CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW? THE VOICES OF HIGH ACHIEVING BLACK MALES

EMERGE IN PREDOMINATELY WHITE HIGH SCHOOLS

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

dissertation entitled

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?: THE VOICES OF HIGH ACHIEVING BLACK MALES

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Presented by Eric L. Johnson,

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. Juanita Simmons, Dissertation Chair

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Dr. Carol Maher, Committee Member

Dedication

God, you have given me a mission to serve your people and I pray that my work is pleasing unto you. Continue to use me as a vessel. I pray the world sees you through me.

Denisha: If the Lord keeps me centered, you keep me grounded. The support you've shown throughout this process has been humbling and eye opening for me. You've shown me what it means to love unconditionally and support unceasingly. Thank you for loving me, motivating me, and seeing things in me even when I didn't see them myself. I love you.

Mama, your sacrifices have led me to this day. You willed me through since I started my formal education over 25 years ago by speaking power into my life, working non-stop to provide, and by imparting words of wisdom at the most appropriate times. Thank you for your strength and love.

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To my beautiful daughter, Ari, and my unborn son, Asa: I do this for you. The two of you and your mother are my reasons for being. I teach and serve because this world has many flaws. Ari, I'm doing my part to change a world that your beautiful innocence can't currently understand, but you'll soon comprehend. You and your brother cannot inherit the same world I have. You make this work matter. I love you with everything that I am, and I promise that will never change.

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ABSTRACT

Horace Mann has been recognized as describing education as "the great equalizer." Further examining that statement would unveil American society's admission that there are in fact—or maybe just opinion—inequitable experiences that exist among American citizens. Education should be the equalizer, but can it truly do so when it serves as an institution that is a mere microcosm of the greater society in which unequal experiences exist? Racism is a pervasive and enduring factor in American society and impacts the lives of Black people unceasingly and unrelentingly. Whether individuals are conscious or unaware of the impact of institutionalized racism and unconscious bias play in the social and academic experiences of Blacks, the fact remains that racism is ubiquitous in the United States.

This qualitative case study of 11 high-achieving Black males (HABMs) attending predominately white high schools sought to add to the growing body of literature on HABMs. Using critical race theory as a guiding paradigmatic perspective and the concept of identity development as a framing concept, the goal of the study was to highlight HABMs social and academic experiences while gaining additional insight into their conceptions of authentic identity development and identity expression. Furthermore, centralizing the voice of HABMs provided an opportunity to challenge common notions of Black male underachievement and upend the dominant narrative about Black male identity.

Preamble

I've been constantly developing and fine-tuning the framework of this research study since 1985, the year of my birth. It began to take shape far before I successfully defended this dissertation, before I spoke to any of the research participants whose stories will be highlighted in this manuscript, and even before the thought to enter a doctoral program ever crossed my mind. My identity as a Black male preceded my existence as I formed in my mother's womb. My mother had a mental and emotional image of me that was predetermined; it was based on nothing more than the amalgamated experiences of her father, her brothers, my father, and other Black men like them. That image had already been marred by stereotypes that were developed and reinforced by society and erroneously perpetuated by those who believed them to be true.

Once I entered the world, claimed my own space and a limited voice in who I determined I would be, my formal and informal teachings continued to mold me, form me, inspire me, confuse me, anger me, enlighten me and ultimately move me to love myself and others with shared racial experiences. I became the product of personal life lessons learned about the prevalence of racism in American structures and systems. I became both a recipient of and witness to racism's venomous sting in various forms—through covert bigoted thinking that plague the minds of some people unconsciously; through the bold actions of overt racists who wield their hate without remorse; and through American institutions, weaved from oppressive fabrics to create garments of racial disenfranchisement that we wear as our cloak of normalcy. I voluntarily and involuntarily encountered various institutions that were tasked with socializing my mind into what is considered to be the essence of Blackness and maleness—home and neighborhood, media, church, *school*. School…—it is the place that's both trained me and taught me to educate myself. School is the institution that made this research study come to life.

The making of this study was in its incipiency in 1994 when I was only a 4th grade student at Katherine B. Richardson Elementary School in the Kansas City, Missouri School District (now KCPS). I entered a school competition that year called "Mr. and Ms. Achiever," a competition that asked six male and six female 4th grade students to compete for the honor of holding those respective titles. The committee of judges considered citizenship, attendance, scholarship, and performance the day of the competition to determine the "winner." Similar to most pageant-style competitions, there was a "final question" for each contestant to answer. The question was, "If you could take your classmates on an all-school field trip, where would you take them and why?" My palms were sweaty and my nine-year-old mind searched for the answer even though I already knew what I wanted to say. The audience tried to help by shouting answers—"Disney World…A Royals baseball game, Worlds of Fun (an amusement park in Kansas City, Mo). I swallowed, looked into the faces in the audience and said, "A museum, so they can learn about their culture." The auditorium, erupted with applause from adults and lip-smacking from the stunned faces of 6-10 year olds who thought I had just ruined their chances to go to Disney World. I won the title Mr. Achiever that year.

Retrospectively, I now realize, even as a mere 4th grader, I was my first research participant—A high-achieving Black male (HABM) learning to reconcile what it meant to be Black in America and how that impacted my academic experiences. What's interesting is that I never isolated having good grades as being important. It was only one small aspect of my goal to be a positive representation of my family and to lessen as best I could, the emotional stress my mother experienced. Receiving good grades in school, having good citizenship, and being conscious of my grandmother's wise words that "someone is always watching [what you're doing]" were small pieces of a larger life puzzle. The puzzle has placed race as the center piece,

and other important components such as maleness, racial collective memory, social awareness, and freewill served as important corner pieces. It is a puzzle that in my 31 years of living I've pieced together to formulate my own authentic self—a work of art with well-defined likeness, steeped in self-determination, but a masterpiece yet complete. My participants are piecing their own puzzles together as well, and this study added to their landscape.

The primary title of this study, *Can You Hear Me Now*, speaks to the silencing of the voices of Black males in the telling of their own experiences. In his 1952 novel, *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison tackled the notion of Blacks invisibility in American society because of people's refusal to *see* them. Although Black male students are not invisible—in fact I would argue that they are instead unfairly hyper visible—they are unheard. We tell their stories for them, make assumptions about their experiences, view them through a myopic lens while disregarding the universal truth that being Black and male means different things to different people. This study gave young Black males a chance to have their voices heard—amplified—hence the second part of the title, *The Voices of High-achieving Black males Emerge in Predominately White High Schools*.

The idea of emergence represents that Black males' thoughts, voices, and experiences have always been present. However, whether the emergence of those voices was stifled, repressed, or ignored, the reality is that those primary accounts have rarely been highlighted in research or utilized to not only inform, but also to change educational practice. As a high-achieving Black male throughout my schooling experience, I understand first-hand the potential value added to the field of education by seeking the input of Black males regarding their own schooling experiences. The stories are powerful, they provide insight into a racialized world as

experienced by a racial minority, and they open a window to understand the impact of being an

HABM in its various social, and at times political, contexts.

I recall being an HABM in high school and trying to wrap my mind around the social and

academic pressure, my celebrations of Blackness, the quest to embody "authentic maleness,"

and the role of being deemed "atypical" as a Black male achiever all while trying to understand

myself as an individual and my race as a whole. The contextual experiences of Black male

students in a predominately White school district in 2016 is much different than my own

experience as a student in a predominately Black high school from 1999-2003. However, this

study not only centralized the voices of the participants, it allowed "high school me" to

experience a vicarious redemption for being excluded from the conversation surrounding my

experience as an HABM. What's more, it informed pedagogical practice and in turn, provided

insight on how to enhance the experiences of Black males in general and HABMs specifically

Chapter One

Introduction

In his seminal book, *Can You Hear Me Now?,* Michael Eric Dyson (2009) made a statement meant to intrigue, inspire, and overtake the mind of anyone who read it. He stated, "We must not reduce the problems of race to face and skin; we must also see them in structure and system" (p. 186). Blacks in America[1] have had one of the most disenfranchising experiences in American history (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; DuBois, 1903; Noguera, 2008). From slavery, to the Reconstruction Era, to the Civil Rights Movement, Black Americans have fought to gain prominence within American society. However, the arena of education has been an area of constant struggle in Black Americans' effort (Douglass, 1846; DuBois, 1903; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2015; Noguera, 2008; Woodson, 1933). From abolitionists like Frederick Douglass (1846) who stated*,* "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men," to early civil rights activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) who believed that Black Americans' path to prominence should be reached through the educating of their minds*,* to pivotal moments in American history such as Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education, the message has always been that an equitable and excellent education is the catalyst for the Black American to emerge from an experience of oppression to one of progress (Warrren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016). However, one concern that has been both a source of pride and at times a social and psychological barrier to Black Americans' progress in the educational arena has been society's messages about Black racial identity (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2010).

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[1] The terms Black, Black Americans, African Americans, Blacks in the U.S. may all be used interchangeably throughout the work. The terminology is meant to be inclusive of people of African descent who were products of the African Diaspora. Regardless of nationality, it refers to a person of the Black race who most recently resides in America.

Many of the overt systemic and institutionalized barriers embedded within the American legal system that historically served as obstacles to Black Americans' educational experiences have been lifted; these barriers include the illegality of teaching literacy to Black slaves, the mandate of separate learning facilities for individuals by race, and a host of other acts that promote and institutionalize racial discrimination. The subtly covert aspects of disenfranchisement that influence socialization within American society and highly affect racial identity development such as White privilege (Adams et al., 2010; Lynn & Parker, 2006), systemic oppression, and internalized inferiority (Adams et al., 2010) have not been as easy to erase. Thus, these social barriers have manifested themselves in various aspects of American society, including public education.

Many researchers agree that, overall, Black males have one of the most disparate experiences in America (Kohli, 2008; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Noguera, 2011; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009).

> Black males in American society are in trouble. With respect to health, education employment income and overall well-being, all of the most reliable data consistently indicate that Black males constitute a segment of the population that is distinguished by hardships, disadvantages, and vulnerability. (Littles, Bowers, & Gilmer, 2007, As cited in Noguera, 2008, p. xi)

The schooling process of Black males has consistently been cited in research as one of the precursors and contributing factors to the hardships they face.

Statement of the Problem

Education statistics reveal that the trends of disparate experiences for Black males have become prevalent in our nation's schools. When comparing Black male students and their White

male counterparts, national data trends reveal the following for Black males: Disparities in

achievement (LaSalle & Johnson, 2016; The Schott Foundation, 2012); an overrepresentation in

special education programs (Skiba, 2011); underrepresentation in honors and advanced

placement courses; disproportionately high numbers of disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and

expulsions from school (Ford, 2016; LaSalle & Johnson, 2016; Skiba, 2011; The Schott

Foundation, 2012); and an adversely disproportionate number of Black males who do not persist

to graduation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012, table A-33-1; Schott Foundation,

2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In *The Trouble with Black Boys*, Noguera (2008)

acknowledged that environmental and cultural factors have profound influence on human

behavior, including academic performance. He noted, however that "what is less understood is

how environmental and cultural forces influence the way in which Black males come to perceive

schooling and how those perceptions influence their behavior and performance in school" (p.

18). The experiences of Black male students are multidimensional. Hence, understanding the

Black student experience in general requires a deeper look into the experiences of individual

Black males specifically. However, few studies analyze the connection between the process of

social identity development and the overall experiences of Black males in schools.

     Stories of failure and underachievement dominate the research literature in reference to

Black males in American education. This is not a new phenomenon, yet researchers continue to

study it, discuss implications, and make suggestions for ways to improve the situation with little

success in changing the overall outcome. With respect to race and school, researchers have

studied widely the disparate educational experiences of Black students including: Black students'

feelings toward school (Brown, 2011; Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011); teachers'

perceptions of working with minority students (Milner, 2012; Milner, 2016; Wallace & Brand,

2012); and studies that explore effective, culturally relevant instructional strategies for working with Black students to help address educational concerns that persist nationwide (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2015; Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016). Furthermore, there has also been extensive research regarding Black males' conception of racial identity in urban public high schools (Carter, 2008) and private schools (DeCuir-Gunby, Martin & Cooper, 2012), as well as at the college level (Bridges, 2011; Brooks, 2012; Harper, 2005; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Sellers, et al., 1997). These studies have been instrumental in helping practitioners understand the Black student experience.

Interestingly, however, there have been few studies to date that have taken an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the connection between high-achieving Black male students' racial identity and their perceptions of how race influences their schooling experiences in a predominately White suburban high school setting. Additionally, research on the experience of Black male high school students, told from the perspective of the Black male high school students themselves, is sparse (Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016). It is important to conduct research that seeks to understand the psychological and sociological processes that influence high-achieving Black male students' racial identity and their perceptions of their experiences in school. In doing so, the voices of these rarely heard high-achieving Black males become amplified.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how high-achieving Black male high school students make meaning of their social and academic experiences in predominately White high schools (PWHS). The study utilized a critical race perspective, and was situated

within the context of critical race theory in education. Therefore, participants' perceptions of the influence of race on their experiences was highly regarded. The methodology centralized the voices of Black male students, a group whose personal perspective is often absent from the discussion regarding their schooling experiences.

I did not seek to make exact scientific correlations between socialization, racial identity, and school experience. Instead, the goal was to use the experiences of high-achieving Black male students to understand how their conception of identity and the development of an "authentic self" influenced or is influenced by their social and academic experiences in a predominately White high school in a Midwestern town. Researching this topic through a critical lens helped to garner a better understanding of how the amalgamating concepts from the fields of psychology (how one thinks), sociology (how one acts and interacts with others), and education (the process of being formally and informally educated), influence Black males' perceptions of their social and academic experiences in school (Kohli, 2008). Hearing the Black male student's perception, expressed in his own words, provided an authentic platform to raise educators' awareness of Black males' perceptions, and yielded suggestions for pedagogical strategies that will aid schools in their effort to best educate Black male students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the case study:

1. How do [2]high-achieving Black males make meaning of their social and academic experiences in predominately White high schools?

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[2] High achieving is defined by academic achievement as measured by cumulative grade point average, and for this study, represents a participant who has achieved at least a 3.0 GPA.

2. How do high-achieving Black males define their authentic self, and in what way(s), if any, does their attendance in PWHS specifically contribute to the development of their authentic self?

Definitions of Key Terms

High-achieving. For the purpose of this study, a high-achieving student is defined as one who has at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average scale on a 4.0 grade scale.

Black. The term Black is used to describe the race of an individual who represents any cultural group that has connection to the African diaspora and currently lives in America. The term is meant to be all-inclusive because not all people of the "Black" race are American. However, in this study the terms Black, Black American and African American, will be used interchangeably to both honor the authorial preferences of the researchers whose work I reviewed and to honor my preference for more inclusive terminology when explaining the shared experiences of Black people in America, irrespective of nationality.

Male. For the purpose of this study, a male is an individual whose assigned biological sex was defined as male at birth. The use of the term male in this study does not seek to make connections to societal expectations of being cisgender as a parallel expectation with biological sex assignment (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2010).

Academic experiences. Academic experiences will include references to a student's academic "reality" as measured by grades, experiences within the schooling system that have bearing on achievement outcomes and opportunities, participants' academic self-concept, and academic regard (Scottham et al., 2008).

Racial socialization. Racial socialization consists of the formal and informal messages participants receive from individuals, institutions, and personal experiences regarding racial group membership (Friend, Hunter, & Fletcher, 2010; Scottham & Smalls, 2009).

Critical Race consciousness. One's level of awareness and response to the role that race and racism play in their experiences and interactions.

Social experiences. I have chosen to define social experiences refer to participants' relationships with peers and adults, involvement in curricular and extracurricular activities, experiences with school discipline, and any other non-curricular event (Douglas, 2016; Douglas & Arnold, 2016; Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016).

Buffering. Buffering is a concept related to protective activities and/or zones of emotional safety. Buffering is often encouraged by sociologist who argue that buffering environments help to provide needed support by minorities in predominantly White environments in order to affirm their existence and reduce feelings of isolation and self-devaluation. It is also used to decrease the impact of racism (Cross & Strauss, 1998).

Authentic self. There is no definition of authentic self that met the needs of the study. Therefore I have defined authentic self as, the individual perception of the self that one deems to be undiluted in thought, speech, and action. It is the embodiment of an individual's self-conceived and personally adopted identity. Consciousness and self-determinism are key components of the development of the authentic self. This definition is largely influenced by concepts from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), identity development theory (Burk, 2009; Chickering, 1959), and self-determination theory which places focus on an individual's personal motivation and feelings of freedom through self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative case study utilized a conceptual framework that highlights the tenets of critical race theory and the concept of identity to study how participants make meaning of their experiences in predominately White schools. Tenets of critical race theory in education undergirded this study (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Kholi, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Identity

In this study, the concept of identity is explored from two viewpoints—race socialization and the dimensions of racial identity/ racial group membership.

Race Socialization. Racial socialization refers to one's process of receiving messages about what it means to be a member of a particular racial group (Neblett et al., 2009; Scottham & Smalls, 2009). The process of personal socialization affects an individual's knowledge about one's own race and racial identity (Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley, & Zamel, 2008), view of oneself, individual perception of personal abilities (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997), and personal worldviews (Adams et al., 2007; Friend, Hunter & Fletcher, 2010; Scottham & Smalls, 2009). An important aspect of this study was to understand the messages participants have received about their racial identity because it aided in better understanding their perceptions of the influence of race on their experiences in school.

Although the case study utilized semi-structured interviews, many of the questions were developed using concepts from survey tools that are typically utilized for quantitative measures. The Comprehensive Race Socialization Inventory (CSRI) (Lesane-Brown, Caldwell, & Sellers, 2005) was used to develop questions for participants to self-disclose information about their personal race socialization.

Racial identity/ racial group membership. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity-Teen (MIBI-T) measures teens' feelings regarding racial identity and racial group membership (Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen, 2008). "The MIBI is an important tool for investigating the role that racial identity plays in the psychosocial functioning and life experiences of African Americans" (Scottham et al., 1997, p. 813). It consists of three dimensions that represent Black racial identity—*centrality, regard* and *ideology*.

The dimensions which the inventory measures are broken into seven subscales: *centrality*; *private regard* and *public regard* (subcategories of *regard*); and *nationalist*, *oppressed minority, assimilationist, and humanist* (subcategories of *Ideology*) (Scottham et al., 1997, p. 806-807). Although the tool was not be given to the participants, it was used as a resource in the process of formulating interview questions to gauge participants' feelings regarding racial identity.

Critical Race Theory: A Theoretical Perspective on Race and Education

Critical Race Theory, in its incipiency, was initially theorized as a lens for the field of legal studies (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006), however, the idea has spread into other fields of study such as education (Kohli, 2008). The foundational goals and tenets of CRT have remained even through its expanded applications to various fields. Critical race theory in education, introduced by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) at the American Educational Research Association in 1994, is highly influenced by and is seen as an extension of critical race theory in legal studies (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In their landmark article and subsequent presentation, "Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education" (1995), Ladson-Billings and Tate considered race to be "un-theorized" in literature in terms of educational equality. However, they did not neglect to acknowledge that authors have written about educational inequity for many decades before the emergence of CRT in education. In their article, the authors paid homage to activists such as

W.E.B. DuBois (1903) and Booker T. Washington (1895) who used race as a lens to assess inequality in education, and Carter G. Woodson (1933) who, as Ladson-Billings and Tate suggested, "identified the schools' role in structuring inequality and demotivating African American students" (p. 50). In their attempts to theorize educational inequality, Ladson-Billings and Tate sought to apply the tenets of CRT from the field of legal studies to show the role of race and racism in the field of education (Kohli, 2008; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

Dixson and Rousseau (2006) suggested that "many scholars have "begun to describe their work as reflecting a CRT framework" (p. 5). In its application to the field of education, CRT can be viewed as taking two forms—1) a tool of analysis (program evaluation, structural processes and procedures, etc.) and 2) a theory in practice. As expressed by Dixson and Rousseau (2006), CRT in education "can operate as both an analytical tool and as a curricular foundation" (p. 7). To demonstrate the theoretical or analytical potential of CRT, research done through the lens of CRT in education should be guided by five principles (Kholi, 2008). Authentic studies grounded by CRT in education should:

1. Centralize race and racism and its intersections with other forms of oppression

2. Challenge dominant ideology

3. Represent a commitment to social justice

4. Value the lived experience of people of color, and

5. Use interdisciplinary perspectives, including education, sociology, and psychology (Kholi, 2008).

The next section will expand on tenets one (Race as a Pervasive Issue), two (Challenging Dominant Ideology), and four (Valuing Lived Experience) for the purpose of illuminating the focus of my research study.

CRT in education tenet one: Race as a pervasive issue in American society. The

presence of racial difference is an ever-present phenomena in American society. Tatum (1992),

wrote "racism...is a pervasive aspect of U.S. socialization. It is virtually impossible to live in

U.S. contemporary society and not be exposed to some aspect of personal, cultural, and/or

institutional manifestations of racism in our society" (3). There are two concepts related to race

in America that should be highlighted with regard to its impact on Black people in U.S.

society—Whiteness as having "cultural capital" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) and the idea of

racial "otherness."

Whiteness as property value/cultural capital. Being White has cultural capital in

American society (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2006).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) used three foundational beliefs of CRT as a platform for

transferring the ideas into the educational realm. 1) Racism and inequality exist in American

society; 2) There is a disproportionate imbalance in property ownership when comparing Blacks

and Whites in America (which speaks to the unbalanced economic equality) and 3) The

compounded negative effect on the socioeconomic positioning of Blacks in America when race

and property ownership intersect is obvious. Essentially, they suggested that White Americans

had agency in terms of racial privilege in America. Moreover, Whiteness has cultural capital in

this society because social, political, and economic institutions are tailored to White cultural

values (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate generalize that those same

inequities permeate American schools.

When paralleled with the idea of property ownership in America being disproportionately

in the favor of White Americans, Ladson-Billings and Tate explained that this same concept is

true with respect to social power. Carter-Andrews (2009) further developed the idea of

Whiteness as cultural capital by exploring its role in schools. She explained academic success as

"White property." Due to the explicit and implicit curricula being told from and experienced

through a White middle class lens (Milner, 2015; Tatum, 1997), some students, whether they do

so consciously or unconsciously, begin to see academic success as reserved for White students.

This argument can be strengthened through the commonly heard controversial statements in

American schools. For example, Black students who speak properly or perform well

academically are at times accused of "acting White" (Carter, 2008; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986;

Noguera, 2008).

Invisibility and otherness. In his 1952 novel, *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison uses a

fictional character to portray the feeling of social invisibility experienced by Blacks in American

society. He wrote, "I am an invisible man…I am invisible, understand, simply because people

refuse to see me" (p. 3). This theme has been salient throughout the experience of minorities in

American society—particularly Black males. Furthermore, research and themes throughout

literature suggest that even when minorities are not invisible in American society, they are

plagued with a sense of "otherness" that permeates America's various institutions. One author

posited that "the real issue is not necessarily the Back/White binary as much as it is the way

everyone regardless of his other declared racial or ethnic identity is positioned in relation to

Whiteness" (Ladson-Billings in Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. vii). The idea of otherness

suggests that White culture and White cultural ideology is the tape by which all people are

measured and compared, regardless of racial identity. Duncan (2002) argues that being relegated

to a status of otherness has greatly impacted the experiences of Black males in school. He goes

on to write:

The dominant storyline suggests that Black males are too different from other students, and oppositionally so. Moreover, it comes as no surprise that they have difficulty in schools, especially in those with high-powered academic programs and codes of conduct that rely on student consent and compliance for their enforcement. It is in this way that the *problem-solving* [emphasis added] orientation in research on Black male students contributes to a cycle where the perception of strangeness contributes to the further marginalization of the group in school. (p. 133)

The marginalization that Duncan referenced is ever felt among Black males in greater society and transcends institutional practices and traditions (DuBois, 1903). Being both invisible and hyper-visible at the convenience of individuals in positions of agency takes a toll on the collective Black identity. The subsequent feelings derived from these microaggressions manifest themselves in various ways, but ultimately play a role in racial identity development.

CRT in education tenet two: Challenge dominant ideology. Critical Race Theory in education's second tenet, to challenge dominant ideology, asserts that "CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims of educational institutions' objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Many researchers explain that works which suggest the above to be true continue to support an agenda that does not promote progress for minorities and passively encourages America's current racial status quo of unbalanced and unearned privilege for Whites (Adams Bell & Griffin, 2010; Lynn & Parker, 2006). This dominant ideology has been engrained in school systems throughout American history (DuBois, 1903; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Woodson, 1933). Dixson and Rousseau (2006) explain that CRT argues for the need to examine contemporary events with the historical context

in mind. Therefore, in looking at the current state of Black male students in American public schools, one must understand that:

> A critical race analysis of Black education starts from the notion that education as we know it, was never intended to have liberatory consequences for African Americans…The intent of schools and schooling practices in White supremacist contexts has always been to serve and further support the unequal system of privileges conferred upon Whites. (Lynn and Parker, 2006, p. 116)

Some researchers posit that American education systematically perpetuates White cultural values through the schooling processes (Carter, 2007; Howard, 2014; Gayles, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995' Milner, 2015).

Most mission and/or vision statements of American public schools represent the same general idea—to prepare students to be successful citizens in an ever-changing world. How can this vision come to fruition when most societies in fact use education to preserve the status quo rather than to bring about change and address inequalities (Howard, 2014; Lynn & Parker; 2006; Noguera, 2008)? As previously stated, critical race theory assumes that racism is a pervasive aspect of American society. Unfortunately, the institution of education cannot be shielded from this truth— even the most well-intentioned schools. In fact, schools are a part of the very system that continues to influence the racial identity development of Blacks in American society. Lynn and Parker (2006) suggest,

> "Schools…are part of a complex web of discursive cultural and social forces that further instantiate White culture, ideas and beliefs. This in turn has the effect of further solidifying the political social and economic dominance of Whites at all levels. (p. 116-17)

Although racial enculturation may not be seen as overt racism, the covert or implicit messages and experiences in schools devalue the culture of Black Americans and suggest middle class White values as being the proper alternative is damaging to the identity and psyche. This enculturation suggests that one's success is contingent upon his ability and/ or willingness to adapt and enact the social traditions of that environment – an unfair trade-off for social and academic success, especially to developing youths.

CRT in Education tenet four: Valuing lived experience. Valuing an individual's lived experience is about honoring their right to create their narrative. This can be accomplished by allowing one to give voice to their own experiences and by placing their experiences in context to their "truths" of living within the structures of American society. The ideas of "voice" and "context," are explored in CRT in education tenet four.

Voice: The importance of narrative and counter-narrative. Voice refers to the perspective from which a story is told. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) found *voice* to be an important component of CRT studies in their meta-analysis of research from 1995-2005. Oftentimes the experiences of minorities are not told from their perspective and tend to lose an important experiential component during its retelling. Some scholars have utilized the voices of students of color to describe their perceptions of and experiences in K-12 and post-secondary institutions. This literature reveals both individual-level microaggressions (Carter, 2008; DeAngeliss, 2009; Howard, 2008; Lofton & Davis, 2015; Milner, 2015) in the form of lowered teacher expectations, and macro-level forms of institutional racism in which school-wide programs lack the courses and rigor necessary for students to succeed in higher education (Duncan, 2002, p. 137). Narrative and counter-narrative are important aspects of CRT work (Brown, 2011; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Howard, 2008; Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2012; Milner, 2015; Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016; Williams, 2004; Williams & Portman, 2014). Milner (2012) adds that counter narrative is important to education because the narratives told about a people, by a people often have been dismissed, trivialized, or misrepresented in education research. Utilizing the voices of Black males to tell their own stories is often a scarce component in research.

   Structural and institutional oppression: Schooling that perpetuates White dominance. Adding cultural context to a study provides a level of analysis that is necessary when making meaning of the lived experiences of a person or group. This is especially true when considering longstanding institutional practices. Critical race theory argues the need to examine contemporary events with the historical context in mind (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Kholi, 2008). Furthermore, in looking at the current state of Black male students in American public schools it is important to note that some authors and researchers suggest that the schooling process has served as a means to perpetuate White dominance (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2010; Bartlett & Brayboy, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; DuBois, 1903; Friere, 1970; Kohli, 2008; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Woodson, 1933). One must question, how this process has and continues to impact Black students, and how it contributes to what some have called the *Black male crisis* (Brown, 2011). According to Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012), "research suggests that African American students' beliefs about self and race are closely related to their educational and social development, their perceptions regarding the value of education, and their current realities" (p. 201). The institutionalization of a racial hierarchy adds increased relevance to the need to study how race and racial identity impact students' experiences in schools.

   Many studies grounded in CRT in education confirm that race is an important contributing factor in students' educational experiences. Researchers who use CRT as a lens

have argued the importance of using cultural interactions (socialization) along with systematic

and institutionalized practices to understand the school experiences of students of color (Carter,

2008; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Howard, 2014; Kohli, 2008; LaSalle & Johnson, 2016; Lynn &

Parker, 2006; Milner, 2015; Noguera, 2008). Kohli (2008) sought to highlight the impact that

cultural bias in schools can have on people of color. Through interviews with nine women of

color who were all future teachers, Kohli found that each of the women experienced racism in

their schooling processes and shared experiences of racism that were both overt—being the

target of racist comments—and covert, teachers and professors unconsciously expressing their

low expectations and the participants' perceptions of the school structure being setup to make

students of color feel inferior. Furthermore, the study found that the participants' experiences

led majority of them to question or internalize "a racial, cultural, or linguistic inferiority to White

culture" (p. 182). The likelihood of internalized racial inferiority by people of color has been

theorized by many (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2010; Friere, 1970; Tatum, 1997; Woodson, 1933),

and has been made evident in various studies (Brown, 2011; Duncan, 2002; Kohli, 2008; Pyke,

2010).

Duncan's (2002) study revealed that some teachers disregard and ridicule the culture of

people of color because it is not the "norm." One example he highlighted was one of cultural

insensitivity—the ridicule of Ebonics. The school's Black principal, and a group comprised of

both Black and White teachers all laughed at the joke. The disregard transcends both race and

positional power. It highlights the danger of internalized superiority/inferiority and shows how

ideas can be institutionalized through groupthink— which consciously or unconsciously begins

with the leader of the school. Duncan further explained that the language students and educators

used to describe the experiences of Black male students in the school used for his research study

oftentimes implicitly suggested that Black males are naturally academically and socially

deficient and are in many cases solely to blame for their marginalization and exclusion at school.

He suggested that this type of rhetoric often appears in research about Black male students.

Furthermore, Duncan's study demonstrated the tenacity with which racist stereotypes become

engrained in the minds of students, faculty, and staff. The study confirmed that these

internalizations have significant impacts on Black students' experiences and "undermines the

ability of Black male students to excel at the school" (p. 140). Keeping in mind the national

epidemic of disparate academic experiences of Black students when compared to their White

counterparts, race, racism and stereotyping seem not only to be an issue in the institution that

Duncan studied, but is mirrored in schools nationwide.

Assumptions

Hatch (2002) urges that throughout the research process it is important to "[take] a deep

look at the belief systems that undergird our thinking" (p. 12). Conducting a qualitative case

study of Black males using a critical theory assumes many things. First, it must be noted that

epistemologically, as a researcher, I assume the first tenet of critical race theory in education to

be true: "Racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society" (Dixson & Rousseau,

2005). Racism in America is a contentious topic and the assumption that it not only exists but is

also ever-present is an important aspect of this research.

Second, in addition to belief in the pervasive nature of racism, during this study I also

worked from the belief that systems of oppression exist in America; systemic oppression is

institutionalized throughout the various dimensions of American society, including public

schools (Adams et al., 2007). Educators, whether they do so consciously or unconsciously, play

an integral role in perpetuating these systems of oppression because of their personal

socialization. Ideas of socialization transcend race, class and gender. Therefore, I believe that unless levels of consciousness are raised in an effort to suppress, combat, and undo oppressive acts, the system will continue to adversely impact minority groups in all facets of American society.

Finally, it should be noted that being a Black male educator who was also a high-achieving student in high school adds a level personal bias to my study. I must remain fully conscious that my intention to be a neutral researcher may at times be overshadowed by my close connection to the topic. My own personal experiences with racial socialization and identity, as well as having been a high-achieving Black male in an urban public high school highly influenced my educational experiences, my topic selection, and influenced my interpretation of the data I collected.

Significance

Through this study, I used the tenets and assumptions of critical race theory in education to allow the voices of Black male students to emerge with respect to their own experiences. There are effect data that tell the story of the Black student experience, however, the cause data are not as clear and consistent. Research for CRT in education is most frequently viewed from two perspectives; 1) studies that analyze education using a critical race lens (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings Tate, 1995) and 2) studies that encourage and promote educational practices that use the tenets of CRT to make recommendations for the field of education (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Williams, 2004). My study sought to add to this effort by doing both. I took an interdisciplinary approach to understand the experience of high-achieving Black males by intentionally intersecting psychological, sociological, and educational perspectives within the study.

Giving credence to the tenets of critical race theory in education, and coupling them with the voices of the high-achieving Black males, my study yielded recommendations for classroom practice that are responsive to the needs of Black male students and account for their process of racial socialization. Using the seldom utilized voice of the Black male will give educators insight regarding the connection between identity and the schooling experience. Moreover, I see the findings from this study as transformative in the field of education because they strategically highlight areas of potential professional growth in pedagogical practice for educators to aid them in serving Black males.

Historically, the general experiences of Black males in America have been subpar. In many arenas, Black males are represented as one of the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised identity groups. The field of education perpetuates this concern. However, there are many cases of Black males students who are high-achieving despite the normative experience of underachievement of Black male students. The study did not only ask participants to give a narrative of their experiences in school, it also explored how they explain the reciprocal ways in which schooling experiences aid in identity development and potentially influences authentic identity expression. In addition, critical race theory in education served as a theoretical perspective to understand and situate the participants' experiences, as well as to make recommendations for the field of education in terms of professional development and pedagogical practice.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

> *The paradox of our situation is that Americans are fatigued and fascinated by race (Dyson, 2009, p. 185).*

A study of either racial identity or education in isolation of one another would by themselves yield multilayered findings. Therefore, to synthesize race and education in an attempt to develop an understanding of how their intersectionality make up and add to the experiences of Black males is a large undertaking. This literature review is an attempt to utilize the work and research of scholars who write about racial identity and education to inform my own study of high-achieving Black males. This will provide a foundational understanding from which to work as I seek to discover how my study's participants make meaning of their experiences in predominately White high schools. I have approached the literature review in two ways: 1) Using a critical lens to research studies about race and racial identity development and 2) Highlighting studies that discuss the intersection of race and education of Black students.

Overall, the literature review explores the intersection of race and education and is broken into three parts. Section one is a general look at racial identity development of Black people in America. The second section discusses what research says about the intersection of race and the education of Black students in general. Finally, the third section is what research states about race and education for high-achieving Black males specifically. Ultimately, engaging in research on the topics that have used critical race theory as a lens, studies on racial identity development, and research on the intersection of race and education in America provided a firm foundation for researching how high-achieving Black males make meaning of their social and academic experiences in schools.

The Intersection of Race and Education

> *"A two-tiered universe of perceptions rotates around an axis defined by race. While good fortune lights one side, despair darkens the other: It is rarely sunny at the same time in White and Black America" (Dyson, 199).*

Section 1: Racial Identity Development

The development of Black males' racial identity is paramount to their experiences in life in general and school specifically. Racial identity has been described as the meaning that each individual has constructed about what it means to be a member of certain racial group (Cross, 1971/1991; Tatum, 1997) and the significance that membership in that group holds for the person. Because race and racism saturate American society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tatum, 1997; Tatum, 2004) and because Black identity is multidimensional (Douglas, 2016; Douglas & Peck, 2013; Noguera, 2008; Howard, 2014; Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016), having knowledge of racial identity development in theory is a precursor to gaining a better understanding of Black students' experiences. Moreover, attempting to explain racial identity development requires one acknowledge that racism exists in America. Therefore, there is a need for a working definition of racism. Tatum (1997) quoted David Wellman as saying "racism is a system of privilege and advantage based on race" (p. 7). I will utilize this same definition in my research. This definition encapsulates the multivariate nature of oppression experienced by Blacks in America that extend beyond overt racism (one person's hatred of another based solely on race). It places the magnifying glass on systems and institutional factors that lead to or stymie upward mobility in American society. One does not have to be hated overtly or publicly ridiculed to be systematically disenfranchised. Howard (2014) explains that "as researchers examine the role that race and racism play in the educational experiences of many African American males is that the manifestations of individual and institutional racism are not always blatant, overt, and

easy to observe" (63). Disenfranchisement can come in the form of misinformation or

stereotypes (Lofton & Davis, 2015), omissions, distortions about your identity group, being privy

to the existence of White privilege (Tatum, 1997), or being subjected to White privilege (Adams,

Bell & Griffin, 2010). It can also be manifested within oneself as internalized inferiority to the

"dominant group" or externally by being viewed or treated as inferior due to the internalized

superiority of members of the agent group (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2010).

Research on racial identity development provides additional insight regarding cross-racial

interactions and a deeper understanding of Black Americans (Tatum, 1997). Noguera (2008)

contends that "the processes and influences involved in the construction of Black male identity

should be at the center of analyses of school performance since it is on the basis of their

identities that Black males are presumed to be at risk, marginal, and endangered in school and

throughout American society" (p. 27). When viewing the achievement of minority students,

authors agree that cultural factors such as identity (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2010) and social

factors outside the school setting greatly impact the perception of school and subsequently the

academic achievement of minority students (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2010; Friend, Hunter &

Fletcher, 2010; Pyke, 2010; Tatum, 2004). Giving attention to racial identity development opens

the door for larger conversations about race in America, provides an opportunity for people

within systems to change and counteract the inequitable practices that impact the lives of Black

Americans, and it could serve as a vehicle to drive social change.

Identity development models. There are various identity development models presented

in research literature in the fields of psychology and sociology. However, I will introduce three

within this review that discuss the processes and stages of identity development— (Atkinson,

Morten & Sue, (1978/1999); Cross, 1971/1991; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Each researcher

worked from the assumption that identity development is a process and is defined by various

stages. Although there are slight differences in the stages of each model—including sub-

categories referred to as "identity clusters" within various stages— the overarching ideas are

quite similar. Ultimately, the identity development models presented show a progression that can

be summed up as Blacks advancing on a continuum of racial consciousness that ranges from

"naïve innocence" to "racial re-socialization and self-actualization"

The stages of identity development seek to categorize Black people's experiences of

achieving a positive racial identity and racial self-conception by extrapolating the level at which

the individual embraces that identity. Furthermore, it is a measure of how the person utilizes

their understanding of their identity to examine the role of race in America and the impact that it

has on their personal worldview. Additionally, each researcher explains that individuals do not

always progress through the stages linearly although the models suggest hierarchical stages that

delineate tiered levels of consciousness and self-assuredness regarding racial identity. One can

be in multiple stages at once depending on social context, and they can vacillate between

multiple stages (regress and progress) based on daily experiences (Cross, 1971/1991; Hardiman

and Jackson, 1997; Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross Jr., & Worrel, 2001). The following

section highlights the various stages of three similar identity development models. I will give a

brief overview of each stage individually before synthesizing the overarching concepts revealed

about racial identity development when they are examined collectively.

Nigrescence model. William Cross (1971/1991) developed a nigrescence model that

outlined steps and stages through which Black people progress on their path toward developing a

strong and positive Black identity. The stages define the level with which Black people

centralize their racial experiences and the level of significance they give race in understanding

their experiences in American society. The original Nigrescence model had five stages of Black

identity development: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization,

Internalization-Commitment (Cross, 1971/1991). In Cross's (1991) revision of the model, he

synthesized some of the stages and developed a model with three overarching stages that

included Pre-encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization (Vandiver et al., 2001). Within

those three stages however, there are seven distinct identities or attitudes that Black people could

project. Cross calls these attitudes "identity clusters" (Vandiver et al., 2001).

A. Pre-encounter Stage (low salience, race neutral, anti-Black)

    1. Mis-education

    2. Assimilation

    3. Self-hatred

B. Immersion-Emersion Stage

    3. Intense Black Involvement

    4. Anti-White

C. Internalization Stage

    5. Humanist/universalist- "open to cultures and worldviews, but still opposed to societal

        racism and oppression" (Vandiver et al., 2001, p. 182)

    6. Internalized Bicultural Identity (acceptance of being both Black and American)

    7. Multiculturalist-Black self-acceptance plus the intersectionality of two other identity

        categories (i.e. sexual orientation, gender, class, etc.) are seen as having an effect on

        the person in a similar way as race.

    Racial/cultural identity development model. Atkinson, Morten and Sue's (1978) Minority

Identity Development model (MID) was the original model which and Sue and Sue (2008)

revised and renamed as the Racial and Cultural Identity Model (R/CID) in 1999. This model is

similar to Cross's revised nigrescence model. However, the R/CID model has five stages of

identity development. For each stage, the model explains how an individual may feel about

himself, others of his racial group, other minority groups and members of the majority group.

The five stages of the R/CID are:

1. Conformity

2. Dissonance

3. Resistance and Immersion

4. Introspection

5. Integrative Awareness

Social identity development model. The stages included in Hardiman and Jackson's (1997)

Social Identity Development Model are also similar to those presented in the other two models. It

should be noted, however, that although Cross (1971/1991) and Sue and Sue's (2008) models are

specific to racial identity development (Cross's model is directly focused on Black racial identity

only), the explanations within the stages of Hardiman and Jackson's Social Identity

Development Model are generalized to account for the development of any social identity group

(race, class, gender, religion, sex, etc.). The model is not specific to racial identity, however,

working under the assumption that America is a society based on privilege and oppression, the

model serves the same purpose as the other two—to showcase how one attains a positive self-

conception of their identity group while reconciling a separation, duality, or integration with the

dominant or agent group identity. For the purpose of this research project, when referring to

Hardiman and Jackson's model, I will be applying the model to the social identity of race only,

and more specifically Black identity development. The stages of the Social Identity Development

Model are:

1. Naïve/No social consciousness

2. Acceptance

3. Resistance

4. Redefinition

5. Internalization

The three social identity development models described above have similar stages.

However, their slight differences are significant enough to highlight individually as I seek to

synthesize their overall meanings and attempt to better understand the nuances of racial identity

development for Black people. Because the three models have a combined total of 13 stages (17

if the reader accounts for Cross's subcategories within his stages), I have further synthesized

these topics into three views or expressions of Black identity described by Michael Eric Dyson

(2009), an author, activist and advocate for the Black race. He refers to them as "strategies"

Black people use to navigate society. These strategies or racial identity expressions are 1)

Accidental Blackness, 2) Incidental Blackness and 3) Intentional Blackness.

Stage 1-Accidental Blackness: naïve/pre-encounter. Dyson (2009) explains accidental

Blackness as simply being born Black. He states that one's Blackness is obvious to the outside

world, but may not necessarily be an important aspect of identity to the individual. The first

stage in the three racial identity development models presented highlight individuals' naive

attitudes regarding the role of social class position when juxtaposed to Whites (Atkinson et al.,

1978/1999; Cross, 1971/1991; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Hardiman and Jackson call this the

"naïve" stage where the individual is learning through experience what it means to be a member

of the Black race. At that stage, one may experience discomfort and question certain White

cultural ideology, but the individual is neither fearful of nor hostile toward White people. This

thinking, however, can bleed into a stage of "acceptance" (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) that

suggests the individual actively and consciously adopts dominant cultural ideology. Atkinson et

al. call this stage "conformity" and it outlines an experience that has deeper rooted implications

beyond accepting views of the dominant culture. They explain that Black people in this stage

may value dominant culture over one's own or they simply accept or conform to dominant

culture ideology.

Cross's revised nigrescence model further analyzes the experience of Black people in the

first stage of racial identity development. His "Pre-encounter" stage has three identity clusters—

Assimilation, Mis-education, and Self-hatred (Vandiver et al., 2011). Similar to conformity, the

first stage in the model proposed by Atkinson et al., *assimilation* speaks of Black people who do

not see their race as central to their experiences or as having a deep importance to them

personally. Instead, they have a strong centralization toward being American more than being a

member of their racial group. Dyson, (2009) would suggest that a person identified as having a

pre-encounter experience that is highly influenced by mis-education is bombarded with negative

messages about being Black in America. The mis-educated Black person has internalized these

stereotypes and erroneously believes them to be true (Bridges, 2011; Tatum, 1997). The self-

hatred (Bridges, 2011) or "anti-Black identity (Vandiver et. al., 2001) is represented by a group

of Black people who have a negative private regard for being Black. The negative messages of

being Black have been so salient in these people's experiences that the individual has

internalized them and projects them in a self-deprecating, race loathing fashion. The

explicit/implicit messages they have received, or their personal perceptions of how others feel about their race cause them to also see their own racial group in a negative light.

The three models show a wide spectrum within the first stage of identity development that ranges from naïveté, to conscious and overt decentralization of Black culture and disdain for Black identity. The specificity with which Cross (1971/1991) explains this stage serves as a cornerstone for understanding Black Americans' journey of racial identity development. Their position on the continuum of having a positive racial identity is nuanced and may be projected in multiple ways.   The role of personal experiences and how individuals have made sense of those experiences is of high relevance to one's "starting point" in stage one.

Stage one of each of the models proposed by Hardiman and Jackson (naïve); Atkinson et al., (conformity) and Cross (pre-encounter, including assimilation, mis-education, and self-hatred) include components of racial passiveness that characterize this early stage of identity development. The lack of intentionality or centrality of the Black experience, or the avoidance/disdain for the racial experience is akin to Dyson's idea of accidental Blackness. The concept of accidental Blackness seems to suggest that one has no ownership over their racial experience. Because one was born to one or more parents who have been defined as a member of the Black race—regardless the ethnicity— that person has inherited the social experiences of Black people and all that comes along with that designation. The psychological understanding of race in America is limited in this first stage. The experience of an individual in this stage is plagued with what others have *done to, think about,* or *believe about* Black people. It is an experience that is dependent on others' views of the person and their racial group rather than personal ownership, self-definition, and self-determination. The concept of power and control are disproportionately tipped against the favor of the individual because they are either 1)

unaware of the role of race in determining social power in America, or 2) their awareness of their

perceived lack of social power in America due to their race designation causes what seems to be

a psychological retreat inward and away from embracing one's Blackness. This results is

blissful conformity to White dominant ideology or a personal disdain for self and the Black race

because the "accident" of being Black has relegated them to a life of social strife.

Stage 2-Incidental Blackness: dissonance, resistance, redefinition/immersion. Dyson

(2009) explains "incidental Blackness" as one's race greatly contributing to and having a valued

role in his or her life experiences. As previously stated, experience and messages received

regarding race are important contributors to identity development. Stage two of racial identity

development concerns encounter experiences that leave the individual questioning their feelings

toward the dominant culture (Atkinson et al., 1978/1999; Cross, 1971/1991; Hardiman and

Jackson, 1997; Sue & Sue, 2008; Vandiver et al., 2001). Ellison's (1952) character in *Invisible*

Man addressed the value of an encounter experience as the first step in understanding the impact

of race in America. The character informed the reader, "I myself, after existing some twenty

years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility" (p. 7). Encounter experiences lead

individuals to have a heightened awareness of or focus on his own cultural heritage. An impetus

for this stems from the struggle one feels as he reflects on his thoughts and actions regarding race

before the encounter experience when juxtaposed with the revised viewpoint or mental model

after the encounter experience. Atkinson and colleagues' R/CID model call this stage

"dissonance."

Once Blacks begin to question dominant ideology, the heightened awareness can lead one

to view race through a binary lens—"all things Black" are good or neutral, and "all things

White" are bad or evil. This is a common first step in creating an internalized Black identity for

some (Vandiver et al., 2001). Hardiman and Jackson refer to this as *"resistance,"* a concept also examined by Atkinson et al. and Cross. The individual's resistance to dominant culture and their heightened awareness of how they have colluded in the process of their own oppression fuels their desire to rid themselves of those negative racial thoughts and actions.

The desire to resist dominant culture is accompanied by a deeper appreciation for and immersion within Black culture. Hardiman and Jackson call this process *"redefinition,"* while Sue and Sue (2008) and Cross (1971/1991) call it *"immersion."* Cross's Immersion-Emersion stage has been described as a stage of self-discovery and the collective discovery of Blackness. Black people begin to immerse themselves in Black culture by reading about it, writing about, and speaking out about Blackness. This is what Cross referred to as *intense Black involvement*. Atkinson and colleagues refer to this stage as *"introspection"* as the individual becomes more comfortable with their own identity. Now, comfortable with their intrinsic self, the individual begins to establish their own racial identity without following cultural norms. They become more selective in deciding what dominant cultural views are not a threat to their own identity.

The nomenclature used for describing Cross's Immersion/Emersion stage is of high importance. The process of emersion in essence means to "emerge from" something, while immersion is about "deeply engaging in" something. Flipping the two words to instead be read as "Emersion/Immersion" would paint a clear picture of the sequential process of developing high levels of racial awareness as expressed through the identity development models. The encounter experience allows the individual to emerge from their naïve view about race and its role in society. Due to the dissonance experienced, the encounter and subsequent reflective process yields an "immersion" experience that leads to the individual surrounding himself with and immersing himself in the process of racial exploration and self-discovery. Additionally, he

begins to become more aware of the implications that come along with living in a racialized America.

Cross's "Immersion-Emersion" stage can also be seen as potentially dangerous (Vandiver et al. 2001) because of the feelings that can emerge during this stage. The feelings one encounters when shifting from a status of passivity or naïveté regarding the role of race in American society to one of awareness can manifest itself in multiple ways (euphoria, rage, anxiety, guilt, etc.). These feelings translate into actions and can take on two other types of emotional stances—a disdain for Blacks who are in the Pre-encounter stage, and anti-White attitudes (Cross, 2005).

Dyson's (2009) concept of incidental Blackness, is an emergent thread in what I've determined to be stage two of racial identity development in my synthesis of the three identity development models presented. The heightened awareness of race value on race, yet it is still not the only social identity group that is important to the holistic identity. I highlighted this thought for the purpose of this study because it is assumed that the intersection of race and gender would contribute greatly to the study's findings. One's racial experiences cannot always be isolated from other aspects of identity. Therefore, Dyson's strategy of incidental Blackness is a more inclusive expression of how racial identity development manifests itself. Although in stage two the connection to race gets stronger, it is not the only part of one's identity that is considered by the individual during this encounter, emersion, and immersion experience.

Stage 3-Intentional Blackness: Internalization. Intentional Blackness is a very complex strategy and is multifaceted in its expansiveness. Dyson (2009) explains that intentional Blackness suggests race is "vital" to one's Black identity, but it is not the "exclusive aspect" of one's identity. This strategy has similarities with incidental Blackness, however, it is the subtle

yet meaningful difference of better understanding the complexity of race and subsequently the intentional behavior that follows that separates the two. Dyson explains that when one has achieved the ability to make conscious and calculated decisions while accounting for context in every situation, "Blackness is understood in its political forms and its social manifestations" (p. 187) and is experienced in a more strategic way. In the final stage(s) of racial identity development, the individual has transformed a pre-existing identity that did not centralize Black culture and the Black racial experience, to one that does so with a heightened understanding of race in America. A person adept at this stage has a strong sense of self, and understands ways to socially navigate a racialized American society. This can include but is not limited to code switching and other methods of establishing multiple "authenticate selves" to survive and thrive in America.

Cross's (1991) Internalization stage described three identity clusters—Humanist, Internalized bicultural identity, and Multiculturalist. A Black person who takes on a Humanist/universalist identity is "open to cultures and worldviews, but still opposes societal racism and oppression" (Vandiver et al., 2001, p. 182). Someone identified as having an internalized bicultural identity has learned to accept being both Black and American. The Multiculturalist has a central focus on Black self-acceptance and accounts for the intersectionality of other identity categories (i.e. sexual orientation, gender, class, etc.) as having an effect on the person in a similar way as race. This expanded multiculturalist concept provides a necessary lens to better understand one's experience. The compounded effect of interesting identities holds value in the experiences of Black males. Being both Black and male add levels of expectation and understanding to the individual Black male himself, as well as the people with whom he comes in contact. The experience of a White male is not the same as the experience of

a Black male. The same can be said about being a Black male versus a Black female. Although

the shared social identity in each example brings along with it a shared experience, the added

social identity changes the context. I will further expand on this concept of intersectionality in a

later section titled, "Intersectionality: Being both Black and Male in America."

The internalization stage is seen as a turning point in the identity development of a Black

person. During this stage, an individual is celebratory of his Black identity and has the

psychological maturity to claim ownership of his racial identity; his experience is no longer seen

to be a perpetual juxtaposition to White hegemonic thought. All identity development models

(Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1978/1999; Cross, 1971/1991; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) had

similar characteristics in this stage—a greater appreciation for self and the Black race, a greater

understanding for the complexity of race, and the existence of a selective process to determine

what aspects of dominant culture he individual would embrace or dismiss. In essence, the

internalization stage was said to allow Blacks to love themselves and their race without hating

White people (Vandiver et al., 2001) and allow them also to see benefits of working with and

supporting other diverse groups.

Racial identity development is complex and highly dependent on the socialization

experience of an individual. However, the stages of racial identity development models suggest

an assumed shared experience that all Blacks are engaged in whether consciously or

unconsciously. Racial consciousness and personal worldviews are important contributors to

racial identity development and how one personally examines their experiences within American

structures. Therefore, one must account for this process when understanding the schooling

experiences for Black males as it may shed light onto how they make meaning of their

experiences.

Intersectionality: Being both Black and Male in America

      Masculinity. Being Black is only one social identity that is important to account for when discussing the experiences of Black males. It is also imperative to deconstruct the role of biological sex (which subsequently leads to gender) and how it intersects with race. Gender is both functional and expressive (Connell, 2005). It is functional in a sociological sense insofar as society defines normative roles of being biologically male. It is outwardly expressive in the form of masculinity and how exhibits the roles associated with the term.

      The concept of masculinity can be problematic as it encompasses a range of expressive features that are contingent upon one's view of what is masculine. However, personal and collective definitions and expressions of masculinity are in effect highly influenced by hegemonic masculine ideology. Connell (2005) explains that "hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (77). Hegemonic notions of masculinity suggest that men are emotionally guarded, are focused on success, have a necessity for control, are competitive/ tough, and are unapologetically heterosexual (Connell, 2005; Mince, Alfonso, Hackney, & Luque, 2014; Reigeluth & Addis, 2015). These finite descriptions of masculinity suggest certain gender norms to which males are expected to uphold. However, Connell warns that "hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations" (76). For example, what is defined as masculinity for white males, is not at all times the dominant hegemonic belief of what masculinity means to the Black community. Mince et al.,

(2014) explained that Black males tend to define masculinity through abstract ideas such as responsibility, accountability, and sacrifice, rather than the general characteristics of males described above. That does not suggest, however, that Black males' expressed forms of masculinity do not adhere to larger society's hegemonic ideas.

Douglas (2016) posited that anchoring one's idea of masculinity in its singular form is problematic. He suggested that "there is no singular, unified, or universally accepted manifestation of masculinity." Instead, acknowledging and accounting for the plurality within and across the vast scope of masculinities would be more appropriate. He explained that using the term in its singular form does not account for the many ways that masculinities are embodied and experienced by the unique individuals to whom the term can be attributed.

Moreover, researchers also question the "either/or" approach to categorizing individuals into dichotomized groups—male/female—and subsequent gender roles based on biological sex. They argue that these ideas of a gender dichotomy affect widely accepted definitions of masculinity when juxtaposed to its binary opposite, femininity (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2010; Connell, 2005; Thomas & Stevenson, 2015). Exploring the idea of gender dichotomy in depth was beyond the scope of this study. What was important, however, was that the complexity of gender expression remained in the foreground of the conversation on identity development with respect to the various expressive factors of masculinities specifically, and the potential impact for Black males when accounting for its intersection with race particularly. Therefore, reviewing what literature says about the Black male image and Black masculinity are important concepts to review in the attempt to understand how Black males make meaning of their experiences in predominately white schools.

The Black Male Image: Stereotypes of Black Males and Black Masculinity

Black males must navigate three separate yet interconnected factors in their search for identity. They must determine what it means to them to be a member of the Black race, what it means to be male, and ultimately, they must reconcile the compounded effect of being both Black and male simultaneously. Additionally, they have to determine what their memberships in those social identity groups means for them personally and for the world around them. Inherent within this task is problematizing the image that is imposed on Black males before they have an opportunity to individually define their identities. Generally, characteristics of Black males are learned or "given" to them to adopt through explicit and implicit lessons passed down from family and friends, messages transmitted through media, and ideas implanted and reinforced by institutions and frequented locales (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2010; Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, 2014; Douglas, 2016; Harper & Nichols, 2008).

The images and depictions of Black males in literature, cinema, print, and television media can be both helpful and at times deleterious to the process of Black males' identity development. For example, stereotyping and societal conceptualizations of Black males serve as the impetus for how Black males have been treated historically, continue to have tremendous impact on how they are viewed contemporarily, and impact if they internalize or reject the characterizations and stereotypes imposed on them (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, 2014; Howard, 2014; Lofton & Davis, 2015; Noguera, 2010).

Howard (2014) suggested there are a number of depictions of Black males that have led to lasting impacts on America's conceptualization of the group— (1) the physical brute and anti-intellectual, (2) the shiftless, lazy Black male, (3) the hypersexual Black male, (4) the criminal-minded Black male, and (5) the slickster-pimp/gangster Black male (p. 31). These depictions

were developed to maintain a racial hierarchy that benefitted white Americans. It justified the

enslavement of Blacks, vigilante justice that resulted in the lynching of many Black males, a

relegation to second class citizenship, the unequal treatment of Blacks in America's institutions,

and they became rationale for the separation of the races. Now, in a post de jure segregationist

America—which has also been described as "post racial" in some circles—the perpetuated

depictions of Black males as criminal, emotionally abrasive, libidinous sexual beings, and unfit

fathers have led to a simple permutation of the same process of sorting and separating the races

into a caste-like social system. The system yields similar outcomes to Jim Crow America.

However, in 2016 it operates under a more covert and abstract guise of "(in)equality" which is so

deeply woven into American society that it may be difficult to perceive in a tangible way unless

one unearths the topsoil of American society's social garden in search of its racist roots.

Although Jim Crow may be difficult to see, touch, or hear in objective and overt ways, its

sting is felt deeply through the microaggressive experiences of the oppressed (Reynolds, 2010)—

misconstrued notions of Black male identity and de facto racial superiority of White Americans.

It is seen in the Black Lives Matter movement that screams for America to pay attention to the

disparate experience of Black Americans with special attention paid to Black males; It is

characterized by the disproportionate incarceration of Black males, Black scapegoating,

assertions that "opportunity is at everyone's reach" and that Black males are too lazy to pull

themselves up by their own bootstraps; It is plastered in music videos and throughout social

media that depicts that the Black male rapper as a criminal and misogynist who disrespects his

"oversexed" Black female counterpart. By using those same historical depictions outlined by

Howard to dichotomize and minimize what it means to be a Black male in U.S. culture, this

process has been deliberately manufactured in a quest to protect America's racial status quo. In

the process, these erroneous depictions have unfortunately become widely accepted as general

characterizations of the Black male.

Stereotypes do not create themselves. They are developed and constructed in the minds of

people through rote memorization—a socializing effect— as their minds are constantly

bombarded with stereotypical messages. These insidious messages and characterizations

presented about Black males are wide spread and fluid within society. Therefore, the adoption of

these messages by its consumers transcends race, class, gender, and/or religion. This is possible

because the messages are embedded within various sociopolitical aspects of American society

which gives it a normative effect (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2010; Howard, 2014); the effects

manifest themselves through internalized superiority of whites, internalized horizontal

oppression of Black males by other oppressed social identity groups (Adams, Bell, & Griffin,

2010), and at times, self-fulfilling adaptations by Black males themselves as they perceive and

make sense of media portrayals of people who most phenotypically resemble them (Adams-Bass,

Stevenson, & Kotzin, 2014).

Adams-Bass et al. (2014) found that receiving more positive messages regarding racial

socialization better prepares Black students to identify positive and negative stereotypes as

consumers. However, they found that "Black males were less likely to identify negative media

stereotypes, but more likely to endorse the negative messages than females" (384). The reality

that some Black males have embraced, glorified, and attained high social status (Reigeluth &

Addis, 2015) due to intense socializing messages as well as the commodification of these

negative depictions makes it difficult to reverse society's general thoughts, feelings, and

expectations of about Black males and in turn their expectations of themselves. It requires a high

level of critical consciousness on the part of Black males to recognize, sort, and categorize media

messages and other socializing factors that greatly impact their identity development.

Howard (2014) suggests "Black male identity to a large extent stems from a distorted

notion of masculinity within the traditional context of many Black communities and has been

treated largely as one-dimensional and universal" (42). The notion of having to argue against the

generalizability of the Black male experience is, in and of itself, a concern. The Black male

experience is dynamic and encompasses a variety of lifestyles and identity-types. The narrowly

and rigidly defined concept of masculinity isolates and excludes many males who do not fit

society's notion of what it means to be "masculine" because they do not fit normative definitions

(Connell, 2005). This concept is exacerbated for Black males (Harper & Harris, 2010; Howard,

2014; Noguera, 2008). Black masculinity is often riddled by hypermasculine characterizations of

exceptionalism that are beyond the scope and reach of "regular" Black males (Douglas, 2016;

Harper & Harris, 2010; Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2008. This is troubling on many levels with

respect to both race and gender identity. First, the Black experience and membership in the Black

race are oftentimes oversimplified. Some researchers argue the problematic nature of seeing the

Black male experience as monolithic (Duncan, 2002; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harper & Nichols,

2008; Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2008). For example, Noguera (2008) describes the dichotomizing

nature of Black males within the media as extremely hypermasculine figures that defy law and

order, or on the flipside, extremely talented athletes who make up the upper echelon of those

who play the sport. The exceptional nature of the character exhibiting masculinity, whether he is

embraced as generally positive or loathed as exceedingly negative, becomes the litmus test or

measuring stick for Black masculinity. Harper and Harris (2010) suggested that "definitions of

masculinity contribute to the exclusion of Black males who do not fit the hyper-masculine

construct" (43). Similarly, Douglas (2016) asserted that Black males racial self-conception is

impaired due to a constant state of emotional taxing brought about by the way the western

world's measuring stick for what is considered Black masculinity.

Black Male Identity: Accounting for Intersectionality

Black male identity is complex. To understand it one must take into account both the

power of collective experience of Black male membership and the idiosyncratic nature of

identity development; societally imposed perceptions, stereotyping, psychology, socialization,

and personal beliefs and experience are all contributing factors in the identity development of

Black males. Kimberlee Crenshaw, a critical race theorist, introduced the concept of

intersectionality in 1989 (Howard, 2014). Intersectionality suggests people are members of

multiple social identity groups. Members of these identity groups can be subjugated in American

society (target groups), or can be the recipients of unearned privileges—agent groups (Adams,

Bell, & Griffin, 2010). When one takes into the account the intersection of these multiple

identities, it creates a nuanced and heightened social experience of privilege, social oppression,

or a combination of the two depending on social context and social identity highlighted (Adams,

Bell, & Griffin, 2010; Connell, 2005; Thomas & Stevenson, 2015).

Black men can experience both agency and oppression when viewing each social identity

separately. As a man, he has agency in America's patriarchal society. As a person of color, he is

a member of the target group. When you combine the fact that he is both Black and male in

America, however, the push and pull of agency and oppression becomes a conundrum. Because

of the social limitations that come along with being Black, his agency with respect to being male

is not experienced on the same level field as his white male counterpart (Howard, 2014). So then,

what is the experience of someone who is a member of both agent and oppressed identity

groups? Social context becomes highly important when attempting to answer this question. Being both Black and male in America does not lead to one general collective experience (Harper & Nichols, 2008). It is imperative to neither ignore nor negate the power and existence of unique differences and varied experiences among Black males insofar as the roles of class, religion, sexual orientation, etc. are concerned (Howard, 2014). As Connell posited, any theorization of masculinity must include a component of intersectionality in order to account for hegemonic definitions of masculinity, authorization (or the act of claiming authorship of gender hegemony from the privileged perspective), marginalized masculinities—as experienced through the lens of men from subordinated social identity groups including non-white, gay, non-Christian— and the subordination of men who are not cisgender.

Black males are placed in a perilous position as they attempt to formulate an authentic true self that is informed by, but not dictated or suffocated by societal expectations. During the process, they must navigate the racial and gender expectations imposed on them from mainstream society as well as intragroup expectations--from other Blacks and other males. Although America's myopic view of Black males could erroneously assert that there is one general Black male experience, doing so would be an ostensible show of ignorance of the multidimensional factors associated with individual Black male identity. The minimization and oversimplification of both racial and gendered experiences is one consequence of the misunderstanding of the overall Black male experience. America's conception of masculinity in general and Black masculinity in particular are social constructs worth deconstructing in an attempt to better understand the Black male experience in schools. This research sought to include the role of intersectionality in the identity development of Black males and its role in how they make meaning of their experiences in predominately white high schools.

Black Masculinity and School

The experience of being Black and male are almost inseparable identities when discussing school. The vast number of studies that reflect disparate academic experiences for Black males and the disproportionate disciplinary practices that leave Black males bearing a heavier burden, all reflect the interconnected experience of being both Black and male. Many of the outcomes experienced by Black males stem from stereotypical characterizations of Black men created within larger society.

The stereotypical identities of Black males outlined by Howard (2014) in an earlier section are perpetuated in American schools and manifest themselves in the academic and disciplinary outcomes referenced above. Black male students are seen as (1) "the physical brute and anti-intellectual" when being identified as more concerned with athletics than academics (Harper & Davis, 2012; Howard, 2014), and being identified as a high propensity for violence (Howard, 2014); (2) "the shiftless, lazy Black male" who refuses to work and remains oppositional to school success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Reynolds, 2010); (3) the hypersexual Black male, and (4) "the criminal-minded Black male" which results in the disproportionate number of behavior referrals (Lofton & Davis, 2015; Skiba, 2011); This highlights the power of institutions to create, shape, and regulate social identities (Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2001; Warren, 2015).

Ferguson (2001) makes a fundamental observation regarding Black male students and their "status" as high achievers (schoolboys) or what she calls "trouble makers." She stated:

I gradually realized that to see Schoolboys and Troublemakers as fundamentally different was to make a grave mistake. As African American males, Schoolboys were always on

the brink of being redefined into troublemaker category by the school. The pressures and

dilemmas this group faced around race and gender identities from adults and peers were

always palpable forces working against their maintaining a commitment to the school

project. (10)

The status of being both Black and male in school poses the ever present potential for status

change from positive/productive student, to one of potentially at-risk and problematic to the

school.

This phenomenon is a double sided coin. The first and most prominent side concerns the

process of naming, defining, and the categorizations of Black males which are imposed on them

by others and reinforced within larger society. The general perceptions people have of Black

males play an integral role in how they are categorized and subsequently treated. Howard (2014)

explained that "African American males are generally viewed as possessing characteristics

incongruent with academic success (e.g. laziness), valuing athletics over academic

accomplishments, and having a propensity toward aggression and violence" (p. 167). Whether

conscious or subconscious, many educators also hold "unsubstantiated, unquestioned, and

inaccurate thoughts about Black male students" (Milner, 2007). This form of perceptual

predetermination (Muhammad, 2009) requires Black males to battle against the preconceived

ideas of school systems and people within them. They battle against the assumption that they

lack interest in academics and they must manage the pejorative stereotypical characterizations

that are limiting to their self-concept at best and psychologically harmful at worst.

The second side of the coin is also connected to larger society's perceptions of Black males

but takes into account Black males' adoption or rejection of these characterizations (Adams-

Bass et al, 2014). Black males vacillate between what it means to be a "schoolboy" or a "trouble

maker" as they mediate racial/gender risk such as the perceptual predeterminations described above and the external social pressures associated with those risks. Each male's actions are dependent on the context under which others perceive him and how he perceives himself, the reinforced ideas of what it means to be a Black male, and his level of strength and self-awareness to personally define himself.

Black males and schools: How to intervene. Researchers assert that there must be a paradigmatic shift away from the notion that there is a general Black male experience. Moving toward an understanding that masculinities are multidimensional, and the added social identity of race makes it even more varied and nuanced (Connell, 2005; Harper & Harris, 2010; Howard, 2014) is a positive step toward making progress in this area. This is especially true when accounting for formative years of development for Black males and how that relates to the "Black male crisis" (Noguera, 2008). The term *crisis* is used broadly in reference to an obvious wedge in how traditional forms of schooling are experienced by Black males as compared to other racial groups. The acknowledgement of the crisis is reactionary as it uses data to identify Black males as a general group with little attention given to the individual accounts and stories of the young Black males that make up that group. Black males, have unique experiences that must be addressed. Howard (20140, states, "Researchers and practitioners will not be able to effectively address the educational and social issues affecting Black males if they are all seen as the same" (p. 29).

Howard (2014) acknowledged that efforts have been made to perform research and develop interventions to address Black male underperformance in school. However, these efforts have had limited success because "the approaches taken historically have fallen short in incorporating, addressing, and examining the full scope, complexity and diversity of Black male identity" (40).

Educators' understanding and consciousness of how schools contribute to the perpetuation of

Black male underachievement deserves much attention. For example in Ferguson's 2001 book,

Bad Boys, she discusses her observations in Rosa Parks Elementary school. She observed

students deemed extremely at-risk by school officials. Ferguson noted, "No one at the school

seemed surprised that all the students deemed at-risk of failing academically, of being future

school dropouts, were mostly Black and male" (4). This inattention to glaring realities that have

extensive implications for the well-being and life outcomes of a marginalized group of students

is not only disheartening it borders on professional neglect. My hope was that through the stories

of high achieving Black males and my focus on the multivariate role of identity to their

schooling experiences this research would highlight concepts that impact Black male

achievement that are oftentimes ignored or suppressed in other studies on the same topic.

There is no shortage of literature that paints the picture of America's struggle of seeing

Black males as problematic (DuBois, 1903; Ferguson, 2001; Howard, 2015; Noguera, 2008;

Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016). Beyond seeing Black males as a problem, however,

attention must also be given to why they are seen as problematic. Teachers, similar to any human

beings, unconsciously make generalizations of others based on cultural differences (Thomas &

Stevenson, 2009). Understanding that boys are more often theorized in research as disciplinary

concerns in the classroom rather than astute academicians, and because scholastic success is seen

as even more atypical for Black male students (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009), Black males' high

academic prowess are noteworthy by these standards. Breaking barriers that cross gender and

racial stereotypes places high-achieving Black males in a unique position to explain how they

defy typical notions of academic success. Also, using a critical perspective to show how imposed

conceptualizations of Black male identity have been developed, and thus, how society has been

transfixed on their existence as potential problems allows educators to work backwards from the point of the "problem" to see the impetus that led to that thinking.

Using the experiences of high-achieving Black males is one step toward expanding educators' views of the Black males in a general sense, but utilizing their voices to further understand their varying individual experiences makes further progress in this arena (Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016). This is only one example of how America's educators can learn from hearing the experiences of high achieving Black males. More broadly, this research deconstructed how individual Black males make sense of their social and academic experiences in predominately white schools while accounting for their ideas of identity development and authentic identity expression. The next section will give a more in-depth overview of the experiences of Black males in school.

Section 2: Race and the Education of Black Students: A General Perspective

> *"We must not reduce the problems of race to face and skin; we must also see them in structure and system" (Dyson, 2009, p. 186).*

Race is an important contributing factor to the overall experiences of Black Americans, therefore, it is necessary to understand its contribution to Black students' educational experiences. DeCuir-Gunby, Cooper, and Martin (2011) defined racial identity as "the diverse attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to which an individual comprehends as well as engages in the unique heritage associated with African American cultural practices" (p. 115). The messages students receive, comprehend, and internalize about race become a part of their identity. Other key researchers touched on race using a concept called racial self-concept (Carter, 2008; Noguera, 2008) and "regard" (Carter, 2008; Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen, 2008). Racial self-concept is how an individual views him or herself and their membership in their race. There are

two components to the concept of racial regard— private regard and public regard (Scottham et al., 2008). Private regard denotes how an individual views or perceives his or her own race. Public regard is a person's belief about how his or her race is viewed by others. With this understanding, one must consider how identity influences students' perceptions of schooling and how the factor of race plays a role in the way they make meaning of their experiences. The following sections will present literature that discuss racial identity and the schooling experiences of Black students, more specifically Black males.

In his research on the implications for Black males in American schools, Noguera (2008) describes that there is oftentimes a converse relationship when considering Black male identity and academic achievement. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggested that the abundance of low achievement among Black students was directly correlated to the development of an oppositional identity. They assert that Black students saw school as a method for White society to force "involuntary minorities" to assimilate to White culture. Therefore, they posit that many Blacks saw achievement as "acting White." Noguera (2008) discussed this idea and partially agreed with Fordham and Ogbu's cultural ecological theory. However, he stated that the ostracism that some Blacks feel from same race peers because of achievement is not always the case. Therefore, he added to Fordham and Ogbu's research in two ways: In addition to Fordam and Ogbu's "acting White" philosophy, he suggests that Black students also:

1. Learn to succeed in both words; learning to be both smart and "street."

2. Actively and deliberately seek to redefine their racial identities by showing that it is possible to do well in school and be proud of who you are (Noguera, 2008).

These three ways of intersecting identity and achievement are potential experiences that can likely occur during Black students' racial identity development. This illustrates the identity-achievement paradox as it relates to racial and academic self-concept.

Using Noguera's (2008) concept as a foundation for organizing this section of the review of literature, it is shown that many researchers drew similar conclusions in their studies of Black students. I will further highlight this research in the subsections titled "*Creating an oppositional identity, Succeeding in both worlds*, and *Redefinition of racial identity*.

Creating an oppositional identity. Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) study serves as a precursor to Noguera's (2008) insomuch as oppositional identities are the focal point. The overarching idea of each work explains that the creation of an oppositional identity manifests itself in two different ways among Black males during the schooling process. One is an intentional separation from cultural practices that are typically associated with Black culture by replacing them with what Fordham and Ogbu call "acting White." The second way manifests itself through the adoption of self-defeating behaviors that inhibit possibilities for academic success. The subsections below, *separation from cultural practices* and *self-defeating behaviors*, provide further explanation of Black males' creation of oppositional identities as described by the researchers listed above.

Separation from cultural practices. Noguera (2008) explains that the first manifestation of oppositional identity development results in the intentional separation from cultural practices typically associated with Black culture. This suggests a level of consciousness or awareness of the stratification of race in America. Engaging in the process of rejecting Black culture because it can be seen as potentially deleterious to the social or academic mobility of Black students is an implicit realization of the cultural capital that "Whiteness" holds in America and a subtle admission that this ideology also permeates American school systems.

Carter-Andrews (2009) explained that the "the mainstream script on schooling in the United States often suggests that the cultural traits and behaviors necessary for academic success and success more broadly are White, middle-class behaviors" (p. 297). Because academic success has been racialized and compared to the values and actions of White culture, and non-achievement associated with Black students, it is not implausible that Black males would consider taking on White cultural values and reject or suppress their own cultural heritage to hopefully attain academic success. Doing so, would not be a positive step in one's process of developing a self-assured racial identity. However, it would be validated by Hardiman and Jackson's (1997) Social Identity Development Model as a stage in racial identity development. The idea of Black students creating oppositional identities sheds light onto the importance of self-concept. In these cases, when an individual's internal thoughts about membership in their own race (private regard) and their feelings or perceptions about public regard (how they perceive others feel about their race) collide, the result is the creation of an oppositional identity that is brought to fruition through these students' internal self-doubt, self-denial, and self-suppression for the sake of "survival"— in whatever form that may take.

Self-defeating behaviors. The second display of oppositional identity development, self-defeating behaviors that inhibit academic success, can be described as an extrinsic representation of the internal turmoil that Black students feel when juxtaposing race and academic success. The key phrase that Noguera (2008) uses in his explanation of this manifestation is "self-defeating." I would argue that this analysis takes on a "blame the victim" explanation. It would seem to be a common understanding among researchers that when one feels powerless or that their efforts are fruitless, their behaviors reflect that belief. The inner turmoil, whether conscious or unconscious, may manifest itself in behaviors that are not conducive to academic success. However, instead of

these actions being described as self-defeating they would be better defined as harmful, yet logical

academic behaviors resulting from feelings of powerlessness and lack of cultural validation. Some

researchers would argue that these behaviors are a way Black males cope with racial stress (Harrell,

2000; Stevenson, 2014) or stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and maintain a sense of

power in a seemingly powerless circumstance. Subsequently, a students' show of resistance to

academics as a means to gain power and control oftentimes results in a perpetuated cycle of

academic failure. However, there is not always a direct correlation between a student's racial self-

concept and their academic success. Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2011) address the idea

of academic dis-identification. They found that there was not a strong correlation between self-

concept and grade point average for Black males in their study of 96 Black students in a public

school district in the southwest region of the United States. In this particular case, many of the

students were confident in themselves as individuals, but did not see high academic achievement

as a contributing factor to their strong beliefs about themselves. They were highly confident, yet

academically unsuccessful.

Feelings of self-efficacy and having positive personal and academic self-conceptions are

integral to the success of Black male students (Scottham et al., 2008). Schools play an important

role in this process. According to Noguera (2008), "In many schools, there may not be many

explicit messages about race, but students receive implicit messages about race all the time that

informs what they think it means to be a member of a particular racial group" (p. 13). As such,

it is imperative that educators raise their levels of social consciousness when serving Black male

students. Noguera (2008) suggested,

> In too many cases, educators do not question the assumptions they hold, and as a
>
> result, those who are charged with teaching, advising, and mentoring Black males too

often inadvertently adopt attitudes that are unsupportive and even hostile toward the

boys they serve. (xxi)

Succeeding in both worlds. Being both "street" and "smart," as termed Noguera (2008), is

another example of the identity achievement paradox that some Black males may experience

during their schooling process. Creating and engaging in this social and academic duality is akin

to the idea of social "code-switching." An individual will learn to adjust his behavior and

vernacular depending on the situation, context, and audience in order to navigate socially

dichotomous worlds. In McGee's (2013) study of 11 high-achieving Black males in four

Midwestern charter schools, she found that participants used protective factors to resist falling into

a cycle of non-achievement that is commonly described in literature regarding Black males'

experiences in school. Cross and Strauss (1998) also discussed protective forces that Black males

employ when they experience racial risk or discomfort. They called the process "stigma

management."

McGee (2013) explained that, "Most of the students in [the] study more often than not

found themselves navigating risk with multiple forms of protection, and their responses

depended, in part, on how each [participant] viewed himself, both individually and collectively"

(459). Private regard (how one views his membership in a racial group) was also accompanied

by participants' feelings of public regard (how one thinks other people feel about his racial

group). Therefore, the protective factors employed were also connected to students' experience

with identity. The participants' perception of the impact of stereotypes on their school

experience led to intentional social interactions while in school. For example, the young men

used what McGee (2013) called "academic survival techniques" to avoid being categorized as

stereotypical Black males (p. 460). Similarly, Noguera (2008) gave a testimonial about his own

experiences as a Black teen in high school. He described a personal duality he developed in

school to which he likened to a "split personality." He "behaved one way in class and another

way with friends, and yet another way at home" (5). This ability to navigate between myriad

personalities to take on a chameleon effect proved to be a method of survival for Noguera in

early stages of his racial identity development.

As previously mentioned, McGee (2013) explains that high-achieving Black males have both

academic and social survival strategies. Participants in her study expressed a disdain for how

minorities are treated negatively in schools and greater society simply because of their race.

However, they also acknowledge that people have internalized stereotypes of Black males

resulting in the need for them to navigate two worlds. They are 3.0 high-achievers at school, but

on the walk home, where "being tough" helps with survival, they take on a persona that is

protective of their social well-being. One student described the difficulty of this balancing act in

school because the physical and social dangers of these two world overlap at times. There is a

façade that is important to his social life, but having teachers and academically successful peers

see him as set apart or an exception to stereotypes is also important to him in his academic

success.

Redefinition of racial identity. Finally, the third identity representation described by

Noguera, redefinition of racial identity, suggests that some Black males actively and deliberately

seek to redefine their racial identities by showing that it is possible to do well in school and be

proud of who you are. This concept is echoed by Howard (2014). He asserted that Black

students *feel* [emphasis added] the racism and stereotypes imposed in them schools and respond

by employing characteristics they feel are necessary to take on in order to be high academic

achievers. He proposed that these characteristics do not have to be to the detriment of their

strong cultural identity, and therefore they are "not so much understood as a burden of acting

White in regards to school…but rather as a burden of somehow molding oneself into the [White]

hegemonic images of success (p. 22).

These students have a positive racial self-concept, high private regard, and are unmoved by

public regard because they embrace their racial identity and remain academically successful

despite outsiders' views.

Although the popular narrative regarding the education of Black males often reports negative

experiences, many researchers have sought to examine the counter examples of academic failure

among Black males to uncover information about the experiences of high-achieving Black males

(Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016). The following section will highlight research on the

experiences of high-achieving Black students and will seek to 1) expose what those experiences

were, and 2) determine what contributed to those experiences.

Section 3: High-achieving Black Males: The Counter Narrative

The dominant narrative in research on Black males in schools is one of disproportionate

underachievement and disparate social experiences. According to Noguera (2008), the

normalization of failure on the part of Black males is pervasive in public schools. This

normalization of failure, however, does not represent the experience for Black males as a

collective whole. Conversely, there is a core group of high-achieving Black male students

nationwide whose stories serve as a counter-narrative to underachievement (Warren, Douglas, &

Howard, 2016).

Strategies and Characteristics of HABMs

Although the research on high-achieving Black males (HABMs) is scant, researchers have

studied the topic in many different contexts because the experience of Black Americans is not

monolithic. There have been studies of HABMs at the high school level in private/independent

schools (Decuir-Gunby, Martin, & Cooper, 2012); in urban charter schools (McGee, 2013);

predominately White public high schools (Carter, 2007; Carter-Andrews, 2009); urban districts

(Carter-Andrews, 2009; Williams & Portman, 2014); and racially diverse settings (Marsh,

Chaney, & Jones, 2012). Studies have also been completed at the collegiate level in

predominately White institutions (Brooks, 2012) and public urban universities (Harper, 2005;

Wiggan, 2008). The contextual nuances that impact the experiences of high-achieving Black

males in each of these arenas are of high importance. However, there were two themes that

emerged from the literature regarding the process of how high-achieving Black males navigate

their experiences in high school regardless of the setting:

1. The process of racializing and de-racializing achievement and

2. The establishment of identity-affirming counterspaces

Furthermore, there were also two common characteristics among high-achieving Black students

throughout the literature that were described as contributing to their academic achievement:

1. They had strong networks of support and

2.   They showed high measures of educational resilience.

Racializing and de-racializing achievement among high-achieving Black males. The

concept of racializing and de-racializing achievement (Carter-Andrews, 2009) was present in

much of the literature on high-achieving Black males. HABMs who explored their educational

experience in ways that both racialized and de-racialized achievement generally displayed

stringer positive racial and academic self-concepts (Carter-Andrews, 2009; Gayles, 2005).

Carter-Andrews explained that participants in her 2009 study defined themselves as successful

and their "perceptions [of achievement] were race neutral while the task of attaining success was

race-loaded" (301). Although the participants described achievement as race-less because "anybody who works hard can be successful," they also discussed achievement in a way that was race-loaded. For example, participants described the burden of working harder to prove to others that they were smart and having to serve as a representative for the entire race in their advance level courses.

Similarly, Gayles' (2005) study introduced a concept called "academic distancing" which served as an example of de-racializing achievement. The study highlighted three high-achieving Black males in their respective schools. They valued their high achievement, but said their grades in isolation were unimportant and were therefore not a large part of their identities. They saw achievement as utilitarian in nature, because although good grades were not important to them and their self-concept, they understood that being a high-achiever would provide a better future for them. These young men took the focus off of good grades as a racial concept and placed more focus on their utility for upward social and economic mobility in the future.

The notion of academic success being both race neutral and race loaded is an example of the HABMs desire to reconcile the internal battle that academic success can be achieved by all, but the microagressions that accompany being academically successful as a Black male have social impact. They force one to see that although he potential for one to achieve is race-less, the contextual reactions of others regarding the success of Black males make it racialized. High-achieving Black males exhibit an understanding that academic achievement can be race neutral, but research suggests that they also have an understanding that race plays a role in their process of achievement.

Until academic success among Black males is no longer seen as atypical, the process of continually racializing and de-racializing achievement will be necessary. I will go further and

assert that it is also necessary to specifically arrange the order of this process. Fist, Black males have to de-racialize achievement because of the salient message of underachievement that is delivered regarding Blacks in our society. Next, they must racialize achievement to understand that their accomplishments stand in stark contrast to what society believes is the norm for them simply because they are Black. This is not only important for academic identity, but also for their racial identity. In the process of re-racializing achievement, one could wonder what happens to identity and achievement concept. Carter (2008) explained that "Black students' awareness of racism as a potential limitation to their school and life success is critical to [them] developing a positive racial identity" (p. 13).

Social involvement/identity-affirming counterspaces. Beverly Daniel Tatum's 1997 book, *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, addresses the role that collective experience plays in the social exchanges of students in schools. The concept of identity-affirming counterspaces is salient in the research on high-achieving Black students. Carter (2007) contends that "counterspaces represent institutionalized mechanisms that serve as protective forces for students and allow them to maintain strong racial sense of self, while maintaining school success in a racially hostile environment" (p. 546). Studies about high-achieving Black students in high schools across the nation varied in demographic make-up and format (public, private, charter) acknowledged that the utilization of counterspaces was key to their high school experiences.

Counterspaces serve as both formal and informal supports. Marsh, Chaney, and Jones (2012) discussed clubs and organizations that affirmed student's racial and ethnic identity at a diverse honors high school. Interestingly, Marsh and colleagues found that in the racially diverse school where the study was conducted, Black students were involved in clubs that were not

specifically targeted for Black students. However, Black students frequented certain club

meetings and they become "de facto" clubs/activities comprised of only Black students. The

authors noted that Black students stayed clear of organizations that were for other racial

minorities and for Whites. This stood in stark contrast to Noguera's (2008) suggestion to

educators to encourage Black students to explore involvement in organizations in which Black

students did not typically participate. He argued that the experiences would give Black students a

more authentic understanding of their identity as Black students. Although Marsh and

colleagues (2012) did not suggest that Black students stay away from clubs and organizations

that are not targeted specifically for them, the process of finding identity affirming counterspaces

did not include people outside of the race. Noguera's argument, however, is grounded in the idea

that race in is integral to identity development, but it is only one of the many parts that make up

the entire identity of a person. Therefore, I would assert that based on Noguera's

recommendation, finding an identity affirming counterspace for a Black student may be just as

socially motivated as it is racially motivated.

Collegiate studies on HABMs also found that social involvement and identity affirming

counterspaces was a valuable contributor to the positive experiences of high-achieving Black

students at the collegiate level (Brooks, 2012; Harper, 2005; Wiggan, 2008). Wiggan (2008)

asked high-achieving Black collegians to retrospectively explain their success in suburban high

schools. They explained that their connection to caring adults, involvement in extracurricular

activities, and their ability to tap into identity affirming counterspaces played important roles in

their success. Furthermore, Brooks (2012) and Harper (2005) found that Black collegians who

were highly involved in identity affirming organizations were also leaders on their campuses.

Harper explained that "high-achievers chose to seek leadership positions that would allow them

to address the issues that plagued African Americans and other racial or ethnic minority

students" (p. 12).

The importance of counterspaces outside the school setting rather than within schools is

also discussed in the literature (Cross & Strauss, 1998; Douglas, 2016; Douglas & Peck, 2013).

Institutions such as churches and barbershops provide a formal/informal education that is non-

curricular in nature. Accounting for the important role of racial identity development, young

men of color learn to navigate America's social and political terrain as expressed through the

experiences of individuals with similar backgrounds. Douglas and Peck suggest, however, that

although the lessons are learned in the community-based counterspaces, all the lessons may not

necessarily be positive. However, external counterspaces represent only one area of

consideration when discussing the role of social spaces in racial identity affirmation for Black

students.

> Addressing one organization or entity will not allow us to address the needs of every
>
> student. Just like we must individualize instruction, an understanding of individual needs
>
> must undergird our approach to evaluating how spaces can be effectively utilized to
>
> buttress schoolhouse and other mainstream institutional approaches to education.
>
> (Douglas & Peck, 2013, p. 85)

Nonacademic counterspaces should be viewed as a viable source for informing, impacting,

buffering, and at times counteracting the social and academic experiences of Black students in

school.

Having formal and informal networks with same race peers or using community

institutions as cultural safe havens serve as a "buffer" to racism and promotes positive racial

identity development (Carter, 2007; Cross & Strauss, 1998; Douglas, 2016; Douglas & Peck,

2013). The use of the term counterspace is in concert with Clark, Swim and Cross's (1996)

concept of buffering (as described by Cross & Strauss, 1998). Cross and Straus (1998) explain

that the buffering function of Black identity helps to reduce the impact of racism. This idea was

echoed by Chatman, Eccles, & Malanchuk, (2005) who assert that "buffering protects the self-

concept from the negative effects of stigmatizations" (p. 126). Because of the pervasiveness of

racism in American society, it breeds a social experience for African Americans to see many

situations as race loaded or what Cross and Strauss (1998) call stigma tainted. Counterspaces can

serve as social locales that help Black students become more adept at navigating a racially unjust

society while also having the ability to discern unnecessary racial undertones in an otherwise

race neutral situation. Buffering is the neutralizing agent between racial hypersensitivity and

racial naiveté in a racist society. It suggests one has the ability to understand that every situation

has the potential to be racist or have aspects of racism embedded within it without it being fully

and holistically racist. Furthermore, if utilized in its fullest potential as a buffering agent, the

counterspace provides the individual with the tools necessary to respond to racially stigmatizing

situations in a way that addresses social injustice while also honoring a positive racial self-

concept and taking advantage of opportunities which that very situation may present for personal

progress or racial group progress.

Network of support. A strong network of support was a common characteristic among

high-achieving Black males as found through the review of literature. Although, the support

systems differed slightly from study to study, the ultimate message is that having strong supports

is an important factor in the success of high-achieving Black males. The literature highlighted

support in the form of families, peers, schools, and the community. The idea of support is

another of Clark, Swim, and Cross's (1996) functions of identity development, which they call

"bonding." Bonding with peers of the same race, family with shared racial experiences is

integral to stigma management for Black people in general and Black students specifically. Cross

and Strauss (1998) assert, at the core of Black identity is one's attachment and bonding to Black

people, Black culture, and the historical and contemporary Black experience" (p. 271).

Family support was found in two forms: having parents/family with high academic

expectations (Archer-Banks & Horenstein, 2012; Brooks, 2012; Carter-Andrews, 2009; Douglas,

2016; Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016) and having race conscious parents (Marsh, Chaney, &

Jones, 2012; Slaughter & Defoe, 2013). The important role of supportive peer groups (Carter,

2007) served as healthy identity affirming, positive influences on high-achieving Black males'

academic experiences. Additionally, beyond family and peers, it was found that Black males

discussed the need to find support within the school system from teachers who utilize culturally

relevant practices in their instruction (Wiggan, 2008).

One research article took a retrospective approach to ask Black male graduates what

could make the difference in the academic success of Black males in high school, more

specifically those who live in urban areas. They explained the highly effective intersection of the

supports previously mentioned: home, school, and community support (Williams & Portman,

2014). Williams and Portman exclaimed that there should be "shared responsibility" for the

educational outcomes of Black males, particularly those who are from urban areas. Although

one of the themes they identified was personal responsibility," meaning that the learner must first

and foremost be an agent in their own success, they also addressed that it takes a network of

supports to strengthen the experiences of Black males. More specifically they explained this

support comes from parents and the community. Furthermore, they specifically discussed the

important role of school counselors (and in essence other school officials) to connect students

with resources, instill within them a sense of efficacy, and provide the structures (policies,

practices programs) that promote success. Other researchers echo Williams and Portman's

thoughts as they suggested that the synergistic relationship of family, schools, and the

community (including churches, businesses, corporations, local government) have a large

responsibility in creating positive achiever and racial identities in Black males (Douglas & Peck,

2013; Milner, 2015; Noguera, 2008).

 Resilience. Williams and Portman 2014, adopted Wang and Gordon's (1994) definition

of educational resilience for their study. They refer to resilience as "the ability of

children/adolescents to succeed in school despite exposure to personal and environmental

adversities" (p. 14). Using a critical race lens while researching the topic of high-achieving

males' experiences, the assumption is that racism is a pervasive and endemic experience in

American society. The thoughts and feelings that come along with racism would be an adverse

experiences for Black students, therefore, it is integral to study how students respond to these

experiences.

 Many scholars have written about educational resilience as a characteristic of high-

achieving Black students. "Most researchers seem to examine two concepts as intrinsically

present in the understanding of resilience; risk factors and protective factors" (Williams &

Portman, 2014, p. 15). Although resilience was a motif within the literature across various

school settings, the way resilience manifested itself among students in the research studies

mentioned varied based on context.   For example, in urban settings, authors focused on the

inequitable environmental factors (risk factors) that students needed to overcome and the

characteristics they must employ (protective factors), in order to attain academic success

(Gayles, 2005; McGee, 2013; Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Slaughter, 2014; Williams & Portman,

2014). In settings that were more racially diverse, the students' resilience came in the form of succeeding despite institutionalized or personally adopted views of educators—whether conscious or unconscious—(Duncan, 2002), or other racially uncomfortable contexts (Brooks, 2012; Carter, 2008). Finally, there were also studies that looked at resilience in the form of persevering through academic difficulty in order to succeed in rigorous coursework (Marsh, Chaney & Jones, 2012). Black students' ability to excel despite social or academic challenges has proven to be an integral characteristic among high-achieving Black males.

Summary

Research has shown that the education of Black males is oftentimes marred with discussions of failure and negativity. Race has been said to play a significant role in this narrative. However, underachievement is not the sole experience of Black males. High-achieving Black males exist in many schooling contexts-urban, suburban, public, private, and charter schools.

Viewing the idea of Black males' academic achievement through the lens of critical race theory in education, the ever present concept of race will continue to play some role— whether minor or significant, positive or negative, celebratory or hindering— because racism is a permanent and pervasive part of American society. What's more, the experience of being Black in America brings along with it a sociological process of developing and independently defining what it means to be a member of the Black race. Using an understanding of what social identity development models explain about racial identity development as well as giving high consideration to the ideas of racial self-concept and racial regard, one can explore how high achieving Black males view the role of race as they make meaning of their social and academic experiences in school.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Data reveal that the disparate experience of Black males in America's public schools is a major national concern. This study sought to shed light on this problem of practice within America's public schools. Although the data from previous studies have been overwhelmingly negative in a general sense, there are cases of Black male student success that counter the data (Carter, 2008; Whiting, 2009). I believe however, that although there are counter stories, the influence of race still greatly affects Black students' experiences in schools. Therefore, this study analyzed high achieving Black males in predominately White high school to understand how they make meaning of their social and academic experiences. Furthermore, I highlighted the concept of identity development to understand how their perceptions and definitions of authenticity affect or is affected by their attendance in PWHSs.

This section will outline the research design and methodology utilized for this study. First, I will reiterate the purpose of the study—including the questions that drove the research. Second, I will provide details regarding the research design by explaining my decision to utilize qualitative research methods, more specifically a case study approach, and critical perspective as a research paradigm to frame my study. Third, I will provide background knowledge on the research participants and how they were selected in a section titled *participants and sampling procedures*. The *data collection* section will explain the various types of data that will be collected, as well as the ethical considerations of data collection. The *data analysis* section details how I analyzed the data. Following the data analysis, I will reveal to the reader how I influenced the study as a researcher and how I accounted for my personal bias. Additionally, I will outline the methods I employed to ensure that the research process and findings are valid,

reliable, and trustworthy. This will be accomplished across two sections—*role of the researcher* and *trustworthiness*. Finally, I will discuss the limitations and my assumptions with respect to the research topic.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to use the experiences of high-achieving Black male students to understand how their conception of identity and the development of an authentic self-influenced their perception of their social and academic experiences in predominately White high schools in the suburban school district in the Midwest. By highlighting the experiences of eleven high-achieving Black males, the study served as a counternarrative to the numerous studies of Black male underachievement and highlighted characteristics associated with high achieving Black males. The research did not make exact scientific correlations between socialization, racial identity, and school experience, however. Ultimately, the purpose of the research was first and foremost provide Black male students with a platform to speak about their own experiences in school and society. With respect to impacting the field of education, the goal of the research was to make educators aware of Black males' perceptions of their school experiences as told through their voices, and to aid in raising educators' awareness of potential approaches that can help schools to better serve Black male students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the case study.

1. How do high-achieving Black males make meaning of their social and academic experiences in predominately White high schools?

2. How do high-achieving Black males define their authentic self, and in what

way(s), if any, does their attendance in PWHS specifically contribute to the

development of their authentic self?

Research Design

I used a qualitative case study approach for this research study. Hatch (2002) described

qualitative research as an attempt to "understand the world from the perspective of people living

in it. Furthermore, a case study, as defined by Creswell (2009), is "a strategy of inquiry in which

the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals"

(13). Merriam (1988) echoes the value of utilizing qualitative research methods in the field of

education as she suggested that "the qualitative case study is a particularly suitable methodology

for dealing with critical problems of practice and extending the knowledge base of various

aspects of education" (p. xiii). Therefore, a qualitative case study provided an effective skeleton

for the study's research design.

Research Paradigm: Critical Perspective

Hatch (2002) advised that when an individual considers performing a qualitative study,

the decision should come from answers to questions about the researcher's views of the world.

My overall beliefs about knowledge and the world closely align with the critical paradigm

(Hatch, 2002). Therefore, the theoretical perspective I utilized to orient my work was *critical*

theory (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) describes critical theory perspectives as being

"concerned with empowering human beings to transcend constraints placed on them by race,

class, and gender (p. 63). The case study of eleven Black males in predominately white schools

necessitated a critical approach because the goal was about empowerment of the participants.

Tenets of critical race theory in education (CRT in education) education (Kholi, 2008; Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995) provided the lens for data collection and interpretation, implications for

the field of education, and recommendations.

Education studies often draw from various disciplines including sociology, psychology,

and history (Merriam, 1988).   The interdisciplinary nature of the case study approach when

conducted in the field of education is well-aligned with CRT in education (Kholi, 2008; Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995), because the theory's foundational tenets were developed considering

components from various fields of study. The alignment of qualitative case study assumptions

and the tenets of CRT were beneficial in framing and designing a cohesive study.

Research Context and Sampling Procedures

Midwest Public Schools (MPS), the institution where I conducted my research, (MPS) is

a large, predominately White, suburban public school district in the Midwest that serves

approximately 19,000 K-12 students. MPS is located in a small city with a population of

approximately 130,000 people. Although the school district is considered suburban, it also has

characteristics of rural and urban districts respectively. The city's landlocked location is

surrounded by small farming communities but is centrally located between and influenced in part

by two large urban metropolitan cities. In addition to serving as home to MPS, the city also

houses a large state college and a host of private and public post-secondary institutions.

Although there is a large percentage of residents who have advance degrees living in the city, the

county in which MPS is located is noted as being in the bottom 25 counties in the nation for

potential for upward mobility. Said differently, the likelihood that individuals move up in

economic status is unlikely.

Research participants were identified for the study using four criteria. Each participant

was 1) a high school student in Midwest Public Schools; 2) self-identified as a Black male in the

district directory; and 3) had a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0

scale. This purposive sample (Merriam, 1988) included eleven Black male students (freshman-

senior) from two of the district's three comprehensive high schools, "DuBois College

Preparatory Academy" and "Alain Locke High School."   The participants were between the

ages of 15 and 18 years old at the beginning of the study.

       Gaining the voluntary participation of the eleven voluntary participants was a three step

process. I received permission from MPS to get directory data that included the race, school

classification, parent contact information, and email addresses of students who identified as

Black males. They also provided access to the cumulative grade point averages for the Black

males in the district. Upon review of the data, it was found that a 3.0 cumulative grade point

average was above average for all students (total school population) across the three schools.

Therefore, I chose Black males who had cumulative grade point averages of at a least 3.0 at the

start of the study. This GPA was the lowest GPA to meet the high achieving requirement for the

study. There were 34 Black males in grades 10-12 across the three comprehensive high schools

who had the cumulative grade point average required to participate in the study.

       Once I received the contact information for the guardians for the 34 potential participants

I emailed an informed consent letter to their guardians and ask for them to contact me if they

were interested. Of the 34 potential participants 14 guardians responded—five from "Alain

Locke High School," eight from "DuBois College Preparatory Academy," and one from "Garvey

School of Excellence." After receiving permission from guardians, I spoke with each of the 14

potential participants so they could sign a letter of informed consent. Two of the potential eight

candidates from Dubois and the only responding candidate from Garvey chose not to take part in

the research study leaving eleven total participants from two of the three high schools. All

students who had reached adult age signed their own letters of informed consent (Creswell,

2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

Data Collection

The purpose of the following section is two-fold. First, I will discuss the data collection

procedure I utilized during this study— individual interviews. Then, I will briefly discuss ethical

considerations for the data collection process including the protection of research participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected between January and May 2016 via individual interviews conducted

with each participant (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1988). Each interview was

digitally recorded.   I conducted face-too-face, one-on-one interviews that lasted 30-90 minutes.

The interview questions were developed with the critical perspective in mind and the with the

goal of centralizing the voices of the participants as a main focus The interview protocol was

semi-structured with a mixture of open ended and direct questioning to ensure consistency in the

general questions asked while remaining open ended as to not stifle participant responses.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed me to further probe participants when

necessary. Because the study focused on aspects of identity, I analyzed the Multidimensional

Inventory of Black Identity- Teen (Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen, 2008) to aid in developing

questions surrounding racial salience and regard, and the Comprehensive Race Socialization

Inventory (Lesane-Brown, Brown, Caldwell, & Sellers (2005) to frame questions that would

yield responses regarding racial socialization.

The interview questions revealed participants' individual perceptions and provided an

opportunity for follow-up or clarifying questions when needed. By gaining the perspective of

HABMs through one-on-one interviews, the participants selected provided a counternarrative to

the overarching problem of disparate academic outcomes of Black males. My hope was that the study would yield findings that can transform the way schools view the role of racial identity as an influencer of school experiences and provide insight into pedagogical practices that promote positive identity development and positive school experiences for Black male students.

Human subjects protections. There is vast potential for risk during the data collection phase (Creswell, 2009). To ensure participants' protection, the University of Missouri's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed my research plans. I abided by the ethical principles and responsibilities outlined in the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979) to outline potential risks and benefits, and to minimize or eliminate the potential for harm in any form.

Research participants were students in a public school district and were discussing their experiences in their respective schools as they relate to identity development, identity expression, and personal perception. This topic had the potential for various social, emotional and psychological considerations. Although I cannot with 100% surety confirm that participants were not negatively impacted by the study I anticipated the following as potential concerns.

1. Participants could have been concerned about how the study may influence their relationships with other peers as well as with teachers. Social pressures placed on students to "fit in," may have provide negative, unwanted attention from the participants' peers.

2. The results and specific data collected from individual interviews could have adversely affected participants' relationships with teachers, parents, and school officials if not fully protected.

3. Questions about their personal socialization and questions that ask them to share their ideas about racial identity could have led them to personal discovery in areas of their lives they had yet to explore.

4. Information participants provide could have revealed concerns regarding their home lives.

   a. Depending on the extent of the concern, information gathered could have presented a conflict of interest for me as a researcher because as a professional, I am a mandated reporter.

To account for this risk, I included the above potential risk factors in the informed consent. Furthermore, I restated them before the interviews began and reiterated the voluntary nature of the research process to the participants. The research problem proposes that there are general concerns with the experiences of Black students in school. I had to ensure that as a researcher, I did not do anything that would further disenfranchise or adversely affect experiences of individuals or groups of participants in any way (Creswell, 2009).

As a researcher, I protected the data collected and maintained the confidentiality of my participants because of the ethical considerations listed above. As an initial safeguard I informed the participants and their guardians of the specifics of my study. In the letter of informed consent mentioned in an earlier section, I addressed how potential risks would be avoided by providing participants with a high level of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. Furthermore, participants' personal information, interview responses, and all other forms of data collected were kept under secure, password protected digital files. I will keep these files for a minimum of five years. After five years, the files will be deleted.

In addition to protecting the rights of my participants, I remained ethical in my interpretation of the data and presentation of the findings. Therefore, I affirm that the findings

outlined in Chapter Four have been presented accurately and truthfully and reiterate my biases as a research as stated above.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was a very meticulous process. Transcribing all interviews verbatim was central to the analysis stage. First, I transcribed each participant's individual interview and coded for themes. Once I developed initial themes found in each participants' interview, I looked for themes and outliers between and among participant responses. The same process was repeated for all follow-up interviews. Cross analyzing the transcriptions during the analysis and interpretation phase provided insight into the experiences of these participants as individuals and as a group of Black males. Moreover, highlighted how the messages they have received about race influence their perceptions of their school experiences.

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Role of the Researcher

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My experiences as a Black male have greatly influenced my perception of the world and in turn influenced my interpretation of the data I collected. I was raised in the inner city of Kansas City, Mo. where my family socialized me to value my identity as a Black person. My thoughts and ideas about the world are most aligned with the *critical* paradigm (Hatch, 2002). Preferring to view the world through a critical lens, I consider American society to be guided by inequity and systemic oppression and I believe that minorities are most often disenfranchised. It should also be noted that I assume racism is a pervasive and impactful part of American society in terms of race relations, opportunity for upward mobility, and psychological stress of oppressed minorities. Furthermore, because race is socially constructed with White, middle class culture being the dominant ideology from which American society is understood and navigated, I also

believe that race and racial socialization will impact the thoughts, actions, an experiences of Black students in any school context.

I also have a tendency to highlight race is the most important aspect of my personal identity. Having background as an equity trainer, I understand what it means to be a member of agent and target social identity groups with respect to structural oppression, but I often highlight race above all. It was important for me to consider the intersectional identities that my participants brought to the table as I truly sought to understand how they created, defined, and expressed their authentic selves. I placed great effort into not letting the shared experience of being both Black and male overshadow the individual stories they told.

My research topic and my personal life are highly interconnected. Moreover, my academic experience of being a high achieving Black male in high school aligns with how I have identified the characteristics of my research participants. Having my own idea of how my race influenced my decisions as a high achieving Black male adds personal bias to the study. Therefore, I employed specific strategies and techniques to confirm the reliability of the data and to check for error in my own interpretation.

The study took place in *Midwest Public Schools*, a district with which I am familiar because I am not only a researcher, but also a practicing educator in the Midwest. Because I am also an administrator, it could have raised issues of *power* in the eyes of some. For example, because of the often unbalanced perception of authority of administration in general participants could have felt *required* to participate knew I was a building principal because of my positional power. In contrast, my professional position outside the field of research could have also serve as a limiting factor as others may not have wanted to participate because they would not have wanted to reveal personal information and experiences to an "administrator". In addition, the

bias I brought as an educator could have led readers to question the validity or reliability of the findings because of my connection to the work in a general and specific sense.

I will present the benefits of this research to the district of study, Midwest Public Schools); the research will provide insight into the experiences of a subgroup whose outcome data has been a topic of conversation nationwide for many years. They will also become a springboard to potentially make fiscal and pedagogical decisions for the district in terms of the educational experiences of Black males, and ultimately, all MPS students.

Trustworthiness

I utilized "member-checking" to have participants' verify that my interpretation of their ideas was accurate. Performing a qualitative study lends itself to presenting findings using "rich, thick description (Creswell, 2009). To add to the validity of the findings, I have used ample direct quotes from participants that provide context and support for the conclusions I drew. Finally, to further my trustworthiness and validation of the findings, I have further clarified how I remained as objective as possible throughout the research process in the conclusion in addition to what was written in the section of this paper titled *role of the researcher*.

Readers of my research will see how findings from my study transfers to their experiences in public schools even though the findings of the study cannot be seen as generalizable. These findings aim to inform education practitioners of the experiences of my participants' and to affect pedagogical practice.

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Limitations and Assumptions

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Limitations

There were expected limitations of my study and design. First, with interviews being the primary tool for data collection, and I am the primary interviewer, I have to be aware of the

biases that I brought to the data collection and analysis processes (Hatch, 2002). Being a high

performing Black male in an urban district differentiates my experiences from those of my

research participants—Black males in a suburban district.

Second, performing research as a 9-12 educator serves as a limitation. Although, in order

to build community and get participants to be open with me, I had to be open with them about

my profession. I clarified that I was doing research as a student, not as an administrator to avoid

confusion.

Finally, a third limitation was the sample size. Although I was able to get more than 30%

of potential participants to complete the case study, having the stories of all the individuals who

qualified would have provided additional insight. Additionally, not having representation from

Garvey High School, served as a limiting factor because the experiences of Black males in that

school environment may possibly have revealed experiences that were not accounted for at

DuBois and Locke.

Assumptions

Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities opposed to one subjective

reality (Merriam, 1998; Hatch 2002). The critical perspective I used to situate my study

exacerbates this philosophical assumption. The way my participants make sense of their own

lives, their personal beliefs, and their ideas about the world drove the research process and

findings. In short, the purpose of a case study was to understand the experience of participants

(Merriam, 1988). Therefore, it was imperative that I have direct interaction with participants to

conduct an effective case study that sought to understand their experiences (Creswell, 2009). In

doing so, I also centralized their thoughts, even in the process of analyzing their statements for

themes, to ensure my interpretation did not dilute or overpower their voices.

Every research study has embedded within it a multitude of assumptions which stem from the researcher's background. As previously stated, the critical paradigm assumes that there are multiple realities (Hatch, 2002). Furthermore, Merriam (1998) points out that in addition to the research and the participants' perspective of the world and the data, the reader adds a third perspective during their analysis of the findings. Acknowledging this concern does not change the importance of the participants' individual reality—which was the crux of my study. However, it is important that the reader and I are cognizant of how these varying perspectives influenced interpretation of the study's findings. I believe that every person goes through an experience of socialization (Harro, 1982) where they receive and interpret messages about who they are with respect to the world in which they live. These lessons come from family, friends, media and institutions such as churches, schools, frequented locales, etc. Each research participant has gone through this process of personal socialization which has aided in his racial identity development. Subsequently, I also assume that their socialization processes impact how they view and experience school from both social and academic lenses. The impact of these experiences are further influenced by the various intersections of the participants' multiple social identities.

Summary

Data continue to reveal that the experiences of Black male students are subpar in comparison to their White male counterparts in America. However, there are Black male students who have positive social and academic experiences in school. The purpose of my qualitative case study was be to tap into the voices of high-achieving Black male students in an effort to understand their perceptions of how racial identity influences their social and academic experiences in predominately White public high schools in a Midwestern school district. The

research was be conducted in *Midwest Public Schools* and consisted of eleven Black male high

school students. Being a professional educator necessitated that I clarify my bias with respect to

doing research in a field which I am so connected, in a state when I have influence. Additionally,

I had to reveal any potential bias I have or assumptions that come a long with the reality that I

was a high-achieving Black male, graduated from a high school in an urban school district, and

now work in a predominately White, suburban public school district.

The research was conducted from the critical paradigm and will be situated using the

tenets of critical race theory in education to inform the research design. Although I only utilized

persona interviews to collect data, I used two other survey protocols, the Multidimensional

Inventory of Black Identity-Teen (Scottham, Sellers & Nguyen, 2008) and the Comprehensive

Race Socialization Inventory (Lesane-Brown, Brown, Caldwell, & Sellers (2005) to help frame

research questions that helped me gain knowledge of participants' socialization, their perceptions

of their racial identity, and their explanations for how they believed their race influenced or has

been influenced by their social and academic experiences.

The research design revealed three expected limitations. First, I am a Black male bringing

in my own preconceived perspective of what it means to A) be a member of the Black race, and

B) the influence of race in the schooling experiences of high achieving Black males. The second

limitation was the influence of performing research in a 9-12 setting as a 9-12 administrator by

profession. Last, the absence of participants from one of the district's three comprehensive high

schools as well as having only approximately 30% of potential participants complete the study,

served as a limiting factor in getting holistic representation of HABMs across the district. .

Ultimately, the study provides a counter narrative to the lack of academic success of

Black males, it also provides insight into how HABMs define themselves in terms of an

authentic identity, how they develop those authentic identities, and it will subsequently provide

educators with information that can help them better serve Black male students with respect to

social considerations and pedagogical practices.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how high achieving Black males make meaning of their experiences in predominately White high schools. Using the tenets of critical race theory in education as foundational assumptions, the goal was to utilize the voice of HAMBs to tell their own stories and varied experiences in their PWHSs with special attention given to their identity development. Ultimately, I hoped the participants could provide a counternarrative to the common story of underachievement of Black males and illuminate the role that racialized contexts contribute to Black male experiences. One goal of this study was to challenge claims of race neutrality and objectivity in educational institutions (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Therefore, to help accomplish that goal, HABMs were specifically chosen for this study to highlight the concept of Black male academic achievement and to centralize race and its intersections with other identity groups as evidenced through their personal experiences.

The case study was performed in Midwest Public Schools and consisted of eleven participants who attended two of the district's high schools. The participants were identified as meeting criteria for this study because they self-identified as Black in the school district directory and held at least a 3.0 grade point average (GPA). The 3.0 GPA was chosen as an indicator to denote academic achievement because it is higher than the grade point averages for all Black males, all males, and all students when grade point average was viewed through those respective lenses for each school. Each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview and was asked to participate in a follow up interview for the purpose of clarification and member checking.

The participant pool consisted of eight Black males who were sons to two Black parents (John, Jude, Levi, Zeke, Phillip, Jimmy, James, and Thomas). Two of the eight, Phillip and Zeke,

had parents who born in Africa before immigrating to the United States. One of these two participants, Phillip, was born in Africa and immigrated to the U.S. while the other, Zeke, is first generation born American. The other three participants, Andrew, Bartel, and Peter are biracial males who identify as Black in the district directory. Peter and Andrew have Black fathers and White mothers. Andrew's father is African born and immigrated to the United States. The third biracial participant, Bartel, is son to a Black mother and White father.

Prior to reporting findings, the chapter will begin with brief descriptions of the participants in a section called "Participant Introductions." Although each profile is unique to the individual participant, I've highlighted a general family background for each, a preview of their thoughts regarding academics, and their general thoughts regarding membership in the Black race (personal conception and perceived public perception). After participant introductions, I will highlight and expand on seven overarching themes found throughout the study. Additionally, I will directly address the answers to the study's two research questions by highlighting each question separately. The purpose is to summarize ideas expressed within and across the seven themes to more clearly express how the themes presented aided in answering the research questions.

Participant Introductions

Each participant will be introduced separately in this section. However, Table 1 provides an organized summary of demographic data for the Black male participants in this study.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Data

Participant	School	Classification	Grade Point Average
Andrew	Locke	Sophomore	3.9
Bartel	Locke	Junior	3.2
Jude	Locke	Sophomore	3.2
James	Locke	Senior	3.0
Jimmy	Locke	Sophomore	3.1
Thomas	DuBois	Senior	3.6
John	DuBois	Junior	3.2
Levi	DuBois	Sophomore	3.3
Zeke	DuBois	Junior	3.3
Peter	DuBois	Sophomore	3.0
Phillip	Dubois	Junior	3.3

Andrew

Andrew is a sophomore at Alain Locke High School who had a 3.9 GPA at the start of the study. He is biracial, with a father from Africa and a mother who he described as White. He spoke in great depth about his racial identity throughout the study. His view of himself and his racial identity come from the world around him and his interactions with other individuals. Andrew described his family as "internally White" because they "typically do things that White people do." However, he explained that the world sees him, his sister, and his father as Black people because of their skin color. Andrew has explicitly been told him that he's "not really Black" by his age group peers. He referred to these comments as "an awkward situation" because he's Black but does not feel Black because he does not relate to what society has deemed "Black to be." Moreover, because Andrew's mother is White and his father grew up in what he described as a strict African culture, his family typically follows the values and beliefs of his mother's side of the family, which he attributes to Whiteness. Andrew's parents have made it a point to talk to him about his biracial identity.

> [My parents] eased me into the real world... And like kinda explained to me how things
>
> worked. And kinda explained the relationship between Black people and White people

very carefully since I was on that borderline. And I think because of that I see the world

pretty clearly and it really helped my understanding of what really happens out there.

Furthermore, Andrew feels that society's constraints when it comes to identity force him to

identify as Black.

> If they had a mixed section I would check that [box], but since they don't I think at a first
>
> glance society would classify me as a Black person so I guess I would classify myself as
>
> that. I think I see myself as a White person. Since I grew up in a White school and my
>
> parents raised me as a White person kind of…a White family. I think that I would
>
> classify myself as a White person because of that.

Throughout his interview Andrew indirectly affirmed this statement with his pronoun choice

when referring to Black people as "they," them" and their" instead of "we," "us," and "our."

Andrew believes that being seen as Black in society places him at a disadvantage. He

explains, "I might not get as many opportunities as someone else because they see me as a Black

person before even talking to me. I think this world is mainly focused on the White people

succeeding and leaving everyone else behind purposely." Andrew stated that Black people are

unique and have a lot to offer the world, but are not given the chance to be fully embraced.

With respect to his extracurricular activities, Andrew is the only African American in

Junior Classical League, and one of only a few who play varsity lacrosse. He says his identity as

an athlete is a strong part of who he is as an individual. When he graduates he wants to go to

college and major in biological sciences.

Bartel

Bartel is a junior at Alain Locke High School who, at the time of the study, carried a 3.2

grade point average. He was tested and identified early in his schooling experience for a gifted

education program called "ARENA." He lives with both his mother, an educator at the state

university, and his father, who he calls a loving "super dad" who works in the medical field.

Bartel spoke extensively about being biracial and the impact that his racial identity has had on

his life being raised by a Black mother and a father who is White. He describes being biracial as

having always been a "touchy subject" for him.

> The world was already telling me like well you're not Black or you're not White so you
>
> don't fit it in. And it's sort of a touchy subject… Like it's hard for me to say I'm Black
>
> because I've been told growing up for so long that I'm not Black but I'm also not White
>
> which is why I keep saying 'of color.' But I'm not White, I'm Black.

Despite his difficulty in describing how he defines race Bartel showed pride in being a Black

male. He called it "empowering" and "exciting." His strong private racial regard and its

intersection with his belief in society's negative perception of Black people served as

cornerstones of how he interacted with peers and carried himself daily.

Bartel defined success as "doing what you love to do." He sees academics as a means to

an end and does not believe that his academic success is an important part of who he is as a

person. He suggested that it is "irresponsible to make someone sit in school all day" when they

can be doing something that furthers themselves or others. To him, being successful is about far

more than achieving a high GPA and great test scores. "The reward of academic success is not

just being book smart, it's about being well rounded and you can work hard to move beyond

[anything]. It's about having grit and working hard toward what you believe."

With respect to extracurricular activities, Bartel is not involved in school sponsored

events at Locke. He does, however, enjoy working out daily to improve his physical health and

fitness and attending a Christian faith-based youth group. Upon graduating from Locke, he plans to attend college to major in business marketing or sports medicine

Jude

Jude was a sophomore at Alain Locke High School during the study. He had a 3.2 grade point average and he's highly involved in marching band. Jude lives with his mother and father, who are both Black. During the study Jude was enrolled in two advanced placement courses and a host of honors classes. After high school he plans to attend college so he can pursue his various dreams of being an actor/director, and musician. He's a fan of superheroes and combining his love for superheroes with his dream of becoming an actor, Jude hopes to one day star in an action movie.

In describing himself, Jude reveals characteristics that are important to him, as well as how he believes others perceive him.

> [I'm] a laid back nerdy fun to hang out kind of person…I like being liked and being
> likable…People say I'm actually a White person and that I'm not really Black. Everyone
> has different personalities and thoughts. I think of myself as a person with dreams ideas
> and beliefs. I'm just a person. Sometimes I ask myself am I being fake when I act a
> certain way around certain people. But then I realize, I'm not. All of these traits are me.

Jude spoke at great length about stereotyping, the role of the media in manufacturing messages about Black males, and his level of intentionality in making sure he is not perceived as a stereotypical Black male. However, Jude explained that it is imperative that Black males in 2016 craft their own image of who they are rather than adopt society's standards of Black males.

> To be a Black male in 2016 means to forge your own identity. I think at this point it's like
> we're always portrayed as one thing. Be your own man. Be your own thing, be your own

self. No matter where you come from, no matter what you go through, be your own

person.

Although Jude is sometimes accused of not being Black by his Black and non-Black peers, he

exerted a strong sense of racial regard for his membership in the Black race. In addition to his

strong racial regard, he also placed high value on his religious beliefs and being an advocate for

social inclusion particularly for targeted minority groups.

Jude loves attending Locke High School. He described it as a place where everybody can

fit in somewhere. Despite the ability to find one's own niche at Locke, interracial interaction is

not wide spread which is exhibited by high levels of racial clustering. Because he has a friend

group that is majority White, Jude attributes the racial clustering to interests and activities rather

than race itself.

James

James, a self-proclaimed "extroverted introvert," was a seventeen year old senior at Alain

Locke High School during the study. He is the older brother of Jimmy, another participant in this

study. In addition to Jimmy, James has two older brothers and an older sister. He describes his

relationship with his siblings as very strong, but mentioned that his youngest brother Jimmy is

the most difficult to get along with. James values the strong relationship he has with his parents

as well. He described his mother and father as "cool" and said, "No matter how bad we mess up,

they're still there to catch us when we fall and to help us learn from our mistakes and not make it

a mistake, but more of a story to tell…They're one of the biggest support systems we have.

Academics is a strong part of James' personal self-concept. He filled his schedule with

AP and honor courses, worked hard to maintain great grades, and in the process, took pride in

people viewing him as a high achiever.

James placed great value on personal identity. He used authentic Mexican food as a metaphor to explain his authentic self. "You know it when you see it. There may be specific tweaks to how its prepared or different regional flavors, but it is still authentic food. I am the same way. I may change myself from situation to situation but I'm still fully me." James also discussed the social pressure that young Black males and females face. He explained that "the media set standards that [young Black people] have to achieve or the alternative is to feel "less than." Being poised to graduate at the end of the school year kept him focused on creating an identity that is personalized for himself, however.

> Pop culture set standards where Black males and females have to set to be these specific things to be popular and liked by everybody…but I feel like as a Black male who is set to graduate, I'm not paying attention to anything that pop culture wants me to be. I want to make sure I have my education down, I have a stable job, my family's covered, go to church every now and then and still try to make time for me, time for friends and time to get to know who I actually am.

This concept of who he really is, is a statement regarding his continued search for identity despite the misinformation and misconceived notions of Black male identity that have been framed for him via the media, influential institutions, and his human relationships and interactions.

James said he did not believe that race dictated a student's experience at Locke because it is up to individual students to blaze their own trail. Generally speaking, the centrality of race in his daily interactions was low. Although he does not feel negatively about being Black, he expressed that he was at times embarrassed by other Black people because they do not seem to share the same values as he and his family.

Jimmy

Jimmy was a 16 year old sophomore at Alain Locke High School who had a 3.1 grade point average during his participation in the study. Jimmy explained that his academic journey started fairly rough in middle school but he was determined to have a more positive academic experience in high school. As a high school student, he considered himself to be "crazy and enthusiastic." During the time of the study he was enrolled in AP World history and a plethora of other honors level courses. Jimmy lives with his mother, father, and one of his older brothers, James, who is also a participant in the study. In addition to James, Jimmy has two other older brothers in their mid-20s and an older sister who is 19. He is the youngest of his parents' five children. Jimmy describes his parents as "chill," and asserts that they take pride in being highly involved in church and the community. They encourage their children to also remain highly involved in community service.

Jimmy struggled with developing a sound definition and specific examples of authenticity, but he talked a lot about being himself and people having to accept it. He discussed values such as honesty and trustworthiness. In his opinion, if people didn't have those characteristics they were "wasting their time being fake, and wasting his time" because he would never change who he is internally. Being his own man and allowing others to be their own person is a concept he held in high regard. He's careful not to impose himself on others, and he's conscious about making sure he does not assimilate to popular culture or trendy fads simply because others expect it.

With respect to racial centrality and public and private regard, Jimmy explained that he does not "see color in a negative way and everybody is the same person." Moreover, he did not cite any of his identity groups as being more important to him than any other. He asserted that

personality is most important but struggled to explain how personality is developed. His

espoused idea of colorblindness was his way of leaning toward the hope of a post racial society

that he knows does not currently exist, but hopes will come to fruition in his lifetime. He feels

that society generally views Black people negatively. Ultimately, he believes that race does not

impact one's schooling experience and one should not let race determine their learning.

Thomas

Thomas was a senior at W.E.B DuBois College Prep who had a 3.6 grade point average

going into his last semester of high school. Thomas lives with his mother, an educator and recent

college graduate who took a non-traditional track to receive her post-secondary degree. His

father is in the manufacturing industry. His parents recently separated at the start of his senior

year. Thomas has one older sister, who he described as dedicated to work, and a brother whose

innocence and timidity remind him of himself when he was younger. After high school, Thomas

plans to attend a four year college in his hometown and major in sports marketing.

Thomas defined success as getting good grades, staying community oriented, and

honoring commitments. With respect to academic success, however, Thomas asserted that he

does well in school because he has to be a model of the level of success Black students can

attain.

> For an African American student you know you may not have the same outlook because
>
> your skin color is different from everyone else, so in order for you to stand out and be the
>
> person you want to be to be, you have to be a stand out individual for your race.

Thomas spoke positively of his school. He stated that "it's one of the best schools in the nation

for academics," and heralded some of the accomplishments of his peers—perfect ACT scores,

national merit scholarship finalists, etc. From his perspective, his experience in the school have

been positive because of its diversity and because everyone respects the individual beliefs of the

students. He went as far as to say that the school is like a family. Because of the diversity, he

states that his race has not affected him as much. Thomas's circle of friends "do not see color

lines." Furthermore, he expounded on this idea about the breaking of racial barriers, when he

discussed the use of the N-word. He says that his White friends use the word with him and it

only bothers him when he's not "in the mood to play." However, he does believe that White

people do not have the right to use the word because the history of that word is emotion stirring.

Despite the belief that the school is like a family and that people generally accept the

differences of others, Thomas stated that race can in fact affect the social experiences of a

student at DuBois. However, it is not because it is externally imposed, it is more about what

some people have internalized about themselves and their perception of their experiences. He

explained that people make decisions and blame it on race or the prejudice of administrators or

teachers, but ultimately, "your decisions are your own and what you project dictates how you are

treated, regardless your skin color."

John

John was a sixteen year old sophomore who attended Dubois College Prep. John lives

with his mother, his father who a former semi-pro football player, his older sister, and younger

sister. He is a two sport athlete who excels at both basketball and football. Additionally, he was a

member of AVID during the study, a college readiness system that equips students with the

academic skills necessary to excel in high school and prepares them for college. AVID stands for

Advancement via Individual Determination—with the key component of the acronym being

"individual determination."

John placed great emphasis on his value for academics. Because he is an athlete, he explained that people are often surprised that he is intelligent, which he says no longer bothers him. However, the perpetual assumptions lead him to work harder in the classroom and remain diligent in his studies. Being one of a few Black males in advanced placement courses heightens John's desire to do well academically. He said he feels he has something to prove not only to himself, but for Black males in general. However, the feeling of loneliness in some of those courses can add to what he describes as a mental and emotional burden.

The pressure of making sure he acts properly at all times was a recurring theme throughout his interview. He expressed that "you should act properly no matter your race," but he describes there is an added pressure to make sure he does it because he is Black. He is at times conflicted because he does not believe people are making him change because "it's supposed to be normal." Although it is supposed to be normal he still feels the weight of it because he knows there is no room for error.

Levi

Levi was a sixteen year old sophomore at DuBois College Prep who had a 3.3 grade point average at the start of the study. He lives with his mother, a mechanical engineer, and his father, an educator in a neighboring school district. Levi stated that his parents are his "number one support." He is a self-proclaimed "World War II nut and absolute sports fanatic" who loves baseball, hockey, football, and wrestling. Levi plays baseball and wrestles for DuBois. He explained that upon entering DuBois he was most excited about playing sports, but he was concerned when people compared him to his older brother who Levi described as a great student athlete when he attended DuBois five years earlier. Levi hopes that he will be able to make a name for himself at DuBois rather than live in the shadow of his brother's outstanding high

school baseball career and his older sister's reputation for being an outstanding student in the

classroom.

Levi took great pride in being a high academic achiever and being identified as such. He

questioned me, the researcher, numerous times about how he was selected for the study, how

long people knew he performed well academically, and suggested we [researchers and educators]

continually praise other Black males. Being ignored or overlooked was a theme that emerged

frequently throughout his interview.

After high school, Levi would like to compete in hockey or baseball at the collegiate

level and ultimately play one of those sports professionally. If his dream of being a professional

athlete does not come to fruition he wants to major in a degree program that leads to a career in

law enforcement, more specifically, the Special Weapons and Tactics team (SWAT)

Zeke

Zeke is a seventeen year old junior at DuBois College Prep. For him, school has always

been an important and valuable part of his life. Zeke lives with his mother and father, both of

whom are immigrants from Africa. They have lived in the U.S. for 25 years and have three other

children. Both of Zeke's parents have attained advanced degrees from universities in the U.S.

Upon graduating high school, Zeke would like to attend a four year university like his parents

and his older sister. His ideal major is pre-medicine and eventually he aspires to be an orthopedic

surgeon.

The stories Zeke told provided strong insight into who is an individual. He spoke at

length about his strong connection to family, the high value he placed on academics and its

contribution to his identity, and the high level of centrality with which he views race.

Additionally, he expressed a strong Christian faith that dictated his values and beliefs. He also

took pride in his ideas about the responsibility of "being a man" (son, brother, and role model to

and protector of the young). Zeke's racial experiences raised his consciousness about the racial

pressures faced by Blacks in American society. Those experiences resulted in heighted levels of

racial awareness and sensitivity to microaggressive situations, a high private racial regard, and a

diverse toolbox of strategies to cope with, respond to, and comprehend racial threat.

Peter

Peter was a sophomore at DuBois College Prep who had a 3.0 grade point average during

the study. Peter lives with his mother who he described as "his rock." He explained that she has

taught him what it means to be a good man because of the absence of his father. His mother and

father divorced when he was in elementary school which resulted in Peter and his father having a

strained relationship. Peter explained that he is disappointed at times because his father lives in

the same city but he only sees him sporadically. Peter has one older brother, a senior at DuBois

College Prep who exceled at baseball and track and field. At the start of the study Peter was

enrolled in one AP course, but he dropped the course by the end of the study.

Of the eleven participants, Peter expressed the most connectedness to his school. When

asked about his experience at DuBois, Peter held his school in high regard.

I think I can be true to myself at DuBois. I feel like DuBois is a pretty good overall

school. Some people say I hate DuBois because they're not getting what they want out of

it. But I think DuBois is a good school and I love this school. I think we have a great

staff. When they say stuff I listen to it. We have a great staff and administration. We have

kind janitors….It's a good school and they make me feel like I can be myself.

Although he was biracial and raised by a single mother who was White, Peter self-identified as

Black. He explained that society sees him as Black, his family has always identified him as

Black, and it has never been a second thought to consider himself to be Black. Regarding the

centrality of race, he acknowledges that negative stereotypes about Black males exist, but he said

it is not a primary factor in how he operates on a daily basis. He does believe, however, that even

teachers with the best intentions act on unconscious bias at DuBois. In his own words, Peter

explained that because Black males persistently hear negative thoughts about who society

believes them to be, those thoughts seem to become engrained into their psyche. Nevertheless, he

believed that teachers have the power to reverse internalized inferiority and the stereotype threat

Black males experience by bombarding them with positivity to counteract the negative messages.

> The stuff [Black males] hear, it's all negative and rarely positive. Right now it's positive,
>
> but mostly its negative stuff…It's kids dropping out, not coming to school, skipping
>
> school, getting kicked out of school, getting into fights at school and they just need
>
> something positive to counterbalance that.

Phillip

Originally from Uganda, Phillip was a seventeen year old junior at W.E.B DuBois

College Prep at the start of the study. He was raised by his grandmother in Uganda until the age

of twelve, at which point he joined his father and stepmother in the United States. Having come

to the U.S. to attend school at a top tier research university, his father and stepmother had always

instilled within his two younger stepbrothers (7 and 8 years old) the importance of education.

Academic excellence was not a new concept to Phillip as his grandmother had encouraged high

levels of academic achievement and a dedication to learning when raising him in Uganda as well.

After five semesters in high school, Phillip had maintained a 3.3 grade point average. He was not

involved in extracurricular activities in school during the study as he describes himself more as

an "observer." Upon graduating from high school, Phillip plans to attend college and major in

mechanical engineering before seeking a career in law.

Being born in Africa, Phillip saw his upbringing in Africa and the contrasting experience

in America as an important part of his personal identity. He alluded to the single story that has

been narrated about Africa as an impoverished, war torn country where everyone is starving. He

asserts that "there's a difference between a war torn Africa and a peaceful one. In a peaceful

Africa there's everything…there's freedom too. You don't feel an oppression."

Oftentimes the West is guilty of comparing the living conditions to their own standard of

parity and sub parity. However, Phillip explains that Western countries, specifically the U.S. and

African nations are very different. The capitalism of the U.S. magnifies the extreme poverty of

those who suffer from it. His dual experience provided insight regarding class, gender roles,

academic identity, and race differences between African nations and America. He referenced a

unique perspective that eluded the others. Although each participant spoke about the existence of

racism in American culture, Philip had a heightened sensitivity to it once he come to America

because it was his first introduction to it. He said he did not know racism existed while in Africa

because everyone was Black where he lived. "If it happened to one, it happened to all." He

attributed America's ugly history of slavery as rationale for why he believes Black people are

happier in Africa than in America as he described the feeling of being Black in America. He

explained that "there is an ever-tense environment when you're Black in America because you

feel anything can happen against you at any time."

Themes

Seven overarching themes emerged throughout the study of high achieving Black males

in predominately White high schools. Critical Race Theory in Education was the theory that

undergirded the study, therefore, my analysis of participant responses and development of the

themes were greatly influenced by the tenets of CRT; I centralized race, challenged dominant

cultural ideology, framed the perceived problem of Black male underachievement as an issue of

social justice that must be addressed, and I valued the experience of the participants by

centralizing their voice to understand how they make meaning of those experiences and to seek

what they perceived should happen as a result.

        In this chapter I present findings in thematic form. First, I present general findings of

participants' thoughts regarding race, identity, and thoughts about their social impact in the first

four themes— (1), The persistent and unnerving nature of racism; (2) Stereotyping: The

(un)believable lies we're told; (3), The dynamic nature of black male identity; and (4) Kinship

through shared experiences. The first theme, *The persistent and unnerving nature of racism*,

serves as a barometer that reveals participants thoughts about racism and its role in their

experience. The next three themes, *Stereotyping: The (un)believable lies we're told*; *The dynamic

nature of black male identity*; and *Kinship through shared experience* outline participants'

thoughts regarding identity and identity development and how those concepts impact their *social*

experience. The organization of these three themes, although presented in isolated subsections,

work concomitantly in understanding the social experiences of the participants in both general

and individualized ways. The themes are highly reflective of and affirmed by literature on

identity and identity development (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2010; Cross, 1971/1991; Dyson,

2009; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997; Sue & Sue, 2008) with respect to participants' unique social

experiences in society and in school.

        Next, I present the fifth theme, *Academics: Identity, utility, and discrepancy* to

specifically outline the participants' thoughts regarding how they make meaning of their

academic experiences in predominately white schools. Although the theme stands along, ideas are pulled from the first five themes addressed to account for participants' worldviews in context of the schooling experiences.

Finally, I conclude the presentation of findings with a subsection which reflects the intersection of participants' general worldviews and specific schooling experiences, both social and academic—and reveal how that cross-sectional analysis creates meaning with respect to their experiences in their predominately White schools. The last two themes, (6) *The importance of being seen, the value in being heard*; and (7) *It starts with me, but I'm not alone*, provide participants' general thoughts about social and academic experiences and provide rationale for how/why the HABMs in this study felt they have achieved "success" in school. They also provide practitioners with specific strategies and advice on how to serve Black males in general and high achieving Black males in particular.

The final section in chapter four will streamline the thematic findings presented to explicitly answer the study's two research questions.

The Persistent and Unnerving Nature of Racism

Understanding Black males' views regarding race and experience on a macro level contributes to better understanding the way they make meaning of their social and academic experiences on a micro level within schools. The first tenet of Critical Race Theory in Education suggests that racism is pervasive and ever-present in American society. Keeping this premise in mind, I tracked participants' comments that directly addressed racism or alluded to their perspective of racism's existence or non-existence in American society on a macro level. Moreover, it was noted how they felt racism impacted their social and academic experiences in school. Beginning my report of the data with the participants' thoughts about the existence of

racism is meant to reestablish the study's adherence to CRT as a foundational theory on which

this case study is built, and to frame participants' perspectives about racism in larger society to

subsequently establish a baseline for analyzing their thoughts about the role of race in

predominately White schools.

Participants were not asked specific questions regarding the existence of racism or its role

in their experiences in general or within their schools in particular. However, in the processes of

discussing stereotypes, bias, and social experiences many participants offered their position on

the matter. Eight of the eleven participants (save Jimmy, James, and Levi) established their belief

that racism exists in America.

Jude was most candid in his response regarding the existence of racism in American

society. He said, "I believe, racism is a problem [in America]. Racism is one of those things that

unfortunately is never going to go away. Hate will always be hate. Hate will always be there.

And that's unfortunate." In Jude's analysis of race relations in America, he referenced the deaths

of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown as well as recent (Fall 2015) protests at various

universities led by Black students who demanded their university presidents resign due to

inaction and lack of protection of Black students. In doing so, he sought to highlight that racial

injustice is a concern in our country.

Andrew recalled a lesson his parents explicitly taught him about racism in America and

its relation to the literal and metaphorical concept of survival for Black males. "To survive, you

have to know that relationship between Black and White people and you have to know that

White people won't always like you…not all White people, but some White people won't always

like you because of your race and your color." He went on to explain the "second class status of

Blacks in America, and their perceived inferiority to Whites because of institutionalized racism.

Andrews references to both the "survival" of Black males—both literal in terms of loss of life

and metaphorical with respect to social navigation in U.S. society— and the feelings of otherness

experienced by Black U.S. citizens were not new concepts in modern discussions regarding race

and racism in America.. Both of these concepts are instrumental to the Black Lives Matter

Movement—a movement that Zeke, Thomas, and Bartel referenced as evidence of the presence

of racism in America. They suggested a need for Black empowerment by highlighting injustices

against Black Americans. The three aforementioned participants explicitly discussed the

disproportionate number of negative interactions Black males have with police officers and

provided specific examples from their personal experiences and stories of close friends/family as

leading examples to strengthen their explanations and rationale.

     Zeke, exuding a mixture of deep concern and ironic laughter, shared his first experience

of being pulled over by the police.

> You know honestly, I think those cops were more scared of me than I was of them
>
> [laughs]…I recognized that after [the stop was over] because of all the work they
>
> put into one kid. And in my mind I was looking at this as I'm a 16 year old kid,
>
> I'm scared of these people because I don't know what I did wrong.

Zeke realized by the end of the traffic stop that the officer was just as scared of him as he was of

the officer, but unnecessarily so. He was afraid of the ghost of the stereotype that society had

created, not Zeke himself. He was afraid of who he perceived him to be; and although it was not

a legitimate fear according to Zeke, he felt that it served more as a cautionary warning from the

officer for Zeke to "stay in line." Zeke's father followed up with him about the unfair nature of

the justice system. He explained that people's unconscious and conscious biases find their way

into systems, including law enforcement—a group whose job is to protect and serve—but as the

Black Lives Matter Movement suggests, instead they oftentimes alienate, endanger, and provide

a level of disservice to Black males. These biases are an outgrowth of racism—power plus the

privilege to impact the social, political, or economic livelihood of members of a targeted group

(Tatum, 1994).

Although Phillip discussed racism during the study, he viewed racism in America

through the lens of being an emigrant from Africa.

"In Africa I grew up not knowing about racism. Because we just didn't know what racism

meant. It was the first time when I came here that I knew about it.

There's a difference between here and Africa because here you're more of…you're one

of the least people in the population so you don't have those many chances of achieving

your goals…In Africa they are happier than they are here. I think it's just it may come

into the way that people were treated during slavery and being in a tense environment

here where you feel anything can happen against you. In Africa if it's happening against

you it's happening against all.

In essence, he spoke to racism's ability to thrive in America because Black people are what has

been described as "caste-like" minorities (Ogbu, 1998) and racism is used to limit their social

capital. Additionally, Thomas furthered Phillip's thoughts of Blacks being cast aside and

relegated to a caste-like experience as he stated that the lack of social power and disregard for

communities densely populated with Black Americans is evidence of racism in America. He

used the 2016 water crisis in Flint Michigan and Hurricane Katrina (2004) to strengthen his

point.

Although participants highlighted the presence of racism in American society, Jude,

Bartel, John, Peter, Levi, and Andrew all mentioned that race relations are getting better in

America. Levi said, "Previous generations, they were defensive or scared because of the whole

racist stuff that they did back then. But nowadays I think people understand that we're just

people. We're not bad or anything, but it's still here. It's just not as aggressive as it was back

then." John echoed this statement and explained that it's not just about less overt racist actions

occurring, there is now a higher level of acceptance of Black people for who they are. "Now they

are sort of like accepting us. Because like racism…it's still there but like, I think there's less

people…People are starting to be cool with it, and can be like friends [with one another]. Like

the mixing of groups." Jude called for people to be more reflective and seek to understand

individual perspectives to continue the progress in race relations. Participants believe that their

interactions with peers in school is helping with that process. Jimmy explained that there is a

"people and just people" approach at Locke High School.

Participants did not speak about racism impacting their academic experiences in school.

However, they specifically mentioned what can be seen as manifestations of racism such as

conscious and unconscious bias and stereotyping. Although the participants described that they

were not enveloped in or privy to overt racist actions in school, racism's lasting and covert

effects have had indirect consequences for how they were viewed by peers and teachers,

impacted how they express themselves as young Black men, had implications for the

relationships they did and did not build with peers, and affected their racial self-conceptions with

respect to how they made meaning of their social and academic experiences in their PWHSs.

These ideas will be addressed in subsections to follow.

Stereotyping: The (Un)believable Lies We're Told

. Much of identity development is dependent on the ability to name oneself, define

oneself, and be oneself. For Black males, the ability to name and define has been stymied within

American society because of the stereotypes that exist about them (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2010; Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Lofton & Davis, 2015; Howard, 2014). Historically, Black people have had stories told to them and about them that contribute to shaping not only their conceptions of themselves, but others' perceptions of them as well. The participants in MPS spoke extensively about stereotyping. In this section, I will discuss stereotyping as explained and expressed by the participants and the role that it plays in their conception of racial identity, their life experiences in general, and their school experiences in particular.

Society's perception of Black identity. The concept of stereotyping was a continual strand throughout interviews. From their ideas of what it means to be a Black male in America, to the impact of stereotyping in their social and academic experiences, participants spoke explicitly about social pressures, misconceptions, and self-fulfilling prophesies they observed and experienced as a result of the stereotyping of Black males. Public regard is defined as the way one believes others view their identity group (Scottham et al., 1997). When asked, "What do you think it means to be a young Black male in 2016?," participants gave a plethora of answers that could be classified as having a positive inclination for private racial regard as well as those that could be categorized as a negative conception of public racial regard for the Black race. Stereotyping was at the center of those negative perceptions.

Jimmy asserted "I feel like a bunch of people want to define Black people as one thing like they're all bad or whatnot, but in all reality they're not. Some of it [comes from] history, some of it from fear. And some people just make crazy assumptions from their minds." In his statement, Jimmy expresses his perception that many people erroneously assume Black people are "bad." A quote from Phillip qualifies Jimmy's statement. From his point of view, "[Society] just thinks most Black people in America are violent uneducated and…you know thieves." The

description of stereotypes about Black males that was offered in the literature review —

excluding the libidinous nature of Black males—almost mirrors the thoughts and ideas

participants expressed throughout the study.

Stereotypes: The role of media. Similar to the tenets of Harro's (1982) cycle of

socialization, many participants felt that the way Black males are viewed comes from an explicit

depiction of Black people developed by messages delivered in people's homes; institutions such

as schools, church, and community venues; and messages delivered through the media. Jude

credited the media with having a tremendous role in shaping how the world views Black males.

> I would say that it's mainly the media. And you know, it's funny because today's biggest
>
> rappers, they're not helping the problem either... Lil' Wayne [is] always talking about
>
> getting money and getting women and stuff like that. You know busting caps and
>
> smoking weed and stuff like that. And it's like, that's not really helping. And then B.E.T.
>
> ([Black Entertainment Television] that's not helping either. All that Love and Hip Hop.
>
> All that is not helping because always having that in the media is pushing this stuff out to
>
> all these people…It's etching into everyone's brains who sees this stuff and hears this
>
> stuff that this is what a Black person is. So, I really think it's society and the media that's
>
> really just grinding it into all these people.

The interconnected relationship of Black identity and the portrayal of Blacks in the media

brought about a quandary for the participants. Jude, more than most other participants, pondered

what I called a "what comes first, the chicken or the egg?," style of question reg

arding this topic. He exclaimed,

> I think it's kinda like a paradox... Like do African Americans act this way because of
>
> what they see, or does it [media] represent the way African Americans act?... It's kinda

like a circle that goes around, and I can't really pinpoint you know how it starts or where

it ends. Or you know…It's kind of a tug of war that kinda requires both sides to give way

a little bit. Because on this side African Americans act this way, which projects this

image and then on this side, the media is portraying this image of African Americans that

they're acting up to. But is it because the media's doing this that they're acting this way.

Or is it because they're acting this way that they media is doing that?

Jude alludes to a strategic and conscious effort on the part of media outlets to construct

the world's idea of Blackness through the images and messages they choose to show or omit. In

the same vein, however, he indirectly acknowledges that some Black people do in fact act in

ways that the media portrays. This is a thought also shared by Jimmy, James, and Bartel. Jude's

question, however, is an interesting one. Do Black people act this way because the media

portrays them in this fashion or do the arbiters of media present what they see to be a general, yet

true reflection of Black male identity? I would caution the danger in allowing one's perception of

an entire group to be accepted as universal truth and an accurate portrayal based on the messages

found in media outlets. For examples see minstrel shows, *Birth of a Nation*, and the Brute Negro.

Nevertheless, no matter the answer to Jude's question about the impetus for negative portrayals

of Blacks in the media, the images and stories that frame Black life have an impact on society's

conception of Black people in general and varying impacts on the personal identity development

of Black males specifically.

Upon further analysis of Jude's quote, it encompassed an idea that other participants also

addressed. In Jude's metaphor of Blacks portrayal in the media being a "tug of war" where both

sides have to give way a little bit, he suggested that although media could find a more positive

and varied representation of Black people, Black males who subscribe to and adopt unwanted or

untrue stereotypes of themselves must stop perpetuating what is shown because it serves as

"evidence" if its veracity. Jude stated, "We have these stereotypes that people have for Black

people and it makes people angry, but then I look around the schools a lot my peers in school are

living up to those stereotypes." Jimmy echoes this sentiment when he stated, "If you want people

to stop defining you as something, then stop acting like that something." Analyzing these quotes

from both Jude and Jimmy revealed that these two Black males understood there is a general

narrative composed about them without their permission, verification, or authorization, yet, they

have the ability to reject it. However, by accepting that the narrative is in fact in draft, they are

automatically and unfairly positioned to defend themselves against it and are forced to prove the

general stereotype(s) wrong. It also necessitates mental strength and self-empowerment to not be

influenced by images that bombard them about characteristics of people who typically look like

them.

   Ghetto. One stereotype that seven of the eleven participants referenced was the idea that

Black people were considered *ghetto*. They spoke of the term with disdain when describing the

society's negative view of the actions of people that do not align with notions of acceptable

behavior. When James discussed people acting ghetto he described them as "having random

roast fests" and people being "blissfully ignorant and loud." Other participants used physical

descriptors such as young men sagging, or girls laughing loudly. To say that one *is* ghetto has

social and economic implications that denotes lower class status in American society.

   Etymologically speaking, the word *ghetto* changed from a noun (*the ghetto*)—which in

its original form was a location in which minority groups lived due to social, economic, or legal

reasons— to the adjectival form, *ghetto*, it became not only a locale but also a condemnation to

social and economic inferiority by definition. It speaks negatively to one's personal worth, not simply their economic or social condition.

Pejorative media messages and the terminology ghetto are two aspects of Black male stereotyping that served as common threads among participants. However, the method in which they spoke of these examples suggested that they were not only making expository generalizations about society's conceptions of Black identity, they were also making connections to these stereotypes as they pertain to their personal identity development specifically. In Jude's descriptions of what it means to be Black in 2016, he revealed an internal conflict or reluctance to answer. For example, when he discussed the stereotype that all Black people listen to rap music, he found it difficult to reconcile the disparity between his thoughts and his words. He said "There's a stereotype that all Black people listen to rap music, but I like rap music, but not because I'm Black, but because I identify with that type of music." The same occurred when he spoke of a vast number of Blacks in his school being from low income families. He seemed to struggle with the fact that the very things he was calling stereotypes were important aspects of his identity—hip hop culture and his class identity coming from a working class family. One can see the turmoil a young Black male can face in trying to make sense of his own identity when there are aspects of his core identity that have been made to seem holistically negative, resulting in feelings of guilt or apprehension about naming it a part of his experience. Rap music is a form of expression, not a reprehensible musing, and being from a low-income home is an economic condition, not a racial absolute—even if it could be argued that the economic power of Black people in America is so disproportionately low when compared to White Americans that being Black is almost synonymous with being low income. Nevertheless, Jude and many other Black males like him are left to battle with the messages heard versus the reality they feel about their

identity. It was found that some participants suppressed certain aspects of their identity in certain social situations as a technique to avoid being viewed in a negative light by judgmental onlookers.

Stereotyping in school. Although the participants generally discussed stereotyping as a societal concern, they made it clear that stereotyping also affects their school experiences. Schools are oftentimes microcosms of greater society, so one could expect to see schools mirror or replicate their communities (Noguera, 2008). One area that participants discussed in depth was stereotypes that led to negative perceptions by White peers. This subsection will solely discuss perceptions of peers (Black and non-Black), however, I will discuss teacher perceptions in a later section.

Being prejudged based on race or having ones "Blackness" called into question were common throughout the study. With respect to prejudice, Peter suggested:

"I think we [Black males] get a bad rep, because all these things happening. People seeing all these Black kids around doing bad things. They think, *oh you're just another one of them. You can go to school and try to make me think you're a good kid but I see right through it*. I don't think people give Black kids a chance to truly make a difference.

Having stereotypes and negative presuppositions thrust upon him even before he was given an opportunity to reveal who he is at the core was a burden Peter and other Black males like him carried into their school experiences.

Levi described an experience just as disturbing and prejudicial in nature with respect to racial stereotyping and the perception of peers. However, the details revealed an experience that contrasted with Peter's in its method of imposition and in turn the participants' reception of the message. Levi represented the counter stereotype of the Black male in the eyes of his peers, a

group comprised of all White males. Levi explained that his identity as a Black person was often

called into question because he stood in stark contrast to stereotypical notions of what some

believe to be the Black male identity. He recalled a story of his friends commenting that they

liked him because "he wasn't really Black."

> They say because I'm not exactly ghetto enough to be Black. Frankly, that caught me off
>
> guard but I didn't mind it because I don't really pay attention to that. They say [that]…
>
> because I don't cuss in every sentence, I don't use the n-word, and because I'm not
>
> ghetto. I have good grades, I rarely curse, and I was raised with respect. I think they don't
>
> see me as other Black people that they know."

In the eyes of Levi's friends they were complimenting him for having good qualities. However,

at the same time, they painted a picture of what they saw Black people to be—poor, foul

mouthed, disrespectful, marred by self-hatred, and struggling academically. The micro-insult

(DeAngelis, 2009) seemed to be of little consequence to Levi. In fact, although he said it caught

him off guard, he seemed to agree with their rationale. The very nature of a micro-insult, if

noticed but not fully felt, gives one initial pause. Levi expressed this with his statement of being

caught off guard. However, if the insult is not fully reflected upon it can leave the target naïve to

or oblivious of the insult.

> Phillip felt that the externally imposed views of others did not stop at their beliefs about

him. He also believed that peers, teachers, and society in general even questioned what he

believes to be true about himself and are surprised when they recognize they had an erroneous

perception of him.

> I think my race makes other people think I have low ambitions for myself. And they
>
> don't view me as someone who will have a better future or someone who can have a

better life for himself. Most of the time they think I'm involved in sports and they think

that's what I want to achieve most of the time. One student asked 'What do you want to

be when you get older?' He said, 'Do you want to be Michael Jordan?' I said, no I want

to be an engineer. He turned on a serious face and was like 'oh…okay'.

The surprise of their peers struck chords with the participants because they felt Black people are

expected to struggle academically. Again, prejudgment placed them in a position to prove that

they are capable of defying the stereotypes imposed on them. For example, Peter, Zeke, James,

John, Bartel, and Andrew all take advance placement courses. Each of them stated that people

are (1) shocked that they took the course because they are typically the only Black students, and

(2) they get surprised when they realize they are not only taking the classes but are also thriving

in them. Peter expressed that his peers and teachers in school are often surprised that he is a high

achiever and that it's an important part of his identity. From his perspective, they try to limit his

potential for success.

Participants explained the sting of misconceptions and perceptions that come from

stereotyping and implicit and explicit bias, and alluded to the microaggressive actions and

comments by others. The response of many is to continue to take pride in not allowing

stereotypes to be imposed on them. Those with higher levels of racial consciousness and

awareness are savvy enough to catch these racial slights and take intentional action to avoid

falling into these racial traps. Others, still in stages of naïve acceptance either ignore the

microaggressions or remain unconscious of them.

The game changers. While recognizing the various stereotypes that exist of Black males,

some participants (Jude, Thomas, Zeke, James, John) explained that they wanted to be what Jude

described as "*game changers*." The game changer mentality is fueled by a desire to break

stereotypes, to refute America's dominant ideology regarding Black male identity, to combat the

internalized inferiority of Black males, and to challenge the mentality of White superiority in

American society.

Breaking social and academic barriers by dispelling stereotypes was a concept shared by

many participants. Thomas purported:

Race plays a huge part in my academic experience in school because statistics show that

most African Americans don't go on to college to get their bachelors or masters

degrees…So I feel like it's on me. Not necessarily for the entire community, but I feel

like it's my part as a Black person to just come to school and just better the image of my

race overall.

Taking on the mantle for the entire race, is Thomas' way of attempting to be a game changer.

Although research suggests that attitudes such as this can add to racial stress (McGee,

2013), Jude found it to be a source of strength and encouragement.

Because I'm a Black male and Black males are perceived as [low academic

achievers]…It actually helps in my academics because if I do well then it's like I break

that barrier that they set for me. I break the walls that they put in front of me to box me

in…It kinda fuels me. Like, when I talk about my career and stuff like that thinking about

how I'm a Black male so I must want to do this I must do that…Thinking about my

career I'm like, no I'm gonna go out there and I'm going to show everyone that I'm a

Black male and I'm doing this. I'm doing it like this and I think that definitely fuels my

academics…If people are surprised at that, it's prejudice. I kinda want that surprise. I

don't want prejudice, and stuff like that, but when people get that surprise I feel pride.

I'm kinda like 'yea, I did that.'

Zeke also spoke about breaking from the stereotypical mold of Black male academic despair. "I don't want to just go through this same cycle, okay. I'm going to be lumped into this category and I'm already there. I have to somehow break out and show them that I'm a different breed of person. I'm not just that person that they just want to put into that category."

John took a "prove them wrong" approach to being a game changer and breaking stereotypes.

> People have like stereotypes of Black people about them being like sorta ghetto or not good. It's kinda like made me want to prove that stereotype wrong…I feel like I'm held to a standard to not do what they think that Black people do. To be successful, to want to like prove the stereotype wrong. Like misbehaving in class, slacking, just like only being reliant on sports, and not having a positive attitude in the classroom. I just feel like I should behave in general, no matter what my race is. But it's also the fact that people think Black males are negative and have a bad attitude. I just think that me doing right is proving them wrong. But it's also what I should be doing in general. It's not like...
> They're not making me change. It's supposed to be normal.

Jude touted, "I think of myself as a game changer, because I'm different. I try to be different…So, because of the way I act, a lot of people say, well you're just more White than Black. I'm, like no…I'm Black. I just prefer to act differently than some of the other Black males. And that's just how I identify."

He broached the "acting White" pandemic that is imposed on Black males who actively reject stereotypical notions of Black male identity. He takes ownership of his identity and reassures anyone who questions it that the range of what it means to be Black is deep and vast.

James explained, "Without everybody else's views or opinions about me or the world, I would say I am an educated Black male living in a predominately White country where there are some chances for me to achieve a lot of greatness, but even more chances for me to fall into trouble." Upon further probing, it was gathered that James recognized the limitations that society attempts to place on him as a Black men as revealed through media entertainment, current events involving Black males (including violence against Black males, police brutality, the high numbers of incarcerated Black men, etc.), but he contrasts that with examples of Black success. The seemingly paradoxical views left him reflective of the way stereotyping and the portrayal of Black males impact his social progress, but hopeful that he would be a person who can reverse this issue.

Zeke added to Jude's idea about the vastness of Black identity and attempts to address the paradox outlined by James by providing a blueprint of how Black males can become game changers.

I would say specifically, what it is to be a Black male in my mind it would be…what I look at it is you're strong, you're confident, you know what you want to do, you can make decisions by yourself, and you have the courage to step out of your comfort zone. You usually have to carry yourself at a higher level. People will look at you differently based on how you dress, how you look, how…what you wear. Like you're always under the radar to be looked at so you have to carry yourself a certain way. You have to be respectful to everybody and so it's kinda this whole idea that a Black male you're held to a higher standard no matter what. Because as soon as you break that standard, you automatically have changed the way how people look at you specifically and the Black males who will follow you. Whatever things I do or create for myself or in my name, my

brother will experience later in his life. And that's kinda how I look at it because his

generation is younger. They haven't gone through everything that this generation goes

through, but once they get here, whatever our generation of Black males have created is

going to be there. And like my dad's generation and people who are older, we're

experiencing what was left from whatever stereotypes were created when they were... So

if we as a people want to break those stereotypes and create a better view of ourselves,

we have to work within ourselves. Each person has to work to change how they're

viewed and based on changing themselves and that will create a better generation and a

better life in society for the people who follow.

In his own way, Zeke spoke to CRT's tenet of placing events into historical context.

Empowering oneself, speaking positivity to oneself, remaining conscious of society's racial

threats (current, historical, and impending), and having a game plan to reject, refute, and place

Black males on a hopeful path toward change for future generations.

The Dynamic Nature of Black Male Identity

The theme of stereotypes and the constraints they place on Black male identities worked

in conjunction with a second theme that emerged throughout the study—*the dynamic nature of*

Black male identity. In both subtle and explicit ways, the participants sought to assert that Black

male identities are multitudinous. As expressed in the literature, identity development is highly

dependent on cultural factors and individual experiences considered to be socializing factors

(Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2010). Accompanied by or embedded within this socialization are

encounters that influence how one views and makes meaning of their experiences—racial and

otherwise (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1979; Cross, 1971/1991; Sue & Sue, 2008). Participants

expressed that they've often felt constraints placed on their identities. They spoke of these

constraints in the form of others placing limitations on their academic and social abilities as

Black males; society attempting to "force" an identity on them; and the most discussed, limiting

the expansiveness of Black male identity through bifurcated definitions of racial experience

[assigning implicit/explicit meaning to seemingly race-neutral attributes and associating them

with either "Blackness" or "acting White"]. In direct contrast to racial constraints, the

participants also expressed counternarratives to those constraints— racial empowerment, self-

definition, and self-determination. In doing so, they indirectly made mention of the tools they

use to battle through the warring ideals of limiting constraints vs. personal empowerment to take

ownership of their experiences and personal identity development.

The following subsections—*The search for identity: Expressions of Black consciousness*,

The fallacy of Black male dichotomy, Acting white, and *Self-defined and empowered*—seek to

communicate the messages participants conveyed about the identities of Black males. The term

identities is used in its plural form to account for the multiple forms and meanings of the

individual identity groups to which they belong, with special attention given to the multiplicities

of Blackness. It also accounts for the intersectionality of various identity groups that create

varied identities and experiences.

Throughout these subsections I will present what participants describe about their

personal identity. I will use the research literature, specifically the amalgamating context I

developed in Chapter Two by combining factors derived from three identity development models

(Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1979; Cross, 1971/1991; and Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) and

Dyson's (2009) identity strategies—Accidental Blackness, Incidental Blackness, and Intentional

Blackness—to explicate what participants' discussions reveal about HABM's identity

development. The analysis includes (1) how participants' experiences impact identity

development and (2) identity development's perceived impact on their experiences in general

and schooling experiences in PWHSs specifically.

      The fallacy of black male dichotomy. Noguera (2008) asserted that Black males often

see limited examples after which to model themselves in media and mainstream society. This

very sentiment was verbalized by Bartel.

> I'm gonna go back to what it means to be Black. I don't know… I feel like it's really
>
> drastic. It's either you're poor, you're ghetto and you're broke and living in the city or
>
> you know in the ghettos or the projects. Or they expect you to be rich, play basketball or
>
> rap. I mean that's the norm now. You know it's either this or that, there's no middle in
>
> between. You don't really hear much about the in-between… the middle class of Black
>
> people…It's either the stars or the poors. You know. The ones who's shootin' or the ones
>
> who shootin' ball."

Bartel poignantly expressed the dichotomized nature of Black male identity. Seeing only two

very different and narrowly defined representations of Black male identity is limiting in nature.

These examples leave out a variety of potential experiences and pigeon hole Black males who

seek examples to observe as they develop their own personal identities. Jude expressed the same

concern. However, he not only expressed that options seem limited, but also that people are

surprised by Black males who verbalize alternatives to these widely accepted limitations of

them.

> Nowadays, you know, you see a Black man and you think oh he can be a rapper, or he
>
> wants to be a basketball player.... But I think if like… if someone walked up to a Black
>
> male and he says 'I want to be a doctor,' I definitely think they would be surprised. And I
>
> think that's just another societal thing...People perceive you this way, and then when you

actually go out and do what you want to do. You surprise them and…you know it shows

that people prejudge you.

The dichotomizing of Black male identity is a symptom of what Jimmy described as the

single story complex. He stated that one of the most interesting things he's learned in his

advanced placement social studies course was the idea of the single story (Ngozi, 2009). A

limited number of stories or experiences observed by outsiders become projected onto an entire

group of people and is perpetuated through the continued retelling of that single narrative.

Evoking his African heritage, Phillip provided a parallel example to Jimmy's suggestion of the

single story in the form of America looking at the whole of Africa as one country.

I think about Americans looking at Africa as one country as…it's just because we're all

Black in there and secondly, we don't treat ourselves that much as countries because we

didn't create the borders ourselves. And sometimes across the borders you share common

cultures and closely related languages.

The nature of his statement served a dual purpose. It described Americans' erroneous idea of a

universal African continent, and it was a resounding call to pay attention to how the vastness of

Black male identity in America—just like the vastness of the African continent—has been

minimized and placed inside a box.

The statement, "we didn't create the borders ourselves," spoke of the physical boarders

placed upon African peoples during colonization, the emotional aspect of their lack of self-

determination, and the metaphorical nature of having inherent yet invisible barriers placed

around them to provide clear boundaries for the convenience of others. Black males also did not

create these dichotomizing boarders of identity for themselves. They were imposed on them by

society and perpetuated through the continual retelling of a single story of who they are and

could be. Simply sharing common culture, language, and skin, does not make their experiences

monolithic. The fallacious dichotomization of Black male identity is neglectful of the duty to

nurture creativity and self-determination in all young people, and it is harmful to the

development of Black males specifically and society's perception of them generally.

     Acting White. Acting White was explored extensively in the literature review with

respect to racial questioning and the potential ostracism of high achieving Blacks by same race

peers (Ogbu & Fordham, 1986); high academic achievement being attributed to and reserved for

White students, or Black students who "act white" (Carter, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995;

Noguera, 2008; Ogbu and Fordham, 1986). Participants in this study echoed these statements. In

most cases, however, they rejected the notion of certain characteristics being attributed to Whites

only, and also exerted the belief of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) regarding the concept of

academic success as White property. One common thought shared by Zeke, Andrew, Jude,

Jimmy, and James regarding their experience of being accused of "acting White" stemmed

directly from how they said they were raised by their families. Andrew said, "My parents raised

me with a lot of respect… I guess you could say that internally we would be considered White

people because we do everything kinda like a White person would. But on the outside people see

me, my sister and my dad as Black people." In a similar fashion, Zeke spoke about being seen as

acting White because his parents have high expectations for him.

     Accusations of acting White were also hurled from participants' peers. Jude, Levi, and

Andrew explained that they have many White friends, typically because of their extracurricular

interests. However, each of them mentioned that they had experienced their friends explicitly

exclaiming that they did not see them as Black, or joked about the authentic nature of their

experiences as a member of the Black race. Levi explained,

[My dad] and his twin brother were known as the Whitest Black kids they knew because

they got good grades, stayed out of trouble, and didn't do wrong [in school]. And that's

kinda me pretty much. I don't get in trouble, keep my nose clean, keep my grades up. So

people say I'm the Whitest Black guy they know. But honestly, I don't care.

Like Levi, Jimmy and Jude expressed that they often overlook the comments from peers

when they question the centrality of their Black identity. For example Jude explained that at

times his friends made comments such as, "Jude you may be the Whitest person here." He

further went on to say, "It doesn't really bother me. That's just the way it happens. It's my

friends. Some of my Black friends some of my White friends…Just jokingly. And we all make

jokes about each other."

In their explanations, they assert that they can be jovial with peers about the concept of

acting White, but only to a certain extent. When it seemed that people attempted to transition the

term away from social characteristics associated with acting White and instead made

presuppositions that academic success was connected to Whiteness, Jude and Zeke became more

passionate in their expression. Zeke mentioned an encounter experience that led him to realize

society did not see Black people as having a capacity for success. He told a story of his older

cousin sobbing in his home because she was called an Oreo—"Black on the outside, but White

on the inside." He said that stuck with him even as a 3rd grade student. It raised his level of

awareness and he began to recognize it more throughout his own academic experience. He

explained that his observations continue to leave him frustrated as a junior in high school.

"I don't feel bad no matter how many jokes you say because I'm proud of who I am, but

the thing is, I'm not gonna sit here and tell you because I'm Black that means that I don't

have to do well. And that's kinda the biggest thing that kinda makes me want to be like

> when I see my friends or some of the people I know be like, oh well you're just acting
>
> like the White people. I just kinda feel like that's kinda in a sense stupid because we're
>
> thinking that only White people are the only people that can do well."

The direct correlation that some individuals attempt to make between intelligence and Whiteness

was also expressed in a quote from Jude. "A lot of my friends and stuff…a lot of people joke

about how I'm more White than Black and stuff like that but I just identify as an intelligent

Black male. I just want people to know that I'm intelligent. You know people say oh you don't

act Black and stuff like that. Really I just say, I just act intelligent. I just use my brain… you

know this is me, this is who I am."

Eight of the eleven participants spoke about the concept of acting White. However, there

seemed to be two distinct components embedded within the idea of acting White—social and

academic. The young men stated that socially they were said to act White due to some of the

positive characteristics they exhibited such as good manners, being respectful, staying out of

trouble, and avoiding behaviors that are deemed stereotypically negative of Black students. Their

friends and peers outside their friend groups made comments about their social choices and

perceived them as acting White (Bartel, Jude, Andrew, Jimmy, James, Zeke, Levi, and Thomas).

Levi and Andrew did not seem to be bothered by the comments; it can be argued that they

actually took pride in the statements. Six participants said the "acting white" comments did not

bother them because (1) they knew it was a joke (Thomas, Jude, Jimmy) or (2) because they

were so inherently proud of who they were that they dismissed it and did not allow other

people's comments to define them (Jude, James, Zeke, Thomas). The only participant who

seemed quite bothered by the social pressure in school of being seen as acting White was Bartel.

Although he mentioned that his peers viewed of him as a Black male and he has begun to self-

identity as a person of color who is biracial, he expressed that he was often "hurt" by the thought that people saw him as White or perceived his as acting White.

With respect to the academic implication of acting White, the participants expressed more concern with outsiders' statements. Again, Andrew and Levi did not seem to mind and did not question the concept of high academic achievement as acting White. Levi's apathetic response was a result of his de-racialized approach to academic achievement. He did not care how anyone classified his academic success because his goal is not to be the most academically successful Black student or White student, he said he's competing with everyone to be the best regardless of race. Internally, Andrew considered himself to be White. Therefore, being classified as "acting White" because he was a high achiever did not impact him. Like Levi, he took a more individualistic approach to academics and did not look at it as racial in nature. His academic success is a personal goal he wants to attain for himself. Jimmy and James felt the same about academics being race neutral and placed more focus on their personal academic success. However, even in taking this stance of the race neutrality of academic success, they made it clear that success is not reserved for White students only. In contrast to Jimmy, James, Levi, and Andrew, the disregard that Jude had for his friends' joking about this Blackness with respect to social interactions elicited a different response when he spoke about it from an academic standpoint. Both he and Zeke felt that stakes become higher when people reserve academic success for White people. They believed it further perpetuates negative stereotypes of Black students and places limitations on the potential of Black males to strive toward a high achiever identity.

Self-defined and empowered. Some of the participants looked at identity as being self-defined, and felt empowered by the people they were or are determined to become. In contrast to

the stereotypes that Black males say they are expected to live up to or the limitations they feel

are sometimes placed on them, Zeke, Jude, Bartel, and James specifically discussed a desire to

self-define and felt empowered to do so. Jude stated, "To be a Black male in 2016 I think it

means to forge your own identity. I think at this point it's like we're always portrayed as one

thing. Be your own man .be your own thing, be your own self. No matter where you come from.

No matter what you go through be your own person."

Zeke expressed a similar idea of identity and breaking the mold. He used advice from his

mother when speaking on this topic. Zeke shared a story that he said has become his fuel for

ensuring his dream of becoming a physician becomes a reality. He told a story of his teacher who

said he would never become a doctor because he dropped his AP science course. Zeke sobbed as

he told his about the experience. Her response to him was, "Don't let somebody define who you

are." Zeke went on to say, "He can't tell me that I can't do it because he doesn't control what I

want to do. If I put in the work I can do it. And if I do what I have to do, I can do it. And even

though I don't let that define me, comments like that and even experiences in other things have

forced me to be like, I have to define myself, I have to look at myself differently or else I'm not

going to get anything done." Zeke began to see the process of self-identification, self-

determination and personal empowerment as a necessary component to his success because he

felt a person he trusted and looked up to almost succeeded at tearing him down.

In addition to speaking to the dynamic nature of Black male identity in terms of defining

oneself, Bartel, Jude, Thomas, and James also talked about the feelings of empowerment they

have for being a Black males in general. Bartel explained, [regarding being a Black male in

2016] "I can definitely say it's empowering... It's like a fire inside of you that like, it's abnormal

but it's good… it's like a fire that it won't burn out. I'm not ever gonna be not Black and it's

like…I feel like. I feel like it's, like a rebel. You're like a rebel. I'm not saying it's bad. It's just

good like...What's his name? Robin Hood." Bartel, Jude, and Thomas spoke about current

protests on college campuses around the nation as students bring to light, injustices and slights

they feel are ignored by their administrative officials regarding equity and inclusion. They

explained that although the need for the protests show a lack of power, the ability to stand up and

fight with confidence is empowering to them and will benefit their livelihood even more in the

future.

      Within this sense of empowerment, Jude and Zeke discuss a concept of a neo society [sic.

Jude's terminology] and a new Black culture. The concept of resistance was central to their

definition of this new society even though they had different views of what the new society

currently is. Jude said,

> Especially after the '60s Civil Rights, there have always been people fighting back and
>
> stuff like that. But, I just think that now that were in…I'll call it a neo society, now we're
>
> way past that and equality with women and all kind of races and sexes and stuff like that,
>
> I think that it's being brought more to the light now because they're like what happened
>
> to equality. We're supposed to be equal this is supposed to be a new society. We're not
>
> supposed to follow our past and stuff like that so I think more people are getting into it
>
> now. Especially with technology, social media and stuff like that. People are getting onto
>
> it and seeing all that.

Zeke called for another Black renaissance-like movement and felt that Black America could be

on the precipice of a new renaissance. He exclaimed that this is only possible if Black people

take responsibility for shedding current stereotypes, if Black males specifically reject current

ideas about who they are and who society thinks they are, and if young Black males of today's

generation look to notable Black men of the past for inspiration. He said,

> *I want* [emphasis added] the culture that we read in the history books. All the successful
>
> people they're writing about because [they've] done something great. That's kinda the
>
> thing that pushed me because I'm like if somebody can be so renowned like Langston
>
> Hughes and those people can be renowned for poetry and all those different things, why
>
> can't I be?...I've just had to carry the whole idea that as a Black man you have to fulfill
>
> what I call like instead of the new culture, it has to be that old culture of a highly
>
> respected person. Somebody that you look upon and you say wow, this person is a great
>
> mind, a great innovator, a great person to be around because they're doing great things
>
> within themselves.

Although Zeke and Jude differ in their definition of old culture vs. new culture, their messages

are quite similar. They suggest that Black people in general and Black males specifically have

the tools necessary, and a tipping point for opportunity to increase their social capital through

self-study, self-definition, self-determination and self-empowerment.

Expressions of Blackness: The continual search for identity. As the above subsections

reflect, participants spoke about their identities in various ways. They discussed race, religion,

and masculinity. However, their conversations were most heavily concentrated on race and the

continual search for and elusive nature of a personalized Black identity. As mentioned in the

introduction to this chapter, the participant pool included only individuals who self-identified as

Black males in their district's demographic data. However, the nuances of their identities as

Black males included eight Black males born to Black mothers and Black fathers (two of which

had mothers and fathers who were both born and raised in Africa); three biracial males (two with

Black fathers and a White mother and one with a Black mother and a White father). Even within a small pool of participants there was much diversity in their origins as Black males.

The complexity of participants' experiences regarding their continual search for identity was revealed throughout their interviews. In an attempt to generalize their experiences while also honoring the individual nature of Black identity and Black identity expression, I analyzed participants' interviews holistically. Furthermore, using revelations regarding participants' thoughts about their membership in the Black race, ideas of racial public regard, and the depth and breadth of what they considered to be—or what the researcher took the liberty to categorize as— racialized experiences, I was able to confidently garner an understanding of the process of their identity development and made strong inferences where exact answers were not stated explicitly. In doing so, I've attempted to classify each participant as accidental, incidental, or intentional with respect to racial identity expression as influenced by society in general and/or school in particular.

Accidental Blackness. Accidental Blackness (Dyson, 2009) as described in Chapter Two is encompassing of the first stage of the three identity development models outlined above. They are expressed in the form of a pre-encounter stage (Cross, 1971/1991) and the individual is described as "naïve" as (Atkinson et al., 1979; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) they learn what it means to be a member of the Black race. During the study, many aspects of Andrew's and Levi's interviews suggested they exhibited thoughts and revelations indicative of the accidental Blackness stage during the study. Andrew may have had the most divergent thoughts and ideas about identity. As a biracial male, born to a White mother and a Black father who emigrated from an African country, Andrew had a unique perspective in contrast the other participants. He struggled to explain his identity as a Black male.

"I'm like I guess I'm like Black, but I'm Black. And I guess it's kind of awkward for me because I'm Black but I'm not. And I just like kinda say yea, I'm White but I'm also Black. It's just like an awkward situation to be in. If they had a mixed section I would check that, but since they don't, I think at a first glance society would classify me as a Black person so I guess I would classify myself as that. But I think I see myself as a White person. Since I grew up in a White school and my parents raised me as a White person kind of…a White family. I think that I would classify myself as a White person because of that.

Andrew spoke of his racial classification as both an extrinsic societal imposition as well as from a stand point of self-identification based on the definitions he has created for what it means to be Black and White in America. Society sees him as Black because his father is Black, but the way he has been raised and what he most identifies with led him to consider himself and his family to be White. Although Andrew was quoted earlier in this chapter as stating his family explicitly taught him about the existence of racism and the importance of being cognizant of the Black experience, he showed evidence of being in the accidental Blackness stage because of his self-disclosed assimilation (Cross, 1971/1991) and conformity to White dominant cultural ideology (Atkinson et al, 1979) and an internal rejection his membership in the Black race. It is purely his birth and subsequent categorization as a black child that led to his membership, hence, his accidental membership in the Black race.

Levi, has a firm understanding that he is a member of the black race, but to him his race is inconsequential, not central to personal identity, and having little personal importance to his self-conception. He has been bombarded with negative messages about what it means to be a member of the Black race and has internalized those ideas. Though it does not manifest itself in

self-hatred, the miseducation (Cross, 1971/1991) has impacted his level of racial consciousness and awareness, and has led to symptoms of racial passiveness. In the section of this chapter on stereotypes, Levi showed an internalization of negative thoughts about Black males although he did not subscribe to them. He saw himself as atypical of the general experience of Black males, and the miseducation and subsequent adopted public racial regard resulted in a missed opportunity for what could very well have served as an encounter moment when his peers presented him with the micro-insult about not seeing him as Black and subsequently providing negative stereotypical descriptors to describe Black people. His initial feelings of "pause" and feeling "caught off guard" were his internal racial barometer alerting him that something may not be right with the comment. However, it was suppressed and served as an opportunity for later reflection.

Jimmy was difficult to classify when determining if he projected an accidental, incidental, or intentional expression of Blackness. He was of the belief that identity groups did not matter and that personality was what made a person a person. When probed to ask how he identified and what identity groups were important to his overall identity development, he mentioned personality characteristics such as goofy, crazy, and chill rather than attributing his self-determined identity as being the product of any particular identity group. Therefore, Jimmy was classified as exhibiting aspects of accidental Blackness. Although he acknowledged that he was a Black male and Black males are viewed negatively in society, he did not feel like race impacted his social experiences. He also established that he and his friend group were colorblind. He described an existence that was almost "a-racial" although he had specific dislikes for people who exhibited actions he defined as stereotypical of Black people.

Incidental Blackness. Incidental Blackness was described by Dyson (2009) as being of the belief that one's race is central to their experience and greatly influences actions and beliefs. In my organization of this stage of racial identity development, an encounter experience (Cross, 1971/1991) is a precursor to incidental Blackness. Furthermore, experiences post encounter that are seen as racialized are thereafter viewed through a more conscious lens. James, Peter, John Bartel, and Thomas exuded an aura that would support a categorization outlined by incidental Blackness Each of these young men, were privy to the idea that there are racial implications that come along with being Black, however, race did not completely define their experiences. They not only acknowledged the existence of the perceived superiority of Whiteness in America, they actively rejected it and attempted to resist it. Bartel and James took an introspective approach with respect to racial identity as they both made reference to the continual search for identity.

Bartel's status as a biracial male was the original impetus for difficulties with identity development. However, unlike Andrew's internal conflict with being seen as Black but identifying more as White, Bartel's experience centered more on a rejection by others rather than a personal confusion about racial self-classification. He said, "people would be like you're mixed but you're like White on the inside. I'm like alright that kinda sucks to say that because I'm trying to be Black at least." He expounded on this idea in terms of the rejection he sometimes felt in his early development in elementary and middle school and how that impacted his social interactions with other students. This served as his encounter experience. "Up until now really it's just this year or last year like I was always, I guess you could say I was cool with the Black kids, but I still felt outside of all that…The world was already telling me like well you're not Black or you're not White so you don't fit it in." Despite the views of other individuals, his identity as a Black person was important to him and its intersection with his beliefs that stem

from his strong Christian beliefs—equality among mankind and the rejection of internalized

superiority of Whites and internalized oppression of any target group—aided in his

classification.

James brought to light that sometimes the search for identity involves an active avoidance

of reflecting over the concept of identity, but he knew race was important to his experience. He

explained:

> I don't know how to describe an authentic me because there are different sides of me. But
>
> I'm more focused on what's happening externally than I am with what's happening
>
> internally for me. So there are times where I get lost in other people's situations and
>
> forget about me...It's just easier not to focus on what really is me… I don't know
>
> specifically what defines me, because there are a lot of factors that define me. Like my
>
> race, my gender, my age and everything else like that. That makes my identity me.

Despite seeming unsure of his identity in a holistic way, James, a graduating senior, had

become very reflective of who he was as a person but at times avoided making definitive

decisions about identity. He spoke in depth about society's expectations of Black males, the

difficulty in defining oneself, and trying to find his true authentic self without the stronghold of

popular culture dictating who he should be. He expressed that he's working on each of these to

create an "authentic" him. However, in the midst of doing so, the dissonance he experiences with

regard to racialized experiences remain important to his identity development on his road to self-

discovery.

> I feel like as a Black male who is about to graduate, I'm not paying attention to anything
>
> that pop culture wants me to be. I want to make sure I have my education down, I have a

stable job, and my family's covered. Got to church every now and then and still try to

make time for me, time for friends and time to get to know who I actually am.

Getting to know his true self is couched in the various identity groups to which he said were

important to him—race, gender, age, and religion.

Intentional Blackness. Intentional Blackness is about the internalization of race as a vital

aspect in one's search for a centralized Black identity. It is dependent on one's level of

consciousness and skill in navigating society with respect to racialized interaction across various

contexts as stated in Chapter Two, Dyson explains that in this stage, "Blackness is understood in

its political forms and its social manifestations." Zeke and Jude were the two participants who

understood and operated in this particular arena. The internalization stage is seen as a turning

point in the identity development of a Black person.

.   Both Zeke and Jude had a strong sense of self and a deep understanding of the social

and political implications of racial membership. Jude exhibited a strong understanding of the

implications of race in America. He addressed 1) The function of White privilege in American

society as a means to separate and impact the social, psychological, and economic well-being of

Blacks in America; 2) How many people view race through a myopic lens that touts an

adherence to racial separatism and how it stymies progress in race relations; and 3) The

importance of making personal progress by understanding the political nature of race dynamics

in America

Zeke was able to provide multiple examples of racial encounter moments that served as

catalysts for his strong racial consciousness. His initial encounter moment came at the age of 16

with his first interaction with the police, an experience described an earlier section called *The*

persistent and unnerving nature of racism. Additionally, Zeke also realized early in his

experience that Whiteness had agency in school and contrastingly found Black males had a

negative experience of hypervisibility thrust upon them by unfairly being perceived as

disciplinary concerns. Furthermore, his conversation with his cousin who was called an Oreo

(described in an earlier subsection) he also was shown the common occurrence that achievement

is often synonymized with Whiteness. Zeke explained, "These situations have taught me that I

have to do everything differently... I'm not planning on doing anything wrong, but I could be

profiled into something I'm not." At one point he described race relations as his "Achilles heel"

because people mistake his self-assured, pro-Black stance as hating White people and

contrastingly, his ability to tailor his actions and speech in a variety of venues as being fake or

acting White. However, what gave Zeke an internalized Black identity was not that he simply

understood that as a Black man he had to always be aware of his actions and surroundings, it was

his immersion in embracing and celebrating himself as a Black man because of these experiences

and the survival strategies he employed to navigate racialized situations in society and in school.

Zeke and Jude have been explicitly taught to have a great appreciation for self and each

have gained a strong sense of identity without demonizing Whites. For example, they have a

skills to recognize and navigate racial threat by engaging in social code switching. Furthermore,

although Zeke has a friend circle that is mostly Black and admitted he was most comfortable

with people of his own race, he saw value in cross racial friendships. Jude, whose friend circle is

mostly white, was unmoved by racial questioning, unafraid to engage in what some would see as

racially divisive conversations, and was not bothered by other people categorizing him as

someone who "acts white because of his friend group and extracurricular interests. Their

informed worldviews provide them the ability to view their experiences in school and in general

in critical and savvy ways that are lost on others who have not achieved a high level of racial internalization.

Kinship through Shared Experiences

A third theme that emerged from the study was the concept of kinship through the shared experiences of Black males. The powerful connective nature of the collective or shared experiences of Black males has been highlighted as a theme throughout American literature and research (Brooks, 2012; Carter, 2007; McGee, 2013). How participants described the purpose and function of the shared experiences of Black males as it relates to social and academic experiences in schools and the context of greater society varied from participant to participant. They addressed experiences that brought a sense of closeness as well as shared feelings of loneliness or isolation.

Brotherhood, kinship (Carter, 2007; 2009; Marsh, Cheney & Jones, 2012), or cultural enclaves (Brooks, 2012) was a recurring motif throughout the study. This was particularly true when speaking about Black males social experiences at school. Bartel and Zeke both referred to the valuable experience of brotherhood and having an unspoken connection with other Black males because of shared experiences. Bartel talked about this in the form of handshakes and greetings exchanged by Black males.

> You know when you see a brotha you say, what's up dawg. You cool and you like got the whole hand slide and you cool. I don't know it's like you're a part of something. We're all a part of something no matter where we come from. We're all of color…Just being a person of color is, it's something you can share. Something you have in common.

He used an experience at a camp for high school males who were deemed future business leaders as an example to describe the immediacy with which Black males can connect based on the

shared experience of being Black in America. In speaking about four other Black participants from four cities in four different regions of the U.S. Bartel explained, "They accepted me, I accepted them you know it don't matter. They didn't know where I came from I didn't know where they came from. It was tight we were like a straight brotherhood."

Zeke echoed the power in the exchange of greetings and the unspoken connection that it represents.

> With Black people if you see one, usually, I like to call it like, people always like to nod at each other. Like everybody always makes this nod. That everybody has always…like if you're in a place and you see another Black male, you're going to nod at them, and it's just kinda like that's the first thing. So you should feel automatically more comfortable with that person. But it's kinda like that sign…So it's weird when someone doesn't nod. It's like I don't know, this is kind of a nervous situation.

In his quote, Zeke not only talked about "the nod's" ability to connect, but also its ability to signal concern for the social situation if one does not nod. Black males use simple greetings as markers in school and other social settings as a means of connection (to those with similar shared experiences), disconnection (from people who may not understand their experience), and protection (from those who seem to threaten or are threatened by their experiences).

Jude gave insight into a different side of how the concept of brotherhood or kinship can at times not be extended among all Black males because of the varying levels of intra-racial stratification within Black social circles in school. "I feel like most [Black males] are okay. I feel like I can go up to [a Black male] that has the same mindset as me and they get what I'm saying. But if I go up to another Black student and he doesn't have the same mindset as me he probably thinks I'm soft or dumb or something."

The simple sharing of Black skin does not invite all Black males into the same brotherhood. Because there are other varying definitions of Blackness, as well as a plethora of other social factors that determine social circles, Jude suggests that all Black males are not always going to be accepting. His comment that some may suggest he is soft or dumb was in reference to his conciliatory idea of race relations, and his experience of oftentimes being seen as acting White. He does not feel shunned, rather he is simply not in the inner circle among many other Black males.

Jude talked about kinship/brotherhood from the perspective of an "insider" who is oftentimes seen as an "outsider," but is never denied entry. Other participants explicitly discussed how the connection to other Black males is not an explicit attempt to disconnect from males of other races, rather it shows the strength in the easily made connections with other Blacks which is situated opposite the frustration of oftentimes being misunderstood by non-Blacks. John attempted to explain this idea in our conversation.

> People in my same race, I can pretty much say anything and they may be able to relate. They may not it, but like they're cool with it. But then like when I'm with people outside of my race…If I were to say some of the stuff I say with Black people…like they would probably think I'm weird or something and they wouldn't be able to relate. And that would just make for a bad conversation. I kinda like avoid that.

Similarly, Thomas exclaimed, "White people definitely have good knowledge of what goes on in the world, but when it comes to interacting…I feel like my Black friends know way more because they know what's going on in terms of our race.

Bartel, more than any other participant, tried to explain the social connections among Black males as being positive for that demographic and how it does not sever ties with White male counterparts.

"I got White friends and we're still brothers too. We just don't have that same sharing of the same skin. They don't go through what other minorities have to go through. The different struggles we have. How society approves of them and not us. How they still think like that they are somewhat better than us. They may not think that but subconsciously they're like at least I'm not Black."

The connection these three young men speak of in terms of their kinship to other Black males is powerful. One noticing, however, is that they each spoke about their connection to Black males in terms of White males. Their comments are a powerful illustration of how the dominant discourse of the division of the Black race is not a blanket truth. They unconsciously placed their connections to the Black male counterparts in the context of how White people feel or think. They each used qualifying statements about Whites in conjunction with their explanation of the common connections among Black males. Although speaking of White males when speaking of Black kinship does not cheapen the connection and the brotherhood experience, it does represent the invisible but ubiquitous nature of unconsciously positioning Black experiences in the context of White existence.

Company among the lonely. Feeling alone socially was an extension of the theme *Kinship through shared experiences* for the participants. The discussion of loneliness most often stemmed from their experiences in advanced level courses. Jude, Andrew and Thomas addressed this subtopic, however, Zeke and Bartel provided the most insight. Zeke explained:

In a high school where there's predominately White students…I see like even in a lot of my classes because I take a lot of honors and AP courses. I've never been in a class I think only sophomore year when I had somebody else who was a Black male in my class. And then after that I told my parents…They would come home and ask who's in your class and I'd say…well there's this person and this person. And then they'd say is there anybody who looks like you. And I said nah there's not any. You'd see a girl who's a Black, but you'd never see an African American boy in the class. And so that kinda struck me as funny to be like okay ell why is it so like why is there such a divide. And I've always told, I've told them every time I get in a class I'm like you know I'm the only one. There's nobody else that's gonna experience something maybe similar to what I'm experiencing.

Zeke's musings about loneliness addressed the multi-layered nature of kinship, as well as the experiences of Black males in predominately White schools with disproportionate demographics in their advance level courses. He highlighted three specific ideas.

1. The vast underrepresentation of Black males in his honors and AP courses;

2. His parents concern for the sparseness of Black male representation in upper level courses; and

3. His feelings of loneliness—"I'm the only one." He feared that nobody would share his experiences.

With further probing, Zeke revealed he was often challenged in a questioning fashion by his white peers in AP classes when speaking about coursework and society from his point of view. The lonely feeling is exacerbated when he becomes the racial representative for Black people among a host of White peers.

Bartel also addressed the feeling of loneliness in advanced courses. However, he discussed to power of having other Black males in the course with him.

> When I saw the kids in my AP class I was like whoa, we're the ones clowning [speaking of him and his Black friends] but I was still surprised and impressed that they were in the class. I was like 'y'all know we bout to be struggling together right? This ain't no walk in the flowers, what's the term, walk in the park.'

Bartel felt relieved that he would have the support of people with a shared experience despite the perceived difficulty of the course. His quote "you know we're gonna be struggling together" encompasses the idea that although the class would be hard, they would be able to rely on one another throughout the process. In contrast, Zeke continued to speak about his experiences of feeling lonely—not only because of the lack of connection with peers, but also because of his lack of connection with his mostly White teachers. He spoke about his experiences with multiple teachers, however, he shared one story as an example to clarify what he sees as a general concern for Black males.

> It's interesting because our teacher makes a connection with the students who are of his same color before he makes a connection with any of us [students of color]. It is interesting that he knows anything about those kids and even if I just say hey…It's a different reaction when I say good morning to the teacher versus when a person who is the same race as the teachers says good morning. They start a whole conversation and with me it's like oh hi, and then it's over. So I feel like that connection isn't made with the teacher. They don't try necessarily to do it, but they're doing it without even knowing it. And so sometimes I'll say that minorities like have the issue that you know, we have to do everything…You have to do everything yourself. Sometimes it feels like you're alone.

I tell my mom all the time that I feel like sometimes at school I feel like I'm alone

because your friends aren't in every class. You're alone when you take the test. You're

alone when you do this, you're alone…and even when you feel like the teacher should be

the one person on your side you still feel alone.

Zeke's impassioned monologue exudes both frustration and hurt. The lack of kinship with non-

Black peers and his teaches make the connections with his Black male peers even more

important to his emotional well-being. He explained that the lack of affirmation from peers and

teachers in his academic experiences takes a toll on him at times.

Overall, the participants revealed that kinship through shared experiences play an integral

role in their social and academic lives. It provides them a sense of emotional comfort, provides a

buffer from racism and racially uncomfortable situations, gives them a barometer to measure

perceived risk, and empowers them to achieve at higher levels due to interdependency and

reciprocating positive encouragement when in the midst of difficult social situations or

academically rigorous courses. Additionally, they reveal that some Black males feel a sense of

disconnectedness from other Black males when they know this kinship exists but don't always

feel to be a part of it.

Academics: Identity, Utility and Discrepancies

The high-achieving Black male participants in the study spoke of the purpose and

function of academics from various perspectives. The three major subthemes found within the

theme of academics were identity, utility, and academic discrepancies. The following section

will discuss these subthemes from the participants' perspectives.

Academics as a form of identity. For many participants, their high achiever status was a

major part of their identity although they described its centrality and impact in varying ways.

Some specifically stated that having "good grades," which John, Jimmy, and Phillip defined as all A's and B's on their report cards, was not only important to them, but also a part of who they were and how they wanted to be perceived. Andrew explained that being a high academic achiever made him a leader, and established him as the individual who sets the bar high for others to reach. Four of the eleven participants noted that taking honors and advance placement courses was a part of showcasing a high achiever identity. Jimmy, Andrew, Zeke and, John listed the courses they were currently taking and explained that taking the challenging courses was a part of developing a true identity as an academic achiever. The idea of solidifying a high academic identity by taking advance level courses was echoed by Bartel, a participant who took AP courses but did not subscribe to the idea that his high achiever status was an important part of his identity.

> Even if I had bad grades but I was in AP it's like at least I was in AP. It still looks like you care. You can still be failing AP but you're still in AP. You can be failing regular class and that would be real bad. Because no matter how…even if you did the least amount of work, it still looks better that you're in AP. You seem like you're challenging yourself.

Some participants embraced their academic self-concept as a valuable part of who they are. Beyond grades, Phillip embraced being a high achiever because he said his grandmother instilled it within him as a young boy in Africa and his father continued those teachings once he began his schooling in America. James also said academics was a key characteristic of his personalized identity. He described his achiever identity as not being a separate part of his identity, but rather a vehicle to protect other aspects of his identity. He explained, "The high standard of achieving in our family is pretty high because we're trying to break through the stereotypical… what is

defined to be a Black person, or stereotypical idea of Black people." To James, being seen as a high achiever would be advantageous in how he's seen as a Black person in school and society.

Academics as a utility. A closely related subtheme to academics as a form of identity, is academics as a utility. Although some participants did not mention that the high achiever status or academics in general were important aspects to the identity, many did discuss the usefulness of academics by seeing academic success as a means to a greater end. Some adopted this concept through thought, reflection, observation, and experience while others were explicitly taught by guardians and caring teachers that high achievement was a precursor to societal success. Phillip asserted, "the way I was taught when I was young was to value education and to make sure I could do the best I could in school because that was the only way you can improve yourself in the community and be helpful to other people.

Similarly, other participants also saw academics as a way to achieve upward mobility in American society. John and Peter looked at this concept of academics as a utility to reach short term goals and to receive incentives such as discounts on car insurance for the family, staying eligible for sports and extracurricular activities, and as a "potential stepping stone" to college. Other participants, however, looked at the long-term utility of being academically successful while in high school. Levi provided an example in very direct terms. "As and Bs to some [people] are just letters. But to me it's my way to college and beyond." John had a similar belief. "My parents, they both push me to have good grades in school because they know that it's important to have a good education…I know that I'm not just here [school] just to be here. Just to show up. I know it's going to translate to something in my life." Thomas credited his father for instilling this same value into him. "My dad always told me throughout my life that education is probably one of the most important things you can have in life. It opens up a bigger scheme

towards the things you're able to do." Finally, Jimmy viewed academics as an avenue to

increase his future earning potential because the college degree he hopes to receive one day will

place him in position to be more marketable person in his community and in the work force.

     Academic discrepancies. Along with eleven participants came eleven unique

personalities. The first two subthemes, *academics as identity* and *academics as a utility*, were not

common subthemes among all participants. Therefore, the subtheme, *academic discrepancies*,

was developed to negotiate participants' divergent thoughts and experiences regarding academics

in their predominately White high schools. Discrepancy is used in two ways in this section: (1)

Discrepant or contrasting statements made by participants regarding the same topics, and (2)

Participants' beliefs regarding the discrepant ways in which education in general and educators

in particular add to or detract from how they make meaning of their experiences in their

predominately White schools.

     Discrepancy: Academics as a form of identity. As previously mentioned in this section,

some participants saw education as an important part of their personal identity. In contrast, there

were others who embraced academic success as a means to achieve personal success, but did not

see it as an important part of their identity. Jude struggled to find a specific stance regarding his

feelings and thoughts about education in general and his status as a high achiever in

particular. He made it clear that his academic success did not define him as a person, but he also

shared other participants' views about the necessity of academics to be successful in society. He

saw his academics as a vehicle to assist him in what he really wanted to do in life. In that sense,

he felt that academics "defined [him]" because without them he could not be who he ultimately

wanted to be.

     Bartel shared Jude's concern about school being a necessary yet frustrating process.

> I could say one frustration would be school that's for sure. (grunts… uuughghh). Like I had to realize that this is just… everyone just has to go through it and everyone… this is just where I'm at in life and high school is not forever… I just I don't know. I want more than just school to be my reality. Someone can be smart academically, but intelligently, they can still not know who they are. They can be doing book work to be doing book work. And it's sad but if you want scholarships and you want to go to college you have to be academically successful…But I feel like there's more than just academic success. For me, that's knowing who I am.

From Bartel's perspective, academic success is a means to an end but it is also seen as a barrier. Bartel is the embodiment of Gayles's (2005) idea of academic distancing and a reflection of Cokely's (2011) thoughts on academic disidentification. Whether he is doing well, or not, his academics do not ultimately define or reflect who he is as an individual. Furthermore, Bartel exclaimed that the purpose of school is meant to help students make strides in the area of responsibility. He noted a key discrepancy in the statement when he analyzed the structure of the schooling process.

> My personal finance teacher said it best. He said [educators] just want to see how responsible you are. I mean that's a good way to put it, but it doesn't seem to be responsible for you to waste your time on something like [the daily grind of school] when you can be doing other things and achieving more things in life that can better your life and the people around you."

Discrepancy: Race doesn't matter in academics, but it does. Another discrepancy found among participants was their belief of whether or not race impacts students' academic experience in their schools. The differences were not only between schools but also among students within

the same schools. Some participants seemed to explain almost divergent thoughts regarding race in society and the way race influences academic experiences in their predominately White schools. The thoughts and experiences addressed by the participants affirm what researchers describe as racializing and de-racializing achievement (Carter-Andrews, 2009; Gayles, 2005). Although most participants stated that racism is a prevalent aspect of American society, when asked the specific question "How, if at all, do you think race impacts your academic experiences in school?," most participants answered that race does not impact their academic experiences. Their statements were grounded in the idea that everyone has the same opportunity for academic success in their schools (Peter, Jimmy, Jude, Bartel, James). Although participants explicitly stated that race did not impact their academic outcomes in their predominately White schools, they gave examples of how their social experiences were impacted within the academic setting but did not ultimately influence their academic well-being or achievement outcomes. To them, academic experiences such as what classes they choose to take and how they are treated in those classes by peers or teachers are social in nature which make the experience race loaded. Yet, in terms of achieving high grades their academic experience becomes race neutral because everyone is presented with the same opportunities.

Some participants also believed personal responsibility outweighs perceived structural oppression when it comes to academic outcomes. However, three of the five participants who adopted this idea were those who were analyzed as having low levels of racial centrality (Andrew, Jimmy, and Levi), while the other two, James and Peter, were outliers in this category. These five participants discussed personal responsibility as not allowing race to impact one's education. Andrew expressed that "Every student at Locke High School has the same opportunity as everyone else. It's just the matter of them taking that opportunity… It's just a

matter of breaking the stereotype and taking the opportunity instead of letting it slip out of our

hands." James, who also attended Locke, attributed the *race does not matter in academics*

ideology to the diversity of the school and cultural proficiency of the teachers.

> Our school is a diverse school. You can look around and it's a rainbow of races and the
>
> teachers are very diverse and it's not like you're going to have all White female teachers.
>
> No, you have Black teachers, male teachers, Hispanic teachers, Asian teachers, teachers
>
> from all different walks of life with all different backgrounds and understand the levels of
>
> struggling to achieve educational excellence.

Peter and Levi, both sophomore's at DuBois, shared the same sentiment as James, praising their

teachers for being focused on the academic well-being of all students regardless of race and

stating that it is the responsibility of the student to achieve at high levels. The concept of

academic success being race loaded and race neutral is continued in the next subsection

regarding the discrepant belief that academic success is reserved for white people.

> ***Discrepancy: Academic success is reserved for White people.*** Although some

participants believed race had no bearing on academic success many had a general belief that

academic success seemed to be reserved for White students in their schools. They described what

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) deemed to be the illusion that intellect and academic success is

property reserved for Whites. Participants views on being defined as "acting White" because

they maintain high grades and take advanced courses serve as examples of their belief that race

does not impact academic experiences. For example, Bartel discusses Black males' decisions to

not enroll AP courses because they don't feel like they belong there. "People aren't taking that

opportunity just because they're like, this isn't what Black people are supposed to do. Like it's

this whole idea that makes it feel like we aren't good enough when we are. People just don't understand."

Zeke expanded on this idea of by stating, I just feel like that's kinda in a sense stupid because we're thinking that only White people are the only people that can do well. This "prove them wrong" attitude, was adopted by Peter in his quest to tackle the concern Zeke raised. He said, "In some [AP and honors] classes I'm like one of the only Black kids in there. I'm thinking like...sorta like, maybe like, Black people don't want to take this class. Maybe they don't belong in that class and that kinda makes me want to work harder sorta like so I prove that like all Black…some Black…like Black people can think. They can just do the same classes as anybody else."

The participants' statements regarding enrollment in AP classes can be classified as an academic or social experience. However, because AP courses are designed to expose students to the rigorous nature of college level work and are said to raise chances of college attendance and matriculation, an internalization of the thought that AP is not for Black males widens the opportunity gap and relegates Black males to lower level courses. Because the research suggests taking AP courses increases the likelihood of college matriculation (Equal Opportunity Schools, 2012), this internalized thought and subsequent opportunity gap has immediate and long-term ramifications. These include exposure to more in depth and rigorous understanding of global citizenship, an absence in the boosted likelihood of college matriculation by taking advanced courses in high school, and ultimately denial of access to future jobs that promote economic stability in adulthood.

Discrepancy: Teacher low expectations for Black males. Another inconsistent finding was the role of teachers and the level of support Black males receive from teachers en route to

academic success. Earlier in this section students praised their teachers for their level of support,

understanding, and willingness to help. However, there are also participants who felt the opposite

from their teachers. They explained that they could sense the low expectations placed on Black

males. John, Zeke, Bartel, and Jimmy stated that oftentimes teachers are not surprised when

Black males are struggling because, according to Bartel, they feel "Black kids are supposed to

struggle. That's how it's supposed to be." Bartel's thoughts of teachers' low expectations for

Black males were affirmed by Zeke's story of the teacher who told him he'll never be a doctor,

as well as the following statement from John.

> I think [White teachers] think of me as like, an athlete that doesn't work hard for stuff.
>
> That doesn't, uhhh, doesn't really care about school because I've had people…they've
>
> seen my grades and they're look. Oh that's'…I didn't expect that. I mean like I'm not
>
> offended by it. I just don't think people should be thinking that. And then like, this is just
>
> the same as you having good grades, so I dent get why I should be held to different
>
> expectations.

Andrew and Jude discussed the trail period that Black students go through to prove that they are

worthy enough to be in advanced courses. Some teachers make verbal comments to show their

surprise while others show it through their actions.

The concept of discrepancy with regard to teachers' low expectations is not reserved only

in the sense that participants' answers varied, but also that the participants felt that the act of not

making Black students feel welcome in advanced level courses and having low expectations

were academically discrepant themselves if the goal of education is achievement at high levels

for ALL. They trust teachers with their educational well-being and if educators have biased

thoughts about their abilities, they face an unnecessary hurdle in attaining academic success and social stability in the school setting.

The Importance of Being Seen, The Value in Being Heard.

        When participants were asked why they participated in the study and/or what advice would they give to educators about how they could best serve Black males in general or high achieving Black males specifically, nine participants alluded to one of two thoughts (and sometimes both). They 1) believed Black males are often overlooked in predominately white schools and should be recognized more often (Bartel, Levi, Peter, Zeke, Jude, John), or 2) they wanted their voices to be heard regarding their own experiences as Black males in predominately white schools (Peter, Andrew, Zeke, James, Jimmy). Interestingly, having an intentional focus on changing current narratives about Black males throughout the study ameliorated the lens through which I listened to the participants. In my first analysis of participant interview transcripts the subthemes *voiceless* and *invisible* came to mind. However, when viewed through an ameliorated lens I gathered that the participants spoke more from a place of empowerment and expectancy rather than deficiency. Simply changing the lens took their experience from one of dejection and powerlessness, to one of empowerment. *Invisibility* became *the importance of being seen* and *voiceless* became, *claiming and sharing my voice: the value in being heard*. Black males were not missing out on the world because of society's problem of seeing them as problematic, the world had been missing out on them.

        The importance of being seen. Many authors in the literature review discussed the concept of invisibility. Participants also discussed the lack of acknowledgement they feel in school. The desire to be seen and acknowledged was salient throughout the study. It was most notable when participants were asked, "What advice would you give to educators regarding how

to best serve Black males in general, and high achieving Black males specifically?" Zeke framed the theme well through his example of "Bring Your Parent to School Day" an annual event at DuBois. He described an interaction between his teacher and mother. His mother asked how he was doing in class and his teacher could not tell her anything about him personally or academically even though he had been a student in her class for three months by the time of the exchange. In reflection he explained in his interview,

> I'm not doing bad in the class…Telling a kid that they aren't memorable enough or important enough for you to just remember anything about them [scoffs]. Or that struck me as odd and different because of the fact that what is it that can make me not be memorable? Why can't you want to learn more about me? And it doesn't mean you have to know every aspect of my life, but…any teacher and any person, if you have them in class you should be able to answer how are they're doing, based on the fact that you *see* [emphasis added] them every other day.

Zeke's frustration stems from the age old issue that Ellison (1952) wrote about in *Invisible Man*. "I am not a spook, I am merely invisible because others refuse to see me. Zeke explained that his teacher saw him every other day (because they are on an alternating Black schedule), but she knew nothing about him. He personalized it and made it about an issue with himself by stating that he's not memorable, when in essence, the issue was the teacher's inability or lack of effort to connect with him. She had not *seen* him since he had been in her class. He had only existed in the course and occupied a seat in the classroom up to that point.

In continuing the theme of acknowledgement, Levi gave a very humbling statement regarding recognition in terms of high achieving Black males as well as how to encourage other Black males to be high achieving as well. He said,

> We [participants in the study] are academically excellent in a predominately white
>
> school, but then again, we were fine before you noticed us. If you kept it the same or if
>
> you tried to strive for other Black males to be excellent…to be the high achieving Black
>
> males, then in my thought, you would find that more people would want to be more
>
> academically correct. But then again, we were already doing good… We just now found
>
> out that you're noticing us.

Levi made an excellent point. The absence of recognition of success is not equivalent to the non-existence of success. He vacillates between the necessity of acknowledging high achieving Black males while encouraging them to be successful, and the acknowledgement being meaningless to some because they were already successful without it. However, he goes on to say,

> Like you [the researcher] did with me, keep an eye on those who are doing good. But
>
> acknowledge it in the open...Because if they are doing good and getting good grades
>
> they're going to feel good about themselves. And they find out you're paying attention, to
>
> them but they did even know it. They'll understand that 'I gotta keep doing good. I want
>
> to keep getting recognized.'

Although actual recognition of his high achiever status was not more important than the actual attainment of the status, Levi realized that it can be a motivator for others. This sentiment was echoed in comments by John as he personalized the idea of acknowledgement for himself. He stated, "[participating in this study] is letting me know that I'm doing what I'm doing right and that I should keep doing it…It's like a reward. It's like to let you know that what you're doing isn't just looked past." Taking one additional step, Bartel described the importance of acknowledgement not only as a way to make someone feel good and want to continue doing well, but as a way to build self-worth. "Make them feel like they're worthy and they matter and

even if they don't care like, try to get them to care…Just let them know that they're being

noticed and they're not invisible."

Although the participants described various reasons for their academic success, how

they've attained it, and what it means to them, one constant found in their responses was the idea

of HABMs being acknowledged. Whether it was them striving to prove something to themselves

to acknowledge their personal power, to prove something to others and being acknowledged for

their determination, or simply to exert themselves as a human being and being acknowledged for

who they are and what they're worth rather than being categorized by other people's

preconceived generalities.

The value in being heard. The dissertation title, *Can you hear me now?: The voices of*

high achieving males emerge in predominately white high schools, suggests that providing

participants the platform to be heard was central to the study. Recalling the final question of his

interview, Peter smiled when asked "why did you choose to participate in this study." With a

sense of confidence he said, "You know what, I just wanted to give my input because I feel like I

had a lot of things I wanted to say, but I never got the opportunity and you gave it to me so that's

what I wanted to do." Similarly, Bartel had ideas he wanted to discuss and knew his unique

perspective would be needed. He asserted, "I felt like I had to speak my voice up, because I

know nobody else thinks like me at least. I wanted the world to hear a little bit of Bartel." These

two participants used the study as a platform to talk about their unique experiences that have

oftentimes been generalized or minimalized.

In the same spirit, Zeke wanted to be heard because he felt he had a lot to share on a topic

about his own experiences. He said,

> This is a topic that really interests me and it's probably one of the biggest things that affects me in my life. I've always been someone who's been open to discuss anything that goes on with Black males because it is something that affects me. These people are going to be able to hear something that they don't necessarily hear every day. And it's something that they can hear from me. Even though they don't know it's me, they get to hear my voice and a voice of somebody who experiences this every day.

Drawing from his experience of being a young Black male, Zeke felt confident that the world needed to hear from him. His experiences are his own, and his firsthand knowledge is important to consider when researchers, policy makers, and society in its various arenas discuss "the Black male crisis," in terms of a problem with Black males rather than a problem with the way society has constructed and narrated the Black male experience in America.

Zeke, James, and Jimmy shared important thoughts about the use of voice to change society. When asked why he participated in the study, James stated, "It's your voice, and with having your voice it helps impact a social change." James asserted, "We need a voice, and if I can put my input out there then we're one step closer to a little bit of change." Similarly, Zeke made a very personal statement about what he hoped came from the research as his interview came to a close. Zeke's following quote furthers James' and Jimmy's line of thinking regarding the use of voice to inspire change in society.

> I would hope that whatever people find from this interview and from anything that goes on with your research, I would hope that people would not take this a just a way for you to get your doctorate, but as a way for people to understand how things need to be changed within society. Because I don't want it to be just 'okay, Mr. Johnson now has his doctorate,' I want it to be, 'okay, he got his doctorate while doing something that is

important.' It's still something that needs to be addressed, it shouldn't just be okay well

he did this study and now we see what happens and we see how people are being

affected. But people need to use it to create a change within the world.

Zeke's impassioned statement was spoken idealistically, but with a sense of expectancy. He was

not specific about the changes that should be made but his small gems of wisdom throughout his

interview we're noted.

It Starts with Me, but I'm Not Alone

A final theme that emerged from the study was "It starts with me, but I'm not alone."

Peter explained:

I think it [the drive and ability to do well] has to come from within yourself and it also

comes from home. If you don't have a good support system, it's gonna be hard. You

gotta believe in yourself…You're the only person who can believe in yourself as much as

you want to and if you can't do that then it's basically not gonna be there. You're going

to feel empty.

Peter's quote is the quintessence of what participants in this study believed about what it takes to

achieve success—effort and support. Noguera (2008) also paired these factors together and

deemed them to be important to the positive academic outcomes of Black boys. This theme

addresses the level of personal responsibility participants suggested was important to their

academic and social success and the value in recognizing that the road to success is never a solo

journey. Instead, having a strong network of support aided in their personal development as well

as their academic success. Again, Peter's quote and corresponding ideas from other participants

suggest a formula that encapsulates the idea that personal responsibility plus positive support

equals success in whatever form one defines it.

Self-determination and grit. Self-determination is one's ability to choose his own path, his own destiny, and control his own life through personal motivation and volition (Hui & Sang, 2012). The term is most often used in reference to the self-determination or sovereignty of countries, however, the idea is translatable to the schooling and identity development processes of young Black males. Zeke explained self-determination well when he stated,

> "Sometimes you can't control how like you're going to be perceived by other people, but you can do your best to change yourself. I can't control what [my teachers] think or what [they're] going to do, but my focus was more on what can I change within myself so I can do better… don't let somebody define who you are."

Again, referring back to his example of the teacher who told him he would not be a doctor, Zeke stated the following.

> Once I am able to succeed in what I want that will change the fact that he can't tell me that I can't do it because he doesn't control what I want to do. If I put in the work I can do it. And if I do what I have to do, I can do it. And even though I don't let that define me…comments like that and even experiences in other things have forced me to be like, I have to define myself. I have to look at myself differently or else I'm not going to get anything done.

Zeke exuded a strong belief in the idea of taking control over his own destiny by defining himself, rejecting the negative perceptions of others, and rebuking any discouraging or disparaging comments from someone who is not an ally in his quest for success. He does so by being focused and goal-oriented. "I'm like a goal setting person. So anytime I want to do something I set a goal and I push towards it. And if I have bumps in the road, I'm going to figure out how to still end up at my goal."

While Zeke shared in depth about self-determination, other participants shared

extensively about a parallel idea, *grit*, a term coined by Carol Dweck. In her book, *Mindset: The*

New Psychology of Success (2007), Dweck discussed the idea of finding success through hard

work. She asserted that teachers as well as students had to have a growth mindset rather than a

fixed mindset in terms of the malleability of one's academic potential. Ultimately, she urges that

progress can be made through hard work and determination to persevere through academic

struggle or to achieve higher levels of academic success. In most cases participants spoke about

the concept of grit when asked what has set them apart from the normative statistic that suggests

Black males generally underperform academically. Peter explained:

> I just feel like I have more grit than people. Like I want something more out of this than
>
> most people. And I just want to be successful. I don't want to just go to college…I want
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> to go to college and get a good job. And be stable financially, and have my own stuff. To
>
> be successful on my own and not depend on anyone else."

Jude used similar verbiage and referenced the overarching ideas expressed in Dweck's research

when he stated, "Maybe some students advocate more than others. And maybe these don't really

get much done and don't do the work. That's a mindset." Peter affirmed and strengthened Jude's

statement by saying "You can have all the drive in the world and you can say you want to do

something, but if you don't have gas to fuel that drive, it's just not gonna happen. It's just not

gonna be there." Peter and Jude not only discussed their own personal drive but also suggested

the lack of drive and personal effort exerted by some of their Black male peers oftentimes led to

a lack of academic success despite being intrinsically well-intentioned.

Peter, Jude and Zeke discussed self-determination and grit from a platform of personal

success. Bartel also agreed grit is a necessary component to success. He described it as a daily

grind. However, it should be referenced that Bartel's strong academic disidentificaiton (Cokely,

2011) led him to speak about success differently than other participants. Rather than academics,

he discussed what made him feel personally successful and the role that grit played in that

process. "Success is doing it every day and loving what you're doing every day. Right now my

success is working out. That's my grit, that's my grind. And I've never had so much passion

wrapped around something." Bartel saw himself as successful not because he has high grades,

but because he's putting in hard work to achieve something that is important to him. His drive

made him feel successful in the process because he continues to grow and make progress.

Although it was not his primary focus, Bartel spoke briefly about grit from an academic

standpoint. He said seeing Black males in AP classes shows that they have grit because he knows

it is a struggle for them socially because of the low number of Black males who enroll in those

courses. Furthermore, he explained that it can be a struggle academically if they are not prepared

for the rigorous nature of the course. However, he was proud of Black males who took AP

classes because they show an intense level of grit by first signing up for the courses and second,

remaining in them.

   Balance and priorities. Balance was a concept participants addressed with respect to

success "starting with them." Having a healthy balance of a strong academic life and a

meaningful social life was a precursor to what participants determined it meant to be successful.

John stated, "Outside of school, [success] is like being responsible, holding myself accountable

to the things that I do and think how they affect other people."

Zeke spoke passionately about the importance of extracurricular activities to a successful high

school experience. He explained that grades alone do not make a person successful because

social interaction is an equally important aspect in one's success.

To me a high achiever would be that you focus on school. Like you focus on academics,

you focus on doing well, but that's not the only aspect of your life. I know a lot of people

on the other side who all they do is school. That's all they know. They go to school, they

go home, they have tutors all the time and they have no social interaction. And they leave

high school and they aren't ready for the real world, because school is not just…school

should not just be the only part of your life.

Although Zeke stated there should be a good balance between academics and social life, he felt

that having the skill to prioritize is key in the process of discerning which is most important from

situation to situation.

My mom's rule is if you're not done with your work then you're not leaving the

house…So people need to understand that you're going to have to make sacrifices. I do

many activities outside of school, but I always told myself that means that I [may] have

to skip a meeting or skip an activity with my friends because I have to do some things I

can't miss. Like basketball for instance…I want to do as much as I can to help the team,

but at the same time, if it's impeding on me doing well in school… [shrugs his shoulders

and shakes his head]. I don't want to graduate with a D and be like oh yea, but you were

at the basketball game though. NO, THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO ME.   It's like,

okay I'm just sitting here like the team won, but am I winning in any other aspect?

Zeke's idea of "winning" is about balance—a thought shared by Bartel, Jude, James, Peter, and

Levi.

Support systems. The theme, *It starts with me but I'm not alone*, makes it evident that

participants feel responsible for their own social and academic success, but as the second part of

the theme, "but I'm not alone," suggests, they have strong support systems to help them through

the process. Their support systems consisted of a combination of parents, extended family, friends, and teachers. These supporters were not simply encouragers. They served as buffers for many of the participants as they developed strong racial and achiever identity self-conceptions despite structural and cultural barriers that did not always promote those strong identity indicators for Black males in schools.

Family. James described the tenacious nature of his mother—who is also assisted by many family members throughout the process— when it comes to her unrelenting support of his education.

> I have a mother that no matter what grade I get, it can always be better. And she's like 'have you done your homework?' before I start watching TV. 'Have you done your homework?' before I get on the phone…She makes sure I have all my ducks in a row before I start relaxing. And I have a father who does that, and a grandmother and a whole family that does that. No matter how old they are, they have no problem being on anybody's case, especially about their education

Jimmy, Thomas, Phillip, Peter, and Jude expressed similar level of support from their families. The high expectations and support role of family aided in developing their academic self-efficacy.

Levi and Zeke spoke about the support or their families from a not only a stance of academic success but also of social identification. Levi explained that his family supported each of his siblings so they could do well academically and they expected nothing less. He was also encouraged to explore activities and experiences that he described to be outside the realm of what is considered "*normal*" for Black people. Encouraging him to cross what could be seen as racial boundaries promoted a strong propensity for an internalized racial identity that was

unbounded by typical notions of what is or is not culturally acceptable for Black males. Similarly, Zeke used his cultural background to explain the support he felt from his family regarding his academic success as well as the social support they provide to make him self-aware and proud of who he is as a Black male.

>I think the biggest thing with family is that you know they're the ones who see you every day, they're the ones that you live with, that you can tell your problems. I have a close-knit family... So, that kinda just sticks into the idea that family is like the big thing in my house and even like in my culture. In African culture family is like an important thing.

Family was a motif throughout Zeke's interview. His family did not only motivate him academically, they gave him strategies to recognize racial bias and to circumvent racial stress as a Black male in a predominately White society. They also helped him navigate being a first generation American with African parents and encouraged him to be cognizant of how that may impact his relationships with other Black people, his peers, and his teachers in a predominately White school district.

Educators. Although students discussed teacher low expectations of Black males academically as a symptom of greater society's low expectations and stereotyping of Black males in general, many participants referenced the support they felt from teachers in their own personal academic success. For example, Peter spoke highly of the faculty and staff at DuBois with respect to providing academic support and aiding in his identity development.

>We have a great staff and administration. We have kind janitors….It's a good school and they make me feel like I can be myself. In middle school I couldn't be myself. DuBois has helped me step outside my box and I just feel more comfortable. I feel like nobody

else, but myself…I was trying to find my identity and my purpose because I was just

going to school and I was trying to fit in so much.

He followed up by stating, "In 8th grade I wasn't hanging around the right crowd. My teachers

saw that and pulled me aside and told me…hey you're smart. You need to hang around people

that have the same goals as you." Peter suggested that the positive attention, specific praise, and

candid directives to find people who had positive influences on him made a difference in his

academic and social well-being during his transition from middle school to high school.

Bartel and Jimmy saw the importance of having support from home being followed up by

support at school from teachers. They both a praised the teachers at Locke High School for their

efforts to help students be successful socially and academically. Jimmy stated, "The teachers,

they see me doing good in their classes and they expect like good from me. So if I get a bad

score on a test they're like ohhh what happened. And my family it's like 'you're doing good,

keep up the good work, don't fall behind on your grades.'"

Bartel echoed this sentiment when he stated, "Motivation externally from like my teachers and

my parents especially [is important]. My parents set the bar really high and expect me to do well.

And then my teachers realize that I'm trying and then like motivate me to do better than the

average student in my honors and AP classes. And push me harder."

The sense of personal responsibility and the high levels of support with respect to

academic success and positive identity development were key factors in how participants made

meaning of their social and academic experiences in their PWHSs.

Research Questions Answered

Research Question One

The first question for the this research study was "How do high achieving Black males make meaning of their social and academic experiences in predominately White high schools?" The research question was in essence comprised of two parts: 1) How do HABMs make meaning of their social experiences?, and 2) How do HABMs make meaning for their academic experiences in predominately White high schools? Although the question was not asked to participants directly, a holistic understanding of their social and academic experiences was developed by analyzing answers to questions across each of their interviews. In short, the answer to the research question is high achieving Black males in this case study make meaning of their social and academic experiences in predominately White high schools in both similar and contrasting ways. Despite their similar experiences and contrasting ideas about social and academic experiences at times, ultimately, participants explained that academic and social experiences in their PWHSs are individualized and personal to every HABM. These experience are influenced by how they were socialized, their racial centrality, personal experiences, and personal self-determination.

Academic experiences. How HABMs in this case study make meaning of their academic experiences in predominately White high schools is outlined in the section titled *Academics: Identity, utility, and discrepancy.* As suggested by the subsection's title, high achieving Black males in this study viewed academics in their own unique ways and believed academic achievement served varying purposes. The value each participant placed on academics was determined by his own conception of personal success currently and what he envisioned it to be in the future.

Participants use academics to help define their personal identities. However the extent to which they do is dependent on the personal value they place on academics (whether as a contributing factor or non-factor in their personal conception of who they are as individuals). Next, the data suggest participants viewed academics as a utility that has meaning to them beyond their time spent in school.

A third finding with respect to the academic experiences of the participants was the divergent and contrasting nature of their views regarding the usefulness of academics, the role of education, and their views of educators' roles in adding to or detracting from their personal experiences in PWHSs.

The final way in which the participants made meaning of their academic experiences was their belief that education is personal and academic success is dependent on one's perseverance and pursuit of opportunities presented to him regardless of peer, teacher, and societal perception.

Social experiences: Swimming against social currents. Participants narrated stories about their social experiences in predominately White high schools by addressing their interaction with peers and educators as well as their individual perceptions and worldviews. When making meaning of their own experiences, participants at times took the social liberty and racial authority to address the general experience of Black males in their schools. For the sake of concisely organizing findings regarding how participants make meaning of their social experiences in predominately White schools, findings suggest that participants would metaphorically define their social experiences in predominately White high schools as swimming against strong social "currents." Swimming against the current has a dual implication when used as a metaphor for American society and the social experiences of Black males in predominately White high schools. The first suggests that these participants are going against societal norms.

The second implication acknowledges the struggle or added physical, emotional, and psychological difficulty one experiences when fighting against current social realities rather than perpetuating them. The participants found themselves swimming against (a) current societal issues that are socially divisive such as racism, injustice, and stereotyping; (b) attempts to reverse current social interactions between the races being met with both implicit and explicit resistance; and (c) social practices or experiences in schools that perpetuate the current status and perception of academic success as being White property.

Social current: Racism and stereotype threat as barriers. An attempt to understand participants' social experiences in school required an understanding of their view of the world outside their respective school buildings. As previously mentioned, each participant acknowledged that racism was a prevalent aspect of American society. Although their view of its influence, level of impact on upward mobility, or its salience in their experience differed at times they each referenced racial discord in American society and what some researchers have called the caste-like experience of minorities in America (Ogbu, 1998). Despite the presence of racism outside the school, none of the participants referenced overt and explicit racism being prevalent within their schools.

Participants recognized that the absence of overt racism in their schools did not suggest the schools have been eradicated of individual bias. As mentioned in the subsection titled, Stereotypes: The un(believable) lies we're told, the participants spoke at length about stereotyping. They suggested that the stereotypes are constructed and perpetuated through processes of socialization (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 2010), which led to their public racial regard for Black people to be generally negative. The notion that society generally views their race negatively influenced their social interactions in school. The impact of these stereotypes on

the participants was made manifest in the ways they view themselves, their desired way of being

viewed by others, and how they view their peers. They were hyperaware of the stereotypes that

existed about Black males and many of the participants were intentional in their actions to avoid

falling into the stereotypical categories.

Participants found it difficult to reconcile their frustration with the stereotypes that

existed about them and their observation of other Black males who cloaked themselves in the

very linens of those stereotypical ideas. This resulted in a heightened desire to thwart and

ameliorate the pejorative views greater society have of the Black race in general and Black males

specifically through their actions and interactions in school. It became part of their experience to

not be categorized. Their efforts to distance themselves from stereotypical notions of Black male

identity could not be attributed to a deliberate attempt to create oppositional identities (Fordham

& Ogbu, 1989; Noguera, 2010). Rather than denying commonly accepted and personally adopted

values of Black culture, they were instead actively trying to shed the stereotypical values

imposed on Black males that some of their other Black male peers have come to embrace. The

participants felt that they were swimming against the current by rejecting stereotypical notions of

Black male identity. However, they recognized the stereotypes are deeply engrained in

American society. Their battle to dispel these stereotypes had implications for their social well-

being inside and outside of school including, but not limited to, interactions with peers of the

same and different races, their interactions with their teachers, and their teachers' perceptions of

them.

   Social current: Attempts to reverse racial division. Despite the continued existence of

racism in America and stereotypical notions of Black male identity being ubiquitous— including

within schools— findings revealed that high achieving males in both Locke and DuBois

generally felt that race relations in their schools were positive but fractured and marred by

racial/cultural ignorance or misunderstandings. The participants discussed interracial interactions

from a platform of "understanding" race and individual perspective. Thus, the concept of

"misunderstanding" became a word that denoted ideas of inclusion and notions of division with

respect to HABMs social experiences in both Locke and DuBois. Subsequently, this concept

unintentionally framed the lines of racial interaction for each participant. Participants' circle of

friends differed in composition across and within both high schools. Zeke and John had mostly

Black friends. Peter, James, Jimmy, Philip, and Bartel had diverse friend groups. Thomas,

Andrew, Levi, and Jude had friend groups that were all or majority White. The various

compositions of friends yielded varying social experiences for each group of participants.

John, Bartel, Thomas, and Zeke felt that their White peers did not understand their

experience of being Black. Although they strived to have positive relationships, their peers' lack

of understanding—or what these four participants would consider to be social and cultural norms

of Black people—generally led to surface level friendships with non-Black peers. Again, they

furthered the "swimming against the current" metaphor as their desire to bridge existing gaps in

race relations was often an arduous task because their peers of different races lacked the

knowledge, and at times the desire, necessary to understand their racial experiences. Thomas had

an especially interesting experience in his attempts to bridge gaps that instead became crevices

filled with particiles of misunderstanding. Unlike John, Bartel, and Zeke, most of Thomas'

friends were White. He described them as genuine people and potentially good friends, but

seemingly dismissive of his identity as a Black person. Thomas provided one example regarding

his White friends' use of the N-word. He said that his White friends use the N-word, and he

allows them to unless he is frustrated. He felt that allowing them to use the word helps to further

race relations because it takes away the word's power. However, he felt that their lack of regard

for its history and subsequent lack of respect for its impact on him leads to mixed emotions about

the use of the word and its role in further dividing or connecting people of all races in his

generation.

Jude, Levi, Jimmy, and Andrew described experiences of feeling misunderstood as well.

However, their level of disconnectedness was not from peers of different races. Instead, they felt

disconnected at times from same race peers. They explained that they had no Black friends

because they were involved in activities that many other Black students were not (band, soccer,

theater, baseball, and wrestling). Levi, Jimmy, and Andrew explained that this led to feelings of

disconnectedness from their same race peers because they did not understand them. Andrew

went as far as to explain that his Blackness was in question by his Black peers. He stated, "I

would say that because I hang out with White people the Black people don't really see me as

Black person anymore." Additionally, these participants expressed that they did not understand

why many Black males acted in stereotypical ways. Jude was an outlier when categorizing this

group because of the high level of racial consciousness and racial centrality he exhibited as

measured by his responses during his interview. He did not have Black male friends. However, it

was not because they did not understand him or that he did not understand them, rather, he

attributed the make-up of his friend group to his extracurricular interests. These four participants

found themselves swimming against the social current because although there is no racial divide

in their circle of friends, they felt disconnected from and/or misunderstood by their same race

peers. They expressed that they felt an external pressure to perpetuate the racial divide, rather

than an urgency to bridge it. They perceived that although their mixed friend groups stemmed

more from social interests and hobbies rather than racial similarities, their choice of social group

led to outsiders of all races questioning their Blackness. Many of the participants explained that

their schools are part of the larger community and are therefore affected by societal ills.

Interestingly, however, the participants did not feel that they were personally enveloped by,

subjected to, or operating within the midst of racism in their schools. Nevertheless, they

described what can be called an unspoken pressure to acknowledge and perpetuate bias and

racial division in schools.

       Social current: Schooling practices and education as White property. At times,

participants' social experiences overlapped with what was defined as an academic experience.

The courses in which students were enrolled was, on first read, classified as an academic

experience during the coding process. However, participants' reasons for taking certain courses,

as well as social experiences with peers and teachers within those courses necessitated that it

evolve from being seen purely as an academic experience to one that was also social. For

example, participants felt the struggle of swimming against the current when taking AP courses.

Zeke at Dubois, and Bartel a student at Locke each explained that participation in AP courses is

encouraged by counselors and administrators in their buildings. However, the feelings of

otherness they as Black males felt when enrolled in their courses led to social discomfort. They

describe environments that did not feel welcoming and they firmly believed that their

contributions to class discussions were disproportionately dissected by their peers in comparison

to the contributions of their White counterparts. They also believed they were accepted with

apprehensions by teachers and peers in their higher level courses. The feeling of not belonging in

the course or the perception that they would struggle was expressed by John, Zeke, and Peter at

DuBois and Bartel, Jude, and Jimmy at Locke. Additionally, participants described what

educators often call "the teacher lottery." They explained that some of their teachers seemed to

be intentional about making the curriculum "relatable" to them, while others seemed to purposely omit topics surrounding Black culture. A lack of cultural proficiency and culturally relevant pedagogy, served as barriers to participants' social and academic well-being in both schools. The expectation that they would struggle, the feeling that they had to prove that they belonged in advanced courses, and the feeling of disconnectedness to the course material were problematic experiences.

Research Question Two

The second research question for this case study of HABMs in PWHSs was "How do high achieving Black males define their authentic self, and in what way(s), if at all, does their attendance in PWHS contribute to the development of their authentic self? In the world of literary analysis, the term cultural authenticity is defined as an analysis of the extent to which a book reflects the worldview or beliefs and values and depicts the accurate details of everyday life and language for a specific cultural group. Because the participants are asked to provide a first account narrative of their experiences I asked them to explain to me their definition of authentic, how they would describe their authentic identity, and their process of developing what they deem to be their authentic self. What resulted was a myriad of answers that ranged from very specific to undefined and unanswered.

Throughout the study I was able to hear participants' perspectives regarding their personal identity. They described their membership in Black race and other identity groups to which they belong, their perception of how the world views them, personal traits and characteristics that define them, and a narration of how they form their personal identities and interact with the world as a result. Participants shared their stories regarding personal journeys, racism and

stereotyping in America, public and private racial regard, and the experience of attending a predominately White high school.

A major tenet of CRT in education is to honor the voice and lived experiences of individuals as they narrate their own stories. To better understand how participants narrate their personal stories, participants were asked the question, "How do you define your authentic self?" Some participants gave very straight forward answers to the question, while others used metaphors to make a very abstract idea more tangible and comprehensible. Although each individual defined their authentic self in slightly different ways, their responses formed a unique tapestry of similar ideas interwoven with common threads of personal experience. Upon analyzing each participants' responses, there were three characteristics that were present in each of their descriptions of their espoused authentic selves. They believed the nature of their authentic selves to be personalized, autonomous, and dynamic.

Personalized self: Adopted and individualized. Each participant utilized some form of the following terminology in their description of their authentic self: *real*, *original vs. copy*, and *individualized*. They described authentic as valuing a personalized experience and creating an individual self who is comfortable with the characteristics he has adopted and how he portrays his personal self to others. Andrew simply called this "not lying to yourself," while Peter called it "being original and true to yourself."

Authentic self: Autonomous. Many participants alluded to concepts of self-definition, personally adopted characteristics, and the rejection of fallacious identities imposed on them by peers and society. Dispelling stereotypes (Jude, Zeke, John, Andrew) and avoiding trends and institutional messages that are divergent from their personal views (Jimmy, Zeke, Bartel, Jude, Peter) were ways participants described the autonomous nature of their authenticity—choosing

to remain steadfast in their values and beliefs despite the messages and pressures they experience to do otherwise. The identities that mattered most to the participants were those that they deemed to be individualized and personally adopted. They valued self-determination over societal imposition.

    Authentic self: Dynamic. Each young man placed value on the multiple identity groups to which they belonged (i.e. race, class, sex, religion), they discussed the dynamic nature of personality and the role of critical analysis as they build on their personal belief systems, some addressed their keen sense of situational awareness, and finally Zeke and James discussed the importance of using a dynamic identity to navigate various social situations. With respect to identity groups, nine of the eleven participants referenced religion as an important aspect of their identity and three (Levi, Peter, and Jimmy) referenced notions of manhood, how those ideas developed, and the role it contributes in identity development when you're also Black and attending a White school. Regarding dynamic personalities, each individual participant listed personal characteristics that define their authentic self— intelligent, focused, driven, honest, trustworthy, open-minded, outspoken, confident, loving, passive, and selfless. Finally, Zeke, Peter, John, and Bartel discussed the dynamics of authenticity for personal survival to navigate social situations and to be upwardly mobile in society. In their own terms, they express the necessity to understand that one's authentic self is manifested differently in varying situations (social code switching).

    Each participant described their ideas of authenticity in their unique ways—some with more surety and authority than others. Some participants, such as Phillip, Peter, and Levi, struggled to find the words to describe their authentic self and felt like they had not spent much time thinking about that particular topic. Others, like Jude, Zeke, Bartel, James, and Jimmy acknowledged the

difficult nature of the question initially but were able to provide thorough responses soon after.

For example, James stated, "That's a really hard question to answer. I've been alive for 17 years,

almost 18 and that has been the hardest question I have been asked so far because self-

actualization is a lot harder than what it seems like." His younger brother Jimmy exclaimed, "I

don't talk a lot, not about [my authentic identity]…Every now and then, but usually I don't throw

this out there." However, both James and Jimmy were able to use metaphors of Mexican food

and paintings respectively, to explain the personalized and autonomous nature of the authentic

self. Jude, Zeke, Bartel and, John's explanations included the dynamic nature of authenticity and

the idea that one could exude multiple characteristics and personalities depending on situational

awareness.

In most cases, each participant was able to give a description of his authentic self when

asked the question specifically, yet the manifestation of how his attendance in a predominately

White high school contributed to the development of the authentic self-needed further analysis.

Ultimately, one's level of racial awareness and critical consciousness were important

contributors in how each participant defined his authentic self and in turn made meaning of his

school experience.

On the surface, participants were able to provide examples of how they adjust their

thoughts, actions, and viewpoints because of enrollment in a PWHS, therefore it can be argued

that enrollment in a PWHS contributes to the development of the authentic self. However, it is

difficult to attribute the PWHS as a direct cause for the development of the authentic self or if it

was another variable or a combination of factors beyond the scope of school enrollment.

Nevertheless, because CRT suggests the lived experiences and voice of the participant has

authentic and valuable merit, some, but not all participants in this case study suggest that

HAMBs enrollment in a PWHS plays a role in identity development and the manifestation of the

authentic self.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Implications

In this chapter I will reestablish the purpose for this case study of eleven high achieving

Black males who attend two predominately White high schools. While doing so, there will also

be a short review the methodology utilized throughout the study. Additionally, there will be a

restatement of the findings before I further discuss implications. Finally, the chapter will

conclude with recommendations for the field of education and thoughts regarding future research

based on the findings of this case study.

Background and Summary of Study

This study explored how high achieving Black males make meaning of their experiences in

predominately White high schools. Statistics suggest that America's public school system is

underserving Black male students nationally. Black males score disproportionately lower on

standardized tests when compared to their White male counterparts (Schott Foundation, 2012),

they receive disproportionately higher numbers of disciplinary referrals and school suspensions

(Ford, 2016; Skiba, 2011), they are underrepresented in advanced level honors and AP courses

(Schott Foundation, 2012, Skiba, 2011) and persistence to graduation is dismal when compared

to White males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012 table A-33-1). Although the

impetus for the study stemmed from a national problem the deeper concern was two-fold.

The first concern was that very few of the vast number of studies regarding Black male

underachievement took a critical approach to explaining the antecedents for the problem by (1)

accounting for existence of racism and (2) analyzing how certain forces—personal to the

research participants and/or institutional in practice—to provide additional layers of meaning to

the data. The second concern was that the disparate stories of Black male underachievement far

outweighed the counterstories of and reasons for Black male academic success. Additionally, too

few studies isolated the plight of Black male students with respect to achievement, without also

including or accounting for the Black male subjects' personal thoughts about the topic (Howard,

2014). Howard (2014) called for a "paradigm shift in how Black males are taught and discussed"

(19). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how high-achieving

Black male high school students personally make meaning of their social and academic

experiences in predominately White high schools (PWHS). By centralizing their experiences and

highlighting the use of their own collective and individual voices, the participants were able to

provide a counternarrative to the disparate stories of Black male underachievement and provide

context for how external and intrinsic forces, including racism, racial self-conception, and

personal identity contribute to their experiences in general and their experiences in PWHSs

specifically.

   While highlighting how high achieving Black males make meaning of their experience in

predominately White schools, I explored how those same HAMBs define their authentic selves,

and how, if in any way, their attendance in a PWHS impacted the development and/or expression

of their authentic selves. The following research questions framed the study:

1. How do high-achieving Black males make meaning of their social and academic
    experiences in predominately White high schools?

2. How do high-achieving Black males define their authentic self, and in what way(s), if
    any, does their attendance in PWHS specifically contribute to the development of their
    authentic self?

   Critical Race Theory in Education was the theoretical framework that undergirded the study.

Therefore, CRT in education will also serve as the foundation on which the discussion of the

findings, subsequent implications for the field of education, and recommendations will be built. Although the discussion of the findings will not be organized around the tenets of CRT, CRT in education serves as a backdrop for understanding the racialized nature of the public education system and subsequently the lens for my recommendations.

This case study was performed in Midwest Public Schools (MPS), a predominately White suburban district with comparable amounts of rural and urban influence. The 11 participants were high achieving males who identified as Black in their district's directory. Each male was a 10th-12th grade student and attended either DuBois College Preparatory Academy or Alain Locke High School. The requirement to determine "high achieving" was participants' attainment of at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average at the time of the study.

Each participant participated in a face-to-face, semi-structured interview that lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. The interview questions were structured to allow the participants to provide insight regarding their thoughts about race, race relations, personal identity development, views on social experiences in general, and social and academic experiences in a PWHS specifically.

Interview questions were developed with assumptions of CRT in education in mind and were also greatly influenced by aspects of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity-Teen (MIBI-T) (Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen, 2008). The MIBI-T measures teens' views of the centrality of their race to personal experience and racial regard—their thoughts about membership in the Black race. I transcribed each interview to find initial themes that emerged from each participant's responses. After coding individual interviews, I looked for patterns and outliers across interviews to develop overarching themes. I utilized member checking and follow-up interviews to confirm accuracy. Finally, I used axial coding (Creswell, 2009) to solidify the emergent themes and findings organized in the subsection to follow.

Major Findings

There were seven overarching themes that were found throughout the study of the experiences of the eleven High achieving Black males (HABMs) in this study. The themes were presented independently in Chapter Four to account for their individual importance, however, their interdependence helped to establish the major findings of the study. The major findings are organized by research question in this section for the purpose of clarity. The seven themes found throughout the study yielded **four major findings** when answering the study's two research question number one yielded three findings and question #2 yielded one finding. Each finding will be discussed independently in this section with an explanation of how it is either affirmed by or how it deviates from what was found in the research literature.

The first research question was, *How do high achieving Black males make meaning of their social and academic experiences in predominately White high schools (PWHSs)?* The question is comprised of two parts—social experiences and academic experiences. Therefore, the findings for each of these components for research question one are presented separately despite their codependent nature in understanding how HABMs make meaning of their experiences holistically.

Research Question One (Q1) Findings. The first part of research question one, how HABMs make meaning of their social experiences, yielded one finding that encompassed two subparts. The finding was best depicted metaphorically.

Q1-Finding #1: HABMs experiences in PWHSs could be described as "swimming against social currents". The sub components that explain this finding were the following:

A. Participants found it necessary to navigate racism, racial stress, and the implications of stereotype threat as each served as barriers to their identity development, identity expression, and social interactions with peers and teachers in their PWHSs.

B. Current practices that perpetuate the perception of academic success as being equated with White property are deeply embedded in the mindsets and attitudes of teachers and peers resulting in increased social pressure for HABMs.

Both subcomponents will be interwoven into one fluid discussion of "swimming against the current." I will use an excerpt from WEB DuBois's essay, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," to lay a foundation for discussing the social experience of Black males and to dissect the metaphor of swimming against social currents generally and in school settings specifically.

> *To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience,--peculiar even for one who has never been anything else…It dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. For the words I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head, --some way. With other Black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything White; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the Whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above. (DuBois, 1903)*

In the excerpt above from W.E.B DuBois's essay, "Of our Spiritual Strivings"—which is found in his famous anthology, *Souls of Black Folks* (1903)—the author spoke of a profound experience in understanding his identity as a Black male in America. The prelude to the experience however, is a captivating question that is often unasked but always alluded to through uncomfortable interaction and conversational subtleties—*how does it feel to be a problem?* In

the same essay DuBois described his encounter moment (Cross, 1971/1991) when he was intentionally and preemptively excluded from receiving a valentine card from a young White girl in his class. The minor, yet impactful event, was an enlightening moment for DuBois, as his reflection over the incident led him to recognize his existence of "otherness" as a young Black male. Although he was just an innocent child, he found himself to be different and cut off from a world that was reserved for White people. After his realization of being unjustly relegated to second class citizenship, DuBois described the stages he went through in his attempt to prove himself to… *himself* and others by being better than his White peers at anything he could—play, academics, fighting, etc. At some point in his youth he realized that simply beating his White peers at seemingly meaningless events were inconsequential on the greater scale of his life. They, his White peers, were gifted with privileges inaccessible to him.

Although Dubois was not specific in his opening paragraphs about the privileges from which he felt exempt, in further analysis of DuBoisian literature, one can ascertain that he was speaking of liberty, social and professional success, access, economic freedom, and the inalienable rights and justices assumed to be the inheritance of every American born citizen. DuBois decided that he would reverse the notion that these concepts, ideas, and civil liberties were reserved for Whites only. He would wrestle these "prizes" from them [his White counterparts] to claim as his own—to create a counternarrative of sorts. In his decided bout of self-determination, DuBois mentioned, however, that there were many other Black males who did not take the same route as he. Some began to accept the plight of otherness while others were stymied with anger at the feeling of helplessness to reverse their situation. In both cases, these Black males remained on the societal peripheral, rather than having a centralizing experience.

I outline and highlight DuBois's excerpt because many of the ideas outlined in the short passage paralleled the thoughts expressed by participants in the study—the feeling of being seen as problematic, encounter moments, notions of white privilege, feelings of otherness, a desire and determination to transcend racial barriers, etc. However, the findings revel that it is not black males that are the problem, instead, it is structure and dominate thinking surrounding their experiences that are problematic. Using CRT as a lens to analyze the findings aids in making this connection with more clarity.

Critical race theory provides an opportunity for historically marginalized groups to centralize their experiences and reject existing dominant narratives that do not account for their voice, histories, or lived experience. Various authors suggested that Black males' experiences as expressed by Black males themselves is often a missing component of studies about Black males (Duncan, 2002; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2008). Oftentimes this results in Black males and their experiences being painted with a large brushstroke of generality. CRT situates race and racism as obligatory focal points of reality rather than conveying their potential contributions to the experience of Black males as optional or debatable conjecture. Because the pervasiveness of racism is a major factor in identity development and expression, CRT provided an analytical lens that accounted for the general impact of race and racism while leaving space to explore the roles that personally nuanced experiences contributed to how participants in this study made meaning of their experiences in predominately White high schools.

With respect to identity development, I highlighted the stages/tenets of three identity development models in the literature review (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1978; Cross, 1971/1991; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997), and synthesized them under the unique "identity strategies" outlined by Michael Eric Dyson (2009). The identity strategies, accidental, incidental, and

intentional Blackness were created to aid in further classifying participants' expression of critical race consciousness as developed through analysis of their responses during the study. My goal was not to further marginalize young Black males, or to take them from one box that they've been placed in by dominant society and place them into another. Instead, the goal was to use the classifications to further understand how their descriptions of their experiences affirmed or diverged from the research literature. When referring to critical race consciousness I am alluding to participants' level of awareness and response to the role that race and racism play in their experiences. Although I did not use a specific instrument to scientifically measure how their responses led to my conclusions, my analysis of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity-Teen (Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen, 2008) provided insight into criteria that led to participants' prospective classifications.

When making race the social identity of focus, the ultimate goal of the identity development models presented in Chapter Two is liberation—A liberated racial identity that centralizes and celebrates membership in the Black race while understanding the sociopolitical implications of racial membership. The participants who were classified as utilizing intentional Blackness as their major form of racial identity expression discussed encounter moments with clarity, provided substantially more examples of racialized incidents that could have otherwise been defined as race neutral, exhibited the most self-assuredness in their racial identity, and were the most savvy about finding dynamic methods of identity expression. Their identities were influenced by race and racism, but the critical consciousness they exhibited provided them with strategies to buffer the negative effects of race and racism and to navigate around potential barriers to social and academic success (Carter, 2008; Chatman, Ecceles, & Malanchuck, 2005; Cross & Straus, 1998; Douglas & Peck, 2013; McGee, 2013; Tatum, 1997; Tatum, 2004).

Stereotyping was a recurring motif throughout the study. The role that stereotypes played in the construction, expression, rejection, and perceptions of the HABMs in the study made it a multidimensional concern. Steele and Aronson (1995) assert that "After a lifetime of exposure to society's negative images of their ability, [Black] students are likely to internalize an inferiority anxiety" (p. 797) Steele and Aronson coined the term stereotype threat after conducting experiments that showed individuals from devalued identity groups have performance anxiety when they are placed in a position to potentially confirm a stereotype of their group. In addition to stereotype threat, Stevenson (2014) defines racial stress as the emotional overload or shock to an individuals' coping system before, during, and after racial interactions (Stevenson, 2014, p. 28). Stereotype threat and racial stress contribute largely to the overall experiences of HABMs in PWHSs.

Racial stress has been defined with an understanding that racism is ubiquitous. Stevenson (2014) quoted Dr. Shelly Harrell, as defining racial stress as "race related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being (Harrell, 2000). The definition accounts not only for overt racist acts against minorities, but also encompasses the passive or unconscious racist and accounts for implicit bias. The definition takes the focus off the person and their intended actions and places onus on the system and dynamics of racism from which those actions emerged. Furthermore, it focuses on the resulting feelings of the target after the "transaction."

Stevenson used an amalgamation of Harrell's (2000) definition of racial stress, and Cross' definition of encounter to coin the term (racial encounter stress). While Harrell's and Cross' definitions of racial stress and encounter moments respectively depend on actual interactions,

Stevenson explains that his definition of racial encounter stress is about stress felt due to the

anticipation of racial interactions and is not limited to those that are first-hand experiences.

Black males are concerned about racial interactions before and during an experience that they

perceive to have the potential to be racialized or stereotypical in nature. I question then, how can

educators buffer racial encounter stress for Black males—whether they experience racism

personally or in surrogacy as a vicarious race referent? I coin the term *vicarious race referent* in

an attempt to encompass Stevenson's ideas of racial encounter stress (anticipatory and

experiential interactions) while also taking into account the collective memory of African

Americans with respect to racism and racist observations. High achieving Black males in this

study shared similar experiences of the males studied in the research regardless of context or

academic level. They addressed similar thoughts of racial stress as expressed by HABMs in

urban areas (Duncan, 2002; Harper, 2005; McGee, 2013; Wiggan, 2008; Williams & Portman,

2014), high achieving Black males in diverse school settings (Decuir-Gunby, Martin, & Cooper,

2012; Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012), and HABMs in other predominately White schools

(Brooks, 2012; Carter, 2007; Carter-Andrews, 2009). Furthermore, they add to the general

narrative of the racial stress and coping strategies outlined by Black males in educational studies

regardless of their academic and/or economic status.

        Although much of the work on stereotype threat has been done in experimental

environments and focuses on stereotype threat's implications for intellectual outcomes, I would

argue that stereotype threat, when viewed from a socioemotional standpoint, also has

implications for the identity development and identity expression of Black males in

predominately White high schools. The participants spoke at length about the narrowly defined

characteristics of Black male identity as expressed by society due to the stereotypes that exist

about them. For that reason, the participants in the study made concerted efforts to not fall into

the stereotypes of Black males. They explained that they keep emotions in check to not be

typecast as angry and aggressive, they were cognizant of how they dressed, they made sure to

maintain high grades so they won't be seen is academically inferior to their White peers, etc.

Although they felt that those characteristics were aspects of their authentic identity, the

additional stress of worrying about others' projected thoughts about them threatened to take a toll

on many of the participants at times. Racial consciousness and centrality played a large role in

what I am calling the socioemotional implications of stereotype threat on identity development

and expression. For those participants who fell into Cross' (1971/1991) pre-encounter stage, or

Hardiman and Jackson's (1997) conformity stage, stereotype threat was not as much of a

concern. Instead, they were unconscious colluders in the threat process. For example, Levi and

Andrew had conformed so much to stereotypical notions of Black males, they took pride in being

seen as nothing like "Black males." On the other end of the spectrum, Black males who exhibited

attributes of intentional or incidental Blackness were most affected by stereotype threat or racial

stress. John, for example, discussed the importance of academics and the weight of having to

represent well for the entire race in upper level courses. Additionally, he stated that someone is

always waiting for Black males to "slip up," so it fulfills other people's ideas of a high achieving

Black males as falling into the same stereotypical categories as other low-achieving Black males.

Similarly, Zeke, explained the taxing nature of stereotype threat and the exhaustion that comes

along with being racially conscious yet socially savvy. He said:

> I'm one of those people who has worked on the fact that I can't get angry in public. And I
>
> can't show people that I'm angry. Because as soon as I do that, they perceive me
>
> differently and then I'm automatically this stereotype of an angry Black man, and I hate

this world. If I do that, if I create that, if I get angry or lose control of what's going on and

make a poor decision, I will not be able to continue to reach my goals. So, I've worked on

that in myself, but it feels like I'm doing so much to change myself, but sometimes it feels

like, why can't the world around me change just a little bit so I can feel a little bit calm.

Because it bothers me that I can spend all this time working to create the Zeke that is best.

like the best Zeke that I know how to do but then I have people telling me that I'm not

good enough. It's like all I need is an inch of wiggle room and I'll be fine. I just need a

little space to make it out so I can get where I want to go.

Zeke forthrightly expresses one example of how Black males feel that they are swimming against

the social current. They try to ameliorate the society's view of Black males but the stereotypes

persist.

The participants also expressed their schooling experiences as like swimming against

social currents with respect to teacher and peer interactions. The concept of kinship and

brotherhood among Black males was a theme throughout the study but misunderstanding

individual experiences was an overlay for the theme. The participants had a variety of friend

groups. Some were very homogenous (Zeke, and John), others very diverse (Bartel, Jude,

Jimmy, James, Phillip, Peter, Thomas), and other participants were the only Black person in an

all-White group of friends (Andrew, Levi). Most participants believed that cross racial

friendships were very possible at Dubois and Locke, however their choice of friendships were

heavily dependent on interests and involvement. Participants exclaimed that they were involved

where they felt comfortable, but the reality of racial inclusion and same race acceptance, or

feelings of exclusion and ostracism were apparent.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) discussed high achieving Blacks being ostracized by their peers because they were "acting White", however, that was not the case in this study. All the participants were high achievers, yet some participants *felt* the kinship with other Black males more than others. I would argue that a lack of inclusion in racial circles is not a deliberate act of exclusion, but rather a product of what the participants declared to be a difference in personal interests with respect to co-curricular and extracurricular involvement. High achievement in isolation does not relegate one to being inside or outside of racial circles. It is also dependent on a self-determined need and yearning for identity affirming camaraderie (racial) and an intentional effort to engage with other Black males. Nevertheless, a finding that could not be ignored was that participants felt that despite the "diversity" of their schools, and the ability to have cross-racial friendships, there seemed to be external pressures to perpetuate racial division. The external pressures were both implicit and explicit. Implicitly, Andrew and Levi spoke most about the disconnection from Blacks because they were perceived to "act White." The message they gathered from those experiences were that people are seen as hanging out with *either* Whites *OR* Blacks, never fully heterogeneous groups. Jimmy, who had the most diverse friend group of all participants, spoke about explicit pressure to perpetuate racial division. Although he established that his friends "did not see color"—a concern that is interesting, yet too divergent from the overall findings of the study to give it the attention it deserves with any immediacy— he explained that there is pressure from others to remain in homogenous groups.

With respect to teacher interactions, participants saw low expectations and unconscious bias toward Black males as potential barriers that threaten their academic experiences in class. Zeke shared stories of feeling invisible to, devalued by, and less important to his teachers than

his White peers. Using three different examples, Zeke provided evidence of a lack of effort on the part of his teachers to get to know him personally and make him feel welcome.

John, Jude, Bartel, Zeke, and Peter spoke about feeling lonely in advanced courses but also hyper visible and exposed. They felt that their individual identities were not valued, and teachers' surprised reactions that they were taking advanced courses was problematic. The sense that their teachers are apprehensive about their presence in advanced courses—coupled with the reactions of their White and same race peers— led them to feel that it was an unspoken truth that only White people can be academically successful or that attaining academic success could somehow lead to accusations of acting White. This was not a surprising finding in the study. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) expressed the idea that the notion of academic success as intellectual property reserved for Whites has become an unspoken and often unchallenged notion in dominant American thinking. The marginalization of Black males, whether done consciously or unconsciously, has implications for academic self-concept in PWHS, even for high achieving Black males. Seeing trusted adults as another potential hurdle to jump adds to the stress of HABMs and adds pressure as they swim against the current to resist common narratives about their academic achievement. Educators' unconscious ignorance of HABMs cultural and personal identity serves as a gap between their worlds and limits opportunities for authentic relationship beyond their coexistence in the same classroom.

The second part of research question one, how HABMs make meaning of their academic experiences in PWHSs, returned two additional findings.

Q1-Finding #2: HABMs viewed academic success as a valued aspect of identity development, but they expressed academic experiences through a lens of discrepancy. As expressed in Chapter Four, academics became an important part of defining many of the

participants' authentic identities. Bartel, was the only participant who did not claim academics to be a valuable part of is authentic self. However, he did not completely exhibit characteristics of academic disidentification (Cokely, McClain, & Jones, 2011), instead, like other participants he saw academic success as a stepping stone for upward mobility later in life. With respect to school experiences, the young men who were classified as exhibiting intentional and incidental Blackness were able to have pride in being Black and being successful in school.

There is ample research that paints Black males as persistent underachievers. Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) study "The Burden of Acting White," suggested that Black males tend to develop oppositional identities with respect to their view of academic success. The findings of their study have been challenged many times since its publication (Archer--Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Ogbu, (2004); Noguera, 2008). However, Noguera's (2008) refutation of the acting White claims came in the form of adding two academic identities that Black males create, rather than simply refuting the "acting White" notion. He suggested that Black males "learn to succeed in both worlds" (they become both street and smart) or redefine academic success altogether to show that you can be academically successful and proud to be Black). Participants classified as exhibiting incidental and intentional Blackness tended to redefine the idea of Black achievement by rejecting the dominant narrative that Black males cannot be successful without feeling like they are seen as "acting White" and by establishing that they do not feel a need to vacillate between two worlds. Jude framed this idea poignantly.

I think of myself as a game changer, because I'm different…So because of the way I act, a lot of people say, well you're just more White than Black. I'm, like no…I'm Black. I just prefer to act differently than some of the other Black males. And that's…That's just

how I identify. It's just cuz I don't want to be perceived as hood or stuff like that. I want

to be perceived as artistic and intelligent and kind and nice and cool, and friendly.

Like Jude, other participants also showed that it is possible to be smart and proud of who you are

(Noguera, 2008). Furthermore, similar to findings in (Carter-Andrew, 2009) regarding academics

being both race loaded and race neutral, the participants acknowledged that their race did in fact

elicit bias from teachers and peers, however, their ability to be academically successful was not

determined by narratives that exist about Black male achievement.

Q1-Finding #3: HABMs believed personal and academic success in a PWHS was

dependent on one's perseverance and personal pursuit of opportunities. Despite claims of the

"victimization" of Black males with respect to academic outcomes, participants in this study

viewed academic success as a point of personal responsibility and as a platform of personal

empowerment. They acknowledged that teacher low expectation, feelings of otherness in

Advanced Placement and honors courses, and implicit bias of teachers and peers due to societal

socialization may impact their social experiences in an academic setting, but ultimately their

academic success is their personal responsibility. The participants' conclusions of the necessity

of personal responsibility should not be seen as echoic of findings from studies of Black male

achievement that do not take a critical approach. Oftentimes, Black males' personal

responsibility in academic outcomes is a keystone argument of typical narratives that attempt to

establish reasons for Black male underachievement that have been refuted by CRT theorists and

researchers (Duncan, 2002; Howard, 2014, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1996; Milner, 2007).

Therefore, the personal responsibility conclusion should be considered in conjunction with the

acknowledgement of the barriers that Black males face in society not as isolated ideology. The

conclusion acknowledges that the pervasiveness of racism has potentially deleterious

implications for the academic success of Black males, therefore, it is important to highlight the

component of personal responsibility to circumvent these stymying structures and not be

complicit in the process of one's preconceived failure.

Research Question Two (Q2) Finding

      Q2- Finding #4: HABMs felt they were being authentic if their identity was

personalized, autonomous, and dynamic. The second research questions was, How do high-

achieving Black males define their authentic self, and in what way(s), if any, does their

attendance in PWHS specifically contribute to the development and expression of their authentic

self? Not all participants were able to answer the question, *how would you define your authentic*

self? However, I was able to gather valuable insight that alluded to their ideas about their view of

authenticity through their answers to other questions such as, *What is important to you*?, *How do*

you define success?, and *How would you describe your social experiences in school?* Participants

who were able to provide a definition and in turn provide examples of authentic expression,

alluded to three specific characteristics of an authentic identity—it is an identity that is self-

defined, autonomous, and dynamic. I did not know what to expect when I asked participants

about authenticity. However, what I found was not only impressive, it was eye opening.

      Critical race theory requires an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the experiences of

targeted groups. The definition of authenticity that I developed was an attempt to honor that idea

as it includes aspects of psychology, sociology, and critical theory. I defined the authentic self as

the personally developed perception of the self that one deems to be undiluted in thought, speech,

and action. It is the embodiment of an individual's self-conceived and personally adopted

identity. Consciousness and intentionality are integral to the development and embodiment of the

authentic self. I have developed this definition of the authentic self by amalgamating key

components of social identity theory— a person's sense of who they are based on their group

membership(s) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), identity development theory—how one acts (roles and

behaviors) based on who they believe they are and the ideas they have internalized about

themselves as a member of an identity group(s) (Burk, 2009; Chickering, 1959), and self-

determination theory which places focus on an individual's personal motivation and feelings of

freedom through self-determination.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) relies on social categorizing, social

identification, and social comparison to aid in the development of one's social identity. It is an

important aspect of socialization. The HABMs in this study used this concept of sorting and

comparing many times in the development of their authentic selves. As they adopted and

compared their group identities to other "out groups" or groups seen as dissimilar from them,

identity development theory became more prevalent. They began to decide how they'd *act upon*

their thoughts about the categorizations and comparisons they've made. Finally, self-

determination theory highlighted their personal motivation to achieve goals and the feelings that

they had regarding their ability to make personal decisions.

Although the participants were similar insofar as their self-identified race and high

achiever status were concerned, the added intersections with other social identity groups to

which they belonged (membership in additional racial groups, ethnicity, religion and class) made

their definitions and expressions of authenticity unique. This idea is supported by other critical

researchers who suggested Black males cannot be viewed through a myopic lens or as having the

same monolithic experience (Carter 2008; Carter-Andrews, 2009; Duncan, 2002, Howard, 2014;

Kholi, 2008; Noguera, 2008).

A surprising finding was in essence a non-finding. I anticipated HABMs to specifically speak to the role of attending a PWHS as highly impacting the development of their authentic identity. They did not see school as aiding in the development of their authentic selves, but did see it as an institution in which they could not always fully express themselves. They did not pinpoint the entire school system when providing rationale for why they could not always be their authentic selves. Instead, they mentioned the mindsets of individuals within buildings that threatened to stifle their authentic selves by not honoring their personal identities, by making generalizations of who they believe Black males to be, and by not intentionally providing experiences that affirm who they are. The unique characteristics that participants bring to school experiences make it important to see these young men as unique, to honor the experiences they bring to their schools, and to support them in their process of developing a holistic authentic self.

For these reasons, the socioemotional stereotype threat that the Black males in general and HABMs in particular feel should be given specific attention in schools. Although it is understood that stereotyping is a concern, the findings from this study suggest that the perpetuation of them in schools, a major institution of socialization, is even more problematic. Reinforcing stereotypes through the explicit curriculum, implicit curriculum and null curricula is a threat to positive identity development and limiting to HABMs level of comfort in expressing an authentic identity.

Recommendations

Findings from this study suggest that there are critical implications for the identity development and overall schooling experiences for high achieving Black male in a predominately White high schools. Therefore, the recommendations have been framed to specifically aid in Black males' positive identity construction, identity enhancement, and identity

protection. Recommendations are both structural and cultural in nature. I recommend three recommendations for Midwest Public Schools specifically that could also serve as general recommendations of any school/district serving Black males. What happens in individual students' homes and accounting for every individual Black male's personal socializing factors outside of school is not within the district's sphere of influence. Therefore, the recommendations will be tailored specifically to what schools can do to impact the social and academic experiences of HABMs in predominately White high schools and potentially aid in the facilitation of positive identity development in the process.

District-wide Cultural Proficiency Training

The first recommendation is an attempt to address the experiences of HABMs by formally incorporating cultural proficiency (Nuri-Robbins & Lindsey, 2009) or equity training into the district-wide professional development plan. The goal would be to create systemic change by addressing the mindset of the educators who work with HABMs in PWHSs. Because racism is ubiquitous and engrained in American society, the ways in which people are socialized impact their mindsets and beliefs about their own identity groups and people from identity groups to which they do not belong. Internalizations of superiority, inferiority, or race neutrality (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2010) become a part of our psychology and in turn our social experiences. Being cognizant of these processes is important because in order to reverse thinking and actions that are potentially deleterious to the experiences of others—in this case, the experiences of Black males in PWHSs— it requires awareness, persistent consciousness, a mindset shift, and finally a change in actions. It is difficult, or nearly impossible to control the thoughts that cross our minds, but we can adjust how we respond to those thoughts and implicit biases.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is about more than incorporating students' names into lessons. It requires intrinsic reflection to determine unconscious biases, an acknowledgement of the presence of existence of racism in America, the need for diverse perspectives in the classroom, and a willingness to reverse common school practices that intentionally or unintentionally serve as barriers to Black male achievement in order to promote positive conceptions of racial identity. Hawley & Nieto (2010) suggest, there are a number of examples that reflect critical relevant pedagogical practices at play. A few strategies they mention were:

a. Respecting and being interested in students' experiences and cultural backgrounds,

b. Supporting higher order learning,

c. Building on students' prior knowledge, values and experiences,

d. Avoiding stereotyping students, and

e. Facilitating learning of challenging material by knowing how to deal with stereotype threat (some students' beliefs that cultural myths about racial differences in abilities may be valid. (p. 68)

To aid in this effort, cultural proficiency training with a focus on racial literacy (Stevenson, 2014) should be institutionalized across the district and emphasized in individual buildings' professional development programs.

Stevenson (2014) suggested that explicit teaching of racial literacy skills—"the development, practice, and internalization of cognitive, behavioral, emotional intelligence"—is necessary to engage educators in authentic and meaningful dialogue about racial politics in school (p. 27). Zeke provided a number of specific examples of teachers who did not provide the high level of support he would have expected from educators, but he also made it clear that many of his teachers went above and beyond to help him in class. Although the lack of consistency and

people's method of interacting can be attributed to personal socialization, what Zeke's inconsistent experience with is teachers reveals is the need for cultural proficiency training that will raise the level of awareness of all teachers when interacting with and serving a diverse core of students and decrease the likelihood that students have to rely on "hitting the teacher lottery" in terms of who will value their experiences.

Participants reiterated numerous times that being seen, feeling heard, being understood, and feeling connected were important components of a valuable experience. For these reasons, to best support the education of young Black males, it is important that all teachers recognize these valued traits among Black male students and strive to intentionally integrate them into their instruction and non-instructional interactions with HABMs. Additionally, seeing and acknowledging the Black male experience as dynamic rather than static or monolithic begins with addressing common misconceptions and stereotypes of Black males and Black male achievement. It is hoped that increased positive interactions between teachers and Black males as a result of educators' heightened social and cultural awareness will relieve some of the racial stress Black males experience in school.

To make interactions more comfortable with individuals from social groups that differ from one's own requires a desire to increase one's cultural knowledge, a suspension of preconceived notions, and a willingness to communicate fully and effectively by honoring their identities. Stevens (2014) suggested, "Promoting racial literacy in schools proposes assumptions, guidelines, and strategies to examine and develop successful racial communications and interactions between individuals generally, and between teachers, students, and parents in schools specifically" (p. 27). Furthermore, Howard (2014) asserted "Our failure to engage one another in an authentic, honest, and sustained dialogue about race, racism, power, and all of their manifestations, significantly

limits the manner in which various individuals can talk about their experiences in the United States (Howard, 2014, p. 52). Therefore, a cultural proficiency and equity become formalized aspects for the district-wide professional development plan, there must be explicit discussion about the *why* behind it. Educators cannot be shielded from the reality that racism, or at least American power structures, impact the experiences of Black males in schools. District leaders must be forthcoming with the importance of mindset change if the goal is truly to serve ALL kids well. Creating a space for educators to discuss their personal journey of socialization and gaining insight into the lived experiences of others while receiving strategies that can aid in cross social identity interactions are positive steps in ameliorating the social and academic experiences of not only HABMs but all students. As expressed by the National Equity Project, "Working towards equity involves interrupting practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children."

Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Once districts begin to address educators' mindsets the second recommendation is to incorporate more culturally relevant concepts into school curricula. While doing so, they must remain cognizant of what is present in the explicit (what is explicitly taught), implicit (what is inferred through structure and response but not formally taught, and null curricula (what is absent from the curricula) (Milner, 2015). A key rationale for this recommendation came from Levi's interview. When asked if he felt that his race impacted his academic experiences in school he said "no." However, he followed up by stating, that race had not impacted him *yet*, but it may when he is a senior and takes English 12 and chooses "African American Literature" as topic of study. In essence, what Levi reveled was that in the first eleven years of his education he had not seen himself reflected in the curriculum and the curriculum had no impact on his racial identity

development. He was not alone in his thoughts about the not seeing positive messages, or even a critical analysis of the experience of Blacks in required education curricula. Other participants expressed the same concern.

Upon reviewing the course catalogue for the high schools in MPS, I found that they offer elective courses such as African American History; Race, Class, and Gender Inequality; and Popular American Culture. These elective courses are supplementary to the required curricula and do not touch the masses of students. To increase the level of intentionality of using the curriculum as a vehicle for positive identity development and a source of critical analysis, the district should perform an equity audit (Scheurich, & Skrla, 2003) of the general core curricula to analyze the extent to which it explicitly acknowledges, honors, and builds upon the experience of Black males. Therefore, the recommendation is not to include more elective options—although specialized courses are a valued part of school curricula. Instead, the goal would be to support systemic change by creating more inclusive *required* curricula that specifically address the history and contributions of African Americans and outlines the African American experience by deconstructing the implications of America's racialized structures.

Additionally, media literacy should be a focus area wherever possible and most appropriate within the general curriculum. Participants' had an extreme focus on the role of stereotypes in identity development and strong perceptions of the harmful nature of negative images that are portrayed about Black males in media—which is supported in the research. This revealed the importance and necessity of Black males having the skills to view, interpret, critique, and evaluate media messages in order to transcend stereotypical messages and make conscious decisions to accept or refute explicit and embedded messages that impact identity development, personal internalization, and expression.

Curricula should be inclusive not only by topic, but should also challenge dominant notions of supremacy, critically analyze power structures in America, and seek to make students critical consumers of the information they take in through the explicit and implicit curricula. For example, world history, U.S. history, English courses, etc. can be taught through a social justice lens and told from varying perspectives that reflect students' experiences. Reading Huck Finn through the eyes of the character Jim, the Civil War as described from the standpoint of human rights, comparing standards of professional dress from around the world and the social implications of commonly adopting Eurocentric versions as the "standard" are all ways of differentiating instruction, challenging concepts of colorblindness and meritocracy, and challenging dominant narratives of American ideology that are commonly accepted as universal truths. When curriculum is critical, rigorous, and reflective of current events as they relate to the diverse populations of our nation it is to the benefit of all students not only the marginalized and typically underrepresented.

Hawley and Nieto (2010) suggest it is unfortunate that "most measures of good teaching do not deal explicitly with culturally relevant pedagogy, in spite of the fact that research has documented that this approach to teaching can be effective with all students" (68). A review of the teacher evaluation model revealed that there is a criterion which reflects the expectation that every teacher in MPS "build relationships with all students as individuals in order to increase student achievement." The criteria were also accompanied by two descriptors.

a. Teacher demonstrates an awareness and appreciation of individual differences.

b. Teacher demonstrates sensitivity and knowledge regarding how race, culture, gender, and disability relate to learning.

These descriptors reflect the district understands the value of building relationships and the importance of seeing students as individuals. However, the criteria on the teacher evaluation report

is not as inclusive and explicit about equity and inclusion to promote true accountability to those

ideals. Incorporating a focus on teaching for equity and social justice as an evaluative measure is

another recommendation for consideration. It has commonly been said that "What gets measured

gets monitored, and what gets monitored gets done." Therefore, an increased focus on teaching for

equity and social justice should be accompanied by data driven tools to measure implementation

and outcomes. The added knowledge of the vastness of the concern of not meeting the needs of

Black students in the curriculum, the changing national demographics that show continual incline

in minority populations (U.S. Census), and the increased accountability on teacher evaluations

make an argument for more equitable practices in school and an interest in an enhanced and

affirming experience for Black males converges with the interests of not only educators, but all of

American society.

Embedded Mentorship and Support for Black Male Students

Douglas and Peck (2013) discuss the importance of community based pedagogical spaces

to the socialization and identity development of Black males. Although the goal of community

based spaces is to serve as affirming and socializing institutions *outside* the school setting, I

argue that the valuable lessons learned both formally and informally in those spaces need to have

a more salient presence in the experience of Black males—including in schools. This could come

in the form of embedded mentorship. Black males from these various socializing locales should

be invited into schools to not only provide programming, but to be fully, yet indirectly immersed

in the culture and daily operations of the school. Inviting members of the community into

schools solidifies a true partnership between the school and the community to have shared

responsibility in the development of Black male youth. Additionally, the hope is that having

access to and intentional interaction with Black males from community spaces other than the

school would affirm and enhance the identity development of Black males. Simply placing more

Black youth in the presence of Black males will not serve as a panacea. Instead, critical and

culturally relevant programming would be essential in any embedded mentorship program

schools develop.

In addition to formal and informal mentoring for identity development, emotional support

is also needed specifically for high achieving Black males. Through the study, the participants

acknowledged that counselors and administrators encourage them to take honors and AP courses

and that their schools had in fact increased their enrollment of typically underrepresented groups

in Advance Placement courses. Hearing the experiences of Zeke, Bartel and Jude in their AP

courses and taking into account Peter's story and rationale for dropping his AP course in the

middle of the school year, I would suggest Black males—HABMs and those striving to

challenge themselves more academically—need additional support in their effort to take more

rigorous courses. The stereotype threat that accompanies Black males' enrollment in AP courses

coupled with feelings of loneliness and perceptions of otherness create a perfect storm of

emotional discomfort, especially for Black males taking AP for the first time. Although I applaud

the schools in their efforts to engage more underrepresented groups in AP, I would suggest

embedded support for minority students in these courses. This support could be as formal as a

companion study hall or seminar class for first time AP takers or as an informal group through

the schools' counseling offices. The ultimate goal would be to extend beyond just increasing the

number of Black males taking advanced classes; the goal would be to keep them engaged and

filled with feelings of efficaciousness.

Future Research

This study of eleven high achieving Black males in predominately White high schools led to some expected yet thought-provoking findings. As I engaged in the study I found myself wanting to answer questions that were outside the scope of this study. Therefore, in this section I will present potential topics for future research that may provide additional insight into the identity development of HABMs and their experiences in predominately White high schools.

One area that deserves further analysis is an examination of the role of co-curricular, extracurricular, and community involvement outside of schools to the identity development and authentic identity expression of Black male youth. Studies have found that identity affirming counter spaces are integral to identity development and expression for Black students (Brooks, 2012; Carter, 2007; Carter-Andrews, 2009; Douglas, 2016; Douglas & Arnold, 2016; Douglass & Peck, 2013; Marsh, Chaney, &, Jones, 2012; Tatum, 1997). This study found the same to be true. However, there was a small cadre among the participant group that suggested identity affirmation is dynamic and accounts for more than racial membership. Thus, it would be beneficial to delve deeper into an exploration of how HABMs use spaces inside and outside the school to develop and affirm their personal, authentic identities and what activities/locales in particular provide such affirmation.

Additionally, the concepts of experience and personal socialization were integral in understanding the participants in this study. Because the study focused on authentic identity and social and academic experiences there were a host of nuanced differences in participants' explanations for their identity development and expression. All the participants, however, discussed family, or other supportive individuals and institutions that impacted their personal development. To better understand the role of personal socialization in the identity development

of HABMs a study that gathers perceptual data from the guardians or people who serve as

supports to HABMs would provide insight. The messages they explicitly and implicitly delivered

to their sons about social identity groups—with special attention given to race and gender—

messages about school and the schooling process, and their thoughts feelings about their sons'

attendance and experience in a predominately White high school would all be factors of interest.

Finally, to enhance the findings of this study, it would prove beneficial to understand

teacher perceptions of HABMs and their experience with teaching a diverse core of students.

Participants expressed feelings of high support from some teachers and low support and

expectations from others. There was only one example provided of a teacher who overtly

expressed his lack of belief in a student, and verbalized that the participant would not reach his

ultimate career goal. However, there were many instances when participants felt a sting of low

expectations or racial slights from teachers because of unconscious or unintentional actions.

Understanding the socialization of teachers and the experiences they bring into the classrooms is

valuable in unpacking the experiences of HABMs in PWHSs. Just as the participants bring their

values, beliefs, and preconceived notions to school, so do teachers. However, the unbalanced

power dynamic gives the educator more influence in creating, constructing, and facilitating

social and academic experiences in school. Understanding how teachers' socialization impacted

their educational philosophies while also measuring their propensity for instructing with equity

in mind provide necessary information in exploring the various factors that could impact

HABMs experiences in school. Furthermore, conversing with, observing, and performing an

equity audit of the curricula of teachers that HABMs describe as impactful to their development

and overall experiences, as well as those they see as neutral or detrimental can potentially

provide a framework for understanding how to best serve HABMs from social, emotional, and academic standpoints and will aid in avoiding potential pitfalls when serving this group.

Conclusion

The importance of self-definition remained a keystone aspect of the interview and analysis phases. However, to say this level of objectivity was difficult would be an understatement. Human nature threatened to interfere in the study. As the researcher, I wanted to provide the participants with insight about the educational experience from the perspective of a Black male researcher who was once like them, a HABM in high school. I wanted to share in their excitement, experience their accomplishments alongside them, and bask in the utopian worlds some of them described. I wanted to praise them for their self-definition, empower them to continue seeking greatness, and express that I envied their high levels of consciousness at such young ages. Contrastingly, I wanted to shield them from their "ignorance" of the world while protecting their innocence. I wanted to desperately add positively to their lives, "correct" their perception of their experiences when they insisted they were not racialized, apologize for their past experiences, and warn them of experiences yet to come. Objectivity was difficult—and I'd venture to say it was impossible— because this research matters.

The stories of these eleven young men were my story. They tried to find the words to explain how their ultimate dreams are to do nothing more than achieve their definition of success and to be accepted for who they are while being given the space to figure out who that is. They wanted to be loved and appreciated. They wanted to feel safe. They hurt but didn't know how to express it. They were confused by this world in which they live. They felt suffocated by the heavy weight of society's expectations, and they were fatigued from running a racial race with

no finish line. On the flipside, they felt empowered, accomplished, hopeful, and proud of who they were despite the continual journey to truly claim that identity.

This work is a living, breathing representation of the inner turmoil I personally feel as a Black male educator now, and felt as a young HABM throughout my own schooling process. I summoned my emotional and intellectual strength to suppress my inner subjectivity and strong connection to the work so I could remain unbiased and objective. Despite the difficulty in separating myself from the work, I reminded myself continually that the participants themselves had ultimate authorship of their stories. Therefore, the question "How do you define your authentic self?," yielded authority to the participants for the purpose of self-definition rather than further imposing identity structures on them.

I remained merely a vehicle for the stories they told, finding solace and personal strength through what became my motivational metaphor. A metaphorical vision that showed me the importance of the work. In my vision I was a cauldron placed over a steady flame as the participants poured into me the essence of who they were—their worldviews, fears, racial celebrations, schooling experiences, and personal stories of socialization. Their ideas bubbled inside me as their individual stories melded together to create a new dish for others to consume. I am the cauldron and every reader is an individual ladle dipping from the collective knowledge of the participants as they feed themselves new insight through their consumption of this work. For some, the dish is cold and bitter to the taste, for others a sweet delectable treat as they internalize the experiences of these young Black males and make them a part of their own experience as well. This research matters.

We, these participants and I, are the embodiment of the counternarrative to America's faulty storyline of us. Unfortunately, we're merely telling our story against the backdrop of the

current one. We can't avoid it. We can't get away from it. At times I penned the thoughts and

ideas found in this work with televisions blaring the background, and on it were shows,

commercials, and advertisements that affirmed every concern the participants had about how

Blacks are portrayed in the media. I wrote the same day that I watched a video of Alton

Sterling's life leave his body after being shot by police. Two days later when Philando Castile

died while his significant other and young daughter sat next to him in a vehicle, I was again

writing and developing this work. I also typed while sitting at my work desk many times, hours

after the last school bell rang; I reflected on my duty to put into practice many of the same

recommendations I outlined for the district above for my own school in my own district of

employment. I wrote at times sitting next to my beautiful and supportive wife who will soon

bring our first son into the world. He, my unborn son, a future young Black male made this

dissertation matter even more. These participants, their lives, their experiences, their hopes, their

passion rekindled a fire within my fingers to write, to tell their stories, to provide a platform for

them because this research matters.

Work in the field of education must extend beyond the current mentality of simply

exposing and countering myopic, false, or diluted narratives of Black males. Instead, there is a

sense of urgency to analyze and reverse school structures that do not serve all kids well, to

support educators through their personal journeys toward more equitable practices, to rebut

deeply embedded societal practices and beliefs that are destructive to personal and academic

development of Black males, and to centralize the voices of Black males in their own

experiences to not only counter the narrative, but for schools to empower Black males to change

and control it. This research matters.

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Group.

Appendix A

Informed Consent

Identification of Researcher: My name is Eric Johnson and I am a doctoral student in the University of Missouri's comprehensive statewide Ed.D program. I am with the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and will be conducting a study in the [name of district] titled *Can You Hear Me Now?: The Voices of High Achieving Black Males Emerge in in Predominately White High Schools.* I am the only researcher engaged in the study described below.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this case study is to determine how high-achieving Black males make meaning of their social and academic experiences in high school within [name of district]. For this case study, high achieving is defined as having a grade point average of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 grade scale. Black males are defined as students who are identified in the "MPS" directory as Black, African American or multiracial (with African American being one of the racial identities). You have been identified as a student who meets the grade point average and racial characteristics outlined above by demographic data provided to me via *E-School,* the district's learning management system.
Ultimately, the goal of the research is to utilize the voice of high achieving Black males in "MPS" to inform educators of the factors or characteristics that they determine to be important to their status as high achievers. Furthermore, the research will use race and racial identity as a lens for the study. Subsequently, the data will help to inform educators of how to find ways to replicate academic success for other students in general and Black males specifically while accounting for the role that students feel race plays in the schooling process.

Request for Participation: I am asking to interview you to help me gather information for the study. Participation is NOT mandatory and would be done on a voluntary basis. It is up to you whether or not you'd like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply skip them. You may also choose to withdraw your data at the end of the study.

Exclusions:
- You must be at least 14 years of age and in high school to participate in this study. If under the age of 18, parent consent is required
- You must self-identify as a Black, African American, or multiracial male attending high school in [name of district]
- Your GPA must be at least a 3.0

Description of Research Method: This study asks for your participation in an in-depth interview about your racial identity and how it informs your experiences in general. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked various questions about your experiences in school, specifically your high achiever status, and the role that you feel race may contribute to your experiences in school. You will also have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have regarding the topic throughout the interview process. After I have an opportunity to reflect on our interview, you may possibly be asked to participate in a follow conversation with me to clarify some of the statements from your interview. The follow up conversation will last no longer than 30 minutes, and can take place via telephone or face-to-face.

Privacy:
Please be aware that [name of district] will provide me with access to your school records. The records provided will be limited to your cumulative grade point average and the race/ethnicity you identified upon enrolling in the district. All of the information I collect will be kept confidential and pseudonyms (fake names) will be used to protect the identity of participants. The interview will be digitally recorded and will only be reviewed by me. The recording will be kept in a secure, locked location on the University of Missouri Campus. All transcriptions will also be kept in a secure, password protected electronic file.

Explanation of Risks: There are no specific risks to participating in this study. However, unintended social risks may include:
- Peer pressure not to participate and/or
- The potential to expose thoughts, feelings, or raise levels of awareness regarding race and/or school that may not have been previously explored.

Explanation of Benefits: Once I have finished my study I will send you a summary of my findings. It will be a document compiling my interpreted findings from the individuals I interviewed and the documents I analyzed. The research will also provide educators with valuable information that will help them continue to serve and better serve you and other minority students socially and academically.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact me. I can be reached at ejohnson@cpsk12.org. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Campus IRB at (573) 882-9585. You can also feel free to contact my academic advisor, Dr. Juanita Simmons at (573) 882-4218.
If you would like to participate, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep.

I have read this letter and agree to participate.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Informed Parental Consent

Identification of Researcher: My name is Eric Johnson and I am a doctoral student in the University of Missouri's comprehensive statewide Ed.D program. I am with the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and will be conducting a study in the [name of district] titled, *Can You Hear Me Now?: The Voices of High Achieving Black Males Emerge in in Predominately White High Schools.* I am the only researcher engaged in the study described below.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this case study is to determine how high-achieving Black males make meaning of their social and academic experiences in high school within [name of district]. For this case study, high achieving is defined as having a grade point average of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 grade scale. Black males are defined as students who are identified in the "MPS" directory as Black, African American or multiracial (with African American being one of the racial identities) in the "MPS" directory. Your child has been identified as a student who meets the grade point average and racial characteristics outlined above by demographic data provided to me via *E-School,* [name of district]' learning management system.
Ultimately, the goal of the research is to utilize the voice of high achieving Black males in "MPS" to inform educators of the factors or characteristics that they determine to be important to their status as high achievers. Furthermore, the research will use race and racial identity as a lens for the study. Subsequently, the data will help to inform educators of how to find ways to replicate academic success for other students in general and Black males specifically while accounting for the role that students feel race plays in the schooling process.

Request for Participation: I am asking to interview your child to help me gather information for the study. Participation is NOT mandatory and would be done on a voluntary basis. Because your son is a minor, it is your decision whether or not you'd like for your child to participate. If you decide you would not like for your son to participate, you or he will not be penalized in any way. Either you or your son can also decide to stop the research process at any time without penalty. If he does not wish to answer any of the questions, he may simply skip them. You may also choose to withdraw the data at the end of the study.

Exclusions:
- Students must be at least 14 years of age and in high school to participate in this study. If under the age of 18, parent consent is required
- The student must self-identify as a Black, African American, or multiracial male attending [name of district]
- The students' GPA must be at least a 3.0

Description of Research Method: This study asks for your child's participation in an in-depth interview about his racial identity and how it informs his experiences in general. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. During the interview, the participants will be asked various questions about their experiences in school, specifically their high achiever status, and the role that they feel race may contribute to those experiences. Participants will also have the

opportunity to ask any questions they may have regarding the topic throughout the interview process. After I have an opportunity to reflect on our interview, your son may possibly be asked to participate in a follow conversation with me to clarify some of the statements from his interview. The follow up conversation will last no
longer than 30 minutes.

Privacy: Please be aware that [name of district] will provide me with access to your child's school records. The records provided will be limited to his cumulative grade point average and the race/ethnicity identified upon enrolling in the district. All of the information I collect will be kept confidential and pseudonyms (fake names) will be used to protect the identity of participants. The interview will be digitally recorded and will only be reviewed by me. The recording will be kept in a secure, locked location on the University of Missouri Campus. All transcriptions will also be kept in a secure, password protected electronic file.

Explanation of Risks: There are no specific risks to participating in this study. However, unintended social risks may include
- Peer pressure not to participate and/or
- The potential to expose thoughts, feelings, or raise levels of awareness regarding race and/or school that may not have been previously explored.

Explanation of Benefits: Once I have finished my study I will send you and your son a summary of my findings. It will be a document compiling my interpreted findings from the individuals I interviewed and the documents I analyzed. The research will also provide educators with valuable information that will help them continue to serve and better serve you, your child, and other minority students socially and academically.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact me. I can be reached at ejohnson@cpsk12.org. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Campus IRB at (573) 882-9585. You can also feel free to contact my academic advisor, Dr. Juanita Simmons at (573) 882-4218.
If you would like to participate, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep.

I have read this letter and agree to let my child,_____
participate.

              (Child's name)

Guardian's Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix C

Informed Assent (Minor)

Identification of Researcher: My name is Eric Johnson and I am a doctoral student in the University of Missouri's comprehensive statewide doctoral program. I am with the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis and will be conducting a study in the [Name of district] ("MPS") titled, *Can You Hear Me Now?: The Voices of High Achieving Black Males Emerge in in Predominately White High Schools.* I am the only researcher engaged in the study described below.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this case study is to determine how high-achieving Black males in "MPS" high schools make meaning of their social and academic experiences in school. For the purpose of this study, high achieving is defined as having a grade point average of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 grade scale. Black males are defined as students who have are identified in the "MPS" directory as Black, African American or multiracial (with African American being one of the racial identities). You have been identified as a student who meets the grade point average and racial characteristics outlined above by demographic data provided to me via *E-School,* the district's learning management system.

Ultimately, the goal of the research is to utilize the voice of high achieving Black males in "MPS" to inform educators of the factors or characteristics that the participants determine to be important to their status as high achievers. Furthermore, the research will use race and racial identity as a lens for the study. Subsequently, the data will help to inform educators of how to find ways to replicate academic success for other students in general and Black males specifically while accounting for the role that students feel race plays in the schooling process.

Request for Participation: I am asking to interview you to help me gather information for the study. Participation is NOT mandatory and would be done on a voluntary basis. It is up to you and your guardian whether or not you'd like to participate**. Because you are under the age of 18, you MUST have your guardian's permission.** If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply skip them. You may also choose to withdraw your data at the end of the study.

Exclusions:
- You must be at least 14 years of age and in high school to participate in this study. If under the age of 18, parent consent is required
- You must self-identify as a Black, African American, or multiracial male attending a high school in [Name of district]
- Your GPA must be at least a 3.0

Description of Research Method: This study asks for your participation in an in-depth interview about your racial identity and how it informs your experiences in general. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. During the interview I will ask you various questions about your experiences in school, specifically your high achiever status, and the role

that you feel race may contribute to your experiences in school. You will also have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have regarding the topic throughout the interview process. After I have an opportunity to reflect on our interview, you may possibly be asked to participate in a follow conversation with me to clarify some of the statements from your interview. The follow up conversation will last no longer than 30 minutes, and can take place via telephone or face-to-face.

Privacy: Please be aware that [name of district] will provide me with access to your school records. The records provided will be limited to your cumulative grade point average and the race/ethnicity you identified upon enrolling in the district. All of the information I collect will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms (fake names) will be used to protect the identity of participants. The interview will be digitally recorded and will only be reviewed by me. The recording will be kept in a secure, locked location on the University of Missouri Campus. All transcriptions will also be kept in a secure, password protected electronic file.

Explanation of Risks: There are no specific risks to participating in this study. However, unintended social risks may include:
- Peer pressure not to participate and/or
- The potential to expose thoughts, feelings, or raise levels of awareness regarding race and/or school that may not have been previously explored.

Explanation of Benefits: Once I have finished my study I will send you a summary of my findings. It will be a document compiling my interpreted findings from the individuals I interviewed and the documents I analyzed. The research will also provide educators with valuable information that will help them continue to serve and better serve you and other minority students socially and academically.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact me. I can be reached at ejohnson@cpsk12.org. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Campus IRB at (573) 882-9585. You can also feel free to contact my academic advisor, Dr. Juanita Simmons at (573) 882-4218.

If you would like to participate, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep.

I have read this letter and agree to participate.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Identity Development and Authenticity

1. Can you start off by telling me a little bit about yourself, your family, and anything you'd like to share about what it was like on your journey from boyhood until today, specifically how your experiences have shaped your personal identity?

2. What defines you? What's important to you?

3. How would you define "authentic?"

   a. With the understanding of this definition, how would you describe your authentic self?
   b. What has contributed to this definition?

4. How would you describe the messages you've received about what it means to be a Black person in general? A Black male specifically?
   a. How did these ideas develop?

5. What does it mean to be a young Black male in 2016?

   a. In your opinion, how is this similar to or different than what it meant to be a Black male in previous generations

Personal Definitions of Success Compared to School Definition

6. What does success mean to you? Why?
   a. What comes to mind when you envision or think about what it means to be successful at this point in your life and in the future?
   b. How do you think your ideas compare to what society would say is successful?

7. According to your school, you have been identified as a high academic achiever based on your GPA. What does this concept of being a high-achiever mean to you?

Social and Academic Experiences (Special Focus on School)

8. Statistics have shown that Black male students typically do not perform as well academically as their white male counterparts. Why do you think that's the case?
    a. What is it about you that has allowed you to be set apart from this statistic?
    b. What do you think has helped you gain high-achiever status

9. Share with me what it's like for you to interact with people at school.
    c. How would you describe your circle of friends, your interactions with others within and outside your race, and your interactions with the educators in the building?
        i. How, if at all, does your personal identity or the concept of your "authentic self" impact your social and academic life?

10. How do you think your high-achiever status impacts your relationships and interactions with others (peers, teachers, family)?

11. How, if at all, do you think race impacts your *academic experiences* in school?

12. How, if at all, do you think race impacts your *social experiences* at school?
    d. Do you think a student's race has an impact on his or her education in your school? Why or Why not?

13. If there was one piece of advice or word of wisdom you would give to educators about how to better serve high-achievers in general, and high achieving Black males specifically, what would you say?

14. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX E

Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity—Teen

Centrality

1. I feel close to other Black people.
2. I have a strong sense of belonging to other Black people.
3. If I were to describe myself to someone, one of the first things that I would say is that I'm Black.

Private Regard

1. I am happy that I am Black.
2. I am proud to be Black.
3. I feel good about Black people.

Public Regard

1. Most people think that Blacks are as smart as people of other races.
2. People think that Blacks are as good as people from other races.
3. People from other races think that Blacks have made important contributions.

Nationalism

1. Black parents should surround their children with Black art and Black books.
2. Whenever possible, Blacks should buy from Black businesses.
3. Blacks should support Black entertainment by going to Black movies and watching Black TV shows.

Humanism

1. Being an individual is more important than identifying yourself as Black.
2. Blacks should think of themselves as individuals, not as Blacks.
3. Black people should not consider race when deciding what movies to go see.

Assimilation

1. It is important that Blacks go to White schools so that they can
2. learn how to act around Whites.
3. I think it is important for Blacks not to act Black around White
4. people.
5. Blacks should act more like Whites to be successful in this
6. society.

Oppressed Minority

1. People of all minority groups should stick together and fight discrimination.
2. There are other people who experience discrimination similar to Blacks.
3. Blacks should spend less time focusing on how we differ from other minority groups and more time focusing on how we are similar to people from other minority groups.

Likert response scale is as follows:
1 _ *really disagree*,
2 _*kind of disagree*,

3 _ *neutral*,

4 _ *kind of agree*,

5 _ *really agree.*

Scottham, K.M., Sellers, R.M., & Nguyen, H.X. (2008). A measure of racial identity in African American Adolescents: The development of multidimensional inventory of Black identity-teen. *American Psychological Association 14*(4)*,* 297-306. doi: 101037/1099-9809.14.4.297

Appendix F

Comprehensive Race Socialization Inventory

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APPENDIX
COMPREHENSIVE RACE SOCIALIZATION INVENTORY

1. The next few questions are about messages you might have received to help you know <u>what it means to be Black</u> and know <u>how to deal with people outside your race</u>. Please check the box on the right to indicate how often the following people talked with you about these issues when you were growing up.

	Very Often	Fairly Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a. How often did your parents or the people who raised you talk with you about <u>what it means to be Black</u> and <u>how to deal with people outside your race</u>? Would you say very often, fairly often, sometimes, rarely, never?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Not including your parents or the people who raised you, how often did other close relatives such as your brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and grandparents talk with you about <u>what it means to be Black</u> and <u>how to deal with people outside your race</u>?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. How about your friends?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. How about other adults such as members of your place of worship, your teachers, or neighbors?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

IF "NEVER" FOR ALL RESPONSES IN QUESTIONS 1, GO TO QUESTION 5.

2a. When was the first time any of these people talked with you about <u>what it means to be Black</u> and <u>how to deal with people outside your race</u>?

_____

2b. When was the last time?

_____

3. Think about the messages you have received to help you know <u>what it means to be Black</u> and know <u>how to deal with people outside your race</u>. Do you remember being told any of the following things?

	YES	NO
a. Race doesn't matter.	☐	☐
b. With hard work you can achieve anything, regardless of your race.	☐	☐
c. You should 'keep it real.'	☐	☐
d. You should not trust White people.	☐	☐
e. You should be proud to be Black.	☐	☐
f. You should not trust Asian people.	☐	☐
g. Hispanics and Blacks have a lot in common.	☐	☐
h. Whites think they are better than Blacks.	☐	☐
i. Sometimes you have to act White to get ahead.	☐	☐
j. You will experience discrimination.	☐	☐
k. Did you receive any messages that were not mentioned?	☐	☐

IF "NO" TO 3K, GO TO QUESTION 4.

What were the messages that were not mentioned?

_____

4. What do you think was the most <u>useful message</u> that you have received (CHECK ONLY ONE)?

a. Race doesn't matter.	☐
b. With hard work, you can achieve anything, regardless of your race.	☐
c. You should 'keep it real.'	☐
d. You should not trust White people.	☐
e. You should be proud to be Black.	☐
f. You should not trust Asian people.	☐
g. Hispanics and Blacks have a lot in common.	☐
h. Whites think they are better than Blacks.	☐
i. Sometimes you have to act White to get ahead.	☐
j. You will experience discrimination.	☐
k. Other.	☐

5. Which of the following messages would you tell <u>your</u> children to help them know <u>what it means to be Black</u> and know <u>how to deal with people outside their race</u>?

	YES	NO
a. Race doesn't matter.	☐	☐
b. With hard work, you can achieve anything, regardless of your race.	☐	☐

	YES	NO
c. You should 'keep it real.'	☐	☐
d. You should not trust White people.	☐	☐
e. You should be proud to be Black.	☐	☐
f. You should not trust Asian people.	☐	☐
g. Hispanics and Blacks have a lot in common.	☐	☐
h. Whites think they are better than Blacks.	☐	☐
i. Sometimes you have to act White to get ahead.	☐	☐
j. You will experience discrimination.	☐	☐
k. Other.	☐	☐

6. Were there specific things that people did to help you know <u>what it means to be Black</u> and know <u>how to deal with people outside your race</u>?

Yes   ☐
No   ☐

a. If "YES," please give an example.

_____

_____

VITA

Eric Johnson is a native of Kansas City, and a proud graduate of Kansas City Public Schools. After graduating from Lincoln College Preparatory Academy, Eric attended the university of Missouri-Columbia where he received his BSED, English Language Arts; M.Ed, Curriculum and Instruction; Ed.S in K-12 Administration; and EdD in Organizational Leadership. Dr. Johnson serves the students of Columbia, MO as a high school principal in the public schools. He is married to Denisha Johnson, a second grade teacher who also serves in the Columbia school district. Eric and Denisha two children, a daughter named Arian Elise Johnson and a son, Asa Elijah Monroe Johnson.