

Copyright

by

Judith H. Owens

May, 2012

WWBSS – WHAT WOULD BLACK STUDENTS SAY?

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Judith H. Owens

May, 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,
And did He stoop to quibble could tell why
The little buried mole continues blind,
Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day die,
Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus
Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare
If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus
To struggle up a never-ending stair.
Inscrutable His ways are, and immune
To catechism by a mind too strewn
With petty cares to slightly understand
What awful brain compels His awful hand.
Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!
Countee Cullen, 1925

My cast of angels:

Corinne and Jackie – the first social educators in my life, what examples you set

Hannah and John – two incredible kids

Bridgid and Marliece – two dynamic sister-educators

Cam – you reminded me I could still learn and challenged me to act

Cheryl – you pointed me to the question

Yali – you told me I had something valuable to say

Susan – always the voice of calm, reason, interest and reality

Dustie, Amy and Sabrina – partners in the struggle to finish, thanks for all of your help

Jason and Bernardo – you two understood me best

Alex – can I pick new friends, or what?

BECKY PEREZ – just hoped to be half as strong as you, and thank you for making this a reality and not giving up on me, so meet you at the front of the bus!

WWBSS – WHAT WOULD BLACK STUDENTS SAY?

An Abstract
of A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by
Judith H. Owens
May, 2012

Abstract

This is one story of a study of black high school students and their experiences with school. The study employed the narrative inquiry process and method to listen to student stories about their journeys through the educational terrain. These stories were valued for their insight on how students view race as significant in their school lives and to their academic achievement.

The participants in this study share authentic understanding of their roles as black individuals and learners. They describe the meaning they place on their relationships at school, explicate issues of race within the context of being black, high-achieving students that attend majority white, suburban high schools, and provide their own perspective on the critical question, *Does race still matter?*

The influences of race described by participants are categorized as being those that *affirm* them as individuals and black students, *challenge* deeply-held stereotypes about their race and their abilities, *impede* their efforts to share in perceived resources they believe are reserved for the privileged and powerful, and *inspire* them to persevere within a system that even at their young age they interpret as being tilted against them.

These stories provide an understanding of how these students believe race operates in schools, its connection to their educational experiences and its impact on their academic achievement. This study demonstrates the value of utilizing the narrative inquiry process to garner authentic and relevant knowledge from an informed and reliable source. Information this valuable should be used by all stakeholders to influence school practices and policies that are targeted to support black high school students along their academic journeys in meaningful and effective ways.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
Personal Reflections on Race and Education.....	5
My Childhood	8
Chapter 2 – A Review of the Literature.....	23
Race in America.....	24
Race in Education	29
The Schools as Agents for Change – Two Perspectives.....	37
The Search for Causes	44
Origins of the Achievement Gap	52
Purpose of the Achievement Gap	64
Critical Race Theory	71
The Search for Solutions.....	77
Chapter 3 – Methodology	80
Narrative Inquiry.....	81
Study Outline	88
Participants.....	90
Group Conversations	90
Social Networking	92
Reflective Journals.....	93
Follow Up Telephone Interviews.....	94
Conclusion	94
Chapter 4 – Findings and Analyses	99
Narrative Inquiry Process	100
Participants.....	103
Field and Research Texts	105
What Black Students Said.....	107
Affirming Influences.....	108
Challenging Influences	114
Impeding Influences.....	123
Inspiring Influences	129
Limitations	132
Chapter 5 – Conclusion.....	135
Recommendations.....	140
Educating School Personnel	140
Increase the Number of Black School Personnel.....	142
Equity and Justice	143
Implications.....	144
Final Reflections	146
References	149

Appendix A – Transcript Session 1	168
Appendix B – Transcript Session 2	180
Appendix C – Transcript Session 3	191
Appendix D – Follow Up (Em)	202
Appendix E – Follow Up (Tee)	205
Appendix F – Follow Up (Vee)	208

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Education is a lifelong journey of self-discovery endeavoring to awaken in the individual a truer and deeper understanding of self and others. Education should provide learners with continuous and wide-ranging opportunities to explore, question, reflect and make meaning of information known, presented and discovered. Placing these sources alongside learners' own experiences allows them to construct more personal, relevant and authentic understandings of their knowledge claims and empowers them to become socially-engaged, problem solvers and decision makers. These truer individual knowledge perspectives are both valuable and valid, and must be the foundation of any society's mission of freedom, inclusion, equal opportunity and justice for all of its citizens. Teachers who partner with students in the education process play a crucial role by facilitating the development of independent, critical and confident learners who become productive citizens.

Education can also be a tool of oppression, indoctrination and assignation. As a public and mandated institution the process of education can function to reifying social, cultural, economic and political claims of authority, consensus and merit that benefit select citizens and place others at the fringes. Education sites, or schools, are perfect locations of hegemonic fabrication where the agenda of the dominant class is perpetuated and gifts of power and privilege are distributed to those deemed deserving. It is at these locations that the myth of meritocracy is used to justify inequitable treatment and the resulting regression and failures of the powerless. When education functions as an instrument of demoralization as well as a facilitator and manufacturer of institutionalized racism, its detrimental impact is almost certainly prescriptive and irreversible. In this

role, education becomes an intentional weapon of personal, cultural, social, and economic destruction.

Stories about school can be tales of achievement, popularity, personal growth, validation and positive relationships. But, everyone experiences school differently and for many their narratives would describe experiences of failure, marginalization, regression, bullying and isolation. Whatever the remembrance, stories allow their teller to organize, edit, and express events in the way that best represents their beliefs and feelings.

Storytelling also provides the benefit of emotional space between teller, listener and the event - room to share more, at a risk of less judgment and reproof. The teller's version is legitimized simply because it has an audience. In this way storytelling becomes a safe mode of social interaction that looks beyond the recount of a series of events. Stories become an invitation for others to share an experience once individual but now common to the group and provide power through voice in ways that may not be possible through direct questioning. Therefore, stories about school hold a truth that cannot be revealed by examining commonly collected education data such as grades, test scores, demographics and ranking.

This study is about black students and their school experiences. It endeavored to listen to student participants' stories about their journeys through the education terrain. Through storytelling, the researcher hoped to acquire a better understanding of how the participants view their roles as individuals and learners, how they make meaning of their experiences at school, and how they explicate issues of race within the context of being a black student. The research method and process chosen for this study was Narrative Inquiry.

This study relied heavily on the appropriateness and value of narrative inquiry as a research method and practice. As a methodology, narrative inquiry both confirms the relative nature of knowledge and validates human expression as an effective vehicle to evince the lived experience. Narrative inquiry is well suited for chronicling personal stories and collecting ineffable data with authentic relevance to the participant subjects. It is a necessary process for revealing both the objective and subjective natures of meaning and truth.

There were four (4) participants for this research. The participants were selected from a purposively sample of volunteers who are black high school students. The researcher operated as both a participant and an observer during the research process. The researcher's stories of being a black student were shared and positioned alongside those of the participants in order to expose common and emerging themes, patterns of commensurable experience and instances of divergent understanding or individual meaning. Data was collected during in-person group conversation sessions, video conferencing, reflective journaling and follow up interviews.

The inspiration for this study of the educational experiences of black students is personal and self-serving. As the parent of a black, male, academically unpredictable child I struggled with the suggestions that my son was low-achieving because he was a lazy, disorganized and unmotivated student who did not understand the connection between an education and his future life opportunities. Given that he was identified as having a high IQ by the school district, was never a discipline problem at school or home, communicated about a range of topics at an age-appropriate level and socialized well with his peers, I remained confused about why he was consistently evaluated as being

below average. And while I objected, passively, to this assessment of him at intermittent conferences with his teachers I still believed in their authority and more importantly their knowledge and intention of doing what was best for him.

In 2005, I entered my first doctoral class. This class and one of its required textbooks provided a different perspective on education, the classroom, and the academic experiences of students in American schools. One paragraph in *Critical Pedagogy Primer* (Kinchloe, 2004) spoke to my struggle to name and reconcile the tension between what I knew as a parent and what I was being told by the school. I became empowered to question their narrative. The paragraph stated,

Thus, proponents of critical pedagogy understand that every dimension of schooling and every form of educational practice are potentially contested spaces. Shaped by history and challenged by a wide range of interest groups, educational practice is a fuzzy concept as it takes place in numerous settings, is shaped by a plethora of often-invisible forces, and can operate even in the name of democracy and justice to be totalitarian and oppressive (p. 2).

When my son approached middle school I began to see him struggle with his lack of academic success. The gap between his student self-image and his grades grew wider and began to affect his sense of self-efficacy. Until this point, all of my actions of contestation and resistance had been waged privately (pointing out to his first grade teacher that his placement in the lowest reading ability group was in error because he could read already; getting tests rescored; insisting on placement in special programs). But, my actions were still grounded in the belief that, principally, the school had my son's best interest at heart. In a classroom I began my personal and public exploration of

the complications of education that can make it, “hurtful to particular students” (Kinchloe 2004, p.2).

Personal Reflections on Race and Education

I did not know there was an achievement gap between black and white students until I had children of my own despite being a black student who has attended majority white schools most of my life. In the late 1980s I taught at a school that was predominately white and yet from both of these perspectives, as student and teacher, I had no idea there were achievement differences along racial lines. I knew black students who were smart and white students who were smart. The converse was also true. In her discussion on the impact of class in education, bell hooks (1994) points out how we have been conditioned to believe that schools are neutral spaces. She writes, “From grade school on, we are encouraged to cross the threshold of the school believing we are entering a democratic space - a free zone where the desire to study and learn makes us equal” (hooks, 1994, p.177). Many imagine the potentially negative influences of class, race, and gender on school experience but still believe that student effort will be met with appropriate performance outcomes and rewards – that it will ameliorate these factors and the student will overcome. I was one of the acolytes.

My children attended a predominately white, suburban elementary school where they were usually one of the two, maybe three, black children in their classroom each year. I became concerned about both the living and learning environments I placed them in when my six-year old daughter refused to choose a black Barbie doll to purchase at a local store. I kept overruling her selection of white dolls offering up brown-skinned dolls dressed as doctors, astronauts and ballerinas but she refused my choices. She finally

explained to me that the white Barbie dolls were *prettier*. Many friends with black daughters had this same experience. The historical significance of her perception was not lost on me eliciting thoughts of the research conducted by child psychologist, Dr. Kenneth Clark (1950), that was used to support the legal claim that segregated schools were detrimental to the psyche of black children, in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (Brown v. Board, 1954) court case. In their experiments, Mamie and Kenneth Clark (1950) used dolls to determine how black children perceived race. The Clarks' findings were that segregation damaged personality development in young children, and that prejudice and discrimination caused them to develop a sense of racial inferiority and self-hatred. While this research highlighted the damaging effects of segregation, black parents who integrate predominately white, suburban neighborhoods are very conscious of the potential for the internalization of negative race perceptions by their children, also. For this reason I worked hard to promote positive race identity and pride. Despite this proactive approach to child-rearing somehow my daughter had still concluded that being black was in some way inferior to being white.

Other instances involving negative race perceptions occurred during my children's school years - a lack of referrals to, and participation in, the school's coveted programs and organizations, and consistent placement in classes with inexperienced teachers are two examples that come to mind – but, the pivotal moment that publicly exposed the practice of distinguishing students by race occurred during a parent meeting at their school. The topic of the meeting was the school's accountability rating. The principal was reviewing the latest results from state-mandated testing and projected an enormous chart on a screen in the gymnasium that showed student scores disaggregated

by sub-population (defined by race, English-language ability and family income). Her presentation was focused on how best to address the deficiencies of certain student groups and improve the school's overall performance results. I remember staring at the huge chart trying to find the errors in its figures, assured that I was not seeing a thirty-percent difference in the mathematics scores of white and black children. As she explained about resources that would be redirected to help address this problem and encouraged audience feedback, I remember a white parent asking what funds would be directed to supporting the children who were *not* lowering the school's scores?

I was confused by the data, trying to imagine how such a small population (less than 10%) could negatively impact the school's performance results so heavily, but I said nothing. Instead I sat feeling conspicuous, embarrassed and even guilty because by association, I was derelict and responsible for damaging the school's scholastic reputation simply because I was the parent of black children. It was at this meeting that I became aware of the practice of disaggregating performance outcomes by groups and the broader school community's perception about who was achieving and who was not. I learned there was such a thing as the black/white student achievement gap. But, my first thought was not to question its truth - what I wanted to know was why and how it was true.

Paulo Freire (1992) believed that no act has a single reason behind it and for this reason he found it most important to focus on the whys and not the fact itself. Why was race (or income or English-language ability, for that matter) significant to grouping and examining student performance and how had the school come to understand and accept the legitimacy of achievement differences? By using race as a characteristic, what messages were being transmitted within and outside of the school? My concern extended

beyond the school and community's internalization of an achievement gap between black and white students to include the influence these beliefs had on black students in the school.

My Childhood

My upbringing is a collection of stories about deliberate effort to develop a positive sense of self-awareness and race consciousness. If you are black in America there are revolving opportunities to question the meaning and value of being black. For any of us, identity and value are only half of the equation. How others see and value us is just as significant to who we are. In his writings on spiritual strivings, W.E.B. Du Bois (2003) discusses this by addressing a question posed to him that asked, "How does it feel to be a problem?" (Du Bois, 2003, p. 7). He describes his reflection on this query as a strange experience because he has never been considered anything else – black and a problem in America. He continues by explaining this unique and unnatural status saying, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, 2003, p.9).

If you are white in America the truth, value and meaning of this status speak for themselves. Peggy McIntosh (1989) acknowledges this fact stating, "...I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an

advantage” (p. 1). Defined as a weightless knapsack, McIntosh (1989) considers white privilege to include a collection of “special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks,” all unearned and unrecognized (p. 1). These provisions allow for seamless transitions within American society. In this way being white and American is a reduction – you are *just* American. In contrast, being a *black* American is a complicated identity, tinted and textured. I am never just black, or ever just America. This duality produces a perpetual, complex and competing narrative.

My black consciousness, or race awareness, as well as my Americanism are the result of intentional actions on the part of my family, efforts to assist me with the development of a conscious and truer self. A high priority was placed on developing a strong and caring core, a broad sense of justice and a spirit of community, but my family also understood that many of the challenges I would face along my path of self-discovery while growing up black in America would concern race (Du Bois, 2003). They believed I needed race training. My family provided multiple opportunities for critical thought about race. They never argued about the ontology or legitimacy of race, rarely evaluated its merit or focused on ways to leverage its impact. Rather these opportunities were meant to provide me with swatches of material experiences I could use to construct the race garment I would wear. I was being asked to reflect on my individual circumstance in the hope that it would inform my future actions and relationships and equip me to manage them. As Paulo Freire (2000) observed, “Human beings *are* because they *are* in a situation” (p. 109). It was my family’s desire that I learn to manage being both *subject* and *object* within race-conscious America and that I become my most authentic self through the practices of critical reflection and critical action (Freire, 2000).

In the process of normalizing whiteness we destabilize non-whiteness. It is the ‘others’ who live a conditional existence as hybrids of ethnicity and nationality. For them there is the constant dance between defending their national allegiance and celebrating their ethnic identity. As a black American I am not afforded simple meanings of my race and nationality, and so as a child I needed to learn to view my membership through the lenses of various categories of identity and settings. I had to become expert at reading the world around me (Shor & Freire 1986, p. 135) and understand how this world viewed me.

Education, both informal and institutional, has always been regarded as a means of survival and a vehicle of social advancement for blacks in America. When social, political and economic progress was not realized in post-slavery America, blacks clung to the hopes of parity and social elevation through education. As bell hooks (1994) notes, “The emphasis on education as necessary for liberation that black people made in slavery and then on into reconstruction informed our lives” (hooks, 1994, p. 51). Elders taught children both obvious and invisible boundaries (a set of unspoken rules and behaviors) to improve their chances of survival as slaves - never look a white person in the eyes to avoid being perceived as arrogant or rebellious, never get caught reading or writing to avoid implications of intelligence or competence, never confuse your status or place as slaves in juxtaposition to the master’s children to avoid ideas of equality, and so forth.

These lessons, carried forward to subsequent generations, transformed into warnings and strategies about how to interact within a race-conscious nation. As opportunities emerged within the establishment of common schools and colleges opened to black students, families viewed education as a springboard over their second-class

citizenship and status, propelling them toward the American Dream. This was true in my family.

I was taught the significant historical accomplishments of famous black Americans early in my childhood but this instruction also included familiar references. My family was filled with social activists. My grandmother was a well-known citizen in her small, southern Ohio town. She spoke to many civic groups about the history of Troy, Ohio, and did radio programs for Women's and Black History month. She supported the special needs community and was active in the local and national Special Olympics program. But what she would regard highest would be the work she did in her community tending to anyone in need of room, board or a helping hand. My mother and her sisters were all involved in local politics, social causes and charitable organizations. They carried with them the tradition of my grandmother's work to whatever city they lived in. As a child growing up in New York I spent many weekends in Harlem absorbing the arts and culture of this rich neighborhood at beauty shops, street markets and rallies listening to H. Rap Brown and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. speak about black empowerment. I also remember going to the Apollo Theatre watching James Brown, The Temptations and Stevie Wonder perform. My family was actually in the traffic jam of police and ambulances at 124th Street when Malcolm X was shot at the Audubon Ballroom although we didn't know what happened until we got to a relative's home later.

During summers spent at my grandmother's house, I remember the car ride we would take in the afternoon to her job as a maid for a wealthy manufacturing magnate. She took a break at midday after taking care of the morning household operations and before the same was required in the evening. She would come home, pick up the

grandkids and drag us around town to see several infirmed people she looked in on regularly. Sometimes she would take us back to work with her and although we had to enter through the kitchen we would sometimes be allowed to explore the family's mansion when they were out for the evening or out of town. We would run out to the stable and see the horses or roam around the second floor, our destination the playroom that had every toy imaginable.

To get to their house we had to take the town's major highway and this meant driving past the whites-only community outdoors swimming pool. And, even though there was a community center for blacks not far away that had an indoor swimming pool, I would stare for the entire time *their* pool was within view because the children seemed to be having the time of their lives, running, jumping, splashing and laughing. My grandmother never said a word about this pool nor did she try to placate us by reminding us that there was a pool for us on the other side of town. I just remember we would always ride by the pool in silence and she never let her eyes leave the road, an intentional act of inadvertence. I would stare at my grandmother during these rides trying to resolve and take in who and what this fiercely proud and accomplished women was (and by extension, who that made me) – a maid to a wealthy white family, owner of several properties and a stock portfolio, mother of college graduates, civic leader in the community, and proud black woman who couldn't swim in the whites-only pool. I could almost feel the rise in temperature of the car's interior, her rage at the injustice being the energy source. But I also observed the restraint she exercised and I knew her reaction was intentional and educational. I just wasn't sure what lesson I was supposed to be learning.

When I was 10 years old, my mother took us on a ‘field trip’ to the Hough Riots in Cleveland, Ohio to witness first-hand civil unrest. I remember being scared we might get hurt but also exhilarated by the chance to see first-hand what was being aired on network television stations. My fear was balanced by an understanding that the rage I was witnessing was not directed at my family or me because we were black, too. As a family we visited Operation Breadbasket (precursor to The Rainbow Coalition) in Chicago and attended protests against the Vietnam War. My family’s circle of close friends (and relatives) was a rich cross-section of every imaginable persuasion and this was never hidden from us, openly acknowledged and frequently celebrated. I was asked to recognize and appreciate difference both inside and outside of my immediate everyday world. Woven into these experiences were visits to other aspects of culture, too – international travel, museums, performing arts venues, two World Fairs, countless parades, places of worship, cultural festivals and ethnic food restaurants. My view of America as an amalgam of diverse citizens and multiple perspectives was informed by these exposures. Equally important were the counter narratives brought forth in stories when family and friends gathered. These stories served as additional ingredients for the formation and grounding of my identity. The recounts of my family’s childhood exploits, their school and employment experiences, romances, successes, failures and deaths carried messages of the significance of race on these experience’s outcomes.

I am the great great-grandchild of freeborn blacks from Virginia who were among the first black residents in Ohio, and of former slaves from Kentucky. I am the great-grandchild of an interracial couple, a mulatto couple and two black couples, who trained thoroughbred horses and were Methodist ministers. I am the grandchild of a maid who

sent three daughters to college in the mid-nineteen forties. I am the child of one of the first black officers assigned to command an integrated troop in Europe following desegregation of the U.S. Army. I am the sister of two college graduates, the aunt of two nieces and two nephews who all attended college, making my children the fourth generation in our family to pursue higher education. I belong to a family steeped in *firsts*. Consistent messages were threaded through this honorable and colorful family roll call of achievements; (1) being black was both something of which to be proud but also a condition to endure in America, (2) you are only as great as your capacity to give to others, and (3) education is a privilege, attendance and achievement non-negotiable, failure is inevitable and revocable.

There are instances of prejudice that speckle my entire experience as a student. As one of only four black children at a Catholic school in New York, I recall a nun explaining that through penance Negroes ascended to earth as former sinners burned by the fires of hell which caused their skin to be dark. My initial reaction was deep feelings of shame but I also maintained a sense of disbelief. According to this person of authority my race made me not only disgraceful but also potentially contagious in its sinfulness. At school I spent a lot of time and energy contemplating how to become less of a pariah or problem (Du Bois, 2003).

Because of my family's efforts to counter racist thinking I knew to dismiss the nun's explanation of my blackness even as a first grader but I did tell my mother about what had been said. She advised me to ignore it, saying the nun was crazy. Fully influenced by Catholic religious doctrine, I remember not being sure whether I would go to hell because I was black or because my mother had spoken out against the nun. My

mother's position was to not allow a bigoted nun to stand in the way of us receiving what she considered a *good* parochial school education. During grade school I vacillated between the conflicting approaches of trying to transcend my race in order to achieve. I learned to listen through two sets of ears, and see through two sets of eyes. In speaking about her experiences in graduate school, bell hooks (1994) discusses the advantages of being seen and not heard that black students learn, noting that it was implied that silence and obedience were rewarded in the classroom, loudness, anger and emotion deemed unacceptable. In this way, censorship within the classroom conditions student behavior while also reinforcing dominant culture values and practices. At home I was expressive about my blackness but during school I remained mostly silent.

Bowles and Gintis (2001) argue in support of hook's (1994) claim that social interactions and rewards for behaviors (correspondence principle) correspond to the personality traits viewed as applicable to a student's social-class background and expectations for future employment - docility and obedience for working class students, initiative and assertiveness for the managerial class. In *Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited*, they suggest that their original theories that schools promote specific pro-social behavior regardless of their value to individual students, and also advance traits that advantage one group (school personnel) even if they are not generally advantageous, still hold true after three decades (Bowles & Gintis, 2001, p.19).

My solution was to become as invisible as possible knowing that my family expected me to achieve and endure with a deliberateness that parried these messages of deficit. This all changed during the fourth grade. That year I had a male teacher whose family owned an upscale dress shop in Shaker Heights, an upper middle class suburb of

Cleveland, Ohio. I am not sure why Mr. Kulberg decided to become a teacher and can only imagine that with his family's wealth and connections he could have chosen another profession. Mr. Kulberg helped me re-vision myself as a student with agency by employing two simple practices - he looked at me when he spoke to me and he listened to what I had to say. For a student who tried her best to fade as far in the background as possible this was affirming and empowering. I went from choosing to sit at the back of the classroom and be as inconspicuous as possible, to being the spelling test checker, class monitor and the go-to student when the correct answer was needed. I still remember Mr. Kulberg's piercing blue eyes, his suede elbow-patched jackets and stale jokes. I fell in love with him and by default I also fell in love with learning. My wish is for a Mr. Kulberg for every student who enters a classroom.

In junior high school, I remember reverting back to my strategy of maintaining my invisibility, neither being recognized for any special talents nor any transgressions, but in high school I was everywhere - cheerleader, athlete, Black Student Organization member, class president junior and senior year. I attended high school at The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, established by Professor John Dewey as a location to test his educational theories, in 1896. I was a confident student who ranked in the upper fourth of my class. At the time I had no idea about how this institution's practices differed from those of a traditional public or private school but I knew I was in a place where I was encouraged to question, think deeply and participate fully in my education. I understood that it was a privilege to attend this school because of the cost and the selection criteria.

Although I don't remember exactly, I believe the upper school had a student population that was approximately 10% black. The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools was very proud of its record as the first private school in Chicago to admit blacks, in 1942 (University of Chicago Laboratory Schools website, 2011). What was memorable about my junior and senior years was the emergence of racial discord between black and white students at The Lab School. Beginning with the rejected membership application of a white student to the Black Student Association (they assessed his interest in joining as being disingenuous) and then following with a spate of articles in the school newspaper and missives pinned to the central bulletin board, the racial lines at this seemingly race-transcendent institution were drawn. Angry words were exchanged on both sides and although the issue of race was covered comprehensively in the 1973 yearbook along with another article that made note of the rise in black student participation in leadership roles at the school, what was notable was that the school administration abstained from facilitating any discussion among the disparate parties or intervening to resolve the issue.

The disharmony lasted my last two years of high school and with such a small student population, less than 500 students in the entire upper school, it was almost impossible for any at the school to remain neutral. Race, as a social and institutional phenomenon, had reared its head and long term, interracial relationships were put to the test. In the end, all of the arguments proffered by white students distilled down to a final perspective – black students were receiving unearned admission to prestigious universities and colleges because of preferential treatment. By doing so they were taking spots that belonged to qualified, and more importantly, deserving white students. This

was the mid-1970s - the period between the momentum sparked by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the dawn of the push back on civil rights legislative progress, as seen in cases such as Allan Bakke's (Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 1978). Advancements may have been made in America regarding race equality in the spheres of employment, education and social mobility but changes in the fundamental beliefs of superiority, entitlement and resentment were merely suppressed and publically presented as being politically and socially incorrect. When the stakes became high, the embers of racist thinking catch fire in even the most liberal of environments. I was the third senior class president, in a row, who was black. The two former presidents were attending Harvard University. Yet, during my college counseling session my white advisor suggested that it was best that I apply only to state universities.

Even within the best schools belief in the primacy of Euro-centricity is prevalent. Either through the absence of diverse voices in the institution, curriculum and instruction, uninformed and stereotypic representations of cultures of color or the valuation of everything coming from the white, male, European tradition as 'normal', the message that *white* is both right and good is transmitted to all students. The Lab School had a few black teachers and staff who mentored minority students. They sponsored the Black Student Association, they counseled on individual issues of perceived prejudicial treatment and they operated under the radar exercising an unwillingness to be too conspicuous or outspoken as minority teachers in a prestigious school. Considering the progressive paradigm of the school, I do not remember any remarkable engagement with diverse pedagogy beyond the basic multicultural fare seen in most high schools at that time; reading *Black Boy* (Wright, 1954) and *Invisible Man* (Ellison, 1952), a Maya

Angelou poetry project, discussions on the high-profile black alumni, innovators and political figures during the month of February, and one black production by the drama department each year.

Although many of the minority students came from the upper-middle class neighborhood surrounding the school and were the children of university employees and professors a considerable number of black students also came from outside of this academic culture, albeit, mostly from solidly middle-class families. I do not remember many opportunities to share information about our cultural differences or to reference the diversity that existed within the school's general or minority populations. We all knew we came from a broad spectrum of backgrounds but The Lab School never chose to acknowledge this student characteristic. Their choice to focus mainly on the academic experiences of the student body did not help the many students who voiced serious concerns about identity issues regarding race, gender and religion.

To outsiders, The Lab School was a beacon of progressive education practice although I now know that many public schools in Chicago were providing a critical curriculum to their students, also. The Lab School kept its explorations of multiculturalism within controlled parameters and still managed at the same time to apologetically convey the message that ultimately students must navigate and achieve within the prevailing standards of American society that are informed by the dominant white culture. In this way they both informed about and normalized cultural dominance and racial oppression. Their pride developing the individual and improving the social came mainly from revealing these truths and hypocrisies and not from advocating a challenge to or reform of them.

I lived within the multiple messages from my family and society. Some were contradictory and some complimentary – be proud of your race and minimize its significance; contest racism and rise around and above it; know who you are and who you are does not determine who you can be. Perhaps, the most important lesson was teaching me to recognize, reflect on, counter and endorse my identity as a black American (to sense through two different sets of ears and eyes), to move forward, strategically, within paradoxical ideas, expressions and practices of race, democracy, justice and humanity. In reading and participating within the larger society and moving toward a life of meaning and personal empowerment I needed to understand that America has fluid and revolving definitions of race identity and entitlement. There is no place this is truer than within the institution we call education.

From these lessons and experiences I gained important insight about the connection between my race, my educational experiences and my academic performance. The stories I have told and those I have yet to tell are critical to reaching this understanding. From this understanding comes the following important questions for this research study: (1) why would an understanding of how race influences educational experiences be of significance to the academic performance of study participants, (2) in what way do participants believe race influences their educational experiences, and (3) how can this intersectionality be explored through the stories of participants and the researcher during the narrative inquiry process?

Findings from other studies support the use of race as a lens through which to view the academic experiences and achievement of black students. Research on the static conceptions of identity and the importance of critical race awareness (DeMeulenaere,

2009), the tension between maintaining a positive ethnic identity and being academically successful (Bergin & Cook, 2002), participants as positioned subjects (Gayles, 2005), the individuality of the black student experience (Hemmings, 1996), and black parents' beliefs about the significance of race in their children's achievement (Williams, 2006), uphold this approach. Dr. Pedro Noguera, professor of education at New York University, who has researched race, student identity and achievement extensively, visited students at a Brooklyn, N.Y. high school to answer questions generated from their research projects on the achievement gap that were inspired by a viewing of one of his video-taped speeches on the topic. The students' research included an investigation of the achievement gap in their school. They developed an instrument, collected survey data and then analyzed it and reported their findings in graphs and narrative reports.

Students questioned the origin and legitimacy of the achievement gap, discussed its impact on their lives and offered some possible solutions from closing it (Fullan, 2011). This study illustrates the important placement of black students in the conversation about and the identification of solutions to the achievement gap. Having those most impacted, black students, share their stories and play an active role in the investigation of this issue is the only way to ensure that findings are authentic and relevant to changes in educational policy, programs and practice. My research objectives were to:

- Understand how black students view race as it relates to their educational experiences.
- Share stories of both unique and common school experiences.

- Provide opportunities for participants to reflect on and counter the master narrative about black student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
- Empower participants to become the architects of their own truths.
- Expose potential strategies for navigating the black student education experience that are both transformative and transferrable.

Chapter 2 – A Review of the Literature

Conversations about race are at best awkward and at worst they are painful and instigative. Whites become the privileged recipients of unquestionable national identity at birth, in American. This leaves it up to all others to justify their presence and rightful access to our nation's resources regardless of what is constitutionally conferred to them by birth or naturalization. Recently, popular perspectives have emerged that suggest that American is post-racial (the election of the first non-white president), color-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) or that just as racism had a beginning we have reached its end (D'Sousa, 1995). These arguments bring into dispute the contemporary nature of racism and its power to impede the quality of life and progress of non-whites in the 21st century.

Belief that injustice is applied to various citizen groups blindly, equally, agenda-free, or even unconsciously is exemplified in the diverse reactions to the arrest of Harvard University professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for disorderly conduct in his own home in 2009 (Watkins, 2010; The New York Times, 2009). Many believe that race is incidental to the workings of this nation and the reality of its inequitable distribution of dominance and power. This perspective serves to support challenges to the outcries for reparation of past transgressions against select groups waged by white Americans who view themselves as the *de facto* victims of racism (Kinchloe, 2006). Of course, these positions require what Kinchloe (p. 19) refers to as "socio-historical amnesia" in order to argue down substantive evidence to the contrary. Strands of this new permutation of white rights, supremacy and victimization ideology (Blake, 2011) can be found in the emergence and popularity of the New Conservative and Tea Party movements now

popular among younger white Americans. Once again, the idea and significance of race is being reargued and revisioned by another generation.

In the novel, *Passing* (1929) by Harlem Renaissance writer Nella Larsen, characters Brian and Irene have an exchange about a mulatto friend's husband using a derogatory word for a black person. The friend, Clare, is 'passing' as white although it is the couple's belief that her husband, who is white, knows his wife's true race. It is this assumption that confounds Irene – if he is so disgusted by blacks, as evidenced by his use of a pejorative, why would he stay married to her, *and*, if she is aware of his true feelings why would she stay married to him? In one of the most profound and salient statements Brian replies, "If I knew that, I'd know what race is" (p. 96).

Race in America

In America, race is an enigmatic construct, as witnessed by its competing abilities to elect a black man president while simultaneously undermining his legitimacy and authority as the nation's leader because of his race (CNN Politics, 2009). The nation still struggles with the idea of race centuries after the model was hypothesized as a scientific approach for explaining human diversity.

As a scientific theory the concept of distinct races within the human species, rooted in Enlightenment era postulation, has met with substantial and substantive challenge (UNESCO 1950; American Anthropological Association 1998). Programs such as *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (California Newsreel, 2003) and *Race: Are We So Different* (American Anthropological Association, 2007) are dedicated to documenting historical context for understanding the history of race science theories. Consensual and

explicit in early theoretical models of classification are the emphasis and conclusion on the European race superiority (American Anthropological Association, 1998).

Modern ideas on differentiation within the human species are grounded in identifying geography, ergo environment and adaptation, as central to the visible variations among people and groups, as opposed to genetic origin. Race Theory has moved beyond the milieu of empirical science into the social and political realms. Propagating human difference once served to justify the institution of slavery, and its associative treatment of non-whites as *sub*-American, for as far back as colonial times. The invention and exaggeration of visual differences laid the foundation for race doctrine (Smedley, 2007). Four hundred years later race as a construct remains an impalpably subjective force with evolving and elusive (imaginary and inventive) definition and theory thus contributing to its resilience and longevity. Ideological premises that people can be grouped and ranked, and that there are associated, heritable features and behaviors for each grouping from which they cannot transcend (Smedley, 1998) has little to do with science and mostly to do with establishing and maintaining white privilege, power and dominance. Race is a useful vehicle for culling, repositioning and stratifying certain segments of society to establish and maintain the prerogative and class status of a select group. And, as with any sustainable system of caste once you are born into a group concerted effort is applied to ensure that you remain there.

What makes race indelible? With the mobility and blending taking place today between America's increasingly diverse populations how can we still employ a social classification system known as race? Historically and today, classifying citizens by race is a purposive process that demoralizes human beings. It establishes majority and

minority standing based on demographical numbers that very soon will be (if they are not already) refutable, under the aegis of ensuring that national resources are distributed equitably, and practices and policies do not discriminate. Race is the impetus for judicial enactments (Arizona's Immigration Law, S.B. 1070) and the basis of institutional practices (the decennial U.S. Census) that continue the classification narrative and simultaneously provide evidence of its validity. These actions support a legacy of race theory that remains ideologically resolute and irrevocable.

Since inception, every issue of the U.S. Census questionnaire has changed its questions concerning race, modifying them to reflect the evolutionary (from science to social) complexity of this concept (Population Reference Bureau, 2010). Controversy over the resurrection of the term "Negro" that was first used in 1930, along with the inclusion of race options "black" and "African American," the appearance and disappearance of certain groups of color such as Chinese, Indian, Japanese, mulatto, quadroon and octoroon, and the ability to self-select multiple race identities, are all representative of the irresolution of the meaning of race in America.

Over the 240 years of census counting, category permutations include: free white/free persons/slave, the data item "color" appearing in 1850, and the 1910 data item "color or race" (Cohn, 2010). For 2010, the Census Bureau explains that the racial categories, "reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country, and are not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically or genetically" (United States Census, 2010). Conceding that race category also encompasses nationality, socio-cultural origin and ethnicity invalidates race as a meaningful system of classification, the government still insists it must collect data based upon it to allocate funds and establish

congressional districts. Expanding and collapsing racial categories for the census has not provided any more insight into what *is*, and what *is not* race in America. But it legitimizes race as equally significant for data collection purposes along with legal status, residency, family income and marital status.

Cartesian (1637) logic tells us that engaging in arguments about the truth of race confirms its reality. How can we argue against the existence of something that is not? If race *is*, then what are its critical attributes? Is race based in ethnicity, culture, socio-political practice or some or all of these? We may not agree on what race is but we know that it is, that is to say, we know it when we see it. This is perhaps the only irrefutable aspect of race epistemology but also its most sensitive property - race is visible, it is what we see when we look at someone. The language of race, rather than the reality of it bear greater responsibility for its presence, power and persistence in society. Jones (2005) offers the Aristotelean equation that race = man + color. Essentially, race is the color you are. Because it is impossible for people to separate from their physical color, race is perceived as a sinew between variation in skin tone and genetics, instead of as the confluence of environmental factors operating below the epidermal layer that are expressed cognitively, anatomically and behaviorally. First planted in our society to explain the emerging variety in America's population resulting from a rise in immigration and the need for a larger labor force during and after colonization, the skin color/genetics theory has been internalized by every generation since, even in the face of strong scientific evidence of disproof.

The agenda of race categorizing holds some commonly accepted principles resulting in the spread of a cross-cultural and multigenerational narrative. One of these

propositions is that race has terminal points – black and white. There is nothing beyond being white or at the other end of the spectrum, being black. All other races, be they emerging, contrived, self-identified or re-classified, are positioned along the continuum between these diametrical positions. A second proposition is that one of these positions, being white, is considered normal in America and being black, anomalous.

The establishment of a normal orientation lays the foundation for valuation; if it is normal it must also be better. So, within the binary, ideas of what is normal or abnormal, which is good or bad, or right or wrong is also implicated. In his review of *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*, Westmoreland (2010) quotes author George Yancy as stating, “To be white in America is to be always already implicated in structures of power” (p. 113). Defense of the privileges that whites experience is often based on perceptions of their status as normal, good and right, ergo, deserving. That leaves everyone else to be some degree of deviation from this normative state. In some cases and for some groups the magnitude of this deviation is slight while for others the measured distance is extreme.

With all race paradigms failing to definitively present evidence of the beginning of one race and the end of another, it would seem logical that practices predicated on this ideology must also be faulty. Yet, within every social sphere, economic, political, judicial and socio-cultural there is a chasm between the white experience and the experience of *others* in America. The scientific ‘nothing’ of race ends up resulting in a social ‘something’. In the absence of scientific evidence the social idea of race is freely employed through the use of the terms black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American and Pacific Islander in our everyday conversations as well as throughout our institutions

and systems. And depending on the social sphere the race categories may change, revolving (Negro, then Black, then both Negro and Black on the U.S. Census), evolving (Pacific Islander) and dissolving (Mulatto, Quadroon and Mongoloid) seemingly at will. It is this protean nature that has made race potent, inexorable and indomitable. Another salient fact about race is the assignment process based not upon biological or scientific significance but rather on the social. Race appointment is made not because someone *is* black or white. It is made because someone is *defined* as black or white (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Race and Education

Scholars now believe that race is undertheorized in educational research (Tate 1997; O'Connor, Lewis, Mueller 2007; Martin, 2009). Although race categorizing is ubiquitous in schools and widely utilized to collect, synthesize and interpret data, its social meaning and influence are rarely analyzed beyond its use to identify disparate performances among student groups. Race becomes just another demographic characteristic purported to inform on and justify specific behaviors and outcomes. Race may be socially constructed but it has a social reality and real effects. How this happens is based upon the idea of *racial structure* (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Race is the basis of racialized social formation that is designed to reward whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Racial structure, as defined by Bonilla-Silva (2006) is “the totality of the social relationships and practices that reinforce white privilege” (p.9). The structure remains in place (even in the face of illegitimacy and protest) because of the rewards to the dominant group, be they welcomed or unsolicited. In an effort to rationalize privileged status, dominant group members must justify this structure that

results in the development of a race ideology. It is this ideological framework that anchors an institution's operations, becoming the grand narrative to which most members subscribe (both dominant and subordinate groups) and contest. It remains the grand narrative establishing its material and intellectual power.

One position in contemporary debates on race and racism is the claim that racism no longer exists (D'Sousa, 1995; Gallagher, 2003) and that society is color-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). At the other end of the spectrum is the "recovery-of-white-supremacy" thesis that identifies white people, and specifically white males, as the real victims of racism in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America (Kinchloe, 2006). In his chapter on what he terms 'racial apathy' Forman (2004) has identified some forms of new racism expression as laissez-faire racism (Bobo, Kluegel & Smith, 1997), color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000), cultural racism (Jones, 1997), aversive racism (Dovidio, 2001), symbolic racism (Henry & Sears 2002; Sears & Henry, 2003), racial resentment (Kinder & Sanders, 1996), modern racism (McConahay, 1986) and subtle racism (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). These models all share the understanding that new racism emerged following the civil-rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and that racism is not irrational but rather is motivated by the desire to maintain a dominant position in the racialized social structure.

The color-blind racism paradigm is framed by denial, ideas of meritocracy, political conservatism and claims of white victimization (Bonilla-Silva, 2009) which allows whites to believe that the success they enjoy in contrast to 'others' is the result of individual hard work, determination, thrift and investment in education. In color-blind America, race does not disappear. It is dismissed as a hierarchical model, instead

becoming a commodity that signals cultural orientation that can be shared by all (Gallaher, 2003). In this model color-blindness erases the necessity to redress racial inequity since it no longer exists. The color-blindness ideology stands as an obstacle to action against racism (Krysan & Lewis, 2004).

Is race the structural framework for the reproduction of social and academic hierarchies within schools? On almost every scholastic measurement, black students underperformed in comparison with white students. But, these students do not situate in the categories of low performance because they are black - rather, it is because *black* has been established as a race category to which they and their academic performances have been assigned. Racial structures are fluid as are race categories within them, for example the reclassification of East Indians from the category of white to Asian. But the idea of race remains firm, withstanding the social, political, economic and ideological challenges to it. Racism, therefore, is the manifestation of the racial structure and ideology, becoming customary and providing the rules for perceiving and dealing with the “others” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). While race, rationally or not, has become firmly entrenched in American society, the idea of racism and evidence of its influence remain disputable.

Race may be a nugatory concept but this has done little to mitigate its reality and efficacy. One location of its most potent expression is in schools. The history of the education of blacks in America begins in the anti-bellum period as white Americans strove to balance the interests of the slave owner, the value of educating this population in a modernizing society, the potential benefits for religious conversion and the social conscience of those believing in basic human rights (Woodson, 1919). Carter G. Woodson, historian and father of the black history movement, would be disappointed to

discover that very little has changed for black students in American public schools since his observation that, “The instances of Negroes struggling to obtain education read like the beautiful romances of a people in an heroic age” (1919, p. 79). The ebb and flow of literacy levels among blacks pre-dating the Civil War mirrors the roller coaster of academic achievement and failure experienced by them since the promise of educational parity handed down in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision.

Woodson would have no problem recognizing the modern machinations used to segregate and corral black learners, underfund the schools they attend and impede the possibility of an equitable and democratic education. The “mis-education” of the Negro, as described by Woodson in 1933, is the result of persistent traducement and a systemic agenda that works to indoctrinate blacks rather than develop them, devalues their rich heritage and considerable contributions to American society, instills a hatred for blacks in whites (and blacks) by using a curricula that justified their inferiority, and confers the power and responsibility to educate them to their former enslavers (Woodson, 1933). Many agree with Woodson that the process of education for blacks has firm roots in historical racism and add that any coincidences of progress seen today are a testament to nothing more than a “convergence of interest” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005) that occurs when the stakes of white self-interest are at play.

Evidence that the educational experiences of and outcomes for white middle-class students and non-white students differ significantly is uncontested. Within every dimension, graduation rate, dropout rate, rate of suspension and expulsion, enrollment in advanced, remedial and gifted courses and measured achievement outcome, white students are advantaged. Educators, policy-makers, politicians and social activists have

all struggled to find the answer to these disparities with little success. The differences by designated racial group are a fact and yet treatments for these inequities have primarily centered on curing the underachievers of the negative social influences that stand as barriers to their achievement within the system, as opposed to exposing the ways in which the system itself defines and perpetuates the idea of their inferiority as students (Valencia, 1997).

Grounded in the authority of the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (1964) schools are race information-gathering organizations in which data on achievement and other school behaviors are disaggregated, analyzed and reported. The *racing* of data puts on display and draws connections between students' identities and backgrounds and their learning outcomes. The result is that academic differences are legitimized as having a basis in race and a school social structure emerges that mirrors the broader society and functions to conscribe specific students to their inevitably appropriate rung on the education ladder. Discussions on racial differences in achievement and test scores by scholars who acknowledge the illegitimacy of race may unintentionally propagate claims of inferiority by failing to underscore the influence that non-school dynamics have on these results (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). As a socially constructed, albeit nonsensical, category *race* produces real effects. In schools, it functions to create the pathways of success and failure for white and non-white students with precision and purpose.

Researching the issue of race as it relates to the teaching of mathematics, Martin (2009) believes that race is undertheorized in relationship to learning and participation. He questions how an unsound model such as race can produce incontrovertible

information on specific student groups and rejects the idea that achievement differences are informative of anything other than, “the adverse conditions under which some children are often forced to learn, the privileged conditions afforded others, and how forces such as racism are used to position students in a racial hierarchy” (p. 5). Noting that mathematics education is a part of the larger school experience, that it is considered an indicator of intelligence and that it promotes the national goal of global superiority, Martin’s (2009) analysis of how race plays out in schools is generalizable beyond this specific subject. Because mathematics is an area of content in which almost every student must enroll his research is applicable to the broader school experiences of black students. Martin (2009) addresses two potential criticisms of any analysis on race, pointing out *intersectionality* as an important consideration as well as the potential for objectifying black students as victims. Efforts to understand the influence of race require it to be separated from other social realities if we are to tease out its persistence and power. The narratives of these students give voice to their experiences thereby positioning them as agents of struggle and change instead of victims of circumstance.

Evidence suggests that this point of view is common among white teachers who make up nearly 90% of the K-12 teaching population (Martin, 2009). In Katy, Texas, a white, elementary school principal was placed on leave after suggesting, to a black teacher, that she consider using Ebonics to help a struggling student, also black (Dang, 2010). New Racism’s claim of a color-blind society stand in stark contrast to the instances of race-relevant events that occur with frequency within a society that supposedly functions as a system of meritocracy no longer related to race, that accepts the facts of cultural deficits and that is not responsible for remediating any differences in

social outcomes (Martin, 2009). In a speech on the House floor on November 29, 2010, Representative Steve King (R-IA) responded to the U.S. Senate's approval of the multi-billion-dollar funding for the Pigford II and Cobell settlements that allow the government to pay out claims to African-American farmers and American Indians who were discriminated against in recent decades by government agencies, by saying:

"Figure this out, Madame Speaker: We have a very, very urban Senator, Barack Obama, who has decided he's going to run for president, and what does he do?"

King said. "He introduces legislation to create a whole new Pigford claim."

"We've got to stand up at some point and say, 'We are not gonna pay slavery reparations in the United States Congress,'" he said. "That war's been fought. That was over a century ago. That debt was paid for in blood and it was paid for in the blood of a lot of Yankees, especially. And there's no reparations for the blood that paid for the sin of slavery. No one's filing that claim" (Slajda, 2010).

The new racism orientation preempts use of the 'race card' and belittles the salience of race as a part of one's identity by trivializing race's significance and complexity.

The orientation of race in schools today is expressed in new and covert forms. Martin (2009) points out that studies on the impact of race invariably default to investigations of the ways that people of color have been affected, and rarely bother to examine the impact of whiteness in relationship to events or influence. Martin (2009) addresses the frequency and ease with which statements about black students' (and other students of color) academic performances are proffered and internalized. Citing results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that black twelfth-grade students possess the equivalent mathematics aptitude of eighth grade white students,

Martin contends that reports such as this reinforce associations between these students and, “negative peer culture, economic dependency, third-world status and political powerlessness,” and reify the idea of their mathematical illiteracy - similar data has been reported by the National Action Network, Reverend Al Sharpton’s organization and by the Council for Greater City Schools (NYDailyNews, 2010). They also solidify the role of mathematics as a gatekeeper subject and indicator of economic and political viability which privileges white males and positions them as the group to be emulated if success is to be realized. Addressing the practice of basing beliefs about students’ achievement on testing outcomes, Martin (2009) points out how society’s beliefs in merit, intellectual superiority and testing objectivity ignore assessment biases toward middle- and upper-class white test takers and the practice of eliminating question items during the test construction process that favor other students. Based on the proposition that psychometric methods can be employed that would allow the creation of test instruments that favor students of color, Martin maintains that this is evidence of the sociopolitical nature of the so-called Achievement Gap.

The actual size and significance of the Achievement Gap has also been brought into question. Citing how the scores on standardized tests can be distorted when reported on different numerical scales, Berlak (2001) contends that the reliance on the neutrality, objectivity and color-blindness of standardized measurements contribute to unequal access to educational and employment opportunities and strengthen institutional racism. Beliefs about *who is* and *who is not* academically successful are the result of the existing social order that positions some in power and others as subordinate and promotes models of racial superiority and inferiority. This complex positionality gives rise to the creation

of simplistic declarations about academic differences such as the Achievement Gap, but it may also be obscuring a more serious reality about issues of race, education and power - schools may never be places of social justice in educating students of color (Zou & Trueba, 1998).

The School as Agents for Change – Two Perspectives

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 has failed to deliver the school experience for black students envisioned by its legal team and supporters. The achievement difference between white and black students, once almost erased in the 1980s has returned and widened. Demanding the opportunity to receive an equal education was packaged with the demand to be seated in the same schools. What could not be legislated, regardless of the ruling, was that schools would simply open their doors, make room for a new diverse student body, and instruct them accordingly or that those currently at the schools would remain in place and become integrated.

Years before the first briefs were filed in perhaps the most socially significant landmark case during of twentieth century, John Dewey and W.E.B. Du Bois were exploring how education should operate in a democratic society. One issue that remained unresolved for these esteemed scholars was how America education could advance both unity and diversity (Burks, 1997). Writing in the campus newspaper, the *Maroon Tiger*, Martin Luther King, Jr. (1947) asserts that education has two purposes – intellectual and character (moral) development. He believed that critical thinking ability that was not coupled with ‘worthy objectives’ towards humanity and justice was a potentially dangerous education. Education should have both individual and social value and must serve both equally.

Two distinguished philosophers of education and social activists, John Dewey and W.E.B. Du Bois, devoted major parts of their scholarship to posing questions and offering observations on education in American. By many broad measures these men were contemporaries. Born less than a decade apart, both men grew up along the East Coast, attended school there and came from modest means. Both were classroom teachers who earned doctorate degrees and numerous positions at esteemed institutions of higher education. Both believed that education must serve the higher purpose of preparing students to critically evaluate truth claims and issues of human importance, rather than socializing them to existing dominant culture convention and ideals.

John Dewey (1938) set out to develop a practical pedagogy of education that acknowledged the sociological and psychological dimensions influential to its practice and that would address the questions of just what constituted an education and what conditions were required to make it a reality (p. 91). He saw the school as the primary place in which the means of social progress and reformation are situated, not within legislative or punitive domains. Arguing that the mind was not static, he believed schools must utilize their concentration of agency to help students become invested in society (Dewey, 1897). Dewey theorized that the role of education in a democracy was to engage learners in the processes and practices that develop an individual's interest in the public and as a result develop a commitment to maintaining social order (knowledge and duty). In *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia*, Larry A. Hickman, professor of philosophy and Dewey scholar, writes, "For Dewey, education is both a tool and an outcome of democratic practice. Education equips individuals for full participation in social life, and in its finest form it is the result of free and open social interaction. It is by

means of education that individuals come to have a stake in society, and it is by means of the strengthened democratic institutions that result from education that the tools and techniques of education are improved” (Chambliss, 1996, p. 151).

Acknowledging the value of understanding the social conditions from which students emerge, Dewey (1897) suggests this is critical to understanding the student’s agency. Yet, he did not conduct any extensive analysis of the problems of oppression and bigotry facing black Americans and integrate this into his theories on reforming education (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 288). Dewey (1915) posited that a truly good education accepts the school as a microcosm of society and works toward developing in students a critical and civic intelligence for improving the social order and society’s ability for continuous renewal. But the social order to be enriched and maintained was one that systematically oppressed blacks, and was rarely the specific subject of critique. Injustices experienced by blacks within society could not be separated from their experience of schooling yet Dewey did not address this intersectionality, instead suggesting that through education students become benefactors of the funded capital of society (Chabliss, 1996, p. 148). The reality was that the common and lawful practices of racial oppression and segregation did not facilitate cross-race interaction nor deliver social dividends to black citizens in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America. The idea that through education blacks could become more like whites was both erroneous and presumptive.

Dewey considered racism anti-American and an affront to democracy, referencing the absence of any scientific basis upon which to assert the inferiority of the black race. This position is well documented in both his writings and in his involvement in

organizations such as the NAACP. He directly addressed the consequences of educational inequality, saying, “For if these race differences are, as has been pointed out, comparatively slight, individual differences are very great. All points of skill are represented in every race, from the inferior individual to the superior individual, and a society that does not furnish the environment and education and opportunity of all kinds which will bring out and make effective the superior ability wherever it is born, is not merely doing an injustice to that particular race and to those particular individuals, but it is doing an injustice to itself for it is depriving itself of just that much of social capital” (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 289).

Dewey’s progressive views on racial equality placed him within a select group of influential white scholars advocating for school integration during the early twentieth-century but his position stops short of a critical analysis of structures of domination and the powers of oppression that impeded social progress for blacks. This omission of acknowledging the influences of dominance, prejudice and privilege in defining race differences, illustrates an ideology that is political in nature and representative of the era’s racist thinking and practice. The politics of social relationships embedded in the ideology of black inferiority during the turn of the century is an area Dewey seems to avoid discussing. This establishes a distancing from conversation about the social conditions and relationships within the power/dominance model that were representative of the time (Paringer, 1990), “There is no mention by Dewey of how the power over institutionalized education held by the politically dominant members of the society is used to maintain the order he would preserve.”

Dewey did not confront the reality of oppressed peoples' challenge to societal power relations. For him, "social change was something to be determined by the rational thinking of the politically dominant members" (Chambliss, 1996, p. 165). In this way Dewey's beliefs could be interpreted as offering prescriptions for change without diagnosing the disease, never fully addressing how democratic education praxis could influence the educational experiences of black and other marginalized students. His insights on the learner's freedom become diluted within an approach to be critical about issues regarding educating black students (Paringer, 1990).

Informed by an eastern upbringing and privileged status as a white, male, American, Dewey's faith in a patient, orderly restructuring of schools stands in compliment and contrast with the observations offered by W.E.B. Du Bois. In his call for teachers to be central in the fight against racist ideology Dewey asks that they become agents in the collective struggle of the native born, the African, Jew and Italian (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 289). Perhaps this provides evidence of Dewey's acceptance of membership in privileged America, and the broad stroke that painted his understanding of distinct issues facing the 'others'. As a member of the American Negro Academy, Du Bois committed himself to utilizing his scholarship and writing to fight for racial equality. The academy promoted higher education for blacks in the arts and sciences and supported his belief that education was the best way to attack racism in America. He distrusted John Dewey's theories on the school's role as an agent for advancing democracy because it normalized the existing systems of power and social relationships that oppressed black Americans. The issues of dominance and social, economic and political suppression must be confronted if collective democracy were to be realized.

On the topic of training black men, Du Bois (2003) reflects back to the first slaves arriving in Jamestown. He writes about three paths of thought; 1) a call for new human unity and cooperation to satisfy the increased wants of man, 2) the belief that the Negro must be contained (veiled) to prevent them from full citizenship which would threaten society, and 3) the thoughts of slaves who question the truth of their inferiority and held uncertainty about claims to equality. It is within these compelling thought domains, social, economic and political, that America must consider educating the black man. Du Bois (2003) felt that these facts could only be addressed in one way – “by the breadth and broadening of human reason, by catholicity of taste and culture. And so, to, the native ambition and aspiration of men, even though they be black, backward, and ungraceful, must not lightly be dealt with” (p. 69). But for Du Bois (2003), a belief that education could deliver some measure of reparation for blacks was insufficient and he still questioned, “Training for life teaches living; but what training for the profitable living together of black men and white” (p. 69).

W.E.B. Du Bois viewed education as a paradox. Believing it to be an artery to the social, he also understood its use as a means for improvement or for the subjugation of certain cultural and social groups (Provenzo, 2002). For Du Bois, education as a benevolent process was a mechanism for personal advancement, as a malevolent one, a vehicle that reinforced second-class status and legitimized the practice of social marginalization of black Americans. Du Bois (2003) argues that the economic consequences of refusing education of blacks are poverty, loss and national decadence. “Only the saner selfishness, which Education teaches me, can find the rights of all in the whirl of work” (p. 68). He questioned models of praxis that were not situated within a

call for improving the lives of blacks and failed to criticize those who promoted a utilitarian pedagogy as opposed to challenging racist ideology and practices. As to the question of school segregation, Du Bois considered this, “the greatest possible menace to democracy and the advancement of black people in the United States” (Provenzo, 2002, p. 14). But he cautioned that education within a segregated environment with inferior instruction and resources was preferable to one within an integrated yet hostile environment that replicated negative public opinion. Du Bois’ views are a collision of past, present and future. He questioned the power and future benefits of an education that did not concede America’s past practice of slavery, and the present realities of Jim Crow segregation, white supremacist terrorism and the popularly accepted discourse on black inferiority that was normalized within society.

Despite their shared vision of the school as an agent of and for self-development and social engagement, Dewey held that education could facilitate social reformation while Du Bois harbored less hope that education would deliver social transformation. Like Dewey, he held little confidence in laws to mitigate social ills predicting that activism for equal rights in voting and education might actually instigate more racial discord. He also questioned the cost to black Americans seeking acceptance and inclusion in the dominant culture’s social spheres. What of their cultural identity would have to be relinquished in the quest of membership? While Dewey may have chosen not to clearly articulate the cultural and social impact of integration in his promotion of education equity, Du Bois chose to confront the competing conversations of assimilation and separatism of blacks into mainstream American culture through education, often seeming to be in support of and against this, concomitantly.

The complexities of envisioning how education can work for the good of all citizens is nothing new for practitioners and policymakers today. In reviewing how these two men struggled with these issues it's important to point out that one remained socially active and optimistic about the transformative powers of education while the others relented to social pressure that resulted in his exile to another country. A main factor in determining their disparate futures was their race. What purpose is served by providing an abbreviated overview of these two scholars' views on the purpose and practice of education as I examine the experiences of black students in schools? Each brought to their perspective very different lived experiences as Americans. These divergent experiences informed their beliefs and theories on the purpose and practice of education in America. They also reveal the trust each man held in what a democratic education could provide to different groups of Americans. I see this as important in the effort to understand how students of different races experience education. Students are objects in the school environment. Their identities and experiences within the school are constructed by influences brought with them, and by influences outside of them. For too many black students these identities and experiences are beyond their control and result in under-achievement and educational failure. This is an outcome that no truly democratic society should accept.

The Search for Causes

Arguments about culture and background have supplanted genetics in analyses of achievement differences between student groups (Noguera, 2009; Diamond, 2007). They frame many of the contemporary theories and studies on the gap in academic achievement. Claude Steele's work on the effects of "stereotype threat" (1999), research

on poverty's impact on performance by Samuel Meyers Jr., and Signithia Fordam's theory of ambivalence shaping students' aspirations and achievements, all suggest alternative causes for the gap including students' perceptions of their opportunities within the broader society and in the educational system itself, and the impact of living with racist practices, structures and ideologies that are enduring and unchallenged (Berlak, 2001). Cultural influence and background as an argument for explaining the widening achievement gap between white students and students of color have pointed an accusatory finger toward parents, family structure and dynamics, income, music and personal values.

Dr. Ruby K. Payne's (1996) theory on the connection between poverty and student performance has come under heated review by scholars who consider her work unscientific, stereotypical, and not researched based or peer reviewed – she bases her findings about the influence of poverty on her thirty-year marriage to a man who experienced “situational poverty”, and six years residing among the wealthy in Illinois (Payne, 1996, Introduction). Yet, Payne's message on how the “culture of poverty” influences academic achievement has been adopted by educators and school districts across the country and she remains in high demand as a speaker and professional development expert. Dr. Payne suggests that the key to helping students from poor families is to teach them “the hidden rules of middle class” (p. 45). Once these students understand the hidden rules under which people of means operate academic success is attainable. This simplistic explanation of how to improve student performance is foreshadowed by Payne's nescient generalizations about class membership. Dr. Payne's critics are numerous (Bohn, 2006; Keller, 2006; Bomer, Dworin, May & Semington,

2008; Valencia, 2009; Sato & Lensmire, 2009). An Iowa State University professor noted that Payne's book lacked the merit sufficient for scholarly critique (Keller, 2006). With pronouncements of how a parent of generational poverty might choose to "whup" a teacher to resolve an issue (Keller, 2006), and her list of the attributes of people in poverty, such as the ability to choose grocery stores with fortuitous garbage bins, the knowledge of how to get guns and an ability to function at laundromats (Dudley-Marling, 2007) it's hard to believe that Payne is viewed as anything more than a shock comedienne on cable TV, and yet there are those that claim her teaching has helped them "...deal with real situations" (Keller, 2006, p.32).

Payne believes impoverished students would benefit from knowing how to retain an attorney, make restaurant reservations, set and decorate a proper table, and discern between and procure different types of insurance (Bohn, 2006). She goes as far as suggesting that a recently divorced woman experiencing situational poverty may need to resort to prostitution for income (Dudley-Marling, 2007). Dr. Payne promises to inform on how to engage stakeholders in anti-poverty programs, how to excavate the giftedness buried inside some low income students, a kit to help college students understand the effect that class has on them and a handbook to help administrators deal with parents – poor parents (Payne, 1996). Although Payne claims that learning the hidden rules of poverty is a skill borne out of dealing with this circumstance and understanding this is essential to being able to educate those among this student group (Dudley-Marling, 2007) others argue that Payne is a willing participant in the "war against the poor", promoting herself as an advocate for this group while contributing to the narrative on how the poor are underserving and at blame for their circumstances (Sato & Lensmire, 2009).

In response to a Katy Independent School District teacher's explanation of the suggestions outlined in the book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (1996), sitting on his desk, one of his black middle school student asked, "Why do you need a book to tell you how to teach us?" Payne's popularity and success at spreading the *blame-the-victim* and *it's-not-the-school's-fault* messages are welcomed explanations that relieve schools of any responsibility for student failure or obligation to fix it, and reify assumptions about academic inferiority already inherent in these institutions. Her beliefs stand in stark contrast to analyses that recognize the need to reduce poverty, for both moral and practical reasons, in order to increase student achievement (Berliner 2005).

John Ogbu, noted anthropologist and professor at University of California-Berkley, theorized that non-voluntary minority groups developed oppositional identity in response to perceptions of forced assimilation (Ogbu & Gibson, 1991). These minorities resist the practices that contribute to dominant culture integration and school success. Drawing the comparison between voluntary and involuntary minorities, Ogbu and Gibson point out that voluntary minorities maintain a positive attitude regarding upward mobility and eventual social acceptance that contrasts with involuntary minority beliefs that their second-class status is without justification and is permanent. Oppositional identity development leads to the implementation of survival strategies that negatively impact school experience. Collective struggle results in blaming the system for failure, a slackening of effort and the misappropriation of time and effort toward non-academic activities even when the importance of education is emphasized as being critical to getting ahead in life (Ogbu & Gibson, 1991). Oppositional culture becomes a mark of identity instead of a boundary to be overcome and acculturation is viewed as internalizing

the white man's values. Black students who exhibit attitudes conducive to achievement are suspicious and perceived as "acting white or acting like Uncle Toms" (p. 27). With skepticism about schools' abilities to educate black children, involuntary minorities transfer these perceptions to their children making it improbable that they will accept and follow school rules and behaviors that contribute to academic success.

In his seminal study of black students in the upper middle class suburb, Shaker Heights, Ohio, Professor Ogbu documented the deleterious effects of academic disengagement and its roots in cultural influence. Claiming not to dismiss the significance of societal and school mistreatment of blacks, Ogbu (2003) still concluded that academic disengagement played a major role in the low academic performance of these students. A summary of some of his findings include: (1) blacks' frame of reference as second class citizens requiring them to perform at higher levels to reap equal social rewards, and the inability to escape stereotypical views of their abilities; (2) the verbal emphasis on the importance of education and the conflicting beliefs that education was the path to upward social mobility and achievement of the American Dream,; (3) the belief that unequal opportunity still exists and skepticism about the value of academic credentials which discourage students from committing to educational excellence; (4) racial barriers as justification for the reliance on sports, entertainment and drug dealing as alternative and survival strategies that lead to success; (5) blacks' affective rather than pragmatic response to black/white relationships within the system and beliefs that behaviors and attitudes conducive to academic success were equivalent to acting white; (6) the existence of high academic aspirations but the lack of educational strategies and behaviors that lead to high achievement; (7) black parents' assignment of educational

responsibility away from themselves and toward the schools and their lack of involvement in supervising their children's homework, unwillingness to intervene against negative peer pressure and low participation at school functions; and (8) black parents' contribution to the uneven tracking of students in classes because of their failure to understand the leveling system (Ogbu, 2003).

While Ogbu (2003) claims to acknowledge the larger societal role of race in the lives of these students and their parents he fails to consider it much beyond this observation. In his analysis on leveling or tracking he identifies the threat of differential distribution of students in classes, by race, as being evident as early as in the first grade.

Recall the report of a first-grade teacher in the school district for 17 years who made several unsuccessful attempts to get Black parents to participate in a program for first-grade students with learning difficulties, most of whom were Black. Children who received help during this early period in their school career might avoid being assigned to remedial programs or learning-disability curriculum at the upper elementary school. We may assume that the failure of Black parents to get the help described by the first-grade teacher for their children during the early years contributed to the disproportionate assignment of Black students to the remedial programs and their under-representation in the academic enrichment programs at Woodbury (p. 263).

Ogbu does not question the arrangement and legitimacy of a class of first-grade students with learning difficulties that is majority black, in a school district that is majority white. A critique of John Ogbu's findings notes that they are based on differential responses of an entire ethnic group rooted in cultural boundaries, while ignoring the diversity of

thought within the ethnic group, thus painting them as autonomous, homogeneous and stereotypic (Truba, 1988). Ogbu's presumptions about the meaning of cultural responses ground his taxonomy model of differences among groups and form the basis of his interpretation of data. Discipline was identified as a major contributor to the academic disengagement of black Shaker Heights students. Instead of examining the implications and negative impact of isolating misbehaving elementary students at separate tables during lunchtime, Ogbu concludes that a black girl who was a regular at this table, but who was actually not on punishment but still chose this table to sit at, was merely acting out of habit (Ogbu, 2003). His evaluation on the disparity in discipline at the middle and high school levels included that black students were punished more because they misbehaved more, and that the disproportionate number of discipline problems involving black students led to academic disengagement and achievement disparity.

John Ogbu's reliance on the significance of oppositional culture in contributing to low achievement and a black-white achievement gap has been challenged by established research that disputes its core claim that black students display resistance towards education (Ferguson, 2001; Foley, 2004; Diamond, 2007). Citing research that finds these students no less engaged than whites, that they do possess the desire to attend college, apply attention to homework and maintain attendance at similar rates, and that they can both achieve at high levels and maintain popularity among peers, Diamond (2007) concludes that the oppositional culture claim is illegitimate. Likewise, the acting white (Fordam & Ogbu, 1986) hypothesis was brought into question in the absence of ethnographic evidence to support that academic pressure on high achievers is unique to black students (Ferguson, 2001). Also problematic is the association drawn between

acting white and achievement. None of the respondents in the study conducted by Ogbu and Fordham actually drew a connection between charges of acting white and academic performance (or used the term acting white). “In most cases this accusation is attached to behaviors unrelated to academic performance (Diamond, 2007).

In her article for The New York Times, *Why Are Black Students Lagging?* Felicia Lee (2002) recounts comments made by Ron F. Ferguson, senior researcher at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, about John Ogbu’s findings. “I would agree with Ogbu that there are youth cultural patterns and behaviors that are counterproductive for academic success,” adding socializing in class and watching too much television, “But when they engage in those behaviors, they are not purposely avoiding academic success” (Lee 2002). Others acknowledge that Ogbu’s work is based on generalized beliefs about American black culture but still believe that it provides important insight into distinctions between voluntary and involuntary minorities and possible explanations for differences in student behaviors and attitudes (Foster, 2005). In his later writings, Ogbu acknowledged that his generalizations extended beyond his research findings regarding opposition to white attitudes, behavior and speech and the broad brush with which he painted its prevalence (Diamond, 2007). Diamond states, “There are tangible structural, institutional, and symbolic consequences to being African American that have educational implications for students. This unequal educational terrain has more powerful implications for the Black/White achievement gap than the much more elusive and less prevalent oppositional culture” (Diamond, 2007, p. 17). International scholars have also critiqued Ogbu’s findings and questioned the simplicity of oppositional identity theory model as they also address issues of migration, ethnicity, identity and belonging and their

implications for educating a diverse student population in the United Kingdom (Bhatti, 2006).

Origins of the Achievement Gap

Reflecting on my work examining the black/white student achievement gap I realize that I made a fundamental misstep in the research process. One of my professors asked if I knew the origin of the *achievement gap*. When did this phrase come into use and who used it? – A query that pulled me up short. As common a mistake as this may be for graduate students I am surprised by the ease with which I internalized and utilized the term and contributed to the dominate culture discourse on its legitimacy, definition and its causes. I read extensively on this topic yet never stopped to apply any critical review of my epistemological acceptance of its meaning and value. This lapse sent me on a journey to uncover the history that under girds this powerfully judgmental phrase and its influence on the education conversation today.

The achievement gap is one phase in the cycle of social assignment – a poor education leads to less income, resources and economic power, which leads to fewer housing choices and less political power, which leads to fewer educational choices, which leads back to a poor education. We know that by the end of fourth grade black students are two years behind their white counterparts, three years by eighth grade and as much as four by the twelfth grade, based on standardized tools of measurement. Black students are three times as likely to be placed in special education programs and half as likely to be in gifted or advanced programs, and they are about half as likely as whites to receive a bachelor's degree by the age of 29 (Education Week, 2011). The social cost of an inadequate education is irrefutable and yet year after year we devote mounds of research

activity and dollars toward closing the elusive *achievement gap*, with absolutely no evidence of success to show for these efforts. A search for historic references to an achievement gap between the performances of white and black students began by eliciting the help of two research librarians, one from Northwestern University and the other from the Gutman Library at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I specified to them that I was not looking for research studies that had been conducted but rather examples of the use of the term, *achievement gap*, within broader discussions on race and education.

The ideas that support contemporary policies and practices related to educating black students can be found in the early studies conducted on race and intelligence. George Wiggam (2007), who researches student achievement and school failure, provides a contextual background for his work by discussing the origins of intelligence and achievement testing. He cites a study performed by George E. Stetson as one of the earliest attempts to compare the intelligence of black students to that of white students. In 1897, using 500 black and white Washington, D.C. students as his population sample the students were read a four-stanza poem and were scored based upon their ability to repeat the poetry accurately and the time it took to do so. The results, which showed that the majority of black students scored higher than the white students, were met with criticism because of the contemporary belief in white supremacy.

According to Wiggam (2007) intelligence tests given before the age of two show accelerated brain development in African and black American infants when compared to European and white American babies. The Binet scales that tested Standard English proficiency produced opposing results and these were widely acclaimed as evidence that

white people were smarted than blacks. Early in the twentieth-century observations were being made by leading black scholars and social activists about the inferiority of the educational experience for blacks students. In 1918, W.E.B. Du Bois responded to the report, *Negro Education, a Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*, prepared by a specialist in education and racial groups. In *The Crisis*, Du Bois wrote,

What, now, is the real difference between these two schemes of education? The difference is that in the Butte schools for white pupils, a chance is held open for the pupil to go through high school and college and to advance at the rate which the modern curriculum demands; that in the colored schools, on the other hand, a program is being made out that will land the boy at the time he becomes self-conscious and aware of his own possibilities in an educational impasse. He cannot go on in public schools even if he should move to a place where there are good public schools because he is too old. Even if he has done the elementary work in twice the time that a student is supposed to, it has been work of a kind that will not admit him to a northern high school. No matter, then, how gifted the boy may be, he is absolutely estopped from a higher education. This is not only unfair to the boy but it is grossly unfair to the Negro race (Lewis 1995, p. 263).

Two years later, Du Bois wrote about the century-long efforts by scientists and psychologists to prove that blacks were inferior to whites, intellectually. Citing the results from a study conducted by “none other than our astute army officers,” Du Bois criticizes the experimental methodology and reports on the study’s findings, saying, “The result? Do you need to ask? M. R. Trabue, Director, Bureau of Educational Service, Columbia

University, assures us that the intelligence of the average southern Negro is equal to that of a 9-year-old white boy and that we should arrange our educational program to make 'waiters, porters, scavengers and the like' of most Negroes!" (Lewis 1995, p.198).

Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1933) wrote a critique of the institution of education, noting that the "so-called modern education" serves others more than blacks because of its grounding in the principles of oppression and racism that "justified slavery, peonage, segregation and lynching" (Preface). He believed these practices suppressed black history and culture and produced black students who were indoctrinated in self-hatred. In, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson (1933) wrote, "When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary" (Preface). What Woodson is suggesting actually goes beyond an indictment of educational inequality implying that the delivery of inferior instruction was more than a casual oversight - perhaps opportunistic negligence.

Twenty years later, a major focus on educational inequity made its way into the sphere of legal debate in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Its historical language, that is, "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," could certainly be interpreted as addressing this issue. The justices clarified that the issue was not the disadvantage resulting from physically separate buildings, "even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be unequal." Some have argued that the ruling could be interpreted to mean that by virtue of sitting next to a white student, black

students would be imbued with greater intelligence. Either argument supports belief in achievement differences between these groups of students and the academic inferiority of black children.

The *Coleman Report* (1966), officially known as *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, is a 737-page study commissioned by the U.S. Congress as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. James S. Coleman, a sociologist from Johns Hopkins University and Ernest Q. Campbell, a sociologist from Vanderbilt University, conducted the study. This quantitative study, a provision in the legislation, was cutting-edge not only in its methodology and volume, but also because of its references to student performance and the inequality of educational resources (Viadero, 2006). The report was so mired in controversy regarding its findings that a yearlong seminar attracting some of the leading educational scholars of that time was organized with the purpose of reexamining the *Coleman Report* (1966). Several of the study's findings were both unexpected and racially inflammatory but what is most important for this analysis are those that relate to achievement differences. Revealing that little progress had been made toward school integration both in the North and South, the report also concluded that the average black 6th grader performed at an academic level that was 1.9 years behind that of a white student and by twelfth grade this gap had widened two-fold (Viadero, 2006).

There is evidence that the intersectionality of race and education was a topic of interest for major newspapers around the country. Washington Post reporter, Elsie Carper (1960), wrote an article titled, *Rights Unit Considers New Fields*, on March 20, 1960. Her coverage of a meeting of the Civil Rights Commission identified the focus as a discussion on expanding the committee's scope of study beyond voting, housing and education

however educators from several southern states were in attendance to discuss problems arising from school integration. Carper (1960) wrote that during the conference, “Subjects for discussion will include the effects of desegregation on scholastic achievement, steps that are being taken to reduce the achievement gap between white and Negro pupils and how placement plans are working” (p. 1).

In 1963, the *New Pittsburg Courier* covered the delegate assembly meeting of the Virginia Teachers Association reporting on their adoption of a, “multiphased program directed at further racial concessions, sealing of the Negro academic achievement gap and federal aid to education” (ProQuest, 2011). An article in *The New York Times*, dated July 1, 1966, reports on a congressional survey (the Coleman Report) and summarizes the results as showing that the achievement gap between the races is directly related to the inferiority of predominantly Negro schools. The article also emphasized the findings that both Southern white and black students scored lower than students in the North and that the gap between white and black students was wider in the South than in the North (Herbers, 1966).

Roy Wilkins (1966), former executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, delivered his keynote address to the 57th National Convention, on July 5, 1966, just days following the release of the Coleman Report. Enumerating various steps to be taken by Negro’s in their fight for full citizenship rights, the director said, “The report says officially and professionally what we have contended all along; that predominantly Negro schools are inferior to those attended largely by whites. Also that the achievement gap widens between the first grade and the twelfth. In

other words, the longer our children attend racially segregated schools, the farther they fall behind white children” (Wilkins, 1966).

An article in the *Science New- Letter*, dated July 11, 1964, two years before the *Coleman Report* (1966), suggests that stress and not intellect, influenced the academic performance for black students who were newly integrated into white classrooms (JSTOR, 2008). Reviewing the psychological factors that may impact learning for these students, Dr. Irvin Katz, a psychologist at New York University’s Research Center for Human Relations reported that, “When the intellectual standards of the integrated school appear too high to be attained, Negro students may lag scholastically. Most Negroes in integrated classes are confronted with some kind of ‘*achievement gap*’ ”. A recent article appearing in The New York Times Education Section (Dillon, 2009) discussed that researchers have documented the positive impact of President Barack Obama’s election on black students, showing that a performance gap between black and whites on a 20-question test administered before President Obama’s nomination became statistically insignificant when the exam was administered after his Democratic Party Nomination acceptance speech and again following his win in the general election. This suggests that the influence low expectations have on actual performance, known as stereotype threat (Steele, 1999) may be reversible.

It is important to acknowledge the major time lapses between the references to intelligence testing that took place in the early 1900s, and the newspaper articles of the 1960s. Possible explanations for this may be that schools were primarily segregated during this period so comparisons in achievement were probably less likely to be considered important or studied and secondly, for many the *Brown* decision in 1954

provided a belief that educational equality was on the horizon. But, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. recognized the limits of this landmark decision when he remarked, “The real cost lies ahead. The stiffening of white resistance is recognition of that fact. The discount education given Negroes will in the future have to be purchased at full price if quality education is to be realized” (King, 1967). Thirdly, the 1960s mark the beginning of a period of widespread media coverage of civil rights activism focused on the broader themes of voting rights, employment, housing, and poverty. Also, this period probably preceded the advanced processes of research design and data collection that are in place today. Kirkland notes the early use of the term *achievement gap* in a report commissioned by the city of Chicago that stated intensified educational opportunities would close the gap between Negro boys and girls and other students (Kirkland, 2010). He also writes of the term’s use by the Academy in 1970 when it was used by economist James Gwartney in his description of the parallel between the widening of the gap and the rise in general educational level.

A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) is considered to be one of the driving forces of the school reform movement seen today. Its portentous findings regarding the decline of education in American schools and its entreaty for immediate changes in how we both value and practice education warned that inattention to this crisis was synonymous with indifference toward national security and the demise of global dominance. This report represents a threat packaged as an open letter to the American public. The language used in its introduction could easily be used by any recruitment organization as testimony to

the urgent need for selective service registration, exposing a viewpoint about the important connection between education, economics and the military.

This report provided fodder for the education/industrial complex operating today. This system has resulted in a self-justifying network of business-model experts and quality management models, uncontrolled spending on reform programs, services and tools by state and federal agencies, and the commercialization and politicalization of education (Gelberg, 2007; Peterson, 2008). Politicians, corporations and teacher unions became willing allies in the battle against ignorance and were more than happy to supply the weapons of rhetoric and dollars needed to fight the war on American illiteracy. But, for all of the discussions about risks, threats, war and unilateral disarmament, skilled intelligence, the fostering of a common culture and admonition about how history will be unkind to idlers, I could not find one reference of an achievement difference between any student groups in the report. In the report there is language, such as, “The Federal Government, in cooperation with States and localities, should help meet the needs of key groups of students such as gifted and talented, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority and language minority students, and the handicapped” (A Nation at Risk: Recommendations, 1983) and in a subsequent section, “In the early part of this century and continuing to this very day, our schools have absorbed vast waves of immigrants and educated them and their children to productive citizenship. Similarly, the Nation’s Black Colleges have provided opportunity and undergraduate education to the vast majority of college-educated Black Americans” (A Nation at Risk: America Can Do It, 1983) that come close to identifying certain populations as deficit but overall the report’s indictment of student performance is indiscriminant.

One explanation for the absence of any specific mention of an achievement gap among black and white students may be that black students exhibited achievement gains in mathematics and reading during the period of 1973 – 1996 (U.S. Department of Education, 1978-2004). While the gap was not completely erased, the perception was that these gains were indicative of a trend toward academic parity. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) may have served another purpose. Where education had been considered primarily a state responsibility, this report made it clear that the federal government needed to play a larger role in guiding education policy if we were to save the nation from the inevitable status of mediocrity.

During the Carter Administration, Congress passed the *Department of Education Organization Act* (P.L. 96-88, 1978) that located it in the middle of several complex and controversial educational issues such as, special education, school bussing, finance reform, federal funded program effectiveness and accountability. By 1980, a majority of states had high-stakes examinations in place so testing *became* the reform strategy for improving basic skills. The shift from local leaders to business leaders pushing for school change was evident. The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and its Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) were created and charged with investigating new ideas for teaching diverse populations and disseminating new approaches in pedagogy, curriculum and school administration.

President Reagan's education policies, guided by Secretary of Education, William Bennett, focused on the negative correlation between spending and student outcomes. *Prospects: The Congressionally Mandated Study of Educational Growth and Opportunity* is an evaluation report mandated by The Hawkins-Stafford Amendment (1988) focused

on school reforms not specific to any special target group. This shift was away from the categorical approaches of the 1960s and 1970s to whole-school improvement aimed at benefiting all students. There are two interesting points in the report on the correlation between learning gaps and poverty; (1) there was no change in the learning gap for students who participated in the compensatory Title I program after one year and, (2) the majority of Title I participants were white, non-Hispanic students (SIFEPP - The Reagan Years). It is interesting to note that despite these findings white students did not become the ‘face’ of the achievement gap but rather, became the standard by which all other student groups are measured today.

Although in 1989 President George H. W. Bush hosted the Education Summit, a first of its type between a president and U.S. Governors and pushed for passage of *America 2000*, no substantive education reform legislation was enacted during his term (SIFEPP – The George H. W. Bush Years). The school reform movement increased momentum in its call for accountability. In 1994, the Clinton administration was successful in enacting the *Improving America’s Schools Act* (IASA) a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965. In Section 1001, Declaration of Policy and Statement of Purpose, it reads: (b) Recognition of Need--The Congress recognizes that--(1) although the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and other children has been reduced by half over the past two decades, a sizable gap remains, and many segments of our society lack the opportunity to become well educated (IASA, 1994). This is the first federal document on education I found that used the term *achievement gap*. Title I became the single greatest revenue source for programs serving low-achieving students in low-income districts (SIFEPP – The Clinton Years).

Continuing many of the programs and legislative efforts brought forth under the Clinton administration, President George W. Bush was able to capitalize on Texas' aggressive role in developing and instituting state-mandated testing. As president, he proposed the No Child Left Behind Act after just three days in office. Defining provisions of the act included federal support for improving achievement through standards, assessments, and specific requirements of accountability (SIFEPP – The George W. Bush Years). But, during his campaign for president, his platform principles included the language, “To ensure that a child has a quality education, Governor Bush will close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers, improve math and science instruction, and enhance the use of technology in the classroom” (4President Corporation, 2000).

With the influences of the public debate on the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (P.L. 107-110, 2002) and the requirement that states publish data annually in a report card on “a comparison between the actual achievement levels and the State’s annual measurable objectives in reading/language arts and mathematics,” for a list of subgroups that include, “Major Racial & Ethnic Groups” (NCLB, 2002), the term *achievement gap* has become a cultural meme as well as a popular education topic both within and outside of the academic sphere. Even if there is no clear single origin for the term it is a phenomenon (as framed in the context of education) that has historical roots in theories of race inferiority, transmission of dominant cultural values, preservation of political power and policies of oppression. Perhaps, most important, it has successfully been generalized, is universally understood and almost never theoretically or structurally contested.

Purpose of the Achievement Gap

The power of education and its ability to provide individuals with freedom and choice in society is what motivated slave owners' and southern whites' efforts to keep slaves illiterate. In his historical overview of the education of black students in America, James D. Anderson (2007) explains how there have been three other 'gaps' that these students have had to confront. The first of these was the literacy gap, prevalent among slaves and free blacks. Great gains were made following emancipation and ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments but social and political forces combined to stave the educational advancements of blacks, beginning in 1900.

What followed was the enrollment gap. Focusing mainly on schooling in the South, Anderson (2007) theorizes that the 65% literacy rate achieved by the end of the 1800s was subjugated by political and social forces that no longer valued black literacy and in fact viewed it as a threat to the maintenance of a dominant white society. Teacher wages and other school expenditures were appropriated to white schools at a disproportionate rate leaving black schools with an inequitable percentage of the tax dollars (from every qualified citizen) that supported public education (Anderson, 2007). To support education of black children alternative funding sources were sought including the donations of property, labor and money by blacks and other philanthropists. States' refusals to adequately fund education for black students in the early 1900s resulted in blacks banning together to finance, for a second time (they had already paid property taxes), education for their children (Anderson, 2007).

The third education gap that Anderson (2007) examines is the high school completion gap. Using Georgia as an example, Anderson explains that the prevailing

belief in the pointlessness of a secondary education for blacks guided the exponential growth of white high schools from 1904 to 1916, from 4 to 122, while the black students, who represented 46% of the secondary school population, did not have even one 4-year high school (Anderson, 2007). This trend continued and was exacerbated by World War II – by the 1950s two-thirds of black students of high school age were not enrolled in school. A high school education became an important indicator of future economic and social opportunities for anyone in America and once again blacks found themselves on the negative side of this trend.

Education became the symbol of justice and equality as promoted by ordinary citizens, social activists and some public officials. Jim Crow laws, de facto discrimination and other forms of oppressions were challenged resulting in legal action to gain fairness. Despite creative forms of resistance to circumvent legal requirements for providing an equitable education to black students as set forth in the decision rendered in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) throughout the 1960s and 1970s, by 1997 eighty-six percent of blacks ages 25 – 29 were high school graduates. The gap in high school graduation rates between whites and blacks was statistically erased (Anderson, 2007). But by 2003, that figure had dropped to 80% for blacks (Stoops, 2004). The point being made by Anderson (2007) is that there are historical footprints of educational gaps that have led us to what is now termed ‘the achievement gap’ experienced by black students in school today.

In *Race and Education: The Roles of History and Society in Educating African American Students*, William H. Watkins (2001) walks the reader through some of the ideological, political, social and economic considerations and arguments that framed the

education of blacks in America. While the philosophical differences between W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington provide two conflicting perspectives on the mechanisms for black membership and full civic participation, the broader question concerned the status blacks would have in a society grounded in the tradition of white supremacy. How much education, how many should be educated, what knowledge and what type of curriculum, what are the risks of having an educated black population, where all questions being debated by southerners attempting to adjust to blacks newly acquired freedom, and by northerners anxious for the south to reunify and control its newest citizens.

As Watkins states, “The tasks of the northern hegemonists and their southern supporters were to reconcile the growing black demand for education with the political realities of peonage and oppression” (Watkins, 2001, p. 42). With accommodationist-style education (existing within the contemporaneous racial and social class structure of the South) being the appropriate compromise, education leaders began calling for a careful approach, a “special education” for the Negro that addressed their needs in the areas labor and character development. At the end of the 19th century, conferences were being held to debate the construction of schooling for blacks. In his description of those meeting, Jacob Carruthers ... “The Negro education system was carefully planned and implemented. As a case in point consider the Lake Mohonk Conferences in the Negro Question. Some of the leading White education of this country met at Lake Mohonk, New York (a resort area) on June 4 – 6, 1890, and June 3 – 5, 1891, to read papers and discuss what they officially called the ‘Negro question’. By the time the second conference ended they had decided that the primary goals of education for Blacks should

be morality and the dignity of labor (i.e. working for White folks” (Watkins, 2001, p. 43). The expectations and purpose of education for blacks was formulated and implemented.

As evidenced by the Hampton Social Studies, an education primer, the curriculum for blacks was grounded in other philosophies other than pedagogy. Belief in the innate tribalism and social, political and moral naiveté of the Negro rationalized the instructional focuses on duty, citizenship, obedience, appreciation, and capitalism. The Hampton Social Study was an elementary textbook on ‘race development’ the premise being that it would take time for members of the black race to evolve into productive members of society (Watkins, 2007). This set of beliefs served to inform future education philosophy, purpose and policy. Evidence of this can be found in the practices of student segregation in the form of tracking, gross underachievement in comparison to white students, disproportionate diagnosis of and membership in special education, disproportionate rates of discipline referrals and action and the staggering rate of black student dropouts, all of which are realities in schools today.

In his book, *The Achievement Gap in U.S. Education – Canaries In The Mine*, Mano Singham (2005) summarizes the reason behind the education philosophy, purpose and policy practices that impact what we see in schools today. He says, “Schools are the way they are because the world of work as presently constituted needs them to be that way. When viewed through this lens, the working of schools suddenly makes a lot of sense. If we see the role of schools as being to staff the world of work at different levels, then the way we treat students and the attitudes that such approaches generate become a lot more understandable” (p. 162). Singham continues with, “In other words, there is the implicit belief that the educational system has miraculously selected the right number and

kinds of people to fill the kinds of jobs available. Seen in this light, the education system has to be viewed as a remarkable success” (p. 169).

We must acknowledge that schools are spaces of social interaction and as such they are spaces of social structure and hierarchy. Social bonding is a basic human nature. Questions of belonging have a direct effect on motivation and contribute to racial disparities in achievement (Walton, & Cohen, 2007). In their work on social belonging and interventions to repair it, Walton and Carr (in press) explain that social belonging and negative stereotype are “antithetical” if you accept that belonging implies an acceptance of who you are as an individual (p. 4). They outline the importance of having a sense of belonging and its impact on motivation and achievement in students. Students who find themselves underrepresented and contend with negative stereotypes actual become vigilant in their search for negative cues about their inclusion. As an example they note that in 1985, for a senior thesis, a student wrote:

My experiences at Princeton have made me far more aware of my “Blackness” than ever before...no matter how liberal and open-minded some of my White professors and classmates try to be toward me, I sometimes feel like a visitor on campus; as if I really don’t belong...it often seems as if, to them, I will always be Black first and a student second (Robinson, 1985, p.2).

The student was Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States (Walton & Carr, in press, p. 3). Where do the models for these arrangements and classifications in schools come from? How is it that some students maintain a status of belonging while others do not? In her study on the experiences of immigrant youth (specifically Hmong immigrants), race and school, Lee (2005) states the following:

Whiteness is both invisible and ubiquitous in defining “American-ness.”

Specifically, whiteness is associated with all that is ostensibly good about American and “being American.” Blackness, by contrast, is associated with that which is ostensibly bad about America and being American. Thus, to be considered good immigrants must aspire to and show the likelihood of achieving middle-class status and in other ways assimilate to the dominant White culture (p. 4).

An additional observation made by Lee (2005) is that the dialectic nature of the black/white paradigm marginalizes immigrant groups (and others) thus impeding authentic assimilation for immigrant students. This lack of authenticity and sense of irrelevance is what many black students experience in schools on a daily basis, as non-immigrants.

Schools are also political spaces wherein the activity and decisions that take place are rooted in dominant culture ideology and often operate in oppressive and totalitarian ways, all under the aegis of democracy and justice (Kinchloe, 2004). In this respect they function to transmit a set of culturally correct norms, standards and practices that are normalized by those in our society who hold power. Schools help generalize, internalize, operationalize, reproduce and reinforce a nationalized psyche. Their purpose is to replicate the ‘national DNA’ into each student who will then transmit the standards and behaviors they believe are the source of America’s greatness and global status. When this process is criticized and brought into question the delicate equilibrium between schools and society is tipped. In response, schools must identify the source of malfunction and assure the larger society that their role in the project of nation building and maintenance is stable and effective. One response tactic is to find a root problem, something that is throwing

the fine-tuned system off course. Likely and convenient culprits are those who have historically existed at the bottom of the social ladder and have established connections to many of society's other ills such as poverty, crime and moral decay, according to the dominant culture narrative.

As the gateway into adulthood and active citizenship, schools are the only social institution to which every child is conscripted. But what happens to students once they have enrolled is less prescribed and determined more by chance in some cases. Research suggests that with regard to outcomes, black students' academic futures may be a bit more predictable. In *Race and Education: The Role of History and Society in Educating African American Students*, Asa G. Hilliard III (2001) speaks of the importance of hegemony in the educational experience. As a foundation to his argument he provides the following seven common characteristics of domination: the suppression of history of the oppressed group, the destruction of the oppressed group's culture, the prevention of the oppressed group's understanding of their membership in a cultural family, the systemic teaching of white supremacy, the control over the socialization process, the control over the accumulation of wealth and, the institute segregation and apartheid (Watkins, 2001, p. 24-25).

We see many of these elements present in schools across America wherein, social studies/history curriculum and instruction is still grounded in the white male European perspective, the behaviors of black and other minority students are considered threatening to the point of prohibiting certain clothing and accessories, the under representation of qualified black teachers and administrators in school buildings, the segregation of students into certain sections of the school building, control over student socialization

through leveling, tracking and suspension, and the under representation of black students in high profile programs, clubs and organizations that are perceived as representative of the best and the brightest a school has to offer.

Questioning both the reality and usefulness of the achievement gap, David E. Kirkland (2010) believes that there is only one practical strategy for any student of color in American schools and that is “achieving Whiteness” (p.1). How powerfully painful this is given the impossibility of the task. He posits this as another example of the “apple-to-orange” propositions Americans have become accustomed to given the racial regression seen in the areas of achievement and desegregation (p. 1). Kirkland suggests that infusion of the achievement gap into mainstream national and intellectual discussions on education may have begun as a way to explicate academic disparity among races, but it has also normalized Whiteness, obscured the complexities of past and present racial oppression and upheld white-superiority ideology. It blames black students for their oppression and penalizes them for not being white.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a relatively new social movement (begun in the late 1980s) that places race at the center of its analysis of social structure and phenomena. Its origins are in critical legal scholarship and conventional legal principles but where doctrine and policy are the roots of these inquiry types, *context* is fundamental within the critical race theory paradigm. Critical Race Theory seeks to explicate how race influences the social experiences of subordinate groups within a society that makes claims of race-neutrality, rules of law, merit, equal protection and equal opportunity (Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999). What CRT provides is a broadening approach for

examining racism not from the traditional civil rights perspective but from a human rights standpoint and takes to task ideology premised on the belief that within our society racism is both irrational and atypical. In this way CRT exposes the relative ineffectiveness of legislation in addressing and mitigating racial inequity and the erosion of many supposed gains resulting from the civil rights movement of the 1960s and related legislation. Common elements of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998) are:

1. Racism is acknowledged as a 'permanent fixture' of society, and is central to discussions on differences thereby negating the need to explain that it persists. CRT aims to expose and interrogate racism in its various forms.
2. CRT is skeptical of liberal notions of neutrality and color-blindness that underpin white responses, as approaches to challenging 'race' issues.
3. CRT places a high value on the use of narrative and storytelling in order to add necessary contextual validity to the seeming 'objectivity' of positivist perspectives (Ladson-Billings 1998).
4. CRT argues that American civil rights laws continue to serve the interests of Whites, described as *interest-convergence* by Derrick Bell (1980).

During the 1970s, in the field of law a group of legal scholars sought to uncover the influence of race on legal decisions and legislation. This discipline expanded beyond the field of law into other social spheres. Critical Race Theory provides a relevant framework for examining of the persistent and pervasive underachievement experienced by black students in schools. As a way of examining the everyday interactions and operations of schools CRT diverges from the more popular color-blind or multicultural approaches (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) toward addressing the differential

experiences of white students and students of color, and takes a more critical look at the way in which race impacts the operations and interactions in schools and the resulting educational experiences of black students.

In understanding how citizenship (and therefore, rights) and race are related, CRT identifies the issue of property as central to notion of rights. Situated within the CRT proposition that U.S. law is based on property rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) is the interpretation of *whiteness* as a property. According to Ladson-Billings, the possession of this property that ‘others’ do not possess confers other privileges such as the rights of disposition, the rights to use and enjoyment, the rights to reputation and status and the absolute right to exclude (Parker, Dehkle & Villenas, 1999). The privileges derived from this status of ownership function to strengthen national allegiance and solidify citizenship for those being served by the system while diminishing trust and loyalty for those underserved and marginalized by the system.

This resulting system requires us to take a critical examination of the interrelationships of race, society and schooling and this examination reveals; (1) that racism is not a set of random, disconnected or unintended acts, but rather, is commonplace in the American experience, (2) that civil rights laws have been ineffective in remedying the consequences of racial injustice and are often undermined long before they can deliver reparation or solutions, a challenge to claims of neutrality, objectivity and meritocracy exposing them as camouflages that privilege the interests of the dominant group, (3) the importance of subjectivity to reflect perspectives of those victimized by racist practice and, (4) the use of first-person accounts and narratives. Applying these to the concept of ‘property rights’ within the discussion of educational

inequity lays a foundation for a different analysis of the physical (material) and the intellectual goods and services alleged to be accessible to all students in schools. This justifies CRT as an important framework for looking at schools as locations of progression or oppression, as mechanisms for developing or destroying human agency and as institutions for promoting or impeding socially just relationships of power.

In the article, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education* (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the researchers claim that educational inequity is both logical and predictable (and not anomalous) within a society that continues to diminish the importance of race and silences discussions on racism and its impact. As an observable and testable concept, CRT has been criticized for its reliance on narrative and storytelling, anecdotal accounting, and its lack of rational inquiry and analysis, empirical data and quantifiable support. In response, critical race theorists have pointed out that this type of data have historically served as subterfuge to claims of discrimination and inequity and have also supplanted efforts to expose how race impacts the lived experiences of blacks.

Critical Race Theory provides a lens through which the experiences of black students can be examined by placing race at the center of any analysis of social dimension. It demands that race not be considered incidental or peripheral to the experiences of people of color (Fernandez, 2002). As an approach for exploring the everyday interactions and operations of schools and the ways in which white privilege and domination are practiced and maintained, CRT takes a more critical look at how race impacts school policy and practice, as well as persistent and pervasive underachievement among black students. As indicated by Villenas, Deyhle, and Parker (1999), “a CRT analysis of local schooling practice can reveal the racism under girding typical schooling

practices related to tracking and ability grouping, disciplinary procedures, testing, and curriculum and instruction” (p. 33, as cited by Fernandez, 2002).

One principle of CRT especially relevant to this study is the value placed on voice, and the use of narrative and storytelling in order to add necessary contextual validity to the presumptive “objectivity” of positivist perspective (Laden-Billings, 1998, p. 53). Voice facilitates the communication of experiences and challenges for those who have been oppressed. Critical Race Theory uses voice as a way of interjecting context, cultural viewpoint and experience and views this as a way of linking form and substance in scholarship (Parker, Deyhle & Villenas 1999). According to Delgado (1989), there are three reasons for the use of voice in inquiry; (1) reality is socially constructed, (2) stories are vehicles of psychic self-preservation and, (3) storytelling provides a bridge between teller and listener that counters ethnocentrism and dysconscious (King, 1991) conviction of singular perspective.

In an analysis of the argument that the voice of people of color has been silenced in education, one of Lisa Delpit’s graduate student’s offered:

There comes a moment in every class when we have to discuss “The Black Issue” and what’s appropriate education for Black children. I tell you, I’m tired of arguing with those White people, because they won’t listen. Well, I don’t know if they really don’t listen or if they just don’t believe you. It seems like if you can’t quote Vygotsky or something, then you don’t have any validity to speak about your own kids. Anyway, I’m not bothering with it anymore, now I’m just in it for a grade (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58).

CRT scholars suggest a shifting of the frame, or what Matsuda (1995) refers to as a “look at the bottom” as a way of valuing the knowledge claims of people of color (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006, p. 35). These theorists legitimize the use of stories as evidence and challenge a quantitative approach to presenting data on discrimination and inequity. Voices function to counteract the dominant group’s stories. It must be noted that the use of voices does not imply a singularity of narrative that all students of color profess, but rather the existence of a common experience with discrimination, low-expectations and isolation.

Critical Race Theory as a guiding principle provides a framework through which the proposed influences of white primacy and normality, deficit thinking, oppositional cultural identity, poverty-achievement interrelationship, and student motivation can be understood in relationship to students’ experiences in public schools. It places race squarely as the central theme connecting each of these influences and requires that analysis and consideration be given to the importance of the racial structure in American society and its negative impact on black students. Bell and other critical race theorists forecast little change in the educational landscape for black students. Given this dim prediction it seems counter-intuitive to continue with research to explicate the power that race has in schools or to explore practices that might positively impact the black student experience. Those working to reverse the seemingly impossible mission of improving education for black students do so by channeling the hope and persistence of a people who for several centuries have had very little to celebrate but a counter intuitive belief in the possibility of change.

The Search for Solutions

In his discussion of the myths that surround the idea of a black/white student achievement gap, Mano Singham (2005) uses the analogy of the musical *My Fair Lady* as an example of misplaced value judgment and evaluation. Just as professor Higgins avers that he can change Eliza into a proper lady in six months time, the focus on how to improve black student performance becomes a metaphor for how we can make them reach the level of white students. Singham believes that making this offensive comparison assumes that this *is* the goal of black students and suggests that it erroneously obscures the fact that many white students are underachieving also (p. 31).

Cable station CNN aired a program called, *Black in America: Reclaiming the Dream*, on July 19, 2008. Soledad O'Brien, the host of the program, and a panel of well-known black representatives from the fields of education, radio, entertainment, and religion, engaged in a discussion on the dismal state of black education. Panelists included an administrator of an all-boys school, the president of an historically-black college and an economist from Harvard University who administers a program in which students are paid up to \$250.00 per year for passing tests. The economist's program, as well as a program in Houston, Texas that sends community volunteers door-to-door to persuade dropouts to return to school, were highlighted in a brief video that framed the central theme of the open discussion – new approaches to solving the black-white student achievement gap.

One panelist challenged the entire idea of extrinsic reward as a solution to motivating black children to learn. Another suggested that we need to question what we are asking black student dropouts to return to – are our school environments conducive to

learning? Another, in showing his approval of these innovative approaches described these programs as “new-school” solutions to “new-school” problems implying that black students have changed and so must our methods for reaching them. What struck me as significant is that this was a collection of *after-the-fact* perspectives. Each panelist is highly regarded in their professions and yet not one of them shared stories about their experiences being a black student in school in America - or, the experiences of their children. It was almost as though the academic struggles experienced by black students today were totally foreign to them. It seemed as though each had reached their level of success seamlessly, by gliding through school without a hitch. And yet, if we questioned them or engaged them in conversation, I wonder who would have stories to tell about low-expectations, underachievement, inexperienced or poorly trained teachers, isolation, suspension or expulsion, tracking, discipline or racism.

There are those who believe in the potentiality of race in predicting academic performance. By understanding blackness, actions associated with it can be described, anticipated and potentially controlled. Commonly referred to as *deficit thinking* (Valencia, 1997), in this paradigm difference equates to deficiency. The evolution of the *deficit thinking* model parallels the historical journey traveled by blacks in America. Discourse promoting beliefs in the physical, cognitive and cultural inferiority of blacks were common beginning in the 1600s through the nineteenth century (Valencia, 1997). According to Valencia, economics was central to the promotion of this model. The oppression of blacks for the purpose of profit was justifiable if they were internalized as being less than human, slovenly, uneducable and threats to the social order that satisfied the market’s labor demands. In practice, the deficit model blames the victim for their

educational failure. In looking at solution for the achievement gap there are many theories modeled on generalized causes and the identification of black students as complicit in their own educational demise.

We have considered many approaches for addressing the underachievement of black students - how to instruct students to be culturally successful (Payne, 1996), how to create positive associations between being black and achieving academically (Fordam & Ogbu, 1996), how to involve black parents and help students see the connection between an education and future life choices (Ogbu, 2003) and even how to pay students to achieve - the rhetoric of deficit and fault has guided most of the policies, practices and spending earmarked to erase the achievement gap, with no measurable results. Our best hope for addressing the under-performance of black students in schools will come from those directly affected. Engaging students in conversation about the role that race plays in their educational experiences is another approach for understanding how these students view race and make meaning of its placement and power in determining their academic experiences. If we listen to them, they just might tell us the solution.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Clandinin and Connelly provide a perspective for this study of the lived experiences of black students and the role they believe race plays in these experiences, stating, “We learn about education from thinking about life, and we learn about life from thinking about education” (2000, p. xxiv). There is still much to be learned about the intersection of education and the lived experience of being a black student. Important questions for this research are, (1) why would this understanding be of importance to their academic performance, (2) in what way do they believe race influences their educational experiences, and (3) how can this intersectionality be explored through the stories of participants and the researcher during the narrative inquiry process? In short these are the *why*, *what*, and *how* of this study’s narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At the heart of this study is the belief that a broader and more authentic understanding is necessary to deliver these students from the academic quagmire that many find themselves in. Lehn (2009) explains, “The ways in which students see themselves are often mirrored by the overt and covert manner that they are viewed by others at school and at home. In their daily interactions with others, students receive messages about how they are perceived within their families, schools and communities. What those messages say about their identities consciously and unconsciously have an effect on how students of color see themselves as learners” (p. 345).

We all live layered lives with different parts exposed at different times and under different conditions. Delving beyond the surface and exploring what has composited to form our outer shell provides an alternative understanding of the carapace we each wear, its origins, components, and complexities. Fossilized in each layer we live are the stories

of others and us. When we tell our stories we essentially dissect a layer and assign it importance and meaning. We are never truer selves than when we talk about ourselves, and so to learn about (and assign meaning to) the educational experiences of black students, we should go beyond the tradition of collecting and analyzing quantitative data - test scores, grades, discipline referrals, attendance, socio economic status and family arrangement - and instead dig deeper to extract different evidence and expose meaningful information, by listening to their stories of what it means to be a black student. Lehn (2009) emphasizes the value of involving those most affected by a problem being a part of the solution by recounting a student's thoughts,

I honestly believe that students know what they need most. If they are able to use their voice and get what they want, then it adds so much to the culture. If it's a personal thing that students take seriously because they worked for it, they were a part of building it. So they won't destroy it, but will work to protect and improve it. And that's why student voice is so important. Without the voice of students, schools serve no purpose (as cited by Lehn, 2009, p. 355).

Narrative Inquiry

Education's messiness stems in part from its competing goals and paradigms. Competing policies and practices - personal verses collective achievement, tradition or progression, experience or basic skill acquisition, development of the individual verses inculcation, society shaping schools or schools shaping society - are all evidence of discordant understandings of education's function in society (Egan, 1992). Diverse opinions about what should be learned, and by whom, add to education's impotency and ineffectiveness. Explicating what is known about our education system and its

participants can be equally difficult and disorderly. Quantitative data has done little to inform effective policies that address black student academic performance, being most efficient at reporting the size of the achievement gap between black and white students and its continuing growth. In his discussion on the positive and negative aspects of alternative data representation, Eisner (1997) explains that the conversation on research methods must expand to include not just what stands as legitimate forms of data - stories, film, pictures, etc., but what constitutes doing research.

Narrative Inquiry as a methodology provides a framework that validates the participant as the subject matter expert. Narrative Inquiry as a process provides opportunities for the participants to contribute, reflect, learn and grow. On the other side of a narrative inquiry study everyone involved is better for their involvement. In answering the question of why narrative inquiry, Kurtz (2010) views it as having three dimensions - human-social, cognitive and information gathering. She makes the following points regarding these three aspects:

- People act differently when they tell a story than when they answer questions.
- The separation between the actual event and the retelling in story provides emotional safety and opportunities to reveal deeper beliefs and feelings.
- Storytellers are given attention that conveys authority, concern and respect from the audience.
- Stories engage both tellers and listeners.
- Because stories are rich and multilayers storytellers often articulate more complex interpretations than when responding to direct questioning.

- Storytelling reveals values, beliefs and feelings in excess of what is asked or discussed.

Narrative Inquiry provides space and opportunity for participants to relive, tell, and retell an experience, and also reevaluate and rearrange events, actors and meaning. It can also provide opportunities for heightened self-awareness that empowers all participants. In speaking to the value of this, Greene offers, “I am suggesting that, for too many individuals in modern society, there is a feeling of being dominated and that feelings of powerlessness are almost inescapable. I am also suggesting that such feelings can to a large degree be overcome through conscious endeavor on the part of individuals to keep themselves awake, to think about their condition in the world, to inquire into the forces that appear to dominate them, to interpret the experiences they are having day by day” (Greene, 1978).

At its root, education is nothing more than a collection of stories. Language arts, history, and social studies are obvious examples of this but even mathematics is the story of how numbers engage and disengage, and science, the story of how elements configure to produce life and the physical world that surrounds it. Without these stories there are no educational facts and yet, counter intuitively, we claim that the facts give these stories their truth.

Before literacy was introduced stories ‘caused’ education to occur (Egan, 1992) and so it would seem improvident to engage in any investigation of education outside of the stories of it. This study was an inquiry of the stories of black students and the ways in which race influences their educational experiences. It endeavored to go beyond the grander narratives of being a black student in American - academic underperformance,

under-representation in advanced or gifted classes and over-representation in special education programs, disproportionately high suspension, discipline and dropout rates - and look behind the obvious, the *facts*, to learn personal truths. These truths run parallel to the data that schools collect and report to construct their official versions of students' academic experience and achievement, and the negative perceptions about black students that the larger society willingly digests. In this way, the truths that emerge from the voices of black students through their storytelling represented a challenge to these institutional narratives. Stories hold a special importance for black Americans. They are a way of retaining a history interrupted by slavery and afterward, by a social reality of second-class status, marginalization, oppression and discrimination. Stories not only ensure that the past has a present but they also provide threads of hope that can weave a fabric of changed futures. They provide a counter narrative to the assumptions and generalizations that make up the perceptions of black Americans as inferior, degenerate and undeserving. Stories are the foundation of black Americans' truths.

My history, and therefore my truths, are a collection of family stories about ministers and panderers; horse trainers and gamblers; domestic workers and college graduates; military servants and public servants; criminals and caregivers; conservatives and cross-dressers. The examples of deficit thinking are numerous making many of the successes antilog to the complex struggles required to be black and successful in America. Every one of my family stories has supplied foundational fibers of resilience, fortitude and pride to counter each and every challenge and adversity I have faced in my lifetime. It is because of these stories that I know I am not inferior but am instead extraordinary, that I possess both virtue and value, and that I am wholly deserving of

everything I have and will attain. Within each of these stories are complex elements and a multitude of dimensions that make them indelible, timeless, and without an ending. I have heard them (and many, many more) from as early as I can remember and with each retelling they become transformed in their significance and relevance. The amended understandings are based partly on my particular circumstances or mindset at the time of telling, but also reconfigure based on who is present and who is doing the telling, and the ways the story has changed since the last time I heard it. And at each recount I learn a bit more about the characters involved, about me, about the world of the story, and the world in which I live. This makes the storytelling (and story writing) experience one that cannot be experienced alone. A story never belongs to just one person, nor is it ever complete.

My education story, albeit a story of success, is also one rippled with experiences of discrimination, low-expectations, discouragement and misunderstanding. Race was a constant denominator throughout my education struggles and triumphs. I am certain that the stories of my family, *my truths*, enabled me to confront and transcend the negative encounters and influences of race and discover alternative ways to persevere and succeed. My *race* and my *education* are inseparable stories.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson waxed extensively about the connection between race and schooling. Du Bois (1903) forecasted race's importance across all social dimensions when he distilled its significance in the oft-quoted statement:

Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gently Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line (Du Bois, 2003, p.3).

In his seminal text, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, published in 1933, Woodson notes:

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples (p. 5).

The salience of these two statements still resonates within society today. A century later, indicators point to a strong correlation between the social, political and economic health of an American citizen, and their race.

Narrative Inquiry is grounded in John Dewey's (1938) notion of the inseparability of experience and education and studies people, places and things by researchers in location with people, places and things (cited by Craig, 2009). The use of the narrative and storytelling as a cogent process for the study of black students' experiences in education and the importance of race vis-à-vis these experiences, signifies a legitimacy of the lived experiences of these individuals as sources of knowledge and truth. It integrates the lived meaning placed on specific events in which both the researcher and participants take part and organizes these experiences, along with dialogic interactions, into meaningful units of data constituent to a story.

We all construct our own stories and participate in them making narrative inquiry a phenomenon, a process and a methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The mind is not fixed and cannot be separated from experience or the world, and time is indelibly connected to relationship and circumstance, narrative inquiry captures both the individual and the context necessary to explore human experiences (Moen, 2006). Narrative inquiry

captures the richness, complexity and diversity of live encounters and in the process it empowers both participants and the researcher by challenging them to make sense of these moments and push back against the dominant narrative. People live multi-dimensional lives. The narrative inquiry process unravels within these dimensions, the temporal, the personal and social, and the contextual, and gives authority to the meaning and significance individuals place on their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Personal experiences don't vanish simply because they are not spoken of or reported. As noted by Dewey (1916) when something happens we respond to it. We do something with it and endure the results of our actions. In this way the something that happened responds to our response, creating an experience-learning cycle.

The five constituents of narrative inquiry as explained by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) are: (1) researching on the boundaries, (2) researching in the midst, (3) knowing through relationships, (4) narrative truths, and (5) following where the stories lead. These components can facilitate multidimensional understandings about student experiences and their beliefs about the role of race in these experiences. *Researching on the boundaries* exposes and confronts the inconsistencies and tensions in participant and researcher stories, the grand narrative and individual participant histories. *Researching in the midst* facilitates a cobbling of the past, present and future lives and by association, stories of researcher and participants, while also creating new temporal experiences and interaction. *Knowing through relationships* develops as stories are shared, discussed and reflected upon by the group. *Narrative truths* are revealed in the interpretation of stories and the transcription of field texts as representation of the relationship between inquirer, participants and their narratives. Lastly - *following where the stories lead* - allows the

purpose and focus of the inquiry to change during the research process (cited in Craig, 2009). Using the processes of group conversation, social networking, individual interviews, and written narratives, this study endeavors to explore and share:

- Participants' stories about race and school.
- Participants' personal understanding of what race is.
- Instances of race in participants' school experiences.
- Participants' beliefs about how race has influenced their school experience.
- Participants' beliefs about how their school experiences shape their knowledge about what it means to be a black student.
- Participants' personal and social growth (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Study Outline

This inquiry was conducted to explore the ways in which black students see race as constituent in their education experiences. It provided opportunities for participants to engage in dialectic, analyzing what race is, identifying the ways in which race lives and operates in their schools, and sharing and reflecting on their personal stories about race and learning. As researcher, I brought the stories of the education and race intersections throughout my academic journeys and shared them with participants during group conversation sessions and social networking.

This study was inspired by the personal, passionate and participatory inquiries chronicled by Ming Fang He and JoAnn Phillion (2008). Anchored solidly in Clandinin and Connelly's conceptualization of the relevance of individual life experiences to education, and Dewey's idea of effective education being inseparable from the life

experiences of children. Personal, passionate and participatory inquiry is both political and transformative (He & Phillion 2008).

My research objectives were to:

- Understand how black students view race as it relates to their educational experiences.
- Share stories of both unique and common school experiences.
- Provide opportunities for participants to reflect on and counter the master narrative about black student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
- Empower participants to become the architects of their own truths.
- Expose potential strategies for navigating the black student education experience that are both transformative and transferrable.

Black students' beliefs about the significance of race in their educational experiences may provide a basis for more authentic understandings of what supports, inspires, challenges and impedes the academic success of black high school students. These new understandings about the role of race in schooling may guide new approaches for developing effective policies and programs that improve both school performance and classroom instruction. There were four components to this research project. They were:

- A. Participant Group Conversation Sessions
- B. Participant Social Network
- C. Reflective Journals
- D. Participant Follow Up Telephone Interviews

Participants

This study included participants who self-identify as being black, who are between the ages of 17 – 19, and who are high school students in two majority-white suburban school districts in the Greater Houston area. Four participants were used for this study. The participants were individuals who self-identify as being both black (and African-American) and academically successful.

Study participants were selected as a purposive sample of individuals with rich knowledge about the research topic. By selecting participants who were academically successful motivation to negatively associate race as significant to academic performance was reduced. Because the study sought the beliefs of black students only those who self-identify as black were included.

All study participants were volunteers. The four (4) participants selected were contacted by email and given a description of the study, a consent form to sign (or have signed by a parent or guardian if they were a minor), as well as a schedule and instructions for group conversations, social networking and the participant follow up interview.

Group Conversation Sessions

Conversation is one method of obtaining field texts. In conversations, the listener plays a part in expanding the representation of an experience beyond what occur during an interview (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thorough examination occurs in conversation, but it occurs, “in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 109).

Participant stories were shared in conversation during two group conversation sessions. During the first session, participants discussed the videos they were asked to preview before this first meeting. These videos served as a binding experience to focus the group on the study topic of how participants experience race in their schools. During the first meeting participants were asked to share stories related to their personal experiences with race at their schools. Participants were encouraged to respond to the shared stories of others. Relationship building was the goal with the expectation that this would lay a strong foundation for more comfortable, trusting and deeper interactions during the social networking process and the second group session meeting. All in-person group sessions and the follow up interview, by telephone, were tape-recorded. With the permission of participants the group sessions were also videotaped.

The two videos participants were asked to view prior to the first group interview session were:

1. What is race? – A video by the American Anthropological Association

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aaTAUAEyho&feature=related>

2. Black or White: Kids on Race – A CNN Special on Anderson 360°; Parts 1 - 8

http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=cnn+black+kids+race&oq=cnn+black+kids+race&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&gs_sm=e&gs_upl=9011860510188931191191011113101160196111.71810

During the second group conversation, participants were asked to respond to the social network postings. Retelling stories and the telling of new stories also took place during this session. Participants were asked to retell their own stories and

respond to the re-story telling by others as well as discuss their experiences as participants in the study, both verbally and by writing a narrative.

Social Networking

Participants' lives neither begin nor end with their involvement in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Their landscapes, home, community and school are in the midst of the narrative process. Social networking can provide a vehicle for bridging these narrative places. Communication using social media is native practice for most youth today. A social network site was created for the study group. It was private and accessible only to study participants. The social network provided an additional and alternative space for participants to give storied accounts, as well as revisit experiences shared during the group conversation sessions.

By employing social media, participants were able post their thoughts and comments instantaneously, anytime, anywhere, and in between the group conversation meetings. This was intended to extend their involvement in the study beyond the confines of scheduled sessions and capture their thoughts and feelings as they occur. In this way, participant stories would have a life both inside and outside of the group conversation sessions giving them the opportunity to speak for as long as they choose, to story from top to bottom and reflect backwards and forward. The researcher participated in this part of the study also. The purpose of providing this medium was to capture contemporaneous accounts of experiences and allow participants to "puzzle out" (Clandinin & Connelly 2000) stories shared during in-person group sessions. The social media program used was Edmodo at www.edmodo.com.

Reflective Journals

Participants kept journals throughout the study and were asked to write reflections at the end of each group meeting session, while also having the option to use them beyond this requirement. As noted by Fay Martin (1998):

To speak is one thing, to be heard is yet another. I believe the narrative interview operates at a third level....The [written] assignment requires the participant to self-reflect on both parts and the whole of his/her story. My experience of what the participants did with the assignment suggests that this engaged them at a fourth level, a step beyond being confirmed as heard....The narrativists say that one creates and recreates oneself and positions oneself socially through narrative choices. My sense was that many of these participants, reflecting on themselves in the middle of the development task that was the focus of the investigation, found themselves in the telling, experiencing themselves as creating themselves and as recovering themselves from the stories that had been told about them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2007, p. 443).

Journals can be viewed as “spaces for struggle” (as cited by Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 104). Reflective writing provided an opportunity for participants to enter into conversation with their selves. They were able to revisit thoughts about the group sessions and social network postings, take measure of what their experiences have in common (and how they differ) with those of the other participants, and add whatever they felt had not been said. This allowed participants to look more critically at what their participation in this study meant and consider how the experience had implications for their lives as black students.

Follow Up Telephone Interviews

One follow up telephone interview with each participant took place. The purpose of these conversations was to provide participants with an opportunity to add to the accounts relayed in their stories and to clarify the meaning of these accounts. Given the inherent inequity in the interviewer/interviewee relationship, the purpose of the follow up interview for this study was to shift the power away from the researcher toward the participants and allow them to correct, retell or modify their accounts and their meaning.

Conclusion

In his work examining the influences of identity and race in the achievement of *urban students* (this is the term used by the researcher although the participants are “working-class black students” in an urban middle school in San Francisco), DeMeulenaere (2009) criticizes the static conceptions of identity that ground educational research, the dismissal of identity’s fluid nature and the uncertainty of expressions of human behavior. In his section on theoretical grounding, he makes note of a study in which six, high-achieving “urban” black students are successful because of their connection to role models that not only exhibited critical awareness of race and social oppression but also were active in challenging discrimination. His belief is that this had a positive influence on student self-efficacy and may in fact have empowered these students to overcome their own racial and class challenges.

While this presents a novel perspective on the benefits of the student-mentor relationship that I had not previously considered, perhaps the most important finding for my study’s approach is the acknowledgement that over-generalization and static

conceptions of identity are too often distilled into a singularity of assumptions and results in research on black students.

Bergin and Cooks' (2002) study on high school students of color and the phenomenon of 'acting white' exposes important areas of possible discussion for this study's participant group. They posed questions to participants concerning their avoidance of appearing to act white, whether they felt the need to trade ethnic identity for academic success, and the importance of high achievement peer-group association. One of the implications they did not design their study to test was how diverse school racial demographics affect students' perceptions of identity and accusations of acting white. This may also be significant to my work.

Gayles (2005) utilized a positioned subject approach in his study on the meaning that high-achieving African American males attached to academic achievement, noting Clifton Conrad's, et al., (2001:3) assumption of the importance of "people, as positioned subjects...actively interpret and make sense of their everyday worlds" (p. 252). This permits students to assign meaning to the phenomenon *academic achievement*. In addition, he authorized students' perspectives by keeping interview questions open-ended and allowing future questions to develop from the topics students identified as salient and meaningful. This study also provides a potential area of bias as the researcher notes that although care was taken in interpreting results, the researcher's identification with the participants, and I assume this means he is a black male, may have influenced his interpretation of findings.

In her study on black, high-achieving students, Hemmings (1996) rejects Ogbu's implication that black students minimize the importance of schooling as a result of

cultural belief in the impossibility of being able to compete in white America regardless of their academic achievement. She points out in her conclusions, the “unique student responses” to their school cultural surroundings, and the students’ multiple and often conflicting self-images of their blackness, student identity and other personal categories (p. 45). As a final note, Hemmings states, “How the six black achievers responded to the particular images of who they ought to be, depended on their own images of who they were or hoped to become. They were different individuals who responded in different ways to markedly different school contexts” (p. 47).

Black parents have offered insight into the role that race plays in the educational experiences of their children. In a study that focused on the perceptions of black, middle-class mothers with children in predominantly white, suburban middle schools, Williams (2006) concludes that it is the belief of these parents that “race is a concerning factor in the academic achievement of these students” (p. 114). In her study on the experiences of minority students in predominantly white high schools, Lehn (2009) emphasizes the importance of listening to the stories these students tell about school, suggesting, “...the present cannot be ignored. The narratives of participants clearly indicate that when we ignore the present we eliminate potential before there is an opportunity for it to grow. Narrative inquiry provides a lens for educators to see with potential, become agents of change, and seek ways for empowering marginalized students” (Lehn, 2009, Abstract).

Each of these studies provided implications applicable to my research on black students and how they identify race as being significant in their educational experiences. Each also reinforced one of the grounding principles of CRT, which is the high value placed on the narrative and storytelling processes as a way of providing contextual

validity to participant perspectives. A second principle of CRT that these studies addressed is the avoidance of over generalizing findings and the presumptive identification of *common threads* in participant stories.

Viewing each participant as an individual with experiences that possess original knowledge and meaning was a priority. It was also important to allow participants to position themselves within their accounts, and by doing so acknowledge that identity is fluid and therefore accounts of the same situation may differ in the telling and retelling processes.

The importance of the lived experience of education cannot be stated strong enough. Learning is a series of experiences taking place both inside the classroom as well as outside in the world (White, McCormack & Marsh, 2011). Unfortunately, the experiences of black students and their perceptions about the role of race in their education has been both undertheorized and underresearched and this may contribute directly to our inability to understand the educational needs of these students and our ineffectiveness in addressing the broader issue of underachievement.

We do not believe experience has ever been valued in education, and certainly not the individual experiences that color the thoughts of both children and adults. Education, as it currently stands, does not contribute to learning in any real sense of the word because it does not allow for the individual experiences that come before and the communal experiences we bring to any discussion (White, McCormack & Marsh, (2011, p. 15).

It is vital that we learn about these experiences through the stories that black students tell.

The goal of this research was to provide a space for acquiring a broader and deeper understanding of how black students experience race at their schools. This study provided space, time and opportunity for participants to explore race, its importance in their own educational experience and the experiences of others, and question and reflect on their understanding of this intersectionality. A secondary goal of this research project was that it be of benefit to participants. Though the narrative inquiry experience I wanted participants to acquire a greater understanding of the role of race in their educational experiences, a deeper understanding of who they are as students and students of color, a sense of agency for directing their own learning journey, and a desire to face and address instances of marginalization, discrimination, and oppression experienced by them and others. This was how I would judge this study's successful. As the researcher participant my goal was to learn and grow stronger during this process, and speak out loud on behalf of black students. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Mary Oliver (2008), said it best when she wrote,

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it (Oliver, 2008, p. 35).

Chapter 4 – Findings and Analyses

The goal of this narrative inquiry was to provide a space for acquiring a broader and deeper understanding of how black high school students experience race at their schools. A secondary goal was that involvement in the study benefit participants by helping them gain a greater understanding of the role of race in their education, a deeper understanding of who they are as students and students of color, a sense of agency for directing their own learning journey, and the desire to face and address instances of marginalization, discrimination and oppression experienced by them and others in their schools. Acquiring this new knowledge about the significance of race in these students' educational experiences can provide a basis for more authentic understanding of what affirms, challenges, impedes and inspires the academic success of black high school students. The hope is that this information can be used to *de-*, and *re-*, define black students so that they are viewed as the individuals they are, with unique experiences, gifts, and aspirations that should not be generalized or assumed.

This inquiry began with the question, "What would black students say," about their educational experiences and the significance of race in those experiences? The literature tells us that race is an enduring paradigm in American society that is operational within every social system and institution. Although race categorizing is used ubiquitously in schools to collect, synthesize and interpret data, its social meaning and influence are rarely examined beyond providing information on enrollment, testing and disparate achievement between student groups. But, race is a social reality in schools, it has real effects (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and it is undertheorized in terms of its impact on

student behavior and performance (Tate, 1997; O'Conner, Lewis & Mueller, 2007; Martin, 2009).

The Narrative Inquiry Process

Participants' beliefs about the significance of race in their educational experiences were explored through their stories about school. Field text was collected during group conversations, through participants' written narratives and during follow up interviews conducted by telephone. Group conversations took place during videoconference sessions and in-person sessions at the researcher's home. Participants were asked to view short videos in advance of these meetings to help them focus on the topics of race, prejudice, and the achievement gap. The group conversation sessions began with the researcher sharing a story about her school experiences related to these topics as a way of personalizing the topic. Participants were then asked about their beliefs on how these issues influenced their own educational experiences. Each participant was encouraged to contribute to the conversation as well as provide feedback on the stories as told by the other participants.

Negotiating our relationships as a purposive group sharing stories about our experiences with race and school was a challenge during this narrative inquiry process. As the only adult participant, initially I was perceived as both an expert on the discussion topics and a person of authority, and less as a study group member. As explained by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "Part of the negotiation is explaining ourselves (p. 73)." As a result, the first meeting of this group was very low-energy and formal. Participants seemed to be more focused on providing answers, the correct answers, than they were in engaging in conversation. They wanted to know what I wanted to know from them, so

that they could supply it. In the roles of researcher and participant, I wasn't sure what I wanted to know and therefore began to doubt myself as being prepared to navigate through this narrative process and carry out this study. My insecurity was most likely evident to participants as I followed their lead and pounded them with a question after each response they provided, never letting any silence settle between questions or providing an opportunity for them to think more about the question or their response. What was transpiring would better be classified as an interrogation instead of a conversation.

My stories of race and school did not seem to resonate with participants in the way I had planned. My idea that we would share a few "me, too" moments was quickly vanquished. Instead, when participants made reference to the stories I shared they usually prefaced their comments by saying, "back in your day," or "in the past." This was an indication of how they viewed their experiences with race as distinct from those of my generation or earlier generations. In my efforts to be a part of their conversations this was a disappointment, but it also served as a reminder that we are all owners of our stories possessing the right to connect and distance them as we see fit. In this way our stories can have threads of commonality while also remaining unique and personal.

All participants did not know each other (two were students at the same school) because they attend three different schools and so there was a period of sizing each other up. I was considered as the conversation leader, them as subject experts. This perception was understandable because I asked most of the questions during our first session while trying to balance the tasks of keeping the conversation flowing, composing notes and listening. The medium used for our first group session was videoconferencing and

although everyone could see and hear each other, the virtual mode provided a physical distance that challenged the formation of a collective purpose of sharing and learning from each other. Each group member talked in turn, politely, but we never developed a comfortable conversation flow.

In their chapter, *Beginning in the Field*, Clandinin and Connelly (2003) explore the process of the researcher finding their role. The participants had for all intents and purposes, marginalized me, at least this is the way I felt. I didn't know how to join in in a way that would not be imposing, and as a result I became a voiceless bystander on matters about which I was passionate (p. 75). I bided my time and found my usefulness in making observations about not only what the stories entailed but also how they were told, writing notes as the participants took temporary ownership of our group conversation session. This dynamic changed during the second group conversation session that took place in-person, with participants appearing to be more relaxed, less self-conscious about their responses and more congenial with both the research and each other. Obviously, during the second session participants had a better idea of how the meetings would progress, and they also knew who would be participating which may have contributed to this positive change. As researcher, the questioning of my agility for balancing all of the tasks of narrative research caused me to step back and relinquish control of the process reins. I began to travel with greater ease and confidence along the narrative inquiry journey with them, not ahead or behind them. During the second session I became a full-fledged participant in the narrative process. Another influence on the improved relationships among participants during the second, in-person session could be that we each had the opportunity to interact with each other in real life. This allowed us to

observe body language and experience the sensory nuances that are inherent in true personal engagement, and less discernable on a computer screen.

The third group session began as a videoconference fraught with technology problems. The conferencing program software was quirky and some of the participants had issues with their headsets. By the time these issues were resolved the energy and anticipation generated from the previous session had dissolved. The session was ended and the fourth session was scheduled as an in-person meeting. During the fourth meeting that took place in-person, participants were much more outspoken, asked each other questions and referred back to what other participants said. Although they came together as a research subject team I am not sure I ever reached the status of equal partner in their group. I remained as “ma’am” throughout the process. Just as it was difficult for them to erase the generational gap between us, likewise, they interpreted a distinction between my educational experiences as a black student and theirs.

Participants

Four participants were chosen for this study. Three attend two different high schools in a majority-white, suburban school district west of the Greater Houston area, with a district student enrollment of 60,573, a black student enrollment of 9.4% and a per pupil expenditure of \$9,744.00. There are 2,986 students in one of the high schools, 5.4% are black and there are 2,696 students in the other high school, 6.3% are black (Texas Education Agency, 2012). One participant attends high school in a majority-white, suburban school district northwest of the Greater Houston area, with a district student enrollment of 45,092, a black student enrollment of 13.9% and a per pupil expenditure of \$11,488.00. There are 3,266 students in this high school, 10.3 % are black (Texas

Education Agency, 2012). Two of the participants attend the same school. Two participants are female and two participants are male. For the purpose of the study participants are known by pseudonyms. Participant backgrounds are as follows:

- Em- a male, high school senior who is 17 years old and self identifies as being black. He identifies himself as being a high-achiever. He plays on the school's basketball team. Em is very self-assured, focused on achievement and unbending in his resolve to not be influenced by external pressures. He was usually the first person to respond to conversation topics. The majority of his classes are advanced placement.
- Tee - a male, high school junior who is 17 years old and self identifies as being black. He identifies himself as being a high-achiever. He plays on the school's basketball team and attends the same school as Em. Tee is sensitive and took his time before speaking, always choosing his words carefully. He often referenced what others said and felt comfortable expressed his assent or disagreement. The majority of his classes are academic level.
- Jay – a female, high school sophomore who is 16 years old. She is bi-racial and self identifies as being black. She identifies herself as being a high-achiever. She is a member of the school's dance team. She attends a different school than Em and Tee, but in the same school district. Jay almost always articulated the level of racial influence she believed existed in the stories she told and focused more on the social aspects race in her school. Her classes are a mixture of advanced and academic level.

- Vee – a female, high school junior who is 15 years old and self identifies as being black. She self identifies as being a high-achiever. She does not play any sports for the school. She attends high school in a different district than does Em, Tee and Jay. Vee is the most radical in her views about how race operates at her school. She offered several examples of differential treatment both in and outside of the classroom. Like Jay, she was also very observant about social patterns. She provided the comic relief for the group around which we were all able to bond. The majority of her classes are advanced.

Field and Research Texts

Like many narrative inquiry researchers I developed strong feelings for my participants. I was concerned with the possibility of losing objectivity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as I began to think about preparing research texts from my notes of our sessions, our narrative reflections and the video and audio tapings. What helped was thinking about the process of research text development as another chance to have a conversation with participants and experience their stories again. Field texts came from three, one-hour group conversations (the second group conversation session was canceled because of technology difficulties) with participants and the researcher, that were videotaped and audio recorded. One of these sessions was held virtually and the other two were held in person. The group conversation sessions were transcribed.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out how field texts are imbued with interpretation. During development of the group session transcripts, I made the decision to selectively eliminate certain sounds and words of uncertainty or questioning, for example, “um” and “huh” as well as the continuous usage of the word “like” employed

by these and many other teenagers today. Additionally, phrases such as, “and stuff” or “you know,” were also edited in some places of the transcripts. This was only done after replaying the responses many times in an attempt to ensure that the essential meaning of the response was still preserved in the transcription. The original recordings of all four sessions remain unedited and preserved.

The researcher’s journal reflects the influence of relationship on the interpretation of the narrative inquiry process as it unfolded during and between the group conversation sessions and therefore does not stand as an unbiased documentation of what occurred during the group sessions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I composed my journal entries it was impossible to eliminate the influence of the other participant’s voices, stories and emotions displayed during the sessions. My journal entries did not carry complete meaning without their stories, and their stories did not carry complete meaning without my journal entries.

Field texts also came from notes taken by the researcher during the group conversation sessions and from the written narratives of participants and the researcher during journaling. These remain in their original form. The process of journaling proved to be difficult for participants without the help of prompts that were derived from the group conversations. As one of the components of the study’s design, a private social networking site was established. The researcher posted comments on this site several times however participants did not make any postings. When asked why they would not respond using this medium, participants explained that it reminded them too much of an assignment for school and they did not have time to visit the site. They did not place this activity as a priority. As a negotiation of the way we would proceed as a narrative process

group, I chose to listen to them and discontinue this study activity. Notes taken during the follow up interviews conducted by telephone with each participant were also transcribed into field texts.

What Black Students Said

Participant stories were analyzed for indications of a belief in race as influential in the school events described by them. I chose to code these influences as being *affirming*, *challenging*, *impeding* or *inspiring* to them as black students. In many cases a story or an event did not have clear boundaries within one category of influence and applied across themes. Field texts were coded to reflect at least one of these four influence categories:

- Affirming – influences that provide participants with a sense of freedom to be who they want to be. These responses express participant’s awareness of race within the context of school. Participant stories describe their preferences in how they socialize at school and their ability to choose this. Participants show an awareness of what race looks like in their classes and describe their frequent and intentioned exposure and interaction with students from many different ethnicities and races. The responses reinforce the participant’s belief that race should not matter.
- Challenging – influences that bring into question the participant’s ability and the ability of other black students, as well as support racial stereotypes about black people in general and black students specifically. These stories express the participants’ beliefs about the negative attitudes held by adults and some students at the school. They describe how negative stereotypes of black students’ abilities

and black people in general are reinforced in the school. They also reveal how participants choose to negotiate the challenges and respond to them.

- Impeding – influences that privilege select students and disadvantage participants.

These stories are characterized by participant's beliefs that money and social capital provide some students with unearned benefits. Inspiring – influences that cause participants to feel a sense of pride about who they are as black people or black student. These stories describe events that validate them and support their beliefs, values and behaviors.

Affirming Influences

In the category of affirming influences, each participant indicated an awareness of racial grouping as commonly defined within American society. They all described an awareness of how different groups socialized at their school.

No. It's more like I sit with the people from basketball and Tee sits with people he knows in the hall. Basically, there's no particular separation based off of that. It's just like the people you feel like hanging with really. I hang with a variety of races so at my lunch table there's one Asian, a couple of white people. I'm the only black person at the table. Em – session 1

I don't really sit with a group of black people at lunch. If it happens it happens. It doesn't really mean anything but I usually sit with a bunch of people I know a long time ago from junior high or people I know from the hallway. Tee - session 1

It's pretty mixed. There are some sports teams that sit together because every team is in my lunch so they all sit together in different places in the cafeteria and there's like church people and there's just a bunch of different groups but it really doesn't have anything to do with race. Jay – session 1

The proverbial configuration of black students sitting together in the cafeteria at lunchtime, as described by Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997), was a pattern mentioned by only one participant.

During lunch all of the black people sit in one area. We have 5 or 6 tables to sit at.

Everyone else sits towards the front of the cafeteria. Vee – session 1

According to participants, each of their schools has a core group of black students that socialize together. This dynamic was interpreted as being the result of interest convergence and not race, much in the same way that athletes, club members, students along similar academic tracks or any other school group share their free time with each other. Participants believe that these social patterns are fluid with students of all races having the choice of mobility within different groups.

Basically they have their own little cliques and they, we, all mostly all like to hang out together but there are some people that hang out with the other races.

Em – session 1

I hang out with both black people and white people. I think equally. There are a couple of white people in my neighborhood that I hang out with a lot, so I would say I hang out with black people and white people equally. Tee – session 1

There are a lot of kids. If I don't share similar interests with them then I'd probably wouldn't ever meet them or feel the need to talk to just them randomly.

Jay – session 2

It's true. I don't know. I guess it's true. Like everybody at my school we all hang out in one clique but we'll talk to other people that aren't black but it is insignificant. It shouldn't matter. I don't think it should. Vee – session 2

Participants were acutely aware of the low numbers of black students in their classes.

They acknowledged that tracking was most likely the cause of this pattern as well as the demographics of the school population.

I hang out with a lot of the races, because of the classes I'm in I hang out with the Indians and the Asians and because of basketball I hang out with a lot of the whites and the blacks as well. Em – session 1

I really have no choice to hang around black people because at (school) there is a majority of white people in all my classes, even in basketball. I don't have a problem with that. I'm just saying there's a majority of white people in my classes. Tee – session 1

In my advanced classes there are no black students besides me at all, no partial black. It's either usually white, Indian or Asian. Jay – session 1

When asked whether race was insignificant to their generation, participants interpreted my question to mean race relationships and not institutional influence. Em articulated the general consensus of all of the participants, saying,

It's not as evident but I still think it's around. Back in your generation, it was more, like, nobody had any shame about it. They went around just in that manner with no problem about it because it was socially acceptable then but now it's not really acceptable and you'll be judged if you do something like that so people still do it but it not as blatant. They kind of do it behind closed doors. Em - session 2

Participants offered several observations about why and how race operates in their community today. They blamed parents for negatively influencing their children's views about race and credited their own upbringing with providing a value system that honored adults and taught them to be respectful of authority. Participants held strong belief in the power of peer pressure to dissuade overt expressions of prejudice by students and also felt they had the power to avoid circumstances in which they felt they were being targeted racially. Not one participant could provide an example of a racial incident that took place at their school.

Yeah, but also it depends on how they're brought up, because parents will say anything. They'll act a completely different way when people are over and then as soon as they leave they'll say completely different stuff. Or they might say something about people on TV. Or you might hear white people talking about Obama behind closed doors and then their kids go out and say the same thing but I think it's the environment. If their parents act that way it's going to eventually rub off them. Em – session 2

Definitely it's completely lost a lot of significance. It isn't really socially unacceptable to ah... Yeah, but in school I'm sure there are kids whose parent are, they're not necessarily racist, but they're prejudice and it rubs off on them but I

don't really think they show it openly because it's very possible to get a lot of negative responses to having these feelings in our generation. Jay – session 2

In a discussion about their schools' possible responses to a racial incident, two of the participants had very different perspectives. One was very supportive of the school district's efforts to model inclusiveness and zero tolerance, saying,

In school race doesn't really, cause everyone...I guess when you go to (district) ISD schools, or any other ISDs, you kind of all learn very similar values from your school...and in (district) ISD you learn in elementary school about Martin Luther King and they definitely play down, they tell you that the way he was treated as a child wasn't right, and they model that throughout school, I guess, and I can't remember what I was talking about... Jay – session 2

The other participant's opinion did not support a confidence in the school taking action against racial incidences or in support of black students.

I guess. I don't know. We don't really think about it. If we're being mistreated or something, racial wise, we'll like, joke around about it but we don't really care. We don't really do anything about it... I wouldn't think they'd do anything.

Vee – session 2

One participant made an interesting connection between racist acts and bullying - you can be bullied in a racial way, or for a racial reason.

It definitely goes along with bullying. I feel like I've watch race videos that have to do with bullying and that wasn't right but like, it's kind of like that's not okay but neither is bullying like this and bullying like that. So yeah, they do definitely make sure you get the message that it won't be tolerate. Jay – session 2

During one session, I asked participants about Black History Month activities going on at their schools. With the exception of a few random mentions of the accomplishments of blacks broadcasted on the morning announcements, their schools did not have any formal or school-wide activities. Participants also said there was no mention of Black History Month in their classes by their teachers. Another participant noted that instead of a Black History Month program they had an Anti-bullying Rally.

Are schools intentionally framing acts of racism as a constituent to a larger problem, bullying - if so, then why? What are the costs or benefits to black students? By definition, bullying is an act of unwanted aggression. So is racism. Bullying is also typified as being repetitive. What if this repetition comes from many instead of a single source? And lastly, bullying involves an imbalance of power in the relationship. If we consider acts of racial aggression as bullying in our schools, are we also acknowledging the power that certain students wield over others, racially, in the school? In other words, is racial bullying a misuse of inherent power by the dominant group over minority groups?

Participants were asked how difficult it was for them to talk about race. Surprisingly, all participants said that race is a frequent topic among students.

I don't find it that difficult. I don't see any problem with talking about it, but I mean. I don't know. It's not that difficult for me. I guess it comes up all the time during school all the time, everyone talks about races, but it's not that serious of a topic, really. Em – session 1

It's not really that hard to talk about it sometimes. It's just not that hard to talk about. Tee – session 1

It's kind of interesting because I kind of just think of people as people and not really by race, so talking about it is kind of different, I guess. Jay – session 1

In terms of affirming influences, participants claimed that talking about race was not difficult and that the subject came up within their peer groups frequently at school. They told stories of their actions to dispel racial stereotypes about them as students and about black people as a racial group. They were aware of the racial makeup of their classes and the low numbers of black students in them. Despite these dynamics, participants socialized intentionally, choosing to move in and out of peer groups of other races, without the expectation of identity conformation. They feel free to be whom they are within whatever group they engage.

In this way these participants expressed a sense of race-confidence that was familiar to me. I also believed that I could move between racial groups at my school with ease and pride. I did not believe there was a price to pay for this passage, or any “burden” to bear that required me to shun one identity in favor of another to obtain acceptance or achievement. Unlike these participants, I did believe that race mattered, and I saw no evidence that it didn't.

Challenging Influences

Challenging influences are those that call into question participant's membership in the black race and as a result, their abilities and behaviors associated with this membership. Participants shared stories about their efforts to push back against beliefs others in the school hold about who they are and what they are capable of accomplishing. Each participant self-identified as being black and high achieving, but they told stories of having to battle against how they are perceived as students and people of color.

One participant shared a particularly personal account that had an obvious impact on him and the other participants. This story was framed as an example of this participant's belief that teachers treat black students differently than they do others. But even though participants publicly acknowledge (and for the most part, accept) that the treatment of black students at school is not equitable, this account rattled their internalization of this reality on a very personal level, and exposed a hole in the armor of indifference they each claim to wear.

I asked if I could go the restroom and my teacher told me no, and then a white student went up and asked the same question and she let them go, and I just sat there and thought to myself, why did you tell me no and tell the other kid yes, but then after a while I just let it go. Tee – session 1

After sharing this story, the participant dropped his head, in what seemed to be a display of shame and resignation. I could see him struggling with his answer when I asked him what his response was to the teacher's actions. I realized I put him on the spot but I was eager to find out how he responded to this indignation. Unintentionally, I was challenging him to tell a heroic tale about how he put the teacher in her place, or reported her to an administrator. This was unfair and a moment in our group sessions of which I am not proud.

I was one of these classroom teachers who were frequently cited for having my students in the hall going to or from the bathroom during class time. I could never abide by this restriction because I have always believed it is a basic human right to go to the bathroom when you think you need to, and not when someone else decides this for you – a basic human right and therefore, a basic student right. There is a reason why the scene

in the movie, *Driving Miss Daisy*, in which the black chauffeur insists on stopping by the side of the road to “make water”, is such a powerful part of this film. It stands as a metaphor for the litany of personal and deeply-painful indignations very few white people will ever experience.

With the other participants also looking on in anticipation of his reply, the room became still and it took quite some time before he spoke. This became a defining moment in our discussion group’s shared journey to expose and explain how influential and hurtful issues of race at school can be. During the silence it seemed that we each took a moment to remember our own stories of shame. We admired his courage to do so and agreed to give him space and time to offer his response.

I did ask, but I didn’t really like care too much that she let them go, you know, I wasn’t going to throw a fit or anything. I was just going to sit there and be calm about it. I don’t know. I would have gotten so upset and I didn’t feel like arguing with her at the time so I just let it go. Tee – session 1

None of us replied knowing that given the same situation it is difficult to claim how we would react. I would like to think that I would be angry enough to respond openly but the truth is that even as an adult subjected to race-related offenses, both macro- and micro- in potency, I also sometimes choose the path of least resistance confident that, inevitably, another opportunity will come along for me to register my outrage and respond differently.

I remember when I taught biology two students got into a disagreement ending in one, who was white, calling the other the N-word. It is amazing how that word resonates above even a lively classroom’s conversational din. My classroom went silent and ever

set of eyes registered on me. Because I was the first black person in the school teaching a core course, I had spent a great deal of time making sure my students knew I was race proud and that this did not mean I repudiated them. I exposed them to the things I celebrated about my race and culture and they knew of my strong aversion to any form of disrespect directed at anyone in the class, for any reason.

I knew this would be a test of my value claims and yet I struggled with how to tend to these two students who obviously had different needs. I asked the black student to stay after class and I asked the white student to step out in the hall. With this decision I hoped to make a statement about who I believed had the right to remain in the classroom and who didn't, but at the same time adhering to my belief that no offense justified abasing a student, publicly. I know of those moments when you are frozen in time and not sure how to respond because there are so many issues and emotions wrapped up in the affront and much at stake for your decision about how you react. I have no advice or strategy to offer the participants on this, and that makes me sad.

Another participant shared her accounts of how she is treated differently at her school.

...I sometimes think they favor the other kids instead of us. If we start an argument in the cafeteria like we'll just be sitting in the cafeteria and talking and sometimes we're loud and they'll have cops come and stand next to us and tell us to bring it down. But if the white kids did I don't think they'd do anything. They yell across the cafeteria all the time and we always get in trouble for that but nobody else does. Tee – session 2

When I'm in class, I pay attention but I get bored easily so I'll start messing with people and doing stuff and sometimes I feel like I get singled out and if the other

white kids do it they just look at them and say stop but if I do it they'll start yelling and threatening me and stuff and I think okay...Tee – session 2

With regard to proving themselves as students, participants expressed their beliefs that they had to perform at a level above other students. What emerged from these stories was the complicated dance participants perform between contesting racial stereotypes while also separating themselves from other black students perceived to be troublemakers or underachievers. They seemed to struggle with their decisions to both claim their black identity and distance themselves from it.

I would say that we do have to work harder, not just in school but out in the real world, because I just think we have to work harder than other races out here because we are black and because of our history and all that. I think it's how people look at our work. Tee – session 1

I feel like there's a certain stereotype that some people carry about black people. And so they kind of expect everyone to fall within the same category in their work and school and everything. Depending on the person I feel like they feel all black people will be the same and so you have to work harder to some extent to prove that you are not at the same level as the stereotype they hold you too.

Jay – session 1

I have been blessed to kind of be more successful than most others in academics so when they look at me they don't really see that kind of stereotype. They kind of see me as the odd man out from the stereotype because they don't believe I apply to that so I've never had to go through that but I can imagine that they do

have that stereotype for others that are not as academically, that are more academically challenged I guess. Em – session 1

When asked if being considered “odd man out” wasn’t itself a stereotype, the participant paused to think about this.

Yeah, I would guess. But I mean it’s a good one. I would rather have that than everybody thinking that I’m the opposite of what I am. Em – session 1

Prejudice is a fact of life within most social systems. Studies have examined how the source of prejudice, implicit (subtle and covert) or explicit (traditional and overt), can impact the outcome of interracial group relations. Prejudice is not something most of us want to admit to. Individuals will go to great lengths to connect their reactions or opinion to anything other than race (Dovidio, Kawakami & Gaertner, 2002).

Participants claimed not to have witnessed any overt or serious forms of racism at their school. In contrast, they provided many examples of frequent encounters with verbal microaggressions, some of which were welcomed (jokes between students) and others, not. They also admitted to the stereotypes they held about racial groups (including their own) in the school and their participation in joking about these groups. These stereotypes were unanimous among students – Asian students were smart and serious about their education; white students were privileged and spoiled, materially; black students were social, dressed well and acted out. Participants did not offer any stereotype about Hispanic students and all claimed they could distinguish between harmless wordplay and intentionally derogatory insults.

Participants shared their suggestions for television shows people of other races could watch to learn how Americans view race. The shows they identified included *South*

Park, *Family Guy*, *Everybody Hates Chris*, *106th and Park*, and *The Boondocks*, among others. One participant shared a story about a white classmate's stereotypic view of blacks at her school.

We were in class one day, it was this week that just passed, and they sell fruit snacks at my school and this white boy was selling this box of fruit snacks and he was carrying it around the school and he said some black kid beat him up for his fruit snacks and he didn't even take the grape flavor, he took the other flavors. (all participants laugh). Vee – session 3

In other instances participants told stories of contesting racial stereotyping.

One thing that the people at (school), really in general, and a white person will be like, they'll say this to a black person - you want some fried chicken? We'll be in a conversation and then we're talking about going to eat somewhere and they'll be like you want some fried chicken. And I don't get that because a white man invented fried chicken and we just like chicken like that, so. Tee – session 3

I don't get it either. Everybody likes fried chicken. Lots of people like Kool-Aid, lots of people like grape soda just because black people like drink it more. And if they wanted to be racist wouldn't they talk about pork and pig and stuff. That's the stuff that we came up with. We didn't come up with Kool-Aid and fried chicken and stuff. Em – session 3

Only one participant claimed that she would probably respond aggressively to stereotypic suggestions but also admitted that this depended on who the source of the comment was. Although she had no response to the comment about grape fruit snacks because she

thought it was both clever and funny, she believed that if the tone were hostile she would have had responded negatively. As explained by Em and Jay,

It's not demeaning but yeah I think it's more like a Family Guy kind of way.

Because it's not like they're trying to hurt you when they say it. It's more for laughs. Because everybody knows that it's not always true, but they kind of think it's funny at the same time. Em – session 1

In general people will say obnoxious, like someone will be obnoxious and make a racist joke or something, but I don't take it too personally because usually they're kidding but it's kind of like they don't think about it before they say it, I guess. I don't know. Jay – session 1

In other stories participants expressed a sense of responsibility for when and how they respond in these types of incidents. They also believe they have a role in helping teachers form positive perceptions of black students. Participants were asked if they believe teachers have preconceived notions about black students and how they tried to dispel them.

Sometimes, I feel like that way but other times I think I'm just like overthinking it or something like that. Tee – session 1

I try to make sure I don't have that impression on them or something like that.

Tee – session 1

I kind of more...it's not because I'm black it's because of how I was raised. By background, the way I was brought up, I was always taught to be respectful to adults, and the higher ups and my elders. I don't feel any pressure towards it.

They can think what they want to think. I don't see blacks but they might see us as a bad crowd but that's if they looking at a specific group. But if they looked at the populations as a whole they would see a completely different picture.

Em – session 1

I also agree with Em. My parents raised me to be respectful also and to never disrespect my elders. Tee – session 1

I think if they looked at the population as a whole rather than just the bad part, or just the one group that stands out which is usually the bad ones. Like the ones who are good are usually the ones in the background that nobody else notices, but the ones who stand out are usually the people who give off a bad image so if they looked at the general picture rather than just that one specific group they'd see that the whole population as a whole is better than they believe it to be.

Em – session 1

Participants spoke of the challenges they face encountering and refuting deeply rooted beliefs about their race and their abilities as students. They attributed these beliefs to select teachers, administrators, parents and some students. They are aware of racial stereotyping and participate in the perpetuation of it in ways they considered harmless. They articulated the conflict between the social value of demanding recognition for your qualities and accomplishments, and the consequences inherent in minimizing or dismissing practices or a system that is unfairly stacked against them as black students. They told stories about their choices to sometimes claim kinship with other black students, or dissociate from them when their behavior contrasted with their own beliefs and goals.

Most black people would recognize this process as one they have employed. It involves the transition between versions of consciousness and identity. The result is an improvisational dance of choosing, displaying, promoting and suppressing characteristics, emotions and ideologies in certain situations and with certain people. This requires constant questioning and readjustment about whom you are, whom you are when you are with others, and what the repercussions are for each choice. Then all of this must all be positioned next to the person you see when you look in the mirror everyday – the person who is just you.

During high school I did not feel pressure to uphold the pride and tradition of my race. I felt that I belonged where I was just as much as any other student and believed this was confirmed by having passed the same entrance requirements that every other student did to gain admission to the school. The abilities and accomplishments of black students at my high school were confirmed regularly when they were selected for positions of leadership and recognition and gained admission to coveted colleges and universities, year after year. Teachers and administrators at the Laboratory School neither challenged nor celebrated black heritage and tradition, neither inspiring it nor impeding it, either.

Impeding Influences

Participants indicated that some challenging influences were so great that they interfered with their efforts or plans to accomplish certain goals at school. Each believed these influences to be so powerful that no intervention on their part, or their parents, could change who were the benefactors of certain privileges and resources. When asked to rank race, politics, or money in order of their influence at school, none considered race

as being most influential. Many examples of how politics and money favor select students were shared.

Well, to be honest, I think my years at (school) playing basketball have been kind of a big deal. Or, not a big deal but I feel that the coaches don't like how some of us play or act on the team. I remember last year, my first year on JV I realized the coaches had favorites and the favorites were white and they didn't let me or Em show them what we could do for the team and on the team but only in practice is when we got asked to do something and I feel like that was kind of messed up because they know we have more potential than we show face to face and that they should let us show that on the court. Tee – session 1

Well, my second reason is because the player's parents went to go talk to the coaches and all that and that's why they're always on the floor more than the rest of us because I think the coaches at (school) prefer money over hard work.

Tee – session 1

My dance teacher definitely has favorite but I don't really think it's based on race. I think it's based on personality more than anything. However, the two, well there were three, the three black girls on our team she really didn't really like any of them very much but I think it's personality. Jay – session 1

I have one black, male teacher and there's this one black student that he just loves him. I'm not in his class but he talks about him and he's always bragging about him but he also brags about his jocks. I think that they based their behaviors on activities and how they relate to students. Jay – session 2

There is definitely politics in schools but it's not really based on race. It's like she said, you could be a star on the basketball team. You could be tardy every day to class and they will never count you tardy but be some regular student and show up tardy three days of class and all the sudden you've got detention. So I don't really think it's based off of race so much as, like she said here, your extracurricular activities. If you continue getting in trouble it will affect your position on the team and they don't want to affect the perfect school.

Em – session 2

I'd say the same thing but I kind of think money and politics go hand-in-hand because also in sports the parents with the most money, the coaches usually favors that kid because they knows their parents will give more to the booster club, so I think the first and second one are the saying the same thing. Em – session 2

Like sports. Some of them have parents that have companies and they give the school money for prom and stuff like that. They give the school a lot of money.

Vee – session 3

I shared my yearbooks with participants during our second group session. I told them the story of my meeting with the high school counselor and her opinion that black students at the Laboratory School were better suited for state universities than Ivy League or other top tier colleges despite their academic and social accomplishments. Participants had no response to this story. One reason my story may not have resonated with them is because only one participant is a senior, but I was surprised that he had no comments about it either. Participants did not identify politics at their school as a cause of academic

underperformance. In fact, they placed the responsibility of achievement squarely in the laps of students despite any challenges or conditions of negative influence.

After determining that participants were familiar with the term *achievement gap* I gave each of them a copy of their schools' 2011 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report that showed the scoring gap between the performance of black students and others. Even in their schools are routinely identified as being some of the best in the state of Texas, black students lag behind white students in every area, with a scoring gap that mirrors national statistics. They each studied the report intently, flipping back and forth through the pages. I explained that a twenty-point difference in score represented approximately two years in learning. They were all surprised by the reports' data.

Despite what the AEIS reports indicated all participants expressed strong feelings that black students were equally as capable of achieving academic success as the other racial groups at their school. Participants expressed some surprise and skepticism about a two-year learning gap between black and white students at their school, but whatever the true measure of the gap, they did not blame their schools for student underachievement.

No. Because we don't try. Black students don't try. If we put more effort towards it it would be higher but they don't try. Two grade levels? Yeah. I'd probably say maybe one grade level. Vee – session 3

I agree with her. Most black folks don't really try at school. And...they just don't try and I probably wouldn't be surprised. Tee – session 3

I would say the same. Except for I don't think it would be two grade levels because the white kids don't try as much either. White kids don't try as much either. Em – session 3

I think it's just like...its how the person is. If they really don't care about their academics than they won't try but if they do they will try to get a better education and I wouldn't just say its black people... Tee – session 3

Some of them are smart. Like me -I'm smart. But I'll get to school, but, I'll do my schoolwork, but sometimes I'm loud. They stereotype us as dumb or ignorant but we're actually really not. We're making good grades. Vee – session 3

Yes. If they put the effort forward, they are smart, if they tried. None of them really try. They are the ones that go to class and act up... Yes. If they put the effort forward to actually do their work and actually pay attention to what these people sometimes say that is relevant, they'd be smart. They are smart. They're all smart. They just need to put the effort forward and do their work.

Vee – session 3

One participant suggested that because of the small number of black students, score differences by race could easily be explained by the poor performance of only one or two black students. As participants pored over the reports I was reminded of my own experience examining the accountability report projected across a screen in the gymnasium at my children's school. I recall how intent I was in finding mistakes or some other rationale for the scoring gap between black students and other children at the school.

As I think back on my own high school experience I cannot recall ever believing that race, politics, and money influenced student access to academic resources, before my encounter with the counselor during senior year. Many of the students at the Laboratory School came from wealthy families, but this was true of both black and white students. The divide between the *haves* and *have-nots* was great, but this applied across racial groups. There really wasn't much to be political about at the Laboratory School. We were not recognized as an athletic giant in our independent school league and there were no scholastic teams or clubs. I don't believe the upper school had a PTA or any other parent organization. As a matter of fact, you almost never saw a parent at the school. This all may have contributed to an environment of if not consciously collective purpose, certainly reduced competitiveness among the student body. That is until the stakes became high when we began the college application process and white students viewed their advantages as being in jeopardy.

Participants seem to possess confidence in their intelligence and abilities. They believed that across the board, black students possessed what it takes to be academically successful. They shared stories about how they address inaccurate assumptions about them regularly and expressed a confidence that both peer pressure and school policy play roles in containing overt instances of racial aggression. But, this self-assurance was less obvious regarding strategies for combatting the politics in operation at their schools. They each seemed to be resigned to the fact that the *haves* would always get first access to the best the school offers and the rest would have to compete for whatever is left. They did believe there was enough left for them to construct the educational outcomes they desired. Participants expressed resignation to this circumstance and did not provide any

examples of when or how these practices were ever contested by them, other students or their parents.

Inspiring Influences

Inspiring influences uplifted participants' beliefs, values and behaviors as black students in their schools and positively impacted their school experiences. Unfortunately, this category was represented by the fewest stories told by participants. While participants credit their parents with instilling in them a positive self-image and racial pride, and each expressed feelings of belonging and social acceptance within their social groups, there was no mention of receiving support or encouragement from teachers or administrators at their schools. In their follow up interview I asked participants if they were ever proud about being a black student at their school.

Yes, all of the time. Tee – follow up interview

Yes, whenever they mention all the obstacles my ancestors had to overcome so that we could be as blessed as we are now. Em – follow up interview

Well I am proud of who I am but I don't think there has ever been a time at our school where black students were singled out for something good.

Vee – follow up interview

An unforgettable moment in the lives of these participants was the election of our nation's first black president. Barack Obama's election provides inspiration for them within an environment that does not always acknowledge their value as good students and is imbued with stereotypes that underrate their student race group.

Participants told stories about attempts to dispirit them, to contain their elation, about President Obama's election – in one district a text message was circulated on the night of the election telling students to wear all black to school on the day following the election to symbolized the death of the country, and another participant was told to put a jacket over the Obama t-shirt she wore to school that day – and they described how conversations about Obama's incompetency have increased as the 2012 election nears. While they did not always choose to challenge the legitimacy of their academic accomplishments or potential, they all seemed to draw the line at criticisms about our presidents or suggestions that he was undeserving or qualified.

There are still people at my school trashing him and saying how terrible a president he is. I feel like a lot of it does have to do with race. There are a lot of parents out here that don't feel that having a black president, like he's not as capable. They're still trying to prove he's not even from the United States. I feel like they feel intimidated by that almost, they should be the superior race but they don't classify it as that. There's still a lot of people saying how bad he did and how glad they are that it's election time. Jay – session 2

I remember when he got elected and everyone was like oh he's probably going to do terrible and the discussion about being in the wars and it kind of upset me too because you not even giving him a chance. You've got to at least give him a chance to do something. Bush just destroyed the country practically and now you don't even want to give President Obama a chance. I mean what's the worst he can do? We're already doing pretty bad right now. Everybody now there are just like, they are pretty critical of him cause Bush had eight years, and even after a

fourth year they were still like oh he can bring us out of this and they let him dig us into a deeper hole rather than remove him from office back then. Now, Obama, after three years in office everybody's already being critical and they're already talking about wanting to get him out of office when he's actually been helping the country. He's been fulfilling his promises whether they like it or not. They might not like the fact that the rich people aren't being benefitted as much and that he's actually helping the poor people with like his health policies and he's actually doing what he said he would do so I don't know why they are being upset about that. He told them before he went to office. I think it comes back to racism because it's actually like what she said as well, that they feel intimidated.

Em – session 2

I sensed that with all that these participants confront, endure, contest and suppress on a daily basis at school, the election of Barack Obama as America's first black president, is a *So, there!*, a comeback-in-reserve, for them. For them his election is a hole card - no matter what you think or say about them one thing you can't change is the fact that the most powerful person in the world is a black man. This is a powerful source of motivation and a cogent weapon of contestation.

The race sensitivity that results from the compounding effects of challenging and impeding influences at school is balanced out by the immense pride the participants feel about this. It is something external they can use against beliefs of deficit, but it is also something they can call on internally to remind them that they are not only worthy but also fully capable. Years ago I experienced a similar sense of pride when Harold Washington was elected the first black mayor of the city of Chicago. I remember my own

children being ecstatic on the night of the 2004 election but I cannot imagine what it would be like to experience this as a teenager. I am jealous they will have that memory and spirit of possibility to carry with them throughout the rest their lives.

Limitations

For this study I collected stories about race and school experience as told by a purposive group of students who self-identify as being black and high achieving. No efforts were made to verify their academic status. Participants' self-identification as high achieving qualified them to share stories of how they believe race operates in their school, and served to reduce negative association between race and school experience because of low academic performance. The fact that students claim to be high achievers is enough to meet this purpose. The findings reached in this study are not meant to be generalizable to the entire population of black high school students beyond the possibility that similarly self-identifying participants may have had comparable experiences with race and school, thus making the WWBSS study participants' experiences transferrable (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; as cited by Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Most group meeting sessions included stories shared by me about my experiences in high school and the challenges presented in being a black student. Participants could have made the assumption that I was only interested in hearing stories that exemplified negative experiences regarding race and schooling. Every effort was made to frame the group conversations around patterns or events participants observed whether or not they supported or supplanted a belief that their experiences as black students were negative. Participants were given equal opportunity to contextualize their stories and categorize them as positive, negative or neutral.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) caution about avoiding “illusions of causality” when using lived experiences as data sources in narrative inquiry. Participants were given the space in their storytelling to assign (or not assign) blame or connection to anyone or anything. I avoided the practice of trying to clarify the specifics contained in a story or to pin participants down to details of temporality. What I did try to capture was their story and what it meant to them. Often the same story was retold in reference to a different topic (for example in response to discussions on which groups participants have membership in and what are the socialization patterns of students at your school during lunchtime). These instances were used to validate my understanding of participants’ beliefs about the meaning of the event, and not to confirm truthiness or prove consistency.

Constructing category codes provided the opportunity to organize and group the meaning participants attached to stories based on common threads. Because of this, I tried to select dynamic definitions for these categories that were fluid enough to allow stories to be assigned to multiple categories. In this way I invite each reader of this study to see what I saw and/or to see these stories differently. Every interpretation provides the opportunity to share in the participants’ experiences which is more important than determining their correct classification.

The most important limitation to this study’s finding for me was employing the practice of listening. As researcher I wonder, did I listen? I made videotapes and audiotapes of every group meeting sessions. I viewed them and listened to them several times before I transcribed them. I transcribed the sessions into field text, replayed the sessions and reread the field texts, editing to make sure I typed what I heard. And, I

reread and re-listened to write these chapters of this research document. But I still must ask - did I listen? Did I hear what the participants were telling me?

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

What America's position is on race today (and where it is going) is the conversation *du jour* across many social spaces. Is America post-racial (Touré, 2011; Rutten, 2010; Rodgers, 2010; Zogby, 2009; C.L., 2001), in a state of transracial universalism, as suggested by Harvard Law School professor, Randall Kennedy (Staples, 2011; Smith, 2011), or even aracial, a term coined by student Paula Maouyo and defined as a refusal to identify with any race (Weinberg, 2011). Are millennials, the most racially and ethnically diverse population of 18 -30 year olds in America's history, both implicitly and explicitly immune to society's race definitions and the resulting consequences inherent in its paradigm of stratification, privilege or power?

In their study of millennial's attitudes on race, racism and social systems titled, *Don't Call Them Post-Racial*, the Applied Research Center (2011) cautions assuming too much about this generation's appearance of race transcendency. Their results challenge use of the word "post-racial" to describe millennials, reporting that their focus group conversations "strongly suggest that most young people today believe race still matters (Executive Summary, p.1)." Additional findings from this study include: 1) young people of different races view race and its significance differently; 2) millennials, like most Americans, are challenged to define race in terms beyond *discrimination* and *stereotypes*; and, 3) young people of color are more likely to view racism as systemic, while young whites believe more in its interpersonal nature and expression.

The participants in my study, while far from being post-racial, struggled to label specific events or actions as race-based. They made several suggestions about race being influential in some of their experiences but in many instances stopped short of naming the

experiences as racist in nature. Their age and limited experience in life beyond school is a plausible explanation for this. I would describe the WWBSS participants as 'peri-racial'. They are fully surrounded by and hyperconscious of race and its influences. They possess a naiveté about the possibility of any reversal in racial advancement and see movement toward race harmony or at least racial impotence. They believe they are viewing race pragmatically and not emotionally, like past generations do, and are willing to apply the benefit of the doubt (let's wait and see what happens) to contemporary instances of racist acts by individuals and by systems. They believe in the power of social pressure, institutional protocol and judicial action to ameliorate racism and compensate the injured and deserving, eventually. And they are patient. An associative belief is that even as bad as issues of race may seem in the United States today, they will never be as bad as they were in the past, and for them this signifies progress.

Some would argue that this stands as a primary example of successful social brainwashing and the effectiveness of the dominant culture in indoctrinating this generation with the grand narrative about America finally reaching a state of post-raciality and ubiquitous opportunity, with the proof of this being the election of President Barack Obama. But it may also be prescient of something else – an emerging ideology that rebukes old versions of race structure and resulting acts of racism endemic to them. They remember what they have been taught in school, and at home, but they don't believe overt instances of racism are common practices or commonly acceptable, except by the fringes and only in extreme cases. Despite the admonition of eighteenth-century philosopher, George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (1905, p. 284), these participants are not totally willing to say the murders of

Trayvon Martin, in Florida, in 2012, and Emmett Till in Mississippi, in 1955, are synonymous – analogous, maybe, but not the same. They challenge the immutability of the race paradigm of old and instead view race as amorphous while believing that America will eventually get *race* right.

The participants in the WWBSS study go to school equipped with an understanding of the cultural behaviors and expectations necessary for academic success. They come from middle-class backgrounds and have strong family support from parents who are educated and actively engaged in their communities and schools. Their toolkits of resources should provide them with everything they need to navigate their high school experiences deliberately, on their own terms, with their own goals. They are able to articulate what race looks like in their schools, applying it to student socialization patterns, student/teacher interactions and other classroom dynamics. They each make the claim of strong connection to their race. They dismiss the idea of carrying a burden of “acting white” (each admitting they had heard the term used at their school) and adopting a *why-try* attitude that is characteristic of oppositional identity theory (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004), believing instead that they can still be academically successful, socially popular and race-proud. They view themselves as savvy enough to read the school terrain, and they balance, strategically, between conformity and avoidance to achieve what they want to achieve (Fordham, S. - as reviewed by Harris, J. 1996). These participants have opened their windows of educational opportunity as wide as they can and they understand that sometimes an ill-smelling wind blows in.

Participants told stories of the challenges they face as black students in majority white suburban schools and gave accounts of instances when they faced and contested the

racial stigma of deficit as imagined by a variety of people in the school. They spoke of the influences of politics and money that override merit in determining privilege for some students and assigned these influences to specific actions and events, while firmly disputing their connection to other influences. They admitted to the stereotypes they ascribe to students of other racial groups and described the tension between embracing their black culture and distancing themselves from its negative characteristics that are in opposition to their beliefs, behaviors or values. They storied about a complicated existence as black students in majority white high schools, an existence they are familiar with and sometimes accept and sometimes question. These students believe race shouldn't matter, they know that it does, but they believe it won't matter as much in the future.

The WWBSS study participants are far from post-racial in their understanding of what is happening with race in America and its influence in their educational experiences. They are race-affirmed, race-challenged, race-impacted and race-inspired. Most important, they believe they are able to meet the challenges of being a black student and be successful in spite of them. Many of their challenges were not the challenges of my school experiences, just as many of mine were not challenges to which they could relate, but what our experiences do have in common is the belief that you can operate within a system, even a race-influenced system, and still navigate to the finish line even though your course may be quite different than that of others.

I am saddened by their internalization, at such a young age, that the educational playing field is not equal for them and for many other students. But, I am gladdened by their incredible insight, optimism and resilience. And their patience with educators,

because with all we know about teaching diverse student populations we just can't seem to get it right for them. We continue with the conversations of deficit and opposition behavior as explanations for black student underachievement, and on the other side, we point fingers at racist practice and insensitivity. After so many decades of seeing no remarkable change you would think we would be smart enough to ask the question, "Is it in our collective interest for black students to be successful in school?" The question that should follow the obvious assent is, "How do we see that this happens?"

In their follow up interviews I asked participants if they believed their school experiences would be enhanced if their schools had larger black student, teacher and administrator populations. While some participants expressed indifference to an increase in the number of black teachers and administrators at their school, one participant shared this.

I think there should be more (black students) so people could become less ignorant at how black people really behave. I think there should be more black teachers at school because it offers a comfort to black students and allows them to perform better. I think there should be more black administrators so the black students can have someone who will understand them. Em – follow up interview

I asked participants what they thought would make it easier for them as black students at their school and the responses spanned across the personal to the systemic.

Have more black people. Tee – follow up interview

Eliminating stereotypes. Em – follow up interview

We should have some type of all black organization... Vee – follow up interview

Participants told me they did not consider the study to be difficult although it was sometimes hard to manage their time and attend our group conversation sessions. They appreciated the opportunity to talk about race and their school experiences, and said they learned a lot about how black students are treated at schools other than their own. I wish they knew how much they taught me. I wish the study did not end and that I didn't have to let them go. Because of our time together working as a narrative inquiry team I know I will carry their experiences and stories with me to my next inquiry project.

Recommendations

The WWBSS participant group is the source of the following recommendations on how black high school students can be supported throughout their educational journeys. The recommendations expose practices and policies participants believe would affirm and inspire them as black students, reduce or erase many of the challenges they face and positively impact their academic achievement. I believe this group is highly qualified to offer these suggestions:

Educating School Personnel

Participants expressed confidence in their peer-acceptance, intellectual ability and academic achievement but stated that they believed their efforts and accomplishments go unrecognized and unrewarded by teachers. Instead, they are consistently viewed through the lenses of deficit and oppositional identity development and subjected to the same stereotypes that commonly frame black people as a race in the opinion of many Americans.

Research conducted by Downey and Ainsworth-Darnell (2002) support the participants' claims of social popularity within all student groups resulting from their

standings as high-achievers as well as their pro-school attitudes manifest in their stories. Lewis and Kim (2008) noted that within a culture of teacher low-expectations, black students are explicit in their desire to have teachers that are caring, just, and helpful to them as learners. Casteel (2000) found expressions of these same desires in his study of black seventh grade students despite other findings that these students are ignored and disciplined more often, and called upon and praised less often by white teachers. In his discussion Casteel (2000) concludes that black students do not see their race as significant to the treatment they receive in the classroom and feel that white teachers can relate to them. In all of the stories about school told by the WWBSS participants, none included the name of a single teacher or administrator who positively contributed to their school experiences, either socially or academically.

Participants believed they were treated differently than other students and were singled out and reprimanded for behaviors and infractions that go unpunished when carried out by other students, beliefs supported by Casteel's (2000) research. In his analysis of the data on disciplinary action in public schools reported by the U.S. Department of Education for the 2004-2005 school year, Chicago Tribune reporter Howard Witt (2007) found that in 49 states black students receive suspensions and expulsions at rates grossly disproportionate to their representation in school population giving legitimacy to these participants' claims. Noting that there is an absence of evidence to support that black students misbehave more often than white students, Caralee Adams quoted leading scholar on discipline and race, Russ Skiba, as stating, "We can call it structural inequity or we can call it institutional racism" (Adams, n.d.).

To these ends, participants recommend that school personnel be educated about their misjudgment of black students as being casual about school and their academic achievement and unproductive as school citizens. They expressed a desire to have groups or organizations that focus on the issues unique to the black student school experience as well as provide opportunities for them to share their experiences with other black students as a way of affirming these experiences and finding localized support and camaraderie for facing these challenges.

Increase the Number of Black School Personnel

While they were ambiguous about the benefit of having more black school administrators at their school, participants believed that having more black teachers would be a positive influence on their school experience. Economists who worked on the published report, by the National Bureau of Economic Research, examining the impact of having black teachers instruct black students, refer to this phenomenon as the “role-model effect” (Alexander, 2011). Research results, cited in Jackie Alexander’s (2011) article, *Minority teachers are hard to come by*, suggest that there are tangible improvements to the academic performance of black students who are taught by black teachers. But, a Rochester, N.Y. thirteen year-old student, Jada Williams, found that voicing a desire for teachers of her same race can have detrimental consequences. Jada claims she was subjected to harassment by teachers and her grades plummeted after submitted an essay comparing her school experiences to those of Frederick Douglas stating, “Most White teachers that I have come into contact with over the last several years of my life, have failed to instruct us – even today,” (13WHAM.com, 2012). The backlash caused by her opinion as expressed in a written English class assignment

eventually led her parents to remove her from the school. Although she has returned to the school, the most important lesson Jada learned is to suppress her opinions if she wants to be academically successful in that school.

Participants in the WWBSS research project also believed that black teachers would serve as role models and provide them with a support network knowledgeable about the challenges they face as black students in a majority white school. Each said there was at least one black teacher at their school. Noting his findings that black students prefer teachers of their own race Casteel's (2000) study also shows that this preference does not extend to a desire to have only black teachers. WWBSS participants did not express an interest in only having black teachers but did believe the number of black teachers in their schools should be increased.

Equity and Justice

WWBSS participants wanted to be treated fairly, judged equitable and acknowledged for their abilities and achievements. Their stories expose the complexities of being black students and the delicate strategies they employ to balance their cultural identities with peer and school loyalties. Participants were frustrated with the lack of opportunities to voice their concerns and celebrate their heritage. It is their belief that creating organizations with the mission of supporting black students would provide a place for discussions on race and the struggles that black students face. They believed these organizations or committees could potentially serve as a resource for school personnel and for other students attempting to understand their unique status as minorities in their schools. Most important, they believed they have much to explore and share with

others about their experiences and instead were not provided with the chance to be reflective, valued as experts or operate as agents for change.

Implications for Research and Practice

Based on participants' recommendations several areas for future research and school practice are implicated. First, participant's claims about the value of educating school personnel on their beliefs about black students suggest the need for professional development programs that explore teacher and administrator perceptions of black students as school members and individuals. Programs that facilitate the unpacking of deeply-held negative attitudes and provide data that challenges these beliefs would benefit not just black students but all students and everyone else in the school while also elevating expectations for this student group. The result of such development programs may be that students' ethnicity will cease being viewed as a challenge to their academic achievement and instead will be valued as a resource for engaging students in the educational process, as suggested by Zou and Trueba (1998).

The research is conflicting on black students' preferences for black teachers and the effects of having black teachers teach black students. Future studies should examine the impact black teachers have on black student achievement and engagement in schools. Increasing the number of black teachers (as well as other teachers of color) is a focus for many school districts across the country but what is less understood is the benefits wrought by having teachers of color teach students of color. What, if any, tools and strategies do these educators employ that positively influence students and what can other teachers and administrators learn from their success?

How would the findings from the WWBSS research project differ if the participant group were black students attending a majority black high school? Black students who attend the same schools as the WWBSS participants, and who are struggling academically, would share what stories? How would these two student groups categorize their experiences in terms of the influence of race? These and many other questions should be the sources of future research on black student school experiences and their beliefs about the influence of race in these experiences. As the participants in the WWBSS study taught me, we should not assume a disposition or understanding about this age group's perceptions of race and its impact in their school experiences and lives. Instead we should continue to provide opportunities for black students of all academic levels attending schools as both minority and majority members to share their knowledge and understandings with us. It is indisputable that the finding derived from engaging black students in sharing their school stories, regardless of the school's racial makeup or their academic achievement level, have potential benefits for understanding what affirms, challenges, impedes, and inspires these students and contributes to their academic engagement and achievement.

Lastly, I believe there are two critical questions left to ask: (1) how do we empower students to recognize and contest the "plethora of often-invisible forces" (Kinchloe, 2004) that can impede their full participation in education and, (2) in what ways can we realistically expect students to play active roles in addressing the marginalization, oppression and discrimination of students at their schools?

Narrative inquiry research is a process and method that can be instrumental in helping students recognize and process the forces in action at their school. It also

provides space for participant awakening to occur, which is a critical first step toward activism. In this way the narrative inquiry process and method serve as research of safety, relationship and action. Certainly, organizations in the school that encourage story-sharing and student voice can offer a platform for exploring and articulating issues of race influential in students' academic experiences. But is it reasonable, is it fair, to expect students to take up the banner of activism that can lead to meaningful changes in their schools?

No one should doubt the power and potential of students when they are awakened and informed. On March 29, 2012, fifty black students walked out of their high school in protest against the lack of education they were receiving at a Detroit high school (Huffington Post, 2012). Citing poor resources, teacher absenteeism and the reassignment of their principal, students said they were left with no other recourse after waging complaints to administrators. Less than a month later, students walk out in protest against the pay cuts levied against their teachers at Madison High School, also in the Detroit, Michigan area (Raj, 2012). Time will tell us if students' disgust with the quality of education they are receiving and the disparate treatment many of them receive spreads across the country in the form of student demonstrations and other acts of protest.

Final Reflections

I struggled with how to end this narrative inquiry journey, with how to wrap up my findings, my thoughts and my hopes for this participant group. I do this knowing that it is not an end to the topic of race and education for me, or for the participants. I am confident they will carry this experience with them and even draw on it for insight in the future.

My hope for these participants is that they maintain their strong personal identities as black people and black students. Each of them has a unique set of qualities that will benefit their school, their race and society as a whole. I hope they continue to observe and acknowledge the presence and power of race as an influence in their school and on their educational experiences, and that they continue to represent its beauty and value, and contest its use to marginalize and oppress them and others.

I hope they continue to challenge the negative stereotypes held by others and reflect heavily on those they admit to harboring. I hope they believe and can teach those around them that everyone matters and that everyone has a future in which we are all invested. I hope they get to be the students of as many teachers as possible who view them as the individuals they are and I hope these teachers are able to see a little bit of themselves when they look at them. And, I hope they continue to reflect on and speak about their experiences being a part of this research project.

I advise the schools attended by these participants and other black students to take the opportunity to provide a forum for students to tell stories about their school experiences. School personnel may be very surprised at how well students can articulate the intersectionality of race and school experience, and provide concrete ideas about how to positively impact black student achievement. By not seizing this opportunity, schools are missing out on their most informed, and therefore most valuable resource for improving the school experience of black students. Blacks students have a lot to say.

One question I asked in the participants' final follow-up interview was, "What was the most important thing about being a part of this study?"

"Helping you out," one participant replied.

And at the end of any day, isn't this what it's all about – helping each other out?

References

- Adams, C. (n.d.). Are you biased? *Scholastic- Administrator Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3748775>
- Alexander, J. (2012). Minority teachers are hard to come by. *Gainesville Sun*. Retrieved from <http://www.gainesville.com/article/20120105/ARTICLES/120109745>
- American Anthropological Association. (1998, May 17). *Statement on "Race"*. Retrieved from <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm>
- American Anthropological Association. (1998). Are we so different? *Race*. Retrieved from <http://understandingrace.org/home.html>
- Bell, D. A. (1980). Brown v. board of education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 93, 518-533. Retrieved from pscfiles.tamu.edu/links/div-com/bell-interest%20convergence.pdf
- Bergin, D. A., & Cooks, H. E. (2002, June). High school students of color talk about accusations of "acting white". *The Urban Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2
- Berlak, H. (2001, Summer). Race and the achievement gap. *Rethinking Schools*, Vol. 15, No.4. Retrieved from http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/15_04/Race154.shtml
- Berliner, D. (2005, August 02). Our impoverished view of educational reform. *Teachers College Record*. <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 12106
- Bhatti, G. (2006, May). Ogbu and the debate on educational achievement: An exploration of the links between education, migration, identity and belonging. *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 133-146

- Blake, J. (2011). Are whites racially oppressed? *CNN.com* Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/12/21/white.persecution/index.html>.
- Bohn, Anita. (2006/2007, Winter). A framework for understanding Ruby Payne. *Rethinking Schools*, Vol. 21, No. 2. Retrieved from http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/21_02/fram212.shtml.
- Bomer, R., Dworin, J., May, L., & Semingson. (2008, December). Miseducating teachers about the poor: a critical analysis of Ruby Payne's claims about poverty. *Teacher College Record*, Volume 110, Number 12, pp. 2497-2531
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (1997). Rethinking racism: toward a structural interpretation. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 465-480.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism Without Racists* (2nd ed.). Lanham, Maryland. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2001, November 8). Schooling in capitalist America revisited. Retrieved from <http://www.umass.edu/preferen/gintis/soced.pdf>
- Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S 483(1954).
- Burks, B. (1997, Spring). Unity and diversity through education: A comparison of the thought of W.E.B. Du Bois and John Dewey. *Journal of Thought*, XXXII, pp. 99-110.
- Carper, E. (1960, March 20) Rights unit considers new fields. *The Washington Post*.
- Casteel, C. A. (2000). African American students' perceptions of their treatment by caucasian teachers. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 27, 143-148

Chambliss, J. J. (1996). *Philosophy of Education – An Encyclopedia*. New York. Garland Publishing. p. 151

Civil Rights Act of 1964. (n.d). Retrieved from

<http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/42C21.txt> on January 23, 2011

C.L. 2001. Whiteness in America: A state of racelessness and culturelessness? *ColorQ World*. Retrieved from

<http://www.colorq.org/articles/article.aspx?d=2001&x=raceless>

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA. John Wiley & Sons

Clandinin, D. J. (2007). *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications, Inc.

Clark, K. B., & Clark, M. K. (1950). Emotional factors in racial identification and preference in Negro children. *Journal of Negro Education*, 19, 341-350

CNN Politics (2009). Carter again cites racism as factor in Obama's treatment. *CNN.com*.

Retrieved from <http://articles.cnn.com/2009-09->

[15/politics/carter.obama_1_president-jimmy-carter-president-obama-health-care-plan?_s=PM:POLITICS](http://articles.cnn.com/2009-09-15/politics/carter.obama_1_president-jimmy-carter-president-obama-health-care-plan?_s=PM:POLITICS).

Cohn, D. (2010, January 21). Race and the census: The Negro controversy. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from [http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/01/21/race-and-the-](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/01/21/race-and-the-census-the-%E2%80%9Cnegro%E2%80%9D-controversy/)

[census-the-%E2%80%9Cnegro%E2%80%9D-controversy/](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/01/21/race-and-the-census-the-%E2%80%9Cnegro%E2%80%9D-controversy/)

Coleman, J. (1966). Equality of educational opportunity. *United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing

Office. Retrieved from

<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/06389>

Connelly, M. & J. Clandinin. (1990, Jun – Jul.). Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 19. No. 5, pp. 2-14

Council of Greater City Schools. (2010). A call for change: The social and educational factors contributing to the outcomes of black males in urban schools. *CGCS.org*

Retrieved from

<http://www.cgcs.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&ModuleInstanceID=124&ViewID=047E6BE3-6D87-4130-8424-D8E4E9ED6C2A&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=73&PageID=1>

Craig, C. (2009, February). Learning about reflection through exploring narrative inquiry. *Reflective Practice*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 105 – 116

Dang, T. (2010). WME principal on administrative leave for allegedly making racial remarks. *KatyTimes.com*. Retrieved from

<http://www.katytimes.com/articles/2010/10/17/news/doc4cb4bef727af6852423579.txt>

Dawsey, C. (2012). Dozens of Douglass Academy high schoolers suspended after

protesting lack of teachers. *Detroit Free Press*. Retrieved from

<http://www.freep.com/article/20120329/NEWS01/120329019/Detroit-high-school-students-walkout>

Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for Oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative.

Michigan Law Review, 87: 2411-41

- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York, New York. New York University Press
- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2005). *The Derrick Bell reader*. New York, New York University Press
- DeMeulenaere, E. (2009). Fluid identities: Black students negotiating the transformation of their academic identities and school performances. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, Vol. 2, pp. 30-48
- Dewey, J. (1897, January). My pedagogical creed. *School Journal*, Vol. 54, pp. 77 – 80
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York. The Macmillan Company.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. London. Collier and Macmillan.
- Dovidio, J., Kawakami, K. & Gaertner, S. (2002). Implicit and explicit prejudice and interracial interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 82, No. 1, 62-68
- Downey, D. & Ainsworth-Darnell, J. (2002, February). The search for oppositional culture among black students. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 1, pp. 156-164. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3088939>
- Diamond, J.B. (2007, Spring). Are we barking up the wrong tree? *Harvard Graduate School of Education*. A version of this article originally appeared in the Spring 2007 issue of *Ed*, the magazine of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from www.agi.harvard.edu/events/download.php?id=79
- Dixon, A., & Rousseau, C. (2006). *Critical race theory in education*. New York. Routledge

- Dillon, Sam. (2009, January). Study sees an Obama effect as lifting black test-takers. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/23/education/23gap.html?ref=politics>
- D'Souza, D. (1995). *The end of racism*. New York. The Free Press.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. (2003). *The Souls of Black Folks*. New York. Barnes and Noble Classics. P. 67 – 69
- Dudley-Marling, C. (2007, Winter). Return of the deficit. *Journal of Educational Controversy*. Volume 2, Number 1
- Education Week. (2011). Achievement gap. *Education Week*. Retrieved from www.edweek.org/ew/issues/achievement-gap
- Eisner, E. (1997, Aug – Sept.). The promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation. *Educational Researcher* , Vol. 26, No. 6, pp. 4-10. Retrieved from JSTOR at <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/stable/1176961>
- Egan, K. (1992, Summer). The roles of schools: The place of education, *Teachers College Record* Volume 93, Number 4
- Ellison, R. W. (1952) *Invisible man*. New York: Random House.
- 4President Corporation (2000). George W. Bush 2000 on the issues of technology and the new economy. *4 President.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.4president.org/issues/bush2000/bush2000technology.htm> on 07/11/2008
- Ferguson, R. (2001). A diagnostic analysis of black-white gap disparities in Shaker Heights, Ohio. *The College Board*. Permission to publish from Brookings Papers on Education Policy 2001, Washington, D.C. Brookings Institute

- Fernandez, L. (2002). Stories about school: Using critical race and Latino critical theories to document Latina/Latino education and resistance. *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 45. Retrieved from <http://qix.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/8/1/45>
- Fordam, S. and Ogbu, J. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of 'acting white'". *Urban Review*, Vol. 18, pp. 176-206
- Foster, K. (2005, Sept. – Oct.). Narratives of the social scientist: Understanding the work of John Ogbu. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 18, No. 5, pp. 565-580
- Freire, P. (1992). *Pedagogy of Hope*. Continuum. London.
- Freire, Paulo. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum. London.
- fullamj2 (2011, Jan. 22). Aspire! PART 1 urban high school students research the achievement gap. *YouTube.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JXRQLkF2w>
- Gallegher, C. (2003). Color-blind privilege: The social and political functions of erasing the color line in post race America. *Race, Gender & Class*. Volume 10, Number 4, 2003
- Gayles, J. (2005). Playing the game and paying the price: Academic resilience among three high achieving African American males. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 250-264
- Greene. M. (1978). Wide-awakeness and the moral life [electronic]. *Landscapes of Learning*. Retrieved on 04/21/2011 from <http://home.comcast.net/~stauer/greene.html>

- Harris, J. (1996, Spring). Blacked out: Dilemmas of race, identity, and success at Capital High – review. *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 65, No. 2, pp. 243-246
- He, M. F. & Phillion, J. (2008). *Personal, Passionate, Participatory Inquiry into Social Justice in Education*. Charlotte, N.C. Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Hemmings, A. (1996, March). Conflicting images? Being black and a model high school student. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 27, pp. 20-50
- Herbers, J. (1966, July 1). Negro education is found inferior. *The New York Times*
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress*. New York. Routledge.
- Huffington Post. 2012. Detroit high school protest: Students suspended after demanding 'an education'. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/30/detroit-high-school-protest_n_1392436.html
- Improving America's Schools Act. (1994). P.L. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27, 20
- JSTOR. (2008). Stress affects success. *The Science News-Letter*, Vol. 86, No. 2, July, 11, 1964, pp. 23. Retrieved from JSTOR on 08/07/2008
- Keller, B. (2006). Payne's pursuit. *Education Week*, 5/3/2006, Vol. 25 Issue 34, pp. 30-32.
- Kinchloe, Joe L. (2004). *Critical pedagogy – a primer*. New York. Peter Lang
- Kinchloe, J. (2006, Winter). The southern place and racial politics: Southernization, romanticization and the recovery of white supremacy. *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 27-46.
- King, J. (1991, Spring). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 133-146

- King, Jr., M.L.K (1947). *The purpose of education*. (Electronic). The Estate of Martin Luther King, Jr. Retrieved from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/papers/vol1/470200->
- Kirkland, D. E. (2010, August 17). "Black skin, white masks": Normalizing whiteness and the trouble with the achievement gap. *Teachers College Record*, ID Number: 16116. Retrieved from <http://www.tcrecord.org> on 5/28/2011
- Krysan, M., & Lewis, A. (2004) *The changing terrain of race and ethnicity*. pp. 43 – 66. New York. Russell Sage Foundation
- Kurtz, C. (2010). Why narrative inquiry? *Story Colored Glasses – Organizational and Community Narrative Social Network*. Retrieved at www.storycoloredglasses.com/2010/03/why-narrative-inquiry.html on 8/30/2011
- Kozol, Jonathan. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York. Crown Publishing
- Ladson-Billings G., & Tate, W.F. (1995). Towards a critical race theory in education. *Teachers College Record*, Vol 97, No 1, pp 47-64.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998) Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 7-24.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Gillborn D. (2004) *The Routledge-Falmer Reader in Multicultural Education*. London. Routledge Falmer
- Larsen, N. (1929). *Passing* [electronic]. Digital General Collection. New York. Alfred A. Knopf. Retrieved from <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer->

[idx?c=genpub&cc=genpub&idno=aat2524.0001.001&q1=I+d+know+what+race+is&frm=frameset&view=image&seq=112&size=100](http://www.genpub.com/genpub/idno=aat2524.0001.001&q1=I+d+know+what+race+is&frm=frameset&view=image&seq=112&size=100)

Lecture Management (2011, April 3). Dr. Ruby K. Payne: Bridges out of poverty.

Retrieved from <http://www.lecturemanagement.com/speakers/ruby-payne.htm>.

Lehn, J. (2009). *Identities in the making: a multistoried mosaic exploring four black students' experiences of attending a predominantly white high school*.

Dissertation - The University of Nebraska, Lincoln ([electronic](#)).

Lee, F. (2002). *Why are black students lagging?* The New York Times, November 30, 2002. Accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/30/arts/why-are-black-students-lagging.html>, accessed on 03/05/2007

Lee, Stacey J. (2005). *Up against whiteness: Race, school and immigrant youth*. New York. Teachers College Press

Lewis, D. L. (1995). *W.E.B. Du Bois, a reader*. New York. Henry Holt and Company, LLC

Lewis, J & Kim, E. (2008, November 6). A desire to learn: African American children's positive attitudes toward learning within school cultures of low expectations. *Teachers College Record, Volume 110*, pp. 1304-1329. Retrieved from <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 14749

Marks, G. (2011). If I were a poor black kid. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/quickerbetteertech/2011/12/12/if-i-was-a-poor-black-kid/>

- Martin, D. B. (2009). Researching race in mathematics education. *Teachers College Record, Volume 111*, Number 2, 2009, p. 295-338. Retrieved from <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 15226
- McIntosh, Peggy. (1989, July/August). White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack [electronic]. *Peace and Freedom* July/August. Accessed at <http://www.library.wisc.edu/EDVRC/docs/public/pdfs/LIReadings/InvisibleKnapsack.pdf>
- Moen, T. (2006, December 6). Reflections on the narrative research approach [electronic]. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 5 (4) Article 5. Retrieved from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5_4/pdf/moen.pdf
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A Nation at Risk. The Imperative for Education Reform* (Electronic). U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>
- New York Daily News. (2010, November 12). Rev. Al Sharpton says Obama and Boehner must work together to close racial achievement gap. *NYDailyNews.com*. Retrieved from http://articles.nydailynews.com/2010-11-12/news/27080959_1_young-black-men-black-children-achievement-gap
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. P.L. 107-110 115 Stat. 1425, January 8, 2002
- Noguera, P. (2009). The change we need. *Power Play, Volume 1*, Number 1
- O'Connor, C., Lewis, A. & Mueller, J. (2007) Researching “Black” educational experiences and outcomes: Theoretical and methodological considerations. *Educational Researcher, Vol 36*, No. 9, pp. 541-552

- Ogbu, J., & Gibson, M. (1991). *Minority Status and Schooling; A Comparative Study of Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities*. New York. Garland Publishing
- Ogbu, J. (2003). *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb; A study of Academic Disengagement*. New Jersey. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Ogbu, J. (2004. March). Collective identity and the burden of acting white in black history, community, and education. *The Urban Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1
- Oliver, M. (2008). *Red Bird*, in the poem Sometimes, p.35. Boston, MA. Beacon Press
- Paringer, W. A. (1990). *John Dewey and the paradox of liberal reform*. Albany. State University of New York Press
- Parker, L., Deyhle, D. & Villenas, S. (1999). *Race is...race isn't*. Boulder, Colorado. Westview Press
- Payne, R. (1996). *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Highlands, TX. aha! Process, Inc.
- Peterson, P. (2008, May 9). America's education industrial complex. *New York Sun*. Retrieved from <http://www.nysun.com/opinion/americas-education-industrial-complex/76189/>
- ProQuest. (2011). Va. teachers aim at rights gains. *New Pittsburg Courier (1959-1965) National Edition. Pittsburg, Pa., Nov. 16. 1963*, Vol. 4, Issue 31
- Provenzo, Jr., E. F. (2002). *Du Bois on Education*, Walnut Creek. Rowman & Littlefield. p. 14
- Raj, R. (2012) Madison High School Students Walk Out in Protest. *myFOXdetroit.com* Retrieved from <http://www.myfoxdetroit.com/dpp/news/local/madison-high-school-students-walk-out-in-protest-20120423>

- Regents of the University of California v. Allan Bakke. (1978). 438 U.S. 265 (more)
98 S. Ct. 2733; 57 L. Ed. 2d 750; 1978 U.S. LEXIS 5; 17 Fair Empl. Prac. Cas.
(BNA) 1000; 17 Empl. Prac. Dec. (CCH) P8402
- Rockefeller, S. C. (1991). *John Dewey: Religion, Faith and Democratic Humanism*. New
York. Columbia University Press
- Rodgers, W. (2010, January 5). A year into Obama's presidency, is America postracial?
The Christian Science Monitor. Retrieved from
<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Walter-Rodgers/2010/0105/A-year-into-Obama-s-presidency-is-America-postracial>
- Rutten, T. (2010, February 6). The good generation gap: The way that young people deal
with race is a hopeful sign for our politics. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from
<http://articles.latimes.com/2008/feb/06/opinion/oe-rutten6>
- Santayana, G. (1905/1980). Reason in common sense. *The Life of Reason*, Vol. 1, p. 284.
New York. Dover Publications, Inc. Retrieved from
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15000/15000-h/vol1.html#CHAPTER_XII_FLUX_AND_CONSTANCY_IN_HUMAN_NATURE
- Sato, M. & Lensmire, T. (2009) Poverty and Payne: Supporting teachers to work with
children of poverty. *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 90, No. 05, January 2008, pp. 365-
370
- S.B. 1070. (2010). <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf>
- Science News-Letter. (1964, July 11). Stress Affects Success. *The Science News Letter*,
Vol. 86, No. 2. Retrieved from JSTOR on 08/07/2008

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1986). *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*. Connecticut. Bergin & Garvey

Slajda, R. (2010, November 30). Steve King: Black Farmers' Settlement Is 'Slavery Reparations'. *TPMMuckraker*. Retrieved from http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/11/steve_king_black_farmers_settlement_is_slavery_rep.php?ref=fpb

Smedley, A. (2007, March). The history of the idea of race. Presented at a conference in Warrenton, VI sponsored by the American Anthropological Association, Retrieved from www.understandingrace.org/resources/pdf/disease/smedley.pdf

Smedley, A. (1998, September). Race and the construction of human identity. *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 100, No. 3, pp. 690-702. Retrieved from JSTOR database <http://www.jstor.org/stable/682047>

Smith, T. 2011. A euphemism for marginalization. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/09/21/under-obama-is-america-post-racial/a-euphemism-for-marginalization>, on 03/11/2012, at 10:08 AM

Staples, B. 2011. The too black, too white presidency. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/books/review/the-persistence-of-the-color-line-by-randall-kennedy-book-review.html>, on 03/18/2012 at 2:44 PM

States' Impact on Federal Education Policy Project (SIFEPP). *New York State Education Department*. Retrieved from http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_contents.shtml

- Steele, C. (1999, August). Thin ice: stereotype threat and black college students. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/08/thin-ice-stereotype-threat-and-black-college-students/4663/>
- Stoops, Nicole (2004, June) Education attainment in the United States: 2003. 20 – 550. U.S. Census Bureau. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-550.pdf
- Tate IV, W. (1997) *Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications*. Review of Research in Education Vol. 22, 195-247
- Tatum, B. D. (1997) *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York. Basic Books
- Texas Education Agency. (2012). Academic excellence indicator system district reports. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/index.html>
- The New York Times (2009, July 22). The Gates Case and Racial Profiling. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/07/22/the-gates-case-and-racial-profiling/
- 13WHAM.com. (2012). Essay on race sparks debate. Retrieved from <http://www.13wham.com/mediacenter/local.aspx?videoid=3317720>
- Touré. (2011, Nov. 8). No such place as ‘post-racial’ America. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/08/no-such-place-as-post-racial-america/>

Truba, H. (1988, Sept.). Culturally based explanations of minority students' academic achievement. [electronic] *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 3.

Retrieved from JSTOR database at www.jstor.org/stable/3195834

University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. (n.d.) School website at

<http://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/about-lab/diversity-statement/index.aspx>

U.S. Department of Education. (1979). Department of Education Organization Act.

Public Law 96-88, 93 Stat. 688, October 17, 1979.

U.S. Department of Education. (1978-2004). NAEP 2004 Trends in Academic Progress

Three Decades of Student Performance in Reading and Mathematics. *National Center for Educational Statistics*. Retrieved from

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005464>

U.S. Department of Education. (2001). No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [electronic].

Public Law print of PL 107-110, Report Cards, Title I Part A, Non-Regulatory Guidance – Accountability Data. Retrieved from

www2.ed.gov/legislation/esea02/107-110.pdf

Valencia, R. (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*.

New York. Routledge.

Valencia, R. (2009, June 25). A response to Ruby Payne's claim that the deficit thinking model has no scholarly utility. *Teacher College Record*, ID Number: 15691.

Retrieved from <http://www.tcrecord.org>.

Viadero, Debra. (2006, June 20). Race report's influence felt 40 years later: Legacy of Coleman study was new view of equity. *Education Week*. June 20, 2006.

Retrieved from

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/06/21/41coleman.h25.html>

Walton, G. & Cohen, G. (2007) A question of belonging: race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 92, No. 1, pp. 82-96

Walton, G. & Carr, P. (in press). Do I belong? How negative intellectual stereotypes undermine people's sense of social belonging in school and how to fix it.

Retrieved from

www.stanford.edu/~gwalton/home/.../Walton%20%26%20Carr.pdf

Washington, James M. (1986). *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York. HaperCollins Publishers

Watkins, B. (2010) Report: Henry Louis Gates case was not about racial profiling.

Huffington Post Black Voices. Retrieved from <http://socialnetworks.blackvoices.com/2010/06/18/henry-louis-gates-racial-profiling/>.

Weinberg, Z. 2011. Raceless like me. *The Crimson.com*. Retrieved from

www.thecrimson.com/article/2011/10/13/scrutiny-raceless-students/

Westmoreland, M. W. (2010). [Review of the book *Black bodies, white gazes: The continuing significance of race*]. *In-Spire Journal of Law, Politics and Societies*. Vol. 4, No. 2, 2010.

White, C., McCormack, S., & Marsh, S. (2011). Our journeys: Paths toward social education. *Journal of Social Studies Education*, 2011: 2(1), 1-20

- Wiggam, G. (2007). Review of educational research. *American Educational Research Association*. Vol. 77, No. 3, pp. 310 – 333. Los Angeles. Sage Publications
- Wilkins, R. (1966). *Steady as She Goes*. Keynote address to the 57th NAACP 57th Annual Convention. Los Angeles, CA. July 5, 1966. NAACP papers Part 4 Box A3
- Williams, T. (2006). *Middle class African American mothers' perceptions of white teachers' interaction with their African American children in predominantly white suburban junior high schools*. Dissertation. Texas A & M University Libraries. College Station, TX. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/ETD-TAMU-1093>
- Witt, H. 2007. School discipline tougher on African Americans. *Chicago Tribune.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/newspaper/eedition/chic070924discipline,0,2901282,print.story>
- Woodson, C.G. (1919). *The education of the Negro prior to 1861: A history of the education of the colored people of the United States from the beginning of slavery to the Civil War*. EBook # 11089. Released Date of February 2004. The Project Gutenberg EBook.
- Woodson, C.G. (1933/2008). *The mis-education of the negro*. New York. Classic House Books
- Wright, R. (1945). *Black Boy*. New York. Harper
- Zogby, J. 2009. Barack Obama: America's first global president. *Campaigns & Elections.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.campaignsandelections.com/magazine/us-edition/255163/barack-obama-americas-first-global-president.shtml>

Zou, Y. & Trueba, E. T. (1998). *Ethnic identity and power: Cultural contexts of political action in school and society* [e-book]. Retrieved from OneSearch UH Libraries

<http://uh.summon.serialssolutions.com/search?s.q=ethnic+identity+and+power>

Appendix A

Transcript Session 1

Appendix A

Transcript Session 1 (Video Conference)

Note - Vee had problems with her audio output so her contributions to the conversation came through written chats

R: As I told you the purpose of this study is to get your feedback on your school experiences but also those experiences that you feel are connected to race. So the first thing, probably, that I want to know from you, and, if you had gotten the chance to see the videos that would have set the stage for this, but the first thing I want to know from you is how does race play out in your school? In my high school, I went to a high school that was predominantly white, a very small black population, and the black students came from all over the city. At lunchtime or in classes those students always tended to gravitate towards each other and um, um, kind of socialize with each other. So if each of you could tell me a little bit about how that looks at your school. Jay, if you can go first because I see you first.

Jay: There definitely is a large group of like black students that all hang out together, not all black students at my school, but like there is a humongous group that just they all know each other and are all friends and, you know.

R: So do they all, do they also at different times socialize with others students or do they pretty much just hang out as a core group and then other black students kind of move in and out of socializing with them?

Jay: Yeah. They definitely, I don't know, they get around I guess.

R: So they have friends in other groups.

Jay: Yes.

R: Okay. What about you Em?

Em: I mean there's, I wouldn't say there is a big population of blacks at (my school), it isn't small either, but, there's more of the other races, there are more Indians and whites and stuff like that, and Asians and stuff like that, and like basically most of the blacks hang out together or there may be like that one or two that...

R: Okay, go ahead Em.

Em: What was I saying?

R: You were giving me some idea of the population and saying that there's only a small population of black students and you were about to tell me how they socialize.

Em: Basically they have their own little cliques and they, we, all mostly all like to hang out together but there are some people that hang out with the other races.

R: So they move in and out?

Em: Yeah.

R: What about you, Tee? Same thing? What is your observation?

Tee: I feel like what **Em** said, we all just hang out with each other pretty much and hanging out with a group of white people is not that common, so **Em** said it all.

R: Jay, tell me how you socialize.

Jay: I have friends in a bunch of different groups, I don't know.

R: Is that true for you, Tee and Em too?

Em: I hang out with a lot of the races, because of the classes I'm in I hang out with the Indians and the Asians and because of basketball I hang out with a lot of the whites and the blacks as well.

R: Because of your classes you end up hanging out with a lot of people from different races?

Em: Yes.

R: Is that true both in school and out of school.

Em: Out of school I met people from all races so yes, true for both.

R: What about you, Tee?

Tee: I hang out with both black people and white people. I think equally. There are a couple of white people in my neighborhood that I hang out with a lot, so I would say I hang out with black people and white people equally.

R: What about in your classes, Tee?

Tee: I really have no choice to hang around black people because at (school) there is a majority of white people in all my classes, even in basketball. I don't have a problem with that. I'm just saying there's a majority of white people in my classes.

R: Let's talk about classes. What about the racial makeup of the classes? Jay, are you in mostly advanced classes or pre-AP classes, or is it a mixture?

Jay: It's a mixture.

R: In terms of your classes compare your advanced classes to your regular classes for me.

Jay: In my advanced classes there are no black students besides me at all, no partial black. It's either, usually white, Indian or Asian.

R: Then, in your academic classes?

Jay: There are a few black students but it's still primarily Caucasians.

R: So where are all the black students? In the remedial classes?

Jay: I have no idea. I don't have any classes with a large amount of black students.

R: None?

Jay: I have a few but not as a majority of the class, or even a quarter, it's more like two students.

R: What class do you have that there are more black students? That you would consider a lot.

Jay: I guess, my academic chemistry class?

R: And how many would that be?

Jay: Two.

R: Two is considered a lot?

Jay: I really don't have any classes with black students.

R: You think it's because of the classes you're taking?

Jay: Yes.

R: So you don't know what classes they're taking.

Jay: Nope.

R: Tee, you said you have quite a few black students in your classes?

Tee: No. Not really because my classes are mostly white and there are very few black people. I think the most black people in one of my classes is basketball, and that's not really that many.

R: What about teachers?

Tee: Sometimes I feel like teachers treat black students different. I feel that some teachers treat us differently than they do everyone else.

R: Can you give me an example?

Tee: I asked if I could go the restroom and my teacher told me no, and then a white student went up and asked the same question and she let them go, and I just sat there and thought to myself, why did you tell me no and tell the other kid yes, but then after a while I just let it go.

R: You didn't ask?

Tee: I did ask, but I didn't really like care too much that she let them go, you know, I wasn't going to throw a fit or anything, I was just going to sit there and be calm about it.

R: You didn't go up and ask why they got to go and I didn't get to go?

Tee: No. I didn't?

R: What do you think would have happened if you asked?

Tee: I don't know. I would have gotten so upset and I didn't feel like arguing with her at the time so I just let it go.

R: Is that somebody you've had other issues with in the class, other than that?

Tee: Oh, no. No.

R: What about being called on, or being able to give answers or just approaching the teacher?

Tee: I try to make sure I don't have that impression on them or something like that.

R: You think some of the teachers already have preconceived notion about black students?

Tee: Yes.

R: You kind of feel responsible for changing their perception about black students, and making sure they have a good perception about black students.

Tee: Yes.

R: Who else feels pressure to give teachers and administration a different idea of how black students are? Does anybody else feel responsible for doing that, you want to make sure you are extra respectful, or...?

Em: I kind of more...it's not because I'm black it's because of how I was raised. By background, the way I was brought up, I was always taught to be respectful to adults, and the higher ups and my elders. I don't feel any pressure towards it. They can think what they want to think. I don't see blacks but they might see us as a bad crowd but that's if they looking at a specific group. But if they looked at the populations as a whole they would see a completely different picture.

Tee: Same here.

R: Say that again, Em.

Em: I think if they looked at the population as a whole rather than just the bad part, or just the one group that stands out which is usually the bad ones. Like the ones who are good are usually the ones in the background that nobody else notices, but the ones who stand out are usually the people who give off a bad image so if they looked at the general picture rather than just that one specific group they'd see that the whole population as a whole is better than they believe it to be.

Tee: I also agree with Em. My parents raised me to be respectful also and to never disrespect my elders.

R: To all of you. Have you ever had an instance where you felt that a teacher or an administrator was disrespectful either to you or to another student and it had to do with their race?

Tee: Sometimes, I feel like that way but other times I think I'm just like overthinking it or something like that.

R: Or it could be another reason?

Tee: Yeah.

R: What about you Jay, because you're unique in that you get to see both sides of this. Have you ever experienced someone being surprised maybe that you're bi-racial or maybe said something not knowing that you are or something like that?

Jay: Definitely.

Jay: In general people will say obnoxious, like someone will be obnoxious and make a racist joke or something, but I don't take it too personally because usually they're kidding but it's kind of like they don't think about it before they say it, I guess. I don't know.

R: They don't think about it. Well, they think they are safe in saying it because they think no one in the group is going to be offended or it won't go out of the group.

Jay: Yes.

R: What's the worst racial incident you have seen at school?

Tee: I can not recall.

R: Anything? Nothing that made you feel bad or embarrassed or anything like that?

Tee: Oh, no.

R: You, Em?

Em: No.

R: Nothing?

Em: No. I can't think of anything other than like the usual black jokes and stuff like that but those don't really, I know they're just joking when they say that so it's not usually anything serious.

R: Who would this be? Students, or..?

Em: Students.

R: All of you seem to, well, you have instances to bring up but you seem to be saying that race is not much of an issue at your school?

Tee: I guess it depends on the teacher or the principal or you know someone who works there, but most of the time I don't think my school has anything to do with racial problems.

Em: And, it also depends on who you hang out with because if you hang out with people who have no problems with that kind of stuff you're not going to see it at all, and if I have a problem with somebody I tend to associate with them so I wouldn't have any of those instances.

R: As far as your grades and how you are assessed at school, do you feel that you are evaluated the same way as other students at the school?

Tee: Can you repeat that?

R: Do you think you're graded fairly, the same way as other students? We've talked about behavior things but in terms of your class work do you feel like it's graded the same way as other students? Do you feel like you have to work harder? Do you feel like you ever have to make sure you check everything to make sure you are given the same amount of points as other students, that kind of thing?

Tee: I would say that we do have to work harder, not just in school but out in the real world, because I just think we have to work harder than other races out here because we are black and because of our history and all that.

R: You think you're starting from a point of a disadvantage or you think it's because of how people look at your work?

Tee: I think its how people look at our work.

R: What about you, Jay?

Jay: I feel like there's a certain stereotype that some people carry about black people. And so they kind of expect everyone to fall within the same category in their work and school and everything. Depending on the person I feel like they feel all black people will be the same and so you have to work harder to some extent to prove that you are not at the same level as the stereotype they hold you too.

R: What do you think about what Jay said, Em and Tee? That there's a stereotype of what a majority of people from other races think about black people. And you have to work to dispel those stereotypes?

Em: I have been blessed to kind of like be more successful than most others in academics so when they look at me they don't really see that kind of stereotype. They kind of see me as the odd man out from the stereotype because they don't believe I apply to that so I've never had to go through that but I can imagine that they do have that stereotype for others that are not as academically, that are more academically challenged I guess.

R: Isn't that kind of a stereotype right there? You're an exception to the rule?

Em: Yeah, I would guess. But I mean it's a good one. I would rather have that than everybody thinking that I'm the opposite of what I am.

R: But even in your success there is a stereotype that you're exceptional.

Em: Yeah.

R: And more than just you're exceptional as an individual but you're an exception as a black student.

Em: Yes.

R: What about on your sports or your extra-curricular activity?

Tee: Well, to be honest, I think my years at (school) playing basketball have been kind of a big deal. Or, not a big deal but, I feel that the coaches don't like how some of us play or act on the team. I remember last year, my first year on JV I realized the coaches had

favorites and the favorites were white and they didn't let me or Em show them what we could do for the team and on the team but only in practice is when we got asked to do something and I feel like that was kind of messed up because they know we have more potential than we show face to face and that they should let us show that on the court.

R: If you had to guess why that was, why do you think it was?

Tee: I would think it was because they liked the white kids more than they did the black kids on the team.

R: They knew them better, or?

Tee: Well, my second reason is because the player's parents went to go talk to the coaches and all that and that's why they're always on the floor more than the rest of us because I think the coaches at (school) prefer money over hard work.

R: So they end up being impressed with the parents or families that they think have a lot of money?

Tee: Something like that, yeah.

R: Or, do the parents actually somehow contribute financially which places their children in a better light?

Tee: I think they contribute more to the coaches so they can get their son on a higher team but I also think that from a coach's perspective they should look at how hard people work on the team to get more playing time and stuff like that rather than just looking at the money and stuff like that.

R: So not always based on merit or a work ethic?

Tee: Yes.

R: How hard you work.

Tee: Yes.

R: What about you, Jay, because you're on the dance squad? Do you see any preference there for certain dancers or are certain dance members pushed to the side?

Jay: My dance teacher definitely has favorite but I don't really think it's based on race. I think it's based on personality more than anything. However, the two, well there were three, the three black girls on our team she really didn't really like any of them very much but I think it's personality.

R: How do you think their personalities clashed?

Jay: One of the girls, just she didn't like, she wasn't respectful and she just didn't care. And one of the girls always has, she's always very sassy and smart-alecky and it really drives my teacher insane and then another one is very quiet.

R: None of those were her preferred personalities?

Jay: No. She only likes suck ups.

Vee (Chat): I think there might be a little favoritism and racism because of money. At my school everyone makes it.

R: What about at lunchtime? Describe for me how the students are situated at lunchtime.

Tee: It's not really based on race or anything like that.

Em: It's pretty mixed.

Tee: Yeah, it's mixed and people are with their own group of friends just eating with each other.

R: There's no real black table?

Tee: No.

R: Really?

R: At (school) it's not?

Tee: No.

R: When I went to school we definitely had a black table at lunch and actually we played cards through out lunch. And at different times people wondered and they asked questions about why are all of the black students are sitting together, why do they always have to sit together, but that was definitely going on back then. But not at (school)?

Em: No. It's more like I sit with the people from basketball and Tee sits with people he knows in the hall. Basically, there's no particular separation based off of that. It's just like the people you feel like hanging with really. I hang with a variety of races so at my lunch table there's one Asian, a couple of white people. I'm the only black person at the table.

R: No black people, except you.

Em: No.

R: What about you, Tee?

Tee: I don't really sit with a group of black people at lunch. If it happens it happens. It doesn't really mean anything but I usually sit with a bunch of people I know a long time ago from junior high or people I know from the hallway.

R: And, Jay?

Jay: It's pretty mixed. There are some sports teams that sit together because every team is in my lunch so they all sit together in different places in the cafeteria and there's like church people and there's just a bunch of different groups but it really doesn't have anything to do with race.

R: Church people?

Jay: Oh, there's some crazy church people.

R: You mean people that go to the same church.

Jay: They all go to the same church and they spend four out of seven days together after school and yeah.

R: Kind of a little cult?

Jay: Yeah.

Vee (chat): During lunch all of the black people sit in one area. We have 5 or 6 tables to sit at. Everyone else sits towards the front of the cafeteria.

R: Definitely different out there. That's more of what I'm used to, too. I am surprised that at (school) and (school) that is not the case. Although if you're describing sitting by your sports I know that the jocks tend to sit together, that makes sense.

R: I am going to ask you one last question. How difficult is it to talk about race as a part of school? Is it difficult, is it liberating, is it interesting, is it not so interesting?

Tee: It's not really that hard to talk about it sometimes. It's just not that hard to talk about.

R: What do you think, Em?

Em: I don't find it that difficult. I don't see any problem with talking about it, but I mean. I don't know. It's not that difficult for me. I guess it comes up all the time during school all the time, everyone talks about races, but it's not that serious of a topic, really.

R: You say it comes up all the time at school and we're going to talk about that at our next session so I want you to think about instances where it's come up, because you said it, okay? So that will be for our next session.

Em: Okay.

R: Jay, what do you think? Is it uncomfortable, not uncomfortable?

Jay: It's kind of interesting because I kind of just think of people as people and not really by race, so talking about it is kind of different, I guess.

The following is the text chat from Tee:

Tee: im getting another computer.

Tee: i think there might be a little bit of favoritism in races because of money. well at my school must of the people make it cause of money. i can hear you... lol

R: what about volleyball?

Tee: i don play any sports for the school

R: okay

Tee: during the lunch that i have, all of the black people sit in one area. we have like 5 or 6 tables we sit at. everyone else sits towards the front of the cafeteria.

R: how hard is it to talk about race? Easy? Interesting?

Tee: At my school its easy. We tell the teachers and people about how they favor the white people but they pay no attention to it so its pointless.

Appendix B

Transcript Session 2

Appendix B

Transcript Session 2 (In-person)

Note: Tee was missing from this session. The session started with participants looking at the researcher's yearbooks.

R: We ended up talking about you as black students socializing. Have you made any other observations since we had our first conversation, I mean, school wise? Did it heighten your observations about how black students interact, how you interact?

Vee: I didn't pay attention to it.

Jay: No (head shake).

R: How about you, Em?

Em: No.

R: So nothing we talked about changed how you look at your groupings or your...?

Jay: A little bit. I looked around the lunchroom and kind of noticed who sat where.

R: And pretty much what you had told me before, the groupings?

Jay: Yes (head nod)

R: What about your school, Vee? Tell me how people group up? Tell me how people hang out?

Vee: I don't know. All the black folks do hang out with each other. We all sit at lunch with each other like on one side of the cafeteria. In the hallway we're always together.

R: And it doesn't matter gradewise. Do freshman hang out with juniors?

Vee: It's all one clique.

R: What about the black students that aren't in the center group, that aren't in the group that hang out together? What about them?

Vee: If they're not in the center group, then, I don't know? Just don't speak to them, I don't know.

R: I don't know. That's what I'm asking.

Vee: I don't get what you're saying. If they're not in our group then what do we do to them? We don't do anything to them.

R: Every black student is in the group?

Vee: No. We just won't speak to them. We probably don't know of them.

R: Really

Vee: Yeah.

R: So it wouldn't necessarily be somebody who socializes with another group most of the time but you guys still talk to and... they're just in another group altogether?

Vee: I guess. I don't know. I never really thought about it. If we don't speak to them then we don't speak to them. It's not like we're ganging up on them or anything...just that we don't speak to them. We don't know of them.

R: What do you think about that, Em?

Em: Ah...I mean that's kind of the case where we go. If somebody is not in your clique you usually don't associate with them. It's not because you choose not to, it's just because you're so involved with the people around you, that you don't really notice the people who aren't with you.

R: So it's not a case of, if you're not in our group we're not going to speak to you. It's just because of how you go throughout the day? So there could be black people at the school that you just never meet in four years of going to school with them?

Vee: Possibly

Em: It depends on if you're talking about in our grade or throughout the whole school. Because there are freshman who I've never seen before and then I see them and...they come up and talk to me and I don't even know who they are.

R: Jay, Are there black students at (school) you just will never know?

Jay: Probably. There are a lot of kids. If I don't share similar interests with them then I'd probably wouldn't ever meet them or feel the need to talk to just them randomly.

R: Lots of people would say that race is insignificant to your generation. That you really don't think about it in the same way my generation, or past generations do. What would you say to that?

Em: It's not as evident but I still think it's around. Back in your generation, it was more like, nobody had any shame about it. They went around just in that manner with no problem about it because it was socially acceptable then but now it's not really acceptable and you'll be judged if you do something like that so people still do it but it not as blatant. They kind of do it behind closed doors.

R: You mean exercise their prejudice?

Em: Yeah

R: So there's a lot more pressure to be inclusive or at least to not show you have bad feelings about certain groups?

Em: Yeah

R: You think the other students feel that way? You think the white students and the Asian students feel that way?

Em: Not all of them. But I'm sure there are some that feel that way. I'm just assuming but I've never come into personal contact with that incident.

R: No prejudice? By any other student?

Em: Of course if someone treats me like that I'm not going to spend my time hanging around them.

R: Tee?

Vee: What was the question? If there's prejudice and stuff at my school?

R: We were talking about many people would say that for your generation race is insignificant. That in terms of how you guys get along or socialize race is not a very important criteria to it.

Vee: It's true. I don't know. I guess it's true. Like everybody at my school we all hang out in one clique but we'll talk to other people that aren't black but it is insignificant. It shouldn't matter. I don't think it should.

R: You think people have more of an attitude that race doesn't matter?

Vee: Yeah

Em: Yeah, but also it depends on how they're brought up. Because, parents will say anything. They'll act a completely different way when people are over and then as soon as they leave they'll say completely different stuff. Or they might say something about people on TV. Or you might hear white people talking about Obama behind closed doors and then their kids go out and say the same thing but I think it's the environment. If their parents act that way it's going to eventually rub off them.

R: But in the school environment race is downplayed among students?

Em: Yeah.

R: What do you thing, Jay?

Jay: Definitely it's completely lost a lot of significance. It isn't really socially unacceptable to ah...

R: To be a bigot?

Jay: Yeah, but in school I'm sure there are kids whose parent are, they're not necessarily racist, but they're prejudice and it rubs off on them but I don't really think they show it openly because it's very possible to get a lot of negative responses to having these feelings in our generation.

Note: Here the researcher reminded participants about the demographic makeup of her school and how students socialized. She emphasized how well white and black students got along.

R: I would say there was a real sense that everyone was the same, equal, whatever, until senior year. My senior year when we started applying to schools was the first time that people began to express their feelings about black students. And one of the problems was black students were getting into Ivy League schools that some of the other students felt that they should have gotten into and didn't. And it turned into this big controversy in the school newspaper and on bulletin boards at the school, and it just blew up into this major thing. So, until the stakes were higher, everybody got along fine, but once, in everyone's opinion the stakes got high, then people started expressing their views about who they thought deserved to be in certain schools and who they thought didn't. My own counselor told my best friend, G, told both of us, when you go in for your college counseling session, she ask where we were thinking about applying to schools and she told both G and I that we should look at state universities. This was in Illinois, in Chicago so that was University of Illinois or Northern or schools like that. She told us we were wasting our time applying to the schools we applied to, essentially. And, both of us got into the schools we picked and applied to but even the college counselor, knowing our grades and knowing our involvement in activities we were involved in at school was still telling, and it wasn't just us, many of the black students checked with each other later on and she pretty much had the same conversation with all of us, and those were students that ended up at Harvard and Yale and Princeton and wherever else. So that was the first time an incident got public attention regarding students' feelings about race. So I'm wondering if there has been any incidents at your school, either, I don't know, somebody saying something and it got back to everybody or whatever?

All three: No.

R: None?

All three: Nothing.

R: So what happens when somebody steps out of bounds and says something? It doesn't get around to everybody at school?

Jay: (Unintelligible)... I can imagine that people would step in and say it was wrong and disagree with them and switch subject or walk away. Discontinue the conversation.

R: So people they were talking to?

Jay: Yeah. I don't really think it would be something you would go and tell someone else, like it wouldn't really be the daily gossip or anything.

R: It would just be contained in the group that it happened in?

Jay: Yeah.

R: Even among teachers? If something happens in the classroom with someone

Jay: If the teachers heard I pretty sure that kid would get special principal time. I can definitely see you getting into serious trouble cause that would be up there with sexual harassment and all that stuff, I guess it would be in the same category, inappropriate behavior.

R: But you don't know of any instances?

Jay: No

R: Wow. Vee?

Vee:: Uh, uh.

R: Seriously?

Vee: Yeah.

R: So you think the school has done a good job of letting students know that's inappropriate and you're going to get in trouble for something like that.

Vee: I guess. I don't know. We don't really think about it. If we're being mistreated or something, racialwise, we'll like, joke around about it but we don't really care. We don't really do anything about it.

R: But you do talk about it among each other? You might bring it up?

Vee: Yeah, probably.

R: Em, nothing? No instances?

Em: It might have happened but I haven't heard about it.

R: So what I'm hearing from you guys is, it makes no difference if you're black at your school.

Jay: Not as much as it does in the public, I guess. In school race doesn't really, cause everyone...I guess when you go to (district) ISD schools, or any other ISDs, you kind of all learn very similar values from your school...and in (district) ISD you learn in elementary school about Martin Luther King and they definitely play down, they tell you that the way he was treated as a child wasn't right, and they model that throughout school, I guess, and I can't remember what I was talking about...

R: Well I asked does your school send a message that that's not going to be tolerated and...?

Jay: It definitely goes along with bullying. I feel like I've watch race videos that have to do with bullying and that wasn't right but like, it's kind of like that's not okay but neither is bullying like this and bullying like that. So yeah, they do definitely make sure you get the message that it won't be tolerate.

R: So then I asked so does it make any difference whether you are a black student at your school, verses a white student, verses an Indian student, verses an Asian student, verses a boy student, or a girl student, it doesn't make any differences?

Vee: In my school it's mostly white but like we have a good percentage of black people that are coming from other districts so we all, I don't know, we all like stick together so if something would happen we'd all be there for each other, or something. Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't.

R: Do you think if a racial incident came up or an instance when you thought you were being singled out or whatever happened, happened because you were black, you said you would talk about it among your friends but it probably wouldn't go any further than that?

Vee: Probably, yeah.

R: Would that be because you thought the school wouldn't do anything about it or it's not that important? I mean on a day-to-day basis it's really just not that important.

Vee: I wouldn't think they'd do anything. Our school is stuck up, kind of. All the...I think everything at my school is wrapped up around some of the people that have money, it's mostly all the white kids and so they don't really...I sometimes think they favor the other kids instead of us. If we start an argument in the cafeteria like we'll just be sitting in the cafeteria and talking and sometimes we're loud and they'll have cops come and stand next to us and tell us to bring it down. But if the white kids did I don't think they'd do anything. They yell across the cafeteria all the time and we always get in trouble for that but nobody else does.

R: What about that? Tee bought that up. That instances where he thought he received a, well he couldn't go to the bathroom and somebody else could – so a difference in treatment. Do you see that? Do you see behaviors some kids are allowed to get away with and others kids it's considered unacceptable? Even in the classroom.

Vee: Yes

R: Like what? Well you already gave me the example of being loud in the cafeteria. I know that's always been an issue?

Vee: When I'm in class, I pay attention but I get bored easily so I'll start messing with people and doing stuff and sometimes I feel like I get singled out and if the other white kids do it they just look at them and say stop but if I do it they'll start yelling and threatening me and stuff and I think okay...

R: Jay?

Jay: I have one black, male teacher and there's this one black student that he just loves him. I'm not in his class but he talks about him and he's always bragging about him but he also brags about his jocks. I think that they based their behaviors on activities and how they relate to students.

R: So you think this black male teacher lets this kid get away with stuff?

Jay: I think that if he did anything he'd probably could get away with more but if he did something like that would get him in trouble, let's say, he was copying someone's homework he would get harsher punishment but I feel like if he was talking in class he would get away with it easier than someone else talking in class. My teacher would kind of laugh it off and say stop talking but anyone else he would yell at them and say if you keep talking you're going to go to the principal's office, why do you think you can do that, and just go on about it.

R: Is the male teacher a coach?

Jay: Yeah. But I would think it would be all football students but he treats other football students differently than that. He only puts this kid on a pedestal, and the other ones, he likes them more, definitely, but he doesn't treat them the same, I guess. He still favors them but not like he favors this kid.

R: What about this kid with other teachers? Is it the same thing or is it just you observe it primarily with this one teacher?

Jay: Yeah I've just observed it with him but I don't really know any of his other teachers.

R: You think he knows he can get away with stuff with this teacher?

Jay: I don't know. He's a really good kid in general so I don't think he would try it but I think he knows.

R: What do you think, Em?

Em: There is definitely politics in schools but it's not really based on race. It's like she said, you could be a star on the basketball team. You could be tardy every day to class and they will never count you tardy but be some regular student and show up tardy three days of class and all the sudden you've got detention. So I don't really think it's based off of race so much as, like she said here, your extracurricular activities. If you continue getting in trouble it will affect your position on the team and they don't want to affect the perfect school.

R: So if you had to put them in order of priority in terms of being significant - race, and I'll say class but I mean money, and then what you all have talked about in terms of politics, your relationship with those with power either through a sport or through, a lot of times, parents know teachers, or they go to church together or they're friends from the neighborhood so there's a relationship built there, and we'll call all of that politics - those three things, politics, class or money, and race, how would you rate them in terms of importance? In terms of impacting the benefits and the favors students get at school, how would you rank those three things?

Vee: I'd say money is first, and then politics and then race.

Em: I'd say the same thing but I kind of think money and politics go hand-in-hand because also in sports the parents with the most money, the coaches usually favors that

kid because they know their parents will give more to the booster club, so I think the first and second one are the saying the same thing.

R: But do people have political clout if they don't have money?

Em: I think that, yeah.

R: You would say some people have political clout even without money?

Em: Not that I've seen. Most of the kids who have politics have usually have parents with money

R: Or parents that contribute. They don't necessarily have more money than anyone else

Em: They give more.

R: So you would put money and politics together, and then race.

Em: Yes.

R: What about you, Jay?

Jay: I would say politics, race then money.

R: Why would you put money last?

Jay: Just from my experience in dance, she seems to prefer people whose parents give time, help her, bring her stuff. Personal relationships get you further, in my experience.

R: What we call social capital. What is the conversation about President Obama? That is a lightning rod issue that people a lot of times will say, it has nothing to do with race. And I know that in all three schools and neighborhoods there are heavy Republican populations. So what do the students say, about him. You can either go back to when he was elected or what are they saying now?

Jay: The day he was elected I remember there was a text message going around that was like wear black for the death of the country.

R: What?

Jay: Wear black for the death of the country. And I was so mad. Like he hasn't even come into office and you're already saying he's bringing our country down when our last president just put us into so much debt. And I was so mad. It was so obnoxious.

R: Wear black to stand for the death of our country. I kind of remember that because Hannah was a senior. It started almost immediately on Facebook. Something came out from the district warning kids about what they wore to school and all of that. I remember that.

R: And what's the conversation now.

Jay: There are still people at my school trashing him and saying how terrible a president he is. I feel like a lot of it does have to do with race. There are a lot of parents out here that don't feel that having a black president, like he's not as capable. They're still trying to prove he's not even from the United States. I feel like they feel intimidated by that almost, they should be the superior race but they don't classify it as that. There are still a lot of people saying how bad he did and how glad they are that it's election time.

R: Still students at your school?

Jay: Yes.

R: Em?

Em: I remember when he got elected and everyone was like oh he's probably going to do terrible and the discussion about being in the wars and it kind of upset me too because you not even giving him a chance. You've got to at least give him a chance to do something. Bush just destroyed the country practically and now you don't even want to give President Obama a chance. I mean what's the worst he can do? We're already doing pretty bad right now. Everybody now there are just like, they are pretty critical of him cause Bush had eight years, and even after fourth year they were still like oh he can bring us out of this and they let him dig us into a deeper hole rather than remove him from office back then. Now, Obama, after three years in office everybody's already being critical and they're already talking about wanting to get him out of office when he's actually been helping the country. He's been fulfilling his promises whether they like it or not. They might not like the fact that the rich people aren't being benefitted as much and that he's actually helping the poor people with like his health policies and he's actually doing what he said he would do so I don't know why they are being upset about that. He told them before he went to office. I think it comes back to racism because it's actually like what she said as well, that they feel intimidated.

R: Vee?

Vee: I agree. We had that on first day. I had on my Obama shirt on. We all went to school and me and my friends wore Obama shirts and the principals and teachers told us we had to wear jackets because it was a distraction.

R: The day after the election?

Vee: Yes. The first day we went back to school we were told that.

R: I'll have to check with Hannah. That might have been the case with them. They said don't wear any political stuff? I got a letter from the homeowners' association telling me to take my sign out of the yard.

Vee: There was this lady at the end of our street. She had a little McCain sign in her yard and I remember that day because me and my friends were outside. She lived on the corner by the stop sign and we were sitting there and we were all talking and we were sitting on the grass on the curbside part and she started cussing and yelling at us and telling us to go home and we so all went to my house. We were all sitting at my house

just chilling and stuff and it was late at night cause they were all staying, and it was late at night and we were sitting in my room. This girl, I think she said she left her phone cord in the car so we went outside and we had an Obama sign, and the Obama sign was missing and the lady at the end of the street was closing her garage. I was like, wow.

R: I had one sign taken. But I'm not sure it wasn't someone who wanted an Obama sign in their yards because I had considered driving into Houston and taking someone else's Obama sign until we got some out here. So I can't claim why my first one was taken out of the yard.

R: So, there's still a lot of conversation about that and especially now that the Republican primary is going on and whatever. And who are people saying they like, Republicans?

Jay: This year? This election?

R: Yes.

Jay: I haven't heard anything.

R: They don't say we want...?

Vee: They just say Obama's not getting elected again.

Em: I think Perry.

R: Perry?

Em: Yes.

Appendix C

Transcript Session 3

Appendix C

Transcript Session 3 (In-person)

Note: Jay was absent from this session.

R: What do know about the achievement gap?

Tee: Huh?

R: The achievement gap? You know what that is, heard anybody talk about that?

Em: The gap in education?

R: Right. But, the black/white student achievement or the achievement gap between races, heard anything about it?

All three: No.

There was a conversation among participants about TAKS being replaced by STAAR. Students were aware of the changes made to the test, the new requirements and whom it would affect.

R: The achievement gap is a pretty well-known phenomenon in education circles. And essentially it is that in terms of test scores and academic performance, as a group, not individually, black students as a group score below white students. There is an exam that's used by the federal government and its results are called the National Report Card. This exam is given to samples of students across the country and it's a record they have been keeping since the 1970s. It is used to measure the achievement gap. The achievement gap has consistently been there. At one point I think in the 1980s the gap almost shrunk to 0 but since then it has widened and is at one of its widest points. That is one of the reasons why NCLB was supposedly put into place to address issues of the achievement gap. As it stands right now in most categories, and it's measured in reading and mathematics primarily, those two areas, and it's measured from third grade on up through high school. At high school level the gap is currently about 20 points on the scale that they measure which translates to almost into two grade levels...

Vee: Below the white kids?

R: Right. So they are saying that the average black high school sophomore has the same academic achievement of an eighth grade white student. So these are the statistics. Let me ask you if you would be surprised if that were the case at your school.

Vee: No. Because we don't try. Black students don't try. If we put more effort towards it it would be higher but they don't try.

R: So you wouldn't be surprised if that were the case at (school)?

Vee: No.

R: But would you be surprised if it were two grade levels? Would that surprise you?

Vee: Two grade levels? Yeah. I'd probably say maybe one grade level.

R: Would you be surprised if there were a scoring gap at (school), Tee and Em?

Tee: (Long hesitation) I agree with her. Most black folks don't really try at school. And...they just don't try and I probably wouldn't be surprised.

R: You don't think they take things seriously?

Tee: No

R: What about you, Em?

Em: I would say the same. Except for I don't think it would be two grade levels because the white kids don't try as much either.

R: Because what?

Em: White kids don't try as much either.

R: So you think that there is just a distinction between those students that are academically serious and those that aren't. And it's mixed. There are just as many white kids that don't try as.

Em: Yes, because I try. And I'm in the upper class group so...

Tee: I think it's just like...it's how the person is. If they really don't care about their academics than they won't try but if they do they will try to get a better education and I wouldn't just say its black people...

Em: And, then the parents. If your parents push you to do good in school then that attitude goes with you throughout your whole life at school. It becomes like a habit that's hard for you to break.

Students were given copies of the 2011 TEA report on academic progress for their schools. They spent about 10 minutes studying the reports. Despite what they had said about black students not trying hard academically, they all seem to be surprised by the actual numbers, seeing them in print. Em brought up the point that the difference in scores could be the result of only one or two students testing poorly, in a school with a small black population. The other participants agreed.

R: If you wanted to teach someone from another country about what race is in America, what television show would you tell them to watch?

Em: "South Park", "Family Guy", "Everybody Hates Chris"

Tee: "South Park", "Family Guy", "Dave Chappel Show"

Vee: Any show on BET; movies, comedies, drams and "106 & Park"

Tee: Cartoons in general. They draw exaggerated features on everyone.

R: (Referencing the frog in “Princess and the Frog”) Disney is famous for doing that. Exaggerating. And that’s a case of, I think, definite negative stereotyping.

Em: Ignorance.

R: Yeah. It’s one thing to make sure you show differences. Difference is fine. It’s another thing to show those differences as being a negative characteristic and I think Disney is guilty of that.

Em: That’s like in Boonedocks.

R: What about Boonedocks?

Em: It’s so ignorant at times (laughing).

R: But isn’t that his point? To be absurd?

Em and Tee: Yeah.

R: Like the grandfather?

Em: “Grandpa, you use the N-word 46 times a day. And then he said it right then.” (laughing).

R: So now, do you have people at school talking about Boonedocks?

Tee: It’s not even on the air anymore.

My son walked in on the conversation and he suggested that BET would not be a good source to teach about black people because you need to be black to differentiate between what is exaggerated and what black people really go through.

Tee: Well if you’re from another country and you’re not black you can relate to something on BET but it really won’t do much because every culture has their own way of doing stuff but I haven’t really seen anyone else do the stuff black people do.

Em: I kind of think that’s true because with Everybody Hates Chris some of the stuff the mom does is true but like other stuff, because there’s stereotypes going around that black people always drink Kool-Aid or grape soda, or that they always eat watermelon, and stuff like that...

Vee: (laughing, she interrupts Em) We were in class one day, it was this week that just passed, and they sell fruit snacks at my school and this white boy was selling this box of fruit snacks and he was carrying it around the school and he said some black kid beat him up for his fruit snacks and he didn’t even take the grape flavor, he took the other flavors. (All laugh)

R: So this kid said that?

Vee: Yes.

R: And, was he laughing when he said it?

Vee: No. He was serious but I thought it was funny, and I just started laughing.

R: So he was just telling you he got beat up.

Vee: He was just sitting there talking and he was like, some black kid came in the hallway and started beating me up for my fruit snacks and he didn't even take the grape flavor. And I was like, wow.

R: So clearly stereotypes to some extent flow over into school. And you (Em) talked about jokes and would you say the jokes are in the same way that Family Guy or South Park treats them? It's a joke to show differences or is it jokes to demean one group?

Em: It's not demeaning but yeah I think it's more like a Family Guy kind of way. Because it's not like they're trying to hurt you when they say it. It's more for laughs. Because everybody knows that it's not always true, but they kind of think it's funny at the same time.

R: So it's like Vee said. If you all were sitting at a table everybody would understand why that funny but would also understand that everybody who is black doesn't necessarily like grape fruit snacks.

Vee: Some people would take offense to it and some people would laugh.

R: Who do you think would take offense to it?

Vee: There was this other black kid in my class that got mad and he said I'm going to punch you and he just walked off. But I just laughed.

Tee: One thing that the people at (school), really in general, and a white person will be like, they'll say this to a black person - you want some fried chicken? We'll be in a conversation and then we're talking about going to eat somewhere and they'll be like you want some fried chicken. And I don't get that because a white man invented fried chicken and we just like chicken like that, so.

Em: I don't get it either. Everybody likes fried chicken, lots of people like Kool-Aid, lots of people like grape soda just because black people like drink it more. And if they wanted to be racist wouldn't they talk about pork and pig and stuff. That's the stuff that we came up with. We didn't come up with Kool-Aid and fried chicken and stuff.

R: So they are not necessarily informed about their stereotypes but there not right but do you think that's done as a joke or do you think it's also kind of a backward way of trying to make a racist statement that is...

Vee: Both

R: ... open enough that you could step away from it if someone says, hey, why did you say that?

Em: I think it depends on what the situation is when they say it, if it's a joking environment. But if they know you're mad and they say something like that then I think it's more like to get under your skin.

R: So what would your response be to something like that, Tee? If you're in a group talking about going to get something to eat and somebody says, I bet you want to go get fried chicken.

Tee: I really wouldn't react in a bad manner. I would be like, not really. I would really like something else, but I really don't know.

R: Just let it slide off your back.

Tee: Yes. It really wouldn't bother me that much.

R: What about you, Vee?

Vee: I'd probably say something back. I have a smart mouth, so. I'd say something racist probably just to get back at them.

R: Something like?

Vee: I don't know. I have to be in the moment.

R: You have to be creative in the moment?

Vee: Yes.

R: But not the grape soda joke or grape fruit snacks. That one you thought was funny?

Vee: (laughing) I guess.

R: My point is, it's hard, isn't it. On a daily basis...

Vee: I think it's like the way they say it and the tone in their voice.

Em: Yeah.

Tee: Yeah.

Vee: Because you can tell if they actually mean it or if they're actually just...

All three: Playing around.

R: And maybe does it make a difference what the stereotype is, too? If the stereotype is you can dance verses if the stereotype is, don't you want watermelon? Are those two different stereotypes to react to? Do you think about reacting differently?

Em: I wouldn't get mad when you say I can dance. I wouldn't get mad when you say I like watermelon, either. I honestly don't care for watermelon. I don't love it and I don't hate it.

R: No, but you know what they're implying. I'm asking do you think there is a difference in what the context of the stereotype is? That some stereotypes you don't mind but others you might? What do you think Vee?

Vee: It depends on how they say it.

R: Depends on how they say it more than even the subject of it.

Vee: And who says it because if I don't like you I'm going to go off so if it's one of my friends and it's a white girl I'm just going to be like - ha, ha, ha... whatever.

R: Do you think that's true too? If you know the person or like the person then it makes a difference, too?

Tee: Because if some random kid I don't know says it I'm going to be like, who are you?

Em: Yeah. What did you say? You better watch who you're talking to.

All three: (laugh)

R: How often do Asian kids engage in this? Do they ever try to make jokes sometimes?

Tee: No.

Em: I know some that do (laugh).

Tee: Not in my grade. Out of all the Asians I know I probably know of one. And he really does it just as a joke. It's nothing serious.

R: Let's face it. In your age group it's pretty common to be critical of each other about anything. You get on people about their glasses, their hair and weight. That's just typical of the teen age. That's just high school, right? Some people take it to the extreme, the mean extreme but it's just not uncommon to go back and forth on each other in high school. Even among friends, right?

Vee: If we're playing we would do it.

R: That's what I mean.

Em: With the Asian friends I was talking about, they usually will only do it if everybody is joking around about races. They just walk up to me and say, want some fried chicken or something like that. It's like everybody is joking around and they might say something.

R: And do they get it as much as they give? Do people make Asian jokes?

Em: There's an Asian kid on the basketball team and one of my friends said, oh, do you see in wide screen?

All three: (laugh)

Em: And then they make jokes about him not being able to see and drive.

Vee: Asians can't drive. They really can't.

R: Complete the following thought or sentence for me - Asian students at my school are known for, white students at my school are known for, and black students at my school are known for. Their responses were:

Vee: Asian students are known for being smart.

R: What does being smart mean?

Vee: Books, and say, they like a lot of books and passing all their classes.

R: So being academically advanced? Not just successful but advanced?

Vee: Yes. White kids at my school are known for having money.

R: What do you mean, having money? Clothes and cars and stuff., because you don't need money to go to school.

Vee: Like sports. Some of them have parents that have companies and they give the school money for prom and stuff like that. They give the school a lot of money.

R: So they're known for having their parents pour money into the school.

Vee: Yes.

R: But, what about them personally?

Vee: They don't have any money because none of them have jobs.

R: So their political power comes from their parents?

Vee: Yes. Black kids at my school are known for fashion and hair and stuff. Everybody I know comes to school with a new weave every day. We all hang out with each other.

R: So they're known for being social?

Vee: Yeah.

R: What about academically?

Vee: Some of them are smart. Like me -I'm smart. But I'll get to school, but, I'll do my schoolwork, but sometimes I'm loud. They stereotype us as dumb or ignorant but we're actually really not. We're making good grades.

R: Even though you think many of the black kids are smart if someone were coming in and making generalizations that wouldn't be what they would pick out to complete that sentences?

Vee: No.

R: Would you say more of the black kids at your school are smart, than not?

Vee: Yes. If they put the effort forward, they are smart, if they tried. None of them really try. They are the ones that go to class and act up...

R: Clown?

Vee: Yes. If they put the effort forward to actually do their work and actually pay attention to what these people sometimes say that is relevant, they'd be smart.

R: So what do you think prevents them from doing that, or prevents them from thinking that's important?

Vee: Stuff outside of school. Like going to basketball games and track me. And people in class. They influence me to do bad stuff in class.

R: But you're in school. Do you have any idea why they have decided presenting themselves as smart or academic is not what they want to do? Why that is not important to them, even though you think they are smart.

Vee: They are smart. They're all smart. They just need to put the effort forward and do their work.

R: But you don't know why they are choosing not to do that?

Vee: Lazy.

R: Em, can you complete the sentences for me, Asians ...?

Em: Same thing.

R: Known for being smart? Being serious about academics?

Em: (head nod yes) Uh huh. And the white kids are more spoiled. They have the nice cars and nice houses and stuff like that. They're more spoiled.

R: They're known for being more affluent? Cars and homes?

Em: Yeah. And the black kids are more...I don't know because the two most popular black kids at our school are so ignorant, and basically everybody looks at them and they expect all black kids to act the same way?

Tee: (Asks Em if he is talking about two students, by name.)

Tee: No. (He names the two students and both Em and Tee laugh)

R: Are they both guys?

Em: Yes. And they're both ignorant.

R: What do you mean they are the most popular? Not the most popular black kids, they're the most popular kids in the whole school?

Em: You could say it for both, really. They host the pep rallies. They're usually the most social and they know everybody. All those people that meet them, they look at them and I guess they expect the other black people in the school to act that when most of us don't, so they give that false image that all black people act ignorant.

R: When you say they act ignorant what do you mean?

Em: The way they talk. And then, they'll be dancing randomly in the hallways.

Vee: I do that all the time.

Em: The way they act towards other people. I can't really...

R: So they're just very...

Tee: Outgoing.

R: Flamboyant, and, over the top.

Em: Yeah.

R: Do you think in some ways it's encouraged by other students or encouraged by other people? How did they get to be popular?

Em: People think they're funny.

R: So in that sense it reinforces them to do it.

Em: Uh huh

R: So is some of their behavior kind of the stereotypes we were talking about?

Em: Uh huh.

R: Is it more race-specific or is it just stupid across the board?

Em: Stupid. Yeah, it's more stupid.

R: Do teachers like them?

Em: Yes.

R: They're popular with teachers, principals, everybody?

Em: Yes.

R: Okay, Tee?

Tee: I'm going to have to go with Em about the Asians. Asians are more serious about their education. And white people are just spoiled.

R: What we might called privileged?

Tee: For the white people?

R: Privileged in the sense that they have a sense of entitlement. A sense that certain things should just come to them.

Vee: Yes.

R: Yes or no? Or just spoiled in material things?

Tee: Just spoiled in material things. For the black people, they're ignorant. Most of them are ignorant at (school). Like he (Em) says with the two most popular black kids at (school), they're known because they get the crowd hyped and usually white people at our school, they think they're too cool to do some of the stuff they do, so they're like, forget it. And, they think too much of themselves, like, here's where they are (uses his hands to indicate a level) and here's where they think they are (uses his second hand to indicate a level higher than the first hand). For us, we like to get the crowd going, so being ignorant at our school for some events is okay, but in other situations it's not.

R: So these two don't know the difference between the two?

Tee: What do you mean?

R: They don't know when it's okay to be a cheerleader and when it's not? They're like that all the time?

Tee: Pretty much.

R: Do you have any classes with them?

Tee: No.

Em: I remember when we had a senior meeting in the PAC and they were playing music on the speakers and everybody was walking in and sitting down and they're in the back sitting there dancing and being loud and obnoxious.

R: So they try to attention grab?

Tee: And really they don't care who sees or who talks about them. They're just pretty much themselves.

R: But popular still?

Tee: Yeah, popular.

Appendix D

Follow Up (Em)

Appendix D

WWBSS - Follow Up Questions –Em

Who taught you about race?

My parents taught me

What is the biggest challenge of being a black student at your school?

Overcoming the stereotypes of how the typical black person acts.

What is the most important thing I should know about being a black student at your school?

Be yourself and just do your best on everything you do and you will be successful.

Are you ever proud of being a black student at your school? If so, when?

Yes, whenever they mention all the obstacles my ancestors had to overcome so that we could be as blessed as we are now.

Are you ever embarrassed about being a black student at your school? If so, when?

No

What would make it easier to be a black student at your school?

Eliminating the stereotypes.

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black students at your school, and why?

I think there should be more so people could become less ignorant at how black people really behave. I think there should be more so people could become less ignorant at how black people really behave.

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black teachers at your school, and why?

I think there should be more black teachers at school because it offers a comfort to black students and allows them to perform better.

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black administrators (principals, counselors, etc.) at your school, and why?

I think there should be more black administrators so the black students can have someone who will understand them.

Have your parents addressed an issue at school that they felt was influenced by race?

No

Have you heard any of the black students referred to as “acting white”?

Yes

Do you think blacks students need to “act white” in order to be successful academically, or be popular among other race groups?

No, they just need to be themselves to be popular and to excel academically. They just need to challenge themselves and push to get the best grade possible.

Are there students at your school who date students of races other than their own?

Yes

What do other students say about dating within other races?

They usually have no opinion of it.

What was the most important thing about being a part of this study?

Understanding how blacks are treated at other schools besides my own.

What was the hardest part of being a part of this study?

It was hard to manage my schedule.

Any other comments:

None.

Appendix E
Follow Up (Tee)

Appendix E

WWBSS - Follow Up Questions - Tee**Who taught you about race?**

School and Life

What is the biggest challenge of being a black student at your school?

Knowing what to do, and not to do.

What is the most important thing I should know about being a black student at your school?

You do not get treated fairly

Are you ever proud of being a black student at your school? If so, when?

Yes, all of the time

Are you ever embarrassed about being a black student at your school? If so, when?

No

What would make it easier to be a black student at your school?

Have more black people

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black students at your school, and why?

I wish there was more black people at my school. The school would be better.

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black teachers at your school, and why?

It really does not matter to me what race my teacher is.

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black administrators (principals, counselors, etc.) at your school, and why?

It really does not matter.

Have your parents addressed an issue at school that they felt was influenced by race?

No

Have you heard any of the black students referred to as “acting white”?

Yes

Do you think blacks students need to “act white” in order to be successful academically, or be popular among other race groups?

No, they need to be themselves

Are there students at your school who date students of races other than their own?

Yes

What do other students say about dating within other races?

I don't know

What was the most important thing about being a part of this study?

Helping you out.

What was the hardest part of being a part of this study?

I didn't find anything hard.

Any other comments:

None.

Appendix F
Follow Up (Vee)

Appendix F

WWBSS - Follow Up Questions - Vee**Who taught you about race?**

I always knew about race and didn't really pay any attention to it but you (Mrs. Judi) brought more attention to it and made me realize it more.

What is the biggest challenge of being a black student at your school?

The biggest challenge of being a black student at my school would have to be that everyone expects us to mess up and be dumb. All the administration looks and pays more attention to us.

What is the most important thing I should know about being a black student at your school?

Well we really don't have many activities and stuff to do as black students. It would be great to just have a little group or organization for us black students.

Are you ever proud of being a black student at your school? If so, when?

Well I am proud of who I am but I don't think there has ever been a time at our school where black students were singled out for something good.

Are you ever embarrassed about being a black student at your school? If so, when?

I (and other black people) get embarrassed when other black students act a fool and start stuff and other people perceive us as being that way.

What would make it easier to be a black student at your school?

To make it being easier being black at my school would never really happen cause (school) ISD think they are right all the time and don't really want to hear what other have to say. But to make it easier, we should have some type of ALL BLACK organization....

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black students at your school, and why?

The black student population in my school is actually growing because of other schools closing down. So no I would keep it just the way it is now.

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black teachers at your school, and why?

I think there should be way more black teachers at my school because there is literally like 4 and we really don't have many people that can teach and tell us about Black History.

Do you wish there were more, less, or no change in the amount of black administrators (principals, counselors, etc.) at your school, and why?

No not really. We already have 1 black principal. I think that's enough.

Have your parents addressed an issue at school that they felt was influenced by race?

Yes, nothing was ever illustrated during Black History month

Have you heard any of the black students referred to as "acting white"?

Yes. Happens everyday

Do you think blacks students need to "act white" in order to be successful academically, or be popular among other race groups?

Nope. If they really wanted to be successful, they could do it. It's all a choice that is never taken seriously.

Are there students at your school who date students of races other than their own?

Yes. A lot of the boys say that white is right and white is the way to go because a lot of black girls don't know how to act.

What do other students say about dating within other races?

A lot of the white kids hate it....

What was the most important thing about being a part of this study?

The attention being brought and all of the stuff I learned.

What was the hardest part of being a part of this study?

I didn't really find anything to hard.

Any other comments:

None.