Fall 10-2017

The Schooling Experiences of African American Males Attending Predominately White Independent Schools

Dana Adams Coleman
Loyola Marymount University

Fall 10-2017

The Schooling Experiences of African American Males Attending Predominately White Independent Schools

Dana Adams Coleman
Loyola Marymount University, danacamille14u@gmail.com

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

The Schooling Experiences of African American Males Attending Predominately White Independent Schools

by

Dana Adams Coleman

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2017

The Schooling Experiences of African American Males

Attending Predominately White Independent Schools

by

Dana Adams Coleman

Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Dana Coleman, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

10/2/2017
Date

Dissertation Committee

[redacted]
Antonia Darder, Ph.D., Committee Member

[redacted]
William Parham, Ph.D., ABPP, Committee Member

[redacted]
Marta Sanchez, Ph.D., Committee Member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This was not a journey that I made alone. Throughout this entire process, there have been several individuals who have allowed me the space and freedom to pursue this degree.

To my loving and incredible husband, Chè. This is as much your degree as it is mine. You gave me the space and freedom to write, study, and attend numerous classes. You took care of our son when I was not there to do so. You made me a better person. While I went back to school, you unselfishly took care of everything else. Thank you for being the love of my life, the best husband in the world, and a magnificent father to our son.

I would like to thank my mother for always supporting me and loving me through each and every endeavor I have embarked upon. You are a wonderful grandmother to Ché Thomas and the best mother I could ask for. I hope that you are proud of me.

To Dr. Antonia Darder, the only Chair in the world who could have guided me through this process. Thank you for continuing to believe in me through all the times when I had lost all hope. Thank you for leading with love and experience. It was an extreme honor to have you as my Chair, and I am a better person for having worked with you. You realized the importance of this work to my personal story and my life, and as a result, you were able to help me shape my dissertation vision into my completed work.

Dr. Marta Sanchez, thank you for always pushing me to get a doctorate and to be a better me. You have believed in my "brilliance" from the beginning, and I have relied on your mentorship and love from day one. Thank you for showing me the importance of family first and for supporting me through this entire process.

To Dr. William Parham, thank you for your perspective and leadership. You shared many insights and wisdom, and your direction was impactful. Your acumen was particularly appreciated as I worked through revisions.

To my very dear friends Vanessa Garcia and Kristalyn Smith, thank you for the late night words of encouragement, the creative strategies to "just get it done," and the unwavering love and support. I leaned on you two like I have never leaned on friends before. Thank you for just being there.

I wish to thank my participants who generously gave their time and shared their rich stories. Their willingness to partake in this process allowed for the completion of this work and contributed to the limited body of research detailing their experiences.

To my many family members who checked in on me throughout this journey, always offered words of support and encouragement, and showed up to congratulate me at graduation, thank you! Thank you for always loving me and for always being there.

And lastly, to my only son, Ché Thomas Hackley Coleman, to whom this work is dedicated. May you continue to be the intelligent, loving and most wonderful son that you are. My hope is that your schooling experience validates and enhances your wonderful spirit. I love you with everything that I am.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my husband, Ché Coleman, and my son, Ché Thomas Hackley Coleman. I love you both with all of my heart and soul.

I also dedicate this work to all the Black boys who attend independent schools and need for their voices to be heard so that we can all learn from their stories.

And lastly, I dedicate this work to my late father, Thomas Perry Adams, Esq., Thank you for every year that you were with me. I miss you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

The Schooling Experiences of African American Males

Attending Predominately White Independent Schools

by

Dana Adams Coleman

This dissertation seeks to examine the schooling experiences of African American males attending predominately White independent schools in California. Using Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework and the factors contributing to schooling experiences, this qualitative research explores the role of student self-perception, teacher expectations, and parent involvement as contributing factors to participants overall schooling experiences. Utilizing counterstorytelling as a means of capturing the rich narratives shared by the participants, data analysis included holistic content coding based on themes that emerged from narrative examination. Findings indicate how parent involvement became the overarching critical component that was most significant in positive schooling experiences for Black males. These findings also support the need to continue to examine the shortage of literature examining the schooling experiences of Black males in predominately White independent schools.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Three-quarters of the [African American] students [attending independent schools] said they had to make special efforts to fit into their school communities; 82 percent reported that they had had negative experiences at their schools; and 40 percent did not believe that the school treated all students the same.

-- Edith G. Arrington, Diana M. Hall, & Howard C. Stevenson (2003), *The Success of African-American Students in Independent Schools*

My research is as much a personal endeavor as it is a scholarly one. I am the mother of a seven-year-old African American male who attends a predominantly White, kindergarten–8th grade (DK-8), independent day school. Knowing that my son will most likely spend his entire presecondary schooling years in a predominately White, independent school, I wonder how his racial identity as a Black male will develop and how his schooling experiences will support that identity development. However, I feared that his placement in a public school would put him at risk of ending up as another African American statistic, given the racism and social, and educational injustices faced by the majority of Black children in U.S. society. With these concerns in mind, the decision to send my son to a predominately White, elite, independent school was embedded in fear and the lack of other options that provide the same level of academic excellence.

The risks of placing African American male students in public schools are well-documented by data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) on school-aged children and young adults. Under the Obama Administration, the OCR

performed what was described as the first comprehensive look at civil rights data from every public school in the country completed in nearly 15 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The findings from civil rights data for the 2011–2012 school year were publicly announced by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder in 2014 and published in a report, "Expansive Survey of America's Public Schools Reveals Troubling Racial Disparities" (2014). The report noted:

> the data released today reveals particular concern around discipline for our nation's young men and boys of color, who are disproportionately affected by suspensions and zero-tolerance policies in schools. Suspended students are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to be suspended again. They are also more likely to repeat a grade, drop out, and become involved in the juvenile justice system. (para. 8)

These prevalent and consistent statistics underscored our fear that our son could easily be classified as "deficit" as a result of his race. Our choices, as parents, were to take this risk or to enroll him in a school environment with affluent students who, because of their privilege, are more likely guaranteed a strong and effective educational formation.

Jessica DeCuir-Gunby (2007) noted that it is important to examine how issues of race and social class influence African American adolescents' sense of identity within the school context. They have also insisted that when examining identity formation, it is important to look at how the school climate and culture shape the schooling experiences of Black youth. Since our social class is one of privilege, we felt confident that we would nurture his African American identity and engender his bicultural sense of self, giving him social tools to negotiate between his Black world at home and his predominantly White world at school.

As my son undergoes his journey in this independent school, I want to be able not only to understand his experience, but also to provide support, given the potential obstacles and struggles that he may face as a Black male growing up amid the racism of U.S. schooling and larger society. My hope then is that he—and all young Black males in this country—will both feel connected to their school environment and find spaces to participate in school environments that affirm them as young Black males.

This study also relates to my personal history as a Black student in an independent school. I grew up in Los Angeles in an upper-middle-class African American household. Both of my parents have advanced degrees, and my grandparents on my mother's side have college degrees. Additionally, my husband's grandfather was a doctor who graduated with his medical degree in 1940 from Howard University. With this legacy of educated Blacks in my family, I readily acknowledge that I grew up with a certain level of privilege that is still not the norm for African Americans in the United States. I also acknowledge that this is not a narrative that is frequently discussed; however, this is the narrative that shaped my life. I have always been Black. As a woman of color, my childhood was often about just that. From kindergarten through college, I attended predominately White academic institutions. I attended an all-girls independent school for middle school, where I was one of six Black girls in a class of 87. I am therefore very aware of what it feels like to be one of only a very few Black students in the room.

My mother, a former educator who dedicated her career to teaching students of color with special needs, and my father, an attorney who often represented people of color, stressed that education was not only a key to personal success, but also a catalyst to effect social change. As an elementary, middle, and high school student, I had the opportunity to attend and face the

challenges of both public and private schools. Even during my formative years, I was able to observe the disparities in the academic preparation provided by public and private schools, as well as the unique challenges that students of color faced in private schools. While working in higher education, I have witnessed the struggles that students of color continue to face, even when they advance to university.

My passion for exploring the schooling experiences of African American males who attended predominantly White, independent schools has only been heightened by the fact that my husband and I now have a son who will face these challenges. My affection for the subject matter, personal experiences, and intellectual curiosity compel me to delve into a study that explores whether an independent school environment can genuinely afford Black male students the quality of education promised under the U.S. Constitution and, more importantly, required by those with a commitment to social justice.

With all this in mind, it is my intent to examine how the schooling experiences of African American males are affected and influenced by being in environments that are predominately White. As members of a group that is not socially or economically advantaged in the same way as the Whites population, Black students in independent schools benefit from acquiring the academic and social knowledge that will position them for success in college and future careers. Connecting with possible future leaders in society and, more importantly, potentially becoming one of these future leaders are other advantages of attending independent schools. However, by attending independent schools, Black students must also grapple with implicit and explicit messages that their racial community is not as valued in schools as the dominant cultural community of their White peers (Arrington et al., 2003).

Statement of the Problem

The Boys' Latin School of Maryland strives to create an inclusive school community serving boys in grades K-12, and preparing them for the pluralistic society, in which we live, work and play.

-- The Boy's Latin School of Maryland [diversity statement], 2016, para. 16)

The mission and diversity statements of a variety of independent schools across the country, as echoed by the diversity statement of The Boys' Latin School of Maryland, appear to indicate that the independent school community has an expressed commitment to being an inclusive and diverse population. Designed to provide individualized attention in a close-knit community environment, independent or private schools have been serving the community since the first Europeans settlers came to America. Initially, these schools were only for White males and were in many instances established by religious missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church. Parallel to this narrative of advanced educational opportunities for some are the national and local policies that were in place during the enslavement of African Americans via the trans-Atlantic slave trade from approximately 1592 to 1866. These enslaved individuals were intentionally kept uneducated and illiterate.

In their research, Diana Slaughter and Deborah Johnson (1988) have noted that in Northern states, where slavery was abolished prior to the Civil War and Reconstruction, Black children were by law forbidden to attend schools with White children. This law applied to independent as well as public schools. Despite the passage of years since of the seminal case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and subsequently *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, it is patently clear that all children still do not have equal access to a quality education. Moreover, historically, public dollars were not allocated for the "separate but equal" education of Black

children (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988), unless there were repeated struggles by Black parents and communities. Thus, even though the majority of African Americans have continued to attend public schools, this relationship has seldom been equitable or positive.

For example, the Achievement Gap data from the National Center for Educational Statistics indicate that while, in some states Blacks have narrowed the achievement gap in mathematics and reading since 1999, the 2011 data report that Blacks in every state are still lagging behind in mathematics and reading. Additionally, the National Association of Educational Progress provided data on mathematics and reading proficiency from 1990 to 2013 and depicted Blacks as being 18 and 14% proficient at fourth- and eighth-grade mathematics skills and 18 and 17% proficient at reading skills in 2013.

Thus, approximately 80% of Black students in 2013 were categorized as basic or below basic on mathematics and reading achievement-level assessments, while less than 20% were categorized as proficient or advanced. Additionally, in many of the years reported, only 1–2% of African Americans were categorized as advanced. Hence, Slaughter and Johnson (1988) noted that it is not so difficult to see why some African American families—particularly middle-income families with the ability and willingness to pay tuition at the elementary and secondary school levels—have chosen most recently to explore a variety of options, including nonpublic or independent educational options for their children.

However, in reflecting back to the mission and diversity statements at independent schools, Ali Michael and Elonora Bartoli (2014) posited that such statements tend to reflect the racial socialization goals of most White parents: wanting to have racially diverse communities in which the issue of race or conditions of racism in schools and society do not matter. Thus, this

view can cause many to feel that racial neutrality is both plausible and possible in schools and that practicing colorblind approaches is an acceptable way to teach and socialize youth about interracial existence. Moreover, it must be noted that independent schools, similar to public schools, seldom reflect a genuinely diverse teaching environment and, consequently, often lack the lived experiences and cultural knowledge required to access accurately how students and, more specifically, African American students experience schooling (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2004).

For example, according to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS, 2016), more than 2,000 independent schools across the United States provide high-quality education to more than 700,000 students from pre-K through high school. This finding reflects that the independent school arena is a school choice that many parents are making. The 2015–2016 NAIS data on African American student enrollment in independent schools across the United States, however, indicate that less than 7% of the total enrollment of 1,672 participating schools is African American. Similarly, in California, African Americans only account for 4% of the approximately 2,700 students enrolled in 160 independent schools across the state.

Tyrone Howard (2003) posited that African American students continue to require an educational space where their own lived experiences and cultural beliefs can contribute to the important dialogues surrounding their perspectives and opinions regarding the formation of their own academic identities and their educational experiences in general. However, there continue to be few independent schools that cultivate, nurture, and support a positive racial identity beyond their diversity statements. Evidence of this phenomenon is reflected in the low numbers of African Americans attending independent schools and the lack of conscious policies and

practices in place to support the construction of counternarratives that can speak to African American student experiences and challenge the Eurocentric culture of the school and classroom environment.

Thus, many independent schools still appear to utilize a "colorblind" approach in educating all students by way of a hidden curriculum of assimilation (Darder, 2012). This approach has tacit expectations that just by virtue of being in an environment that supposedly supports diversity, students will "naturally" learn racial competence. In some ways, these attitudes about diversity are akin to the melting pot idea of the 1950s, when the "goals were primarily assimilationist through the reduction of prejudice" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2014, p. 24), while structures and practices of educational inequities remained unchanged. More importantly, as noted by the results of a study conducted by Arrington et al. (2003) on the success of Black students in independent schools, such assimilationist expectations are gravely misguided and, ultimately, false.

More specifically, Arrington et al. (2003) defined characteristics of success for African American students in independent schools; these included having a strong sense of connection to the school community; a positive sense of self across contexts, but especially in the school; social and emotional health; and a racial identity that would serve as a resource as they develop, but particularly when these students encounter racism. Conclusions based on Arrington et al.'s Success of African-American Students (SASS) in Independent Schools project, however, also noted that there is no simple answer to the question of how Black students are doing in independent schools.

In educational narratives about racism and student achievement, the conversation must begin with acceptance that race is a *social construct*, and therefore there are no biological factors at play (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), beyond racializing ideological formations. This phenomenon of racialization speaks to processes of schooling that ascribe cultural or racial identities, behaviors, relationship, social practices, or group interactions an essentialized significance or attribution that are directly tied to skin color, language, or other signifiers of racism (Darder, 2012). As such, Gloria Ladson Billings and William Tate (1995) asserted, "race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States" (p. 48). Hence, an exploration of race and its racializing impact on the education of African American students within independent schools is necessary in order to better understand the possible variations at work in the systematic expression of racism within these often unregulated and autonomous educational contexts—a question that has been unstudied and undertheorized in the field. Hence, there is grave need to give voice to the experiences of African American males who have attended independent schools and how they believe these experiences have impacted their academic formation and achievement.

Research Questions

This study explores the experiences of African American males and the influence and impact that their attendance at predominantly White, independent schools has had on their overall schooling experience. Toward that end, the following research questions informed the direction of my study:

1. How do young adult African American males who have attended predominately White independent schools speak about their schooling experiences?

2. To what extent do these students express feeling embraced and nurtured by their peers, teachers, and administrators at school, particularly with respect to their cultural development as African American males?
3. What recommendations do young adult African American males who have attended predominately White schools have for making these independent school environments more welcoming and conducive to the overall development of African American students and their cultural and academic formation?

Theoretical Framework

In 1954, United States Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren said that the court could not "turn the clock back to 1868 when Fourteenth Amendment was adopted; or even to 1896, when Plessy v. Ferguson was written" (para. 9). Derrick A. Bell, Jr. (1980) later noted that if the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision—which served as a catalyst for change—is to remain viable, those who rely on it must exhibit the same dynamic awareness of all legal and political considerations that influenced it as those who wrote it. In concert with this sentiment, the foundations of Critical Race Theory (CRT) are based on a legal construct (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theory is embraced by a movement of liberal scholars, most of them people of color in law schools whose work challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in the American legal system and culture; and, more generally, in American society as a whole (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

In its purest form, CRT subscribes to two overarching claims. The first claim is to understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color has been

created and maintained in America and, in particular, to examine the relationship between the social structure and professed ideals such as "the rule of law" and "equal protection" (Crenshaw et al., 1995). The second claim is a desire not just to understand the distress and tension between law and racial power, but also to transform it. Similarly, within the educational context of CRT, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) offered a set of propositions about the intersection of race and property, which sought to "move beyond the boundaries of the educational research literature" (p. 48), in order to include arguments from both law and the social sciences. As mentioned earlier, key to their discussion is the centering of race as the major unit of analysis, insisting that race must be engaged as a fundamental category for understanding conditions of inequity within schools.

Moreover, from its historical beginnings, using CRT as a framework for this study situates the stories of African Americans at the center of the discourse. Its conceptual emphasis on the value of counterstories aligns with the significance of the stories, which will be shared by African American young men in this study. These stories offer a voice to an understudied and undertheorized phenomenon that is pertinent to understanding independent schools. As an expanded framework of analysis, CRT asserts that White privilege is a fixed and intractable construct in the United States. Therefore, when we seek to understand the experiences of African American males in predominantly White schooling environments, CRT provides a salient and useful conceptual lens of analysis. Given its prominent role in grounding this study, the literature related to CRT is discussed more extensively in Chapter 2.

Methodology

The methodology employed by this study is firmly grounded in qualitative inquiry, which aligns well with the conceptual framework and research questions that drive this research. More specifically, the methodology is grounded in critical narrative research, which is consistent with the counterstories feature and vital to knowledge construction efforts within a CRT approach. Employing the power of critical narratives for this study allowed participants to share their stories in a free and authentic fashion, as they took the lead in narrating their own experiences and sharing their stories about their schooling experiences within a predominantly White, independent school.

To carry out this study, I identified and subsequently engaged eight African American males between the ages of 18 and 25 who are graduates of independent schools located in California. Participants graduated from California schools that were either solely high schools (grades 9–12) or schools that had a wider range of grades but also went to 12th grade. All participants were African American males from the 2012–2016 graduating classes. They were invited to participate in my study via email, social media, and word of mouth. They were also provided a detailed description of the study and permission parameters and an explanation of confidentiality.

Participants meeting the criteria were invited to share their schooling experiences in independent schools through participation in a narrative session that provided them with open-ended questions that served as prompts. The purpose of the narrative session was to capture each participant's story and counterstories about their experiences during grades nine through 12. All recorded responses were transcribed then coded and decoded for patterns that represent

significant thematic concepts and repetitive ideas linked to the major research questions that inform this study. By identifying and analyzing common ideas and thematic patterns in participant responses, I traced the schooling experiences of the participants, noted shared experiences, and identified recommendations offered by participants.

In addition to narrative sessions with the young men who participated in this study, I convened a parent focus group. Four of the parents who participated in the focus group were related to the young men who participated in the critical narratives. The purpose of the parent focus group was to get a better sense of how parents of Black male students in White independent schools perceive the school experience of their sons and to gather parent insights about how they perceived their own contribution to their sons' social and academic wellbeing. The parent focus group consisted of five parents of African American young men who were currently attending or had attended a predominately White independent school.

Significance of Study to Social Justice

This work is critical to the advancement of our understanding of social justice because its primary purpose is the representation of the underrepresented. This research allows the voices of African American males to be heard when they have traditionally been silenced. With the utilization of critical narratives as a means for capturing the voices of participants, their experiences can be told first hand. As we look at the literature addressing African American males with regard to academic achievement, it is also useful to turn to the concept of dehumanization, which results when subaltern populations are rendered silent and invisible. Paulo Freire (1970) stated that dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has

been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, results from the distortion of what Freire called our true vocation: becoming more fully human.

This concept is particularly applicable to the plight of all African American males within the historical and contemporary context. As a group, African American males have been and continue to be dehumanized—as we have witnessed in the last decade with the multiple deaths of unarmed young Black men at the hands of police. This disabling legacy has negatively affected the societal progress of African American men and manifested itself through conditions of struggle and alienation (Freire, 1970). In the exploration of the current state of African American males and education, Freirean principles, linked to moral and ethical concerns related to the education of oppressed people, serve as valuable components to the discussion of social justice that grounds this study.

Assumptions

Throughout this introduction, I have alluded to some basic assumptions. I want to reiterate that there is a dearth of literature on the topic of Black students attending predominately White independent schools. Hence, the stories of my participants have not been told. Therefore, I have had to make suppositions based on my own experiences and research that address similar conditions of schooling, students, and parents, but without necessarily the specificity to Black males. In my discussion, several assumptions have been made. First, parents help to bridge the gaps that exist for Black male students in predominantly White, elite, independent schools. I have drawn from my own experience—lessons taught and support given to me by my own parents—when I was a Black student attending primarily White schools. Second, teachers have

predisposed notions of Black male students, which students must then contend with in their school experience in a predominantly White, elite, independent school.

Moreover, since teachers in these schools do not share Black student experiences, their culture, or their funds of knowledge, there is a high probability that they retain deficit notions about Black students embedded in their own acquired folk theories and stereotypes about Black male students. Third, the participants would share openly about their experiences as students—some which might be difficult, unexpected, or even troubling—in a predominantly White, elite, independent school. I recognized, however, that such responses might be a possibility, so I considered this aspect within the context of my methodology and designed my questioning to elicit clear, open, and honest responses about participant experiences. Fourth, parents were able to speak about their Black sons' experience in a predominantly White, elite, independent school. I believed that parents participating in the focus group would understand the importance of my study, but I prepared and initially distributed to each participant a well-crafted and thoughtful description of what I considered to be the potential value of the study.

My preparation and accommodation for unexpected outcomes was critical to my analysis. The assumption that the participants would be willing and able to readily speak about their experiences may have been daunted by their difficulty in recalling their experiences. There was also the consideration that perhaps they were not consciously aware or did not differentiate their treatment from that of their White peers. Lastly, in handling the data, I recognized that there was a possibility that the study could yield information from the participant narratives that might reflect positive outcomes about their experience in predominantly White, elite, independent

schools. These outcomes were analyzed and explained by delving further into participants' responses and providing well-researched explanations.

Limitations

It is important to note the limitations of this study. One of the major limitations is the sample size. Today, there are approximately 2,700 African Americans attending independent schools, approximately half of whom are males. This study, nevertheless, sought to capture, with depth, rich data about the schooling experiences of eight Black male students. This study was also limited to the geographic location of the schools that participants attended. Another limitation to the study is that the participants were asked to share experiences that occurred in the past. Since this depended on their memories, their self-reporting, and recollections, there is always concern about the accuracy of accounts shared. However, within narrative inquiry, it is understood the how people remember a past experience is, in itself, significant in understanding the phenomenon and its impact on their lives.

The study was implemented in Los Angeles, and the students all came from predominately White, independent schools in Southern California. Participants were selected through a convenience sampling pool with reliance on referrals, social media, and personal contacts. Given the use of critical narratives, participants told their own stories as they saw fit and were not bound by the constraints of time during their interviews. Thus, the need to limit the number of participants was warranted. This study was also limited by the timeframe for completion of my doctoral program.

Lastly, a possible limitation to this study was my personal relationship to the study, as I have a son attending a predominately White, independent school. Therefore, researcher bias had

to be kept in check so that the results and conclusions of the study were consistent with appropriate research protocols. However, my story may also serve, indirectly, to help sustain the legitimacy and authenticity of the findings.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are utilized throughout this study. They are understood and used according to the following definitions.

African American (or Black) culture: African American culture is combination of what was brought to this land by the enslaved Africans, the segregation of Blacks throughout American history, and the interpretation of modern-day experiences of Black Americans.

Counterstories: The integration of experiential knowledge is drawn from a shared history in an attempt to transform racial hegemony

Critical Race Theory: (a) Racism is a permanent fixture in America; (b) stories or narratives are deemed important; (c) racism requires sweeping change, and liberalism is no mechanism for that change; and (d) a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color has been created and maintained in America.

Independent schools: Independent schools are nonprofit, private schools that are independent in philosophy: each is driven by a unique mission. They are also independent in the way they are managed and financed: each is governed by an independent board of trustees and is primarily supported through tuition payments and charitable contributions.

Race: A specious classification of humans created by Europeans (Whites) that assigns human worth and social status by using "White" as the model for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power. Race is a social construct, and no biological factors are at play.

Racialization: This refers to processes that ascribe to ethnic or racial or cultural identities, behaviors, relationship, social practices, or group interactions particular significance or features that are directly associated with skin color, language, or others signifiers tied to race.

Racism: Racism is a particular form of prejudice defined by preconceived, erroneous beliefs about members of ethnic groups.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into the following five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study and an overview of important aspects that define this work. Chapter 2 provides a more comprehensive discussion of the literature on African American male students and significant factors linked to their educational experiences. In addition, Chapter 2 centers on a discussion of different aspects of the schooling of African American male students, which employs a CRT conceptual lens identifying those issues in the educational literature most pertinent to this study. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology, the critical narrative method, and an explanation of the research design for this study. Chapter 4 systematically presents the voices of African American males who attended independent schools through their counterstories, highlighting significant themes that directly relate to the research questions. In addition, a summary of the data collected from the parent focus group is presented. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the counterstories and focus group data, a discussion of findings, along with conclusions, implications, recommendations for the field, and considerations for future study.

CHAPTER 2

CRT AND THE SCHOOLING OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The black students' experience of racism in and out of school is important to address because, for a number of students, racism adversely affects their emotional and psychological coping within school.

---Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003

In reviewing the research on the schooling experiences of African American males in independent schools, it is clear that a dearth exists. As such, the need and importance of this study became clear in that I unexpectedly discovered that discussions about the phenomenon of African American male students in independent schools are few and far between, with the literature often dated. This begs the question: Why? As discussed earlier, the percentage of African American students enrolled in independent schools remains low, despite an expressed commitment by independent schools to diversity over the last two decades. In fact, according to the 2014–2015 "NAIS Facts at a Glance," African American students represented 6.2% of students overall, actually lower than the percentage in 1972 (cited in Gueye, 2003, p. 22). Nevertheless, what makes this absence in the literature even more surprising is the shift in the educational and social spotlights during the last decade, which has placed much focus on African American males, nationally.

It is common to find that educators are continually bombarded with alarming statistics regarding the academic underachievement of African American males. Yet, it was not until I began searching the literature that I came to realize that there seems to be little interest in the

schooling experiences of African American males attending independent schools. Might this have to do with stereotypical images of Black males as both hopeless and underachieving (Harper & Davis, III, 2012; Knight, 2015) in academic environments and, thus, not in need of more rigorous research or intervention? With so much of the educational research on African American males focusing on their negative outcomes, why has there been such little effort made to study their positive outcomes? With this in mind, this study focuses on the narratives of African American male students regarding their schooling experiences in independent schools, in the hope of addressing these tenacious questions—questions that have made composing this literature review so challenging. Thus, no matter how we turn these questions, what is clear here is that there is an overwhelming need to investigate factors that lead to African American male achievement in general, and more specifically within independent school contexts.

In an effort to overcome the technical problem of the inadequate literation available on the educational experiences of African American males in independent schools, this chapter explores the racialization of cultural identity as it relates to Black male adolescents and their schooling. The Critical Race Theory educational literature on African American students, as a response to the racialization of Black students, will then be presented. Next, I discuss the literature that connects cultural identity development and the schooling experiences of African American males. And, lastly, I consider the manner in which parents and teachers impact the schooling experiences of Black male youth. Through integrating these disparate bodies of literature, my aim is to access categories that will facilitate my analysis of the data collected from African American male students in predominantly independent schools and data gathered

from African American parents who work to support the wellbeing of their sons in these environments.

Racialization of Cultural Identity

Walk into any racially mixed high school cafeteria at lunch time and you will instantly notice that in the sea of adolescent faces, there is an identifiable group of Black students sitting together. Conversely, it could be pointed out that there are many groups of White students sitting together as well, though people rarely comment about that. The question on the tip of everyone's tongue is "Why are the Black kids sitting together?"

---Beverly Tatum, 1997

In this passage, Beverly Tatum's (1997) astute observation highlights the manner in which African American student behavior—in this case sitting together in the cafeteria—is racialized with overtones of deviance, despite the fact that they are participating in behaviors common to all adolescents. Hence, she suggested that Black students eating together does not reflect any form of abnormality, but rather depicts a common aspect of adolescent development tied to Black students coming of age and realizing their Black identities. With the legacy of racism so pervasive in the United States, it stands to reason that racializing attitudes related to the cultural identity of the Other would make their way into the fabric of our educational system. The inability of the dominant culture to accept the reality of people of color as legitimate is intensified by the repressed contradictions that have existed since the creation of American society (Darder, 2012).

Accordingly, since being brought forcibly to the Unites States as enslaved individuals, Blacks have been deeply racialized in myriad ways that have denied equal education and opportunities. Nieto (2000) has argued that although overt expressions of racism may be less

frequent in schools today than in the past, racism exists not only when schools are legally segregated or racial epithets are widely used against Black students. On the contrary, the racialization of cultural identity within education is as pervasive today as it was prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The outcome is a pedagogy of assimilation and Eurocentric epistemology that negates the strength and knowledge of African American history and denies the power of Black students' cultural identity.

Olga Welch and Lisa Nesson (2016) posited that many discussions of educational disparities focus on characteristics *within* students, as if the source of the problem resides in their deficit intellect or deficient cultural values (Darder, 2012). As such, working-class children of color are often characterized as unmotivated, noncompetitive, and culturally disadvantaged products of inadequate families and bankrupt communities. What often goes unnoticed is that these descriptions, wittingly or unwittingly, ignore the larger structural barriers and societal inequalities that weigh heavily on African American youth and create obstacles in their lives that can be insurmountable for too many. Generally, this results from unexamined assumptions that reinforce the racializing gaze among mainstream teachers and bolsters individualistic and universalizing educational practices that blame students and parents for the difficulties they experience.

Dorinda Carter Andrews (2009) suggested that for many students of color, the mainstream script of schooling in the United States indicates that the cultural traits and behaviors necessary for academic success (and success more broadly in society) are linked to behaviors anchored in the dominant culture. Andrews went on to say that for many students of color, these cultural traits and behaviors are in direct conflict with values typical to their own cultural

communities. Thus, for many students, this presents an internal conflict, whereby acting White is deemed more acceptable than the embodiment of their own cultural norms (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; McWhorter, 2014). Focusing on the struggle that oftentimes high-achieving African American students can face when opposing cultural majority norms, Andrews (2009) also noted that students of color may reconcile this conflict by using school success as a form of resistance. It is significant to note, however, that such resistance among students of color is far more feasible and probable among students who possess a clear sense of their bicultural identity (Darder, 2012).

In their work, Theodorea Berry and Matthew Candis (2013) drew on Taylor's (1999) definition of cultural identity: "One's understanding of the multilayered, interdependent, and nonsynchronous interaction of social status, language, race, ethnicity, values, and behaviors that permeate and influence nearly all aspects of our life" (p. 45). For African American students, these ongoing interactions and cultural experiences also form their sphere of understanding with respect to their cultural identity. Thus, Black students in independent schools can feel both connected and disconnected to their schools because they encounter people and resources in their school that both affirm them; at the same time, they confront challenges to their sense of self and community (Arrington et al., 2003). Moreover, racializing experiences within schools and society have served to construct a Black/White binary that results in monocultural identities for those identified as White, given that their experiences have taken place almost exclusively in sociocultural venues constructed and dominated by White people, even when those venues are visibly occupied by African Americans (Berry & Candis, 2013).

Thus, the process of hegemonic schooling creates spaces in which all students are expected to act in certain ways and follow certain norms in order to conform to the behavioral expectations of the dominant culture. However, the experiences of African Americans in these environments can be very different from that of their White counterparts. For African Americans, the dominant values of the school often collide with the cultural values of their communities. It is precisely this cultural conflict that inspired what W. E. B. Du Bois (1994) termed *double consciousness*, which refers to the psychological challenge of "always looking at one's self through the eyes" (p. 2) of a racist White society, and having to "measure oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt" (p. 2). Du Bois's concept is also echoed in the work of other theorists of color, such as Frantz Fanon (2008), who wrote *Black Skin, White Masks,* and Antonia Darder (2012), whose *critical biculturalism* scrutinized the collision of dominant and subordinate cultural values and its impact on racialized populations.

Darder (2012), writing in *Culture and Power in the Classroom*, theorized that much of the problem with understanding culture and its relationship to pedagogical theories and practices results from a failure to examine culture beyond those constructs that have been set forth by Western anthropological discourses. Central to Darder's thesis is an understanding of culture as inextricably linked to the question of power, particularly for students of color who are forced to constantly navigate the asymmetrical power relations inherent in their bicultural existence. Moreover, for Darder (2002, 2012) the formation of cultural identity is deeply intertwined with issues of voice, social agency, empowerment, and self-determination, insisting that engaging the differences inherent in racialized inequalities is significance to the education and academic success of bicultural students.

In contrast to Darder's perspective, many teachers and schools, in an attempt enact policies and practices that are considered "color-blind," refuse to acknowledge cultural or racial differences (Nieto, 2000), despite the impact these have on classroom life and the academic achievement of students of color. Administrators and teachers will say that they do not see color and that all students are treated the same regardless of their color. But, Nieto has pointed out that that this so-called colorblindness results in refusing to accept significant cultural differences among students and, therefore, leads to the wholesale acceptance of the dominant culture as the norm for all students. Accordingly, this results in denying the cultural identity of African American students, thereby rendering them invisible. As we examine the phenomenon of cultural identity formation, then, it is vital to examine not only how culture may influence learning and achievement in schools, but also how the overgeneralization or distorted views of cultural beliefs can have dangerous effects (Nieto, 2000). We must also acknowledge that a bicultural tension exists, which must be both understood and navigated, in order for genuine practices of cultural democracy to shape just practices and relationships within classrooms and the larger society (Darder, 2012). Such an approach recognizes the importance of cultural identity in African American youth, as well as the need for them to navigate their world as both cultural beings and subjects of their own learning (Freire, 1970).

Tatum (1997) noted that, as children enter adolescence, they begin to explore the question of identity, asking, "Who am I? Who can I be?" in ways that they may have not done previously. African American children ask those same questions but must also consider how their identity intersects with their race or ethnicity. One might concede that all children at some point begin the process of self-discovery and that Black children are no more unique than their

White counterparts. However, not all children have to think of themselves in racial terms (Tatum, 1999), and only children of color are forced daily to navigate the dominant and subordinate cultural divide, which often denies their cultural knowledge, silences their voices, erases their histories, and marginalizes their existence (Darder, 2012). Consequently, racism in the classroom has had long lasting effects on the learning outcomes of Black students. Willis Harley and Sonia Nieto (2010) argued that when it comes to maximizing learning outcomes for racially diverse students, *race matters.* Moreover, they insisted that racism influences teaching and learning in two important ways: it affects how students respond to instruction and curriculum and, it negatively influences teacher assumptions and expectations about just how much Black students are capable of learning in the classroom and how much they are capable of achieving out in the world. It is precisely these distortions in the White gaze of teachers that critical race education theorists have sought to ameliorate and transform

Critical Race Theory and Education

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has its origins in the United States. It is both an outgrowth of, and a separate entity from, an earlier legal movement called critical legal studies (CLS) (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As such, CLS serves as an important foundation of CRT research and conversations in education. This is consistent with the critical legal studies movement that focuses on individuals and groups in social and cultural contexts, in which people do not believe that the struggle for civil rights had to represent a long and steady march toward social transformation. Since CLS, however, failed to provide pragmatic strategies for social reform, CRT became the natural offspring for the legal community of color (Ladson-Billings, 1988). With many scholars distressed at the country's slow pace in addressing ideas of racism and racial

reform, CRT emerged, with the proposition that racism is normal, not aberrant, and intractable in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical Race Theory then situates itself within a lens of race as the central unit of analysis and an approach to challenging racial oppression and institutional subjugations within legal, educational, or other societal domains (Howard, 2008). Additionally, CRT represents a liberating force for the oppressed. Freire (1970) stated, "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation." This concept of struggling to transform oppressive conditions is central to CRT, given that its historical base was a direct response to the lack of progress for equality and the reason that legal educators like Derrick Bell (1980) took up the charge of looking at racism from a legal perspective.

Moreover, Ladson-Billings (1998) posited a set of important beliefs or presuppositions at work in the conceptual articulation of CRT. These include: (a) racism is a permanent fixture in American society, (b) stories or narratives are deemed important, (c) critique of liberalism; and (d) a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and sustained in America. Thus, much of the CRT research in education utilizes methods to document the complex ways systems of oppression can impact the experiences of people of color (Huber, 2008).

Permanence of Racism

Bell (1995) suggested that in spite of dramatic civil rights movements and periodic victories in the legislature, Black Americans are by no means equal to Whites. He further stated that racial equality is, in fact, not a realistic goal and that by constantly aiming for a status that is

unobtainable in a perilously racist America, Black Americans face frustration and despair. Although he made these claims over 25 years ago, one could posit that they still ring true today. Furthermore, the notion of permanence of racism suggests that racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains.

While many definitions of race exist, most would agree that race is a socially constructed category and that racial definitions are fluid and have changed throughout history to allocate and deny power to specific groups of people according to their place in racial hierarchy (Huber, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Situating racisms in the realm of ordinariness makes addressing it more difficult as it has almost taken on the persona of a normal occurrence. Racism is ordinary, not aberrational—"normal science," the usual way that society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Counterstorytelling

An essential tenant to CRT is counterstorytelling (Crenshaw, 1995; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Delgado and Stefancic defined counterstorytelling as a method of telling a story that "aims to cast doubt on the validity or accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (p. 144). This manner of sharing one's story allows voices of color to share their own history and experiences as active participants rather than have others tell their story for them. Counterstorytelling validates the participant's unique perspective in the form of narrative.

Using counterstorytelling allows a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes (DeCuir-Gunby & Dixon, 2004) and the racialization

of students of color. With respect to education, counterstories can be found in various forms, including personal stories/narratives, other people's stories/narratives, and composite stories/narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Because the role of voice is so critical to CRT, the use of counterstorytelling lends truth to power, in that it seeks to unearth the hidden and silenced discourses linked to racism in the lives of people of color. These stories provide the necessary context to understanding, feeling, and interpreting (Ladson-Billings, 1998) the everyday conditions students of color face, as well as the structural realities that shape their positionality and social location within the larger society—a positionality and social location predicated on the manner in which they are racialized (Darder, 2012).

Critique of Liberalism

Critical Race Theory scholars are critical of three basic notions that have been embraced by liberal legal ideology: the notion of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and incremental change (DeCuir-Gunby, 2004). Due to the history of racism present in the United States, where most rights and freedoms have been reserved for White individuals and, more specifically, White males, the concept of a "colorblind" society is inadequate to addressing the negative effects of racism.

Furthermore, the notion of colorblindness fails to take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as the Other (DeCuir-Gunby, 2004). As such, the politics of "colorblindness" is often enacted and discussed in ways that pretend the skin color and cultural differences of the Other are not seen or signified, when, in fact, the experience of African Americans suggests the exact contrary, as Tatum's (1997) cafeteria observation in the previous discussion illustrates. Thus, CRT argues that racism must be

openly confronted and that sweeping changes are necessary for its amelioration. With this in mind, CRT contends that liberalism has no effective mechanisms for instituting such a change (Ladson-Billings, 1998), given its universalizing and individualistic approach to questions of human rights and social reformation (Darder, 2015).

Intersection of Race and Property

Slavery linked the privilege of Whites to the subordination of Blacks through a legal regime that attempted the conversion of Blacks into property (Harris, 1993). Thus, the notion of Whiteness as a property right is the fourth tenet of CRT. Harris further stated that this racist formulation embedded the fact of White privilege into the very definition of property, marking another stage in the evolution of the property interest in Whiteness and that possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of Whites. Although Harris (1993) focused on the land seizures of Native Americans, this concept became woven into the American fabric and was used as a basis to discriminate against all people of color. Harris suggested that these functions and attributes of property have historically been deployed in the service of establishing Blackness as a form of property.

Microaggressions

Along with these presuppositions, CRT education scholars point to the manner in which *microaggressions* function within educational settings and the larger society, in ways that disable and disrupt both the self-concept and democratic participation of African Americans (Solorzáno et al., 2000). Within the context of CRT, microaggressions refer to a variety of unconscious and subtle expressions of racism experienced by African Americans and others people of color, which are generally pervasive and, hence, seldom openly noted, acknowledged, or investigated

(Allen, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Johnson, 1988; Lawrence, 1987; Solorzáno et al., 2000). Delgado and Stefancic have compared microaggressions to water dripping on sandstone and small acts of racism, consciously, or unconsciously perpetuated. These assumptions, in turn, continue to inform our public civic institutions—government, schools, churches—and our private, personal, and corporate lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Thus, having a deficit view toward African Americans has been significantly linked to microaggressions (Solorzáno et al., 2000). Solorzáno et al. posited that racial microaggressions in both academic and social spaces have real consequences, the most obvious of which are a negative racial climate and African American students' struggles with feelings of self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation. As we racialize cultural attributes, we can draw a clear link from microaggression to racism. Simba Runyowa (2015) noted that microaggressions point out cultural differences in ways that cast the recipient's nonconformity into sharp relief, often causing anxiety and crises of belonging on the part of minorities. This focus on difference can oftentimes isolate African Americans and call into question their sense of belonging.

The Issue of Colorblindness

In an attempt to fully explore the schooling experiences of African American males attending predominately White independent schools, the issue of colorblindness must be further addressed. Ashley Doane (2007) asserted that colorblindness incorporates a series of claims regarding the current nature of race relations in the United States, beginning with the assertion that, as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the decline of prejudicial attitudes among Whites, racism is no longer a structural phenomenon, and that the only racism that persists in contemporary American society involves isolated "hate crimes" and other actions of a few

remaining prejudiced individuals. Using this as a basic foundation for the origins of colorblindness, one can easily conclude that the focus on race is no longer a central construct of the American experience. However, the reality of this phenomenon is that racism continues to be very prevalent, while the notion of colorblindness persistently garners momentum in the field of education.

Valarie Strauss (2016) presented an argument that White anxiety—not guilt or shame—may be the biggest obstacle to eroding racism and building meaningful cross-racial relationships. She noted that this anxiety starts in childhood when White children are often taught that all skin colors are equal. Therefore, we begin an early socialization to colorblindness that is practiced on widespread platforms—and thus begins the avoidance of conversations regarding skin color. Young children frequently access the rainbow skin tone crayon selection, but they are actually taught that all of the colors are equal. The problem with this is that most young children are able to recognize the differences between skin colors at a very early age. Although a colorblind curriculum is often pushed on children at a very early age, it is counter to their social-emotional adolescent development and usually counter to what is taught at home. The absence of conversations regarding skin color or teaching children to ignore it because diversity is only skin deep will not impede the spread of racism (Strauss, 2016).

These colorblind ideologies can be problematic as African American male students advance through educational arenas, because in the absence of a conversation on race, we avoid a discussion on racial issues. Meghan A. Burke (2013) called this "racial ambivalence," and noted its long history in the United States. Tracing racial realities and colorblind ideals, we can

see how marginalized populations have been overlooked by focusing on a colorblind and racially ambivalent educational pattern.

In the same way that we must reject the notion of colorblindness, we must refuse the notion of the Black/White binary. As this is one of the most rigid constructs maintaining White supremacy and systematic racism, Robette A. Diaz (2017) framed the conversation by situating the Black/White binary as a perpetuator of oppression. Thus, for the Black male student, this can create a pressure to find ways to assimilate into schooling systems that externally support diversity, but internally perpetuate a system of the "hidden curriculum." More destructive and insidious than the formal curriculum is the "hidden curriculum" (Ghosh, 2010), as this curriculum perpetuates racism in several ways. Noting that teachers' roles in shaping the educational experiences of students and influencing their life chances must be understood through their own socialization and values within the social structure, teachers often, perhaps inadvertently, exacerbate existing power inequities by reinforcing social attitudes through their own prejudices and stereotypical assumptions about student capabilities and cultural behavior (Ghosh, 2010). This can result in low expectations for students of color, as well as students of color feeling the need to assimilate in order to succeed in educational settings.

African American Experiences of Schooling from a Critical Race Theory Lens

This study addresses the intersection of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework and the schooling experiences of African American males in predominantly White, independent school academic settings. Specifically, it examined factors that impact the schooling experiences of African American males, while considering the interconnection of race to their schooling experiences. In particular, African American education scholars have repeatedly

utilized the conceptual lens of CRT to examine the academic achievement and other experiences of African American males. Yet, while there are examples of studies that engage such issues as the "Achievement Gap," a disturbing reality of the plight of African American males in Pre-K–12 schools is the relative silence from the educational community at large, and the educational research community in particular (Howard, 2008). In response to this silence, CRT educational scholars have challenged both education and society's tolerance of the prevailing failure of African American males. In the process, they have sought to both examine the existing reasons and rationales for the persistent failure of educational institutions to educate African American males, as well as to give voice to successful practices with historically underrepresented students (Howard, 2008)

In the CRT educational literature that examines the experiences of African American students (see Table 1), the major themes or categories that emerge include: (a) parent involvement, (b) student self-perceptions, and (c) teacher expectations. Table 1 illustrates how this literature intersects with the tenets of CRT. Specifically, this comparison in the literature points to ways in which educational researchers have utilized CTR to examine the schooling experiences of African American students within different contexts. In concert with this comparison, the following will discuss how the literature discusses each of these categories.

Table 1

Comparison of CRT Literature on Schooling Experiences

	Critical Race Theory Tenets			
	Racism is engrained in American culture (microaggressions).	Power structures are based on White privilege.	Liberalism and meritocracy should be challenged and rejected.	Counterstories expose normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes.
Schooling Experiences				
Student self-perceptions	DeCuir-Gundy (2007) Simmons (2012) Howard (2003)	Simmons (2012) Howard (2003)	DeCuir-Gundy (2007) Simmons (2012)	DeCuir-Gundy (2007) Simmons (2012) Howard (2003) Noguera (2003)
Teacher expectations	Kenyatta (2012) Simmons (2012) DeCuir-Gundy (2007) Mitchell & Stewart (2011)	Kenyatta (2012) Bell (2015) Green et al (2012)		Kenyatta (2012) Simmons (2012) DeCuir-Gundy (2007) Mitchell & Stewart (2011) Bell (2015)
Parent involvement	Allen (2013) Howard (2008) Howard & Reynolds (2008)	Allen (2103) Howard (2008) Howard & Reynolds (2008)		Allen (2103) Howard (2008) Howard & Reynolds (2008)

Student Self-Perceptions

Howard (2003) posited that African American students need a space and a forum where their experiences and beliefs can contribute to the formation of their own academic identities and educational experiences. As we study the issues of race and its impact on social class, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) reminded us that it is important to examine how issues of race and social class influence African American adolescent identity within the context of their schooling

experiences. She went on to state that African American students at predominantly White, independent schools often experience marginalization, feel unrepresented in the school culture, and can also feel alienated from their African American peers outside of the independent school context (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). This is particularly the case for African American males.

Over the last 20 years, African American males have been losing educational and economic ground to just about all other racial and gender groups (Garibaldi, 2007). A review of the literature addressing African American male academic achievement in the PreK–12 environments indicates that several factors can contribute to academic success. As discussed earlier, race is a factor that can contribute to the overall schooling success of these young men. Moreover, bell hooks (2000) reminded us that while looking at the experiences of African American in the United States, there is a need to keep in mind that class is essential to understanding African American male identity formation. Nowhere is this concern more evident that within an elite, White independent school context. Arrington et al. (2003) argued that Black students value true relationships with teachers and peers, the resources that exist within the school, the preparation for college admissions and success, and training for future endeavors, but some aspects of independent schools leave a number of students feeling at times as if they do not fit into their school environments and with a tenuous connection to the school community in some areas.

Similarly, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) argued that it is important to examine how issues of race and social class influence African American adolescent identity formation within the school context. Through the lens of CRT, counterstories, and a critique of liberalism, DeCuir-Gunby examined in her work how students attending an elite PreK–12 private school in an urban city in

the South perceived themselves and how they believed their teachers saw them as students. The study followed three African American boys and three African American girls all attending the same predominately white, private high school. For the purposes of my study, I focus on the aspects of DeCuir-Gunby study that speak to the experiences of the African American males.

Findings in the DeCuir-Gunby (2007) study suggested that African American male students attending predominantly White, elite, private schools can encounter many obstacles concerning race and class within the independent school context. Using CRT as the theoretical framework, the application of their counterstories enables the students to provide a narrative about some of the difficulties they face as Black students in this environment. Drawing upon two in-depth and personal interviews for each participant, DeCuir-Gunby used open-ended questions to inspire the participants to provide detailed responses.

All of the interviews began with the query, "Tell me what it is like to be a Black student at this school?" Responses varied but were coded into several themes that included the school's reputation, opportunities available as a result of being a graduate of the school, and race and class issues associated with being middle class in a predominantly middle and upper-class environment. All participants in her study expressed awareness of the racist views that at times were present at the school, but each seemed to navigate those situations effectively by drawing upon their identity as African Americans and an understanding of what it meant to be African American in these environments (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). A student in the DeCuir-Gunby (2007) study, Michael, signaled acts of racism he experienced at the school by saying:

> And a lot of things that are said represent the [racist] views that I thought had dispersed after the Civil War. And it's sad that people still think this way and they say derogatory things. You just have to remember that Wells isn't the most open society. (p. 31)

In the DeCuir-Gunby (2007) study, although Wells Academy was comprised of students from similar class backgrounds and the participants in the study were all middle class, racial differences were a source of concern for the participants. This supports one of the CRT tenets that racism is fixed into the American culture. Additionally, the students faced a White, hegemonic system that favored the White upper-class students and functioned on the basis of this dominant cultural legacy, rather than on merit. According to participants, a genuine practice of meritocracy was not exercised in the school. One student provided the following example:

> There were a lot of politics involved with the school. I didn't like the way some of the decisions were made by the administration. Being that Wells is very powerful and has a lot of kids of the powerful people of the city going there, it's even more annoying to see that the owner of so and so's son is on academic probation, but he can play the football game which would not ordinarily happen. And it's very obvious, and it is so insulting and so right in your face that they don't do anything to correct it. (p. 31)

Similarly, Robert W. Simmons (2012) explored the experiences of African American male students from an urban community who attended a Jesuit high school. His use of CRT and counterstories allowed the six male participants to detail how their parents prepared them for their school environment. Students in the study stated that they had experienced microaggressions, racial stereotypes, and racist comments in classes. However, drawing upon their own personal social capital, they expressed being able to find safe places to associate with

other Black students within the school environment. These safe places were usually in the cafeteria during lunchtime or outside at a particular table or bench, outside of the formal activities of the classroom. With their retreat to the safety of their cafeteria table, serving as a response to interracial conflicts, the young people in this study were equally challenged with making sense of the interracial relationships between themselves and their same-race suburban counterparts (Simmons, 2013). One student in the Simmons study noted:

> My biggest challenge is when my teacher looks at me when slavery comes up in world history. I'm looking at the teacher like don't even think of calling on me but this dude did. Not only did he call on me but he asked if we talked about slavery at home. (p. 7)

Teacher Expectations

The literature asserts that teachers have continually played a large part in the formation of student self-views and their academic achievement. At the micro level, classrooms and teacher-student interactions within that classroom influence how students view and respond to schooling and, thus, can impact both social and academic disparities (Kenyatta, 2012). Researchers in the field have suggested that teacher perceptions are often shaped by the stereotypes and racialized views of African American students that often prevail in the dominant culture (Darder, 2012; Howard, 2003; Kenyatta, 2012).

The structure of schools and the culture of the classroom can also reaffirm troubling categories of difference that promote differential treatment (Darder, 2012; Kenyatta, 2012). Because the teacher-student relationship can be seen as reciprocal, teachers may respond to students based on perceptions that may or may not be accurate. Noting that teachers can often provide differing treatment to students whom they believe are hard workers, Kenyatta posited

that this attribution is typically applied along the lines of race and socioeconomic status, with poor minority children perceived as lazy—an assignment readily assigned to African American males. Kenyatta also pointed to the phenomenon that teachers are agents of the dominant structure and, thus, can create and maintain unjust structures and relationships, through commonsensical practices that support asymmetrical relations of power.

Edward Bell (2015) asserted that many African American males lack adequate opportunities to develop positive classroom experiences and are often berated for minor classroom behavioral issues that become magnified by teachers and administrators. When this occurs, the problems experienced by African American males are often exacerbated, in that teachers deal more seriously with them, as compared to those of their White male peers (Bell, 2015). Similarly, school administrators tend to judge African American males more harshly than their White counterparts, which results in distortions about the views and schooling experience of Black students. This, in turn, interferes with the establishment of an inclusive school climate, resulting in microaggressions that conserve White privilege (Bell, 2015; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995).

These negative schooling experiences can have long-term, devastating effects on African American males and can reinforce existing negative perceptions about educating this population. With this in mind, the purpose of the Bell (2015) study was to understand how African American males feel about their schooling experiences, so that educators might become more conscious of the ways they impact their academic formation. Using qualitative research, 18 male participants shared their stories about their schooling. Results indicated that while most

of them liked their school, their views about teachers were another matter. About this, Bell (2015) concluded:

> Participants' views on teachers were primarily negative. It is interesting to note they were fond of going to school, yet they disliked the teachers. Teachers were often viewed as mean or controlling. The issue of race was discussed and some of the respondents felt that they were policed more than other students. However, some of the respondents made reference to the teachers wanting to help you as well. (p. 1216)

Several of the comments by participants centered on White students being able to get away with certain behaviors that they, as Black students, were not able to get away with. Examples of these comments included:

> "I can't get away with anything …. But the Whites do."
>
> "Look, I am nice and they still are mean, so what do you do?"
>
> "As soon as I break a rule, I am in trouble…. This doesn't happen for everybody, just us Black kids."
>
> "When I was late for class, my social studies teacher didn't even explain what I missed, but when another student was late she did."
>
> "Why do we get sent to the office when we misbehave? The White kids don't, and our behaviors are the same." (p. 1226)

Not only did Bell's (2015) study speak to the importance of providing schooling experiences that are positive for African American males, but also the need for teacher perceptions of Black males to change. Bell (2015) argued that teachers' reactions were often negative and contributed to Black males feeling unhappy in classrooms where they were not

respected or valued. Nevertheless, through the sharing of their counterstories, participants were able to provide rich stories that spoke, first hand, to what they experienced in their school (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Pedro Noguera (2003) posited that we know little about the teacher perceptions and expectations held toward Black males and how these may in turn affect their performance within schools. This, coupled with negative opinions of Back males in general, has caused considerable debate as to why being Black and male is regarded as negative both in school and in society at large. Noting that the vast majority of Black males in schools want to do well, Noguera's research suggested there is a discrepancy between what they say about the importance of education and the support that they receive from teachers. Noguera further noted that African American males were least likely to indicate they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My teachers support me and care about my success in their class."

In a recent study, Robert Green, George White, and Kevin Green (2012) argued that, "If a teacher holds high expectations, that teacher will seek to have student achieve those standards. If students have high expectations, they will make an effort to meet those standards. Conversely, low expectations discourage effort and achievement" (p. 146). As a part of this study, teachers in the Dallas independent school district were asked to complete a survey that measured their feelings and attitudes on a range of variables related to successful student achievement: curriculum, principal leadership, impact of student background, and expectations.

As a result of the survey findings, Green et al. (2012) devised a set of workshops that were designed to promote a culture of high expectations within the school context. Because their research focused on strategies that schools could implement with teachers, they identified

four school strategies related to improving teacher expectations in the classroom. These included: (a) students must know precisely what is expected of them and why it is expected, (b) students must believe that they can meet those expectations, (c) students should have a voice and participate in the creation of their learning environments, and (d) teachers need to be open to the development of spaces where academic and behavioral standards are consistently applied.

Parent Involvement

Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif (1998) asserted that there is general consensus among educational researchers about the importance of parents and families in the education of students. Likewise, parent-teacher dialogues can provide excellent opportunities to establish working alliances that can further efforts to transform the oppressive structure of public schooling (Darder, 2002). In the instance of African American males, parent involvement appears to have a greater impact on their successful school outcomes. According to Allen (2012), despite the perceived privilege that class standing affords middle class Black parents, the families in his study still observed the endemicity of racism, oftentimes experienced through subtle but potentially damaging racial microaggressions.

Using CRT to examine the experiences of Black middle class high school students, Allen (2012) engaged counterstories to document their experiences and to highlight how the parents were able to use their own social capital as a means of advocating for their sons. In his work, Allen detailed how the father's proactive approach to his son's educational experiences allowed the African American males to have an additional presence in the classroom as well as to build teacher relationships. Through the use of counterstories, these fathers and sons were able to detail their experiences; thus, fathers could support their son's educational experiences. Students

and parents were both interviewed and these collective accounts were analyzed using CRT to look at how race and racism play out in Secondary schooling environments.

Allen's (2012) study took place at a large, ethnically diverse high school that had a population of 29% Black, 28% Asian, 19% Latino, 11% White, and 13% Other. Six Black middle-class students and their fathers were interviewed. One father related a conversation that he had had with the school's vice principal regarding an incident with his son:

> You know what, Mr. Matthews? It's awful odd. I've watched things happen. I've been around the school and I've come to meetings and I'm so frustrated I have to stay away and just hold my kids close to me. There's a perception out [there] Mr. Matthews, that most minority children, [people] think they're lesser than, and so do the teachers. They think [minority] means less than. (Allen, 2012, p. 185)

Although expressing his frustration at the perceptions that were felt regarding minority children, this father resisted the suggestion and, instead, advocated for his child.

Looking at parent involvement as a means of addressing the difficult educational experience of African American males, the research confirms the need for family involvement, so that the success stories of Black male youth can be captured more accurately. Tyrone Howard and Rema Reynolds (2008) investigated African American parent involvement as it pertained to middle class schools in an attempt to account for the intersection of race and class through CRT. Their data findings pointed to three areas that were considered fundamental in informing the conversation on parent involvement. These include the importance of being informed, the need to question, critique and challenge, and finally, the importance of collaboration (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

Parents in the Howard and Reynolds (2008) study pointed to being able to effectively advocate for their children as being directly correlated to more access to information that they had at their disposal. One of the parents from the focus group stated:

> In many ways, when educators know that you are informed, they make sure that they do right by your children. So that would be my number one issue, get involved, and make sure that they (school personnel) know who you are. (p. 91)

Parents' involvement in school-sponsored events (back-to-school night, conferences, PTA, etc.) seems to have a direct link to student success. This should be looked at as particularly important with regards to data on Black male achievement gap, which places these students at a disadvantage in mathematics and reading compared to their White counterparts in all 50 states (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). During the 2000–2010 academic school years, 48% of African American males did not receive diplomas with their classmates after four years of high school (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

Through the use of counterstories parents in the Howard and Reynolds study (2008) were able to detail how they advocated for their children when potentially damaging situations arose within the school network. Additionally, when these parents were able to question the outcomes for their Black children are often more favorable. While it is recognized that parent advocacy and challenge can bring about conflict, the parents who do not question, challenge, and critique their schools and their practices and fail to advocate for their children are entrusting the fate of their children to the schools (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

Similarly, Allen (2012) discussed the importance of parents challenging the school procedures as a means to disrupt racially stratifying policies. Hrabowski et al. (1998) also spoke

to the significance of fathers participating in their son's education for successful outcomes. Under the umbrella of CRT, these situations can be explained using counterstories and one of CRT's tenets of challenging liberalism as an American foundation and the notion that all things are equal. Ladson-Billings (1998) implied that the use of voice—or "naming your reality"—is the way CRT links form and substance in scholarship and that these stories can provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting.

The literature for this section supported the notion that there is a prevalence of institutionalized racism in American culture. Howard and Reynolds (2008) cited several accounts where parents spoke of experiences at the school and ways that they support their children. One parent wrote:

> Many people don't think that we (African Americans) belong here (in suburban communities), so we need to be on top of our kids to do right, and then to make sure we have cultural events for our kid. Make sure that they have access to Gifted and Talented Education (GATE), AP classes, college curriculum. That's what we need to do. (Howard & Reynolds, 2008, p. 90)

These comments, captured using counterstories, speak to the general understanding that African American parents have regarding the need to be involved in the schooling of their children.

Howard and Reynolds (2008) also showed that types of parental involvement varied from parent to parent. For example, some parents believed that their involvement was tied to the quality of the school that their children attended. Hence, parents who workers and held a high regard for the school took a more distant approach toward school involvement activities—a

perspective that could be easily misread by teachers and administrators. In one instance, when asked about being involved at the school, a parent expressed the following sentiment:

> I hear many of the (White) parents who say that they spend all of this time in classes, volunteering and everything else. But, what about people who work, and have jobs? We are still involved even though we are not in the school. (Howard & Reynolds, 2008, p. 89)

Clearly, African American parents recognize the need to be involved at the school site. And although levels of involvement may vary, studies reveal that African American parents feel their school involvement has a positive impact on the schooling experiences of their children. This seems to be particularly the case among parents of Black students attending predominantly White, independent schools (Burke, 2010; Ohikuare, 2013). However, "given the complex task of facilitating Black children's competence in Black and mainstream culture, particularly in predominantly White settings, Black parents may focus much of their energy in at home parent involvement behaviors" (Burke, 2010, p. 78), where specific issues of culture and race can be more effectively engaged, as compared to the school context.

Chapter Summary

Although the studies discussed represent different perspectives of African American experiences in school and the outcomes these experiences produce, one thing is quickly apparent. Successful African American students are able to draw upon several resources, such as cultural wealth and social capital as means to be successful in affluent White academic environments (Allen, 2012). Additionally, parents play a huge part in preparing and supporting students in these environments (Burke, 2010). Howard (2003) attempted to provide insights

through the use of counter storytelling into the way that high school students see their identities being formed by noting that as students were asked to describe their "academic identity." There were also frequent discussions of college and their parents' expectations for them to attend college. Likewise, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) noted that the family is also a connection to the larger African American community and, thus, it is also important for the family of African American school students to be actively involved in their student's schooling and extracurricular activities.

The literature also repeatedly suggests the need for more research that engages with issues related to the education of African American students, particularly Black male students. For example, with respect to parent involvement, Howard and Reynolds (2008) insisted that researchers have a responsibility to contribute to a largely overlooked area of study in the professional literature: the involvement of African American middle class parent involvement as a proactive means of advocating for Black male students whose academic prospects can be vastly improved. Many of the studies reviewed for this chapter also speak to the need for future research efforts that systematically study racism and the effects of racialization on African American male students. Kenyatta (2102) argued that teacher education programs with the goal of eliminating racialized processes must focus on practitioner inquiry that guides teachers to honestly interrogate their beliefs about African American students, consider the impact they have on students, and work to create curricula and practices that promote genuine inclusion, consideration of students' cultural differences, and supports the process of their cultural identity. Darder (2012) contended that this is only possible within an educational context where values and practices that support cultural democracy are firmly in place.

As discussed throughout, CRT posits itself as a legal and moral theoretical framework to address the achievement gap of African American males, but CRT alone is not enough. Howard and Reynolds (2008) noted that it is their hope that families, parents, and schools engage in dialogue and collaboration, hearing and learning about different perspectives and needs as they attempt to create optimum educational conditions for all students. Another area with few empirical studies is the examination of schools that have been successful in educating Black male students. For example, Green (2012) noted that in his experience, the most exemplary example of a private school establishing high expectations is the Piney Woods School in Mississippi, which has been a beacon of Black achievement in high school education for more than 100 years and is where my grandmother graduated from in 1924. Yet, little research has explored in depth the independent school's success with African American males. Similarly, since this topic is also personal to me as the mother of a young African American son attending a predominately White private school, I frequently ponder the plight of other African American parents raising sons and their educational experiences. How school systems provide access to parents and students of color will have long-term effects on the academic future of Black males. Hence, research that focuses specifically on these issues is a community imperative.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Recently, I discovered that most of my conversations with friends are a series of stories we tell each other. Through these stories we indirectly learn much about each other's lives, unhindered by modesty or shame.

---James Banks, 1990, p. 49

There are several things that I am unable to change. I am unable to change the skin that I was born with. I am unable to change the fact that I am a mother to a young African American male. I am unable to change the racist binary that historically has existed as a barrier to access for many people of color. Therefore, in thinking about the methodology for my research, I wanted to provide a venue in which young Black males would be able to articulate their own voices by sharing with me their stories about school without interruption, negative interpretation, or judgment. Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) posited that narrative inquiry—the study of experience as story—is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience and further that narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon.

Some trace the legacy of storytelling in the African American community back to the beginnings of enslavement when, as a people, we were silenced and forced to find ways to communicate with each other in secret. The telling of those stories provided the experience to the listener and at the same time validated the experience itself. However, in "African and African American Storytelling," Wilson (2002) argued, "since the beginning of time, storytelling has been an important event in the African and African American communities. Through

storytelling, questions were answered, history was conveyed, and lifelong lessons were taught and learned" (para. 5).

Creating a place for the voices of young African American males was not something that I took lightly. I felt that it was my responsibility to provide a safe place where my research participants were able to share openly and honestly their schooling experiences and where I was able to contextualize and engage with their stories in ways that allowed their lived experiences to teach us about who they are, what they have experienced, and what they believe other young men like them should have as students in independent schools. In collecting and sharing these stories, this research has sought to learn from the wisdom of the voices of the young African American men who contributed their powerful insights to our understanding of their experience.

Research Questions

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research sought to explore the experiences of African American males and the influence and impact their attendance at predominantly White, independent schools had on their lives within that context. The following research questions informed the study:

1. How do young adult African American males who have attended predominately White independent schools speak about their schooling experiences?
2. To what extent do these students express feeling embraced and nurtured by their peers, teachers, and administrators at school, particularly with respect to their cultural development as African American males?
3. What recommendations do young adult African American males who have attended predominately White schools have for making these independent school

environments more welcoming and conducive to the overall development of African American students and their cultural and academic formation?

Qualitative Methods

This research utilized a qualitative approach, which can provide context, understanding, depth, comparison, and voice in the study of social phenomena (Tierney & Clemens 2011), making it well suited for this research. Critical narrative, consistent with Critical Race Theory's (CRT) view of racialized inequalities, is implemented in ways that critically engage questions of asymmetrical relations of power in order to unveil the oppressive or repressive structures within schools and society that marginalize populations (Brown, 2000).

Moreover, conducting the research by way of critical narratives assisted me in creating the conditions for the African American men participating in this study to have an open space, whereby their past experiences as students attending independent schools were shared and respected. As a collective group, these individuals gave voice to a phenomenon that is, in fact, undertheorized and therefore seldom discussed in the literature. Beginning with an overarching respect for ordinary lived experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only about valorizing the lived experience of individuals but also an exploration into the social, cultural, and institutional perceptions and insights constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted within—but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006).

Glenda Moss (2004) outlined the tension in the application of narrative methodology. In the examination of the provisions of trustworthiness as evidence of research accountability and shared responsibility, Moss posited that it is the researcher's responsibility is to engage the

reader and outline the boundaries between these two tensions. Generally, narratives are understood as stories that include a temporal ordering of events and an effort to make something out of those events (Sandelowski, 1991). What constrains the research relationship in each case is the mutual commitment to telling critical stories of experience as works of social justice (Moss, 2004).

In addition, a focus group method was employed to gather information from five parents whose sons had been or were currently enrolled in predominantly White, independent schools. The focus group entails a process by which a small group of people with common interests are brought together to participate in a guided discussion. In his discussion about conducting focus groups, Bill Berkowitz (2016) explained that participants are actively encouraged not only to express their own opinions, but also to respond to other members and questions posed by the leader. As such, "focus groups offer a depth, nuance, and variety to the discussion that would not be available through surveys" (Berkowitz, 2016, para. 34). Moreover, because focus groups are generally structured, the method tends to provide useful information in a short timeframe. "In short, focus groups are a good way to gather in-depth information about a community's thoughts and opinions" (Berkowitz, 2016, para. 34).

Research Design

The research design was guided by the study's focus on the narratives of African American men who attended and graduated from an independent school in the previous five years. The critical narrative approach was structured and developed in an open and fluid manner that allowed participants to find room to both guide and move the narrative session according to their particular needs, interests, perceptions, and insights about the phenomenon that is the

subject of study. The participants, the process of data collection and transcription, and, finally, the means of analysis comprised the major aspects of the research design. I am National Institutes of Health certified and received approval from the Institutional Review Board to conduct research in the field.

Participants

Critical narrative participants. The participants (see Table 2) for this study consisted of seven African American males who had attended primarily White, independent schools during grades nine through 12. Participants attended all four years, or for some part of those years, in this educational setting. The minimum attendance requirement was at least one year as a student at the independent school. Independent schools utilized had an African American population at the school. Participants were selected according to the following criteria: (a) they were African American, (b) they were male, (c) they attended an independent school in greater Los Angeles, and (d) they graduated between 2012 and 2016. Initial contact with the participants was made through identification from my professional networks, school contacts, and social media outlets. When the participant pool was identified, a letter of introduction was distributed detailing the parameters of the study, rationales, and how the information would be collected.

Table 2

Participants in the Study

Name	Age	Location of Independent High School Attended	Grades Attended	Currently Attending University	University Classification
Marc	24	Los Angeles (D)	6th – 12th	no	Graduated
William	19	Los Angeles (A)	7th – 12th	yes	Sophomore
Chance	19	Los Angeles (A)	9th – 12th	yes	Sophomore
Thomas	19	Los Angeles (A)	7th – 12th	yes	Freshman
Nate	19	Los Angeles (A)	9th – 12th	yes	Sophomore
Paul	18	Northern CA (C)	9th – 12th	yes	Freshman
Brandon	18	Los Angeles (A)	7th – 12th	yes	Freshman

The young men in this study were all willing participants and ranged in ages from 18 to 24. Each participant self-identified as African American. Six of the seven participants attended a predominately White, independent school located in Los Angeles, and one participant attended a predominately White, independent school located in Northern California. The participants shared their stories via video conferencing tools. Participants were eager to share their experience. The duration of the narrative sessions was approximately 60 minutes.

Parent group participants. The parent participants (see Table 3) included three Black mothers and two Black fathers who had an African American son who was currently attending or had attended a predominately White, independent school. Participants were selected from a convenience sampling of parents I already knew had children currently enrolled in an independent school. The five parent participants were all university graduates who identified themselves as predominantly middle class. None of the parents in this study had attended a predominantly White independent school. Participants understood that the study was primarily

focused on the narrative of young African American men who had graduated from schools similar to those of their own sons. Hence, they understood that their participation was focused on gathering additional parents' insights.

Table 3

Parent Group Participants

Name	Ethnicity /Race	Gender	Socioeconomic class	Highest level of education	Attended a predominately White independent school
Pat	Black	Female	Upper/Affluent	Advanced Degree	No
Mike	Black	Male	Middle	Doctorate	No
Dawn	Black	Female	Middle	High School	No
Bill	Black/Filipino	Male	Lower Middle	University Graduate	No
Gia	Black	Female	Middle	Advanced Degree	No

Data Collection

The data collection was conducted utilizing critical narratives and a parent focus group. What follows is a discussion of how these two methods were employed. Moreover, I wish to underscore the importance of anonymity in this study. No real names were used in the reporting of the data. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The participants shared their stories via video conferencing tools. Participants were eager to share their experience. The duration of the narrative sessions were approximately 60 minutes.

Critical narratives. Participants for the critical narratives who met the criteria were invited to share their schooling experiences in independent schools through participation in a narrative session. Four open-ended prompts were utilized at the beginning of the narrative session. These prompts included:

1. Tell me your story about being an African American male in a predominately White, independent school.
2. How did you experience your teachers, and what did they expect of you?
3. How were your parents involved in your schooling?
4. Do you feel you were ready or prepared to be in a predominately White, elite, independent school environment? If yes, why? If no, why not?

The purpose of the narrative session was to collect the data for this study, namely participants' stories and counterstories about their experiences during grades nine through 12 in an independent school. Participants either met with me at a location of their choosing or attended a videoconference with me during a time when they were able to allocate 60–90 minutes for the session. All conversations were voice recorded so that an accurate recount of the conversation was available for review. Additionally, participants were encouraged to share as much or as little as they liked during the conversation. I intended to collect participant responses during one session for each participant; however, if other sessions were needed, they were available. Since participants could have been attending universities located in different parts of the world, flexibility was necessary.

Parent focus group. Parent participants meeting the criteria for the focus group were invited to share their experiences as the parent of a Black male attending a predominately White,

independent school. Four open-ended prompts were used to encourage the parents in the focus group to share. They included:

1. Why did you send your son to a predominately White, elite, independent school?
2. Do you (or did you) have any concerns about his experience in the school?
3. In what ways does (or did) the school support his cultural identity development?
4. In what ways do (or did) you prepare your son for the school environment? Or in what ways do (or did) you support your son in navigating the school experience?

Setting

All of the male participants were interviewed using a video conferencing tool. Each interview was conducted during a time that was convenient for the participant. All participants had access to a laptop computer and utilized it for the interview. Interviews took approximately 30 to 60 minutes to conduct, and participants were encouraged to speak freely. Parent group participants were interviewed as a group, and their responses were recorded via video recorder.

Data Transcription

After each participant session and parent focus group had been recorded, the session was transcribed. The data were coded and decoded according to repetitive themes associated with their schooling experiences. The data were coded and decoded for patterns that represent significant thematic concepts and repetitive ideas that responded to the research questions that informed this study. This coding process was organic, and no predetermined themes were designated. By identifying and analyzing common ideas and thematic patterns in participant responses, I traced the schooling experiences of the participants, noted shared experiences, and identified recommendations offered by participants.

Analysis of the Data

As repetitive themes emerged in the narratives and the focus group, they were analyzed through a CRT lens, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2, bringing together the date with the literature in the field, in an effort to determine the findings and make salient conclusions and recommendations. The presentation of the date follows in Chapter 4, and the analysis and discussion of the date, along with conclusions and recommendations, are offered in the final chapter, with the hope that this study will drive new conversations about the schooling experiences of African American males who attend predominantly White, independent schools and to highlight the importance of the perspectives that emerged from the shared experiences of the young men and the parents who participated in this study.

CHAPTER 4

STORIES AND INSIGHTS: THE DATA

O, let my land be the land where liberty

Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,

But opportunity is real, and life is free,

Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,

Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

-- "Let America be America Again," Langston Hughes, 1935

This study, focused on the schooling experiences of African American males who attended predominately White, independent schools, created a space for the male participants to tell their stories about their experiences in these schools and to offer insight regarding what shaped those experiences and how those experiences could be improved for future young men learning in these environments. An underlying assumption here was that gaining an understanding of the schooling experiences of these young men is a critical component to examining how predominately White independent schools can better provide educational experiences for all students and, in particular, serve the academic and social needs of Black male students.

In addition, this study considered the role of parents as participants in the educational process of their Black male sons and how they supported their sons in navigating the predominately White, independent school environments. The first part of the discussion in this

chapter focuses on the stories of the eight young African American men who participated in the critical narrative sessions. Wherever possible their voices are brought into play in ways that make the telling of their stories meaningful. At the end of the chapter, a summary of the major themes identified from the critical narratives and parent focus group will be presented. These will be more fully discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Stories of the African American Male Participants

Marc's Story

Late on a Monday evening, Marc and I connected via ZOOM Video Conferencing. He had finished working for the day and was settling in at his apartment on the East Coast. After light small talk and a restatement of the purpose of the study, we began the narrative session. Marc shared with me that he had attended a predominately White, independent School located in Los Angeles, California, for grades six through12. He graduated from that school in 2010 and entered an Ivy League University. He graduated from the University with a BA and was currently working full-time on the East Coast. Throughout the time March was a high school student, he was raised by his mother who was a professional with a university degree. His family was very accomplished and several other members were also professionals with advanced degrees. Thus, when he entered the independent school environment at age 11, he had already been exposed to a high level of achievement and academic success.

Marc began his story by recounting his initial experience at the predominately White independent school:

> I guess my experience as a Black male, or I guess Black male at a predominately White school was, it started as that of an oddity. There was a lot of intrigue; a lot of these kids

> hadn't really had friends that were Black before or known kids that were Black before. But they listened. This was about the time when the rapper 50 Cent was getting pretty popular. Rap music was getting really mainstream. A lot of kids were listening and enjoying it. And then so, a lot of them also formed, and because of TV and other things, formed a pretty committed and locked in expectation for what kids like me were going to do and how we were going to act and talk and whatnot.

Marc recognized that he did not fit the typical stereotype of African American males that his White classmates at his independent school thought he should.

As a young man in high school, Marc was often perceived as the "smart kid" within his own community. He noted that he did not fit the stereotypical description of young Black males portrayed in the media and, thus, felt that he disappointed the expectations of his peers.

> I didn't really fit a lot of what I think kids expected from me. I think I was pretty disappointing or kids were pretty disappointed because I talked—I used proper grammar, just like to read a lot, play video games, didn't really go out that much. And so it was weird at first because I first dealt with a wave of kids that were really interested in getting to know me, like know what I did and stuff like that and then slowly tapered off and people we're oh, this is an anomaly. All right, we'll go on to the kids who were on the basketball team and stuff like that.

As Marc continued his schooling at his independent school, he began to realize that the same classmates who were so intensely interested in him initially, where no longer interested in him because he did not meet their expectations of a Black male or offer them the excitement that they seemed to be seeking from him. He was not the exciting Black student; a reality that he

eventually simply accepted as the norm. At first, Marc was confused as to why the other kids seemed to want to know all about him and then lost interest. About this he said:

> After a while, I learned not to take it personally and look at everything that happened and understand why and then after that it was pretty easy to just do me, not have to worry about it. That's how it was it was with the kids.

Marc did very well academically. He maintained a high GPA and was able to excel in advanced courses. Being one of the few Blacks at the school, Marc was always recognized for his high academics. He mentioned that his teachers were very supportive of his academic excellence. He also noted that the "Black teachers definitely looked out for the Black students and asked how you were doing." These interactions with his Black teachers were an important part of his schooling experience. Marc proceeded to explain how certain teachers offered spaces that became safe havens for Black students who were not comfortable in other spots around the campus. Marc recalled these "teachers would keep their classrooms open and there was a little community of kids of color that would go hangout in the classroom, eat lunch in there, or something like that with the teacher." He went on to say, "It was like a club almost kind of thing. If you're not really comfy anywhere else on campus, it's a cool spot to go."

However, Marc also spoke of interactions with teachers that were not always so positive. He recalled an uncomfortable incident with one of his White teachers, who tried to connect outside of what Marc called his "comfort zone," through a stereotypical reference to his 'ashy" skin:

> I remember some of the White teachers were almost as intrigued about my Blackness as the kids were. I remember one time in my biology class, I went to go grab some lotion

> and rub it on my arms and my teacher was, “Oh, getting ashy over there? What, you didn’t think I knew about ashy, did you?” “Oh man Mr. Porter, you got me.” But that was the thing I don't know that I ever got used to was people stepping outside of their comfort zone and trying to relate in ways that I could’ve been offended by, but I just tried to take everything as it came.

Nevertheless, Marc noted that most of the teachers were happy that he was doing well in their classes and were “excited for him to succeed.” He spoke of them, for the most part, with high regard, but in telling those stories, he shared another negative experience about a teacher who seemed to feel that Marc both needed saving and needed to be taught a lesson:

> But there was definitely one teacher who really fit the bill of that teacher who’s going to be saving the minority in his class, giving you special attention that you really don't need because you can do fine on your own. I remember I had some issue where I wrote a big research paper, put a lot of time into it, and then I printed it out right before class to hand it to him and I didn’t look at it and the toner and the printer had been messed up and so three of the pages were not clear and he gave me a “D,” without telling me that the paper was messed up and later he told me it was because part of being professional and growing up is paying attention to detail and stuff and he wanted to teach me a lesson. It was a personal thing saying, “Yeah, Marc, I'm trying to mentor you right now.”

Whether enacting microaggressions or the savior mentality, Marc’s teachers were a reality that he simply had to deal with. He was dependent on them for grades, recommendations, and an overall livelihood, which represented a critical part of his schooling experience. Oftentimes their “help” was unsolicited and unnecessary. Marc quickly added, however: “But

yeah, I'd say he was definitely an anomaly, most teachers weren't like him but that did happen. He was one of the people I dealt with."

As uncomfortable as these experiences were, Marc still shared that his experiences at the school were mostly positive. This was largely due to the fact that there were a few select teachers that had a strong impact and influence on his schooling experience. Citing his college counselor as having a positive impact on his schooling experiences, Marc felt a connection with her because she was "similar to him and wasn't what people expected." This counselor encouraged Marc to "be himself" and try new things, rather than worrying about fitting in with a particular crowd. This counselor consistently encouraged Marc to "do his own thing."

During his critical narrative session, I asked Marc about his mother's involvement in his education. About this, Marc shared:

> She cracked the whip at home, made sure I got my work done, made sure I got up on time to go to school, helped or would find me help if I needed help with any of my work, like if it was piling up or something. She went to bat for me when that one teacher was being just ridiculous on multiple occasions, and then in other situations like that where it just seemed I wasn't getting a fair shake, she was up in arms.

Marc credited his mother with making sure that he had everything that he needed to be successful and felt that she was his biggest advocate. Marc's mother was an educated woman who held a high-level position at a communications company. Oftentimes at school events, other White parents would inquire about what his mother did for a living or where they lived. He recalled that one time a White parent said, "Oh, it must be pretty far for you to get over here for a track meet," assuming that they did not live in the local neighborhood. Although everyone at the

school did not say these types of comments, Marc did speak about experiencing negative and racist comments throughout his schooling. He explained that his mother frequently shared her thoughts with him about how he fit in as a Black male in the predominately White independent school environment:

> Just little subtle but clear monuments to the idea that everyone doesn't think we're all equal all the time. So she made sure while I was having my fun in school and trying to be color blind or just enjoy what I was doing, I also kept in mind the environment that I was in and understood it even if I didn't really internalize it. That made sense. She did good for that and I think that's helped me pass school.

Marc went on to graduate from one of the most prestigious universities in the country. When he entered the work force, he moved into a very lucrative career with very few Black males. He commented on some of racial issues he still had to contend with in the workplace, which were not too dissimilar from the politics he had had to navigate in high school:

> I'm immersed in situations where even if it's a big company, small company, you'll be in a situation where it's like there aren't a lot of people that look like you and granted people have seen Black people before; it's not like everyone's a kids that grew up sheltered but, it's still maybe they don't hang out with Black people that often and so you can tell that there are different ways that people show their discomfort around you and it might be super nice or super interested in what you're doing or give you cultural compliments that they might not give other people or I guess in some of the--one of the least pleasant forms is you might be at a work drinks event thing, like at happy hour and then jokes start to come out that people wouldn't dare say at the workplace. Stuff like

> that. And yeah, I don't know, I think being in school and learning to not let that kind of thing get to me in school helped a lot with work and helps me navigate all the politics with that.

Marc and I concluded the narrative session with his recalling that his independent school had a Black Student Organization. The organization was run by a couple of Black teachers. Of this, he noted positively:

> Kids would also come and learn and take part in all the discussions. I don't know, I thought that was really probably the best thing going for Black kids that might be struggling being in an all-White school." Citing that "perhaps things have changed" since he graduated from his high school, Marc's parting words of wisdom were that, "It's very important to keep everyone empathetic."

William's Story

Early on a Friday morning William and I connected via Zoom video conferencing. He was in his dormitory room looking sleepy, but he said he was excited to share his story with me. Currently attending an Ivy League college on the East Coast, William was a 19-year-old sophomore. He grew up in the greater Los Angeles area and attended predominately White, independent schools, from the fourth grade through the 12th grade. For the purposes of my research, the majority of our conversation focused on grades nine through 12. William attended one of the top ranked independent schools in the United States for grades seven through 12. Coming from a university-educated family, he was groomed from a very early age to be focused on academic achievement. Entering the independent schooling arena at a very early age, he noted

that by the time he got to the senior high level, he was "very acclimated to predominately White schooling environments, because they had been intertwined with his life for several years."

When asked to share a little bit about his schooling experience, William began talking about his experience as "a minority" in the independent school he attended:

> Me, being a minority, there were so few of me that it would be hard to make social groups. It was hard to make friends and have the really strong social groups, but fortunately at my school, especially in my grade, there were about five or six other Black males that came from where I'm from, like live in the same—pretty much the same area and we all had the same ideals, so we built a very strong bond within each other. So we were very closely knit.

Sharing that there were other ethnic groups at his school, William still made a point of letting me know that the school was "mostly White."

What William found to be "an eye-opener" about his transition from a public-school setting to a predominately White, independent school setting in elementary school was that he went from being the smartest kid in the school to a completely different environment. He told me the following about this journey:

> I went to a public school, which was predominately Black and Hispanic and I went there from 1st to 3rd grade and then I transitioned to a predominately White independent school which is in greater Los Angeles. It was an eye opener for me at first because in elementary school from 1st to 3rd grade, I was an honor roll student, I was best person in my class, and it came to a point where I was actually teaching other kids the topics instead of the teacher. Because I was pretty much a teacher, pretty much an assistant, but

> I had a couple of fights in that elementary school because I guess being the smart kid wasn't--it was looked down upon. It was looked down upon, so they would always pick on me and one teacher, my 1st grade teacher said—she recognized this and she said, "You won't be able to prosper in this environment." So she had to—her sister taught at that independent school—and so she sent me over there and pretty much, the rest is history.

Still, William spoke of the entire experience in the independent schooling arena as a positive one. He asserted, "I feel it most definitely helped on the academic side and it helped socially a little bit too because I was able to interact with very different people, very different minorities." He saw the environment as one that could better prepare him for life after high school, but that was not without concerns. Speaking about the "ups and downs" of his high school experience, William specifically recalled how the social aspects of being in high school affected him. Social events such as birthday parties and after school get-togethers were not invitations that he readily received. He recounted the following:

> So I was actually not—I wasn't really invited to all the popular parties and stuff like that, but nonetheless I was respected, but that was the end of that friendship. They respected me, but as far as the inviting me to their homes or going out with me, that didn't exist pretty much.

William also recalled an experience in the ninth grade when he was sitting with a group of friends. Having always been strong academically, he was taking honors biology at the time. This incident took place during lunch, while he was sitting at the lunch table with several other students who were all White. One of his female friends asked him an honors biology question. He recalled, "She was asking do you understand this? Does anyone at the table understand this?"

He remembered saying that he was able to help her but was cut off by a White student who looked at him and said, “William, you’re not in honors Bio. How could you help her?” In that instance, William did not have to defend himself, because the other students immediately said, “Have you not heard? William is taking all these honors classes. He is doing well. He is one of the top pupils.” What started out as a negative comment, ended up as a positive interaction. However, William still remembered that situation and how his peer did not initially see him as capable of being in honors biology.

Because academics were not an issue for William, he said his teachers usually had very high expectations of him.

> They were very helpful in my process going onto college because I feel like they understood—and these were predominately White teachers. They understood that I was the minority and they would take the initiative saying, “William, I want you to prosper in my class,” so they would send me emails saying, “Can you please meet with me or--you have very intelligent ideas. I would just like for you to speak more because when you do, you really command the class.” So they brought my personality out of me.

They made him feel understood and respected. He felt that his teachers wanted him to do well and to succeed in his classes. He also credited his teachers for providing a strong educational foundation that supported him continuing on to an Ivy League University. He felt thankful toward his teachers and credited his school for opening doors for him.

William, however, credited his mother with being his biggest supporter. As an educator and administrator, she was well versed in educational practices and made sure that he succeeded. He not only credited her with his success in high school and beyond:

> She was very strong in reading and writing and pretty much all facets of the education, so I did have that lifeline that most people I guess you can say most people don't have as far as if I didn't understand a math question, I could go to her if I needed help on my grammatical skills when writing an essay and just formulated a thesis, I can go to her. And to be honest, I still do that! I still do so, even in college I still go to her. So she pushed me. She most definitely pushed me. I guess she saw something within me and she knew that me being in these highly academic schools, the high schools and middle schools that I can really just take the next step and go to an Ivy League school later on in life.

William credited his mother for having the foresight to select his first independent school in fourth grade and for his entire educational trajectory. He wholeheartedly believed that when he transitioned to his independent high school, "The doors just opened for me and I saw myself actually attending an Ivy League school for college." He no longer was taking baby steps but envisioned himself taking large leaps into his future life.

Toward the end of our time together, William shared that he was also a high school student athlete and that he currently participated in athletics on the collegiate level at the university he attended. However, he recalled that this also evoked negative responses in many of his classmates in high school. He recalled that his White classmates always asked what universities he wanted to attend and were always surprised when he mentioned that he planned on attending an Ivy League university. They tended to automatically assume that he wanted to attend a school known for its athletics, as opposed to its academic reputation.

William suggested during his narrative that his high school should consider having more Black, male faculty members as a means of helping other Black students prosper. Thinking back to his Black advisors in high school, he noted:

> I could turn to them and actually talk about stuff saying "Oh, this kid doesn't think that I'm smart enough" or just talk about problems that I have. Yes, also going back to my teachers, I only spoke to them—my White teachers—I only spoke about them as far as how I'm doing academically. I never brought up how I'm doing socially, how I'm doing mentally or just stuff that's going on in the world, whether it be mass murders or police shootings at that time; [instead] I would always go to them [Black teachers] because I know they would understand where I'm coming from, because they have lived it firsthand.

William also shared that as he looked back on his time attending a predominately White independent high school, the five Black male friends that he made there, when he first arrived to the school, were pretty much his lifelines. He concluded he narrative session by saying:

> I could fall back on them and they were experiencing the same stuff that I was, so we could talk about it and share our experiences. And I felt that just building our bond—that just made our bonds even stronger. Looking back at all my independent school friendships, the only people that I talk to currently are those five or six groups of strong African American males. Everyone else, they're just on doing their own thing. They would smile, say hello, but now that we're doing our own things, those ties are cut.

Chance's Story

Chance joined our Zoom conference video interview while sitting outside of his dormitory building. He was bundled up and sporting a beanie because it was 45 degrees outside. He attended a prestigious university on the East Coast, where he was currently a 19-year-old sophomore. He shared that he attended public school until eighth grade and then attended a very prestigious, predominately White independent school from grades nine to12. Citing that, overall, he had a great experience in high school, he was quick to point out that the levels of wealth that he experienced were unlike anything that he had ever been exposed to prior to attending the school. Chance described his family as middle class; both of his parents held advanced degrees and were career professionals. For him, it was not so much the issue of being in a predominantly White environment that caught his attention, but rather the wealth that was at times overwhelming. He said, "The big change was really the wealth and the status of the people, not the race." He did, however, point out that most of the very wealthy were also White.

As friends and social groups are such an important part of high school years, Chance shared that it was hard at first for him to make friends, but through participating in sports he developed a solid set of friends.

> I didn't have very many friends. But towards the end of my sophomore year, I was playing sports and I just gradually became really good friends with the guys on the team and by the end of my sophomore year, I developed like a very strong group of friends. There were six of us and five of us were Black, one of us was White and that White friend was like my best friend from the beginning of 9th grade, like my only friend and he carried over to this new group. So it was just kind of us, like I don't want to say us

against the world and like nobody liked us and we were by ourselves. Like we really—we like considered ourselves kind of like a family. Like I considered them my brothers and we just got really close and basically only hung out with each other. So, I think having that solid group of friends through the latter part of high school made the experience a really enjoyable one.

This initial group of friends proved to be very stabilizing for Chance. He bonded, as mentioned above, with them over sports, and continued to have strong friendships with this group throughout high school and college. Despite not having a lot of White friends, Chance still reported that he did not experience outright racism at his school—although he did note always feeling Black, a feeling that was persistent "pretty much everywhere" he went.

I never really felt discriminated against or anything like that but you know, I just always felt Black. And I mean there's nothing that I can do to change that. I'm going to feel like that wherever I go so I don't even look at that necessarily as a problem. It's just something that I've learned to deal with my whole life. It's just how someone who's grown up poor knows that they're poor and they have to deal with that. I mean Black, there's nothing I can do to change it. I guess I've just gotten used to it and it didn't--that feeling of me feeling Black didn't--it may have escalated going to my predominately White independent school, like I felt it more but, not in a negative way. I never felt—I may have felt out of place but that feeling applies to pretty much everywhere that I go.

I continued to probe Chance because I was intrigued by his comment that he "is always Black." He consciously realized that his school was "mostly White people" and that, in spite of

that, he was able to navigate and have a positive experience. He spoke several times of the exposure that his school offered him, and he was grateful for the opportunity.

As we moved on with Chance's narrative session, he commented on teachers' lowered expectations of him:

> To be completely frank, I feel like my teachers expected a little bit less of me than the other students probably because I was Black, probably because of the school that I came from, not to the point where it was like I felt like they were holding my hand—like it wasn't like that but, I feel like they expected slightly less of me. I think I graduated with a 3.3 and I feel like if I was like a White student they may have--like my deans and such, may have tried to push me to do a little bit better. I felt like because I was Black and the school that I came from, they kind of felt like that was okay, like it was a good GPA.

So, although Chance felt pushed by his teachers, he did not feel pushed to his capacity. He also felt, however, that they did prepare him for college, never connecting the act of teachers not pushing him because he was Black to racism. Chance seemed to express a subtle sense of being conflicted on the issue, as he reflected on his schooling experiences now that he was removed from the environment. Chance realized now that perhaps he was treated differently because of race or economics, but he did not lament it. Moreover, he emphasized that the Black faculty were very involved and this seemed to help him reconcile the issue in his mind.

Once Chance was finished sharing about the teachers, he moved on to discuss his mother. He credited his mother for making sure he attended an independent high school. He always knew that he was going to leave public school for the ninth grade because his mother told him that was how it was going to work. He remembered visiting his high school for the first time and being

amazed. He instantly knew that he wanted to attend. His mother was active in the school community and active in parent organizations. She encouraged him to participate in organizations on campus that were geared toward Black students and was pleased that he had a core group of Black friends.

Chance took the school bus to school daily and shared that "I would not have been able to attend without financial aid; so going there, cost wise, was very good for my parents." Both his mother and father were involved in his schooling, and he credited them for teaching him how to navigate that environment.

> The thing is, I had always--since I said I was in like gifted programs and stuff, I felt like growing up and being Black you have to be three times better because of how people see you. I would always do it in my head. So whenever anything would happen, it was never a shock. I was going through stuff like this since like 1st grade. I already knew about it but since my parents knew, like I was always with my group of friends and they knew who they were, they knew that we were all Black. I pretty much only hung out with them. My parents knew the significance of my group of friends being successful and doing our thing on campus. They probably felt that was enough. They just knew the way that we carried ourselves and the way that we handled business just on our daily lives, that we were giving Black male students a good name.

Chance's parents, moreover, made sure that he did not lose his sense of cultural identity while immersed in the dominant school culture. He commented, "We just knew who we were and that's just how I was raised. So it's probably like all my parents."

Bringing our session to a close, Chance continued to sing the praises of his high school. He still credited his group of core friends with much of his success and satisfaction. He spoke of feeling fortunate and grateful for the experience and was particularly focused on the exposure this environment gave him to wealthy individuals. He offered parting advice to other Black males attending predominately White, independent schools and, as we parted ways and the interview ended, I was left with these last words, which made me smile.

> I mean high school is really hard at times to stand out and be your own person. I would give this to any student but especially Black students; just don't be afraid to be yourself. Don't be afraid to be who you are. You don't have to change for anyone. You don't have to apologize for anything. But just understand that you're Black and you can't change that. The big thing is a lot of people don't understand that they're Black. They don't get it. They don't understand what it entails. They don't understand that they're not and they can never be like other people because they're Black. And by other people I mean White people. So just always remember but you don't have to look at it as a negative. You can look at it as a positive, like this is a great thing. I'm Black. I have a unique opportunity to not be like anyone else and to be one of a kind and also I probably wouldn't have had such a good experience if I didn't have the strong group of friends that I had regardless if they were Black or not but the fact that they were Black probably really was a good thing.

Thomas's Story

Early on a Wednesday afternoon, Thomas and I connected for our video narrative session. Thomas was a 19-year-old freshman attending a prestigious private university on the West Coast. In sharing his background, I found out that he had attended a private parochial

school until the end of fifth grade, and then transitioned to a predominately White, independent school in the greater Los Angeles area until graduation from 12th grade.

Noting that his overall experience at his high school was a positive one, he began his story with an acknowledgement about being Black on a campus where there were not a lot of Black males. He went on to praise his school, and stated that he "really loved it there." It was clear very early in the interview that he felt academically prepared for college and that he really had enjoyed his high school experience. However, as I probed deeper, the following emerged:

> Across the grade, there wasn't a whole lot of unity, we didn't really all sit together, it wasn't—there was actually even a club for all African American students so it was really for anybody. It was for specifically African Americans and raising awareness and culture around campus. The majority of the Black males didn't even go to that. Other Black males that I hung out with, we didn't go. And it almost…it felt like we didn't really acknowledge the fact that we were Black too much when we were at school.

Thomas also spoke of instances when other White classmates would make jokes that were racialized or stereotyping but felt that these microaggressions were not done with malice. He did not feel attacked, stating, "That's just the way it went." Because of the national climate during his 12th grade, Thomas really began to realize that at times he needed to take a step back and observe his surroundings. He spoke of the socials aspect of his school, and how very early on he and his friends realized that, as Black males, they were not able to navigate every situation in the same manner as their White peers. About this he recounted:

> And so, being a Black male in that world caused you to take a step back at times when going to parties and stuff, especially the parties that they had. A lot of alcohol and things

were used and given the things that were going around across the country, Trevon Martin and all the other various police shootings, we had to be very careful about what we were doing. And, one thing me and my friends always knew, we were the two or three Black kids at an all-White party. And as much as we would joke, "Oh, if something happens, we're going to go to jail and the rest of you aren't." As much as we joked about that, it was still something that was very serious and that we understood was a big possibility. So in terms of enjoying everybody and drinking or doing this or that, we really didn't do that because we knew as Black males, our paths and our trajectory would be very different, should the police arrive. And so it really caused us to hold back from who we were and we couldn't really maybe express and do some of the things that everybody else was doing because we knew that should something happen, that it could take a very, very bad path.

As mentioned above, although a school-sanctioned club existed for the Black students, Thomas and his friends did not participate on a regular basis. When I asked about this, he explained:

I don't think we really wanted to face those social issues. And I know when we would go to those meetings, we would talk about the social issues, we'd talk about the police shootings that were going on around the country. We'd talk about how do we get the message across to the rest of the school about how we feel and how we want to be portrayed? I think for a lot of us that so much of that was talked about in other classes that to go to that meeting and have to hear about it and almost really having to come together and unite and agree on how we feel about it, I think we didn't really want to do

that. I know particularly me, I didn't want to have to go talk about why I'm different. And I think us uniting and coming together as Black people, it had shed a light more on that and really cut us off as—made that racial barrier a little bit bigger and so I'd rather take some time and to hang out with people get to know them and blend in with the community rather than make a big statement and always try to stand for something else that other people might take offense to or see as me trying to attack them in some way. So I think yeah, we were just were preoccupied by school work, sports, we were tired of hearing all the things going on around the country and issues and so yeah we just chose really not to take part in that.

Throughout his narrative session, Thomas made it clear to me that he was concerned with portraying negating stereotypes as a Black male. He did not want to joke about Black stereotypes or portray Black negatively in any way. He was very conscientious regarding this matter and focused on it several times throughout the interview. He said, "When you joke about racial stereotypes, you are giving them life." He continued to talk about this in the context of his school environment and how he and his friends navigated it. Taking a very serious tone, Thomas seemed to want me to really understand where he was coming with respect to his social responsibility as a Black male to other Black males and possibly all Black people in general. He asserted, "You have to really watch what they say (White people) and understand that and I think they are learning and understanding the way I've understood that you can't joke about that anymore and that it's too much going on to take these serious situations lightly."

When Thomas began to discuss other aspects of his school experience, he revealed that he was diagnosed with a chronic condition in ninth grade. Being diagnosed with ADHD was

actually a relief to him because he had been struggling academically, and this diagnosis allowed him to receive assistance in school. He situated both his diagnosis and being Black in the following way:

> Relating that to being a Black male, it was hard because I spoke to previous students who had struggled, previous Black males who had gone to my school and who had struggled academically, and asked them what is it like when you go in a classroom and you feel you're the dumbest kid there? And feeling like having people look at you like, "Oh, the only reason you're here is to play sports," and I played football and I ran track. And so really having that and getting the diagnosis allowed me to pull back and really look at the bigger picture and that while yes they may be looking at me as the only reason you're here is because you're Black or that the school needs diversity, I understood that no I'm working just as hard as them and while I may not be getting as good of grades, I'm happy with the results that I'm getting. And that the reason for some of my academic struggles is not due to my skin color; it is a bigger medical reason. And so that at times was a challenge.

Given his diagnosis, Thomas was allowed certain accommodations while at school with regard to his academics. He spoke of feeling more at ease with other students with the same diagnosis because their struggles were the same, and they could all relate to each other. This was significant because the population receiving the accommodations was very diverse. He saw this as unifying and connecting him with other students. It made him feel more like a regular student, as opposed to a Black student. Thomas was very open regarding his medical condition and felt that sharing about it in this context was an important contribution.

Even though academics were a challenge for Thomas during parts of this school at his predominately White, independent school, he still felt that all of his teachers were fully vested in his success and were understanding of his needs for grades nine through 12. He felt helped, supported, and that his teachers had an understanding of his needs based on his medical diagnosis. He never felt focused on because of his Blackness and noted that he did not feel like race was a factor in his schooling. When I urged him to say more about this, Thomas was content with his statements and really had nothing more to offer on the subject.

Thomas then recalled with ease the words of advice that his father told him before he transitioned into the school in seventh grade.

> This is different than what you had experienced in years before. You are going to be dealing with predominately more affluent White people and going to these schools, they're very expensive schools, top schools in the country. They're not going to be focused on religion or this and that. Your skin color will become more of a factor than I think I had ever realized before. They do look at things differently than the way they see Black people is less of an, "Oh, they're my neighbor," as opposed to "they come from a different world."

Thomas also mentioned how his parents always checked in with him and made sure that he was feeling supported. They seemed very aware of his circle of friends. During his ninth-grade year, they were particularly active while he was transitioning to the upper school environment. He noted, "They did a great job of helping me through my diagnosis and helped me relax and understand that I did not have to play up being Black so much." He was grateful that parents helped him navigate the pressure of being at a highly competitive independent school

environment. His school environment placed a lot of stress socially and academically on him and his "parents did a great job of taking that stress off of me and getting me to calm down and just have fun."

As our session was coming to a close, Thomas wanted to make sure that I really understood that his time at his independent school was time well spent. He felt that the experience worked well for him because he had supports in place and his personality helped him handle the environment. However, he also has thought about what future students like him might possibly need to be successful in such a high-pressure environment. He mentioned that the school needed to continue to make greater effort to provide a diverse community of learners that respect inclusive practices. He knew that we all have different personalities and wondered how well situated his independent school was to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Nate's Story

Nate was a 19-year-old sophomore attending an Ivy League University on the East Coast. He shared that he had attended public school until completing eighth grade and then transitioned into his predominately White, independent school. He attended that school from ninth to 12th grade. It was a Thursday morning when we met via video conferencing for his session, while he was in his dorm room between classes. He seemed eager to participate in the interview and indicated that he was happy to do so.

When asked about his schooling experiences at his high school, he fondly recalled positive experiences at the school and with his many friends.

> I mean I have no complaints about my experience. My experience was pretty good. I don't think I ever had any instances that really like revolved around race. I think the

> environment I was in felt pretty comfortable where I was. I had a lot of Black friends, a lot of White friends, a lot of Asian friends, friends from all different backgrounds. So I was very comfortable with where I was. Compared to where I am now, I wasn't as conscious about racial dynamics, that kind of thing.

Nate further shared that he grew up in a predominately White community and always attended predominately White schools. He credited this as the reason he was very comfortable in mostly White environments. He stated, "That's kind of all I've known so I think I've just kind of been bred to be comfortable in all those different spaces."

As he told his story, he mentioned little regarding his teachers, but did say that they were amazing, encouraging, and very nice. He also made a point of letting me know that there were no conflicts with his teachers and that his teachers understood his background. Although he shared that his experience was positive, he did tell me about the following incident that involved other Black male students:

> Something I just thought of, this wasn't an incident for me but it was something that did happen. There was an incident where one faculty member—there were a few kids trying to get into a basketball game and I think a couple of them happened to be Black—and that faculty member, even though they were students, did not let them onto the court. I don't want to jack up the story but I just know—the base of the story, basically, she didn't let the Black students in, even though they were students.

Although he did not really elaborate on this particular story, he did feel that it was important to share. He also wanted me to know that even though his schooling experience was a positive one, his school could have done a better job of addressing the lack of faculty of color. He noted,

> The Black faculty members that we do have bring a lot to the school and I hope that they're representations of what the school could be more of. So, I hope that is being addressed but, I know that was an issue when I was there.

Nate shared that his parents were supportive of him and wanted him to go to a good school. He also said that they realized that he had not grown up around other Black families, and "Wished that he grew up around more Black spaces." Nate's parents wanted him to get good grades so that he could attend a good college and encouraged him to excel in his studies. Their main focus was not the school environment but that attending that type of school would be advantageous later in his life.

Nate said he participated in student groups that were aimed at bringing the Black students together. As a student athlete, Nate also felt that he represented both groups and offered the following comment, "So as a Black man, a student, and an athlete, those were some spaces that were definitely important to me and I made sure I was a representative of, so that I could show people what those three worlds were about." He also credited his participation in his Black student groups as, "Laying a foundation in terms of exploring my identity as a Black man." Because this student group was a predominately Black space, he felt it gave him a chance to explore that space, which was not something that he had experienced in the past. Nate closed his story by affirming that these group experiences "allowed him to think about where he stood as a Black person, as a young Black man."

Paul's Story

On a Sunday afternoon, I had the pleasure of meeting Paul via Zoom conferencing for his narrative session. He was in his university dorm room when we connected. Currently attending a

small university on the East Coast, he was eager to start our session. Paul had attended a prestigious predominately White, independent school in Northern California. Situated in a very affluent community, he explained that his high school had very few Blacks in attendance.

> It was interesting because first of all, I was the first Black, well, not the first; I was the only Black kid in my grade. So that was definitely interesting. It's pretty cool because I could get to meet a lot of different people. Being there, I was able to see a lot of different things there. They were able to show me a lot of things.

With respect to the question of race, Paul shared that at times his White friends did not know how far to take a joke or a comment. This was something that he had to navigate and eventually was comfortable telling them when to stop. He spoke of good relationships and that, often times, his White friends had just not been around very many Blacks. He noted that, "After a while I got used to asking them to stop or letting them know that their comments were not funny."

Paul credited his experiences at his high school for making him the person that he was today. Starting his discussion with ninth grade, he described himself as a shy young man who was a few months younger than his grade-level peers. Once at his high school, he was forced to try new things and make new friends. Living in greater Los Angeles, he did not know any of the students at his new school. Thus, he had to make all new friends. He began to participate in social activities at his school and began to forge close and meaningful friendships. He recommended his experience to others and wanted to make sure that students from his neighborhood knew about his school and had the opportunity to attend.

In keeping with his positive portrayal of his schooling experiences, Paul shared that his teachers were also extremely supportive. They encouraged him to participate in leadership positions. He felt that they had treated him just like they treated other students, and he felt that they were "amazing." He also mentioned that his mother was the reason that he even attended his high school. Paul credited his mother for pushing him academically and for his independence. Although he did not speak at great length about either his mother or his teachers, what he did say about both was extremely positive. We concluded our session with Paul telling me that he had no regrets about his high school experience in a predominantly White, independent school and felt the experience prepared him well for college.

Brandon's Story

Brandon and I were able to connect in the afternoon between his classes. He was currently attending a private university located outside of greater Los Angeles. Brandon was in his first year of college. When asked about his schooling experience, he candidly responded that, "It was somewhat surreal." He shared that there were very few Black students at his school. So few, that overall, that Brandon felt it was a factor that had negatively impacted his experience.

> You definitely felt like a minority just because there are few people that look like you, it was very easy to find them. I mean, to that extent, it did help with a close sense of community, because there were so few of us that we had to band together; but it was more strange than anything.

Brandon felt that his school was a highly competitive environment that was hyper-focused on academics, grades, and getting into an Ivy League college. Overall, he stated that his experience

was “Not that great,” but that he had had a much better experience in 12th grade. Prior to 12th grade, he had had a few troubling experiences.

For Brandon, the competitiveness was the source of stress and negative feelings. He remembered being constantly stressed about his grades and about getting into a good college. He also mentioned that the students generated a lot of the stress and put pressure on themselves. For all of the stress, he did feel that his parents were a constant source of support. His mother kept him involved in African American youth groups and made sure that he was surrounded with positive Black role models. She was constantly pushing him to do well academically and was concerned that he needed to get into a “good” college. His mother was also active at his school and, thus, was connected to the administration and the school social scene. This also allowed her to be an advocate for her son as she was very present in the life of the school.

Brandon’s father was very active in his college application process and pushed him to apply to several Ivy League schools. Brandon seemed to have close relationship with his parents and, in particular, with his mother. He even mentioned that he would call his mother after our session. Brandon stated that both of his parents “weren’t trying to sugarcoat things” and would make it very clear that “this was the reality of the situation.” He quoted his mother, saying, “You have to get whatever edge that you can. You are a Black male and they want you. They need you because they need you to diversify the population.” Brandon felt that his mother was always trying to show him that he had several options for college, even if his school was only interested in Ivy League.

Although Brandon stated that his high school experience with his teachers was “fine,” he did recall two separate incidents where his interaction with his teachers was negative. One

incident involved a miscommunication regarding homework. Brandon realized that his teacher thought that he did not value the homework because he asked for more structure regarding the collection of the material. The teacher interpreted Brandon's request as a lack of interest in the content and, thus, gave him negative marks. Brandon described the situation as follows:

> Homework was not collected on a regular basis and I told her that I probably would end up putting it off if I didn't have some way to check in with her regularly to make sure I do the Homework at a more reasonable time. She took it like, it's not worth my time to do this work and so I am not going to do it until the last second, which was not even close to what I meant. For a while, she treated me differently because she thought I did not care. But once that miscommunication got solved, things worked out.

In this instance, Brandon's mother and college advisor had to intervene and set a meeting with the teacher to work things out. Although Brandon moved past this incident, he did not ever figure out why the teacher had developed such a negative opinion of him. The next incident he recounted was one that appeared to have been very impactful on his overall schooling experience.

> We were at the end of the "Race" portion of our class course where I tried to talk about disparities and understanding differences of experiences and how we all have our own prejudices and it was just a very heavy conversation. Then he [the teacher] tried to break it up. I continue talking and I think he was just trying to break up the tension. It was just because everyone was kind of caught off guard. It was a lot of heavy stuff throwing at us at once and people weren't really sure what to say, So I guess, he was trying to make a joke and kind of, calm everyone down and it just didn't work out very well.

The "joke" turned out to be the teacher calling Brandon a "Token Black" in front of the entire class. Brandon did not think that the teacher's intent was malicious but, nevertheless, Brandon was left feeling humiliated and upset over the incident. This was another occasion when his parents had to intervene on his behalf.

Toward the end of his story, Brandon pondered if would do it all over again and attend the same school. He could not actually decide if he would or not. His ambivalent feelings regarding his schooling experienced were so mixed and confused, given his experiences related to race. He did, however, mention that he was very happy at his university.

Major Themes from the Critical Narratives

These stories of the participants provide us a better sense of both the positive dimensions and struggles faced by African American males attending predominantly White schools. These stories, in particular, revealed several recurring themes that seemed inextricably linked to the overall experiences of the participants during the years they attended these schools. The five overarching themes included: (a) Friendship is the Key to Survival; (b) Being Aware of Your Blackness; (c) Academic Rigor, Competition and Success; (d) We Need More Faculty that Look Like Us; and (e) Parents Know Best.

Parent Focus Group

In February of 2017, I conducted a parent focus group in Los Angeles. The five parents in the group identified themselves as having a Black son who attended or had attended a predominately White, independent school for high school. From the focus group data, it was clear that parents who had sent their Black male sons to predominately White, independent schools did so with the belief and hope that their sons would gain access to an advantageous

schooling environment. The parents shared very candid experiences, allowing themselves to be vulnerable in their reflections about their decisions related to their sons' education. Since the five parents possessed vast parental schooling experiences, the group narrative was rich and robust.

Early in the parent focus group, it became clear that all of the participants sought the best learning environment for their sons. Pat, one of the parents, summed up well how parents felt about decision to send their sons to an elite, predominantly White, independent school.

> You know, there is really no guide to parenthood. Everybody has got a different situation. All the kids are different. You take in as much data as you can. You make a decision based on what you know and then along the journey, if you are wise, you make the decision today on what you do today. Tomorrow is another decision day.

Many of the parents spoke of wanting successful outcomes for their sons and having a sense that an independent school could provide for such an outcome. When discussing school demographics, all of the parents commented that their initial focus was not placing their son in an environment that was predominately White, but rather in placing them in an academically enriching environment where their son could take advantage of what the school had offer. Interestingly enough, in each instance, the environment was predominantly White. Mike, a parent of a Black male who graduated from an independent school in Los Angeles, commented, "Well, this was an opportunity and this was an environment where he could flourish." Thus, vetting the school became an important part in the decision-making process of all the parents. Parents looked at curriculum, athletics, college acceptances, and facilities in depth as criteria to make an informed decision. However, they all were equally aware of the skewed demographics at each school.

Dawn: You know when you've got a different child. Long story short, I prepared my son and said, "this is where you are going to go," and he didn't want to go, but I said, "this will be a good fit," because he was getting caught on nerves at school, he was getting bullied in the public schools, and I had him in private school growing up, and I did my research, and I said, "No matter what. This is where we are going to go." So I prepared him since 5th grade…I am trying to give him a better education. That was a huge sacrifice for me. You have a gifted child. What am I supposed to do, let him go by wayside? I want more for my son. Whatever you want for your child, that's on you, but my son is gifted, and I wanted to do more.

Mike: I looked at their curriculum. The questions they were asking were good. They were reading Howard Zinn books at the high school level. At least they were going to be dealing with some places, which is one of the reasons I liked his school better than others…They get opportunities in the private setting that they are not going to get in the public setting.

Bill: My focus is what do I need to do to get what I need to get done. So I cringe when people talk about you going to a predominantly White blah blah blah. If you are going to work for IBM, if you are going to work for Sony, or if you are going to work for any big place of business, you are working for a predominantly White institution. So I always try to push that away. There are challenges that come and go with it automatically because you are Black and even more so because you are Black, which I'll touch on, but that's the reality of your life, and you have to learn how to deal with

that and not ignore it but to get through with it and deal with it and that's another hurdle you have to get through to get your goals accomplished.

Bill: One of the biggest things, I think, to get out of this is that it's another option that you have for greater opportunity to graduate from this level. And we as a people, we as parents need to understand what those options are out there. Does that mean we have go to a predominately White, independent school, no, but if you are interested in that, bring your child and let them be a part of that process and find the one that fits if that's what they want to do, and as we talked about earlier, there are so many schools out here.

The parent focus group identified that Black students need to see and interact with Black faculty in the school setting. They all felt that this was an important distinction to make. While most faculty at independent schools are capable to mentoring and teaching all students, these parents felt that the absence of Black faculty presence at the schools was something that needed to be addressed administratively. Mike mentioned that his "son's school has very few Black students and certainly did not have enough Black faculty." The young Black males who participated in this study also identified this theme. Pat recalled that other independent schools, different than the one her son had attended, have a

young Black men's group where some of the Black teachers, Black administration from the school sort of pull all the boys in a talk to them. They meet on a regular basis. Just checking in to make sure that it was all flowing naturally.

The parents also told of positive stories where their sons' Black cultural identity was nurtured in positive ways. They all spoke about systems that each school had in place in an effort to address their son's Blackness authentically. Bill and Pat's comments reflect this view.

Bill: Certain people in the administration made a big effort to make sure that they included the Black students in the process so that they knew that they were welcome.

Pat: The school itself and all of the affinity groups were really good at bringing in sponsors to speak. The African American Student Council brought in various speakers that were there to speak to the entire student body, which I think is really what it's about. Our kids are going to know that they are Black. Our boys, they know they are Black men. They are going to grow up knowing that. With the education, oftentimes, needs to take place with the rest of the community. I thought the school did a good job at that.

Parents spoke about systems that were in place to support their sons. Several noted that school administrators would make efforts to attend events given by the Black organizations in a show of support. Dawn's son, "Started a diversity club at his school during his senior year" with the support of the administration. His school had an extremely small percentage of Blacks, less than 2%. In direct contrast, Mike stated, "that my son's school was not prepared to be empathetic to the experience of others."

Every parent in the focus group told of negative experiences of racialization that occurred at their sons' respective schools. The many comments by parents illustrate their awareness of the problems their sons face in these environments, despite their decision to send them to these schools. For example, Pat recalled an incident where a teacher used a racial slur with her son. The result was a parent meeting with administration where she said her husband pondered:

How do you even have that conversation with parents about how you are sorry. For some stuff, there is no "I'm sorry." I say that because from kindergarten, I have always been on guard with people about the things that happen to our son.

Other parents' comments reflected similar concerns.

Pat: I think our boys are unnecessarily challenged and targeted. And they are cute and sweet when they are kids, everybody wants to rub their cheeks, and as they start to evolve into young Black men, suddenly the teacher feels threatened. My Black son doesn't agree with her point of view, but the White kid over there can disagree. There is no threat. It is just a difference of opinion. When it's our kids, they tend to push them off into a certain category in their own mind and that's where we have to defend them and I don't think that's ever going to end.

Mike: I think my son's school was completely ill equipped to work with him as a young, Black man. But in the classroom setting, I found that they were too often suspected of being rebellious or anti-social instead of just being an inquisitive mind. That led to judgments, which teachers were making that I felt were inaccurate.

Gia: Here is our thing too. You work for our school. Why are you taking the side of some other people you don't even know? But if it's a choice between Black and White, you went over there to the Whites first. That's a problem.

Dawn: Some of my son's friends said, "are you gonna get some watermelon and fried chicken?" And he said, "I just say F-you," or something like that. And I say, "you can't be saying things like that." And, "Mom it's okay, it's okay, that's how we talk." It's no big deal. He said, "I like watermelon and fried chicken." When they come to our house,

he has four friends, I fry chicken for all of them, and they are like, "Ooh. Miss Jacobs, this is good." So yes, boys are like it's no big deal.

Mike: What my son experienced is that people don't come to the east side of 405 [the freeway]. So when there are parties at our house, we didn't get a lot of kids coming to those parties. If you lived on the west side, people would come to your house, but if you didn't live on the other side, they weren't coming over…When things happened, if you don't defend you own child, what kind of father are you? I am not going to defend when he is wrong. But when you are wrong and you singled him out and that is starting to affect him, then I am going to step up. That was at the end of 8th grade and he didn't want to deal with school after that, he didn't believe in people. He thought that he had been betrayed. It was very hard for him. I recognize all that other stuff, but I'm not forgiving of the fact that the headmaster's limitations had an adverse effect on my son that has affected him forever. I am not putting negative on anybody else's experiences but this is just part of his story.

Yet, despite these negative experiences, every parent in the group spoke of how proud they were of their sons for having endured and succeeded in these difficult environments. They spoke of the advantages that these schooling environments provided for their children. About this, Pat said:

I'm happy that he endured. I would have been happier had he not been feeling like he was in college in the 7th grade but I think he is very well prepared and I'm proud of him. I'm proud of his ability to survive despite the scars and bruises because we all got them somewhere for something and it sounds like your voice was the same way.

We ended our conversation with Dawn's reflection: "Did you do the right thing? You question yourself. But in the end, I know I did the right thing because look at him now. I'm just proud of him. I am proud of the experience that he got." Tony too chimed in, "Overall, I think that it has been a great experience for our son." He too, was proud.

In concert with the Black male participants, parents identified that having a strong group of Black parents to collaborate with was important to successfully navigating the school structures. Parents relied on grade-level meetings and gatherings, parent groups aimed at bringing Black parents together, and meet and greet gatherings for the Black parents to learn from one another and provide additional support to each other. Although all of the experiences the parents shared were unique and individualized, three ideas were consistent among the parent participants: (a) independent schools provided an opportunity for their children to excel; (b) their sons needed their Black identity preserved and nurtured at school; and (c) despite any difficulties, the parents were satisfied with their decision to send their sons to a predominantly White, independent school.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching

--- Carter G Woodson (1933), "The Mis-Education of the Negro"

The purpose of this study was to explore the schooling experiences of African American males who attended predominantly White, independent schools. At the heart of this study was the desire to better understand the impact of these experiences on the participants and what their experiences had to tell us about the education of African American males within predominantly White, independent school environments.

Through a detailed analysis of the rich narrative stories of seven African American male participants who all attended predominately White, independent schools, the study provided a space for them to narrate their schooling experiences and offer insights regarding what shaped those experiences and how those experiences could be better for future young men in their position. Data were collected over a period of three months, with participants sharing their prolific stories using a video-conferencing tool. Additionally, a focus group of five parents who had sons who attended predominantly White, independent schools was conducted in order for the parents to share their experiences. The first section of this chapter is guided by a discussion of the major themes that surfaced from the critical narratives. It is followed by an assessment of the three major research questions that informed the development and evolution of this study and how the study responded to the questions posed. Lastly, this chapter addresses the implications

and points to important recommendations related to improving the schooling experiences of African American males attending predominantly White, independent schools.

Major Themes from Critical Narratives

Seven Black males shared stories about their schooling experiences at elite predominantly White, independent schools. These stories revealed several recurring themes linked to the overall experiences of the participants. More specifically, five overarching themes were identified from their stories: (a) Friendship is the Key to Survival; (b) Being Aware of Your Blackness; (c) Academic Rigor, Competition, and Success; (d) We Need More Faculty who Look Like Us; and (e) Parents Know Best. The following is a brief discussion of the themes.

Friendship is Key to Survival

It became patently clear that despite the challenges that individual participants may have faced, having a strong connection to school friends was critical to the social and emotional success of young African American men who attended affluent, predominantly White, independent schools. Stories of friendship and the importance of having a tight friendship circle for these African American men were repeated across the narratives. Excerpts from four of the participants help to illustrate the importance of friendship.

William: And going back to what I said about having a close-knit friend group, that was my lifeline. I could fall back on them, and they were experiencing the same stuff that I was, so we could talk about it and share our experiences. And I felt that just build our bond—that just made our bonds even stronger.

Chance: I was also very small at this time, and yeah, so at the beginning, I didn't have very many friends. But towards the end of my sophomore year, I was playing

football, and I just gradually became really good friends with the guys on the team, and by the end of my sophomore year, I developed like a very strong group of friends. There were six of us, and five of us were Black, one of us was White, and that White friend was like my best friend from the beginning of 9th grade, like my only friend, and he carried over to this new group. So it was just kind of us, like I don't want to say us against the world, and like nobody liked us, and we were by ourselves. No, it's just that we really—we were really good friends, and we were really tight, and we liked other people but it was kind of all about us. Like we really—we like considered ourselves kind of like a family.

Chance: I was just very lucky that I had such a good group of friends and that we really were tight, and I remember it was maybe my junior or senior year but they organized a dinner for all the Black students—all the Black male students at my school, and a good number of us came, and I thought that was really good.

Nate: And so athletics was—I had some ups and downs with athletics, but overall I had a great experience, especially with football. Made a lot of—a lot of my best friends from high school were on the football team, and I still talk to them today, so that was a big part of my high school experience.

Paul: One of the things I like the most is my friendships I made there. I have four really close friends right now. I take a lot from them. I probably will be friends with them the rest of my life. Finding those friendships—because of them, I've been everywhere. I probably wouldn't have thought about schools on the East

Coast unless they hadn't told me about it, or I probably wouldn't be as hard of a studier. When I asked them, they sat down and tried to help me study. Just like surrounding yourself with people who want to see you do well.

Being Aware of Your Blackness

So many of the experiences that participants had at their respective schools involved the racializing perceptions that others had about participants' Blackness. As an integral part of adolescent development and cultural identity, the concept of being Black in a predominately White environment took on keen importance in the schooling experience of most of the participants and surfaced over and over again in their stories. Six of the seven participants recounted detailed memories where being Black was significant in their school experience. Experiences shared ranged from positive to negative.

Brandon: At my school, we didn't really have a lot of Latino students, like, at all. We didn't really have a lot of Indian or Arabic people at all. There were barely really any Black people anyway. We were the third highest population, and we only made up 5% of the entire school from the middle school and up. There were a lot of White people and a lot of East Asian people.

Brandon: I really don't know why I was benched for the game; I was the only Black on the team. I really did not have any friends on that team. I was not melding with any of them.

Nate: So I think the student organization for the Black students gave me that chance to kind of explore a predominantly Black space which I've never really had

before and kind of just laying the foundation, thinking about where I stand as a Black person, as a young Black man

Thomas: Yeah, so going back I think it's—while we maybe were joking, I think it's important for me as a Black male and my friends who were not to really realize that this type of thinking, while it may be joking, it is something that is holding us back as a society and that the racial barriers and the racial stereotypes that we all continue to joke about is giving them life. It's giving them life, and it's continuing them and a lot of people that continue to think of races in that way, and it's not good.

Chance: …they just knew like the way that we carried ourselves and the way that we like handled business just on our daily lives that we were giving Black male students a good name… I just always felt Black [at school]…They don't get it. They don't understand what it entails. They don't understand that they're not and they can never be like other people because they're Black. And by other people, I mean White people

William: But they don't even let you walk through that door, and now reflecting on it, looking back at all my high school friendships, the only people that I talk to currently are those five, six groups of strong African American males. Everyone else, they're just on doing their own thing. They would smile, say hello, but now that we're doing our own things, those ties are being cut.

Paul: I was the only Black in my class…By the time I graduated, there was another Black girl in my class. There were less than 20 Blacks in a school of over 500 students.

Academic Rigor, Competition, and Success

Six of the participants shared that they were very aware that their school valued a rigorous academic program. Most indicated that they felt this this level of rigor not only prepared them for college but also made them better students and more responsible Black young men in general. Participants seemed to embrace the rigorous academics even though, at times, some indicated that the level of rigor was a source of stress.

Brandon: I think my school prepared me to certain degrees to stop dealing with getting bad grades and trying to get it together…I would just say the competitiveness. My school is notoriously competitive. I think that's also what attributed to a lot of stress and negative feelings that a lot of people feel there. And for me, it was pretty profound. I don't know stressing so much about any other college. That was the worst, like how competitive people were to get in the college and get in the places with big names so they can throw around. It seems like the biggest motivator over fit or what you wanted to do, and I remember stressing a lot because 10th and 9th grade were really bad for me

Nate: I also got to go to Mexico my sophomore year, so that was definitely like a huge opportunity that my school provided that I'm not sure I would have gotten anywhere else.

Chance: They really taught me how to be successful in a college learning environment…. It really—and just being in a learning environment where everyone wants to succeed and everyone—and it could be for the reason like I'm just trying to get to a good school or they really care about learning, but just being in that environment is really beneficial to learning and learning how to deal with competition and stuff like this.

William: Once I went to my school, the doors just opened up for me. I saw myself really—that's when I really said to myself, "I can go to an Ivy League school." So instead of me taking baby steps, I envisioned myself taking large leaps later on in life. And that's continuing onto college.

Thomas: I enjoyed my time at my school. I would do it again if I could. I really loved it there. Academically, it prepared me so much for college. Socially, it prepared me a lot for college and allowed me to see some of the areas that I knew I wouldn't want to be a part of and some of the areas that I knew I did want to be a part of and really helped me develop what I value as a person…. My school was such a competitive environment. And regardless of what your race is, everybody is trying to be the best whether it's academically, athletically. It's so competitive, and so I think that really got to us and that whether we realized it or not, we were all trying to compete and be the best whatever.

Paul: They [the school itself and its faculty] pushed you. I'm in college now. I know what I have to do to do well.

We Need More Faculty Who Look Like Us

Several participants offered advice on how to improve the overall experience of Black male students in their respective schools. A common thread was the need for more Black faculty—actual teachers, counselors, or administrative school staff with whom Black students could consistently interact. The four participants felt passionately that this was the most important recommendation for their schools.

Marc: And that organization was supported, it was pretty much run by a couple of the Black teachers and the Black kids. And then other kids would also come and learn and take part in all the discussions. I don't know, I thought that was really probably the best thing going for Black kids that might be struggling being in an all-White school.

William: Well, I do believe if my school were to have a little more African American male—yes, a little bit more African American male faculty members that would really help the other African American population in these types of schools. That would really help them prosper…. They [White teachers] still don't understand the minute aspects of how it feels to be African American socially and mentally, so having a Black academic advisor at that time was important.

Chance: The faculty—the Black faculty—they do a good job of getting involved, talking to you, always being there.

Nate: We don't have a ton of faculty members of color, so I think that's something that I hope is being addressed. I know that we have—a couple of our deans are

people of color. One of them is Black. We had one Black dean leave. We don't have a ton of—I could probably count on my hand how many Black faculty members we have. So I hope it's being addressed because the Black faculty members that we do have bring a lot to the school, and I hope that they're representations of what the school could have more of. So I hope it's being addressed, but I know that that was an issue when I was there.

Parents Know Best

One of the most recurrent themes presented by the participants was the impact of parent involvement on their successful schooling outcomes. All participants commented on the importance of their parents. In particular, every participant commented on the support that their mothers provided them during their time at their independent schools. Although the majority of the participants came from two-parent households, they recalled that their mothers really made sure that they were nourished emotionally and academically.

Marc: I hung out with a pretty diverse group of friends and stuff, but mom wanted to make sure that I still—since we were all kids, and we were having fun, and we all got along, she would make sure I still understood the way things were and the way people might look at you sometimes…So she [Marc's mother] made sure while I was having my fun in school and trying to be color blind or just enjoy what I was doing, I also kept in mind the environment that I was in and understood it even if I didn't really internalize it. That made sense. She did good for that, and I think that's helped me pass school

William: I guess she [William's mother] saw something within me, and she knew that me being in these highly academic schools, the high schools and middle schools, that I can really just take the next step and go to an Ivy League school later on in life.

Chance: And we were able to thrive like, just the most important like word I can think of is family, and I consider that like my real family and like my family that I made there, which would be like my friends, and that's the message that I would want—like you have to have a strong family.

Thomas: She's [Thomas's mother] like, "Just go out there and be yourself and people are either going to like you for who you are or they're not. And you can like movies and play video games and this and that, and that doesn't make you any different from anybody else walking down the street." And so I felt throughout my entire high school career they did a great job of supporting me and helping me through some very tough times, and they did a very good job of taking the pressure off and the stress that can come with a school like mine.

Nate: My parents are definitely on top of me as far as my grades all the time. They definitely helped me out whenever I need it, and yeah, that's pretty much it. Definitely encouraging, helping me out, making sure that I keep on top of my studies.

Brandon: Whenever I needed tutors or help with stuff, I feel like, she [Brandon's mother] would always offer Black professionals to help me out, so at the very least I could always be exposed to it. They always were very frank with

> conversations. They weren't trying to sugarcoat it. They would make it very clear like, "This is the reality of the situation."…I remember talking to my mom, and she was like, "you have to get whatever edge you can get. You are a Black male going for STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics]. They want you. These companies want you. They need you because they need to diversify their population."

Responding to Research Questions

The following discussion directly addresses the research questions that informed this study. The following discussion may have some overlap with the above presentation of the themes. However, reengaging some themes as part of the following responses to the research questions serves to further emphasize the significance of the insights provided by the young men who participated in this study.

Question 1: How do young adult African American males who have attended predominately White independent schools speak about their schooling experiences?

All Black male participants spoke about the low numbers of Black students who attended their respective schools. This occurrence caused them to be very aware of their Blackness within the school context. To counter this, the schools attempted to provide spaces where the Black students could come together with affinity groups or clubs. These counter spaces served as sites where the deficit notions of people of color could be challenged and a positive collegiate racial climate could be established (Solorzáno et al., 2000). Often used as a response to counter microaggressions, these spaces provided refuge for some students. Racial microaggressions in both academic and social spaces

have real consequences—most obvious are the resulting negative racial climate in the school and African American students' struggle with feelings of self-doubt and frustration, well as isolation (Solorzáno et al., 2000). According to several of the participants, these microaggressions usually took the form of inappropriate jokes, racial slurs, and negative cultural assumptions about how Blacks experience life or the projection of negative stereotypes.

Overall, the participants spoke of their schooling experiences as positive ones, which they would do over again. In concert with the perspective voiced by parents who participated in this study, there was a clear respect for the educational opportunity that the school could offer. Darder (2012) noted that the talented, for the most part, are members of the dominant culture whose values comprise the very foundations that inform the knowledge and skills a student must possess or achieve to be designated as an individual who merits reward. Black students attending predominately White, independent schools are talented, and thus in that respect, are tolerated by the dominate culture. However, this form of meritocracy does not always work out so well for Black students. What was discovered was that even though they were competitive academically, they were still challenged by the dominant groups at school.

As noted in the themes above, one of the most important findings of this study was the importance of friendships. Datnow and Cooper (1997) study noted that their participants identified their African American peer group networks, both formal and informal, as one of the most important factors in helping then cope in predominately White environments. Similar to their findings was the reliance of friendships in this

study, where participants all pointed to their close friendships with other Black males as an important factor in their success. This was well reflected in Chance's statement, "I was just very lucky that I had such a good group of friends and that we really were tight."

Question 2: To what extent do these students express feeling embraced and nurtured by their peers, teachers, and administrators at school, particularly with respect to their cultural development as African American males?

Participants felt that their teachers embraced them academically. None reported feeling less than in the classroom with regard to academics. Although misunderstandings were reported, overall, the participants liked most of their teachers and felt that they offered a fair assessment of each individual's talents. None of the participants commented on how their White teachers embraced Black culture. This could be because the question was worded in a way that was unclear or because none of the teachers addressed Black culture with the participants. It is true that in relationships with teachers and peers, Black students value the resources that exist within the school, the preparation for college admission and success, and training for future endeavors (Arrington et al., 2003). Nevertheless, Black students in independent schools can feel both connected and disconnected to their schools. Arrington et al. have argued that promoting Black students' connection to the school community will require continued work to affirm students while addressing the existing challenges they face.

Question 3: What recommendations do young adult African American males who have attended predominately White schools have for making these independent school environments more welcoming and conducive to the overall development of African American students and their cultural and academic formation?

What seemed to be of major importance to participants was the availability of a greater number of Black faculty. Most of the participants reported that they did have access to a Black advisor or dean, but all participants spoke to the importance of having a Black faculty presence on the campus. They did not just want one person to connect with; instead, they wanted to have Black faculty as teachers, mentors, and administrators. The Black students' experience of racism both inside and outside of school is important to address because, for a number of students, racism adversely affects their emotional and psychological coping within school (Arrington et al., 2003).

Implications

The following speaks to the theoretical, practical, and policy implications with respect to this study.

Theoretical Implications

Paulo Freire (1970) stated, "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation" (p. 47). In reviewing the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which include: (a) racism is a permanent fixture in American society, (b) stories or narratives are deemed important, (c) critique of liberalism, and (d) a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color has been created and maintained in America, we must note that as a theoretical framework,

CRT situates itself into this study. By applying CRT to the schooling experiences of the Black males, I was able to articulate how racism was a constant occurrence in each participant's narrative.

Noguera (2003) posited that for African American males, who are more likely than any other group to be subjected to negative forms of treatment in school, the message is clear: Individuals of their race may excel in sports, but not in math and history. Noguera further pointed to the historic location of Black males within school—in remedial classes or waiting for punishment outside of the principal's office—and how this role subjugates them to a position of marginalization. However, confronted with a variety of obstacles and challenges, some Black males still find ways to survive and, in some cases, excel. This seems to be consistent with the young men in this study.

The participants in this study were the exception to the stereotypical narrative that is usually told about Black males in that each of them excelled academically. These participants successfully navigated their schooling environments to a great extent, but what remained a constant was their continual navigating of their biculturalism in a predominately White environment (Darder, 2012). None of the participants could escape issues of racism, regardless of their environment. Thus, within the predominately White, independent schooling context, racism became almost normalized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). However, as Harris (2009) pointed out, the construction of strong racial self-conceptions can help Black students acquire and enact achievement-oriented behaviors in school because they understand that achievement does not have to be equated with Whiteness, nor is it the sole property of Whites. It is a human

character trait that they could embody as Blacks, despite race and racism as a potential barrier in their school setting (Harris, 2009).

Critical Race Theory rests much of its foundation on the use of storytelling (Crenshaw, 1995; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1998) noted that these stories provide the necessary context to understanding, feeling, and interpreting the everyday conditions faced by students of color. By applying CRT to the schooling experiences of Black males who attended predominantly White, independent schools, the use of CRT as a framework was expanded, as it is not always applied to groups that are considered by some to be in a position of privilege. The male participants in this study were not stereotypical Black males in that their schooling outcomes were positive for the most part and their academic experiences were successful—so successful, in fact, that they were all admitted into Ivy League Universities upon graduation. Although this is not the common narrative that is shared with regard to Black male youth, applying CRT as a framework allowed those rich aspects of their stories to unfold.

Implications for Practice

Many would argue that Black males have successful outcomes when they attend predominately White, independent schools. If one just focuses on academics, that statement is mostly true. Most of the Black males who attend and go on to graduate from these schools are usually very successful in the academic arena and out in the world. However, I ask again: Does this success come with a cost? With each participant in the study sharing a racist incident, and all of the parents in the focus group sharing racist situations experienced by their child, I would be

remiss in saying that these experiences were all positive. In fact, as a result of these findings, several educational practices and structures in place at these schools need to be addressed.

An overarching theme that the narratives revealed, as mentioned previously, is the need for Black students to have access to more Black faculty. Teachers from students' racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds can make a significant contribution to the school, enriching both the environment and the curriculum (Nieto, 2000). Both participant and parents pointed to a need for schools to hire, train, and retain more Black faculty. Additionally, the male participants noted that they felt more connected to faculty who matched them culturally and ethnically. In order for schools to address this concern, administrators have an obligation to aggressively recruit teachers who are as diverse as the student body because when faculty members are from a variety of cultural backgrounds and are multilingual, students are more likely to perceive the significance of intellectual pursuits in their own lives (Nieto, 2000).

Changing hiring policies will require sweeping adjustments to the overall school culture with respect to the practice of diversity quotas and diversity norms. It is in some instances by design that predominately White independent schools have been able to continue operating with such a lack of diversity in faculty and student body. We see students from the dominant culture, who excel because they have been raised in homes that can provide them with the social, economic, and cultural capital necessary to meet the elitist and ethnocentric standards of American schools, enjoy greater advantages and more positive regard (Darder, 2012). In fact, the National Association of Independent Schools 2015–2016 data accounted for 1,520 member schools during the 2014–2015 academic school year, and of these schools, only 30 were identified as having an African American school head, or 2% of the total. This number is

significantly lower than the African American independent school student population of 6.6% (NAIS, 2016). This disparity highlights the need for more Black senior-level leaders in independent schools (Gueye, 2003).

Slaughter and Johnson (1988), writing in *Visible Now, Blacks in Private School,* commented that independent schools with the lowest percentage of Black students are most likely to be private elite schools, and that these schools typically enjoy considerable academic and social prestige in their home communities; have few, if any ethnic minority teachers; and began to voluntarily desegregate in the 1960s out of a sense of administrative commitment to the civil rights goals of the broader American society. During that era, Blacks and, since then, Black students and their families have increasingly participated in these institutions, as have Black faculty. However, not much has changed since the 1960s with regard to actual enrollment statistics and Black faculty numbers.

Implications for Policy

Although independent schools are not governed in the same way that public schools are, I do feel that at the policy level changes could be made to improve the schooling outcomes for all Black males. Since many independent schools seek faculty with state licensure and state certifications, teacher preparation programs need to be discussed. Darder (1991) noted in *Culture and Power in the Classroom* that teacher education programs are notorious for reducing the role of the teacher to that of a technician and that, instead of empowering teachers by assisting them to develop a critical understanding of their purpose as educators, most programs foster a dependency on predefined curriculum, outdated classroom strategies and techniques, and

traditionally rigid classroom environments that position not only students but also teachers into physically and intellectually oppressive situations.

Thus, when teacher preparation programs utilize this form of instructional practices leading to licensure, you have universities and licensure bodies that tend to embody a liberal educational discourse that embraces the political ideal that all thing being equal, everyone has the ability to succeed. When new teachers are trained in this manner, we fail to engage the fundamental inequalities that exist in American society (Darder, 2012). Licensure requirements should mandate that teacher preparation programs include coursework and clinical experiences surrounding diversity among groups, language acquisition, biculturalism, and an understanding of how systemic racism affects schooling outcomes for children of color.

In this discussion of recommendations for independent schools, it is also critical to call out the resistance to change bolstered by the normalization of deficit views and microaggressions within these environments. It is critical to note the manner in which the Eurocentric culture of the school reproduces and normalizes the view of these students as "exceptional" and solely individuals. This, in turn, renders them different from other Black youth in the minds of independent school personnel and allows the school system to retain deficit views within the institution because its students are different than the norm. This, then, leaves the burden of change on the Black male student.

Future Research

In light of the findings, future research should attempt to capture the schooling experiences of African American males attending predominately White schools with an expanded set of open-ended questions. I found it a challenge to get the participants to respond to

all aspects of every research question. Future research could also focus on specific aspects of the schooling experience of Black males in an attempt to pinpoint certain areas that need addressing. A mixed-method study utilizing a quantitative survey instrument could be used in an attempt to triangulate data and thus add another layer of validity to the overall study. This survey instrument could utilize a Likert-type scale where participants could rate their overall experiences as well as their satisfaction levels at being supported in the school environment. Bringing the male participants together in a group format would also allow the males to bond over shared experiences and could perhaps elicit more rich responses and provide for a deeper conversation.

Although the size of the parent group worked well for the discussion format, future studies could utilize several parent groups in hopes of capturing more of the stories from the parents. It is important to note that the parent group size should still remain small so that all participants are encouraged to share and are given more time to share their thoughts. A larger parent group format would not allow for this. Additionally, if time is not an issue, male participants could be recruited from different parts of the United States. It would be of interest to see if there are regional differences in the schooling experiences of Black males and if demographics come into play. This would also allow for a deeper dive into the socioeconomic status of the parents to see if that had any bearing on the schooling outcomes or even school placements. The following four expansion studies also should be considered:

1. A comparative study between the strategies that Black males and females use to navigate microaggressions within the independent school context;

2. A study that explores the background of Black parents who send their children to predominantly White, independent schools, their decision to do so, and how they actively advocate for their children;
3. A study that specifically focuses on the social dynamics related to survival of Black students in predominantly White, independent schools;
4. A study that focuses on an examination of the culture within independent White schools and how it perpetuates the normalization of microaggressions.

Finally, I would like to follow my participants through college and ask them a similar set of questions so that they could narrate their college experiences and compare them to their predominantly White, independent high school experiences.

Conclusion

This study not only examined the schooling experiences of African American males who attended predominantly White, independent schools, but also was born of a personal endeavor fueled by my desire as a parent to provide my son with an educational experience that would allow him to flourish both as an individual and academically. Nevertheless, I am left with the nagging question of whether attending a predominately White, independent school can provide an environment that is welcoming and conducive to the overall development of African American students with respect to both their cultural and academic formation. In the true spirit of social justice, I am left unsure as to whether these environments are sufficiently set up to nurture the spirit of young Black males. As a parent, I have had to be hyper-vigilant in order to safeguard the wellbeing of my son with respect to his racial/cultural identity. At times, a colorblind agenda has influenced teachers' approach to educating students of color. This can place a tremendous

burden on students as well as parents as they try to navigate the normalization of a deficit view, juxtaposed to internally normalizing colorblind ideology. Yes, systems are put in place to support identity formation, but the majority of their social and academic success, as attested by both the young men and parents who participated in this study, can be attributed primarily to a strong family foundation. Thus, the issue of parent advocacy is critical to this work. Parent involvement and presence proved to be the single most important factor articulated by all participants, and thus it became a fundamental platform in support of parent involvement. Parents articulated that they not only had to be physically present at the school, but also had to make sure that their child knew that they were a source of support under all conditions. This reciprocal relationship kept the parents involved at the school level and allowed students to feel supported in their cultural and social development knowing that their parents understood their experiences.

All of my participants brought with them a very developed sense of self as well as a strong understanding of their cultural capital. However, the persistence and embedded nature of racism almost normalized the racialized incidents of microaggressions they had experienced. This tells me that racism is as pervasive and fixed in society as it ever was. These participants attended some of the most prestigious independent schools in the United States, and each one of the students recounted a racist incident. Just as James Baldwin (1985) wrote about the shared racial tragedy that is the dichotomous Black/White binary in "The Price of the Ticket," African American students continue to pay the cost to attend and participate in these schooling environments. From the normalization of microaggressions in the context of the elite, independent, predominately White schools to parents normalizing the expectation for racist

incidents throughout the schooling trajectory, the price of this ticket is costly. I am not sure that the cost of securing an excellent education, and thus potentially securing your future, should cost so much. Since this research was as professional as it was personal, I have pondered whether to continue my son's educational trajectory in this direction. In many ways, I have had to challenge myself with regard to my thinking about the educational advantages of such a decision.

This qualitative study of the schooling experiences of African American males in predominantly White, independent schools was also an effort to address the lack of research on this specific topic. Through the lens of CRT and the critical narratives, the narrative stories of participants in this study were analyzed and utilized to better understand the schooling experiences of African American males in independent schools. I am deeply passionate and optimistic that the stories that unfolded will result in a rich and deeply meaningful experience for both the researcher and participants, while at the same time give voice and meaning to the schooling experiences of Black males. There is no question that a more extensive examination into the experiences of African American males needs to take place in order to facilitate meaningful conversations about African American male achievement in the United States.

REFERENCES

Allen, Q. (2013). "They think minority means lesser than": Black middle-class sons and fathers resisting microaggressions in the school. U*rban Education, 48*(2), 171–197.

Andrews, D. (2009). The construction of Black male high-achiever identities in a predominately White high school. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *40*(3), 297–317.

Arrington, E. G., Hall, D. M., & Howard, S. C. (2003). The success of African-American students in independent schools. *Independent School*, *62*(4), 10–19.

Baldwin, J. (1985). *The price of the ticket*. New York, NY: St. Martin's/Marek.

Banks, T. L. (1990). Two life stories: Reflections on one law professor. *Berkeley Women's Law Journal, 6,* 46–56.

Bell, D. A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review, 93*(3), 518–535.

Bell, E. E. (2015). Understanding African American males' schooling experiences: A qualitative inquiry. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(8), 1260–1269. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR20/8/bell6.pdf

Berkowitz, B. (2016). Conducting focus groups. *Community Tool Box*. Retrieved from http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-focus-groups/main

Berry, T., & Candis, M. (2013). Cultural identity and education: A critical race perspective. *Educational Foundations, 27*(3-4), 43-64.

Brown, D. (2000). Learning to work. In Lisa Baumgartner & Sharan B. Merriam (Eds.), *Adult learning and development: Multicultural stories* (pp. 45–51). Malabar, FL: Kreiger Publishing.

Burke, C. R. (2010). *Black parents at predominantly White schools: An exploratory study of race and parent involvement* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). New Brunswick, NJ: State University of New Jersey.

Clandinin, J. D., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35–75). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552.n2

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical Race Theory.* New York, NY: The New Press.

Darder, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Darder, A. (2012). *Culture & power in the classroom*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Darder, A. (2015). *Freire & education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

DeCuir-Gunby, J. (2007). Negotiating identity in a bubble: A critical race analysis of African American high school students' experiences in an elite, independent school. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 40*(1), 26–35. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10665680601093507

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical Race Theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: NYU Press.

Diaz, R. (2017). *The Black-White binary obfuscates and distorts: Why the antiracism movement must reject it. Crossroads Anti-Racism Organizing and Training.* Retrieved from http://crossroadsantiracism.org/antiracism-analysis/the-black-white-binary-obfuscates-and-distorts-why-the-antiracism-movement-must-reject-it/

Doane, A. (2007). The changing politics of color-blind racism. *The New Black: Alternative Paradigms and Strategies for the 21st Century Research in Race and Ethnic Relations, 14*, 159-174.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1994). *The souls of Black folks*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

Fordham, S., & J. U. Ogbu (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of acting White." *The Urban Review*, *18*(3), 176–206.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.

Garibaldi, A. M. (1997). Four decades of progress…and decline: An assessment of African Educational attainment. *Journal of Negro Education, 66*(2), 105–120.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ghosh, R. (2008). Racism: A hidden curriculum. *Education Canada, 48*(4), 26–29.

Green, R. L., White, G., & Green, K. K. (2012). *The expectation factor in Black male achievement: Creating a foundation for educational equity.* Executive Summary, October 2012, Council of the Great City Schools.

Gueye, T. K. (2003). *Race in the appointment and daily leadership of African American independent school heads* (Unpublished dissertation). New York, NY: Fordham University.

Harper, S. R., & Davis, III, C. H. F. (2012). They (don't) care about education: A counternarrative on Black male students' responses to inequitable schooling. *Educational Foundations*, Winter–Spring, 103–120.

Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review, 106*(8), 1721.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in educational settings.* Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press.

Hawley, W. D., & Nieto, S. (2010). Another inconvenient truth: Race and ethnicity. *Educational Leadership, 66*(3), 66-71.

Hrabowski, F. A., Maton, K. I., & Greif, G. L. (1998). *Beating the odds: Raising academically successful African American males.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press

hooks, b. (2000). *Where we stand.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Howard, T. C. (2003) A tug of war for our minds: African American high school students' perceptions of their academic identities and college aspirations. *High School Journal, 87*(1), 4–17.

Howard, T. C. (2008). Who really cares? The disenfranchisement of African American males in PreK–12 schools: A critical race theory perspective. *Teachers College Record, 110*(5), 954–985.

Howard, T. C., & Reynolds, R. (2008). Examining parent involvement in reversing the underachievement of African American students in middle-class schools. *Educational Foundations, 22*(1/2), 79–98.

Huber, L. P. (2008). Building critical race methodologies in educational research: A research note on critical race testimonio. *FIU Law Review, 4*(1), 159–173.

Hudley, C. (Ed.) (2016). *Adolescent identity and schooling: Diverse perspectives.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Hughes, L. (1936, July). Let America be America again. *Esquire Magazine,* p. 6.

Johnson, S. (1988). Unconscious racism and the criminal law. *Cornell Law Review*, *73*, 1016–1037.

Kenyatta, C. (2012). From perception to practice: How teacher-student interactions affect African American male achievement. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research, 8*, 3–44.

Knight, D. J. (2015). Beyond the stereotypical image of young men of color. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/01/beyond-the-stereotypical-image-of-young-men-of-color/384194/

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is Critical Race Theory, and what is it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 7–24.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2004). New directions in multicultural education: Complexities, boundaries and critical race theory. In J. Banks & C. McGee-Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 50–68). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47-68.

Lawrence, C. (1987). The id, the ego, and equal protection: Reckoning with unconscious racism. *Stanford Law Review, 39*, 317–388.

McWhorter, J. (2014). "Acting White" remains a barrier for Black education. *Reason.Com* Retrieved from http://reason.com/archives/2014/10/08/acting-white-remains-a-barrier-for-black

Michael, A., & Bartoli, E. (2014, Summer). What White children need to know about race. *Independent School, 73*(4). Retrieved from http://www.nais.org/Magazines-Newsletters/ISMagazine/Pages/What-White-Children-Need-to-Know-About-Race.aspx

Moss, G. (2004). Provisions of trustworthiness in critical narrative research: Bridging intersubjectivity and fidelity. *The Qualitative Report*, *9*(2), 359–374.

National Association of Independent Schools. (2015). Independent school facts at a glance for the National Association of Independent Schools [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.nais.org/Statistics/Pages/NAIS-Independent-School-Facts-at-a-Glance.aspx

National Association of Independent Schools. (2016) *What are independent private schools?* Retrieved from http://parents.nais.org/Articles/Pages/About-Independent-Private-Schools.aspx

Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (3rd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman

Noguera, P. A. (2003). The trouble with Black boys: The role and influence of environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of African American males. *Urban Education, 38*(4), 431-459.

Ohikuare, J. (2013, December 13). When minority students attend elite private schools. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/12/when-minority-students-attend-elite-private-schools/282416/

Runyowa, S. (2015, September 18). The impact of microaggressions and why they matter. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/microaggressions-matter/406090/

Sandelowski, M. (1991). Telling stories: Narrative approaches in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 23*(3), 161–166

Simmons, R. (2012). Exploring how African American males from an urban community navigate the interracial and intraracial dimensions of their experiences at an urban Jesuit high school. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, & Research*, *8*, 4–12.

Schott Foundation for Public Education. (2012). *The urgency of now: The Schott 50-state report on public education and Black males.* Cambridge, MA: Author. Retrieved from http//www.schott foundation.org

Slaughter, D., & Johnson, D. (1988). *Visible now: Blacks in private schools.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Solórzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical Race Theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education, 69*(1/2), 60–73.

Strauss, V. (2016, March 30). The danger of teaching children to be "colorblind." *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/03/30/the-danger-of-teaching-children-to-be-colorblind/

Tatum, B. D. (1997). "*Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?"* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Taylor, E. (1999). Lessons for leaders: Using critical inquiry to promote identity development. In R. H. Sheets & E. R. Hollins (Eds.), *Racial and ethnic identity in school practices: Aspects of human development* (pp. 231-255). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Tierney, W. G., & Clemens, R. F. (2011). Qualitative research and public policy: The challenges of relevance and trustworthiness. In C. J. Smart & Paulsen, B. M. (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research: 26* (pp. 57–83). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Welch, M. O., & Nesson, M. L. (2016). An examination of scholar identity and achievement in African American adolescents: Is there a connection? In C. Hudley (Ed.), *Adolescent identity and schooling: Diverse perspectives* (pp. 8–20). New York: NY, Routledge.

Wilson, M. L. (2002). African and African American storytelling. *Tar Heel Junior Historian 41*(2). Retrieved from http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-colonial/2031