DO AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS LIMIT THEIR OWN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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Do African American Students Limit Their Own Academic Achievement

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Abstract

This qualitative, phenomenological study provides insight into the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences that six, twelfth grade students held regarding their experiences from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences they lived and to learn about how these students created racial or ethnic identities. I, (a) gained tangible information from six African American students regarding how they might limit their own academic achievement based upon the experiences they have had with teachers, (b) have brought to the forefront the challenges African American students have creating racial identities and how that development can lead to poor academic achievement, and (c) show the need for more awareness and culturally relevant teaching in schools and pre-service teacher preparation. This study adds to the research regarding the (a) blocked opportunities framework, (b) the attitude achievement paradox, (c) the development of ethnic identities, (d) false empathy, (e) expectations of students by parents and teachers, and (f) the self-fulfilling prophecy by attempting to highlight personal experiences of African American students within a particular school district.
DEDICATION

I have chosen to dedicate this study to my grandmother, Nana, the first teacher I remember; along with my parents, Bruce and Terry. These were the people that always told me I could succeed and without them, I may not have overcome being raised in poverty and the transiency I experienced bouncing from school to school and district to district. With their help, I was able to achieve upward mobility and education became a constant in my life. Attending college was non-negotiable in their eyes, it was a seed that was planted early in my life and although it cost me precious moments that I wanted to be working on cars with my dad, I see now why he pushed me away from his side. These are the people that afforded me the experiences that made me who I am today. They are the reason I do what I do and I can only hope my own children and the children I have chosen to serve being an educator understand the power of education and the opportunities it can provide.
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Finally, I cannot thank my wife, Maria and children, Emily, Alex, and Nicolas enough for their support throughout this journey. My wife is bona fide saint. A wife and mother like none other. A woman who has seen an impulsive teenager accomplish his dreams because of her love and understanding. She never gets the credit she deserves and I would not be here without her. My children do not understand why this was a goal and why I have done this, but I did a lot of this for them. I wanted them to see the importance of education and that facts that dreams come true and goals can be accomplished if you refuse to back down.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

What is the achievement gap? Scholars, politicians, and even educators have defined this phenomenon as the difference in test scores between races or groups of students (Lieberson, 1980). This has continued to be a perfectly good explanation. However, if we transform our thinking we may discover a more accurate definition. Ladson-Billings (2008) has offered an alternative view of the achievement gap by referring to it as “educational debt” (p. 236). She has challenged that,

The debt language totally changes the relationship between students and schooling. For instance, when we think of what we are combating as an achievement gap, we implicitly place the onus for closing the gap on the students, their families, and their individual teachers and schools. But the notion of education debt requires us to think about how all of us, as members of a democratic society, are implicated in creating these achievement disparities. (p. 236)

This was an extremely radical view, one that challenged and confronted American society as a whole and demanded that we begin to look at more than just the textbook answers for why achievement disparities have existed between ethnic groups.

Historically, the achievement gap between Black and White students has sparked much debate, conflict, and research regarding the topic and has still not been fully addressed by scholars and/or practitioners (Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007). Literature and research have been collected to reflect that, “lower scores by blacks [sic] are a
reflection of the inherent abilities rather than as a consequence of environmental conditions” (Lieberson, 1980, p. 136). More recently, Goldsmith (2004) explained:

Researchers have offered various explanations for this social phenomenon.

Compared to White students, black [sic] and Latino students are more likely to come from families of low socioeconomic status (SES), live with one parent, and live in high-poverty neighborhoods. (p. 121)

These views appeared more like a class issue than an ability issue. They were saying that African Americans have had more class struggles to overcome and therefore perform at lower academic levels. Fordham (1996) agreed that “a new and totally unfamiliar form of segregation that tends to strangle the life chances of Black adolescents” was created with “the practice of attributing differences in the academic performance of Black and White students to class rather than racial differences” (p. 63). However, maybe it had to do more with the thought or worth of themselves rather than their class or actual ability.

Regardless of the reason, the achievement gap between African American and White students has continued to widen even after President Bush’s promise that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) would, “end the soft racism of low expectations by closing racial achievement gaps” (Lee, 2006, p. 5). He also pointed out that, “this gap is widening, but not reflected in many state-testing reports” because the states are only reporting which students meet the minimum standards of the test and not how far above the threshold each group is achieving; which shows that the achievement gap has remained relatively flat during and after NCLB (Lee, 2006, p. 6). Armor (2006) has offered an alternate view that, “African Americans have been impacted more by teen
pregnancy, dropping out of high school, having never-married moms, divorce, and dads who do not participate in raising their children” (p. 45), which keeps their achievement lower than that of their White counterparts. According to Majerus (2013), “This problem of displacing social and economic societal realities onto individuals substitutes one cause of the achievement gap with another instead of recognizing both (racism and socio-economic disparities)” (p. 1). This may be part of the problem, but “even more troubling is the fact that the gap in achievement among races only widens further once students enter schools, which directly indicts the structure of schooling in our country” (Majerus, 2013, p. 1-2).

For this study, I employed an advocacy and participatory worldview that is in line with the beliefs of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to show that colorblind inequities have permeated our schools and lead to continued discrimination of minorities. The focus of this research was on African American students because of the personal experiences I have had educating this population of students, and that I suspect they may feel marginalized and even disenfranchised in the public school system. The theoretical frames I used to look at the experiences of the students included:

(a) Critical race theory
(b) Blocked opportunities framework
(c) The attitude-achievement paradox
(d) Developing racial/ethnic identities
(d) False empathy
(e) Parent and teacher expectations
(f) Self-fulfilling prophecy

These frames were used to examine the literature and interview students to uncover how African American students may limit their own achievement.

**Identification of the Problem**

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), there was still a gap in the educational achievement between African American and White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). This gap was articulated and interpreted to show that there was a 23 point gap between achievement rates in reading of 9 and 13 year old Black and White students and that there was a 26 point difference in reading between that of 17 year old Black and White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, p. 16-18). If broken out for mathematics, there was a 25-point gap between Black and White 9-year-olds, a 28-point deficit between Black and White 13-year-olds, and a 26-point divide between 17-year-old Black and White Students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, p. 38-40). This problem has plagued the United States since keeping track of the achievement gap began in the 1970’s; yet the NAEP has lauded minor gap closings as positive accomplishments stating, “the 2012 NAEP long-term trend assessments show some progress toward meeting that goal (of narrowing the White – Black score gaps)” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, p. 2).

Therefore, the debate between the achievement gap and how to significantly close it has gone on with only very minor progress. As previously mentioned, there has been some argument recently between the notion of closing the achievement gap and that of
educational debt. The idea of educational debt, as previously mentioned, began gaining more steam as Ladson-Billings took up the challenge to educate more Americans on our moral requirements as American citizens based on the historical injustices experienced by minority students (Ladson-Billings, 2008). She reminded us that for long periods of time we have excluded entire groups of students from education and then underfunded them when they were finally included (p. 238). She has placed blame on these two issues as ultimately affecting student achievement and impeding gap closing.

More recently, Schouten (2012) agreed with all of these points mentioned by Ladson-Billings and has worked to also bring attention to the achievement gap debate. However, she has argued a slightly different point of contention which has deviated from the historical injustices of which Ladson-Billings refers (p. 231). Schouten (2012) has argued that the focus needs to be on eliminating the achievement gap by, “moving closer to an education system in which all students perform equally well. One way we might move toward a more just system is by spending more educational resources – instructional time, for example – [sic]on the low achievers” (p. 233). I have envisioned this spending of additional resources as that of investing in pre-natal care and early literacy programs for impoverished neighborhoods, rather than funding early literacy programs in areas already performing at high levels. Regardless of which side of the argument you agree, there can be no denying the existence of an achievement gap and the difficulties we have faced attempting to close that gap for over four decades.

Kao (2000), like Lieberson, has discussed that African American students have limited themselves academically, adding to the achievement gap, because they have
focused on “their feared selves...which have to do with stereotypes of blacks’ [sic] lower academic abilities (p. 427). Stereotypes can be a very debilitating thing to overcome and Steele (1997) believed that to have, “school success one must be identified with school achievement in the sense of its being a part of one’s self-definition, a personal identity” (p. 613).

As far back as 35 years ago, researchers suggested the differences in the achievement rates of White students versus those of color might be caused by teachers (in low performing, predominantly Black schools) who are not willing to expend additional energy aimed at increasing achievement” (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979, p. 124). Explained more deeply, this “additional energy” they refuse to distribute was defined as, “Lower levels of expectations, commitment, teacher-student interaction and innovative teaching methods” (Brookover et al., 1979, p. 124). This made sense and from a personal standpoint, I have seen and heard some teachers who truly believe a student’s background and socioeconomic status make high levels of academic achievement nearly impossible.

According to Casteel (2000) teacher expectations may not be everything, “one of the most frequent complaints of high school students, especially African American students, is that some teachers, most notably Caucasians, don’t relate very well to them” (p. 143). However, he brought attention to the fact that the students he studied “felt comfortable with their teachers and didn’t have a preference as to the race of their teachers (Casteel, 2000, p. 147). This has also been established by Burt, Ortlieb, and Cheek (2013) when they stated, “African American students generally have positive
perceptions toward their teachers regardless of the teacher’s race” (p. 215). Burt et al. (2013) did mention that, “students in the classrooms of African American teachers reported that their teacher did not embarrass them” (p. 215), but there was nothing significant in the findings that warranted preference of African American teachers. Therefore, regardless of the reason, low expectations or poor relationships, I purposefully attempted to uncover how a small group of African American students might limit their own academic achievement within the school district I have served.

In my experiences, I have seen that African American students have a difficult time navigating public schools because their language, history, and culture is referred to as incorrect or blatantly ignored (Merry & New, 2008; Ogbu, 1983). I would also argue that African Americans have faced educational injustice in schools since the inception of our educational system and that de facto segregation often forces them to attend schools with little exposure to Afrocentric curriculum (Fordham, 1996). Kozol (1991) found that the principals he met were, “reluctant to describe their schools as being ‘segregated’ or, indeed, even to speak of segregation. It is as if they have assimilated racial isolation as a matter so immutable, so absolute” (p. 151). Even today, 22 years after Kozol’s research, segregation is still occurring without much public attention.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate if African American students limited their academic achievement. It was my attempt to connect research regarding critical race theory, the blocked opportunities framework, the attitude achievement paradox, the creation of ethnic identities, expectations of parents and
teachers, false empathy, and the self-fulfilling prophecy with the participants’ lived experiences to determine why these African American students may have limited their own academic achievement.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions have resonated with me personally because of my own experiences working in predominantly African American school districts. I have, as a teacher and administrator, been perplexed by the low achievement scores within the school district and have searched for reasons to help answer and positively impact the achievement rates of the students I have served.

**Primary Research Question:**

Have perceived expectations from teachers and/or other experiences led African American students to limit their academic achievement?

**Secondary Research Question:**

Do the experiences of these twelfth grade students coincide with theories of racial identity, blocked-opportunities framework, and false empathy regarding student achievement?

**Rationale for the Study**

African American students have been scoring lower than their White counterparts since the early 1970’s (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). However, there have never been conclusive answers for why this phenomenon exists. Many theorists and scholars have attempted to address the issue and find reasons for the discrepancy in scores, however, in over 40 years the gap in test scores of Black and White students has
only narrowly closed. This has been a concern of mine for all 15 years I have been in education. It has been something I have wanted to learn more about and help address, so that more African American students are not disenfranchised within the public school system and they might achieve at higher rates. Therefore, learning about the lived experiences of the students I have served seemed highly appropriate in helping to answer these questions.

**Researcher’s Lens**

For over 15 years, I have worked primarily with African American children and parents as both an educator and administrator. During this time, I have struggled with comments made by some of the public, to me, regarding their perception of these students’ and families’ dedication to education in the communities in which I have worked. My belief has been that the public’s perception has existed because it is being observed only through the eyes and cultural norms of White, middle-class America (Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Merry & New, 2008; Weisskirch, 2005).

I have never accepted that African American students cannot achieve at the same rate as White students. I believe that some African American students may limit their academic achievement based on their perceived expectations of their teachers. Explicit or implicit racial discrimination from teachers can hinder student achievement and there may be a way to close the achievement gap if teacher/student relationships are focused upon (Diamond & Randolph, 2004; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006).
Strengthening the relationships between the predominantly White teachers and minority students could be extremely difficult. You have one group attempting to instill their personal views on education with a group who may openly say they value education and the opportunities it affords them, but secretly base their attitude more on group membership and peer relationships (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 185). Take for example an African American student who has gone to school, achieved low grades and has had to conference with a teacher. He or she could tell the teacher what they want to hear and that they understand they need to get good grades. However, that same student may also go home and see parents struggling with minimum wage jobs or hear stories about family members not being offered positions because of the color of their skin. These students have known that, “the schooling offered to them by the dominant group usually reflects the dominant group members’ perceptions of the place of the minorities in the opportunity structure” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 180). This lends credence to the idea of the middle-class values that insist hard-work pays off are not always a reality in impoverished neighborhoods because they [African Americans] view their situation as “worse” when compared with “White Americans” (Majerus, 2013, p. 5). As Fordham and Ogbu (1986) urged, “the community should develop programs to teach black [sic] children that academic pursuit is not synonymous with one-way acculturation into White cultural frame of reference” (p. 203). In other work Majerus (2013) agreed with them and stated that these programs may “counter the aspects of African American cultural interpretations that are harmful to academic achievement without forcing assimilation to the dominant culture” (p. 7).
Having worked in this setting for over 15 years, I have had personal connections to the students and staff in the school district. I have had personal feelings and admiration for the staff and students and was looking to strengthen how all teachers relay expectations and help students develop positive racial identities. I, like Majerus (2013) believe that, “teachers should work with the students to help them retain their own culture while at the same time becoming accommodated to the dominant one” (p. 8). This would, “empower students with cultural knowledge that will not detract from their sense of belonging to the own ethnicity” and help them achieve as, “ethnic identity and acculturation are closely connected to academic achievement” (Majerus, 2013, p. 8-9).

I have already played a significant role in hiring and evaluating staff. However, learning how students have perceived their teachers and the experiences they have lived are valuable pieces of information that can help bring more culturally relevant teaching/curriculum to the district and hopefully foster higher academic achievement.

I chose to work with twelfth grade students for this research because I believed I would be able to obtain more authentic information with less parental influence than if I were to work with younger students. I chose to work with the students within the district I have served because I have had personal experiences working with some of these students as their principal and our relationship was beneficial when conducting interviews. I also felt it was important to work with graduating seniors who had fresh experiences of school and relationships with teachers. I believed their honesty in the interviews was attributed to their age. They were adult enough to answer questions
regarding their experiences by reflecting upon what really happened and they were still current students with very fresh memories.

I employed the role of “advocate” as described by Glesne (2006) who stated that, “advocates champion a cause” (p. 136). I took the position throughout this study that African American students need more culturally diverse teaching and understanding from their predominantly White, middle-class teachers. I wanted to learn if the students I interviewed felt they were met with racist overtones or were allowed to perform at lower rates because of the expectations displayed by their teachers. I strived to discover how students viewed their own effort in conjunction with what they perceived they get from their teachers. In order to truly advocate for a change in expectation and pedagogy, I wanted strong data to support my claims and this is why a phenomenological approach was most appropriate; being that it is based solely on the lived experiences of the participants and “aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

Summary

With the personal experiences I have lived while being an educator in a predominantly African American school district and the disparity in test scores between African American and White students, I have worked to advocate and uncover answers as to possible reasons for the achievement gap. This gap has remained a problem for over 40 years and with multiple theories as to why, I believed this to be a worthy study to conduct. The ensuing literature review has attempted to connect possible theories and previous research to help address the central questions asked within the study.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to connect literature that could support and highlight ways in which African American students’ academic achievement may be limited. Connecting literature was an extremely important aspect of backing up my personal beliefs and this process was more difficult than expected. Difficult not because there were limited amounts of literature, but because there are so many theories as to why African American and impoverished students have historically achieved at lower rates than their White counterparts. The important pieces of literature represented within this review were:

1. History of segregation within the American public school system
2. Critical race theory
3. Blocked opportunities framework
4. Attitude achievement paradox
5. Developing ethnic identities
6. False Empathy
7. Expectations of students by parents and teachers
8. Self-fulfilling prophecy

I began with a history of segregation within the American public school system to set the groundwork for how African American students have been discriminated against and marginalized. I moved next into Critical Race Theory because it provided the entire
framework to begin looking at why African American students may limit their own achievement. Acknowledging the personal and social difficulties African American students are faced with allowed me to paint a truer picture of low expectations, whether overtly or covertly expressed to students that may exist in their daily lives.

The next section of the literature review dealt with the Blocked Opportunities Framework and the Attitude-Achievement Paradox because both helped foster reasons why African American students may limit their own academic achievement. I could not fully describe why African American students might limit their own achievement without first constructing how the students have viewed and compared their own academic achievement. The other purpose for using these two frameworks is to explain how African Americans have typically viewed educational achievement. These frameworks allowed me to understand what the African American students I interviewed believe about academic achievement.

The final section of the literature review demonstrated how African American students create ethnic identities. Included in this section are roles of parental expectations and the False Empathy Framework. I have believed that children use their perceived expectations from the adults around them to help not only create their own ethnic identity, but to also extend or limit their own achievement. Therefore, it was important to describe any unintentional racist tones associated with the False Empathy Framework and the contradiction related to high parental expectations and low student achievement.
The History of Segregation in America’s School

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was the quintessential Supreme Court case that changed the face of education in America. This case was based on race and the under the premise of the separate but equal claim made by the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case; which upheld separate but equal train cars for White and Blacks. Consequently, the *Brown* decision destroyed the notion that separate but equal was acceptable based upon the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (Edwards, 2004, p. 944). Edwards (2004) relayed that, “racial bigotry was firmly entrenched in our society. African Americans faced blatant discrimination in education, employment, housing, voting rights, public office, public accommodations, and interstate travel” (p. 945). This was, unfortunately, a reality in the daily lives of African Americans in the United States, but what was more surprising to me was that Edwards (2004) believed that, “*Brown* addressed segregation in public education, but the case was symbolically about so much more. The decision implicitly endorsed the idea that integration through racial assimilation would eventually cure racial bigotry” (p. 945). This idea of assimilation has helped African Americans gain opportunities previously denied to them, however, it has, “yet to find a cure for the problem that precipitated *Brown* – racial inequality in public education” (Edwards, 2004, 954).

Segregation in schools goes back before the early 1900’s when Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Du Bois were on opposites sides of the argument over segregation versus integration. Washington believed that there should be an, “investment in vocational training for Black workers, largely in separate Black schools”, whereas Du
Bois, “called for integration: he pressed for civil and political rights and the expansion of access to higher education for Blacks” (Edwards, 2004, p. 949). These different opinions have been a source of contention for African Americans for years with Thurgood Marshall and Dr. Martin Luther King being, “our champions in pursuit of this assimilationist ideal” (Edwards, 2004, p. 951).

President’s Kennedy and Johnson were proponents of “affirmative action” which, “went beyond the mere ban on racial discrimination – it included positive measures to achieve true equal opportunity” (Edwards, 2004, p. 953). This paved the way for higher education, when in the 1960’s, we “recognized that the near-total exclusion of historically disfavored minorities from preeminent undergraduate, graduate, and professional school programs would be prolonged indefinitely in the absence of race-conscious solutions” (Edwards, 2004, p. 954). Therefore, universities such as Harvard and Michigan began, “to take race into account as part of the admissions decisions” (Edwards, 2004, p. 954). However, this was addressed years later again in the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978) case where the Supreme Court ruled in favor of, “diversity as an alternative to justifications for affirmative action that focused on past discrimination and inequality” (Edwards, 2004, p. 962). This again was a follow-up from the Sweezy v. New Hampshire (1957) case that stated, “universities have a First Amendment interest in making its own judgments, including the selection of its students” (Edwards, 2004, p. 962). Finally, the Grutter v. Bollinger (2003) case is the, “link between diversity and the ongoing quest for racial equality” (Edwards, 2004, p. 965). This was a case that recognized that, “diversity not only illuminates the differences between groups, but also
the variety of perspectives within any single group” (Edwards, 2004, p. 966). The essential pieces from these decisions led to a shift in mindset from segregation, to assimilation, and finally towards diversity, including, race, gender, culture, and religion.

I have believed that the racial inequality that persists today in many of the public schools in America was a direct correlation of the failed attempt of the assimilation model. This model did not work for African Americans because as Edwards (2004) states they have always been seen as “different” (p. 952). He related this back to the fact that, “from the late nineteenth century to the present, most immigrant groups have been able to accede to the status of “Whiteness” even when those groups were, upon arrival in America, met with fierce prejudice” (Edwards, 2004, p. 951). He said that, “blending in” was a, “fanciful” idea because it is more difficult for African Americans to blend-in with Whites based on their “visible differences” and has even led to African Americans turning, “against members of their own race who were “too dark” or whose hair was “too nappy” (Edwards, 2004, p. 952).

This has also been seen in Great Britain where Brandt (1986) has argued, “educational provision for Black people has ranged from an Assimilationist model through an integrationalist model to one of cultural pluralism…and these various attempts have not only produced isolation and alienation but failure” (p. 49). Therefore you see that racism has persisted through much of the world and was not solely an issue within the United States. The visible differences mentioned by Edwards were reiterated again by Brandt (1986) when he described, “Black people, as an exploited group—not unlike the Northern Irish Catholics—come at the bottom of the hierarchy of exploitation
and are exploited both as a class and as a race” (p. 57). Black people were essentially forced to assimilate and because of their physical features moved towards integration.

This “blending-in” that Edwards mentions was far easier in the northern states than in the southern states because the North was addressing, “the flow of immigration... to provide the means for teaching the English language, develop loyalty to the new nation..., create the habits of dress, cleanliness, and demeanor that were desired, and generate a literate population that could vote wisely and contribute productively to the labor force” (Lieberson, 1980, p. 135). Conversely, in the South, these things were, “largely irrelevant as blacks [sic] were disfranchised and, moreover, the ‘place’ envisioned for blacks [sic] in the economic and social structure of the South…would prepare Negroes for the caste position prescribed for them by White Southerners” (Lieberson, 1980, p. 135). Therefore, while African Americans were legally permitted to attend non-segregated schools, the schools began to resegregate around them; and because most African Americans were, “concentrated in the South” and not required to follow “the stringent standards of admission to the nation” like many other immigrants, they were not afforded the same type of educational advantages (Lieberson, 1980, p. 251). Ladson-Billings (1994) discussed how original proponents of desegregated schools such as W. E. B. DuBois changed their position “after witnessing the persistent mistreatment of African American students in desegregated Northern schools” (p. 5). Some, like Bell (1992) have argued that desegregation was only beneficial to the White communities in the way of more federal funding, programs, staff professional
development, more personnel, and higher wages for staff. Nevertheless, schools have seemed to become more and more segregated again.

De facto segregation, which Armor (2003) referred to as, “segregation arising from such private actions as housing choices” is not unconstitutional and does not mean that we are back to the days before the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision (p. 40). African Americans have had many more opportunities now than before these landmark cases previously mentioned, however, even with “unlimited free public schooling, access to tax-supported public higher education, the opportunity to compete for most low-status jobs” African Americans are still discriminated against (Fordham, 1996, p. 63). Gerard (1988) stated that he forgave the framers of the school desegregation policy for their “short-sightedness…in the legal doctrine that has been built on *Brown*…and its application to large urban de facto segregated districts” (p. 227). However, he cannot understand how they missed two key components of the legislation, specifically, their, “not having anticipated the logistics of northern urban busing” and “lack of acknowledgement of strong widespread community opposition to two-way busing” (p. 227). These miscues may or may not have been easily addressed, but I have felt that the individuals responsible for helping to open the doors of higher-quality education to minority students should be lauded for their efforts. Although there existed an achievement gap between Whites and Blacks, attempting to close something that was created by segregation and unequal education is a difficult task with which we still struggle. Clark (1965) warned that,
Unless firm and immediate steps are taken to reverse the present trend, the public school system in the Northern cities of America will become predominantly a segregated system, serving primarily Negroes. It will, in addition, become a school system of low academic standards, providing a second-class education for under-classed children and thereby a chief contributor to the perpetuation of the “social dynamite” which is the cumulative pathology of the ghetto. (p. 112)

I have felt as though this prophecy as come true in many circumstances around our nation and we are now being reactive to problems with which we should have been proactive. Clark believed that, “the goals of integration and quality education must be sought together” (p. 117). Amazingly, we have continued to struggle with the same issues we faced in 1965. Integration and desegregation have been a farce because White people continuing to move from urban areas, the threat of no upward mobility, and even private and charter schools which tend to be much more homogeneous in nature. Therefore, the discussion of segregation has essentially brought us back to *Plessy v. Ferguson* and as Kozol (1991) stated, “public education seems in general to be unquestioned” (p. 4). This may have something to do with what Lieberson (1980) explained when he stated the general public accepted the, “poor performance of blacks [sic] as further justification for the provision for minimal educational facilities rather than as evidence of the harmful consequences stemming from the failure to provide suitable facilities and schools” (p. 136). This is evidenced in many urban settings today because of the de facto segregation and inequities in school funding between many affluent and urban schools.
Lieberson, (1980), went on to discuss the de facto segregation or “spatial isolation” as a way to keep African Americans within their, “relative position”, meaning their caste or place in society (p. 253). He has also asserted that, “shifts in spatial isolation will have an impact on the educational issues (of African Americans); which he explained are, “composition of schools attended, intermarriage, linguistic assimilation, and even the maintenance of a group’s distinctive occupational composition (Lieberson, 1980, p. 253). These ideas coincided directly with Clark and have proven to be somewhat visionary in my eyes. I have personally seen the differences between school districts with high minority populations versus those from mainly White populations, and I could never accuse people of purposely trying to hurt African American students. However, I would feel comfortable in saying that most White families may not accept their children attending a school with less resources and higher minority populations.

**Critical Race Theory**

The idea that, “schools mitigate racial barriers” was something instilled in many African Americans. Crenshaw (2011) illustrated the early formation and eventual rise of Critical Race Theory (CRT) by explaining that what transformed CRT into an, “intellectual movement” was the misunderstandings that took place between key people committed to racial equality being brought into “sharp relief” rather than dismissed as “marginal differences.” Specifically, she explained the “institutional struggle over race, pedagogy, and affirmative action in America’s elite law schools” (p. 1264). The students at Harvard were upset that the school lacked minority representation in the faculty and curriculum and believed without adjustments to both, they would not have the
opportunity to learn about or from people who had successfully worked towards improving racial equality.

Crenshaw (2011) challenged that the next step for CRT should be, “interdisciplinary, intersectional, and cross-institutional” (p. 1262). She explained that working within CRT we must, “interrogate (racial) power where we live, work, socialize and exist” and uncover the, “epistemic foundations of white [sic] supremacy as well as the habits of disciplinary thought that combines competing paradigms through colorblind conventions” (p. 1348). Cho and Westley (2000) offered that CRT,

Seeks transformation through recovery of, and placing emphasis on, excluded and marginalized elements of the body politic. CRT participates in the production of knowledge through the creation of a counter-discourse. The counter-discourse of CRT stands opposed to powerfully entrenched systems of totalizing knowledge that function through selection and exclusion of data. (p. 7)

This summation referred to exactly what Crenshaw challenged us to do within our own worlds. If we have failed to have the courage to address, question, and challenge the way things have always been done, then we would never get to the root of the problem. Although sometimes uncomfortable, leaders must intimately examine the status quo to ensure that people are not marginalized.

CRT was introduced into the educational scene in 1994 as a legal scholarship movement to address racial injustices (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Gillborn (2006) provided a conceptual map of Critical Race Theory shows that the defining elements are:

(a) Racism is endemic, both deeply ingrained legally and culturally.
(b) CRT crosses epistemological boundaries.

(c) It has critiqued civil rights laws as fundamentally limited.

(d) It has critiqued liberalist claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy as camouflages.

(e) Challenges ahistoricism and recognizes experiential knowledge of people of color. (p. 20)

Racism has been a part of the United States since its inception because of slavery, which has led directly to the experiences of African Americans and other peoples of color being marginalized (Fordham, 1996, p.63). Even after, “slavery ended with the Civil War, many blacks [sic] remained poor, uneducated, and outside the cultural mainstream” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 40). With African Americans being marginalized by being forced into slavery, denied civil rights like owning land and voting, segregated from learning opportunities and discriminated against when applying for jobs, schooling, and even loans, researchers must examine the experiences and places African Americans and other people of color hold in society. These examples have been argued for years throughout the court system; as the notion of separate but equal was proven never equal at all by Brown v. Board of Education. Research must be done in education if we are to ever understand and change the experiences and challenges people of color are faced with in the educational system.

The purpose for using a lens of Critical Race Theory was to focus on the lived experiences of the African American students and if those experiences led to self-limitation in regard to academic achievement. Delgado’s (2001) views agreed with my
advocacy world view when he explained that, “it is important that it is understood that people of color in our society speak from experience framed by racism” (p. 122). As the research developed, it was important to note the actual, lived experiences of the African American students in the study that related directly to racist limitations and the possible self-limitations that exist because of perceptions they hold about their predominantly White teachers.

Critical Race Theory held three major conceptual tools:

(a) Storytelling and counter-storytelling

(b) Interest convergence

(c) Critical White Studies

The purpose behind storytelling and counter-storytelling are to question the traditional myths, assumptions, and wisdoms by, “shifting the grounds of debate or presenting analyses in ways that turn dominant assumptions on their head” (Gillborn, 2006). CRT sought to challenge the mainstream viewpoint with stories that possess first-hand knowledge from the marginalized people who have experienced the conditions CRT seeks to change.

Sometime between the 1960’s and mid-1980’s was a brief period of time referred by some as the “Second Emancipation” (Fordham, 1996, p. 44). “Prior to the Second Emancipation, there existed both legal (de jure segregation) and extralegal (de facto segregation) means of denying the humanness of people of African descent” (p. 44). However, “the Second Emancipation forged a revolution within a revolution – a double layered reformation... an identity implosion” (Fordham, 1996, p 44). This identity
implosion helped spark the “acceptance of the re-imaging of Blackness” and became the first time in “American history in which African peoples born and reared in America were declared legally indistinguishable from their Euramerican counterparts” and found “themselves facing both unparalleled opportunities and subtle limitations” (Fordham, 1996, p. 45). Ultimately the issue now became less about the educational opportunities that existed or were accessible for African Americans and more about the idea or need to integrate into the dominant, White culture to succeed academically.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) stated that, “because racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it” (p. 7). Gillborn (2006) restated Delgado and Stefancic in an earlier quote that, “White elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for blacks only when such advances also promote White self-interest” (p. 25). This coincides with the final conceptual tool of CRT, Critical White Studies. Critical White Studies referred to the attempt at “deconstructing the taken-for-granted myths and assumptions that circulate about what it means to be and not be, a ‘White’ person” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 25). Consequently, it was important to note that teachers must do a lot of introspection when trying to become more culturally relevant or responsive with their instruction.

“Whiteness has been positioned as the optimal status criterion or standard in the society” (Singer, 2005, p. 369). This point has also been stressed in a review article by Powers (2007) which retold a story about a Black, university law student who found, “no language in which to embark on a race-based, systematic critique of legal reasoning and
legal institutions” (p. 152). This story was important because it came at the time before CRT had come to the forefront and it also showed just how CRT fit in to education. If the “…top law schools are well-placed for careers that will allow them to have some measure of influence over the legal system” (Powers, 2007, p. 152). Then not examining the institutional racism involved only perpetuated the vicious cycle of White self-promotion and legal dominance.

Ladson-Billings (2005) provided for a quick historical review of CRT and how it has evolved in educational scholarship throughout the first ten years of its existence in educational research. She highlighted many researchers for their contributions to the major beliefs behind CRT and provided some poignant observations regarding their work. Ladson-Billings (2005) articulated how Donnor has developed a new topic of interest under the CRT umbrella known as, “educational malpractice” (p. 118). She described a scenario of an implied contract between the citizens and their schools and asked, “Is there some minimal level of educational competency that public support of schools should legally expect?” (Ladson-Billings, 2005). This view was important within this research because it addressed what students should expect from their public schools and what they can do if the citizens and public schools they attend do not support or prepare them to take advantage of collegiate offerings.

Another aspect of traditional public schools that CRT tried to address is that of the creation of educational inequity. Ladson-Billings (2005) pointed out that she especially appreciated the way Duncan provided a lens to help construct the timeline of educational inequity. She disagreed slightly, but restated Duncan who insisted, “that schools create
race for everyone, regardless of racial and ethnic affiliation” and, “race is one of those concepts that is already well established before students even get to school” (p. 118). I brought attention to this small debate because of questions regarding the creation of ethnic identities and the role schools have played in the process. Having witnessed teachers and schools focused on treating everyone the same and expecting all students to behave in a similar manner regardless of the cultural differences they possess, has raised concern that the African American students involved in this study may be limiting their own achievement because of the ethnic identity created for them.

If schools can create ethnic identities for students, then it is the educational system that may be failing our minority students. Therefore, change may be needed within the educational system to understand what students of color perceive and understand so that changes can be made to ensure minority students are academically successful. This concept can be taken back to the late 1800’s in Canada and early 1900’s in Australia with the creation of residential, industrial, and re-education schools designed to rapidly assimilate Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children in both countries were forced to leave their families and become educated in the ways of the dominant culture. The government of Canada believed that, “industrial schools provided the infrastructure to remove children from their parents” and separate them from their “savage” ways (Enns, 2009, p. 108). I have not seen our current public schools attempting to erase African American culture from students, but we could be more culturally diverse with our curriculum to enhance and highlight African American achievements.
CRT not only questioned the legal aspect of providing students of color with inferior educational opportunities, but it also addressed the racist overtones that persisted throughout education. A study from the United Kingdom showed that racism is an issue across nations and educational systems. The study suggested that, “…simply asserting our anti-racist intentions means nothing if we leave unchanged the dominant systems of testing, the curriculum, teacher education, and punitive inspection regimes that penalize schools serving working-class and minoritized communities” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 15).

Ladson-Billings (1992) strengthened this response when she stated that, “Critical theorists assert that schools function to reproduce the systemic inequalities of the society. Consequently, the way to break the cycle is to focus on the kind of education minority students need” (p. 109).

In response to the idea of the kind of education that most benefits minority students, Ladson-Billings (1992) offered the idea of culturally relevant teaching.

Culturally relevant teaching serves to empower student to the point where they will be able to examine critically educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society. It uses the students’ culture to help them create meaning and understand the world. (Chapter 8, p. 110)

CRT has had, as a basic insight, “that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 20). Therefore, maybe it was more a function of institutional racism that focuses on the, “more subtle and hidden operations of
power that have the effect of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 20). This study addressed the influence of power teachers have over students and the possible effect that relationships have on the creation of racial identity or self-limiting behaviors of African American students.

**Blocked Opportunities Framework**

African Americans have faced many struggles throughout their tumultuous history in the United States. Trying to understand how African American students have limited themselves academically was not an easy task. Kao and Tienda (1998) recommended using the blocked opportunities framework in, “understanding race and ethnic differences in educational aspirations” (p. 353) because traditionally, African Americans have held education in high regard because of the chance for upward mobility.

Another aspect of the blocked opportunities framework that was of interest was the idea that African American students’ academic achievement is limited by the experiences they have in school, on the street, and in their homes. This was an important concept because African American students have been able to provide more concrete examples of blocked mobility than their White counterparts, but it does not answer why most Black students have high expectations towards educational achievement (Kao & Tienda, 1998, p. 354-355).

Gutman and Midgley (2000) described three major factors that have hindered the academic achievement of impoverished and minority youth, “psychological, family, and school” (p. 227-228). The psychological factors included, “academic ability, social comparison, and public evaluation” (p. 241). The family factors included, “parental
involvement as evidence of continued parental expectation of their successful school performance” (p. 228). Finally, the school factors included, “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported at school” (p. 228). All three of these factors have threatened to significantly block minority and impoverished students from high academic achievement (Gutman & Midgley, 2000).

Poverty can also be a condition which may easily block the mobility of youth, especially minorities. Clark (1965) emphasized this by, “attempting to describe and interpret what happens to human beings who are confined to depressed areas and whose access the normal channels of economic mobility and opportunity is blocked” (p. xxxvi). He talked about the “invisible wall” of the ghetto holding it’s inhabitants in with “deteriorated housing and schools, neighbors resenting his presence…it’s physical ugliness – the dirt, the filth, the neglect” (p. 26-27). Abrego and Gonzales (2010) discussed that,

Racial segregation and limited opportunities have historically concentrated poverty in Black and Latino communities, subjecting residents to the structural effects of poverty. In effect, the low quality of education and low socioeconomic status of urban low-income neighborhoods cumulatively deter the academic progression of the children, shaping their future life chances. (p. 147)

Many students of color do not see the possibility of rising above the impoverished conditions in which they live and many of their families do not understand how to navigate the educational system for maximum support. Therefore, impoverished youth tend to become even more segregated into underperforming schools with substandard
teachers and facilities. Many times this has led to children being, “lost to poverty and turmoil and the damage done by knowing they are written off by their society” (Kozol, 1991, p. 34). This was something that has affected people of color throughout the world. They “experience racism at every turn in education, in their social relations and relationships with authority, in their employment and in housing” (Brandt, 1986, p. 580). This then causes them to “develop attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and competencies that are not necessarily congruent with those required to do well in school (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 179).

Educators cannot control for or improve a family’s socioeconomic status, but they can attempt to remove barriers from children’s lives. Supporting children of color at school by building meaningful relationships and providing opportunities that help show students the benefits of educational achievement. Kao and Tienda (1998) warned that the Blocked Opportunities Framework does not adequately provide for all minority groups, however, because this study is being conducted with solely African American students the framework is pertinent.

Bankston and Caldas (1996) stated that, “a history of oppression and deprivation has attached disadvantages to race over and above socioeconomic disadvantages, and has therefore made minority concentration in and of itself an inhibitor of academic achievement” (p. 536). Their research has coincided with Coleman’s (1966) who found that the background of fellow students has more impact on student achievement than teacher quality, facilities, and curriculum (p.22). Coleman (1966) explained, “that children from a given family background, when put in schools of different social
composition, will achieve at quite different levels. This effect is again less for White pupils than for any minority group other than Orientals” (p. 22). This was astounding because of the segregation that has occurred from the continuous movement of White families to areas with low minority populations. This “residential or de facto segregation” as Armor (2003) and Bankston and Caldas (1996) referred to has blocked African American students from Coleman’s leading variable of student achievement; background of fellow students.

Gerard (1988) disagreed with the view that simply placing minority students in a classroom with White students to compete against is the answer to raising minority student achievement. He compared his own views with that of the pariah hypothesis from the Brown decision that suggested,

Being thrust into the previously all-White classroom, the child (of color) would see herself or himself in a new light and would conclude that he or she was just like and as good as everybody else – like all those Whites out there and here in the classroom. With the notion that, the person must be motivated to reach the higher standard, and it must also not exceed his or her potential grasp; the performance situation must somehow be tractable for the person. (p. 232)

Pollard (1993) agreed more with Gerard, in that “High-achieving African American students report greater confidence in their abilities, more support from others, and more active problem solving strategies” (p. 353). Whereas, Fordham (1996) attributed high-achieving African American students’ motivation to two critical factors:
First, they believe that if they are able to demonstrate that African American students can perform in ways that are comparable to those of their White counterparts (“prove the racists wrong”), they will be able to reclaim the rightful identity of African Americans and obtain the same opportunities and rewards as their White cohorts. Second, they believe they will be able to avenge the dehumanization of their Black ancestors by appropriating and inverting the myth of intellectual inferiority (p. 328).

Regardless of the reason, it was the motivation, or the personal believe held by the student, that sparked the student’s academic achievement, not simply the placement of the student or the demographic make-up of the school. Students have many reasons to achieve and whether it is personal pride, a chance at future upward mobility, or even a competitive nature, I would argue that we cannot rely on the racial makeup of our schools to close the achievement gap.

**Attitude-Achievement Paradox**

A second framework for viewing how African American students develop aspirations for academic achievement is that of the “Attitude-Achievement Paradox” as described by Mickelson (1990, p. 44). The Attitude-Achievement Paradox among African Americans is the coupling of high educational expectations and low performance. Mickelson (1990) explained that she found that Blacks score higher than Whites on abstract ideas about schooling because they understand the promise education makes as a way for socioeconomic mobility, but that they continue to score lower on concrete ideas such as employment obstacles and actual school experiences (p. 44).
Fordham (1996) explained that, “African Americans have been taught that equality of status is best achieved through the process of schooling. They are repeatedly assured that if they will just perform well in school, the blackness of their skin will not matter” (p. 64). However, the disagreement began because of, “the rhetorical importance that blacks place on education has rarely been matched by their scholastic performance” (Mickelson, 1990, p. 44). These quotes embodied the exact contradiction that Mickelson was attempting to uncover with the Attitude-Achievement Paradox. She believed that, “all students, both Black and White, hold two sets of attitudes toward schooling…abstract and concrete” (Mickelson, 1990, p. 45). Abstract attitudes toward schooling have been based upon, “beliefs about education and opportunity, as found in the dominant ideology of U. S. society.” Whereas, concrete attitudes toward schooling, “reflect the diverse empirical realities that people experience with respect to returns on education from the opportunity structure” (Mickelson, 1990, p. 45). This theory was directly connected to that of the Blocked Opportunities Framework because concrete attitudes correlated directly with the student’s, “perception and understanding of how adults who are significant in their lives receive more equitable or less equitable wages, jobs, and promotions relative to their educational credentials” (Mickelson, 1990, p. 45). Even though African Americans may believe education is a valuable tool, some also know many stories and personal examples of other African Americans who were not afforded the same pay or opportunities as Whites with the same education (Fordham, 1996; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Ogbu, 1983). This view was very real and many African Americans have experienced a, “job ceiling, so that even when they (African Americans) achieved in
school in the past, i.e., had good educational credentials, they were not given access to jobs, wages, and other benefits commensurate with their academic accomplishments (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 179).

Downey, Ainsworth, and Qian (2009) have argued that Mickelson and Ogbu may be simply, “skeptical of Blacks’ pro-school attitudes” (p. 2). They argued that, “blacks [sic] may present themselves in an especially positive light to researchers” (p. 2). They cited Ogbu’s research from 2003 that he, “found plenty of Black youths who were willing to admit that they were uninterested in schooling and that they thought Blacks did not try as hard as Whites in school” (Downey et al., 2009, p. 2). They were also concerned that these previous studies imply that, “when Blacks express pro-school attitudes, they need not be taken seriously” (Downey et al., 2009, p. 3). This argument has had credibility and is especially scary if, in fact, educators begin not taking African American students seriously when showing a positive attitude towards school.

Downey, Ainsworth, and Qian (2009) offered the alternate view that African American students attitudes toward school should be give greater credibility. They believed that, “Because achievement depends on much more than attitudes, it is possible that Blacks’ pro-school attitudes are legitimate, but that their school achievement is behind that of Whites because Blacks face other challenges” (p. 4). Two possible explanations for the lower achievement of Black students were the lack of “strategic resources” they bring and discriminatory processes. “Strategic resources” were defined as things that expose students to the, “specific daily routines that develop the skills
necessary for success” (Downey et al., 2009, p. 5). Therefore, Blacks have had a much more difficult time,

Navigat(ing) a more burdensome route when attempting to get good grades, prepare for the SAT, explore colleges, apply for financial aid, negotiate the complexities of applications, garner reference letters, make sense of the expectations of college professors, and negotiate the challenges of college life. (Downey et al., 2009, p. 5)

This alternative view made some sense and connected back to the Blocked Opportunities Framework. The aforementioned difficulties African American students are faced with when attempting to pursue college are real and possible explanations for why Black students achieve at lower rates. Another aspect of this idea was that African American students “must obtain interpersonal support from outside, rather than inside, the school setting (as compared with White students)” (Pollard, 1993, p. 353). African American students’ positive attitude toward school achievement could be negatively impacted if they viewed not being supported by school personnel in the school setting. I believe the two views were not as different as they have seemed and I was especially interested in the idea that African Americans tend to project themselves in a much better light to researchers.

A final view may also be that African American students have faced more “status problems” than do White students (Ogbu, 2008, p. 31). Ogbu (2008) explained that there are four major status problems Black students face:
1. Involuntary incorporation into society
2. Instrumental discrimination
3. Social subordination
4. Expressive mistreatment (p. 31)

“These four areas specifically dealt with being forced into slavery, denial of equal access to education, jobs, participation, segregation, and cultural, linguistic, and intellectual denigration” (p. 32). Even though the current students were not subjected to any or all of this, they do know personal stories of family members or friends that have either lived, experienced, or passed down stories from previous generations who have been discriminated against. These things could put African American students in a quandary when deciding to adopt or exhibit cultural qualities between the White and Black cultures and could make it very difficult to develop positive ethnic identities.

**Developing Ethnic Identities**

Evans (1967) discussed his conversations with one of the best-known theorists regarding the development of identity, Erik Erikson. At the core of Erikson’s theory was the notion that during adolescence, we began to examine our own identities and ultimately create who we are as adults. He described that, “The eight stages of man were really formulated for the White House Conference of 1950. The planners of the conference challenged us, who had looked at children for so long, to tell them how “normality” develops” (Evans, 1967, p. 63). Erikson believed that in order for adolescents to create a healthy identity, they must develop, “a firm identity at the
conclusion of adolescence” (Evans, 1967, p. 29). He believed that if this does not occur, children will not grow into a psychologically healthy adult.

A major piece of the development process for adolescents is “trust versus mistrust.” The idea of trust versus mistrust begins at birth and reflects the many experiences children face when maturing. There were both positive and negative aspects of this idea, with the positive creating an adult who has the ability to trust others and oneself and the negative creates an adult who harbors mistrust for others and oneself (Muus, 1996, p. 47-48). Erikson reviewed that, “Mixed in with the positive identity, there is a negative identity which is composed of what he has been shamed for, what he had been punished for, and what he feels guilty about” (Evans, 1967, p. 35-36).

Another important aspect of Erikson’s identity development was that of autonomy versus shame and doubt. Reflecting upon the adolescent part of this stage, we saw either adolescents who were developing a sense of who they are with pride and control or a child who was doubting their self-worth, self-conscious, or overly brash and out of control. Erikson discussed that, “This is the age when the child begins to blush, which is a symptom of knowing one is being watched (from the inside, too) and is found wanting” (Evans, 1967, p. 19). “For just when a child has learned to trust his mother and to trust the world, he must become self-willed and must take changes with his trust in order to see what he, as a trustworthy individual, can will” (Evans, 1967, p. 19). For the children who have not yet learned to trust their caregiver, this moved directly into the next section of Erikson’s “Stages of Man” industry versus inferiority.
Erikson’s “Stages of Man” I believed, related directly to racial identity because of the industry versus inferiority stage. This stage has the child developing through school, learning rules and regulations. It also explained that in this stage children will either earn a sense of worth and an understanding of the skills with which they are successful. However, just like the others, this stage had a negative side that has the child failing to acquire a sense of usefulness or pride in their skills, which can lead to the feeling of inadequacy and inferiority.

These stages Erikson provided offer some idea of how students begin to develop a sense of identity. African American children may have a much harder task developing a racial identity because of the discrimination and cultural socialization that must occur to construct one that is positive. Markus and Nurius (1986) established what they called “Possible Selves.” “Possible selves, represent individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming” (p. 954). In trying to understand how African American students create a racial identity, we must look at the positive and negative sides to the “Possible Selves” conceptual model. There are many people who have a positive and negative self-image and they are hard to explain and understand, but if we take some time to understand how they were created, we may just get a glimpse at the background needed to construct both.

I focused on the negative self-image and how it may be created by young African American students. This focus may account for the low academic achievement of African American students and help to understand the way they have felt about themselves and their education. Markus and Nurius (1986) mentioned that, “negative
possible selves can be powerfully imprisoning because their associated affect and expectations may stifle attempts to change or develop” (p. 963). The words “imprisoning” and “stifle” have had a very serious connotation and answer directly to what many African American children may be feeling about themselves and their education. This type of self-image can have serious impact on a student’s learning, creativity, and achievement because if they do not believe in what they can do or will be able to do in the future, they will, more than likely, either give up or not put forth much effort in school.

Education in both the United States and Britain has, “functioned to transport the knowledge and culture the ‘society’ wants children to have and that it serves the needs and intentions of the mass of the population and that schools’ curricula and pedagogy are only instruments/tools of transmission.” However, “schooling in Western capitalist societies has proven to not only maintain but perpetuate the status quo of an unequal and stratified society” (Brandt, 1986, p. 74). Merry and New (2008) discussed that African-centered pedagogy could be an answer to developing African Americans’ racial identity and ultimate success in school. Brought on with very good intentions and the success of the charter school and voucher movement, these African-centered schools have strived to take control of schools that are in already segregated areas. At the very core, these schools, “endeavor to supply that cultural base, placing the history, culture, and life experiences of individuals of African descent at the center of everything that they do” (Merry & New, 2008, p. 37). What was most important about the African-centered pedagogy is that leaders of the movement believed that with a strong foundation and
background, coupled with family and community, even institutional racism and deplorable economic conditions cannot derail the creation of a positive self-image for African American students. Brandt (1986) backed up this claim by insisting, “pupils of ethnic minority backgrounds would have a positive self-image and therefore would be more in sympathy with the school as an institution and with society at large” (p. 114). Majerus (2013) also agreed with this claim and insisted that, “Culturally-based academic programs help students to establish dual identities between their home and school environments” (p. 4).

Opponents of African-centered schools spoke to the fact that African Americans are a very diverse group across an even more diverse nation that do not share the exact same history or experiences. They also believed that African-centered schools have undermined the success of the civil rights movement by creating segregated schools and curriculum (Merry & New, 2008, p. 37). There is, however, a group of researchers who believed quite the opposite. Gerard (1988) has argued that we do not enhance an African American student’s self esteem by placing him in a predominantly White setting. He stated that, “the black child growing up in a black family with black friends and relatives probably develops as strong feelings of self-worth as does the White child growing up in a White world” (p. 233). This coincided with the research of Bankston and Caldas (1996) who posited that, “a strong sense of ethnic identity can actually make significant contributions to scholastic performance” (p. 538).

Ladson-Billings (1994) explained that regardless of a person’s vantage point, the idea that African American students receive a typically poor, public education may still be true (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 1). She went
on to explain that even with desegregation, schools have become, once again, segregated, now more than ever before (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 3). 50 years past the Civil rights movement, we are still faced with similar educational inequities between Whites and Blacks (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The reality was that schools may have done a disservice to all minority groups and have traditionally worked to instill Euro-centric, White values upon the students of color in our schools. Brandt (1986) described the “educational climate [in England] is one of economic constraint, accompanied by an ideological struggle…dressed in the nomenclature of quality, equality, firmness, multi-culturalism, harmony and the resurrected notion of Education for All” (p. 66). I have not believed there is too much of a difference between what we have experienced as education as evolved in the United States. We too have seen socioeconomics and class struggles over race affect African American student achievement.

This, in itself, is not the only problem. Casteel (2000) argued that, “Caucasian teachers must be better prepared to teach minority students, if public education is to be successful” (p. 147). Therefore, the answer to fixing the resegregation of schools based on socioeconomic status cannot be determined easily, but we can work to “prepare teachers to teach in integrated classrooms” and help African American children develop stronger self-images, which may help raise their achievement (Casteel, 2000, p. 147).

Socialization has shown us that group images can link directly to ethnicity and ability, which have implied to the different ethnic groups the norms of behavior within their particular group, as well as specifying their areas of expertise and achievement
within society and education (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Shinnar, 2008). Assuming this was accurate, the self-perceptions of African American students were already lower than those of White students, according to Kao (2000), because of the stereotypes linking race, expectations, and educational achievement. Therefore, these images that African American students have about themselves and their cultural group have helped create the minimum standard for behavior within that group and directly shape individual expectations (Seaton, Yip, & Sellars, 2009). What this means was that stereotypes have strengthened the boundaries between groups and even legitimizes beliefs about areas of competence between specific cultural groups (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Kao, 2000; Shinnar, 2008).

Steele (1997) offered a similar view when he stated that, “By diminishing one’s educational prospects, these limitations (e.g., inadequate resources, few role models, preparational disadvantages) should make it more difficult to identify with academic domains” (p. 613). He warned of what he called the “stereotype threat” as to what may be perpetuating the lower achievement of African American students. Stereotype threat, “is the social—psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies” (p. 614). This may not seem like an alarming threat, but consider that, “Through long exposure to negative stereotypes about their group, members of prejudiced-against groups often internalize the stereotypes, and the resulting sense of inadequacy becomes a part of them” (p. 617). The end result could be that stereotypes were responsible for continuing a self-fulfilling prophecy for minority students.
Stereotypes can be very deflating for African American students. Steele (1997) warned that, “in the short run (stereotypes) can depress their (African American/minority students) intellectual performance” (p. 627). Cokley and Chapman (2008) agreed and explained that,

Stereotypes associated with minority status and thereby ethnic identity can impede a student’s academic goals justifying and promoting negative evaluations of one’s ability to achieve in school. Thus, the feelings and attitudes associated with minority status are an inherent aspect of one’s ethnic identity and that can create self-defeating attitudes related to academic achievement. (p. 351)

This statement was thoroughly troubling because of the underlying stereotypes that had permeated some teachers’ thoughts. If educators do not foster the creation of a positive self-image for African American students, they may be unintentionally feeding into the same negative stereotypes that are holding the students back in the first place. I have tended to agree more with Cokley and Chapman (2008) than McWhorter (2001) who described African Americans as having anti-intellectual attitudes. He did paint a very vivid picture of the experiences he has had while as a student and professor of linguistics and even offered interesting insight as to what he saw as a cult of anti-intellectualism. As suggested by “the anti-intellectual strain is inherited from Whites having denied education to blacks for centuries, and has been concentrated by the Separatist trend, which in rejecting the “White” cannot help but cast school and books as suspicious and alien, not to be embraced by the authentically “black” person” (McWhorter, 2001, p. 83).
McWhorter (2001) qualified his statements in the Afterword by pointing to the fact that, “after emancipation, blacks were as hungry for education as any American group: anti-intellectualism was largely a class issue just as it has been in the White community” (p. 270). It appeared to me that their experiences in school have had more of a factor than their own personal attitudes in regard to African American student achievement. Which led me to agree with Cokley and Chapman (2008) that without culturally relevant pedagogy the students will have a difficult time creating a positive self-image and connect that with potential teacher bias and even substandard materials or facilities and we create a perfect storm of low student achievement (p. 352). Majerus (2013) agreed completely with this standpoint and stated that,

This trend of academic underachievement in the African American community is a learned problem. The achievement gap did not simply develop because African American students and parents simply don’t care, but rather it persists since they have systematically been taught not to value the American education system and the knowledge that results from advancement through it. (p. 2)

Fordham (1996) discovered that nearly every student she interviewed internalized, “the claim that they are less intelligent than the dominant White population” and “shared the view that this perception is influential in the consignment of African Americans to low-status jobs and inferior schooling” (p. 65-66). Therefore, the motivation these students have had to pursue academic excellence may be non-existent when they view their place within society as pre-determined.
Children can identify with a certain ethnic group at pretty young ages, however, it is not until adolescence that children begin to actually understand and witness how other ethnic groups view their own ethnic group (Hughes, Hagelskamp, Way, & Foust, 2009). Therefore, these minority youths must, “reconcile their group membership with knowledge that their group is stigmatized and devalued and with experiences of racism, discrimination, and stereotypes” (Hughes et al., 2009, p. 607). So while African American students are trying to navigate the traditional public school and fit in with the Euro-centric values, they are also struggling to create a positive self-image while learning that other groups dislike, distrust, or even devalue them as people. This cannot be an easy thing to do when dealing with maturing into adulthood too.

A significant aspect of creating ethnic identity also revolves around gender. Hughes et al. (2009) found that parents anticipate more discrimination and bias surrounding boys and therefore attempt to prepare them more to deal with such discriminatory practices. They went on to suggest that, “boys are more likely than girls to be viewed by others as threatening” (Hughes et al., 2009, p. 608). This phenomenon cannot be ignored because of the way African American males are treated in education. African American males are more likely to be placed in special education classrooms and especially emotionally disturbed units than African American females or White males.

This notion of developing an ethnic identity is foreign and difficult to understand for most Whites because Whites do not typically identify race as an important aspect of their lives (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2008, p. 140). If this was an accurate claim it was easy to see why there is less Afrocentric pedagogy within public schools that are
typically run by the White majority. My standpoint has been that there is not an intentional disregard for Afrocentric pedagogy in schools and African American students do not have to be taught solely by African American teachers. However, there is a lack of understanding towards the importance of helping students of color develop an ethnic identity. Because Whites do not usually focus on the creation of identity, the concept and importance are not at the forefront of their minds when deciding on curriculum or pedagogical strategies. This was a problem because according to Grossman and Charmaraman (2009), “School serves as a critical context of adolescents’ racial socialization, and a growing body of research documents relationships between school racial/ethnic composition and adolescents’ racial experiences and identities” (p. 141).

Therefore, it should be a goal for public education to help minority students develop positive racial identities within the context of the larger school system. The students need to see how their ethnic group is vital and important to the success of the school and larger society by learning about the accomplishments of people within their own ethnic group as well as those outside of their ethnic group. This does not mean African Americans can only achieve at high levels when having an African American teacher, but it could help foster a more positive ethnic identity (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2008).

The consequences of developing a negative identity can be extremely damaging for children, especially those of color. Seaton, Yip, and Sellars (2009) reported that, “Identity development...provides the foundation for future behavior, which is either productive or adverse, throughout the life span” (p. 406). The implications were that students of color who develop negative ethnic identities are more likely to have a
negative impact on society throughout their lives. This was a profound statement that may or may not be accurate, however, the fact that African American adolescents are dealing with racial discrimination and other “stressors” such as negative views about African Americans, while trying to create their own identity is alarming. The statement, “…experiences predict views, which seemingly predict experiences” offers insight into what African American students are coping with while trying to create their identities (Seaton et. al., 2009, p. 413). They were essentially seeing, firsthand, how people thought about them as an ethnic group and experiencing the discrimination that goes along with that, while trying to develop a positive identity about their ethnic affiliation.

African American students can be highly influenced by their family and neighborhood structure. Byrd and Chavous (2009) found that neighborhoods matter as African American students are creating racial identities. They explained that because we are all influenced by the people who raise us and our daily experiences. Our parents, family, and friends are the adults with which we have first contact and from whom we learn values and beliefs. Discounting where students come from and the experiences they have lived does nothing but provide a disservice to the students (Byrd & Chavous, 2009). As previously stated, educators need to become more cognizant of their students’ backgrounds because the students they serve tend to, “link these beliefs to achievement motivation” (Byrd & Chavous, 2009, p. 558). Clark (1965) felt as though, “The schools in the ghetto have lost faith in the ability of their students to learn and the ghetto has lost faith in the ability of the schools to lead” (p. 139). Gutman and Midgley (2000) expounded on this further, explaining “In these communities (poor and minority), the
attitudes and behaviors of school personnel are often crucial in parents’ levels of school involvement” and that, “These efforts on the part of school personnel can have important behavioral consequences for students’ achievement” (p. 243).

Developing a positive ethnic identity gets clouded even more for Black students because they have to deal with the burden of being labeled as, “acting White” (Ogbru, 2008, p. 49). Ogbru (2008) explained that Black Americans can assimilate with the White culture, accommodate without assimilating, or resist totally (p. 50-51). He described situations where some African Americans have found great success by, “rejecting their blackness [sic] and, insofar as possible, embrace Whiteness” in speech, demeanor, dress, and even walk (p. 49-50). This view, Ogbru (2008) stated, “comes at a great price” and says others opt to accommodate by, “adopting White cultural and language frames of reference where they have to in order to succeed in school or in other White-controlled institutions” (p. 50). Finally, there are some African Americans who have believed that either of these choices resulted in, “disloyalty to the Black cause or Black community” and refuse to change anything about their cultural identity (Ogbru, 2008, p. 52). Sadly, this may have helped with a more positive ethnic identity but limit them in certain situations.

Fordham and Ogbru (1986) discussed the “burden of acting White” as:

White Americans traditionally refused to acknowledge that black Americans are capable of intellectual achievement, and partly because black Americans subsequently began to doubt their own intellectual ability, began to define academic success as White people’s prerogative, and began to discourage their
peers, perhaps unconsciously, from emulating White people in academic striving, i.e., from “acting White.” (p. 177)

Majerus (2013) agreed completely with this idea and stated that, “A negative dual frame of reference is commonly present in the African American community” because “African Americans do not believe that hard work and education will equate success for them” (p. 5). This was a very troubling position on the role academic achievement plays in the African American community and specifically addresses why African Americans may develop “survival strategies, such as collective struggle, uncle tomming, and hustling” to succeed (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 179).

Collective struggle referred to African Americans feeling and perceiving their “treatment by Whites as collective and enduring oppression” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 181). This was a very debilitating belief because it rested on the notion that regardless the intellectual or personal strengths, “they cannot expect to be treated like White Americans, “their fellow citizens” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 181). Although this creation of a collective identity was created out of response to a negative situation, it has served to become a more binding and “positive attribute” for African Americans (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 184). Fordham (1996) referred to this collective identity as “fictive kinship” and explains that the, “fictive kinship system is African American’s premier prestige system in their imagined nation-state, conveying the idea of brotherhood and sisterhood of all African Americans, regardless of class, gender, or sexual orientation” (p. 72).
“Uncle Tomming” referred to members of the Black community acting in ways which are perceived “White” by their peers. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) described a few ways such as, “speaking standard English…, spending a lot of time at the library studying, and working hard to get good grades in school” (p. 186). These behaviors were associated with “acting White” in their study conducted at Capital High and have added to the burden African American students face when trying to simultaneously remain a member of the Black community and succeed in school. A problem that was even more burdensome when, “academically able black students face both pressures from blacks peers to conform, and doubts from Whites about their ability” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 199).

**False Empathy**

False empathy was a term that Delgado (1996) referred to as, “a White (person) believes he or she is identifying with a person of color, but in fact is doing so only in a slight, superficial way” (p. 70). A better way to understand what he was talking about is to consider the example,

when a White empathizes with a black [sic], it’s always a White-black [sic] that he or she has in mind. The White surmises what he would be like if he were black [sic], but with his same wants, needs, perspectives, and history. All grounded in White experience. (p. 71)

This description of false empathy spoke directly to educators because public education in urban, predominantly African American areas, has displayed this type of empathy from many educators. Ladson-Billings (1992) elaborated on this claim when she mentioned
that, “ineffective teachers, while compassionate, often see their students as victims and in inescapable situations. They treat their students as incapable of handling academically rigorous material” (p. 112).

I have experienced teachers who, inherently, want to do the right thing for students and do not set out to hold back minority students. Therefore, one must be very careful when attempting to distinguish the reasons behind why teachers display false empathy. One of the best explanations may be that, “…Whites lack double consciousness. As members of the majority culture, they have little practice viewing experiences from two perspectives at once” (Delgado, 1996, p. 72). This explanation was important because it addressed why teachers may not even know they are doing what is wrong for students when they feel as though they are doing what is best. Fordham (1996) discussed that some educators “are convinced that if (their) students would work in ways that parallel the pedagogical claims postulated in their teacher-training courses, they would become something other than victims in an oppressive social system” (p. 203).

The problem was the teachers’ values, wants, and needs are all predicated on their White middle-class values and belief system, whereas the students they teach are not a part of that culture. Convoluting the situation even more, “school officials readily acknowledge and welcome the academic excellence of a small segment of the student population” who have conformed to the norms of the dominant culture (p. 203). This was assimilation at its finest; a situation where those in charge want attempt to get others to adhere to their values instead of acknowledging the differences in culture. Ladson-Billings (1992) reinforced this by saying, “assimilationist teaching represents and champions the status
quo. Its major function is to transmit dominant culture beliefs, values, myths, and ideologies and to induct students into the role that society has determined for them” (p. 110). Nowhere in that explanation did she say anything about attempting to understand each child’s culture or prepare them for success in a truly multicultural society. This appeared to be the major problem with wanting all American students to look and act alike.

Delgado (1996) gave a perfect example of this scenario as he explained a story where upper-class ladies took it upon themselves, because they were concerned over the plight of Italian immigrant women, to teach them personal hygiene, housekeeping, and essentially how to be American. The upper-class ladies were not trying to harm the Italian immigrant women, but without the ability to see the Italian immigrants’ point of view, the upper-class women told them what they needed, whether they did or not. This was a provocative situation because it attacked the dominant culture and questions whether or not they have the best intentions in mind for the minorities they attempt to serve. This mindset connected directly back to the creation of identities as well as assimilation where teachers may unintentionally force students of color to adapt to and accept White middle-class values as their own. There was no intentional harm with this scenario, but it did create conflict for the child trying to develop a positive self-image about their ethnicity and for the teacher who was trying to understand why the child would not conform to the values they were trying to teach.

Ladson-Billings (1994) painted a picture of teachers who use, “statements as ‘I don’t really see color, I just see children’ or ‘I don’t care if they’re red, green, or polka
dot, I just treat them all like children’” (p. 31). She believed that, “these attempts at colorblindness mask a “dysconscious racism” and like Delgado, argued that “these teachers are (not) racist in the conventional sense. They do not consciously deprive or punish African American children on the basis of their race, but at the same time they are not unconscious of the ways in which some children are privileged and others are disadvantaged in the classroom” (p. 31-32). These teachers failed to really challenge their students or offer them the tools to challenge their own place within society.

African American, low-income students deserve more from teachers than pity and low expectations. (Blustein et al, 2010; Solomon, 2000). Some teachers have believed that their African American students are working as hard as they can, but simply cannot achieve at high levels because of the terrible environments in which they live. First off, this was not always accurate and secondly, this was a stereotype of all African Americans; which is detrimental for student academic success. Ladson-Billings (1994) discussed how a teacher may give African American students a second chance when they are caught misbehaving because she feels badly for them and wants them to know she cares (p. 20). The major problem was that, “they (the teachers) do not understand that their perceptions of African American students interfere with their ability to be effective teachers for them” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 21).

Majerus (2013) urged that, “The socioeconomic context of students’ lives should only impact the educational plan that educators enact in their classrooms and schools to foster high achievement and not the level of expected achievement” (p. 3). Beady and Hansell (1981) suggested that teachers with less experience in education hold higher
expectations for their students, in comparison with senior teachers. This could mean that as teachers gain experience, they become more pessimistic and cynical towards lower-achieving, lower-socioeconomic, African American students. This explanation was also discussed by Delgado (1996) as he explained the connection between norm theory and false empathy. He explained that norm theory will show that, “our reaction to another person in distress varies according to the normalcy or abnormalcy of his or her plight in our eyes” (p. 76). Subsequently, teachers will feel more empathy towards a White, high-achieving student who is suddenly facing difficulties at home than they will for a Black, low or high-achieving student because they know the situation is abnormal for them. This is not always the case, but it is important to discuss the realities of how people may interpret situations. These topics can be difficult to discuss openly because they have challenge the moral fiber of the people who believed they were doing the right things, but without conversations that require people to think about exactly why they are doing what they are doing, we cannot hope to help African American students improve academic achievement.

**Expectations of Students by Parents and Teachers**

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992) studied how teacher expectations impact student performance and report that, “children who are expected by their teachers to gain intellectually in fact do show greater intellectual gains after one year than do children of whom such gains are not expected” (p. 121). They asserted three major student characteristics; gender, social class, and racial group influence a teacher’s expectations (p. viii). This was also reported outside the United States in the United Kingdom by
Gillborn (1998) who noted, “teachers’ tendency to perceive a threat to their authority in many routine dealings with African Caribbean students…and the vast majority of City Road teachers were genuinely committed to the ideals of equal opportunity, yet in practice the tended to generalize (by skin color)” (p. 36). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) also previously found compelling evidence that suggested, “the teachers’ expectations influenced their behaviors toward the children, which in turn influenced the children’s performance” (p. 3). Maybe it was not the skin color of the student, but the expectation of the teacher for the student based on whatever preconceived notions they may possess.

The disturbing question that resonated within me was that if African American students hold lower expectations for themselves, what type of expectations are held by their teachers. Some researchers have argued that the achievement gap was created and fostered by both Black and White teachers who do not believe that minority students are capable of achieving high levels of academic success (Oates, 2003; Ogbu, 1983). Because these teachers have held such low expectations of and for their students, they were less likely to assume responsibility for raising student achievement and maintaining high levels of achievement standards (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Liggitt, 2008; Oates, 2003; Rubie-Davis, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006). With teacher expectations still inhibiting the progress of lower-achieving students, we have continued to struggle with the achievement gap problem.

Labels have been something that has plagued the American educational system from its inception in the 1800’s with Horace Mann and John Dewey. Students of color and those with disabilities, along with many immigrants were discriminated against and
told they could not learn. These statements, while motivating some to excel and prove they can learn, have caused children to perceive themselves differently. These perceptions of being different could be directly related to the academic success of African American students. Chang and Sue (2003) discussed that students live up to the expectations educators hold for them and stated that, “teachers’ judgments and perceptions influence the attention and aid rendered to students” (p. 239). This was even more disturbing because as Kozol pointed out, “Children, of course, don’t understand at first that they are being cheated. They come to school with a degree of faith and optimism, and they often seem to thrive during the first few years” (p. 57). Therefore, the question that has remained is what happens after those first few years.

One possible explanation was offered by Goldsmith (2004) when he concluded that,

The effects of minority peers and minority teachers ultimately raise serious questions about the color lines in American Society and its importance in debates about integration. Supporters of integration have denied that integration’s benefits to blacks or Latinos stem from sitting next to White students or having White teachers. Instead, they point to the benefits of having small class sizes; local community support; and a concentration of students from two-parent, affluent families situated in middle-class neighborhoods. (p. 142)

There were so many different variables that had to be controlled for when looking at what perpetuates the Black-White achievement gap and I have suspected expectations have played a huge role in the success of students. We cannot change the students we work
with and the background from which they come, but we can support and expect greatness from those students and challenge them to rise above their family or neighborhood limitations. Oates (2003) believed that the, “Reduction of the black-White [sic] gap would thus likely be facilitated by initiatives that advance race neutrality in White teacher perceptions (p. 522). However, even if this was the answer, how can teacher preparation programs attack a problem that may start with the very core of some teacher’s upbringing?

**Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**

The essence of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” is the concept that one person’s prediction of another person’s behavior somehow comes to be realized. The predication may, of course, be realized only in the perception of the predictor. It is also possible, however, that the predictor’s expectation is communicated to the other person, perhaps in quite subtle and unintended ways, and so has an influence on his actual behavior. (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968, p. 4)

I have not believed that any teacher would set out to intentionally tell students they do not believe they can achieve, but I have seen there are some subtleties that may come across to students that make them feel their teachers have low expectations for them. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) surmised that a teacher’s, “tone of voice, facial expression, touch and posture may be the means by which –probably quite unwittingly – she communicates her expectations to the pupils” (p. 7). They were on the right track with these assumptions because the things they mentioned were typically unconscious actions based upon a person’s presuppositions or even their biases.
Clark’s (1965) seminal piece, Dark Ghetto, regarding urban classrooms in the 1960’s found that, “A key component of the deprivation which afflicts ghetto children is that generally their teachers do not expect them to learn” (p. 132). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) agreed and discussed many different studies and cases regarding the self-fulfilling prophecy, and highlight the connection between, “the importance of such expectations in the relations among races and the behavior of minority groups” (p. 3). Clark (1965) went on to show that some teachers hold lower expectations for African – American students and “the majority (of teachers) believed one-fourth or less (of students) had potential for college” (p. 133). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) restated that, “teachers tend to rate African American students less favorably on measures of personality and behavior, motivation to learn, and classroom performance” (p. 3). These were staggering realizations that can directly inhibit African American students and cause lower performance academically. Clark (1965) eloquently stated that,

There are two conflicting points of view—one, that the pupils do not learn because they cannot; the other, that they do not learn because they are not taught. The fact is they are not learning. The problem is to see that they do, and only when the attempt is made with enthusiasm and competence will the answer be clear. (p. 139)

My concern after reading this quote was that if this notion was realized in 1965, why are we still struggling with the education of urban youth? It could be the vicious cycle of low expectations by teachers, coupled with blocked mobility and the lack of opportunities perpetuating impoverished neighborhoods. Oates (2003) claimed, “unfavorable teacher
perceptions, even if justified by prior performance and other relevant information, may more strongly undermine the performance of African American students (p. 509). This self-fulfilling prophecy continued to impede the progress of African American students; and if Oates (2003) was correct and, “the evidence of anti-black bias among White teachers…affirms the presumption of self-concept theory”, African American students may be at an extreme disadvantage in school due to the number of White teachers (p. 520). Casteel (2000) disputed this claim, but does not fully rule it out, considering the sample size he studied and Burt et al. (2013) believed their study supported a claim that, “Caucasian teachers hold no bias toward their minority students” (p. 215).

These issues have not just been seen in K-12 education in The United States. Solomon (2000) found that pre-service college education programs also contain much discrimination and racial stereotyping. It was the premise of this research that African American students need more African American teachers so that they have role models. So it was particularly disturbing to find that candidates of color end up as disempowered apprentices to White, veteran educators and student teaching supervisors. This practice not only limited their expectations in the field of education, but directly impacted their self-esteem and belief in their own teaching ability.

As previously mentioned, regardless of age, students live up to the expectations teachers hold for them and if college supervisors and cooperating teachers hold low expectations for the abilities of the African American students they are supposed to be grooming to become teachers, they have limited the ability of the African American, pre-service teacher to transform education and influence younger African American students.
With no way to screen current teachers, university supervisors, or pre-service teachers for racist ideals, we must work towards implementing more cultural diversity training, culturally relevant teaching, and professional development (Merry & New, 2008; Solomon, 2000). Brandt discovered and (1986) stressed earlier that “dual action” was needed, “The ‘multiculturalizing’ of the curriculum content and the consciousness raising of teachers who would then be able to positively use the new material” (p. 118).

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) referred to a multitude of studies that showed institutions, people, countries, and even animals that live up to the expectations held for them. This was a very scary trend, reality, or phenomenon that existed, especially when school-aged children are involved. Educators have had a responsibility to help all students achieve to their fullest potential and I believe we must continue to hold high expectations to begin removing the barriers our disadvantaged and minority students deal with on a daily basis. “African Americans have the capability and the ability to achieve despite the external and structural forces, if educators challenge them to do so and provide appropriate and ample assistance” (Majerus, 2013, p. 4). From my experience, students, regardless of race, have wanted a teacher who they know cares about them and supports their learning. Casteel (2000) found that, “African American students from a low socio-economic population do not believe their race is a significant factor in the way they are treated in the classroom by their Caucasian teachers” (p. 146). This claim was also supported by Burt et al. (2013) and was encouraging information for public education considering, “most public school teachers are overwhelmingly Caucasian and young females” (Casteel, 2000, p. 147).
Finally, Steele (1997) concurred and suggested that “optimistic teacher—student relationships”, “challenge over remediation”, and “stressing the expandability of intelligence” as ways to help minority, stereotype threatened students (p. 624). Positive student-teacher relationships focused on believing in a student’s ability, challenging students with rigorous work while supporting them along the way, and focusing students on the fact they can continue to improve and learn while achieving are all realistic and pragmatic ways teachers can help students overcome barriers and realize their full potential (Steele, 1997). This is something I have intuitively known and a major reason for conducting this study.

Ladson-Billings (1994) has referred to this as culturally relevant teaching and at its very core attempts “to assist in the development of a “relevant black personality” that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture” (p. 17). She challenged educators to:

1. Provide educational self-determination
2. Honor and respect the students’ home culture
3. Help African American students understand the worlds as it is and equip them to change it for the better. (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 137-139)

Self determination was defined as giving parents and communities the chance to influence curriculum and courses of study. Honoring their home culture was defined by drawing attention to the important accomplishments of African Americans and African American culture. Helping African American students understand the world as it is, was defined as providing rich explanations of mistreatment or discrimination so that African
American children can better understand and begin to challenge the inequitable treatment. Finally, she challenged educators to choose whether they want to become “an agent of change or a defender of the status quo”; which this study will ideally serve as a reminder of my desired role as an agent of change (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 133).

Summary

All eight areas addressed within the literature review have added to the research and have supplied reasons supporting whether or not African American students have limited their own academic achievement. African Americans have experienced racism and discrimination within public schools. They have learned and lived experiences of blocked mobility and a job ceiling because of the color of their skin. African Americans have been stereotyped and expected to achieve at lower rates because of poverty issues and, once again, their skin color. Even though African Americans have historically understood the need for education and have shown a thirst for knowledge, they have experienced lower achievement rates without a clear set of reasons.
CHAPTER III

Research Methodology

Introduction

As an educator who has worked in a predominantly African American school district, it was important to distinguish why students within the district were not performing at higher rates as compared with White students across the state. I have believed for some time that the students in the district may be limiting their own achievement based on whether they feel as though their teachers believe in them. Therefore, I tried to uncover if the African American students I have served are adding to the achievement gap between themselves and White students by limiting their own achievement.

This chapter described not only the design of the study, but also the participants within in the study. It was important to explain the district demographics and the criterion used for the selection of students so that a clearer understanding of the study could be revealed. Once explained, the chapter moved into the procedures used during the interview process, the trustworthiness associated with study, and finally how the data was analyzed. As a result, this chapter has addressed the technical procedures used for the study and provided a basis on how the study was actually conducted.

Research Questions

As previously stated, the research questions have had a very personal impact on me as an educator. I have served African American students for 15 years and I have attempted to understand and learn about the lived experiences that may have attributed to
the gap in achievement we have seen in the district in which I have worked and the
nation, as compared with predominantly White school districts. I have hypothesized that
the students I have worked with may be limiting their own achievement and therefore
have developed the following research questions.

**Primary Research Question:**

Have perceived expectations from teachers and/or other experiences led African
American students to limit their academic achievement?

**Secondary Research Question:**

Do the experiences of these twelfth grade students coincide with theories of racial
identity, blocked-opportunities framework, and false empathy regarding student
achievement?

**Design**

I used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to answer my questions because
I was interested in looking at the experiences of twelfth grade students, as described by
them. Creswell (2007) pointed out that, “a phenomenological study describes the
meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon”
(p. 57). As the researcher, I had to identify and acknowledge my own experiences, but
focus my attention on the experiences of the students in the study. Trying to recognize
the similarities of what they have experienced was the overall goal in attempting
phenomenological research because I wanted to provide answers that could possibly
influence, “practices, policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of
the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Van Manen (1990) summarized phenomenological research by stating,

The point … is to ‘borrow’ other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (p. 62)

This was a fitting model because learning about the common experiences of students can be beneficial for teachers (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). Van Manen (1990) also argued that, “We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves” (p. 62). This was the ultimate goal of this research. I wanted to be able to help teachers become more experienced working with Africa-American students by learning from the students themselves.

When making the final decision as to which research design was to be used throughout the study, phenomenology fit perfectly with the questions I wanted to uncover. I wanted to learn more about several students who have common or shared the same experiences of a phenomenon; in order to develop a deeper understanding of what they have experienced (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). I wanted to collect this data from the individuals who have actually lived the experiences and without phenomenological research, I would not be able to gather the personal stories and occurrences needed to help answer the research questions.
Participants

I chose to work with six, twelfth grade African American students to understand the perceptions they have held regarding their perceived expectations and experiences they have had with their teachers; and whether this leads to overall lower achievement. As previously stated, I chose to work with twelfth grade students because I believed the answers provided to me would be less controlled by parents and more truthful than with younger students. I did not want to work with past students. I wanted newly graduated seniors, who still had fresh memories and were still passionate about the experiences they have had. Creswell (2007) suggested a more narrow range of sampling for phenomenological research. He discussed that criterion based sampling works best to ensure that all participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied.

The students were all part of the same school district approximately fifteen miles southeast of Cleveland, Ohio. The school district was 97% African American and 75% free and reduced lunch, which, according to the Federal Register (2012) means that 75% of the students in the district fall below the federal poverty guidelines based on their household sizes. All participants met the following requirements:

a) African American

b) Twelfth grade, non-repeater

c) Attended the same school district from kindergarten through twelfth grade

d) Parental consent and willingness to participate and answer interview questions honestly
I used a criterion and convenience sample of students for the study because I wanted to work with the students within the district I have worked that have met the aforementioned criterion. Criterion sampling, according to Creswell (2007) works well for phenomenological studies because, “it is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied” (p. 128). Once students were selected, parents were contacted via telephone to discuss permission for their students to participate in the study. Even though the students are over 18 years of age, it was important for me to gain permission from parents to ease any fears they might have regarding retaliation or discipline if the students declined or dropped out of the study. Parents then received an informed consent letter outlining the requirements of the study and their students’ rights as participants; which both the student and parents signed.

**Procedures**

Upon contact with the students, interview times were agreed upon and students were asked to bring in the signed consent forms and once received, we began the interview. The data were collected from this one, in-depth interview at the Board of Education offices, which lasted approximately one and one half hours. The interviews took place in my personal office and were tape recorded so no information was missed. I also took hand-written notes while interviewing the students. The taped interviews were then transcribed by me, the researcher, so that I could identify any emerging themes. Creswell (2007) stated, “individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information” (p. 133). I did not experience any difficulty with students having uncomfortable feelings with or failing to answer any questions. In fact, the students were
very open, honest, and relaxed during the process. I attributed this to the personal relationships built years prior while I was a building principal in the same school district.

**Data Analysis**

Data were collected and analyzed personally by me. However, I had to first, as Creswell (2007) suggested, “bracket” or set aside my own “preconceived experiences” to begin better understanding the participants within the study. Therefore, I began the interviews by explaining to the participants that I was interested in their experiences. I explained to them that because they were new graduates, I wanted to learn about the things they experienced throughout their years in the school district and hopefully be able to relay their story to other educators so they may also learn about first-hand experiences of students that have spent their entire educational career within the school district.

The data analysis began first with the hand-written notes taken during each interview. I had previously grouped the 20 interview questions into four categories:

(a) race

(b) attitude

(c) family

(d) identity

These categories each consisted of five questions and while reviewing the notes, this “horizontalization” (Creswell, 2007, p. 235) allowed me to focus the responses into the appropriate areas of interest, listing all significant responses. Common responses and experiences were noted and placed under headings on a separate document.
The audio tapes were then reviewed, by me, the researcher, to check for understanding, missed information, tones, and accurateness of data. Once completed, the document had four headings with responses and data aligned for agreement or disagreement in the experiences lived and sometimes shared. This clustering allowed me to group these like experiences and note themes that may share agreement between the participants and agrees with Creswell’s (2007) steps of data analysis for phenomenological research. This document was then used to record direct quotes, themes, and other important information for the actual data analysis in Chapter V.

I had to be very careful with this study and my findings because, “qualitative research and critique might, itself, strengthen or defend particular stereotypes and ideologies that further marginalize and pathologize students of ethnic minority background” (Gillborn, 1998, p. 34). Because, “qualitative data are always open to alternative explanations; the amount and type of evidence we produce may make our analyses more or less convincing, but there is no fixed line between proven and unproven” (Gillborn, 1998, p. 41). This meant that there would be others who have experienced different things than the students I have interviewed; in both a positive and negative way. Therefore, this study was not meant to be generalizable; it was meant to highlight the educational experiences of a specific group of students in a specific school district.

**Trustworthiness**

I chose to work specifically with twelfth grade students within the school district I have worked because I have made strong connections to the students and this helped in
the obtainment of authentic responses to questions. I also chose these twelfth grade students because I believed that because they are graduating and would not be attending school with the same teachers after the study, they are less apt to conceal their true answers. I made it very clear to the students, during the consent and interview phases, the type of research I was conducting and that I was interested in their personal experiences as students. Based on their responses and candor, I feel very confident that the experiences shared in this study are accurate depictions of what the students’ experienced.

Even though I believed what they told me, it was not necessarily enough to ensure trustworthiness throughout the study. Therefore, because of my own subjectivity towards the topic and presuppositions, I had to make sure that throughout the interviews, I listened intently to the participants and did not infuse any of my own thoughts or beliefs. This was achieved by reflecting upon my own subjectivity, as Creswell (2007) suggested. These reflections can be found within this study under the “Researcher’s Lens” section of Chapter I.

The second way I attempted to enhance the trustworthiness of the study was the amount of time I spent within the field. This was not accomplished through direct interviews in the site, but from working within this particular district for 15 years. Throughout that time, I was able to develop trust with the students and families of which I sought personal stories and experiences. Knowing the culture, the interactions, and having first-hand experiences with the students all attributed to higher trust during the interview process.
Writing a “rich, thick description” is an extremely important aspect of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). I attempted to describe the participants, the school district demographics, and experiences shared during interviews with much detail so that readers, “can transfer information to other settings or determine whether the findings can be transferred” (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). I endeavored to deeply describe the lived experiences of the participants, so as to fully tell their story.

The final way in which I attempted to amplify the trustworthiness of the study was to conduct member checking during which I shared the hand-written notes with the participants of the study upon completion of the interview. This was done to ensure that I captured the exact experiences the students were describing. Knowing my own subjectivity, I had to be sure what I was reporting was truthful. After clarifying questions to ensure accuracy of responses, I felt comfortable with the collected answers and them being free of any of my personal biases.

Summary

The overall study was conducted with fidelity and an ultimate goal of sharing the lived experiences of students I have served. Describing the design used for the study, the participants involved, the procedures employed, and the attempts at garnering trust throughout the study are important tasks in conducting an effective study. In the end, the study provided rich details about the lived experiences of the participants, the district from which they have been educated, and how responses were elicited, recorded, and accurately represented.
CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Data

Introduction

Six students were interviewed for this study and given pseudonyms so their real identity would not be revealed. The students were similar, yet different in a multitude of ways. Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamera were all from the same school district in Northeast Ohio. They attended the same school district from Kindergarten through twelfth grade and were all of African American descent. The students’ socioeconomic status was not requested, however, the school district is 75% free and reduced lunch, meaning that they fall below the federal poverty guidelines based on their household sizes (Federal Register, 2012).

All six students were born in 1995 and were 18-year-old, new graduates. Janelle, Janet, Johnny, and Richie took honors and upper-level courses in high school, whereas Howard and Tamera took general college preparatory courses. Janelle was a cheerleader and student council member, Janet and Johnny were in the band, Richie ran track and played football, Howard played football and basketball, and Tamera was a part of the Business Professionals of America Club. These students may have also been in other clubs and groups, however, specifics were not asked.

The interview questions were constructed so that there were four major categories:

(a) race

(b) attitude
Within each category, the students’ responses were collected and coded to properly fit within each of the four sections. The students were very forthright and open with their answers as explained with the phrases, “comfortable” and “excited” to share their experiences and “cool” with helping their “Ex-Principal” work on his dissertation (Janelle, Janet, and Richie, personal communication July 9, June 25, and July 18, 2013).

The first five questions dealt specifically with race because it allowed me to directly know how the students felt about the race of their teacher comparing between both White and Black teachers. I was hoping to understand if more effort was put forth by students because of their perception of how their teacher views them and if this is influenced by the race of the teacher.

The second five questions related directly to the attitude-achievement paradox section of my literature review. I was attempting to understand what the students’ attitudes were about school and achievement. I wanted to find whether there was a relationship between what the students believe they can do and what they are actually achieving. The relationship could be either negative or positive and these questions allowed me to make some connections on whether students are limiting their own achievement or if they fall directly in line with the ideas associated with the attitude-achievement paradox.

The third set, of five questions, involved the impact of family on academic achievement. These questions helped me dig deeper into the family support system the
students have experienced. My literature review documented the fact that African American parents tend to have very high expectations for their students’ achievement, but that it has not always translated into actual student achievement (Downey et al., 2009). I attempted to learn what the students believed their parents goals were for them, academically, and whether it connected to their actual achievement levels.

The final five questions revolved around racial identities and the role they played in the development of adolescents. I looked for students to explain how they developed their own identities surrounding their race, while also trying to discern who helped them create their ethnic identity. I wanted to know if they believed in themselves or limited themselves because of their race, teacher perceptions, or experiences.

**Race**

The six students interviewed had fairly similar experiences with teachers of their same race; African American. Each student had at least three teachers of their same race, with the average number being five; including both teachers and coaches throughout their thirteen years in the school district (kindergarten through twelfth grade). Howard, Janelle, and Tamera used phrases to describe their experiences as “good” “like all other teachers” and “better able to understand, relate, and communicate with” (personal communication June 20, July 9, July 16, 2013). I pressed the situation, but still received nothing beyond the normal pupil-teacher relationship. The students were comfortable and truly saw no difference between the race and ethnicity of teachers when discussing the questions.
The conversation got much deeper when I asked the students to describe their experiences with both teachers inside and outside their race. Only two of the students classified their relationships with teachers of their same race as “better” whereas, the other four students labeled them as, “about the same” “no different, really” “mainly the same” or “kind of the same” (Howard, Janet, Janelle, Johnny, & Tamera, personal communication, June 20 and 25 and July 9, 18, and 16, 2013). The two students who classified the relationship as “better” spoke directly of the “way teachers talk to them” and the teacher’s “realness” (Howard & Janelle, personal communication, June 20 and 25, 2013). Howard further explained, “Black teachers can talk to us in a realer way. They know how we live and the things we do” (personal communication, June 20, 2013). Two of the students were shocked with the question because they, “never really saw it that way.” When asked to explain further, they felt as though, “teachers were teachers” and they were “always treated the same” by all staff, no matter the race (Janelle & Tamera, personal communication, July 9 and 16, 2013). This was exactly what Steele (1997) was referring to when he suggested ways in which African American students could overcome barriers and reach their true potential.

A teacher’s “realness” was a fairly common theme throughout this question as Howard mentioned that African American teachers were able to, “break it down” and explain life experiences much better. However, it was important to note that even this student said that, “some White teachers could do this too. It just depended upon your personality and relationship” (personal communication, June 20, 2013). I also heard that students were able to open up more with teachers of their same race because they
were, “raised similar ways, by similar people” and they truly understood and could relate to the “struggles our people face” growing up (Janet & Tamera, personal communication, June 25 & July 16, 2013). Janet went on to explain that, “maybe I feel more comfortable with a Black teacher, but I don’t see it like that. It was more about how they treat me” (personal communication, June 25, 2013). This agreed completely with what Casteel (2000) and Burt et al. (2013) found when looking at significant factors of African American’s treatment in the classroom by African American and White teachers.

Shifting into talking with the students about building relationships with staff, the commonalities surrounded the creation of relationships and how students were addressed in and out of class. Five of the six students mentioned that high school teachers were more in tune with their race and culture and that at the elementary and middle school level it was “just the basics because of Black History Month” (Janelle, personal communication, July 9, 2013). I heard comments that teachers, “acknowledged that Blacks have a more difficult time competing for jobs and scholarships” but that, “we also have more (scholarships) available to us because of our race” (Johnny, personal communication, July 18, 2013). All of the students mentioned one course, in particular, their African American history course and the impact it had on them because, “it talked more about lesser-known African Americans in history and the struggles they faced” (Janelle, personal communication, July 9, 2013). Richie felt like he learned more about other African Americans, “than just the famous ones” and it showed him the teacher, “actually cared about African Americans” (personal communication, July 9, 2013). This strengthened the argument for more culturally relevant pedagogy and possibly a more
Afrocentric curriculum because the students really enjoyed learning about their culture and its accomplishments (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Majerus, 2013; Merry & New, 2008).

Howard, Janet, Johnny, and Richie were adamant that teachers that listened to their problems were better able to understand the issues the students are facing. These students felt that, “the advice given to us from White and Black teachers was mainly the same, but sometimes it was better from Black teachers because I knew they really understood me”. With that being said, the students explained that it was the, “relationships with teachers and the connections to our lives” that made the most impact and showed the students that teachers understood what it was like for them and other “struggling African Americans” (personal communication, June 20 and 25 and July 18 and 9, 2013). This was exactly what Ladson-Billings (1994) was referring to when she challenged educators to “honor and respect the students’ home culture” (p. 137). This was a part of teaching in a culturally relevant way to assist students in achieving academic excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

These connections meant, “a lot” to students because they felt like, “even the White teachers understood it’s hard for us sometimes because we’re Black” (Johnny, personal communication, July 18, 2013). However, it was important to note that three of the students mentioned one specific African American teacher and three students mentioned one specific White teacher; but all talked about high school teachers the most when asked with what teachers they were most connected. The students mentioned the relationships, the way teachers listened to them, and the way teachers treated them as the ways they knew the teachers were connected to them.
All six of the students also indicated they tried to achieve, or with the same amount of effort, no matter the race of their teacher. They talked about trying hard for themselves, their own achievement, and their own goals. The students stayed very consistent mentioning it had more to do with, “the relationships I had with teachers, not their race” (Janelle, personal communication, July 9, 2013). The students mentioned listening and talking as the biggest way teachers show they like students. “Being asked to stay after class to help” “teachers using their work as an example for the class” “hugging” “complimenting” “talking to them (the students) on the side” “joking” and “taking a personal interest in what they (the students) do and like” were the most important ways to show kids you like them (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013).

Even though the students felt they worked hard for all teachers regardless of the teachers’ race. They indicated that they did seem to work harder, in subjects they did not like as much, “when I knew the teacher liked me” (Janet & Johnny, personal communication, June 25 and July 18, 2013). Tamara. was very insightful regarding the tone teachers use and how, “they (the teachers) carry themselves even on bad days.” She even noted that those teachers have, “high expectations for you and you don’t want to let them down” (personal communication, July 16, 2013). Johnny expressively pointed out that, “teachers that like you don’t treat you like a burden, they care and talk to you, so effort comes easy in their class” (personal communication, July 18, 2013). I saw this evidence in more support of what Steele’s view of strong relationships was in promoting
African American academic achievement than that of Mickelson and Ogbu who have said that African Americans may present themselves better to researchers (Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1983; Steele, 1997).

**Attitude**

All six students interviewed indicated that they wanted “good grades” and “straight A’s.” The students used phrases like, “striving for excellence” “making it to the top” and “making the Dean’s list” to describe what “good grades” meant (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). They all expected high results for their academic achievement. Three of the students specifically mentioned “graduating from college” and getting a “good career” interpreted as one that, “pays well” as proof of attaining excellence (Janelle, Johnny, and Tamera, personal communication, July 9 and 16, 2013). Howard described that his expectations for achievement changed as he, “got better in sports throughout high school” and Tamera explained that she has high expectations because she is the, “first person in her family to get accepted to a college” (Howard and Tamera, personal communication, June 20 and July 16, 2013).

All six students agreed they are achieving for themselves because they know it is the key to obtaining “better jobs” and for “future success.” Their statements included, “to be something, you have to have an education” “to be a pediatrician I have to go to school and do well” “without school you will have no job or no money. You have to further your education” “a career is important and to be successful you have to have good academics” “it’s hard to get paid well without an education. You can’t wait, education
must be a habit” and “if you ever want to better yourself and get higher pay, you have to go to school” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). I learned, upon clarification, these students were influenced by their families and that they see an education as a chance for upward mobility. They knew education could help them attain their goals and they expressed a desire to make that happen during the interviews. Fordham (1996) explicitly discussed African Americans being taught about school achievement as a path to upward mobility and this was very evident during questioning.

When asked about how satisfied the students were with their grades, four of the six agreed that they were “satisfied” but that they could have “put more effort in (to academics)” (Janelle, Janet, Johnny, and Richie, personal communication, July 9, June 25, July 18, and July 9, 2013). Howard explained, “I didn’t even have a concept of school until after tenth grade. Even though my parents were on me for my grades, I just didn’t get it until then” (personal communication, June 20, 2013). Richie suggested that he also, “did not realize the importance of grades until he was a junior and senior” (personal communication, July 9, 2013). Congruently, Tamera shared a similar experience but she felt that she, “didn’t really adjust to high school life until my junior year” (personal communication, July 16, 2013). Three of the six students also felt, “senioritis” played a role in them being just satisfied with their grades. So even with high expectations and family support, the majority of these students did not put forth all of their effort until later in their high school experience (Howard, Johnny, and Tamera, personal communication, June 20 and July 18 and 16, 2013).
Only two of the six students were very pleased with their grades and effort saying, “I loved my grades! I was always concerned about my GPA and how to get a B into an A.” and “I feel great about my grades and even though I could have tried harder, they were great (grades)” (Janelle and Janet, personal communication, July 9 and June 25, 2013). They explicitly expressed a connection between the effort put forth and the level of satisfaction of their grades. This was completely opposite of the other four students interviewed and I heard comments such as, “I started working on my GPA as a freshman.” and “I’ve wanted to be the valedictorian forever, well, at least since middle school” (Janelle, personal communication, July 9, 2013). Janelle and Janet both summed up the question by agreeing that, “Taking algebra in 8th grade for high school credit probably helped me start thinking about my grades early” (personal communication, July 9 and June 25, 2013).

I moved next into asking about how teachers encouraged students to succeed and participate in school. All six of the students choose things like, “teachers pulling them aside, talking to them specifically about what was incorrect” “not letting you sit in class with nothing to do” and “coming right out and saying they expect more from me,” as ways to describe how teachers pushed and encouraged students. They mentioned that these are the teachers you know care about you because, “they take the time to talk to you and they really know what areas you need help on” and “they know when you’re not doing your best” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July16, 2013).
As far as working up to one’s ability, only Tamera felt she did not work up to her abilities regularly in school (personal communication, July 16, 2013). Four students agreed they did not always work up to their ability and one said she “always” worked up to her abilities (Janelle, personal communication, July 9, 2013). Janelle went on to share that “striving for the top” “working as hard as you can” “staying on top of work” “always knowing what’s going on” “getting the grades you know you earned and worked for” and “pushing yourself to do better each assignment” was what it meant to work up to your abilities (personal communication, July 9, 2013).

**Family**

All six students indicated that their goals and their parent’s goals for them were completely in line. The consistent themes throughout the answers revolved around graduating from college, getting a well-paying career, and doing the best they could academically. Family members were also mentioned by all six students as positive influences on their academics. The students talked about uncles, mothers, fathers, grandparents, and cousins and the high expectations they had for them to achieve in school (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). However, when talking about friends, the students said things like, “Most of my friends didn’t care about my grades. They didn’t work hard like me” “The friends in my classes always competed for grades, we pushed each other and cracked on each other when someone didn’t do as well” “Some friends really messed me up by getting me caught up in some of their stuff, but with the help of my cousin, I was able to stay away from those kids doing and selling
drugs” “A lot of my friends accepted bad grades. They didn’t do their work, didn’t care about their grades, and didn’t even try hard. They impacted me negatively, but when I got in honors, I started competing with other kids” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July16, 2013). Coleman (1966) discussed this topic and the need for competition between races, whereas, Gerard (1988) completely disagreed with that viewpoint. From the conversations had with these students, it appeared competition was had between students with higher achievement levels and cultural background of students played less of a role. This was tough to decipher because the district is primarily African American, however, it was interesting to note.

All six of the students made reference to, “a parent being proud of them, “pushing them to do better” or “expecting the best from them at all times” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July16, 2013). Five of the six students said that their parents could tell, “When I studied or worked hard” and “stayed after school for extra help” which lead to the parents being proud of the student (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 9, and July16, 2013). Johnny said that even with high expectations from his mother he, “didn’t care as much about getting grades for my mom. I did it for me. We would argue when she checked my grades sometimes, but she overreacted. She just wants me to always be better” (personal communication, July 18, 2013). Gutman and Midgley (2000) discussed the positive impact parental involvement has had on a child’s academic achievement. These students
showed a strong family connection and I believe it did have an impact on their achievement.

All of the students indicated that they competed with other students by showing, “test scores” “project grades” and “report cards” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). Tamera indicated that most of her competition, “was in elementary school, but once I fell to the middle of the pack, I didn’t really compete anymore in middle or high school.” Janelle, Janet, and Johnny were in honors classes and indicated they competed as a class; but even more with usually one close friend in each class. I heard responses like, “I tried harder to get the grades that they got. It motivated me” “I’m proud I was smart, but there was always one kid who did better than me and it made me work harder” and “Government class seemed to be one big competition because it was our final time to work on our GPA’s” (Janelle, Janet, and Johnny, personal communication, July 9, June 25, and July 18, 2013).

In the end, all six students said that their report card grades, “mostly” or “for the most part” reflected their true academic potential. It is important to note that all six also said, “I could have done better” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). Howard indicated that, “It really depended upon my connection with the teacher, but I still tried a little even if I didn’t get along with them.” Howard, Johnny, and Tamera specifically mentioned “senior-itis” or subjects they, “hated” “couldn’t stand” or “didn’t care about” as the reason for lower grades than what they felt they could get (personal
communication, June 20 and July 18 and 16, 2013). These students all felt they could achieve at high levels and held very high expectations for themselves. The honesty portrayed with these answers led me to believe the answers students provided. I did not get the sense that students were, as Mickelson and Ogbu suggest, attempting to look better for the sake of the interviewer (1983 & 1990).

**Identity**

I began by asking students when they first realized what their race was. Five of the six students had very specific memories of the first time they realized they were African Americans. Janet mentioned feeling like an, “oddball” when she would go to places with her best friend who was White because she would, “be the only Black person there. We would just laugh” (personal communication, June 25, 2013). Janelle explained that it was not until around fourth or fifth grade when the district demographics started changing and, “I looked around the room and saw that most of the people looked like me now. That was weird” (personal communication, July 9, 2013). One student said they realized they were African American, “During Black History Month in elementary school. I didn’t realize our people had so many struggles until I started to learn about new books and opinions” (Tamera, personal communication, July 16, 2013).

Howard and Richie had negative experiences saying that they remember as the first time they realized their race was different than others. They described things like, “I was babysat by my neighbor, who was White, and every time we picked teams to play football I was always last. I always figured it was because of my skin color being different” and “When I was in elementary school I went to a football game and a White
kid called me “Black” and “Negroe.” I didn’t know what to do, so I told my Aunt. I was shocked ‘cuz no one ever did that before” (personal communication, June 20 and July 9, 2013).

When discussing with the students about who taught them about their race, all six students indicated that their parents were the ones who taught them about their race and culture (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). However, Howard and Johnny specifically mentioned their grandparents and Janet and Tamera specifically mentioned teachers who went more in depth with African American history (personal communication, June 20, July 18, June 25, and July 16, 2013). Overall the responses mimicked each other. I heard, “We have to try harder to get to the same places (jobs and school) as Whites” “It is always gonna be harder ‘cuz I’m Black. They look down on you when you’re Black” “My grandparents told me about their hardships growing up and they wanted better for me. They made me aware of things I might face” “There’s still racism going on. Expect to be talked to differently, treated differently, not always bad, but be aware” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). These were very positive findings and fell directly in line with Markus and Nurius’ (1986) idea of the possible selves model which discusses the need to help students develop a positive racial identity to avoid being trapped with a negative self-image.

I then asked the students about what made them proud to be African Americans and all six students were very proud of their race and culture. The specific things they
selected that made them proud were, “Hearing inspiring stories about getting past adversity and contributions made to the greater population. You know, like Robin Roberts at the ESPY’s” “We (African Americans) are so strong. We’ve come such a far way. We can change the perspective of people. Our valedictorian and top ten were mostly Black, that doesn’t always happen” “We have a Black President. That’s a huge accomplishment. Other successful people like Oprah too, but even myself because people expect me to be rowdy and unsuccessful, but I’m not a statistic, I’m different” “Athletes, businessmen, just proud to be Black. Racism is still so close, but it’s amazing where we are now” “The leaders we have, the things we’ve done, our history and how far we’ve come. We stick together, we have a bond. Because of our struggles our ancestry and family, we’re strong” “We value family. We’re outgoing. And I think seeing people like me doing well in sports and education” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). These students all told me they value their race greatly and truly believe they can achieve and continue the “great things our people are doing.” These answers strengthened the need for more culturally relevant teaching and the positive influence a strong foundation of African American cultural achievements can have on African American students’ academic success (Brandt, 1986; Burt et al., 2013; Casteel, 2000; Ladson-Billings 1994; Majerus, 2013).

Even though the students are proud of their race and culture, I wanted to know if they ever had to act differently to succeed. Howard, Janelle, and Richie immediately said they had to act differently to succeed. They said, “In different environments you don’t
always fit in with Whites. Camps and conferences you act their way. You talk different and even when I was young I talked White because that’s who I was around. I guess I thought it helped when I was little, but now it’s just about me and I can’t be anyone else” (personal communication, June 20 and July 9, 2013). Richie said, “Yes, for Sure! There’s lots of dumb kids who don’t see the bigger picture. They want to be rappers, football players, or basketball players. You need an education” and Howard expressed, “There’s a way I carry myself with friends versus school or business. That can help with better opportunities. You talk more intelligent, it would do more for you” (personal communication, June 20 and July 9, 2013). The answers seemed to support the notion that African American students “act White” to help themselves achieve in academic situations (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Conversely, Janet, Johnny, and Tamera initially said they did not have to act differently, but upon explaining deeper said things like, “No, being good academically you don’t need to change, but I might talk more correctly when doing a project and keep slang out of my mouth; yeah I guess it helps” “I always thought I was different because a lot of African Americans are loud and out of control, but I’m humble and relaxed. I never changed because I was taught to be myself, not what others did” “I didn’t have to. Well, I guess certain situations. You talk smart, like knowing grammar and other words. You talk different in different situations, like with the principal and teachers so they know you’re smart and prove yourself” (personal communication, June 25 and July 18 and 16, 2013).
In both scenarios students felt they had to change their dialect and sometimes demeanor. It was very evident that all six students felt that they had to change, maybe even only a little, to have teachers, “know you’re smart.” When prodded a little about why it was important for teachers to know you are smart, the students responded, “They will help you more if you act and talk better” and “Teachers know you care about your grades if you talk better and act smart” (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July16, 2013). Even Janet, who said she always tries to be herself agreed that, “I guess I do show teachers I care by talking more intelligently and without slang when I’m with them” (personal communication, June 25, 2013). The entire conversation coincided directly with what Ogbu (2008) discussed as African Americans adopting White traits to succeed. Ogbu and Fordham (1986) have seen this kind of “uncle tomming” from students since the mid-1980’s. This was fairly disturbing because I felt students were experiencing just what Delgado (1996) discussed when he described teachers give more help and understanding to those African Americans that display “White” traits.

I finished up by asking students to describe a time someone did not believe in them because of their race. Only Tamera indicated that she had a situation where someone did not believe in her. She mentioned that,

My class was going on a trip for class and our teacher said I wouldn’t do well. It really changed my perspective on him. He was judging me on my attitude and behavior which not always the best, but it was more on actions. I had a principal and counselor also tell me something, but they did it alone. That felt more like
they cared and were worried because it wasn’t in front of the whole class.

(personal communication, July 16, 2013)

Howard, Janelle, and Richie did say that other students didn’t believe in them with one saying that, “My peers didn’t think I would do what I wanted to do because of being Black. They said I couldn’t get top grades or be a doctor because I’m Black” (Janelle, personal communication, July 9, 2013). Howard talked about a coach not believing in him, saying, “He made me choose between basketball and football and told me I couldn’t do both. I don’t think it was race, but he really wanted me to focus only on basketball” (personal communication, June 20, 2013). Finally, Richie stated that, “Some teachers ask how long you’ve been in our school and they treat you different when you’ve been here longer, like me” (personal communication, July 9, 2013). Upon clarification, “longer” was interpreted to mean the longer you have been in our district, the better you can do academically. These ideas were in direct opposition to what Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested teachers do; and that is challenge all students to challenge their place in the world. I was disheartened, but not surprised to hear that not all teachers challenged their students to succeed.

Results of Data Analysis

Before the data is reviewed and conclusions and recommendations are made, it is important to explain my own personal experiences with the phenomenon I have attempted to relay regarding the students within this particular school district. I did not have any personal experiences with teachers or school staff not believing in me because of my race. I did not have any personal stories of teachers expecting less of me because
of the color of my skin. I also have not had trouble relating culturally to the majority of my teachers. Even though I grew up in a low socio-economic household, where I attended multiple schools, in multiple districts and states, expectations for me were high and there never seemed to be anyone telling me I could not achieve or better my situation. There was always a teacher or two working to help me achieve and excel. I could say the same for every student I have served for over the past fifteen years.

I began this research by trying to understand if African American students limited their own achievement as a way to help answer the low academic achievement of the collective school district of which I have been employed. Being a White, male administrator in the district, I have not experienced what our students have seen, heard, and experienced within our schools. Therefore, I was curious to find out what students within the district experienced and if those experiences had an impact on their effort and academic achievement.

I attempted to find out whether or not our students limited their own achievement with a list of twenty questions designed to have students project and describe their personal experiences with their own effort, academic achievement, and with our staff. What I found was, overall, not very shocking; it was some of the richest and poignant responses I have ever heard. They were so skillful and precise with what they lived; and I must admit I did not expect to hear such truthful and mature responses from the students.

This research has opened my eyes to some of the barriers African American students may experience and it has taught me that strong relationships and high
expectations can possibly be the difference for some students as they learn to navigate the public school system. I know that I cannot generalize any of the research from this study, but what I could do was learn from what the students have shared with me and become more adept at fostering relationships across our district.

**Race**

I was expecting to find deeper experiences mentioned when asking the students about their relationships with teachers who are both of their same race and those who are not, however, nothing really surfaced. It was, however, very interesting to note that even those students that felt the teachers of a different race were similar, they felt that depending upon the situation, “Black teachers did understand things better” (Johnny, Personal communication, July 16, 2013). Even though the students could not classify their relationships as better or more positive with teachers of their same race, the experiences and things they talked about made it clear they were more comfortable in opening up, talking to, and confiding in African American teachers. Upon clarification, this fell right in line with Casteel (2000) and Burt et al. (2013) when the students made it very clear that from their point of view, relationships were the key to having a positive relationship with teachers; regardless of their race or cultural background. I thought this was a very insightful way of looking at the situation because the students were really able to pick up on the relationship between themselves and the teachers.

None of the students were able to articulate the actual background of their teacher, the socio-economic stratum from which the teacher was raised, or the family structure the teacher experienced as a youth. The students based all of their assumptions on their
teachers’ cultural background and race. However, I believed this to be a good thing because of the connection to the blocked opportunities framework and the attitude-achievement paradox. Part of this framework discussed the challenges of blocked mobility and the opinion that even beyond socio-economic level, the concentration of race can be a restraint that keeps African Americans from achieving (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Clark, 1965). The attitude-achievement paradox attested that these students were able to see teachers that were of their same race and culture in a successful position, as professional educators; and that alone helped build a relationship that can foster higher achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

One student mentioned the word “burden” when describing how a teacher views students (Johnny, personal communication, July 18, 2013). This stunned me greatly and upon clarification with the student, I realized just how astute this student was at reading body language and hearing tone. He was able to describe several examples of the teacher, “being sarcastic” and “ignoring me.” These findings strongly point to more of a relationship with students than race or background and agreed with Steele (1997) regarding positive relationships. I was hoping to find this type of connection between teachers and students. I discovered, by talking with all six students, that it was less about the race or culture of the teachers when attempting to impact effort and positive experiences; it was more about the relationship they had with their teacher.

This intrigued me because of the tie to the African centered pedagogy discussion and Afrocentric schools discussed during the developing ethnic identities section of the literature review. Had these students been afforded opportunities early in their education,
they may have developed more positive feelings about their race and the historical figures responsible for helping to advance all African Americans (Ladson-Billings, 1994, Majerus, 2013; Merry & New, 2008). I did not feel as though this was a major hindrance to the students, but it nonetheless makes me wonder if this would have allowed them to create better relationships with teachers or staff members they felt actually cared about African Americans; regardless of the teachers’ race. This related back to the feeling the students had about the perception of sharing similar experiences and family background with the African American teachers. The students I interviewed made it clear to me that even though they sometimes felt more comfortable initially with African American teachers; they were sometimes able to create an even better relationship with a White teacher they knew cared about them. Therefore, I would not argue that African Americans should be taught only by African American teachers and I have previously highlighted research that has attested the race of the teacher does not impact student achievement (Burt et al., 2013; Casteel, 2000).

I was intrigued to know why all six students mentioned high school teachers as the ones with which they had stronger relationships. Upon questioning, the students explained it had more to do with teachers treating them like “people” and “adults.” I supposed it was because of the decided difference with the way teachers interact with students at the high school level versus interactions at all lower levels and I was correct. I think it can be easier for teachers to talk and interact with students when they are not trying to parent them or are constantly trying to have students follow school rules. Even
though this may have something to do with the positive feelings the students had for their high school teachers, that would be a different research question entirely.

**Attitude**

I was not shocked at all with the positive attitudes and expectations for achievement the students I interviewed possessed. This coincided directly back to a lot of the research I have read, especially the attitude-achievement paradox that discussed African Americans having very high expectations for academic achievement (Mickelson, 1990). What was interesting and unexpected was how much the students seemed to really know how hard they worked in school. None of them gave me answers they thought I wanted to hear. They did not lie about how much effort they put forth and were very forthcoming with when and how they put forth effort in school (Downey et al., 2009). In union with the amount of effort in school was when four of the students opened up about trying harder later in high school because things began to, “seem more important as a senior” (Howard, personal communication, June 20, 2013). I was also not too surprised because I have personally worked with other underclassmen in our district about the importance of staying on top of grades earlier in high school.

It was encouraging that all six students felt like they had multiple teachers that were confident in them and pressed them to succeed. I was not able to find any connection to the false empathy idea of teachers not pushing students to achieve more because they either do not believe they can achieve at higher rates or because they feel sorry for the daily struggles of the students. However, Richie mentioned that teachers did focus more on the students who had attended the school district the longest, so there may
be a connection between expectations and length of time in the district (personal communication, July 9, 2013). Therefore, this idea would need to be answered with a larger study involving more underperforming students possibly. Overall, I was pleased to find that these students all had high expectations for themselves and were very aware of when they worked hard in school and when they went through the motions. They did not express that or accuse anyone of trying to hold them back. They owned their decisions and effort and I was very proud of them for their honesty and maturity.

**Family**

It was apparent that the family members the students discussed played an important role in their development and really impressed upon these students the need for education. I do not know if the relationships with the teachers were more important than family in the amount of effort put forth, but I do know that each played a significant role in helping the students achieve. This corresponded directly to the ethnic identities portion of research that discusses African American students being highly influenced by family (Byrd & Chavous, 2009). I was not shocked to hear from the students about peers being the ones to bring them down academically and being in direct conflict with what parents were telling the students regarding their grades. I was also impressed with the fact that students could truthfully articulate who they needed to spend time with and those friends with whom they needed to keep at a distance.

I did not really expect too much variance with these answers in this section as the research I read consistently showed that African Americans have high goals for themselves as far as education is concerned and understand that it is a means for upward
mobility (Mickelson, 1990). I was, however, surprised by a couple of the students who mentioned, “getting a good job that has benefits” and the need to “adjust to the first semester of school in a completely different atmosphere” (Richie, personal communication, July 9, 2013; Tamera, personal communication, July 16, 2013). These two statements showed me that someone had spent some time talking with the students about adjusting to college life and the importance of benefits as you get older. When asked, both students said their parents and teachers talked to them about making sure these two things were secured as they got older. So often you hear of students not getting good guidance or understanding some of the pitfalls ahead of them in life, but it was clear that someone had taken the time to explain some things a lot of young adults have to learn by experiencing.

Competing for grades was something a lot of students do in school and part of the research discussed who students compete with as having an impact on overall achievement; both negatively and positively. The student statements showed that competition was present between high achieving peers, but not as much with those not in honors classes. This completely agreed with the Blocked Opportunities Framework idea about competing with underperforming peers and not striving for higher achievement; as well as the idea of students comparing themselves only to those students around them and being highly influenced by their neighborhoods; with both lenses being viewed through a more homogenous, predominantly African American community (Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Clark, 1965). I would have liked to hear more competition stories from the students who were not in honors or upper-level courses because I would have anticipated
the competition to occur less often, according to my literature review, but with a limited number of students meeting my criteria for participation in the study that would need to be discovered with a future study. I also wondered if more data would support whether or not the students I interviewed performed at the same level as similar peers in districts with more of a heterogeneous population or even a predominantly White district.

**Identity**

My research discussed the need to develop positive ethnic identities and difficulties African American students face because of the negative stereotypes associated with being African American (Steele, 1997). I was slightly astonished when I asked the students to describe the first time they realized what their race was because even though the students were much younger at the time, the experience was still very negative, shocking, and vivid for them to recall. These are the types of experiences that I believe have contributed to the development of a negative racial identity and lower self-esteem; both of which, as my research has supported, can affect student achievement (Steele, 1997). I must note that I was amazed, in a positive way, because one student had never experienced racism. Janet was unable to recall a time she had ever experienced a negative situation regarding her race and attributed a lot of that to growing up in a “Black neighborhood.” Even after pushing the situation, she said she had heard other people’s stories, but had never experienced anything personally (personal communication, June 25, 2013). I was skeptical, but at the same time very pleased she had not had the misfortune of dealing with racism and hoped she would not ever have to endure a negative situation.
It was contenting to hear all the positive influences the students I interviewed had regarding family members helping them to understand their culture and race. Students were able to recall many incidences with family members who were attempting to help them learn how to navigate society as an African American. Their comments made an impression upon me because of the strong support each student had with creating their ethnic identity and the connection it can have with positive future achievement; according to the ethnic identities section of my literature review (Merry & New, 2008). The comments were even more meaningful to me because as a White, male, I have had no experience with or memory of anyone teaching me that discrimination may be on the horizon. I was saddened that, in this day and age, conversations like that still take place, but I am aware of the need.

I was not surprised upon hearing that the students felt they had to change how they act, behave, and/or speak to succeed in school. The research supported that African American students do attempt to assimilate into the predominantly White, middle-class culture as a way to successfully navigate schools (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2008). Although, this was a disappointing belief of students that means teachers may only think African Americans who talk “White” are smart or able to achieve at high rates. The research also suggested that doing so may also lead to negative feelings from others. African Americans and the students did acknowledge some students “pick on” them for “acting too White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2008).

Escher and Godley (2012) discussed the idea of teaching teachers to respect this dialect and not to dismiss it as unintelligent. “Current research has suggested that the
racial ‘achievement gap’ in literacy learning is more likely caused by teachers’ lack of acceptance of AAVE [African American Vernacular English]” (Escher & Godley, 2012, p. 705). Whether or not that is accurate, it was important to note it because the “higher achieving students viewed speaking SE [Standard English] as necessary for academic success” (Escher & Godley, 2012, p. 708). This was a common theme with the students I interviewed, which led me to believe the African American dialect was not respected in their classes.

The students I interviewed did not experience a lot of people failing to believe in them and that is positive for them and the staff members in our district. I was hoping not to find many examples of adults with low expectations of students and I am pleased with the findings. I do think the statements revealed some peers, with possible negative racial identities, that do not believe African Americans can achieve or succeed in school, but overall I felt as though the students received encouragement throughout their school experience.

**Summary**

Ultimately these interviews provided a look at the experiences of six students in one particular school district. I was able to make many connections back to the literature review and those topics that could not be supported by the data collected. These students shared responses that dealt with knowing when teachers like and support them, the first time they dealt with racial issues, how hard they pushed themselves to succeed academically, and even ways they change who they are to portray sounding intelligent for
teachers. All in all they have provided a window into their world; their lived experiences through their eyes and with their words.
CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Recapping and restating the lived experiences of others was a difficult task. Ensuring that the participants’ responses were recorded accurately and reflected their lived experience was paramount. Now complete, the study transformed into an arena to reiterate the commitment made to those students for telling their story. This chapter restates that context of the where the participants lived and the conclusions drawn from their experiences. The chapter then offers implications for practice in the field of education and even the transferability to similar districts in the region, along with a researcher’s reflection of the experiences associated with the study.

Review of Methodology

The school district in which these students resided is a predominantly African American school district which bordered a portion of and was located approximately fifteen miles from a major metropolitan area. Serving approximately 3800 students, the school district has changed demographically from a working-class, ethnic European area to a mainly working-class, African American area over the past 20 years. These students have grown up in a mostly African American, lower socio-economic, and very transient community. Their teachers have remained predominantly White, middle-class even though there has been an increase of African American new hires in recent years. The schools the students attended were community schools until nine years ago when they were transformed into grade-level buildings. The newest building the students attended,
until 2013, was 52 years old and in need of many repairs. In 2013 the students graduated from a brand new building with state-of-the-art technology and facilities.

The context of the study revolved around attempting to understand the lived experiences of the students within the district and what circumstances could possibly lead to the students limiting their own achievement. The factors that played into the decision to work with these students revolved around the desire to learn about what the students experienced in the district; upon reading the research on blocked mobility, negative self concepts, and the disagreement between student expectations and actual achievement. This district has performed poorly on attaining state indicators associated with the state report card for each district, and I was attempting to see if the experiences students have lived could shed light on the district’s continued shortcomings.

The students’ experiences were had throughout their 13 years as a student in the district. From Kindergarten through Twelfth grade, the students attended the district and along the way had experiences with both African American and White teachers. They were part of a very limited number of students that had spent this much time with the district. Out of a graduating class of over 220 students, there were only 26 students that met the criterion for this study. These students were asked to recall the relationships, interactions, and experiences with staff members over their entire time in the district. The combination of a predominantly African American population, the low socio-economic status of the city, the aging facilities, the transient students, and the poor performance on the state report card created the experiences these students have lived.
These were things not all students or communities were faced with and to experience them all has proven difficult; in accordance with the Block Opportunities Framework.

**Overall Findings**

While conducting this study and completing the data analysis I have discovered a few major themes from the responses gathered from the participants. First, the creation of strong relationships was key in helping these students succeed. They felt as though regardless of the teacher’s race, as along as a personal connection existed and the teacher believed in them by pushing them to succeed, they could be successful. Second, I was unable to connect the false empathy idea of teachers not pushing students to succeed because they understand the hardships faced by some students within the district. The students interviewed owned their decisions and never accused anyone of not believing in them or attempting to hold them back. However, it was important to note that Richie mentioned that teachers focus more on those students who are in the district for longer periods of time and each of these participants had been in the district for 13 years (personal communication, July 9, 2013). Therefore, this criteria of length within the district, may have limited the responses, but because of the subjective nature of this response, it is only an assumption.

I next discovered that family played an extremely significant role in the development of these students and the motivation to succeed in school. There was an understanding of the possible discrimination African Americans can face and the idea that education is the key towards upward mobility. I would have liked to hear more competition stories from the students not in honors courses regarding grades and
schoolwork, however, the majority of the students in the study were in honors or college preparatory courses and thus limited the findings. Finally, I discovered that even with all the positive influences the students had at home and school, they still felt they needed to change the way they talk and act during conversations with teachers and in class to appear more intelligent to teachers.

These findings have ultimately suggested that relationships played a key component in the academic success of these students. Relationships with both teachers and parents have impacted the ethnic identity formation and the expectations for success expected from the students. Therefore, I believe I have found that strengthening relationships with students and helping them to create a healthy ethnic identity which is built on pride of race yet understanding of pitfalls that may exist to discriminate against them are the solutions to helping our students succeed; which may then support the claim for more culturally relevant pedagogy for African American students.

**Relating the Themes to the Research Questions**

As previously noted the research questions had a profound impact on me personally because of the amount of time I have worked with this population of students and the energy I have put forth to help the students I have served succeed. For that reason, linking findings to the major themes found in the data was a vitally important component of the study’s findings.

**Primary Research Question:**

Have perceived expectations from teachers and/or other experiences led African American students to limit their academic achievement?
The most important findings suggest, as an answer to the primary research question, that teacher expectations have had an impact on the amount effort put forth by students. The participants in the study indicated that they, in fact, did work harder in classes where they felt the teacher liked them. They acknowledged that even in some classes that were not interesting to them, they would try harder to achieve if they felt the teacher wanted them to succeed and showed interest in them. These are extremely important findings, not because they are revolutionary, but because they support the idea that relationships played a vital role in the academic success of students. For these students, relationships were very important in deciding whether or not to push themselves to achieve in certain courses.

It can be argued that because of the strong family support reported by these students, their achievement was to be expected. I do not fully agree with that statement based on the interviews conducted. The majority of students felt as though they could have achieved higher and pushed themselves more; even with stronger parental support (Howard, Janelle, Janet, Johnny, Richie, and Tamara, personal communication, June 20, July 9, June 25, July 18, July 9, and July 16, 2013). Thus the additional support, the high expectations, and the relationship built with the teacher, had an important impact on the academic success of the students.

Secondary Research Question:

Do the experiences of these twelfth grade students coincide with theories of racial identity, blocked-opportunities framework, and false empathy regarding student achievement?
In regard to the secondary question, the students showed congruence with the theories of creating racial identities and the blocked-opportunities framework. However, there did not appear to be any connection or similar experience to that of false empathy. The students interviewed shared many positive experiences with the notion of creating ethnic identities. This took place mainly at home, with very supportive family members. However, there were also small traces found with teachers, during mainly a high school African American studies course. These students were able to create positive ethnic identities and learn to begin navigating the often treacherous waters of public education. Students were also taught by family members and a couple of teachers about the idea of blocked mobility and discrimination facing African Americans. These students luckily had few negative experiences in regard to discrimination, but it was important to note they had an understanding of what may arise when on their own in society.

The idea of false empathy was never experienced by these particular students. I would not say that it did not exist, but it was a positive revelation to hear that these students did not experience teachers holding lower expectations for them because of the color of their skin or the perceived difficulties they may have thought to be experiencing at home. I do not believe that false empathy does not exist in this school district and there could be multiple reasons for why these students have not faced this experience. It could have been that these students were more academically successful early on or it could have been that the teachers they had portrayed high expectations for all students. Whatever the reason, these students did not face this issue.
Overall, the research questions were answered sufficiently enough for me to affirm that all of these students have limited their own achievement; based more on the relationships they have had with teachers and not necessarily their expectations. Two of them were highly motivated from the start, but I would argue they, too, limited their own achievement; more along the lines of competing with only other African American students. I could argue relationships and expectations are similar, but the important learning that has occurred, as a result of the interviews and the experiences shared by these students, indicates relationships over all else mattered. The creation of ethnic identities, overcoming obstacles, and experiencing lower expectations may still be important aspects when working with African American students, but for the majority of these students, it all came down to the type of relationship they had with their teacher. This does not address the underperformance of the district, but it may shed more light on what could be important and needed across the district; although, that would need to be a different study altogether.

**Limitations**

This study was limited in two major ways. First, I have been employed in the district and have worked as an administrator with all of the students interviewed. This may have impacted the study because of the personal biases I have held, along with the fact that my position may have influenced responses not intended or actually experienced. The latter was a concern, however, I was confident with the trust built with the participants over the past 15 years, hopefully limiting these concerns.
The second way in which the study was limited was because of the focused criterion of selecting students to participate. The focused criterion with which participants were chosen may have impacted the study results as well. By limiting the field of participants to only those students who were:

(a) African American
(b) Twelfth grade, non-repeater
(c) Attendance in the same school district from kindergarten through twelfth grade
(d) Willing to participate and could garner parental consent as well

I did not feel as though it was a major concern because 97% of all students in the district were African American. The field was limited because of the criteria of twelfth grade non-repeaters and those who attended the district from Kindergarten through Twelfth grade. Even though the non-repeater status affected less than 10% of the senior class, the attendance requirement negated close to 89% of the senior class. This was a staggering number and severely limited the field. However, due to the nature of phenomenological research, a small sample size was fortunately appropriate.

In spite of these limitations, this study offers an account of how students create ethnic identities and how they approach academic achievement, while also adding to the literature by providing experiences of African American students’ attempts at navigating a traditional, public school system. I was nervous about not being able to generalize the findings from the study, however, because of the demographics of the region and the high transiency rates of this and nearby districts, the findings can be transferred to other
similar districts in the region. This study has served to provide me with the understanding and experiences I was looking to uncover. I remain focused on what the students within the district have lived and I was able to obtain their thoughts and lived experiences; which will allow me deeper understanding and the ability to transfer learning from this study to other similar districts.

**Implications to Practice**

This study has presented multiple lived experiences by participants from a singular school district. These experiences have crossed the lines of racial discrimination, identity creation, expectations, and attitudes towards achievement. Associating how these experiences translate to the field of education can be difficult without the ability to generalize findings. Nevertheless, I have discovered that the African American students who were a part of this study have benefitted from strong relationships both at home and with teachers.

I would argue that educators should focus on fostering strong relationships with students, built on high expectations and cultural appreciation. We should push our students to achieve in the same way we would push our own children and accept nothing but their best work, while being there to support them as they stumble. I would suggest that we also help instill a sense of pride in African American students by highlighting prominent African Americans in more than just February each year. As Ladson-Billings (1994) has argued, a commitment has to be made to more culturally relevant materials that highlight African American culture as well as doing a better job of recruiting and retaining African American teaching candidates.
I would insist that this would look different in different school districts based upon the demographics and cultural backgrounds of the community. Now concluded, this study will serve to be a springboard towards developing and offering more courses and material associated with the African American culture. This could be addressed when curriculum materials are bought and activities are planned in each building. Lessons should be designed with a cultural focus and desire to highlight the African American culture. This is not to say this is the only culture to focus on, but with the district demographics, there needs to be a large emphasis on the African American culture.

I also plan on using my findings and literature review to highlight the positive experiences these students have had with the teachers they felt the strongest connections. Modeling for teachers and challenging them to really get to know their students on a personal level, while showing respect and understanding for their culture. This is meant to be more than referencing famous African Americans. Discussions should be held regarding celebrations, rituals, and holidays practiced by the families and incorporated into lesson design. Godley (2012) suggested some ways to help teachers understand about code-switching,

1. Discuss code-switching at the beginning of the year and ask students to discuss the way they change their language for different situations. This could even be a role-play activity.
2. Do not expect students to speak standard English at all times. Let students be comfortable when discussing topics.
3. Provide opportunities to practice speaking standard English.

4. Use authentic examples of language to spark discussion.

5. Discuss and acknowledge linguistic prejudice.

6. Use literature to discuss ways in which characters were judged solely on the way they spoke.

These suggestions were perfect examples of how teachers can show they respect a student’s culture and support the student in their attainment of academic success.

I finally plan to continue to search for more minority candidates to employ as teachers. I personally believe in hiring the best candidate for each position, regardless of race, but in a district with 97% African American students, it is important to actively search for teachers that have experienced some of the same things the students are dealing with culturally and socially.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This study could lend itself to more of a quantitative model if the researcher was looking to generalize the findings. I would suggest focusing on lower achieving students solely as a way to understand exactly what they experienced and why they may be achieving at lower rates. Another study could also focus on the high achieving students in a predominantly African American district as compared to their high achieving counterparts in a mixed (even percentage of Black and White students) district to see if competing with only their same race led to lower achievement. I would also recommend further research on the difference between interactions at the high school and elementary school levels. I feel as though younger kids may also be able to share experiences they
have had and give explanations possibly during the time they are developing their ethnic identities.

The final recommendation would be to dig deeper into the false empathy idea by comparing what a teacher expects from a White student and what they expect of the same assignment from an African American student that has more family or socio-economic struggles. Regardless of the choice, this is a very full topic that deserves much more consideration.

**Researcher’s Reflections**

Overall I am very pleased with the study and interviews conducted. I was able to learn first-hand experiences from students and compare the information to previously researched topics which have inhibited African American students. I know that I cannot generalize the information from this study, however, I will be able to transfer the learning to similar districts in the region because of similar demographics and transiency rates.

I expected that perceived expectations from teachers and negative experiences led to lower academic achievement for African American students. However, based on the lived experiences of these six students, I do not believe that to be an accurate finding. These students all indicated that relationships with teachers pushed them to work hard and that the better the relationship, the better their effort. There was no mention of limiting their own achievement to spite a teacher. This made a lot of sense to me, since I have held, as a core belief, that relationships are the key to helping students succeed and achieve. All six students reinforced for me the belief that relationships matter most and it
was very satisfying and informative to learn about how these particular students spoke of good and bad relationships they had developed with teachers.

I found much more congruence with my secondary research question. I was curious if the experiences of the six students I interviewed would connect to the theories and lenses I used in addressing the literature review. I did find that many of the experiences the students experienced did agree with the research. The major ideas that seemed to unite the most were the attitude-achievement paradox, the blocked-opportunities framework, and the developing racial identities sections.

All of the students interviewed held very high expectations for their achievement as did their parents. Even the students that were not the highest achieving students shared the same aspirations and goals for academic achievement, yet it did not always translate to higher grades. This is something that, I believe, after reading the research falls directly in line with the Blocked Opportunities Framework.

The Blocked Opportunities Framework is something that I found to be very impactful, according to the experiences of these six students. The students were limiting their own achievement by only competing with other students within their race and socioeconomic strata. These students were limited by their experiences and were left to navigate the education system without much exposure to other races and cultures. This was a real issue that could be addressed with more contact between different school districts, competitions and even some type of collaboration.

The racial identities portion was extremely intriguing as well because it was something with which I had no personal experience or knowledge. The students were
able to articulate how they developed a strong sense of who they were and the people that helped them along the way. I learned about how their family and a few teachers talked to them about their culture and then they related that back to their pride for being African American. These students may have had the motivation from the Blocked Opportunities Framework that Fordham (1996) discussed in trying to prove stereotypes are wrong about them or they were looking to avenge how their ancestors were treated and viewed. Either way, this strengthened for me the need for more culturally relevant teaching and the real need for students to see members of their own culture and ethnicity in prominent positions, but especially teaching because the students were very aware of members of their race and ethnicity holding top positions throughout the United States.

I now have a much greater understanding of the need to help students develop more positive ethnic identities and allow them to showcase their race and culture. I urge everyone to continue having high expectations for African American students, hold them accountable for achieving at the rates in which they and their families believe they can, and respect their cultural differences by teaching them not everyone has to act like the majority to succeed.

The students I interviewed had very strong family ties and high expectations for their achievement. They were honest students that were willing to share their experiences and I was proud to have had the opportunity to work with them at the district level and during the interviews. These students were, thankfully, supported by our staff and built strong, lasting relationships along the way. They felt respected, understood, and able to be themselves as they grew into young adults. Besides continuing to focus on building
strong relationships, I want to follow up my research by trying to infuse more culturally responsive teaching, a more diverse staff, and competition or collaboration experiences for our students so they may work towards developing even more positive ethnic identities to overcome barriers that threaten to impede their academic success.

Summary

The issues that have surrounded African American students’ academic achievement has and will continue to be a major part of education and educational reform until such a time when the gap in achievement test data has been either diminished or eradicated completely. Because that has not happened over the last 40 years, I was not completely sure I would see it occur during my time as an educator. As disappointing as that may be, I do not believe we can sit idly by either. We must continue to lead and search for new and effective ways to help our African American students succeed at higher rates academically.

This study attempted to better understand the experiences six, twelfth grade students had during their time within the school district of which I am employed. I have gained knowledge of times when these students have limited their own achievement based on the relationships that existed with their teachers. I have expanded my knowledge on how these African American students created ethnic identities and from whom they gain knowledge and support regarding their race and culture; so as to overcome the stereotypes and discrimination associated with being African American in our society.
I have also confronted the ideas of providing more culturally relevant teaching along with the addition of more African American teachers. I have wanted to be an advocate for African American students in education because I have had first-hand experience working with some very talented students that have not succeeded as well as I would have expected. If this study has done nothing else but inspire others to read the literature and locate possible answers to why African American students are not achieving at higher rates, than I have accomplish something. The students with which I worked on this study have helped me grow as an educator and by spending a great deal of time with authors such as Crenshaw, Ladson-Billings, Fordham, and the seemingly countless other scholars that have pioneered this research, I have learned that we cannot sit by and be observers; we must champion the causes that we are vehemently passionate about and see them through.
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Hughes, D., Hagelskamp, C., Way, N., & Foust, M. D. (2009). The role of mothers’ and adolescents’ perceptions of ethnic-racial socialization in shaping ethnic-racial


APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT
Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Bruce Willingham and I am the Assistant Superintendent for the Maple Hts. City Schools. I am currently working to complete my doctoral research at Ashland University with twelfth grade students within Maple Hts. I will be conducting research based on teacher expectations of students, through the eyes of the students. Therefore, I will need to spend some time talking with your student asking them questions about what they feel about their teachers’ expectations for them.

I will be asking the students 20 questions that will reveal the feelings, behaviors, and reactions that your child has experienced. I will not be using student names or information and there is no risk involved with your child participating, as I and my dissertation Chair, Dr. Judy Alston, are the only people who will have access to the data. I am simply trying to use the information I find to help better serve our students. The teachers are not going to know what your child thinks and I will not share any of their attitudes about school or their teachers with anyone within the Maple Hts. City School District.

I would like it very much if your student was able to be a participant in my study by conducting an interview(s). Your child’s participation is completely voluntary and he or she may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

I really appreciate any support you are able to give me and I look forward to the chance of working with your child.

Thank you for your help and understanding,

Bruce Willingham
Researcher/Assistant Superintendent
216. 587.6100 ext. 3500
216.401.7998

Dr. Judy Alston
Professor & Chair
Department of Leadership Studies
Ashland University
419.207.4983

I understand and am in agreement that my child may participate in this study. His or her participation is strictly voluntary and may be discontinued at any time without consequence. I understand that the purpose of the study is to understand how students perceive teacher expectations and that all answers to the interviews will be held in strict confidence and will not affect my child’s permanent record. I understand that all identifiable information of students will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Student</th>
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APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Participant Consent Form

Do African American Students Limit Their Own Academic Achievement

A. Purpose and Background

Bruce Willingham, the Assistant Superintendent for the Maple Hts. City Schools and a doctoral research student, is conducting a research study to understand if/how African American students limit their own achievement based on their perceived expectations from their teachers. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a 12th-grade African American student who has attended the Maple Hts. City Schools since kindergarten. I am looking to uncover if students limit their own achievement because of their perceived expectations of their teachers.

B. Procedures

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be interviewed by Mr. Willingham and asked approximately 20 questions, lasting approximately one hour.

2. You may also be asked to review writings once completed to ensure that your responses are accurately depicted in writing by Mr. Willingham.

3. Each interview will be audio taped and last approximately one hour, except in the case of follow-up interview that may be shorter in length.

C. Risks/Discomforts

1. There are no risks or discomforts associated with the study itself.
2. You may be asked to recount situations you have dealt with that may or may not be pleasant for you, but you will be asked nothing other than to explain how you felt and to describe the experience.

3. Confidentiality: Your personal information and anything you share regarding your experiences will not be shared with anyone. I will take all precautions to change your names and the names of anyone who describe so that you will not be identified. I will also be keeping all records in a sealed file cabinet that only I have access to, along with password protected backup computer files. The files will be destroyed once the 36 month retention program is required. I will ask that all participants remain silent on the research and questions asked, however, I cannot guarantee that all participants will do that. I assure you that no real names or identities will be used in any reporting or publications from this study.

D. Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, the information gathered will be used to better inform me of the experiences six students had within our district and while I cannot generalize any of the findings, I will hopefully have a better idea of how/if students may limit their own achievement.

E. Costs

There are no costs to you by participating in this study.
F. Payment

There is no payment for participating in this study.

G. Questions

You have talked to Mr. Willingham regarding this study and have had your questions answered. If you have further questions, you may contact Dr. Judy Alston, at (419) 289-5386 or jalston@ashland.edu.

If you have any comments or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact the Human Subjects Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 and 5:00, Monday through Friday, by calling or writing (419) 207-6198.

H. Consent

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student or employee.

If you agree to participate, you should sign below.

_________________________  ___________________________
Date                      Signature of Study Participant
| Date | Signature of Person Obtaining Consent |
APPENDIX C

PARENT CONSENT SCRIPT FOR PHONE CONTACT
Parent Consent Form Script for Phone Contact

Do African American Students Limit Their Own Academic Achievement

The participant consent form will be used to guide me through the verbally conversation with parents so they are hearing the exact information given to the participants in writing. I have changed minimal things on this form.

I. Purpose and Background

Hello, my name is Bruce Willingham and I am the Assistant Superintendent for the Maple Hts. City Schools and a doctoral research student. I am conducting a research study to understand if/how African American students limit their own achievement based on their perceived expectations from their teachers. Your child is being asked to participate in this study because he/she is a 12th-grade African American student who has attended the Maple Hts. City Schools since kindergarten. I am looking to uncover if students limit their own achievement because of their perceived expectations of their teachers.

J. Procedures

If you agree to allow him/her to be in the study, the following will occur:

4. Your child will be interviewed by me and asked approximately 20 questions, lasting approximately one hour.

5. He/She may also be asked to review writings once completed to ensure that his/her responses are accurately depicted in writing by me.

6. Each interview will be audio taped and last approximately one hour, except in the case of follow-up interview that may be shorter in length.
K. Risks/Discomforts

4. There are no risks or discomforts associated with the study itself.

5. Your child may be asked to recount situations you have dealt with that may or may not be pleasant for him/her, but they will be asked nothing other than to explain how they felt and to describe the experience.

6. Confidentiality: Your child’s personal information and anything they share regarding their experiences will not be shared with anyone. I will take all precautions to change his/her name and the names of anyone who describe so that he/she will not be identified. I will also be keeping all records in a sealed file cabinet that only I have access to, along with password protected backup computer files. The files will be destroyed once the 36 month retention program is required. I will ask that all participants remain silent on the research and questions asked, however, I cannot guarantee that all participants will do that. I assure you that no real names or identities will be used in any reporting or publications from this study.

L. Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, the information gathered will be used to better inform me of the experiences six students had within our district and while I cannot generalize any of the findings, I will hopefully have a better idea of how/if students may limit their own achievement.
M. Costs

There are no costs to you by participating in this study.

N. Payment

There is no payment for participating in this study.

O. Questions

You have talked to me, Mr. Willingham, regarding this study and have had your questions answered. If you have further questions, you may contact Dr. Judy Alston, at (419) 289-5386 or jalston@ashland.edu.

If you have any comments or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact the Human Subjects Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 and 5:00, Monday through Friday, by calling or writing (419) 207-6198.

P. Consent

Your child has been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. He/She and/or you are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not your child participates in this study will have no influence on their present or future status as a student or employee.

If you agree to participate, you should sign the consent form and return it to me.
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. What experiences have you had with teachers who are of your same race?

2. How would you describe your experiences with teachers from your same race versus Caucasian teachers? Are they more positive, negative, or the same?

3. What have teachers done to show you they understand your race and culture?

4. Have there been any times you have tried harder for teachers of your same race?

5. What things do teachers do or say to show you they like you? Do these things impact the amount of effort you put forth?

6. What are your expectations for your academic achievement?

7. Do you think school and academic achievement are important? Why?

8. Describe how you feel about your grades and the amount of effort you put forth in school?

9. How do you know teachers are encouraging you to succeed and participate in school?

10. What does it mean to work up to your abilities in school? Do you believe you do this regularly?

11. What goals do you and your parents have for your academic career?

12. How do any other family members or close friends influence your academic ability?
13. Describe ways you work hard or fail to push yourself to make your parents proud or angry of your school work?

14. In what ways do you compare your academic success with others?

15. Tell me a little about your academic ability in conjunction with the grades you receive on your report card. Does this show your true potential?

16. Tell me about the first time you realized what your race and ethnicity was? Describe the scene.

17. Who taught you about your race and culture? What types of things did you learn?

18. What makes you proud of your race and culture?

19. Have you ever had to act different than other people in your race to succeed in school? If yes, describe why you think this is and if no, tell me what about your actions allow you to succeed.

20. Tell me about a time someone didn’t believe in you in school. How did you feel? Did this affect you academically? Do you think this had anything to do with your race or culture?