five honors students—both seniors—believed that WAPA going out was not disruptive to their academic experience during in-person instruction, while the non-honors students reported that frequent power outages were disruptive to their academics. The contrast in experiences from the interviews was the difference in how teachers managed their classrooms whenever current went out. Those honors teachers took a quick break from class and then the class resumed back to normal while the power was out. Non-honors teachers did not continue to do coursework.

Honors students typically are students that are high academic performers and are in classes that are more challenging than the regular courses—likely putting them ahead of the academic curve than their peers not in honors courses. Honors students, like Jahmila Stout and Pinky, were not only receiving a higher level of education, but when power went out, they continued to receive an education, while regular classes stopped, possibly furthering the academic gap between the students. Honors teachers adjusting to the disruption may be perceived as valuing their students’ education more than non-honors teachers value their students’ education. Some participants in regular courses mentioned that their teacher may attempt to continue working, but the heat in the classroom, attempting to move outside, and too much noise between the students and teachers made it difficult for the course to continue when current cuts out. There was less control over such outages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19

Power and WIFI outages during COVID-19 were unanimously viewed as disruptive and negatively impacting their education and relationships with their teachers. COVID-19 forced the school systems to operate virtually from March 2020 through May 2021 during school sessions. The Virgin Islands Department of Education’s policy regarding Island wide outages versus area outages was a source of contention for the students and their experience with schooling. One out of fourteen participants reported lying about their power being out from time to time—which is likely the behavior the policy attempted to address. Instead, the participants experienced less joy when WAPA or WIFI went out during COVID-19 than they did in-person. Some participants reported that teachers were understanding if the students’ power was cut, while other teachers were not and it brought on more stress, frustration

and negatively impacted the relationship with the teacher. Area specific power outages are not uncommon in the St. Thomas/St. John district, yet creating a policy limited to only allow an excuse for Island-wide outages—despite its good intentions for keeping order—was a disservice to the students and the teachers as it helped cause stress and strain between student-teacher relationships.

Schooling during COVID-19 also introduced students having to care for others (e.g., siblings, cousins, etc.) while they were in school adding to the number of distractions they would experience during school. While his parents went to work, CJ had to make sure his younger siblings, one is autistic, were in school on time and paying attention to their classes while he had to pay attention to his. CJ did feel supported by his teachers as they were understanding of his situation given many students were in the same situation. Jahmila Stout not only had to take care of her three younger siblings but also a younger family member that would stay at the house during the day. Students had to overcome taking on more responsibility, receiving more schoolwork, living in a pandemic world with expectations of producing high academically. During a normal school year, students are in a school building with peers and their teachers not dealing with the distraction of having to take care of anyone else.

While in-person school has its own distractions, like peers disrupting class, COVID-19 brought on a different set of distractions. Although some participants reported enjoying not having to wake up and get ready for school, virtual learning was also an issue for them because laying in their bed during class tempted them to fall asleep or to surf the internet while virtually in class. CJ was not feeling his experiences with distractions during the pandemic:

CJ: Um I probably say ehno. It's like tryna stay focus, ehno cuz like now that you're home you'll have all these distractions around you like the TV, you'll have your family making noise in the background, and stuff like that. You'll tell them to keep it down. It's really hard, which I have nearly got into trouble because of family making noise in the background. And I couldn't even like...that's also another issue, I was trying to say with the lagging [Wifi] and stuff like that.

It's kind of hard to...once you start laggin it's like it's kind of hard to understand your other classmates and it's also hard for your teacher to understand you cuz your voice will be cutting in and out. So, it's very much a challenge and that's very common for me. Like, we reachin' to school late and stuff lik-dat. And they also write down you're tardy into the grade books and stuff lik-dat. So, it's a lot of a challenge

The distractions mentioned are all brought on by virtual schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic and were viewed as negatively impacting their education. For participants that had or created a study space, they felt virtual learning presented less distractions. In fact, Laila found the new virtual format helpful because it protected her and others from being bullied. The academic disruptive experience due to the 2017 hurricanes brought on different distractions and academic disruptive experiences.

IrMaria

Most of the disruptions are not the fault of the school staff and teachers, but they made decisions to try to limit the academic disruption. Some participants believed that the Department of Education providing laptops, mini-WIFI devices and simply attempting to have school during the aftermath of the 2017 hurricanes and COVID-19 was enough to show they mattered to their school. In other words, although their educational process was disrupted, it was not stopped and for that some participants believe the effort to keep school going showed them the adults at school value them and their education. The aftermath of the hurricanes presented an opportunity for schools to be closed for months as many buildings are inoperable and the timing to fix

them would have been long. As of July 2021, there have been some schools fully restored, while some schools are still remodeling, and other schools are closed for good due to the damage from the hurricanes. Instead of using the devastation as an excuse not to have school, school communities were shuffled around to share buildings and temporary modulars were built for some schools. Some of the participants were very grateful for that as it got them out of the house, into a routine and socializing with their peers. It is important to note that despite how disruptive and imperfect schooling was for the participants, having something was better than having nothing. For some participants, they believed the adults did everything they thought was best for the students given the circumstances.

The participants experienced schooling in the aftermath of IrMaria in two ways: physically and academically. The physical experience for some of the students was exceptionally tough as some reported having to trek up and down hills outside of condemned buildings to go from one class to the next. They expressed the physical rigor of going from class to class and hoping their teacher was selling water and snacks to replenish themselves. They shared how confusing it was as the operable and inoperable buildings continued to change. Here is one participant's in-depth take on the physical experience of schooling since 2017:

Participant: Ok, so for Cancryn...I went to Cancryn before I went to Charlotte, as you know we had the hurricanes before that time. So, I did not really have the Cancryn experience like any other Cancryn before me had. We were sharing Charlotte Amalie with the Charlotte Amalie students. We were in the buildin' in the day and in the afternoon the Charlotte Amalie students would take over. That was in the 7th grade year. My 8th grade year, it was awesome and also we were in the modulars on Charlotte Amalie track. It was a maze at first. You didn't know where you were going. You coulda easily geh lost if you don' know where you were. But, once you continue to going de (inaudible) classroom and stuff it's easy to navigate.

Um...for my 9th grade year, we were celebratin' the 100-year anniversary of Charlotte Amalie High school around that time, but both Building A and B were closed off. So, we couldn't take the shortcuts to Building C. We had to go the long road up dah big hill. I tell you it was nooo walk in dah park. You had to have extreme muscles and endurance to walk up dah hill. Also, you also had to be very careful because, as you know, you're walking up a hill, you're walking down and there's still some little cracks and lil stuff you could fall down in.

Um...with 9th grade there were some rooms that were actually flooding, well, when I was in 7th grade anyways, there were some rooms flooding and I'm not sure if dey fixed de rooms now, but we heard in 9th grade that Building C was gonna be closed off as well so they can remodel Charlotte Amalie and rebuild it, but that did not happen. Um...I would say Charlotte Amalie now is not the same as Charlotte Amalie before. To get to many of your classes you have to walk up a hill and de rest of the classes is either in the band room or the art room and most of them are in the modulars. Again, if you know your way around you're good, but if you not know your way around at all it's easy to get lost.

The students that were going into 7th grade—when junior high starts in the USVI—and to Cancryn school are the only group of public-school students that have gone through junior high and high school (so far) without a normal experience of it since 2017. Meaning, every class before them had at least one year of normalcy in junior- or high school before the 2017 hurricanes. That group of students experienced sharing a building on half-day schedules their first year of junior high. Then they were in temporary modulars for their 8th grade year. During the second half of their first year of high school they experienced a pandemic and having to change the method of schooling abruptly. Then finally, their tenth-grade year has been virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Charlotte Amalie's graduating class of 2021, although they had a normal junior high experience, they did not have a year of normality all

their high school years due to the physical destruction of the buildings from the hurricanes and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although losing your school building sounds terrible, gaining temporary modulars resulted in some positive feelings from the participants. The participant from the excerpt above mentioned their 8th grade year, the year the modulars were completed for use, was awesome. Another participant really enjoyed the new air conditioning in the modulars. A sense of newness and having something to call their own after a year of sharing a building with high school students on half-day schedule was a positive for the students. It may be that in the midst of a disaster and instability within a system a good way to give students positivity is to give them something new and that they could claim as their own. Despite, this positive development for the junior-high students, it was a negative move for the high school students as the physical space used to build the modulars took away extra-curricular activities from the high-school students. The participants that were affected by that shared strong negative feelings about the decision to take their field away, included feelings of not mattering to the school. There was most likely no win-win situation the adults in power could have come up with during that time. On an Island with limited space and resources, just like policies, decisions for one group have the possibility to impact another group. The disruption from the hurricanes forced the adults to make very difficult decisions that impacted the students and their academic and extra-curricular experience.

Jahmila Stout believes that despite all the disruption the students in the USVI have gone through since 2017, they are still some of the best students in the world. Which is a wonderful confidence to have; however, many participants—including

Jahmila Stout—reported having less motivation for school after the hurricanes and during the pandemic. Some of the reason for less motivation and less school spirit was brought on by the inconsistencies of schooling, negative teacher relationships, and the lack of school events, sports, and clubs. Jahmila Stout shares an example of school spirit being lost:

Jahmila Stout: Yeah. I don't think that happened for a while now. Yeah ehno cuz when I was...as I said I have two older sisters. So, I always heard them talkin' about ehno Battle of the Bands is de place to be. That's when you go in ehno it's like big healthy competition between the ehno schools.

And then when I reach no Battle of the Band, barely had sports, our band team after the class of 2018 graduated...the band was very small to say the least. Had about one person per instrument and they were...dey tried to work hard to recruit students to be in band but the school spirit was lost. There wasn't any excitement. There wasn't really any reason to be there other than the fact that you have to go to school.

The general attitude of the participants towards school spirit and motivation was negatively impacted by the loss that was experienced. Even when the school was in a position to get back to doing something extracurricular, it was not met with the same enthusiasm; “the spirit was lost.” The participants also noted the lack of school pep-rallies, which was something they believe helped maintain school spirit. School spirit or school ethos is important for a student to have because it has the potential to lead to high school attendance, and healthy social and emotional behavior (Banerjee et al., 2014). Schools should look to maintain school spirit after a communal traumatic event as soon as the opportunity presents itself to get their students involved. Some participants reported positive feelings after having helped clean their school up after the hurricanes, which was organized by their school. School administrations and teachers should also embrace thinking outside of the traditional norms of getting

students involved. In a context such like the USVI, student voices should play a role in the decision making of things that impact their academic career, and not only in the form of student government voices. High school students learning and engaging in participatory action research can lead to high school ethos (Ozer & Wright, 2012), while also gaining a greater sense of political voice, higher academic achievement, and critical thinking of the preservation of culture and identity (Cammara, 2007).

There were numerous ways the academic disruption due to the hurricanes impacted the participants' academics. Some participants reported their teachers graded harder and their grades dropped. Some reported that their teachers graded easier, and their grades increased, while some reported no changes in teachers grading and their grades. Some reported having less school spirit while some reported having more or the same. The participants who were in high school during the aftermath of the hurricanes and were going to school from Noon-4pm reported they enjoyed going to school in the second half of the day because it allowed them to do their homework in the morning and not have to get up too early to go to school. Although studies show that a later school start time for adolescents lead to greater graduation rates, better sleeping patterns, and improved grades (Keown et al., 2020; Wahlstrom, 2016) and the initial feeling was positive for going to school later, the participants eventually shared that the workload was still overwhelming. As previously mentioned, the administrators and teachers set out to include the normal amount of instruction—despite a substantial amount of time lost—during a shortened period for the 2017-2018 academic school year. Again, administrators and teachers finding ways to embrace quality over quantity in the curriculum may reduce stress during academic disruption and increase academic productivity.

Overall, academic disruption keeps students from having a consistent, stable and predictable flow of education. Academic disruption is likely to have moments of positivity from the students' perspective (e.g., WAPA outage providing a break), but overall is likely detrimental to the student's academic experience causing stress, anxiety, and lack of school spirit and academic motivation. Some forms of disruption, like WAPA outages, can be decreased or eliminated by installing generators at the school and keeping up on the maintenance of them. That way, when WAPA inevitably goes out, the generators can power on and supply current to the buildings so that instruction continues. Other forms of disruption, like the COVID-19 pandemic, has no easy solution. However, adjusting the school workload and providing teachers with socio-emotional training for their self and to lead their students in exercises may help combat some of the negative outcomes that come with major disruptive events. Although the students may be resilient through academic disruption, some of the effects, along with issues plaguing the Island, may be too much and impacting their desire to leave St. Thomas after high school.

“Get off the Island Mentality”

School mattering and its perceived role in “get off the Island mentality” was explored in this study. The participants' best parts about living on St. Thomas were mainly environmental (e.g., beaches and scenery) and some cultural (e.g., the communal culture); however, many of the worst parts about living in St. Thomas were associated with either lack on the Island (e.g., not much to do) or frustration with the way life is on the Island. The worst parts about living in St. Thomas were aspects of life the participants felt they needed to escape. The accessibility to the much bigger country and number of options in the United States of America may be a lure for

Black Virgin Island youth living on a small island and perceived limited options to leave St. Thomas. Many of the participants felt they could not succeed if they remained in the Virgin Islands. Some of the participants' future career choices are not offered on the Island and therefore the participant elects to leave the Island instead of creating the enterprise on the Island. Some of the participants' future career is offered on the Island but they would rather leave for perceived greener pastures. Gentrification is a consequence of local Virgin Islanders moving off Island. "Gentrification is a process involving a change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socioeconomic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment in fixed capital" (Clark, 2005, p. 263). Jahmila Stout was the lone participant that brought up the gentrification of St. Thomas and was against it. The process of gentrification and subsequently the concern of the effects of gentrification (e.g., loss of land owned by Virgin Islanders; capital) was not on the mind of the rest of the participants, which may be typical for their age group. Importantly, the messages about St. Thomas and the participants' future received from their school may impact some, while not having an influence on others.

Teachers who support the goals of the student are more likely to be perceived as showing the student that they matter:

CJ: I mean, I mean I don't really think that I...well, um I don't even think...I don't think they actually care where we go. All they know is that they want us to be successful in life, to be a role model for other people—for the younger ones out there. It doesn't matter where we actually go, they still want us to be good in life.

Interviewer: How important is it that your teacher's support where you want to be?

CJ: I mean it's actually pretty important to me, because they don't really discriminate you for being who you are and stuff that. So, if you told

him that you want to become a president, they say, “That's pretty good ehno.” Like, they'll give you like steps on how to help with that.

Although leaving the Island may not be beneficial to the U.S. Virgin Islands, supporting students' goals—wherever they may lead them—may be better perceived as mattering to their school than pushing the student in one direction over the other regarding staying on the Island. However, Oscar Rose did not interpret a neutral stance on leaving the Island as positive as CJ:

Interviewer: Why, why do you think it teachers and them don't want you to stay?

Oscar Rose: Um, because they don' really care what we do afterwards. They just want to get us in and out of there. They don't really care what we do afterwards. Yeah, they just they tryna get they paycheck. Somma dem just tryna get they paycheck, they can care less where we go. Here, stay here, if you end up on the street they can care less.

Oscar did not believe he mattered to his school but his teachers lacking care for his future did not seem to impact his decision to leave Island or not. Most of the decisions to leave or stay were predicated on factors outside of school and the advice from teachers. In other words, for most of the participants their desire was made up; therefore, it is important that teachers discern when an individual student needs guidance and when the teacher should support the students' desire for their future despite their personal preference for the student. Students feeling support from their teachers are likely to positively impact the student-teacher relationship, which in turn positively impacts their school mattering. Although the participants are prideful of their Black Virgin Island identity, the obstacles they face living in the Virgin Islands have most of them looking to live and be successful elsewhere.

Limitations and Future Research

There were many limitations to the study including the instruments used in the survey. There were four scales used in the quantitative study: three validated scales (Elliot et al., 2004; Cornell, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017) and one non-validated scale (Daughtry et al., 2020). The school discipline scale from the National Center for Education Statistics (2017) is a quantitative scale used nationally by schools and researchers testing if the school rules are fair. The scale does not test for school disciplinary practices, such as discriminatory practices. After numerous and rigorous searches, including contacting scholars whose research focuses on school discipline, no validated scale was identified that tests for discriminatory disciplinary practices from the student perspective. As much as we know about school discipline and its link to imprisonment for Black boys and girls (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015; Darensbourg, 2010; Martin, Jennifer|Smith, 2017; Monroe, 2005), the data comes from disciplinary practices at the school/teacher level, surveys from the teacher/parent perspective and case studies. The development of a discriminatory scale that focuses on the context of school discipline for the student perspective is needed. Such a scale could more precisely ask participants about their perception of discriminatory school discipline practices. My colleagues and I developed a discriminatory school discipline subscale, and that scale was included in the survey. The scale had not gone through any reliability tests beforehand, which is a necessary step in scale validation. The next

step is to disseminate the original scale (questions were changed to fit the context of the USVI) for reliability tests and to continue to develop the scale.

The Black boy mattering curriculum subscale (Daughtry et al., 2020) was used to measure culturally sustaining pedagogy because culturally sustaining pedagogy is relatively new and has been used qualitatively. The scale is a subscale of a developing Black Boy Mattering scale constructed using Carey's (2019) theorizing of comprehensive mattering. The scale had not been psychometrically evaluated and had not gone through any reliability tests. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, developed by Paris (2012), is typically measured qualitatively, which is why taking the necessary steps of scale development are crucial in making sure the questions are asking what it aims to test. The uncertainty of the validity of the scale is legitimate as it is possible the scale did not ask what it intended to test for and possibly the questions not fitting well together. The next steps for both Black boy mattering subscales is to continue on with the necessary tests needed to become validated scales for a reliable quantitative measure of culturally sustaining pedagogy in schools.

Finally, the mattering theory by Elliot and colleagues may be limited in understanding non-white groups and marginalized groups. For instance, in many Caribbean and urban Black household's parents tend to be authoritative (Dede Yildirim, 2013; Roopnarine & Chardee, 2016). Black adolescent's perception of mattering may be impacted by the capacity for vulnerability and the ability to make articulate connections to emotions often not explored. Another example, it is not clear how or when reliance may feel less like mattering than it does feel like mattering. The

reliance aspect of mattering assumes the receiver of mattering *wants* to be relied upon. Adolescents that operate as another parent in the house, and constantly has sibling-watching duty which makes them miss out on hanging out with friends, may not feel that they matter to their parent who is neglecting their desire to not want to be a parent. There may be a form of reliance that may be commonly found in different cultural contexts that could be detrimental.

Academic disruption was explored in the current study. Follow-up studies that help understand academic disruption and its impact of student outcomes is necessary to further develop the concept. This study provided a start in understanding how some students experienced the disruption and how it impacted their education and relationships with their teachers. Future studies should also look at how personal disruptive events play a role in academic disruption (this study focus on communal events). Along with academic disruption, street life in St. Thomas was explored in the study as well. Future studies should look to include active street identified youth, possibly in participatory action research (Payne, 2008). While the participants in the current study provided rich data, it was from an outsiders' perspective because they were not street identified youth in street life. Understanding street life and what impacts a person to engage in street life from those currently in it is an important as it may provide a different perspective than those outside of it. Street life is very complex and while the school system often plays a major role in engagement in and disengagement from street life, the responsibility is not all on the school system.

Future studies should look to conduct studies that solely focus on the life of those in street life in the USVI to understand it deeper and clearer than the current study does.

Conducting a study during the COVID-19 pandemic came with its own limitations and difficulties. With many offices closed and personnel working from home, it was difficult communicating with the school staff and getting the proper documentation needed to gain access to the students and their parents. Also, due to students doing online schooling, the number of participants likely decreased compared to had they been in school physically and teachers used class time for students to complete the survey. There were a handful of teachers and class principals that were engaged in disseminating the consent forms and surveys. The qualitative interviews experienced disruption as well. A few interviews experienced repeated WIFI interruption with at least two of them having to go from Zoom meetings to phone calls. In the end, the quantitative data collected was enough to produce strong statistical power and conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis. Some of the participants mentioned how grateful they were for the opportunity to talk to someone without judgement. They mentioned that people normally do not ask them about what they think, and they liked doing that for the study—it made them feel like their voice mattered.

Conclusion

Black Virgin Island high schoolers matter. They are valuable. They are creative. They are culture embodied. They are intelligent. They are resilient. They are full of promise. They have experienced many communal traumatic events since 2017

that may have caused some of them to question if they mattered or not—particularly to their school. This study examined whether school practices (i.e., school discipline, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and teacher relationship) was associated with school mattering. The study also explored how Black Virgin Island high schoolers perceive school mattering and its role in “get off the Island mentality” and engagement in street life. Finally, this study explored how Black Virgin Island high schoolers experience academic disruption. The study revealed that teacher relationship was positively associated with school mattering, while school discipline and culturally sustaining pedagogy was not. The qualitative data revealed that academic disruption has complex effects on the academic process of students, including their relationship with their teacher—mainly disruptive effects. Street life was not a desired life for any of the participants, but most felt that street life identified youth are discriminated against by their school, which possibly causes them to choose the life in the streets. Finally, the participants love who they are as Black Virgin Islanders, but St. Thomas may not have enough to offer to keep them on Island to pursue their future life. There are many gaps in the study that are left for future studies to explore. The results from this study are enough to have stakeholders gain meaningful insight of the students’ perspective of their experiences with school life and the USVI. Black Virgin Island high schoolers matter and becoming aware of their voice when they are speaking is a promising way to show that they matter.

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Appendix A
QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

Q1. What grade are you in?

- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th
- Other

Q2. Which school are you a student at?

- Charlotte Amalie
- Eudora Kean
- Other

Q3. What is your gender?

- Boy/Man
- Girl/Woman
- I identify as...
 - Text entry available to specify

Q4. What is your race?

- Black/Black Hispanic
- white/white Hispanic
- Asian
- Biracial

Answer *Yes* or *No* to the following questions:

Q5. If you answered that you are Biracial, is one of your parent's Black?

Q6. Do you consider yourself a Virgin Islander even if you identify with other ethnicities?

Q7. Were any of your grandparents born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands?

Q8. Were any of your parents born and/or raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands?

Q9. Were you raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands?

Q10. Where you in St. Thomas/St. John for hurricanes Irma and Maria?

Check the ones that apply.

Q11. After the hurricanes, was going to school at that time different for you?

Check all that apply.

- Went to school in a module
- Went to school on a half-day schedule
- Shared the school building with another school
- Couldn't play on school sports team
- Changed my school
- Went off Island to a new school
- My relationships with my teachers and staff got worse
- My relationships with my teachers and staff got better
- My grades DROPPED
- My grades got BETTER
- Teachers graded HARDER than before
- Teachers graded EASIER than before
- I cared MORE about going to school

- I cared LESS about going to school
- I had MORE school pride
- I had LESS school pride
- None of these relate to me

Q12. Has COVID-19 (Corona Virus) change your school experience? Check all that apply

- Went to school on a half-day schedule
- Couldn't play on school sports team
- Went off Island to a new school
- My relationships with my teachers and staff got BETTER
- My relationships with my teachers and staff got WORSE
- My grades got BETTER
- My grades DROPPED
- Teachers graded HARDER than before
- Teachers graded EASIER than before
- I cared MORE about going to school
- I cared LESS about going to school
- I had MORE school pride
- I had LESS school pride
- It was easier to stay motivated for school
- Had difficulty staying motivated for school
- My teachers did not keep good communication with me
- None of these relate to me

Q.13 State your level of agreement or disagreement.

COVID-19 (Corona Virus) is harming my education experience

- Yes
- Not Sure
- No

Q14. Have you ever been suspended (in-school or out of school) or expelled from school?

- Yes
- No

Q15. If so, how many times have you been suspended or expelled?

- Text entry

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: Measured on a 4-point Likert scale of *strongly disagree to strongly agree*

Choose if you would agree or disagree with the following statements.

Q16. The things I learn about in class are appropriate for Virgin Island students and their experiences.

Q17. I learn more about Virgin Island history than just slavery.

Q18. I learn positive things about current Black Virgin Island culture (Ex: music, dance, career paths, new inventions) in class.

Q19. The school assigns us books written by Virgin Islanders or art created by Virgin Islanders.

Q20. In general, my classes talk about things important to Virgin Islanders.

Q21. I learn new facts about Black Virgin Islanders who have done positive things to make society better.

Q22. My classes cover issues that Black Virgin Islanders care about.

Q23. The lessons that I learn in school make me feel better about myself as a Virgin Islander

School Discipline

Thinking about your school, would you agree or disagree with the statements below? Pick the answer that is closest to how you feel. (4-point Likert Scale of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*)

Q24.1 The school rules are fair

Q24.2. The punishment for breaking school rules is the same for all students.

Q24.3 If a school rule is broken, students know what kind of punishment will follow.

Q24.4 Teachers and staff are strict with making sure the rules are followed

Teacher Relationship: Respect for Students

Most teachers and other adults at this school...

Q25.1 ...care about all students.

Q25.2 ...want all students to do well.

Q25.3 ...listen to what students have to say.

Q25.4 ...treat students with respect.

Teacher Relationship: Willingness to Seek Help

Thinking about your school, would you agree or disagree with the statements below? Pick the answer that is closest to how you feel.

Q26.1 There are adults at this school I could talk with if I had a personal problem.

Q26.2 If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying me, the teacher will do something to help.

Q26.3 I am comfortable asking my teachers for help with my schoolwork.

Q26.4 There is at least one teacher or other adult at this school who really wants me to do well.

Q26.5 There is one or more teachers I feel absolutely comfortable with

Mattering

All mattering items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?

27.1 Most of my teachers do not seem to notice when I come or when I go*

27.2 At school, the teachers and staff do not recognize me*

27.3 Sometimes when I am at school, I feel almost as if I were invisible*

27.4 Teachers and staff are usually aware of my presence

28.1 For whatever reason, it is hard for me to get my teacher's attention*

28.2 Whatever else may happen, teachers and staff do not ignore me.

28.3 For better or worse, people generally know when I'm around

28.4 Teachers and staff tend not to remember my name*

29.1 My teachers do not care what happens to me*

29.2 There are teachers and/or staff in my life who react to what happens to me in the same way they would if it had happened to them

29.3 When I succeed, my teachers and/or staff take pride of me

29.4 I have noticed that teachers and/or staff will sometimes go out of their way to help me

29.5 When I have a problem, teachers and staff usually don't want to hear about it*

30.1 Much of the time, teachers and/or staff don't care about my needs*

30.2 There are teachers and/or staff in my life who care enough about me to criticize me when I need it

30.3 None of the teachers and staff really takes pride in my accomplishments*

30.4 The teachers and staff would not notice if one day I disappeared*

30.5 If the truth be told, the school doesn't really need me*

31.1 Quite a few teachers and staff look to me for help with important things at school

31.2 I am not someone teachers and staff turn to when they need something*

31.3 Teachers and staff tend to rely on me for support

31.4 When teachers and staff need help, they come to me

31.5 Teachers and staff count on me to be there in times of need

31.6 Often teachers and staff trust me with things that are important to them

*Reversed Scored Items

School Ethos

All items are scored on a 5-point Likert Scale *of strongly disagree to strongly agree*

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?

32.1 Certain students are watched more closely by teachers and staff in the school hallways/walkways/ramps

32.2 There are certain groups of students that are told to break up their groups in hallways/walkways/ramps more often than other groups of students

32.3 When heated discussions or arguments break out in the school, particular students are the ones told to disperse before other groups.

32.4 There are some students in my school who are told that their behavior is a problem.

32.5 It feels like certain students face harsher punishment than other students for the same issues.

32.6 Some students do not get in trouble for doing the same things certain get in trouble for.

Q33. Did anyone in your family lose their job or get paid less due to the 2017 Hurricanes?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

Q34. Did anyone in your family lose their job or get paid less due to COVID-19?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

Q35. Did you have a job before COVID-19?

- Yes
- No (Skip logic to Q37)

Q36. Did you lose your job or get paid less because of COVID-19?

- Yes
- No

Q37. Do you live with your parents?

- Yes
- No

Q38. Do you any extended family members live with you? (Example: Grandparents, aunts, cousin, etc.)

- Yes
- No

Appendix B

QUALITATIVE PROTOCOL

Introduction

Hello, my name is XX and I am a researcher on this dissertation project for Kendell Daughtry. We are studying how Black Virgin Island high schoolers experience mattering to their school and community. We will record this interview, transcribe the audio and then delete the recording. I want you to think about a name you would like to be called during the project and possibly be referred to as in the summary of the project. The name should be something that will prevent anyone from identifying you, so no family or street names that people know you as. What do you think you want to be called?

This is a reminder that there are no right or wrong answers for this interview. We just want to know what you honestly think.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself (describe your family and living situation, age, things they like to do for fun, etc.)

Mattering

1. Have you heard the term “Black Lives Matter?” If so, what does that mean to you?
 - a) If we just took out the “mattering” part, what does “mattering” mean to you? (Follow up – it’s similar to significance, or being valued, if they are stuck.)
2. Tell me about a time where you felt like you mattered. (Follow up: How did it feel? Did it make you do anything differently?)
3. Tell me about a time where you felt like you did not matter. (Follow up: How did it feel? Did it make you do anything differently?)

Academic Disruption

1. Tell me what it is like to go to your school. What’s your definition of a good school? How does your description of what it’s like to go to your school align with your definition of a good school?
2. Describe what happens when WAPA goes out during school. Tell me, what are your feelings or thoughts about WAPA going out during school. How, if in any way, do you think this impacts your education?

- a) Do you think it is important to have steady current and water for school? How much do you think agencies, like WAPA, value your education?
3. How old were you when IrMaria hit and what grade were you in? What school did you eventually go to when school started back up? Did you go to school on half-day blocks or in modulars?
4. Tell me about how your relationships with your teachers and staff were compared to before the hurricanes? What about your schoolwork/grades, how was that affected?
5. Regarding IrMaria or COVID, what are some best/worst parts about your educational experience during those times? How do those experiences relate to you mattering to your school?

Street Life

1. There have been many shootings and deaths by homicide in St. Thomas over the past year. Many of which are due to street-level violence
 - a) What do you think street-life means? Describe what is street life here in St. Thomas. Being that this is a very small island, have you been impacted by violence? If so, in what ways do you think you've been impacted by violence in the Territory?
2. Why do you think young people get into street-life?
3. What do you think their relationship with their school is like? How do you think they matter to their school? What would it look like if they did matter to their school?
4. What about you? Have you participated in or felt like street life was an option for you? Why or why not?
5. What would the adults at school think if they found out you were involved in street life?
6. Sometimes people find that they matter in the street, which helps them choose to be in street life too. Where do you feel like you matter in your worlds and why? (If asked what "worlds" mean, give some examples like friends, family, neighborhood, school, etc.).

Get off the island

1. Tell me, what is it like to live here in St. Thomas?
2. What are the best/worst parts about living in St. Thomas?
3. If you can live anywhere in the world, where would that be? Why?
4. Do you think the adults at your school want you to stay on the Island? Why or why not?
5. What does a good life look like? Do you think St. Thomas can be the place where you can live out your vision of a good life? Why or why not?
6. In what ways do you think your school helps or can do better in helping young talented Black Virgin Islanders want to remain in St. Thomas?

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS

Victor	Oh well, I'm in 12 th grade. I'm bout to graduate in less than two weeks. I in honors society. I have like six honors classes. I [like to] just stay home. I like to be in my bed
Ainsley	Well, I'm 15 years old, as of right now I'm about to make. My family situation I live with my mom and dad. They attend work. I attend school. Things I like to do for fun I like to...well exercise for fun. Do sports, hang out with my friends, but coronavirus has ehno put a halt on that. I play video games and sometimes I stream and sometimes make YouTube videos. Um...getting very invested in politics and stock markets and I'm evening invested in cryptocurrency.
Amiyah	So, my name is Amiyah. I was born and raised in St. Thomas. I'm 15 years old, my favorite color is purple. My parents aren't from St. Thomas, but I was born heh. Interviewer: What do you like to do for fun? Amiyah: Iunno, jus, be on my phone, interact with my friends, try and stay in my zone. Interviewer: What's your zone? Amiyah: Out of problems.
Mia (Me-uh)	Well, I'm in high school. I'm in 10th grade. I'm 15 years old. Um, yeah, that's it and I'm actually pretty shy. Um, I live with my parents, and two of my siblings...oh and my uncle.
CJ	Well, I live with my mom, my step-dad...both my mom and dad separated, when I was in third grade I believe yeah in third grade. I'm, I am very interested in electronics, I love to draw in my spare times. um I try to help my mom wit stuff around the house, my siblings....my one brother has autism, so I try to help him to understand certain things. And he's doing well, he's doing well. He's starting to understand a lot more better.
Douglas	Um...family...lovable...loud. I have five siblings and I live wit my mudda and fahda. Uh...we love each odda. Me, I enjoy playing

	volleyball. I also ehno...jus...I like to sleep when I have nothin to do. I jus be sleepin or I put some music on.
Velvet	Okay well, first of all I am a born pure-bred St. Thomian. I've lived on St. Thomas since the day I was bahn. I would say my family is a very unique family. It's a very large family, lots fah sure. I am part of two of some of the largest families on St. Thomas. I'm also part of another well-known family, not biologically but adopted in a way. So, I'm probably like the center of all families to come. My favorite colors blue. I like to draw. I like to paint.
Jahmila Stout	Okay. So, currently I live with both my parents and my three...three of my five siblings. Things I like to do for fun...before COVID...I was a cheerleader, but there wasn't a cheerleading squad ehno. Um...for fun I usually do arts and crafts type things for fun. I like to hangout wit friends, which was ehno restricted. Um...dat's really about it.
Laila	Alright, so I am from St. Thomas, um the Virgin Islands, I am currently 15 years old in 10th grade. Growing up, I went private school most of my life until I visited the States for a couple years. That's my first public school experience until I went to the high school that I'm in right now. Um, I wouldn't say that we grew up with...poor, but I wouldn't say that we had too much (inaudible)...It was like a pretty comfortable-ish living situation. We had like issues here and there buh' it wasn't nuttin' dah was too serious. We always like was able to deal wid' it. Um, it was very noisy at times.
Loki	Well, I'm 18, I live in a Virgin Islands, the United States Virgin Islands um. So, ehno I'm the second oldest of five children of my mother, but I will more be under responsible side of ehno Buh, I'm I'm a cool person, ehno I'm all about honesty, talent, ehno. I like to sing that's my number one talent. Draw, you see the paintings on my wall. I love the draw. Um, most of all, I just love to have fun, ehno go out go to the beach, ehno just love to have fun.
Marie	Well, I have two brothers, one is 19 and one is six years old. My family is from heh but I was born in the States, but raised in the U.S Virgin Islands. I like to paint, dance, sing, I would also like to learn an instrument but, currently I cannot do that at the moment. I would like to be chiropractor in the future.
Oscar Rose	I'm 18. I live with my mother, my father doesn't live with us. I have an older brother. I moved here to St Thomas when I was about 10, my mom and all her family from here and live here. I could say, and ehno I adapted to the Virgin Islands, ehno the Virgin Islands is totally different from the States in so many different ways um took some time ehno, trying to blend in and then after a while it just stop trying to blend in (inaudible) on my own.

Pinky	I am 17 years old. I am going through the motions. I just joined the military, so in the summer I'll be gone. My living situation is fine too. There's nothing really wrong with that. I feel good that I'm like, ehno, financially stable more than the rest of us. Um...anything I like to do for fun...there's not really much I can do anymore cuz most the stuff I used to do for fun would be outside but ehno, Corona, so. Most the stuff I do for fun now is binge watching Netflix and stuff like that.
Thomas	I'm Thomas. I was born in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. I'm 15 years old. I will say I plan on joining the military when I grew up. Ehno, like jets a lot. I want to fly jets when I grew up. I only live with my mom now. Well, I like to play video games. I like to go outside with my friends and just ride by, and just play basketball.

Appendix D

VIRGIN ISLAND LANGUAGE GUIDE

Virgin Island Language (Word)in'	Dominant U.S. English Words typically ending in "ing"
Allum	All of them/those
Aye	Hey
Betah	Better
Buh	But
Ca'	Can/Could
Chirren	Children
Cuz	Because
Cyant	Can't
Dah/Dat	That
De/Da	The
Dem	Them
Den	Then
Dey	They
Dis	This
Don	Don't
Ehno	"you know"
Fah	For
Geh/Gehhin	Get/Getting
Gon/Gonna	Going to
Gotchu	Got you/I understand
Gotta	Got to/Have to
Heh	Here
Ion	I don't
Jus	Just

Kinda	Kind of
Lik-dah/Lik-dat	Like that
Meen	Me ain't (I'm not/I don't)
Mudda/Fahda/Grandmudda	Mother/Father/Grandmother
Naw	No
Nuttin	Nothing
Outta	Out of
Powa, current, WAPA	Power (referring to electricity)
Somma	Some of
Teacha(s)	Teacher(s)
They'da	They would/could
Tings	Things
Tru	Through
Tryna	Trying to
Wan	Want
Wanna	Want to
Wit	With
Wuk/wukkin'	Work/Working
Ya	You

Appendix E
UDEL IRB PERMISSIONS



Institutional Review Board
210H HULLIHEN HALL
NEWARK, DE 19716
PHONE: 302-831-2137
FAX: 302-831-2828

DATE: March 9, 2021

TO: Kendell Daughtry
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [1706605-1] Virgin Island High School Mattering
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE: March 9, 2021
NEXT REPORT DUE: March 8, 2022

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (6,7) *Minimal Risk Research with Children-Subpart D Determination- 45 CFR 46.404*

Appendix F
VIDE IRB PERMISSIONS



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OFFICE OF PLANNING, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
1834 Kongens Gade, Charlotte Amalie
St. Thomas, V.I. 00802-6746

February 26, 2021


Kendell Daughtry
PO Box 11674
St. Thomas, VI 00801

Dear Mr. Daughtry,

We are pleased to inform you that your research proposal has been approved. Enclosed is a copy of your proposal with all necessary approval signatures.

Best wishes in your endeavors.

Sincerely,


James Richardson
Director – PRE