MY EXISTENCE DIDN’T MAKE NO DIFFERENCE TO THEM:
PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER EXPECTATIONS AMONG
AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College
of Education, Health and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2015
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The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand the perceptions of African-American students and their families regarding teacher expectations and the experiences that shaped these perceptions. The study sought to understand the ways in which members of the African-American community processed and responded to schooling based on their interpretation of educational institutions’ expectations. Critical Race Theory served as the theoretical framework which posited that culture is critical to human agency and race is relevant, salient, and is an undeniable influence on the structure of all American institutions, including schools.

Findings revealed African-Americans perceived that educational institutions of America, as a whole, are inherently designed to obstruct progress towards social justice. The emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust and resilience and their relevance to and the way in which they informed perceptions of teacher expectations and the discourse surrounding majority-minority relations and cultural negotiations are discussed. This inquiry concluded that the perceptions of teacher’s lower expectations influenced both African-American students’ approach to schooling, but did not deter them from high achievement and encouraged African-
American parents’ activism in countering racial biases to guide their students through school. Implications for diverse school communities include systemic efforts of inclusion, equitable treatment of all students and racial reconciliation as an integral part of increased African-American student achievement.

**Keywords**: teacher expectations; critical race theory; ethnic identity; cultural mistrust; racial socialization; resilience; racial reconciliation
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Vilma Seeberg for chairing my dissertation. Thank you for having the vision to create a meaningful project that I not only had the privilege to be a part of, but also for allowing me to create a study out of it that became my own voice in the academy. I would like to thank Dr. Tricia Niesz, who served on my dissertation committee. Thank you for holding me to an incredibly high standard of academic rigor, which ultimately made me a better scholar. I would like to thank Dr. Joanne Dowdy, who also served on my dissertation committee. Thank you for nurturing both my academic soundness and my scholarly soul with your honesty, wisdom, and support.

In addition to my committee, I would like to thank Dr. Todd Hawley, for serving as my graduate faculty representative and guiding my work through the final stages of this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Angela Neal-Barnett, for providing me a space in her cohort to write, reflect, and be part of a community of African-American scholars.

I would like to thank my husband, Greg Malone, for his unconditional support through this process. Your constant reassurance, devotion and commitment to my academic aspirations are appreciated more than I can put into words. To my daughters, Natalie, Nyah, and Noelle, I pray that I have served as a role model for what holding yourself to the highest standards can enable you to achieve. My acknowledgements would not complete without honoring my Lord and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who

* hath put in my heart that I might teach.*
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## CHAPTER

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I chose to design a study that would contribute significantly to academic scholarship, particularly the research of individuals that are typically underrepresented and often portrayed in a less than positive light in the United States of America’s current education system. I viewed my dissertation topic as an introduction to a personal, lifelong, scholarly endeavor of examining the educational experiences of descendants of the African Diaspora. There was no better place to start my journey than in my own backyard, and I decided to focus my dissertation research on the African-American community and their experiences within the United States’ education system. I made a decision early on for my work to make a contribution to the overarching issue of the academic achievement disparity between mainstream America and the African-American population. In particular, I wanted to examine the academic disparity within a suburban area, because this demographic setting is typically beyond the consequences of the worst economic inequalities and racial isolation, key factors that are posited as the central causes of the academic disparity (Kozol, 1992; Kozol, 2005; Spring 2003). Suburban areas are a particular interest to me because they are typically considered high-achieving overall, yet the African-American population within these districts often academically underperform when compared to their White peers (Ferguson 2002a; Ferguson, 2002b; Ogbu, 2003). Due to the minimization of the impact of socio-economic factors, I felt I could examine the core relationship between the African-American community and educational institutions and center my attention on the
relational considerations that contribute to the academic underachievement of African-American students.

Although I wanted to contribute to the body of the literature that addressed the experience of African-Americans in schools, I did not approach the issue from a deficit model. My desire was to counter the trend in educational research of exploring the achievement in a negative way. Instead, I made the decision to focus my attention on African-American students and their families who had experienced academic achievement and were successful in navigating through the suburban area school system. By using this approach, I hoped to inform the African-American community and the schools that educate this population how academic success could occur and lay a pathway that other African-Americans could follow.

I wanted to narrow the scope for this particular study to one aspect that brought all of my long-term research interests together, while still devising a study that contributed to the current needs of today’s education community. By including the direct voice and perspective of African-American community members and by researching a topic that could contribute to the endeavor of academic excellence for the African-American community, it is was with excitement that I embarked on a study that brought all of my nascent interests together and that made a contribution to the literature of cultural and social foundations.

**Dissertation History and Background**

My dissertation topic naturally evolved during my involvement with a multi-year qualitative research project. “Black American Students’ Achievement in the Suburbs:
Academic Success through Family Engagement” was a large-scale study that spanned several different aspects of the educational experiences of successful African-American students in a suburban area on a range of experiences, such as student and family engagement, community involvement, extracurricular participation and family life. The project began as a response to John Ogbu’s (2003) publication, “Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement,” that concluded that African-American students were not achieving in a school because of their families’ academic disengagement. Residents of the community who knew that there were a significant number of African-American students that achieved academically in the community, wanted to present a counter-story to the narrative presented by John Ogbu. They enlisted Dr. Vilma Seeberg, my advisor and dissertation committee chair, who formed a small cohort of researchers consisting of professors, student researchers, and community leaders. As a new scholar in the department, I volunteered to be part of the project and as time progressed, I became a research assistant and, then, research coordinator of the project. During my time on the project, I have recruited participants, collected data through interviews, transcribed and coded, and, wrote a chapter in the book publication.

During my extensive time with the project, I was drawn to one strand of the research: perceptions of teacher expectations. An intrigue began with two particular questions that addressed the same topic: “Do you think your teachers had high enough expectations?” and “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations for Black students?” I became fascinated that, although interviewees had diverse ways in which
they viewed the world, differed in global paradigm perspectives, and held various experiences and values, the response to this particular question remained consistent and the answers were almost always, “no” when addressing the question of teachers having high enough expectations. Equally consistent, the answer was almost always “yes” to the question of whether they thought teachers had lower expectations for Black students. Furthermore, I was intrigued that the participants often interpreted the term “teacher” to include everyone in the school be it an actual teacher, coach or administrator and often referred to anyone that represented the educational institution as “they”.

After observing the participants’ responses, I felt the topic merited further exploration. How did this commonality occur, despite differences in experiences? Had the participants come into their schooling experience with these pre-conceived ideas or were there specific events that had triggered and formed their perspectives? If so, what were these experiences? Within this exploration, could I better understanding the relationship between the African-American community and the school system?

Additionally, I noticed reoccurring themes in the responses of the participants when they responded to the questions “Do you think teachers had high enough expectations” and “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations for Black students”. The comments and explanations from the participants while addressing teacher expectations seemed to interject the themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience often. How were these topics relevant to the perceptions of teacher expectations and how did they inform the experiences regarding teacher expectations? I felt that this particular strand of research would make a good individual research project and soon after, I
decided to develop this query into my dissertation. By focusing on this one particular aspect of perceptions of teacher expectations and delving into how the emergent themes are relevant to and inform perceptions of teacher expectations, I hoped to contribute a greater insight on the relationship between the African-American community and the educational institutions that they attend.

**Problem Statement**

African-American student academic achievement lags behind that of the United States norms and is commonly referred to as the “achievement gap” in education culture. The achievement gap is defined as the observable disparity on a number of educational measures between groups of students, especially identity groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic status. The achievement gap is observable on a variety of measures, including standardized test scores, grade point average, dropout rates, and college enrollment and completion rates. In this study, the achievement gap refers to academic achievement variation along the line of race and, in particular, that of African-Americans and White Americans. This disparity serves as the overarching problematic and background for this research project.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2011 report, the loosely termed “national report card” of America’s schools that assesses and compares the academic performance of students in a broad range of subject areas, there is a large disparity in achievement between different races, specifically between Caucasian and African-American students. Nationally, 4th grade Caucasian students outscore African-American students by 25 points in both mathematics and reading. This trend
continues through 8th grade, where Caucasian students outscore African-American students by 31 points in mathematics and 25 points in reading. In the Midwest state in which this research takes place, 4th grade Caucasian students score, on average, 23 points higher in mathematics and 26 points higher than their African-American fellow students and 8th grade Caucasian student outscoring the average 8th grade African-American student by 33 points in mathematics and 27 points in reading.

The field of cultural and social foundations of education actively researches the experiences of African-Americans students in the United States, seeking to deconstruct the persistence regarding this population’s struggle for academic success. Some argue that the cause of disparities is societal in root, citing big-picture political and financial influences and factors (Ayers & Ford, 1996; Coleman et al., 1966; Feagin, 2006; Fine, 1991; Kozol, 2006b; Shapiro, 2004; Spring, 2003; West, 1994). Other scholars argue the major cause lies within the schools themselves, placing the blame on the structural design of the American school model that does not fully develop administration or teachers that effectively respond to non-dominant cultures (Delpit, 1995; Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995). There is also a large body of work that stresses the sociological and cultural dissonance at play between the African-American community and the predominantly White schools (Au, 1980; Banks, 2006; Dumais, 2002; Ferguson, 2002b; Heath, 1983; Ogbu, 1991). Still others hone in on the psychological dynamics that may hinder academic achievement, citing peer group expectations and inner-identity negotiations that are unique to African-American students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Kunjufu, 1988; Neal-Barnett, 2001; Ogbu, 2003; Steele &
Aronson, 1998; Tatum, 1997). It is widely accepted in the field of education that the current academic disparity exists because of a combination of societal, institutional, sociological, cultural and psychological issues and concerns, not just one aspect, and further research must be done to examine the experience of African-American students in schools in the United States of America.

Initially, research that focused on disparities along racial lines concentrated on inner-city school systems, where high mobility and concentration of lower socio-economic status populations are more commonplace (Skandera & Sousa, 2002). However, the focus shifted to include the suburbs and affluent school systems because those school systems are facing similar problems, with minorities performing worse than their non-minority neighbors (Ogbu, 2003; Ferguson, 2002a; Ferguson, 2002b). Comparing students that live just houses apart from each other, with race being the major observable difference, is significant because it leads to new discussions centered on topics such as differentiation in learning styles, effective integration, and acculturation. It also places the focus on the relationship between African-American students and the school systems, diverging from the original emphases on big-picture political and financial influences thought to cause disparities in academic achievement.

In recent years, some public discourse has mistakenly claimed that issues of race are mostly a concern of the past, with discrimination and struggles for equality viewed as iconic milestones of a generation before. It is an even more customary assumption that when an African-American family has the income that allows them to be categorized in the financial bracket of the middle class, that there is no integrative or acculturative
concern, because seemingly many social problems have been eliminated. This supposition is further perpetuated when an African-American family has “made it to the suburbs.” However, Cose (1994) and Feagin & Sikes (1995) document the trials of the everyday African-American middle class and how their newfound success coupled with increased interaction with individuals of the White community often creates a more stressful situation, filled with frustration and cynicism. This is reiterated in the work of Tatum (1987, 1997) that discusses the extended cycle of ethnic identity crisis because of mixed messages, both direct and indirect, that vacillate between the polarized arguments of “race doesn’t matter” and “race matters a great deal.” Not knowing the particular ways in which this topics influence the African-American community’s relationship with the American school system and, ultimately, how these factors contribute to academic achievement in the African-American community, is problematic and merits further exploration.

Need for Study

Despite societal, institutional, sociological, and psychological barriers, African-American students have achieved academic success. There is a burgeoning body of scholarly literature that showcases African-American students who perform well and who have achieved academically in the American educational system (Conchas, 2006; Gayles, 2005; Hrabowski, 1998; Perry, Steele & Hillard, 2003; Price, 2002; Tough, 2009). These few studies focused on ways families, schools, and communities could assist the African-American student population to experience academic success, offering advice on how other African-Americans can also make it through an American school system.
However, missing from the body of literature that delved into African-American academic success is an examination of the specifics of the relationship between successful African-American families and educational institutions and how African-Americans view teachers and schools in America. More specifically, the perspective of the whole African-American family, that includes the viewpoint of both the student and the parent, is rarely a part of scholarly research. Additionally, although the importance of teacher expectations is readily known in the field of education (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), there is very little research regarding the perceptions of teacher expectations from the African-American student and their family. There has not been a study completed that focuses on the academically successful African-American family and their views on teacher expectations.

There is a need to further explore the relationship between African-American families and the educational institutions they attend. Specifically, it is important to hear from African-American families, as the perspective of African-American families that have successfully maneuvered through a suburban school and their views on the topic of teacher expectations has not been documented in research. By delving into the critical relationship between the African-American family and the educational institutions, this research will provide a unique perspective on the achievement gap and give voice to how a person of color might experience academic success in an American school system.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families. The focus of this study is on these
perceptions and what experiences shaped these perceptions. The study seeks to understand the ways in which members of the African-American community process and respond to schooling based on their interpretation of educational institutions’ expectations. The study also seeks to understand how the emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust and resilience are relevant to and inform the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations. Knowing what perceptions African-American families hold regarding teacher expectations and, then, learning about the way in which they maneuvered through their constructed reality will provide insight into the way in which African-American families, in particular, those who were academically successful, view and adapt to the American school system.

**Research Questions**

This investigation seeks to respond to the following questions: What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families? What experiences shaped these perceptions? How have these perceptions influenced how students approach school? How have these perceptions influenced how African-American parents prepare and advise their student for school? How are the emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience relevant to and inform the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations?

**Significance of the Study**

The topic of African-American families’ perceptions of teacher expectations is significant, because it can bring to light some of the struggles that occur in the African-
American community in regards to its relationship to the American schools. By examining the perceptions held by African-American families concerning teacher expectations, the scope is furthered narrowed to the core issues concerning that relationship and its consequential socio-psychological underpinnings, highlighting the concern that, although academic success exists, it does not mean that other tensions do not.

This topic is important to the African-American community, because it gives voice and validity to a unique aspect of the African-American experience in school. It also can provide a blueprint for other African-American families on how to successfully maneuver the American school system. Additionally, this study is significant to American teachers and other representatives of educational institutions because it informs them of a perspective of student life that they might not be aware of which might engender thoughts and action to better address a population that is typically marginalized in school and society. Though generalizing from qualitative research is not possible, the rich description within this study sheds light on the relationship between African-American students and their families and the schools they attend. By understanding perceptions of teacher expectations held by African-American families, educators may be able to better address problematic situations that involve the relationship between school and people of non-dominant cultures and, ultimately, may lend itself to effectively addressing academic achievement in the African-American community.
Theoretical Framework

This research utilizes Critical Race Theory as a framework of analysis. Critical Race Theory examines non-majority relationships with American institutions (Bell, 1980; Bell 2004). Critical Race Theory has several principles that examine various aspects of social justice and equity. Most appropriately and befitting to the design of research, one of the central tenets to Critical Race Theory is that of counter-storytelling, allowing non-traditional voices and perspectives to be heard. Counter-storytelling is a useful methodology, because the experiences and perceptions of marginalized participants of a particular phenomenon are brought to the forefront. Through the process of counter-storytelling, very often a commonality emerges, creating a broad understanding of the experiences of people of color in a particular situation (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This research endeavors to be the vehicle in which the collective experience of a small group of African-American students and their families share their journey through a suburban school system, within the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory.

There has been critical research that seeks to chronicle the narrative of students of color in schools (Fine & Weis, 2003; Morris, 2001; Solorzano, 2001; Solorzano, 1998; Yon, 2000). Through documenting and sharing lived experiences, critical race theorists discuss the way students of color process the environment of the schooling system, and how their experiences shape how they view life in educational institutions. Critical Race Theory gives voice to the African-American experience while critically examining American educational institutions, thus providing a solid theoretical framework for this research project that aligns with the purpose of this study.
Definition of Terms

Achievement Gap: For the purpose of this study, the achievement gap refers to the disparity between White Americans and African-Americans, in regards to grades, test scores, placement in academically rigorous classes, graduation rates, college attendance rates and other similar measures and indicators of academic achievement.

Academic Success: For the purpose of this study, academic success is defined as graduating from high school with a minimum of a 3.0 grade point average and completing a degree at a four-year college.

African-American: The term African-American is used to refer to Americans that are of African descent. The larger project uses the word Black and it is embedded in the research questions that are used for this study. Additionally, the participants use the term African-American and Black interchangeably. As the researcher, I choose to use the word African-American because of my acknowledgement that the term Black refers to any person of African descent in any part of the world. Using the word African-American not only distinguishes what part of the world in which this study takes place, but also acknowledges that there is a distinct historical context and experience of African-Americans that is not universal to all Blacks.

Perception: The term perception, for the purpose of this study, refers to the way in which a particular phenomenon is viewed and interpreted and how that, then, becomes the constructed reality of an individual (Hatch, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Race/Ethnicity: According to the American Anthropological Association (1997), “race and ethnicity both represent social or cultural constructs for categorizing people
based on perceived differences in biology (physical appearance) and behavior. Although popular connotations of race tend to be associated with biology and those of ethnicity with culture, the two concepts are not clearly distinct from one another” (p. 1). For the purpose of this study, I have adopted this definition of these terms and race and ethnicity are used interchangeably by both the researcher and the research participants.

**Student:** A student is someone who is engaged in learning, one who is enrolled in a school and attends an institution of learning (Merriam-Webster, 2015). During the interview process, the participants were asked to reflect back to the time that they were ‘students’. Because of this, the participants are referred to as students in this study, although they have since matriculated from the school system.

**Teacher:** Throughout this research, the term teacher is broadly defined and refers not only to the instructor of a classroom, but also to other individuals that represent the local school system, such as, but not limited to: coaches, teacher assistants, administrators, and school board members. In a sense, the “teacher” is symbolic of the educational institution and representative of the school district. Details regarding this usage are found in the data analysis section of the study.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present a literature review that examines research and theory relevant to my dissertation topic on perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families. To begin, the overarching systematic problem of the achievement disparity gap will be briefly presented, followed by a review of literature on academically successful African-American students in a section called overcoming the achievement gap. The inclusion of the achievement gap and overcoming the achievement gap gives situational context to this research and serves as a backdrop for why this research is significant. Next, a literature on teacher expectations will be reviewed, followed by an examination of research on the perceptions of teacher expectations. A review of literature on the related research themes, ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience follows. Lastly, literature on Critical Race Theory, the theoretical framework this research employs, is reviewed, inclusive of its application to education research studies that pose relevant and similar queries.

The literature review presented establishes this research as an extension of existing work in the field of cultural foundations, shows how this study fits into the existing body of knowledge surrounding the specific topic of perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families, and illustrates the way in which this research is a justifiable pursuit.
Achievement Disparity

To give context to this research, a literature review on the underachievement of African-American students is necessary, as this is the overarching reason why further research about African-American students and their families is relevant to the world of education today. Because the depth and breadth of the achievement gap literature is enormous, a limited evaluation of research on the achievement gap is presented, and only the most relevant topics will be included in this review. As the section progresses through various causes that are theorized to affect student achievement, the connection and need for this research will be delineated. To be straightforward, there are some scholars (Jensen, 1969; Hernstein & Murray, 1994) who argued that the African-American community lags in academic achievement because of intellectual deficiencies. These theories have been sufficiently disproven (Ogbu, 1987) and will not be addressed in this research as a credible cause of the achievement gap. There are, however, several other valid factors that may contribute to the achievement gap between African-American students and White students.

Quite a bit of educational research centers on societal structure as one of the main causes of the underachievement of African-American students. Many scholars put forth the perspective that the sheer separation and isolation of African-American students into urban areas as one of the main causes of academic underachievement in the African-American community. Although public schools have been integrated for over 50 years, Gary Orfield (2001), of The Civil Rights Project of Harvard University, found that schools are almost completely re-segregated. Indeed, many urban schools consist of an
almost 100% African-American student body population and many suburban schools consist of an almost 100% White student body population, making the current state of segregation in American schools no better than when the public school system began the integration process. Ultimately, a school system is reflective, no more or less, than the community it is situated in, showcasing its values, struggles, hierarchies and beliefs, both positive and negative.

Arguably, the correlation between race and economics supported the scholarship that puts society at the heart of accountability concerning the achievement gap. Kozol (1992, 2006b) illustrated this when he shows a clear connection and positive relationship between the cost of housing and the educational quality of the public schools in that neighborhood. Spring (2003) supported this link of finances and the quality of education when he discusses how urban schools that typically boast large enrollments of African-American students are, on average, less funded, and schools in low-income areas are more likely to go without high-quality teachers, challenging curriculum, and modern amenities in comparison to middle and upper class areas. The knowledge of and the ability to obtain residential access to the neighborhoods with quality education facilities is out of the financial reach of many persons of color in America (Johnson, 2006). Too often a clear link exists between a person’s background, including economic status, family history, and race, and their level of academic opportunity and achievement (Anyon, 1997; Bickel & Chang, 1985; Feagin & Feagin, 2003; Shapiro, 2004). In short, the achievement gap in America reflects the social dissonance in American society on
various measures and the experiential quality of the educational journey of citizens of color is tied to their experience in the public sphere.

While many scholars placed emphasis on society as the cause of the achievement gap, other research centers on the role of the academic institution and its role in African-American student achievement. Upwards of 40% of students currently enrolled in American public schools are students of color, with the percentage increasing each year while, conversely, White teachers constitute 90% of the American teaching workforce (Howard, 2006). Despite these statistics, higher education institutions often do little in their teacher education programs to prepare educators for a racially diverse student body (Gorski, 2009; Morrow, 2008; Reiter & Davis, 2011), creating a teaching climate that is ill-prepared to deal with students of color (Lewis, James, and Hancock, 2008). The lack of preparation to deal with a diverse student body at the post-secondary level meant that new teachers were not prepared to work with students in the American public school system that serves pre-school through high school. Delpit (1995), along with Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2010), spoke to this in their scholarship that discussed how the lack of preparation of teachers lends itself to moments of cultural dissonance between White teachers and students of color. Howard (2006) furthered this supposition through his research that discussed how many educators are ill-equipped to teach in multiracial schools and how most White teachers have a limited self-awareness or are even in denial about how culture affects their daily interaction with students of color. The lack of cultural preparation on the part of the educator not only immediately cheated the educator
of personal growth and professional development (McIntosh, 1988), but is theorized to have a direct negative effect on students and their families (Lake, 1990; Kunjufu, 2002).

Additionally, the curriculum in educational institutions is also a foci in achievement gap literature. Banks (1996, 2006) and Banks and Banks (2009) advocated to include multicultural perspectives in everyday educational programming, citing the fact that the exclusion of varied cultural viewpoints can be detrimental to all students, especially those of color. Nieto (2007) supported this notion in her research which discusses the devastating effects of how excluding and not acknowledging a student’s culture can create adverse reactions and resistance from students of color. Many other scholars’ research (Bennett, 2003; Gay, 1994; Grant & Sleeter, 2007; Lowen, 1995) showed that the curriculum programs of Americans schools contribute to the racial achievement gap by not only limiting the inclusion of different cultures, but by also including information that is slanted or distorted to promote a euro-dimensional perspective.

Many scholars proposed that the achievement gap is perpetuated by cultural differences between mainstream America and the African-American community. It is theorized that cultural differences, no matter how big or small they are perceived, can create barriers between races when more than one culture interacts, inclusive of school settings (Au, 1980; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994; Ogbu, 1987). Part of the cultural difference is attributed to a lack of “cultural capital” in the African-American community, summarily the “body of knowledge” that is gained by exposure to different mainstream cultural experiences (Bourdieu, 1973; Dumais, 2002; Kalmijn &
Kraaykamp, 1996; Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990). While aspects of cultural capital, such as traveling, museums, and live theater may be commonplace for mainstream students, African-American students may not be exposed as regularly to these cultural events. When schools incorporate pieces of cultural capital as assumed foreknowledge, it may give an undue disadvantage to African-American students who have not had the privilege to partake of these activities.

There is other research that solely examines the African-American home life and particular characteristics typically unique to the African-American population. Phillips, Brook-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, and Crane (1998) discussed how statistical data, such as household income and parents’ educational level, and parental attitudes, such as feelings about public institutions and education, correlate with students’ academic achievement. The literature also documented that the lower class community and the African-American community also approach parental school involvement differently than middle and upper class White families (Heath, 1983; Lareau, 1989; Murray, 2009; Ogbu, 2003), which results in African-American students not consistently having a personal advocate at the institution of learning. Tough (2009) incorporated other nuances, such as how academic preparation traditionally begins later in the African-American community, placing many African-American students behind their White counterparts on the first day of school. Ferguson (2002a) supported the argument of weaker school preparedness of African-American students by showing that the volume of readable material in African-American homes are, on average, significantly less than in White homes of similar social class status. The literature indicated that this lag continues because of particular habits and
behaviors common to African-American families, such as extended time in front of television or video games (Ogbu, 2003) and lack of dedicated space for studies and academics in a home environment (Teachman, 1987), all of which contribute to the argument that cultural differences play a role in the existence of the achievement gap in schools.

Still another part of scholarly research focused on the unique psychological processes members of the African-American community experience as the cause of achievement gap. Ogbu (1991) theorized that the historical context of slavery, segregation, and other collective hardship experiences cultivate a level of resistance to the mainstream culture and the institutions of the mainstream culture in the African-American community. This argument is taken a step further in the scholarship of Cook and Ludwig (1998), Fordham and Ogbu (1986), and Neal-Barnett (2001) where they discussed the phenomenon of “acting White,” when students of color consciously position themselves to fail academically so they are not accused of being a part of the mainstream culture and to retain status within their racial-ethnic group.

Steele and Aronson (1998) discussed the influence of psychological intimidation and its contribution in affecting the achievement in their study. They argue that uniquely, African-American students can be mentally intimidated, experiencing psychological stress, when it is felt that their cognitive abilities are being measured. This occurs because African-American students may fear that they may not perform well and perhaps live up to the adverse stereotype that they are mentally inferior. This threat, imagined or
real, is another way that psychological factors may contribute to the academic underachievement.

Regardless of the emphasis placed, albeit societal, institutional, cultural differences, or psychological influences, each approach provided its own reasoning for why the achievement gap exists and why there is an ongoing cycle of its existence. However, while a portion of the body of literature that examined the underachievement of African-Americans, namely societal causes, is a perfect backdrop of the holistic environment that the struggle of academic achievement is situated in for African-American students, it failed to address the specifics of the personal experience of the African-American community. While other scholarship addressed the achievement gap focuses on the role of the educational institution, it does not speak to the perceptions that African-Americans hold about the institution and how this may influence the way in which African-Americans approach and prepare for schooling. Likewise, cultural differences may explain a portion of why there is a dissonance between the African-American community and mainstream public schooling, but it does not delve deeply into the topic from the perspective of African-American families and how they feel they are perceived by the agents of the school. Lastly, while research on the achievement gap explored psychological influences unique to African-Americans and gave insight into why African-American students underachieve, it does not speak to the experiences of African-Americans who do academically achieve and the processes this portion of the African-American community uniquely experience.
While a variety of achievement gap scholars have arrived at the conclusion that there is more than one factor that causes the achievement gap and that a collective interrelated web exists that allows for the achievement gap to continue (Lewis, James, & Hancock, 2008), there is little research that links the factors together in the same manner that this research proposes, specifically examining the relationship between the African-American community and educational institutions, from the perspective of the African-American students and their families and by exploring the African-American experience within the schools. Even more specific to this research, academically successful African-American students and their families are often overlooked in the literature addressing the achievement gap, which is addressed in the following section.

**Overcoming the Achievement Gap**

Whereas, there is a great deal of research regarding the achievement gap, the academic underachievement of African-Americans and its theorized causes, there is a limited amount of scholarly work that focuses on academically successful African-American students. Just as there is no magical formula for what causes the Black-White achievement gap in American schools, there is no magical formula to overcome the negative statistics experienced by a number of African-American students. There are, however, specific strategies and characteristics that have been documented through observation and research that can create learning environments that either reduce or eradicate the existence of the achievement gap. This section of the literature review is relevant to the topic of this dissertation because the participants of the study are categorized as academically successful African-American students and relevant research
on this topic will be evaluated to situate the research questions of the study and to give context to the participants that are a part of this project.

Ladson-Billings (2009) and Perry (2011) both argued that quality teachers who have a true commitment to students, have a love for the profession of teaching, view teaching as an extension of furthering social justice causes, and incorporate culturally relevant topics are central to ensuring African-American student success. Au (1980) also documented in her work that minority students who were taught in cultural styles that were similar to their home environment showed a higher participation rate. Gay (2010) built upon these concepts when, through her research on cultural responsive teaching, she added the element of caring into the equation, illustrating the need for teachers to not only “care about” their students and have a personal and emotional connection to their student and their culture, but also “care for” their academic success, realizing and ensuring that a true commitment to their academic well-being is of the utmost priority. Ferguson (2002b) also spoke to the importance of caring, citing that African-American students placed high value on knowing that their teacher truly is concerned for them and that belief and connection, which, unlike White students, actually motivated African-American students academically.

Also, researchers have found that academic success for African-Americans often starts in the home environment. Tough (2009) honed in on early intervention of promoting parenting styles that are akin to White middle-class child rearing practices to help ensure success when African-American students enter the world of public schooling. Christenson, Rounds, and Gorney (1992) found that African-American home
environments that set a general tone of academic achievement by focusing on reading, verbal communication, scholastic importance, and, conversely, limiting “screen time,” such as television viewing and computer time, are more likely to result in students who achieve academically. Parenting styles that had clear standards and expectations, but also allowed children to be involved in decision-making processes had a positive effect on student achievement (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Clark, 1983). Laureau (1989) documented that teachers thought parents who were visible at school cared more about their child’s education, thus giving an advantage to children whose parents were involved. Indeed, in a comprehensive literature review that focused on parent involvement, there was overwhelmingly conclusive evidence that parents who were involved in the academic decision making process for their child, attend school functions, volunteer at their child’s school, and monitor the progress of their child’s education, had a positive effect on their child’s school achievement (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Yan, 1999).

Yan (1999) explored how social capital, the ability of parents to build networks with other families and expose their children to greater social interaction, could positively affect student achievement. These connections often result in educational benefits in an indirect, but powerful and essential, way according to Carbonaro (1998) and Kahne and Bailey (1999), and are indicated by scholastic success, such as higher grades and lower dropout rates. Parents who created social networks for their children also promote a wide variety of educational opportunities, and increase the chances of their children performing well academically. Research has shown that students who are involved in
after school sports and other clubs have higher high school completion rates and female students who are involved in after school activities are less likely to become pregnant (Price, 2002).

The scholarship of Hemmings (1996) found that African-American students who achieve academically somehow construct identities that envelope both the notion of being African-American and being academically successful, resulting in “resolved conflicts between being black and being a model student” (p. 22). She also discovered in her work on academically successful African-Americans, being part of the peer group meant putting as much emphasis on academic achievement as being African-American, and academic success had become a norm and vital part of identification for belonging. This same scenario of peer group support as an important drive of academic success is represented in the research of Datnow and Cooper (1996), where African-American students who were academically successful in a predominately White school environment viewed their academic success as part of the main identification markers for belonging to the peer group.

Students who had an emotional connection to school and possess measurable behaviors that they are involved in school, such as alertness, teacher-student interaction, and school participation, performed better academically (Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Voelkl, 1997). Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2005) found that engagement in schools not only bolstered academic success but also linked to a positive outlook on future schooling experiences among African-American students. There is also research that showed external forces of motivation are at work for most African-American students who
achieve academically (Ferguson, 2002). Griffin (2006), after qualitatively researching successful African-American students and their motivational attributions, found that African-American learners vary in what motivates them to achieve academically, and the factors are both internal and external. Ranging from self-determination theory to the influence of their families, Griffin (2006) put forth that there is a wide array of factors that drive African-American students to achieve academically. Interestingly enough, no one in her study placed emphasis on a “love for learning” as their motivation, supporting Ferguson’s (2002b) theory that African-American learners are driven by external motivators, such as the relationship with teachers or peer networks.

While the research on successful academic African-American addressed several factors that are important to the field of education, in the literature there is not a great deal of information that spoke to the interaction between the African-American community and the institution of schooling, but rather the research focused on either one viewpoint or the other. The research topic of perceptions of teacher expectations among successful African-American students and their families will bridge the two stakeholders in African-American student achievement. This is needed to not only create habits and strategies to aid in African-American academic success, but also to better understand the way African-Americans relate to the schools they attend and how that may influence academic achievement. Next, the directly related themes that are relevant to the research questions posed by this dissertation regarding teacher expectations will be explored, followed by the sub-topics of racial identity, cultural mistrust, racial socialization, and resilience.
Teacher Expectations

Before the literature review can begin regarding perceptions of teacher expectations, the role of teacher expectations in academic achievement must be reviewed to establish the importance of why perceptions of teacher expectations is impactful to student achievement and worthy of further study. The seminal work of Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) began the discussion of the role that teacher expectations play in student academic achievement. In their research, they concluded that teachers interact differently with students based upon whether the students are categorized as either high-achieving or low-achieving. Not only are the interactions distinguishable, but the interplay with high achieving students was more favorable and was generally more positive than the interactions with low achieving students. Shortly after, the seminal work of Rist (1970, 1973) confirmed that educators not only treated students differently, but that treatment was based on the social class of the students. Consequently, the teacher expectations established during a student’s early education years remained constant in their subsequent years in the school system.

The topic of teacher expectations continues to be of interest to scholars in the field of education. The subject explores the relationship between teacher and student and how the attitude, actions, beliefs, and demands of the teacher, both overt and covert, affect the academic performance of the student. Practically speaking, much of the school day, and, thus, academic life, revolves around interaction between the teacher and the student. This interaction provides the backdrop for how a child perceives education, how they think educational institutions perceive them as students, and gives an impressionistic
framework to how education fits into their future (Ferguson, 1998). Moreover, there is a consensus among scholars that the effects of teacher expectations not only have direct influence on academic achievement, but also indirect consequences on the behaviors of students, such as student engagement, peer relationships, habits, behavior and the overall self-identification of the student (Weinstein, 2002; Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2000; Rubie-Davies, 2010; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Jussim, 1989; Jussim & Eccles, 1992).

Good (1981) outlined a process model regarding teacher expectations that identifies the role that the teacher plays, the role that the student plays, and the interplay that occurs between the two parties. First, teachers expect particular behavior from specific students. Secondly, the teacher’s actions with certain students are identifiably different than their actions with other students. Thirdly, the actions are interpreted and internalized by the students and, fourthly, these actions thusly affect the students’ achievement, motivation, and how they feel about themselves. Lastly, if the same action continues, the students’ behavior will conform to the expectations placed on them, either positively or negatively, and student achievement will be shaped by the teacher’s expectations. Good’s (1981) step-by-step progression model outlined the hypothesized significance of teacher expectations in the classroom and how this concept can influence student academic success.

Good’s (1981; 1987) review of several different early research projects (Brophy & Good, 1974; Cooper, 1979; Braun, 1976; McDonald & Elias, 1976) focused on teacher expectations supports the findings that this process model is reliable and that teachers typically treat students differently, based upon the expectations the teacher has for the
student. Several observable indicators within these studies support teacher behavior variability towards high-achieving and low-achieving students, such as placement in the classroom, chances to be called upon, personal time given, and critical thinking opportunities, to name a few. Ultimately, the unified conclusion was that teacher expectations played a significant role in student achievement and this stance continues to be supported in research that further investigates this topic (Khalifa, 2011; Ream, 2003; Rubie-Davies, 2010; Rubie-Davies, 2007).

Teacher expectations have been a particular area of interest for scholars who are interested in closing the racial achievement gap. This is because previous research found that race plays a factor in the level of expectations teachers have for their students (Lightfoot, 1978; Grant, 1985; Ferguson, 1998; Dusek & Joseph, 1983). Indeed, the average perception of African-Americans in American society is often negative and these perceptions follow the African-American student into the classroom (Strayhorn, 2008).

Lightfoot (1978) stated that a student’s race, class, and/or gender factors into how a teacher perceives a student. Grant (1985), through observations and analysis of teachers’ perceptions of students, concluded that teachers have lower expectations for African-American male students in a mixed-raced school setting. Ferguson’s (1998) research reviewed several studies and concluded that race did indeed play a role in the expectations teachers have for their students and teachers have more favorable expectations towards White students than African-American students (Baron, Tom, & Cooper, 1985; DeMeis & Turner, 1978). Dusek and Joseph (1983) also concluded that the factors of race and class influence teacher expectations in their meta-analysis research.
project that examined the origins of teacher expectancy. These studies have effectively shown that teacher expectations fluctuate from student to student and the influence of race is one of the criteria that factors into this variability.

**Perceptions of Teacher Expectations**

The concept of perceptions of teacher expectations addresses the student’s question of “Does my teacher think I can achieve academically?” This question is particularly relevant to the African-American community because research documents students of color valued teacher expectations more than mainstream American students (Ferguson, 1998; Paul, 2005; Silver, Smith, & Nelson, 1995). This question is directly related to the research questions of this study and this section of the literature review analyzes research that supports the need for this research.

While there is not a plethora of research regarding perceptions of teacher expectations, there are studies that explored the topic. The research of Woolley, Strutchens, Gilbert, and Martin (2010) concluded that there is a positive correlation between teacher expectations and student motivation among African-American middle school students. This research placed the perception of teacher expectations at a level equal to or of greater importance than the actual teacher expectations. The perceptions of teacher expectations is the interpretation of what the student believes the teacher feels about their academic achievement and plays a major role in how a student of color, pursues, achieves, and believes in their ability to have academic success.

Babad, Bernieri, and Rosenthal (1989, 1991) concluded in their research that elementary students were able to successfully distinguish whether a teacher had high or
low expectations for a student just by viewing a video clip of the teacher and her body language with an off-camera student. As further validity to the original studies, Babad and Taylor (1992) had the same findings that show the perception of teachers’ expectations were universally and consistently interpreted as distinctly high or low based on no other information other than non-verbal cues.

In several different studies (Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2000; Weinstein, Marshall, Brattesani, & Middlestadt, 1982; Weinstein, Marshall, Sharp, & Botkin, 1987; Weinstein & Middlestaft, 1979) the Teacher Treatment Inventory was used and it found that elementary students hold definitive beliefs of whether a teacher has high expectations or low expectations for a student or class. Additionally, these students were able to identify specific incidents that support their perceptions of whether a teacher had high expectations or low expectations for a student. These studies showed that, not only are teacher actions and interactions interpreted and distinguishable by the youngest of students, but specific actions were associated with a teacher’s level of expectations for a student.

Bae, Holloway, Li, and Bempechat (2008) researched perceptions of teacher expectations when they interview Mexican-American high school students from two different high schools. One group of students was high-achieving and one group of students was low-achieving in their study, based upon grade point averages. The two different groups defined what it meant to be a good student very differently. However, all students, regardless of academic achievement level, held the same perceptions of what teachers expected from students of the high-achieving group and the low-achieving
group. Apparala (2003) also researched students of Hispanic descent when exploring the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations. Her most significant findings were that Hispanic students viewed their ethnicity as an important part of their identity, the level of importance of ethnic identity increased as Hispanic students progressed through school, and that there was a correlation between a Hispanic student’s perception of teacher expectations and how that student felt about school in general.

Strayhorn (2008) conducted a study that found African-American male high school students were more than five times as likely to feel they were put down by their teachers in the classroom than their White student counterparts. Additionally, African-American male students were more than three times as likely to feel that teachers were preparing them for work instead of college, when compared to their White student counterparts. During follow-up interviews, it was discovered that African-American students were able to describe specific incidents that included feeling negatively differentiated from other students in the classroom, and publicly embarrassed, humiliated, or disrespected by their teachers, all of which supported their perception of lower teacher expectations for students of color.

The research on perceptions of teacher expectations is rich with information, but I was unable to find any research that addressed the exact research question or involved the exact demographic of this dissertation. While some research examined how students perceive teacher expectations, the participants of those studies were not necessarily high-achieving (Babad, Bernieri, & Rosenthal, 1989; 1991; Babad & Taylor, 1992; Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2000; Weinstein, Marshall, Brattesani, & Middlestadt, 1982; Weinstein,
Marshall, Sharp, & Botkin, 1987; Weinstein & Middlestaft, 1979). Other studies, were similar, but were focused on other ethnic groups that were not African-American (Apparala, 2003; Bae, Holloway, Li, and Bempechat; 2008). The studies that existed regarding African-American perceptions of teacher expectations did not include the perspective of the entire African-American family, nor did the research detail the experiences that shaped the perception from multiple familial perspectives (Strayhorn, 2008; Woolley, Strutchens, Gilbert, and Martin, 2010). This dissertation is filling a gap in the literature by bringing together unique factors that have not been explored before. Next, the emergent themes are explored that are relevant to the discussion of perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families.

**Ethnic Identity**

The literature on ethnic and racial identity, both its formation and its saliency, is relevant because this research is concerned with an African-American population in a culturally subordinate position in a school system molded by mainstream culture. While the formation of ethnic identity is an extremely broad psychological topic, this literature review focused on the process of ethnic identification as it applies to the African-American population and the unique way ethnic identity is formed in the context of mainstream America.

When African-Americans attend institutions that are historically designed for White Americans, an acculturation process takes place. *Acculturation* is the process where more than one culture comes into contact with another culture and changes inevitably take place within one or all of the cultures involved (Redfield, Linton &
Herskovits, 1936). When a culture comes in contact with another culture, the response can be *reactive*, which is when one culture is resistant to change or does not take on any attributes of the other culture(s). Another response is *creative*, which is a creation of an entirely new culture through the combination of the cultures that have come into contact. Lastly a response can be *delayed*, which is where there is no actual sign of change until years after the initial interaction of the cultures (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

In pluralistic societies, environments where more than one culture coexists, individual cultures strategize on how to acculturate, a burden that falls upon the non-dominant culture, particularly. Berry (1997) stated there are four different responses that a non-dominant culture can have to a dominant culture. The first is that of *assimilation*, defined as where a culture group does not maintain its own cultural identity, but rather melds into that of the mainstream culture. The second is that of *separation*, where a culture desires to keep intact all of its attributes of its original culture, oft times to the point of actively avoiding daily interaction with other cultures. In some ways, separation is the exact opposite of assimilation. The third strategy is *integration*. This is where there is an interest in maintaining some aspects of one’s culture, but simultaneously participating in the larger culture as well. This strategy can also be described as biculturalism that is partial to the dominant culture. Finally, the fourth option is that of *marginalization*, which is where a culture does not maintain its connection with its original culture and does not form a substantial relationship with the dominant culture either. In the framework of Critical Race Theory, the acculturative outcome for African-
Americans, in varying degrees, is that of marginalization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2005).

While the integration in the public school systems was the goal for America and many African-Americans in particular, Berry (1997) stated that there are pre-conditions that must be met for society to support this choice of acculturation. The society must: (1) value cultural diversity, (2) have low levels of racial issues, (3) have mutual respect between different cultures, and (4) all cultures must feel like they belong to the larger society (Kalin & Berry, 1996). At the time of initial integration of the school systems of the United States of America, these pre-conditions were not met. In addition, it is arguable that these conditions are not fully met today. It is no wonder, then, that acculturative stress, the social-psychological difficulty of adjustment amongst a culture that is adjusting to a new culture, is commonplace for many African-Americans (Anderson, 1991; Berry, 1980, 2003; Born, 1970).

Phinney’s (2003) research highlighted the relationship between acculturation and ethnic identity and how the acculturative process begins first by a person recognizing that they belong to a cultural group. A person’s self-identification with a group, or ethnic identity, is examined closely in the field of education, particularly social psychology. While all individuals go through an identification process, an African-Americans person’s identity process is unique because it is often tied closely to a relationship to their ethnicity (Tatum, 1997). Erickson (1968), considered the father of identity formation, acknowledged that the communal culture contributes to the formation of an individual.
By looking closely at the process of ethnic identity in the African-American community, educational implications of an integrated educational system are better understood.

Cross’s (1991) research was specific to African-American identity and how development occurs across a lifespan in a person of African-American descent. His theory is referred to as the psychology of becoming African-American, or the psychology of nigrescence. There are five stages to his theory, and while these stages can occur sequentially, stages can also happen out of order, stages can be skipped, and stages can be revisited during a person’s lifetime, all dependent on individual, varying life experiences. Furthermore, he indicated that there are variances in his developmental model, for some individuals’ identity is centralized around their ethnicity, referred to as high salience, and other individuals’ identity is not, referred to as low salience (Cross & Strauss, 1999). Regardless of idiosyncrasies, Cross’s (1991) basic model is helpful in understanding how ethnic identity develops in individuals that are from the African-American community and how the process of ethnic identity affects the acculturation process.

The first stage of Cross’s (1991) ethnic identity development is pre-encounter. This is when a person’s ethnic identity is not consciously relevant to a person’s life. However, during this time period children can absorb different racial environmental messages that influence the way they make sense of their world. The second stage of is the encounter stage, where an individual first makes a discovery that race has some sort of value, reference point, and/or influence on who they are and how they relate to their environment. While Cross (1991) suggested that the second stage begins in late adolescent or early adulthood, Tatum (1997) and Phinney and Tarver (1988) found in
their research that African-American children as early as junior high school are conscious of and reactive to how race affects their lives and others found the early childhood years as the period where there are indications of ethnic development and awareness (Grishhaber & Cannella, 2001; Katz, 1982; Phinney & Rotheram, 1987; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). The discovery of the relevance of race to a person can be a positive encounter or a negative encounter, often dependent upon the experience and situation in which the encounter occurred.

The third stage of development in Cross’s model is immersion/emersion. This is when individuals, sometimes in response to a negative reaction in the second stage of encounter, saturate themselves in the culture they were born into. In this stage, the person embraces behaviors and features unique to his or her culture. The fourth stage of internalization is when an individual begins to experience other cultures again, appreciates particular attributes of other cultures, and may even choose to take on selective values of other cultures. Finally, the fifth stage is that of internalization-commitment and it is when a balance is reached between one’s own culture and other cultures, appreciating and having a comfort level in both. Although this is the last stage of development, the process of racial identity can be cyclical and an individual can revisit one or more of the stages based upon life occurrences, realizations, and new information.

While Cross’s model sought to explain a lifetime of ethnic identity development, the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity sought to understand an individual’s ethnic identity at a particular point in time (Sellers, Morgan & Brown, 2001). Rather than developmental, the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity is static in nature.
The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity outlines four dimensions of African-American identity and focuses on the self-perception of racial identity and an individualistic interpretation of what it means to be African-American (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). The multidimensional model of racial identity makes no value judgment on what is a healthy ethnic identity development, but rather, seeks to describe the ingredients that constitute ethnic identity in a person of color.

The first dimension of ethnic identity in the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity is salience. The definition is similar to Cross and Strauss (1999), as it measures how relevant race is to people’s lives and how important it is to the core of self-identifying (describing) themselves in a particular situation. It is the only dimension that is dynamic in nature, for it is mostly determined and defined by situations (Sellers, Morgan, & Brown, 2001). Salience is the identifying marker that changes because of different scenarios and settings. The second dimension is that of centrality, described as a measure of an individual’s self-concept. Centrality is essentially how much a person’s race is central to how they define themselves. Centrality is related closely to salience because it deals with how a person identifies who they are, however it is not situational, but rather constant and normative.

The third dimension of racial identity, according to the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity, is that of ideology. Ideology is the way in which an individual thinks his cultural group should think, act, and feel about life. There are four ideologies proposed: nationalist (which emphasizes being from African descent), minority (which emphasizes the similarities between people of African descent with other oppressed
groups), assimilation (which emphasizes similarities between African-Americans and the rest of American society), and humanist (which emphasizes the commonalties among all humans). The fourth dimension of racial identity is that of regard, defined as how African-Americans regard their race. Collective self-esteem (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) is the basis of the regard dimension and, like the scholarship in the area of collective-self-esteem, is divided into two segments, a public component and a private component. The private component is an individual’s opinion of the culture he or she belongs to. The public component is how an individual thinks other cultures view his or her home culture. The private and public opinion constitute a person’s regard for his or her racial identity.

Other research that addresses the unique formation of ethnic identity in the African-American community is that of involuntary minorities. Ogbu (1991) pointed to the unique positioning of the African-American community in his work that differentiates categories of minorities in America and placed emphasis on the historical influences of ethnic identity. The first category is that of autonomous minority, where a segment of society is minority due to their low percentage of population and longstanding cultural (religious) core values, such as Amish, Jewish, and Mormon populations. The second category is that of voluntary minorities, or immigrants, populations that come to the United States in search of a better life for themselves and their families, which in inclusive of Asians or Eastern Europeans. The third category is that of involuntary minorities, where a segment of society is incorporated in the United States for subservient purposes by force. This category includes the African-American community, as well as
the Native American and Hispanic communities. Ogbu (1991) theorized that resistance to the mainstream culture is heightened in involuntary minorities and this opposition is a contributor to the formation of the ethnic identity of African-Americans.

Cross’s (1991) identity model is one of the first that sought to explain how African-American identity develops and is widely used to explain the uniqueness of the development of African-American identity. The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity is distinctive in that it combines several different characteristics in contrast to previous racial identity work that had made one factor (or a combination of a few factors) tantamount to the definition of ethnic identity (Baldwin & Bell, 1985; Crocker & Luthanen, 1990; Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984; Phinney, 1992). Ogbu (1991) brought in an added dimension that speaks to the magnitude and impact collective history has upon the shaping of ethnic identity. Every model sought to explain how ethnic identities form and how the formation affects everyday life, in one way or another. Regardless of the model used, it is safe to say that ethnic identity development is a complex process and the African-American population, and each ethnic minority population, has a unique journey of self-identification.

In addition, the history of ethnic identification and its effects on education was detailed in the work of Carter and Goodwin (1994). Their work analyzed the different ways race has been viewed throughout the years in school by educators, from biological and genetic inferiority models to cultural deprivation models, and is an overview of how opinions of ethnic identity has influenced American institutions. There is also much scholarship on how African-Americans have come to terms with their own ethnic identity
within the school system. While some work concentrated on young children (Grishhaber & Cannella, 2001; Katz, 1982; Phinney & Rotheram, 1987; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990), others concentrated on racial identity development during the adolescent years (Aires & Moorehead, 1989; Cokely, 2001; Phinney, 1988; Phinney & Tarver, 1988; Yancey, Aneshensel & Driscoll, 2001). It is clear through this scholarship that ethnic identity, either how it is perceived by the institution or lived first-hand by African-Americans, influences how African-American students experience school.

An additional aspect of ethnic identity is the strong need for belonging. This is often intertwined with the formation of ethnic identity, especially within school settings (Whitehead, Ainsworth, Wittig, & Gadino, 2009). Research found that strong identification with one’s ethnic identity group had a positive effect on an individual’s views of his or her culture (Mason & Verkuyten, 1993; Phinney, Ferguson, & Tate, 1997). Strong identification with one’s cultural group may have positive or negative effects on an individual’s relationship with other cultural groups, dependent upon circumstances and events (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). Identifying with your own culture sometimes requires the un-identifying with other cultures, as illustrated in the phenomena of “acting White”. Research on the topic of “acting White” has conclusions ranging from it being “a major reason” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) of academic failure to it “being existent, but not a major issue” (Bergin & Cooks, 2002). Many additional researchers acknowledged that the phenomenon has, in some way, influenced the ethnic identity of African-Americans and affected their peer relationship within the walls of the school.

Ethnic identity is a complex and unique matter in the African-American community and for the African-American student. The research explored various aspects of ethnic identity, from how African-Americans define themselves to how African-Americans relate to others. While there is was variance in the scholarly exploration of ethnic identity, from developmental perspectives to static indicators, there was a commonality in the explored research that ethnic identity heavily influences how African-Americans experience America and the institutions of America. In turn, individual self-identification influences how African-Americans socialize in school, both with their peers and the institution of schooling as a whole. In respect to education, the process of schooling is better defined, but also further complicated by the concept of African-American ethnic identity.

**Racial Socialization**

After reviewing the literature on ethnic identity, the importance it has in the development of African-American students, and how it affects how African-Americans experience life, the next level of refinement is to filter how the African-American family may uniquely influence the perceptions of teacher expectations in their children. The research questions of this dissertation centers on the perceptions of teacher expectations among successful African-American students and their families. Because families are a factor in this research, a sub-inquiry into the ways these perceptions inform how African-American parents prepare and advise their student for school is necessary. Racial
socialization within the family is an influential force in an African-American student’s development and continues to be a major influence even when a child begins to attend school.

Racial socialization is the process in which African-American parents communicate to their children and prepare them for a racially stratified society (Stevenson, 1994; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). This process goes beyond the general process of cultural transmission, which is when a culture passes down unique cultural characteristics from generation to generation (Berry, 1992). Rather, racial socialization is specifically the passing down of a torch regarding the function of race in society. This is often inclusive of all the baggage that comes with race in America (Ogbu, 2003), meaning racial socialization is often interpretive and contingent upon a particular person’s parents’ own experiences with race, thus becoming an issue of perception and how one views the world.

Racial socialization, be it formal or informal, or through specific messages or inadvertent practices, is communicated from African-American parents to African-American children about matters of race. Racial socialization can be about: 1) the entire group identity, 2) how the group relates to others outside the group, 3) how the entire group relates to each other, 4) how the group is positioned in regards to other groups and in the general social hierarchy, and finally 5) how a person is defined by the group identity (Hughes & Chen, 1999). While children can be thought of as the passive receivers of information in this process, they are actually actively constructing the view of race, community, and life throughout their development. Racial socialization plays a
major role in how African-American children identify themselves, their cultural group, and shapes how their cultural group fits into society (Demo & Hughes, 1990).

In the racial socialization scholarship of Rodriguez, Umana-Taylor, Smith, and Johnson (2009), the two messages that had elevated importance in the African-American community are that of cultural pride and exposure to discrimination. Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, and West-Bey (2009), noted that higher levels of cultural pride messages had a positive effect on high self-identification and performance and school, while higher levels of preparation for bias had a negative effect on academic outcomes and ethnic affirmation. However, this is in contrast to Hughes and Chen (1999), whose theoretical assumptions put forth preparation for bias can be a protection mechanism, an effective way to prepare African-American children for racism and the preparation could potentially serve as a buffer for the effects of perceived racial actions of discrimination.

There are a number of ideas that can be passed down from generation to generation when concerning racial socialization. Often the messages that are passed down are dependent upon a parent’s experiences and even the era a parent grew up in. While there is a variability of what messages are most emphasized, there are common themes that are consistently handed down and there is a strong correlation between how a child is racially socialized and what they believe about race as an adult (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006), showing that racial socialization has a strong effect on an individual’s feelings about race and ethnicity, ultimately influencing the perceptions of
teacher expectations among African-American students and their families in their dealings in the school systems of America.

**Cultural Mistrust**

A message that is often passed from generation to generation in the African-American community is that of cultural mistrust. Because many African-Americans perceive racial discrimination in their daily lives (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Seaton, 2009), there is an expectancy for racism to continue. *Cultural mistrust* is defined as one culture distrusting another culture, both personally and in the larger social context (Irving & Hudley, 2005). It is a concept that is based upon the work of Terrell and Terrell (1981), where they discussed African-Americans’ lack of confidence that White Americans will treat anyone from their race fairly and equitably.

A schema that has roots based upon the historical treatment of African-Americans in America, the construct of cultural mistrust continues through the racial integration process because of perceived continual inequality and unfair treatment (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001). African-Americans culturally mistrust White Americans and this leads to mistrust of White-controlled institutions, with the educational system being no exception. Indeed, many African-Americans do not trust that the school systems have their children’s best interest at heart (Gadsden, Smith, & Jordan, 1996; Ogbu, 1991).

Terrell and Terrell (1981) found an individual’s level of cultural mistrust can affect their expectation of academic value. This is reiterated in Erickson’s (1987) scholarship that stated there is a level of resistance from students when they perceive they receive negative treatment due to their ethnic identity. Irving and Hudley (2005) found
that a person’s level of cultural mistrust cannot only affect whether they found value in education, but also indicates whether they perform well academically. Steele and Aronson’s (1998) research revealed that the mere mention of race and knowing others may judge a person because of his or her race hinders African-American academic performance, even in the population of high performing African-American college students. In short, in the African-American community, many believe that, regardless of what they do or how they perform, the chances of their situation changing is slim, because of the racism found within the institutions of America.

While a moderate level of cultural mistrust can be considered a healthy psychological response that enables an individual to cope with the stresses of being African-American in a racially stratified society, it can prove to negatively affect the full adjustment of African-American children into the school systems of America (Bell & Tracey, 2006; White, 1980). Whether positive or negative, the influence of cultural mistrust highlights the complexity of African-American life in America and its institutions.

This study recognizes the influence cultural mistrust has on many experiences of African-American families, especially when interacting in mainstream institutions. Because this dissertation topic and research questions address the experiences and interpretations of teacher expectations among African-Americans, it was necessary to include a review of the topic of cultural mistrust because of the possible role it may play regarding perceptions.
Resilience

Despite the achievement gap, the unique role of ethnic identity for African-Americans and the possibility of the influence of racial socialization and cultural mistrust, African-American students are academically achieving. This literature review will now focus on the topic of resilience because of its influence and the role this concept may play in regarding the inquiries of this dissertation study. Broadly speaking, *resilience* is defined as the ability for an object to stay in its original state, despite disturbance. In the context of education, resilience investigates a student’s ability to achieve regardless of social, physical, or mental adversities that may arise in a student’s environment (Arrington & Wilson, 2000). Resilience is particularly relevant to African-American student achievement because research finds that belonging to a non-majority culture often increases the stress level of minority students, due to experiencing social inequities such as perceived racism and discrimination (Munsch & Wampler, 1993). Strayhorn (2008), in his study that tracked the success of over one hundred African-American male students at a public university, found the attribute of resilience, defined by him as “grit,” nearly as important to actual scores on academic aptitude tests.

Marsh, Chaney, and Jones (2012) investigated the role of resilience when interviewing sixteen African-American students and analyzing data from nearly one hundred African-American students who attend a highly selective, diverse, high school. They found that many African-American students begin their journey with negative feelings of intimidation and trepidation and a fear of de-identifying with the African-American culture because of academic success. Many students were able to work though
these feelings by connecting with other African-American students in social interactions in clubs within the school that focus on racial and ethnic affirmation, as well as clubs that reaffirm religious values. The participants in the study placed racial and ethnic identity as a high priority as part of their overall identity and the inclusion of social clubs in school seemed to fortify the ability to achieve academic success because it was not seen as a contradiction of the identity, but rather as complimentary.

Cunningham and Swanson (2010) found that African-American adolescent students who perceive that the school supports them, defined as how much they felt the school believed in their ability to achievement academically, have a high sense of educational resilience. Williams and Bryan (2013), when interviewing eight African-American youth who were academically successful, support the findings of Cunningham and Swanson (2010), when they found that a supportive academic peer culture and involvement in extracurricular activities, along with other school-related factors, contributed to resilience.

In his ethnography, Gayles (2005) focused on the role of resilience in three academically successful African-American male high school students in an urban setting. He concluded that the participants were able to achieve academic success because they placed a high value on the correlation between academic success and a positive future. The students in his study fundamentally believed that education was key to their success in life and often hoped the diminishment or elimination of adversity would come about by success in school. Gayles (2005) also found that the students identified their academic achievement as a part of who they are, but not the totality of who they are, sometimes
even creating a distance or downplaying their academic success. Gayle (2005) concluded, aligning himself with similar research (Fordham, 1996; Ogbu, 2003) that by bracketing their academic achievement as just a part of their overall success and not their total identity, allowed the students to keep their racial and ethnic identity intact with themselves and their African-American peers who might not be experiencing academic success.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory is the chosen theoretical and analytical framework for this study. It was chosen because of its ability to examine American institutions and their relationship to people of color and its facility to address race, power, and social structuring in schools (Bell 1980; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It was also chosen because it focuses on sharing the experiences of typically marginalized individuals through the practice of qualitative research (Parker, 1998). This section of the literature review first explicates the history and formation of Critical Race Theory. This is followed by a central examination of Critical Race Theory, its introduction, importance and evolution in the field of education. Next, the major tenets of Critical Race Theory are highlighted, interweaving relevant literature and studies that have utilized this framework in an effort to gain further understanding of how educational institutions marginalize people of color. This section will culminate with how Critical Race Theory will guide this exploration and how this framework is most fitting to this research.

Previous to Brown v. the Board of Education, the 1954 landmark legal case that integrated the schools of America, African-Americans and White Americans were
educated in separate schools, solely segregated on the attribute of race. African-American students attended facilities that were underfunded, undersupplied and overly crowded, when compared to their White student counterparts, thus creating an academic atmosphere that was grossly unequal. The legal decision of Brown v. the Board of Education was the hope for equity and excellence in education for all Americans. In particular, African-Americans saw the decision as the “great equalizer,” a significant way of leveling the playing field for their children. It was anticipated to be the gateway for a fair and equitable start in life for African-Americans (Anderson, 1992).

When the courts decided that the racial separation of educational facilities was “inherently unequal,” civil rights activists believed that the inclusion of African-American students in local schools would bring about a better chance for opportunity for African-American students nationally. The goal was not just for African-American children to attend school with White students. Rather, school integration was seen as a means for African-American children to receive an equal education, and to give African-Americans the opportunity to integrate into the main culture, with the hope that the benefit of access would penetrate other aspects of everyday life (Anderson, 1992; Kozol, 2005). With the education of all American children taking place at the same facility, it was believed that this legal mandate would create a level playing field for everyone and eventually lead to better race relations, improving the overall quality of life for future African-American generations.

Although there were high expectations in regards to Brown v. Education and its anticipated role in social justice in America, there were early indications of
disappointment when many American communities were strongly resistant to the idea of integrating schools. Clearly, all Americans were not mentally or socially prepared for African-Americans to attend mainstream schools. The resistance to desegregation on the national and local level prolonged the efforts of integration for over a decade (Bell, 2004a; Spring, 2003). Because of federal enforcement, the dream of school desegregation was partially realized, despite political and personal agendas that were apprehensive about racial integration in the public school systems of America.

A little over fifty years beyond Brown V. Board of Education, Orfield (2004) reports that the level of segregation in public schools is at the same level as in the aftermath of the landmark ruling. While, in part, resegregation occurred due to economic and geographic forces, such as the rise of suburban lifestyles, the decline of different industries and a shift of employment location (Kozol, 2006a), much of the resegregation process was intentional. Institutional practices such as “redlining,” and “blockbusting,” housing discrimination against African-Americans, and “White flight,” the intentional move of White families from neighborhoods that were racially integrated to all White neighborhoods, showcased the continued resistance of Americans to school integration. In many ways, resegregation was the result of the conscious decision on the part of individuals and institutions to separate mainstream neighborhoods and schools from African-American families and students (Armor, 1986; Ravitch, 1984; Thabit & Piven, 2005). Assuredly, the intention of Brown v. Board of Education has not been fully realized and segregation within the school system continues to plague American society.
The development of Critical Race Theory speaks to the underlying, ever present, issues of race in America and is a framework that seeks to lay out the causes of the incomplete fulfillment of the desegregation school movement, explaining the complex relationship between the African-American community and American institutions, including the role of race in every facet of American life. This theory, which has its roots in the legal realm, began with Derrick Bell, an attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who personally led the desegregation process for over three hundred schools during its period of enforcement after the legal proclamation of Brown v. Board of Education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). Through his firsthand experience of dismantling segregation in the American school system, he ultimately became disillusioned regarding the potential for racial equality in the United States. Out of this disillusionment, he began this scholarship that critiqued the structure of American society, its inevitable perpetuation of racism and inequality, and how African-Americans experience the institutions of America. This scholarship culminated in Critical Race Theory, an examination of the intersection of race, law and power and how this juncture critically affects culture and society and the individuals in the society (Bell, 1980, 2004a, 2004b; Delgado & Stefancic, 2005).

Although Bell’s argument began in the field of legal studies, it has since reached into various arenas of study, including education. The framework of Critical Race Theory gives a unique perspective on how educational institutions of America operate and provides insight about why its current structure, design, and policies are not meeting the needs of children of color. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) offered the first major
research that applies Critical Race Theory to the field of education. They introduced the theory and explain its ability to go beyond the simple inclusion of students of color through multicultural education, which was the current trend at the time of their introduction, and extended into a realm that critically examines the inequities that are part of the fabric of educational institutions. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) and Lynn and Parker (2006) both offered a synthesis of Critical Race Theory in education, highlighting several different applications of Critical Race Theory to educational studies, all of which bring attention to the role race plays in schools in both policies and interactions.

Parker and Lynn (2002) introduced a new approach to Critical Race Theory when they discuss how it could serve as a framework that is complementary to non-empirical research, yet furthers the cause, by giving specific voice to people of color, voices that are often left out of the traditional narrative of qualitative research. Concurrently, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) used the major characteristics of Critical Race Theory, in particular the saliency of race and the power of counter-storytelling, to develop an analytical tool employing theoretical sensitivity and cultural intuition, to give an authentic and dynamic interpretation of the inequities built into institutions. These theoretical developments influenced numerous research studies that use the framework of Critical Race Theory as a critical reference point to examine issues of social justice and equity and the way in which non-majority populations relate to structural entities (Baszile, 2008; Davis, 2007; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Decuir-Gunby, 2007; Fernandez, 2002; Howard, 2008; Teranshi, 2002).
This literature review will now discuss the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory as applied in relevant educational studies as institutional critique. It is a fundamental introduction to the particular attributes of Critical Race Theory because they are the guiding constructs of portions of this dissertation, from analysis to discussion. The tenets are essential to this research, as they each speak to the interrelated role of race and power in educational institutions. Each tenet further explains the different dynamics at play between African-American families and the institution of school, the central relationship explored in this dissertation.

**Permanence of Racism**

There are basic tenets that undergird Critical Race Theory, the first of which is the *permanence of racism* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). It is the acknowledgement that racism has and will continue to play a role in any public American institution. Institutions cannot have a different moral center than the individuals who live in a society where they exist, and Critical Race Theory posits that because race played such a major role in the history and formation of this country, everyone who is American is influenced by race, both subtly and directly (Maynard, 2004). Although the influence of race affects Americans in varying degrees, it does have an impact on everyone and the institutions of America can be no different than the individuals who build, operate, and function within them. Critical Race Theory has at its root the belief that the social construction of race drives policies and decisions in the institutions of America.

Research that examines the institutional structure of the American educational system shows that the achievement gap is impacted by this principle of Critical Race
Theory. One such study that focused on the permanence of racism in schooling is that of Aleman (2007) on the precept of the permanence of racism in the finance policy of Texas schools. By examining the social finance data and court rulings, he drew the conclusion that the funding system was detrimental to school districts that provide services to predominantly African-Americans students and created inequity in educational services provided. According to Aleman, the structure of the educational school system itself is designed to reinforce the disenfranchisement of students of color.

Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) also applied the tenet of permanence of racism to explain the underachievement of African-American students from a historical lens, concluding that the permanence of racism is the root cause for lower attendance of students of color in institutions of higher education. Beratan (2008) illustrated the permanence of racism in policies surrounding special education in an examination of the effect of the language structure of several policies, creating an environment of racial segregation within the school system. The work of Green (1999) assessed the legal structure of the institution of education and concluded that, through tracking and ability grouping, the school system is designed to have the power to create separate and unequal environments, perpetuating the continual placement of African-American students on lower course tracks than White students. All of these bodies of work attempted to expose how the underachievement of students of color in the American school system is connected to the structure and policies of the educational institutions that ultimately stem from the permanence of racism.
Interest Convergence

Another tenet of Critical Race Theory is that of interest convergence. Interest convergence is defined as the willingness of America to initiate or yield to equity policies only when the initiative benefits the majority population (Bell, 1980). Taking this one step further, the tenet of interest convergence purports that the actual driving force behind policy changes is not the ethical epicenter of social morality, but rather a hidden benefit to the dominant culture. Although it appears that there has been progress that has been driven by the desire for equity, changes have actually been motivated by self-interest and selfish gains for the majority population. Bell (1980) gave examples of the principle of interest convergence through the historical milestones of the abolition of slavery, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil War amendments, and several Civil Rights movement court decisions, arguing that each had ulterior motives that benefited the dominant population (Bell, 2004). He continued this argument through Brown v. Board of Education, stating that, although the motive looked egalitarian, it took place when anti-communist fear was at its height in the United States and human rights and civility under American democracy was primed to be cast as superior to communism. Bell (1980) cited the quick verdict of Brown v. Board of Education, but the slow implementation of the ruling, as proof that the case to end desegregation had little to do with equality and much more to do with the interest of the dominant political class and America’s global relations.

Essentially, interest convergence can be summed up in the statement of James Baldwin (1979), “the brutal truth is that the bulk of White people in America never had
an interest in educating Black people, except as this could serve White purposes” (p. 1.)

Critical Race Theory argues that seemingly outside factors are not coincidental, but rather drivers for the partial strides in social progress that have taken place. Unfortunately, historically speaking, the dominant cultural groups have not wholeheartedly and collectively supported the needs of the non-dominant cultural groups, unless the dominant cultural forces somehow benefit from the situation (Taylor, 1999). Therefore, in regards to the achievement gap, if the dominant cultural groups do not see immediate benefit for educational modifications, then the priority of change is minimal.

**Critique of Liberalism**

The critique of liberalism is another principle of Critical Race Theory. The critique of liberalism is the dominant culture’s tendency of avoiding the issue of the construction of race and its power on the formation and operation of everyday life. Instead, the American public often defaults to colorblindness, which is an imagined neutrality, thus believing that color has no influence on legal or social matters (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). By claiming to transcend color, one does not have to deal with the issue of race, for the issue no longer exists and de-constructing the concept and its influence in society can be totally avoided. To take it one step further, small incremental changes are applauded and seen as satisfactory because it puts America someplace on the spectrum of equity, albeit minutely. Thus, the persistence of racism and other systemic issues that are brought about by issues surrounding color are not dealt with fully, as the problem is never exposed in its completeness.
Dixson (2007) described the multicultural movement and paradigm currently in schools as an assimilationist movement that only wants to make minor modifications to race relations, rather than implement policies that force institutions to bring about real, lasting change. Similarly, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) critiqued the early work of multicultural scholarship and its strong liberal ideology, which often softened the complexity of the role of race and lessened the part race played in shaping the way American society is structured. Additional scholarship focused on how the influence of liberalism causes teachers to insist on a colorblind mentality. This has resulted in multiple cultures not being acknowledged in school settings, creating barriers to inclusion for students of color, ultimately limiting everyone’s educational experiences (Henfield & Washington, 2012; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Rosenberg, 2004).

**Whiteness as Property**

Another tenet of Critical Race Theory is the claim that a person’s whiteness has the same attributes as of possession of property. *Whiteness as property* means, in short, that being White is a value that can be possessed, and the possessor holds certain privileges because they have it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). Traced back through a historical lens and how racial identity was constructed in America, Harris (1993) elaborated on how whiteness could be seen as an object that could be held, retained, and owned, an item that could never be fully “owned” by a person of color. Her research placed this tenet of whiteness as property in an expansive context that enveloped the African-American experience in America, addressing not only the lack of equality experienced, but also the reality of a limited possibility of equity.
Applying this tenet to American school experiences, Picower (2009) analyzed how White teachers project racial ideologies through their classroom instruction that assumes that all students possess Whiteness. This behavior propagated an educational structure of inequity and injustice, not consciously understood by the teacher or the students, but, nonetheless, contributed to the possibility of cultural tension within the classroom. Coupled with possessing Whiteness, students from the majority population also possess the physical attributes of being White, such as language, dress, and other characteristics that are accepted as being the norm. In their research, Decuir and Dixson (2004) discussed how African-American students may experience angst when encouraged or pressured to live within the boundaries of the norms set by White students, because the African-American students can never fully realize all of the same benefits or attributes as their mainstream counterparts. Even if a student of color conformed to the other characteristics of Whiteness, through language and dress, since they cannot possess the exterior of Whiteness, they could not reap the benefits of Whiteness as property. This pressure to conform to Whiteness, but never fully being able to fit into the mode of the norm, had the potential to create an antagonistic racial climate in the school system of America.

**Counter-storytelling**

The last tenet of Critical Race Theory is counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling is an ideological principle of Critical Race Theory that refers to the need for marginalized voices to be heard, inclusive of their unique experiences and vantage point regarding life in America and the institutions of American society. Typically, the
interpretation of events is told through the lens of the majority culture. Counter-
storytelling, through narratives and personal stories, incorporates the experiences of
people of color, allowing the “untold” story to be heard (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
Counter-storytelling moves America in the direction of a fair analysis of society as it
allows for a more complete picture to be constructed by encapsulating varying views and
perspectives.

When counter-storytelling is applied in school settings, the experiences of
multiple voices can be captured. This is often not the case when analyzing or examining
the inner workings of schools, as the mainstream voice is often the representative that
narrates. Counter-storytelling allows for voices to be interpretive vehicles and
strategically targets the experiences of those that are traditionally marginalized. While
there may be some variance in how one person of color interprets an event as compared
to how another person of color experiences an event, a commonality often emerges
through counter-storytelling, bringing to the forefront a collective, shared experience of a
population (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Specific to the racial achievement gap, there is
research that sought to chronicle the narrative of students of color in schools (Baszile,
2008; Decuir and Dixson, 2004; Fine & Weis, 2003; Morris, 2001; Solorzano, 1998,
2001; Yon, 2000). Through documenting and sharing occurrences and encounters of
people of color in the mainstream, educational critical race theorists hoped to bring to
light the way in which schools are experienced by people of color, the manner in which
students of color processed the environment of the school system, and how schools
shaped the student’s paradigm of how they view life in America.
In sum, although Critical Race Theory has its roots in law, the framework has been usefully applied to education. Critical Race Theory is the theoretical and analytical framework for this dissertation because it is designed to critically examine the structure of the American school system, how that construction affects students of color, and the way in which African-Americans have responded to the systematic design of education in America.

In this chapter, literature that addressed the experiences of African-American students in school has been extensively discussed. Various angles, arguments, and lines of inquiry surrounding race were weaved together to address the core of the research questions regarding perceptions of teacher expectations. Critical Race Theory constructs race as central to understanding the experiences that shaped the perceptions of teacher expectations for African-American students and their families. Applying the five tenets, the permanence of racism, interest convergence, whiteness as property, critique of liberalism, and counter-storytelling, to an analysis of the school structure and African-American students’ and their families’ perception and interpretation of school might clarify how they navigate through their schooling experience. Prior research using the framework of Critical Race Theory has convinced me that it is a useful framework not only to examine the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families but also to give a platform for their voices to be heard.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

Rationale

I began formulating this study while I was part of a larger qualitative research project that examined various experiences of successful African-American students and their families. While participating in the project as a researcher, one particular aspect stood out to me and I noticed that, regardless of other variant factors in the participant’s lives, there was a commonality to the inquiries regarding teacher expectations. In addition, in proximity to participants’ comments on teacher expectations, I noticed the reoccurring emergent themes of racial identity, cultural mistrust, racial socialization and resilience, throughout the interviews of academically successful African-American students and their parents. I was intrigued by not only their continual emergence, but also was curious how these emergent themes informed the participants’ perceptions of teacher expectations. As I continued working in the large-scale research project, the intrigue turned into inquiry, and I began to shape a research project of my own that would explore the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations among successful African-American families.

Around this same time, I also became interested in Critical Race Theory. This theory appealed to me because of its power to give voice to marginalized peoples and because of its premise of assumed racial stratification in American institutions. These major points of Critical Race Theory seemed to coincide with the presumptions of the
families that were part of the study – their similar perception of teacher expectations seemed to be a shared assumption, often referencing an underpinning of power and privilege for the dominant culture within the school system.

**Methodology**

I used qualitative research as the general framework for this inquiry into the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations among successful African-American students and their families. I tried to understand the way in which members of a particular segment of society processes experiences, events, and occurrences within a setting. I am reminded that the reality of these experiences is relative, meaning it is subject to interpretation through the individual that is sharing them (Hatch, 2002). In the role of the researcher, I situated myself within the research, knowing that I am the instrument for the inquiry, establishing enough of a relationship with the participants, in hopes to eliminate feelings of detachment between myself and the research participants. My vantage point is embodied in the statement, “most generally speaking, the purpose of qualitative research is to understand human experiences to reveal both the processes by which people construct meaning about their worlds and to report what those meanings are” (Hull, 1997, p.3). The research discussed in this dissertation is an extension of that vantage point and illustrates the reasoning for and congruency of my preference for a qualitative approach for this inquiry.

Consistent with the foundational assumptions of qualitative research, this study recognized that people make meaning of the world around them and, then, construct an outlook that has value to them (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1994). According to
Hatch (2002), qualitative research “assumes a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are perspectives or constructions of reality” (p. 15). These qualitative concepts are particularly relevant and have value to the research inquiry of Black families’ perceptions of teacher expectations through a Critical Race Theory lens because it acknowledges that multiple realities exist, realities are constructed by each individual from his or her perspective, and that individuals navigate their community based on their perception of this reality.

Specific to Critical Race Theory, this study is approached with the assumption that race is relevant and salient and is an undeniable influence on the structure of all American institutions, including schools (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The influence of race in a historical and social context is acknowledged in the approach of the study and the interpretation of the data. Additionally, the role of power and how it interfaces with race is presumed in this research and is used to understand and interpret the data. True to Critical Race Theory, this research existed to give voice to marginalized individuals and to provide a counter-story to the master narrative of American experiences.

**The Researcher**

I am a middle-aged mixed-race female who grew up in a predominantly White suburban school district that I attended from kindergarten through high school graduation. I identify with the research topic and the participants in this study and, as some situations were explained or viewpoints voiced, I could relate to the events because I, too, had either experienced them myself or witnessed something similar in my early or
adolescent years. Race has always played a major role in my life, my upbringing, and the way in which I view and interact with the world. Indeed, I most often describe myself as an African-American female, although I am equally of Latina descent. This is because I know the visual perception and presumption when someone looks at me with a limited binary eye of either being White or Black, I am placed in the latter category. This constant, conscious racial-ethnic negotiation is at the core of my identity as has been for as long as I can remember.

During my childhood years, my father was an influential part of my life and often discussed the politics of race and the role they played in our everyday lives. When I was very young, I really felt that my father possessed an antiquated view on race relations, that his ideas were pre-Civil Rights era and we now lived in a post-racial society. His ideas on race were often voiced and when I was not selected to be a part of the gifted class curriculum, he immediately blamed it on the “racists that ran the school.” After I was tested by a private psychologist and scored well within the realm of gifted on the academic spectrum, I began to think that, perhaps, my father was on to something. After the school year began and my gifted classes started, I quickly noticed that I was the only person of color and the only female, I realized that the world might not be as post-racial as I had thought and “Daddy’s views may hold some truth.”

As I matured and progressed through school and pursued education as my life’s work, I learned that my families’ experiences were not unique or isolated and that many researchers had encapsulated my father’s perspective on life (and now my own point of view) into concepts and theories that had titles like “systematic racism,” “racial
socialization,” and, “critical race theory.” Now that I am, professionally, an educator and a researcher and, personally, a parent of African-American children who are in school, I realize more and more that from whatever angle one experiences the American institution of schooling, the influence of race is certain and the intersection of race, class, and power is inevitable. I know that my experiences have influenced the lens through which I see life, inclusive of my research, and I believe that the “experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Yet, although I can relate to their experiences, I also recognize that I am not the sole voice of the participants in this study, but that my role as the researcher is to provide a platform by which their stories can be heard, although my perspective and own experiences do certainly shape how I approach my research (Pillow, 2003).

Data Collection

The Setting

The site of this study is the location of the larger research project “Black American Students’ Achievement in the Suburbs: Academic Success through Family Engagement,” which was conceived as a response to John Ogbu’s 2003 publication, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Engagement*. For this dissertation, the city and the school system have been given the pseudonym of Shuttlesworth.

Shuttlesworth is a mid-western city, an inner-ring suburb that shares its borders with a major metropolitan city. It is considered a desirable area to live in by many
natives of the northeast Ohio region, for it is geographically near to the cultural epicenter of the greater metropolitan area, including several universities and museums, while still retaining the feel of a suburb. The city received national recognition, when it was recognized as a finalist for the All-American City Award (National Civic League, 2008), which showcases its desirable setting and location.

Founded in 1912, it boasts an approximate population of almost 30,000. The median household income of the city is a little over $75,000, thus it is considered a middle-income community (“US Census,” 2010). While the median income shows the average level of the social economic status, the incomes for the area actually range from below poverty level to millionaire status. According to the 2010 census, Shuttlesworth was one the most racially diverse cities in the region. Fifty-five percent of the city was White, 37% African-American, 4.5% Asian, and 3.5% a combination of other races. The community was considered highly educated, with 64.5% of the population over the age of 25 holding at least a Bachelor’s degree, which is almost double the national and state average.

While the Shuttlesworth public schools are racially diverse, they are less integrated than the city. This is due to several private schools in the area, to which many affluent families who are predominantly White choose to send their students, especially during the high school years. The city is organized into different neighborhoods with an elementary school located in each of the five areas. There is one public middle school and one public high school for all the students in the city. There are economic and racial variances in each neighborhood and, while some neighborhoods are fully integrated and
span income levels, other neighborhoods are less racially diverse and have median incomes above or below the general Shuttleworth median income. In short, while some areas are racially and socio-economically mixed, some neighborhoods are predominantly African-American and poorer while others are predominantly White and more affluent.

There is a high standard and expectation from the community regarding the school system, which is reflected in the local motto, “A community is known by the schools it keeps.” Shuttlesworth is nationally recognized for its academic rigor and extracurricular activities, both clubs and sports. The district estimates that upwards of 90% of their graduates attend college and approximately 10% of its graduates receive first choice acceptance to Ivy League colleges and universities, one of the highest rates in the state. Shuttlesworth offers several different courses in the high school and students can enroll in either remedial, college preparatory, honors or advanced placement levels for the core subjects, according to the school’s website.

**Participant Selection**

I selected the families from the data set used for the research study “Black American Students’ Achievement in the Suburbs: Academic Success through Family Engagement.” This large, multi-year study conducted by professors, community leaders, and student researchers selected participants who were identified as: (1) African-American, (2) alumni of the school system graduating between the years of 1984-2004, (3) high-achieving defined as four-year-college entrance, (4) whose parent(s) agreed to participate in the study. Sampling occurred in stages that were successive in nature. The first level was purposeful sampling. The aforementioned criteria for participation were
the parameters at this stage of sampling. Snowball sampling was the next way of gaining participants as they were identified and recommended to the study by research members, community members, and/or past participants. Twenty-five families participated in this larger study and this data set served as the basis for my project.

For this dissertation, I originally wanted to have three female participant families and three male participant families, for a total of six families. However, I ultimately chose eight families to participate, and the process of elimination and selection will explain my rationale. I first eliminated all families that did not have a complete data set, for there were some families whose parents committed and then did not follow through or only half of their interview was completed, due to unforeseen circumstances. This narrowed the selection pool a bit. Secondly, I placed two additional parameters, (1) a grade point average of at least a 3.0 while attending the designated school system and (2) attendance and graduation from a four-year college. By increasing the criteria, the data set was narrowed down significantly. From this point, I added a final stage of selection, theory-based/discriminant sampling, and I read through the data from the remaining families and chose those who were information-rich, meaning the families were interactive, forthright, and elaborative with their experiences and the conversation was free flowing. This left me with a little over ten families from which to choose. My final selection was based upon my desire to have a broad demographic participant pool that included different genders, family compositions and years of attendance, and, in the end, I selected eight families. For this dissertation, the participants had to meet all of the following requirements:

2. Matriculation from the designated suburban school system.

3. Enrollment between the years of 1984 – 2004. These parameters were determined for the study because it captured a heightened time of awareness of academic achievement and racial reconciliation in the community of the designated suburban school system.

4. Academic success while attending the designated suburban system.

5. Attendance and graduation from a four-year college or university. Because this study wanted to include students who excelled academically, graduation from a four-year college is the guideline included to measure success. This speaks not only to the attention to academics by the students while attending the school system selected for this research, but the transferability of successful schooling that could be reproduced elsewhere.

6. Participation of an alumnus of the designated school and the participation of the parent of the alumnus. The requirement for two participants from each family was created to give multiple vantage points to the retrospective, reflective process and because it also addressed the desire to capture the whole family experience with the school system. Additionally, the prospect of interviewing both a student and a parent provided the opportunity for the underpinning concepts of ethnic identity, cultural mistrust, racial socialization, and resilience to be explored to its fullest extent.
Participant Description

The following is a description of the families that participated in this study. This description is included to give context to the demographic data shared in this study and to help frame the voices expressed through the counter-storytelling mechanism utilized throughout data analysis. A pseudonym is given to the family and the individual family members. The descriptors give details to the family structure, varied levels of involvement in activities within and outside of Shuttlesworth’s community and school system while in school, as well as their current educational attainment and occupation at the time of the interview.

The Washington family. A single mother is the head of the Washington family. Natalie Washington and her two daughters, Melissa and Monica, participated in the study and they were all interviewed together. Natalie Washington earned a doctorate from a prestigious private university and moved her family to the school system in a racially diverse neighborhood that was viewed as solidly middle class. While Melissa and Monica were attending school, Natalie Washington worked full-time and was also active in many school and community activities. Natalie Washington was very involved in the parent teacher organization and served as its president at the elementary school. While Melissa and Monica were in high school, Natalie Washington served on the board of the school system. Additionally, she was on the board of the area library and still serves in that capacity to this day. Natalie Washington currently works in administration at a large public university.
Melissa Washington, the eldest daughter, entered the school system when she was in third grade and attended the school system for nine years. While she attended the school system, she had a cumulative grade point average of 3.75. She began her high school career taking all college preparatory courses. By her junior and senior years, she was enrolled in a wide range of course levels, with a couple of courses still at the college preparatory level, a few courses at the honors level and one advanced placement course. She was athletically involved in school, ran on the track team and played on the volleyball team, the latter of which she served as captain. She was recognized as a national achievement scholar her junior year. She is currently a math teacher in the Shuttlesworth school system and has a child attending the schools.

Monica Washington, the youngest daughter, also had a cumulative grade point average of 3.75. Starting in second grade, she spent ten years in the school system. While she was in school, she was heavily involved in choir and eventually earned a scholarship to college in voice. She also was a part of the orchestra and served as the orchestra mistress during her time at the high school. While in school, she enrolled in a mixture of college preparatory, honors, and advanced placement classes. She is currently an actress, singer, and writer.

**The Mitchell family.** The mother of the Mitchell family is a widow, with her husband passing away when her two boys were four and eight. Nyah Mitchell did not remarry until after her children were in college, so for many years she was a single mother. She moved to Shuttlesworth with her children when one child was in elementary school and the other in junior high school to a predominantly African-American section
of the city. She served as an elementary school teacher for 31 years and is retired. Her father and her husband were ministers of their own church and she was very active in church life as well. The church provided the central and most consistent factor in her family’s life.

Melvin Mitchell, her youngest son, participated in the study and was interviewed separately from his mother. He started in the school system when he was in fourth grade, spending a total of eight years in the school system. Outside of school, he was involved heavily in several different aspects of church, from Sunday School to singing and playing instruments in the choir. He stated that his faith is still the most important aspect of his life. He was enrolled in mostly advanced placement classes at the high school level and graduated with a cumulative grade point average of 3.1. Melvin Mitchell was active in theater and music beginning in elementary school and continuing through junior high and high school. He earned a college degree in theater from a prestigious private university on scholarship. Recently, he was inducted into the school system’s hall of fame for distinguished alumni for his accomplishments in the field of musical theater.

The Baldwin family. The Baldwin family moved to the area before they even had children. They have lived in the community for 36 years, 28 years at their current residence and 8 at a previous house in the neighborhood. They have four children together, three girls and a son. A source of pride is that both of the parents are college graduates, all four of their children are college graduates, and their children’s spouses are college graduates. Noelle Baldwin, the mother of the family, participated in the interview
but the father passed away years ago. She attended a female historically black college, earning her Master’s in education, specializing in addressing learning deficits. During her career, she was an elementary school teacher for a major metropolitan school system and for the school system in which this study takes place. Noelle Baldwin was active in the local church and also involved in the parent teacher association when her children were enrolled in school.

Nicholas Baldwin, the son who participated in the study, was interviewed separately. He attended the school system through his entire pre-college education. While in school, he obtained a cumulative grade point average of a 3.0. He played football while in school and was also part of his church’s youth leadership program. Although he took mostly college preparatory courses when he attended school, he also completed a few honors and advanced placement courses, too. He also worked part-time throughout high school. He attended a historically black university and graduated with a degree in economics. He has been in banking ever since and he is currently a senior vice president and manager at a major banking institution. Today, Nicholas Baldwin lives in the Shuttlesworth community and has two daughters who attend the schools.

**The Height family.** The Height family consisted of a mother, father, and a daughter. All family members participated in this research project and were interviewed at the same time. They live in a racially diverse and solidly middle class section of the city. Both Emmett Height and Martha Height are college graduates and own an insurance franchise business where they work together. They were active in the parent teacher association and one served as the local president. Emmett Height was a trustee at
their church and he also co-founded a grassroots organization in the community that addressed academic achievement and equal opportunities for minorities. The family volunteer together at their church and at the local soup kitchen and the father currently serves on the school board of Shuttlesworth.

Ashley Height, the daughter, has always attended this school system. She graduated with a cumulative grade point average of 3.6. She enrolled in mostly advanced placement courses and a couple of honors courses, if the advanced placement level was not offered for a subject. She was consistently on the honor roll and received an honors diploma. She was in the orchestra and student council and mentored other African-American students through a program implemented by the school. Ashley Height recently graduated with her Master’s degree in medical administration from a prestigious university.

**The Plessy family.** The Plessy Family is a two-family household. Together, the mother and father have nine children, all of whom attended the school system for varying periods of time. The father and one daughter participated in the study and were interviewed separately. The family lives in a racially diverse, mostly professional, middle class portion of the community. Greg Plessy holds a doctoral degree in secondary education. He was an assistant principal, principal, and administrator at a school in a large metropolitan school district and currently teaches part-time at the local community college. He coached chess in the school system and at other nearby schools and is active in an African-American tennis club in the area.
Alisha Plessy, the daughter who interviewed for this research, is the eldest daughter and the third oldest child in the family. She interviewed at a separate time than her father. Due to time constraints, her interview was conducted at two different times, the first in person and the second over the phone because she relocated overseas. She entered the school system when she was in third grade when her family moved to the area and she attended the school system for nine years. Although her family lived in an urban area before migrating to Shuttlesworth, she and her siblings attended a private Catholic school. She enrolled in mostly college preparatory classes and a few honor classes and held a cumulative grade point average of 3.0. She was on the tennis team and was in chess club while she attended the high school. She also worked while attending high school. After high school graduation, she went directly into the military service for eight years and completed her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees while in the service. At the time of the interview, Ashley Plessy was approaching candidacy in her doctoral program.

The Bethune family. While their child attended the school system, this two-parent household lived in a racially mixed part of the community. Denise Bethune participated in the interview by herself and the father passed away a few years prior to the interview. The father had been a retired principal in a large metropolitan school district and the mother recently retired as a social worker. Denise Bethune holds a Master’s degree in her field. She was active in the community and belonged to the neighborhood association and was also active in her church, which was also in the community.

Helen Bethune, the daughter, was interviewed separately from her mother. She attended the school system for 13 years, beginning in kindergarten. She held a 3.0
cumulative grade point average. While she was in school, she was a cheerleader and a part of the pep squad. She enrolled in all advanced placement classes, taking the highest level of coursework available at Shuttlesworth. After receiving her Bachelor’s degree, Helen Bethune earned her Master’s degree in public administration. She is currently employed as a senior manager at an international airport.

The Frederick family. During the daughter’s school years, the Frederick family consisted of a father, mother, and daughter. The father passed away a few years before this research project. The mother and daughter interviewed at the same time over two sessions. The family lived in two different areas of the school system and both were considered racially diverse and middle-class. Noelle Frederick, the mother, attended some college and is now retired from a position in human resources at a government agency. During the years her daughter attended school, Noelle Frederick was a Girl Scout leader and active in the parent teacher association. She also was active in the community association and is still active in a local political committee, serving as the secretary.

Loretta Frederick, the daughter, attended the school system from kindergarten through 12th grade. She held a 3.6 cumulative grade point average. She was enrolled in all advanced placement and honors classes. She was active in student government, serving as treasurer for all four years, and was also in orchestra, holding the viola first chair position. She also was involved in a student organization that promoted academic excellence. She was consistently on the merit and honor rolls. Loretta Frederick
attended a historically black college and university after high school graduation and is currently working in administration at a large metropolitan school district.

**The Bell family.** The Bell family is headed by a single mother. Maria Bell raised two children, a daughter and son, and all three family members participated in the research study, interviewing separately. She moved to the area before her children were of school age. The area they lived in was racially isolated, with only a few African-American families and was majority White families. Although her parents never graduated high school, she managed, not only to attend college, but to earn a law degree and practice law, before retiring from the United States Attorney’s office. While her children were in school, she was involved in Cub Scouts and parent boosters for band. Maria Bell also was involved in the community, serving on the library board, the board at the university from which she graduated, and president of the city club.

Keisha Bell, the daughter, attended the school system from kindergarten to 12th grade. From her sophomore year on, she was only enrolled in advanced placement classes. She graduated with a cumulative grade point average a little over a 4.0. She was recognized as a National Achievement Scholar. While she was in school she was heavily involved in the theater department and received a memorial award for her performances. Outside of school, she was a figure skating competitor, and won numerous awards locally and regionally. After high school, Keisha Bell attended an Ivy League university. At the time of the interview, the daughter was an English teacher at a prestigious private, independent school located in the same school district.
Cameron Bell, the son, also attended Shuttlesworth from Kindergarten to 12th grade. He was enrolled in mostly advanced placement classes and had a grade point average that was well over a 3.0, consistently making the merit and honor rolls. He was active in the marching band and was the president of the band and music ensemble. The son served as the class vice-president his senior year and was one of the class speakers at graduation. Additionally, Cameron Bell was active in the theater program and lettered in hockey for three years. After high school, he, too, attended an Ivy League university and now is an entrepreneur in the entertainment industry, as a songwriter and producer.

There were a total of eight participating families in the study. There were 10 students, as multiple siblings from the same family were involved in the study. Seven of the student participants were female and 3 were male. A total of 9 parents participated in the study, as multiple parents from the same family participated in the study. A total of 7 mothers and 2 fathers participated in the research. A total of 19 individuals constituted the participants in this study. Figure 1 graphs the participants, the years the student attended Shuttlesworth, the year of graduation, the grade point average of the student while at Shuttlesworth, and the highest level of academic achievement of all of the participants. The average grade point average was 3.37 for the alumni participants and the average time that the alumni had attended this school system was 11.4 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Name</th>
<th>Family Category</th>
<th>Family Member</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years in Shuttlesworth</th>
<th>Grad Year</th>
<th>Grade Point Average</th>
<th>Highest Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Nyah</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mitchell   Widowed   Student   Melvin  8  1985  3.1  Bachelors
Baldwin    Married   Mother   Clarice  -  -  -  Masters
            Student   Nicholas  13  1983  3.0  Bachelors
Height     Married   Father   Emmett  -  -  -  Bachelors
            Mother   Martha   -  -  -  Bachelors
            Student   Ashley   13  1999  3.6  Masters
Plessy     Married   Father   Greg    -  -  -  Doctorate
            Student   Alisha   9   1993  3.0  Doctorate
Bethune    Married   Mother   Denise  -  -  -  Masters
            Student   Helen    13  -    3.0  Masters
Frederick  Married   Mother   Noelle  -  -  -  College
            Student   Loretta  13  1991  3.5  Bachelors
Bell       Single    Mother   Maria   -  -  -  Law
            Student   Keisha   13  1993  4.0+ Bachelors
            Student   Cameron  13  1991  3.0+ Bachelors

Figure 1. Summary of participants

Interviews

Interviewing served as the data collecting method of the larger project, thus it was also this current study’s method. Interviewing was chosen because of the nature of the research questions. The technique of interviewing supports the exploration of the research questions because qualitative interviewing seeks to understand the views of the participants on a given topic, endeavors to discover the story that aids in shaping these views, and helps to construct knowledge from the information obtained (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Because my research questions was exploratory in design, and wanted to construct meaning around the stories shared, interviews were the logical choice as the data-gathering research tool for this project.
The interviews of the larger study were conducted by a mixed-race team to create a multi-racial environment for the interviewees, to allow for an insider-outsider perspective and atmosphere designed to make interviewees feel comfortable and establish ease, openness and report during the interview process, and avoid encapsulation in presumed insider-assumptions. Additionally, because the interview process often took between two and four hours to complete, having more than one researcher at the interview allowed for the alternation of asking research questions. This assisted in an environment conducive to a group conversation, creating a dialogue that flowed, rather than a simple “I ask, you answer” exchange.

When arranging an interview, the participants were each asked in which setting they preferred to have the interview take place. A researcher’s house, the participant’s house, or public places, such as a library, were normally offered as interview location options. This allowed the participants to choose the environment they felt most comfortable in and helped create an atmosphere that optimized the potential for the participants to share their experiences openly. The interview occurred at a mutually agreeable time most convenient for the participant. Interview times varied from mornings to evenings and from weekdays to weekends. On the rare occasion, if a large block of time could not be established, then the interview was divided over two different dates and times.

An alumnus from a family unit and a parent from that same family unit participated in the in-depth, self-reflective, interview. When at all possible, the parent(s) and the alumnus were interviewed separately. This was purposely done to encourage the
participants to talk freely about their experiences without influence of other family members and to promote an environment of limited inhibitions. An interview protocol was used as a guide that consisted of 55 questions. These questions spanned several topics about the participant’s student life while at the designated school system, including school experiences, home life, after school habits, community involvement and family ideology. The interviews were semi-structured and the goal was to create an exchange that was continual and of a comfortable rapport (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). While the interview questions were pre-determined, an open dialogue was encouraged, follow-up questions were posed, and a conversation between the researchers and the interviewer was typically established. To that end, while the interview guide was followed, often the conversation would move into anecdotal exchanges between the research team and the interviewee, establishing an easy sharing of information and experiences. After the interviews were completed, the researchers gathered all notes and jottings that were written during the interview session and combined the data together in preparation for debriefings and storage. Over the course of four years, the larger research team met bimonthly to debrief the interviews that occurred and to move forward with the interview process. Debriefings established shared interpretations that helped consolidate consistency of findings and led to incorporation of shared approaches and conceptualization in subsequent research projects, including the present one.

**Data Storage**

Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The interviews were transcribed and were stored on a central computer in the principal investigator’s office.
All members of the research team, including myself, had access to the information, at will, for research purposes only (a team research rights contract was signed). A shared computerized folder of the interview data was made available, so that access could be continual and without restriction. Sound files, notes from the interviews from all members of the research team, and documents were also kept at that central location, in raw form, as well as any additional follow-up notes. A correspondence system was assigned to the interviews to protect the anonymity of the participants and to promote objectivity of the research team and pseudonyms were assigned to each alumnus and his or her family.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this project was completed in four parts, initial analysis, counter-story building, critical race theory analysis, and emergent theme analysis, and will be described in detail below. I utilized the qualitative computer program Nvivo for the data analysis portion of this research project. After reading all of the transcripts in the larger project and the selection of the eight participant families, I uploaded their interviews into the computer program. During each stage of analysis, a complete read of the transcripts was required. Codes were developed during each of the stages and the data were coded and categorized according to its relevancy.

Initial Analysis

My first priority was to investigate the answers to the questions from the interview protocol that addressed the research project directly: “Do you think your
teachers had high enough expectations?” and “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations for Black students?” (see Appendix A). The answers to these inquiries served as the initial baseline to begin preliminary analysis. A more inductive read of the data then occurred, looking for general themes towards the notion of perceptions of teacher expectations held among African-American students and their families and the analysis process became a constant interplay between reading, coding, and pattern finding (Goulding, 1998). During this analysis process, I would immerse myself in the data then take time to reflect upon what I read. After time, I would re-immersse myself in the data to be sure that my understanding and conclusions were consistent with my initial interpretation. During this lengthy process, categories began to develop that spoke to the process of the lived experience and these categories were used to further filter the data and a “story” began to be built (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

**Counter-story Building**

To build this story, I used a Critical Race Theory analysis process that relies heavily on counter-storytelling, the vehicle that allows for typically marginalized voices to be heard. Following the Critical Race Theory analysis model put forth by Solorzano and Yosso (2002), I created a counter-story from the data, relying heavily on the actual words of the participants of the study. This process is drawn on the theoretical concepts of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and the concept of theoretical sensitivity where data is given meaning by the researcher’s insight, and Delores Delgado Bernal’s (1998) concept of cultural intuition, where the researcher’s own experience and personal knowledge of the culture is utilized creating a “complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical,
personal, collective and dynamic.” From the data gathered in this study, the relevant literature, my own personal experience as a person of color, and professional experience as a researcher, a counter-story was built, using the participants’ words as the basis of construction (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Many of the counter-stories were direct responses to the initial questions regarding perceptions of teacher expectations and other counter-stories were embedded in the conversational data gathered throughout the interview process. By reading the data several times over, categories for the counter-stories surfaced naturally.

**Critical Race Theory Analysis**

Subsequently, the data were, then, examined using a Critical Race Theory analysis. The major tenets of Critical Race Theory, permanence of racism, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, and whiteness as property, were used as guiding constructs to examine the data gathered during the qualitative interview process, the themes found in the initial analysis and the counter-stories that were built (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). The process of using Critical Race Theory as an analytical tool viewed schools as an institutional structure where race and power played a role in the participants’ interpretation of their experiences. It examined the relationship between the African-American community and the institution of schooling and helped uncover inequities that existed (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Looking at the data through the Critical Race Theory lens clarified the ways in which the participants made meaning of school and their perceptions of their place within that institution. During this analysis phase, I read through the data specifically searching for
each of the tenets of Critical Race Theory, one at a time. Each tenet warranted multiple reads and I then coded for the specific tenets individually.

**Emergent Themes Analysis**

Lastly, I investigated the data on the themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience, which had emerged juxtaposed with the main topic of discussion, perceptions of teacher expectations, during the early stages of this project. By investigating these specific themes and how they interrelated and informed the counter-stories and the Critical Race Theory analysis (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), I was able to further understand the data gathered. Similar to the previous phase of analysis, I searched the data through a specific lens and then coded the data using the emergent themes as guiding constructs.

Using this multi-tiered data analysis process of initial analysis, counter-storytelling, Critical Race Theory and emergent themes analyses, a thorough and exhaustive exploration of the research topic occurred to maximize the contribution this study could make to the field of education and the discipline of social foundations of education. The data analysis portion of this dissertation is divided into the different stages of analysis described and each section foregrounds the words of the participants, true to the nature of counter-storytelling and its purpose of giving a direct voice to typically marginalized members of society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Although the steps of data analysis are designed to answer the research questions separately, a certain amount of interplay occurs between the analyses as the topics are interrelated. Figure 2 graphs the analysis steps and the related research questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Step</th>
<th>Research Question Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Analysis</td>
<td>“What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-story Building</td>
<td>“What experiences shaped these perceptions?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>“How have these perceptions influenced how students approach school?” and “How have these perceptions influenced how African-American parents prepared and advised their student for school?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent Themes</td>
<td>“How are the emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust and resilience relevant to and inform the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.* Data analysis procedure

**Trustworthiness**

**In-Depth Analysis**

The larger research that this dissertation was part of was a multi-year project, and the prolonged existence of the research study provides an overarching framework that adds to the trustworthiness of this study. Additionally, the larger project was established by community members and sanctioned by the school that the alumni participants attended. These attributes further contributed to the soundness of the research because it is characteristic of in-depth analysis, allowing time for trust between the researcher and the researched community to grow and established a sense of rigor about the study, due to sheer longevity (Creswell, 2007).
Peer Debriefing

Since this research began as part of a larger project and multiple researchers were involved, peer debriefings took place over the course of four years. Researchers and founding team members exchanged their thoughts and ideas regarding the data obtained during the information process. This served as a time to ensure that neither researcher inserted their own viewpoints over that of the participants during the process of annotating comments. A consensus of what the participant conveyed was reached and documented accurately in the report and remarks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member Checking

At the time of the interview, the participants were offered the option to have a copy of the recorded interview or the transcription after it was completed. If they opted to listen or read the interview, the participants had the opportunity to object to having all or parts of the interview used as a data source, if they no longer wanted to share a certain experience or if they felt the conversation was leading or a misrepresentation of what they wanted to convey. This process of member checking added to the validity of the research because it created a transparent and open process in which research participants could have access to the data gathered, give feedback, and object to data that they felt did not properly represent their voice (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). A minority of participants availed themselves of this option and no corrections or changes were requested.
Limitations

This study examined the relationship between some African-American families and one particular school system over a twenty-year time span. During this period, the neighborhood in which the school system is located changed, in both racial and socioeconomic composition. The school system itself went through structural changes during this period, as well. This study does not take into account the effect or influence these changes may have had on the responses of the participants, as it is beyond the scope of the current research questions.

Another limitation of this research is the reconstruction of memories and past experiences. As time lapses, recollections are often variably interpreted due to the influence of an assortment of cognitive and socio-emotional factors (Fivush, 2008). In this study, this psychological aspect is compounded because the subject matter deals with the social constructs of race and ethnic identity, which are often fluid and prone to change when new events, either positive or negative, occur in a person’s life (Sellers, Morgan, & Brown, 2001). It is impossible to think that participants’ memories, feelings, and reactions are in their most accurate form and descriptions are exact replicas of original thoughts and reactions, making a study that is dependent upon the participants’ responses particularly volatile to the process of memory reconstruction.

An additional limitation of this research was the predetermined questions that were phrased in a closed-ended manner. While the questions directly addressed the research questions of this dissertation, they were structured in the context of the larger project and could be considered ‘leading’ as they were not open-ended. While it is not
felt that this limitation detracts from the findings of this dissertation, the closed-ended questioning could have led the participants to answer the initial inquiry in a specific way.

**Ethics**

As previously disclosed, this dissertation was part of a larger project. The “Black American Students’ Achievement in the Suburbs: Academic Success through Family Engagement” study has IRB approval from Kent State University (see Appendix B) and the research conducted for this dissertation is covered under that approval. The IRB approvals cover the way in which data collection is conducted, giving an assurance of confidentiality, and providing an explanation regarding the purpose of the study. A separate form gives a description of the intent to audio record and requests permission to do so. Each form requires the signature of the participants indicating that they understand all parts of the study and that the study is completely voluntary in nature and is conducted with an at-will premise. In addition, the researcher signed each form, indicating that the form was reviewed by a member of the research team. The researchers also acknowledged that they would hold all information obtained in confidentiality. Participants are made aware that they can listen to the recordings or review the transcripts, if they opt to do so. In addition to having approval from Kent State University, the school system in which the study takes place in was made aware of the research and has sanctioned and approved this research project.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This research addressed the following research questions: What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families? What experiences shaped these perceptions? How have these perceptions influenced how students approach school? How have these perceptions influenced how African-American parents prepared and advised their student for school? How are the emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust and resilience relevant to and inform the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations?

To address these research questions, the findings from the four-step analytical process are revealed. First, the initial findings are discussed, which addressed the direct question: “What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families?” Second, counter-stories are built to support the responses given in the preliminary findings. This will address the second research question: “What experiences shaped these experiences?” Next, the findings from the Critical Race Theory analysis are discussed, using the major tenets of Critical Race Theory, namely permanence of racism, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, and whiteness as property. This finding section answered the questions “How have these perceptions influenced how students approach school?” and “How have these perceptions influenced how African-American parents prepared and advised their student for school?” The last section explored ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience and
how these emergent themes informed the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations in the gathered data.

Preface to Findings: Teacher Synonymous with Institution

Before I analyzed the specific question responses, it is most important to state a critical observation I made as the researcher and a fundamental interpretation of the participants that prefaced the analysis of this research. Early on, I observed during the actual interviews, and again while immersing myself in the data, that the term teacher was often used by the interviewers, but the respondents often included other persons who were affiliated with the school beyond teachers. The participants often referred to coaches, administrators, school board members, and school staff, when directly or indirectly questioned about teachers or teacher expectations. An example of this is the response of Alisha Plessy (refer to Figure 1, Summary of Participants, in Chapter 3) when asked about teacher expectations, “as long as you were not failing, there was really no teacher involvement. I remember my tennis coach…” She continued, “I requested from a counselor to be put into a lower level course….”. Keisha Bell expanded the concept of teacher even further when she included security guards and, “Black teachers and administrators, White teachers and administrators” to make the interviewers understand it was everyone in the school to whom she was referencing. Perhaps the most expansive example is when Alisha Plessy discussed teachers and expectations “in the school system…I feel like in the school system African-Americans are treated differently,” which clearly included everyone who is tied to the school in any capacity.
Because of this conflation by several of the participants at numerous junctures during the data collection process, the term *teacher* will hereafter refer to the American education system. This concept will be explored further in detail during the discussion. This study has adopted and allowed for the use of the term *teacher* to loosely reference and represent the institution of school throughout the findings revealed.

**Findings 1: Initial Findings**

In this section, the initial findings surrounding the direct responses of the participants addressing the research question “What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families?” are discussed. There are two specific questions that addressed this inquiry of this study in the interview protocol. The first is question #35 from the interview protocol that asked “Do you think teachers had high enough expectations?” This was modified for parents to “Do you think your son/daughter’s teachers had high enough expectations?” The first question is direct, but non-specific to race, to provide the opportunity for the participants to self-construct a response that has meaning to them (Crotty, 1998). The second is question #43 from the interview protocol that asked, “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations of Black students?” This question directly incorporated race into the conversation and provided the opportunity for the participant to provide his or her views upon teacher expectations and race conjointly. While the interview protocol was used for all families, because the interviews were semi-structured (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), at times question #35 and question #43 were not asked directly in the interview. If they were not asked directly, the response was not included in the data calculations.
The responses to question #35 “Do you think teachers had high enough expectations?” were analyzed first, followed by the answers to question #43, “Do you think teachers had lower expectations of Black students?” Following this, the data gathered from both of these questions were synthesized to ultimately address the research question, “What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families?” and the findings are organized in categories at the end of this section.

**Question of High Enough Expectations**

The participants of the study, both students and their parents, were asked, “Do you think teachers had high enough expectations?” The answers varied and many answers went into great depth because of the open-ended, conversational nature of the interview. To that end, I used an interpretive and integrative method to concisely code their answer into categories that were cohesive short answer of “Yes,” “No,” or “I don’t know,” so that the data could be reported succinctly. The conclusion into which category participants’ responses fell was based on each participant’s general connotations when they answered the question, their most frequent response to the question, and the implied nature of their response. Their extensive responses were used to build discussion categories at the end of this chapter. Out of the 19 participants, 15 participants were asked the question, “Do you think teachers had high enough expectations” and 15 participants (100%) responded, “No.”
Question of Lower Expectations for Black Students

In the endeavor to further understand what perceptions African-American students and their families had concerning teacher expectations, the secondary question “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations of Black students?” was asked. This question, too, was asked of students and parents and incorporated race directly into the question. Using the same method of creating categories used in the first question, “Do you feel like teacher have high enough expectations?” the answers to the question “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations of Black students?” were integrated into succinct short answers of “Yes,” “No,” or “I don’t know.” Because one response could not fit into any of these categories, I included an additional category of “I didn’t care” for this question, which was the participant’s direct response to the question. Again, the participant responses were grouped by the general connotation of their answer, identical to the process explained for the first question. Out of the 19 participants, 16 were asked the question, “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations of Black students?” Of the 16 responses, 14 participants (87.5%) said, “Yes,” 1 participant (6.25%) answered, “I don’t know,” and 1 participant (6.25%) responded, “I didn’t care.” Figure 3 graphs the participants’ responses to questions #35 and question #43.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Name</th>
<th>Participant Family Members</th>
<th>Response to #35, “Do you think your teachers had high enough expectations?”</th>
<th>Response to #43, “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations of Black students?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Natalie (mom)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nyah (mom)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>Melvin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin</td>
<td>Clarice (mom)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>Emmett (dad)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martha (mom)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plessy</td>
<td>Greg (dad)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethune</td>
<td>Denise (mom)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helen</td>
<td></td>
<td>I didn’t care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>Noelle (mom)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loretta</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell</td>
<td>Maria (mom)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Responses from participants*

From the findings of the direct questions “Do you think teachers had high enough expectations?” and “Do you think that teachers had lower expectations of Black students?” and the substantive commentary given by the participants following these questions, five distinct categories arose regarding perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families. These categories are (1) Teacher = Institution; Institution = World, (2) The Intersection of Race and Class, (3) Mediocrity Was Okay for Us, (4) Special Permission to Overcome, and (5) Relationship Disconnect.
Teacher=Institution; Institution=World

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it became clear early on in the study that the participants viewed the term teacher as a conflation of the institution of school, referring to coaches, administrators, and school staff in the term teachers. The participants also viewed the institution of school as a part of the world. This was illustrated again and again when the students and their families felt teachers did not have high enough expectations for African-American students, as seen in the case of Loretta Frederick when she elaborated on low expectation, “it’s a microcosm of the world. I mean it’s a microcosm of the society we live in.” Denise Bethune gave a similar response, “a black child in America has a different road to travel than others, and it’s a fact,” linking the school experience to just a piece of a larger worldly experience for every African-American child. Greg Plessy placed the universality of the low teacher expectations as representing the institution, and the world, “Well that exists, this is just part of the world. And honestly, to answer your question, many teachers have low expectations for African-American kids.” He continued by saying,

And I think that in Shuttlesworth, the same thing exists in [nearby city] and [other nearby city] and in Walla Walla, Georgia, the same thing exists. You know, when teachers come they bring their middle class idea and it is hard for them to separate and there are some expectations, but I think this is very pervasive and so the answer to your question, yes, I think many, many teachers have low expectations for kids, for Black kids…
In some ways it was as if the participants accepted not having high enough expectations by their teachers, or at least they certainly were not surprised. Indeed, they seemed to view the teacher as playing their role in the school system and they were subject to the perceived norms of a world in which they live. Greg Plessy stated, “Well, I think that it is kind of inadvertent, something that many times middle class teachers bring with them - all kinds of baggage.” He continued, “The mainstream culture is European American and … many teachers, they don’t come out and think this consciously, but they often think…‘Oh he can’t do it, they ‘oh, he can’t do it.’” Helen Bethune answered similarly, “I think a lot of people feel the same way . . . it’s not intentional, but it’s what I think.” The teacher’s role and the low level of expectations for African-Americans seemed to be anticipated and viewed as the norm, just like any other part of life in what they implied was a racially stratified environment (Greene, Way, & Pehl, 2006; Seaton, 2009), and the teacher was subject to the norms of the world as they perceived it.

**Intersection of Race and Class**

The perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families seemed to center around class and socioeconomic status in the responses given by some participants. Many participants made references to the intersection of race and class. For example, Loretta Frederick said, “Now, in kindergarten, my teacher, yeah, she had low expectations for Black students, period. And if you came from a certain part of Shuttlesworth then, yeah, they had low expectations, too.” Greg Plessy reiterated this attribution to social class as a reason for low expectations, “And, honestly, to answer your question, many teachers have low expectations for African-American kids. That’s
true. Whether they are Black or White, and it is because of their lower social economic status.” Alisha Plessy explained expectations for students by an economical pecking order, “When I was coming up, their expectations were mainly based on socioeconomic status and parental involvement. If you’re affluent you’re at the highest category. If your parents are involved, that’s second. Then, average White, average Black, in that order.”

The source of teacher expectations depending on social class, according to some participants of this study, seemed not to only derive from an assumed social class hierarchy where the upper and middle classes were more valued than the lower class in Shuttlesworth, but also that the lower class held a different set of values from the upper and middle class. This is illustrated by Greg Plessy, “Many teachers, they believe…not because they are Black, but it is because of the lower socioeconomic status…they are not going to value some of the things that they are preaching in the classroom as much as White kids.” He later stated,

They believe that, ‘Oh, he can’t do it,’ at the level that other kids are capable of doing it and I think that exists in the minds of many middle-class people and I don’t think they look at him and say, ‘He can’t do it,’ because he is African-American, but, rather, ‘He can’t do it,’ because he is poverty level, he does not have the resources that other kids have, he does not have the motivation, he is from a single home parent.

Maria Bell reiterated this point and added another level of complexity, “there were some differences in how Black students were perceived by the system. And I was unable to decide whether it was because I was a single parent…so, I spent a lot of time trying to
make a determination.” The teachers not having high enough expectations, according to the responses of the participants, was tied to race, but also, and sometimes even more so, to social class.

Mediocrity Was Okay for Us

Another theme that surfaced during this phase of analysis could be described as mediocrity was okay for African-American students. Nyah Mitchell used whether the expectations were above mediocrity as a measure as to whether a teacher was good or not. She mentions that certain teachers and extracurricular advisors were good teachers because they “wouldn’t settle for mediocrity” in regards to her son’s school performance. Maria Bell thought teachers almost had an automatic default of a mediocre level of expectations for her children. When she was asked the question, “Do you think that the teachers had high enough expectations of your kids?” she responded, “After they realized they have never had those expectations, yes they did . . . you know every now and then . . . sometimes they are not expecting enough and I have a little conversation in a teacher’s meeting.” Implied in her response is that before parental intervention took place, the teacher did not expect enough of her children and did not even realize that their expectations were mediocre.

Other participant responses to teacher expectations were centered on specific academic experiences. Nicholas Baldwin, when asked, “Do you think your teachers had high expectations?” responded,

I think that they did. But, obviously I could have been taking tougher classes. I clearly could have been in a more rigorous program and the fact
that somebody let me not be in the most rigorous program that I could have . . . maybe someone, my mom, my dad, or teachers or somebody didn’t push hard enough to do that.

His response began by seemingly supporting the notion that his teachers had high expectations but soon after he nullifies the affirmation by stating that they could have been higher and that the academic program he completed did not align with the standard of high expectations and was, in fact, mediocre. While he opened the conversation to include several adults who could have intervened, he clearly included the possibility that teachers could have been one of the adults that “didn’t push hard enough,” eluding to the idea that their expectations were not as high as they could be. Loretta Frederick had a similar experience when she states, “I think some teachers would say, ‘Oh that B is ok.’ Well, if you know I’m an A student you should expect an A and not like dummy down what you expect of me.”

**Special Permission to Overcome**

When participants responded that they felt expectations were high for them as an individual, there was an immediate recognition of exceptionality. There seemed to be a consensus that high expectations for African-American students were not universal, but rather, it was because they, in particular, had been given “permission to overcome.” Melissa Washington, when asked whether her teacher had high enough expectations, retorted, “But, I was a smart kid. I was targeted. I was already in those classes where the expectations were high.” Cameron Bell gave a comparable response when he stated, “I
think it depends on who the Black student is.” Nyah Mitchell also recognized the
exceptionality of her son receiving high expectations when she states,

I think in most cases they had fair expectations . . . especially that teacher who
recommended him for that Advanced English, because there were times where
children were treated in a certain way, I got that feeling that it was kind of like,
this boy is Black, he couldn’t be, he couldn’t be so advanced as to be in this
English course and that’s just not heard of. I think sometimes that existed back in
those days.

Nyah Mitchell saw her child as an exception to an unspoken rule of low expectations
given by teachers for boys of color. Ashley Height attributed this special treatment to
academic class level,

Yeah, because Shuttlesworth groups themselves, so there is such a stark contrast.
So, if you are a teacher teaching mostly college prep, you are in a classroom with
students that feel they can’t go anywhere and the teachers feel that they can’t go
anywhere. And that combination is kind of deadly, so you have out of control,
loud, rowdy kids that were just angry about how they felt. Versus students that
were in honors and AP classes who have more students that would want to learn.
But, I think the standards were lower because it was known as busy work that was
given in college prep. So that has to make you feel like something, as a student,
you know the work you were getting was busy work.

Monica Washington expounded upon this notion, “I’m sure the teachers, depending on
what type of class you’re in, you know…they have certain expectations, they have a kind
of access…and the expectations isn’t as high or whatever and is higher if it’s AP or honors.” In the responses there was a theme that the students and their families recognized that if they received high expectations from their teachers, they were somehow privy to exceptional treatment that was normally not allotted to the general African-American student population.

**Relationship Disconnect**

It is worth noting another theme that arose during analysis. This theme is that of an indifference to whether teacher expectations were high enough for Black students which resulted in an aloof response, or a disconnect, on the part of the participants, regarding their teacher. Alisha Plessy answered the question, “as long as you were not failing, then there was really no teacher involvement.” Her statement shows that her teachers were indifferent. She expanded on this theme of disconnect, “I requested from my counselor to be put into a lower-level course and my counselor said okay. He didn’t do any work and the teacher didn’t say anything.” Her response indicated that she felt the teachers were disconnected from her, so when questioned about whether her teachers had high expectations, in summary, she stated, “They did not care.”

Conversely, Helen Bethune gave a clear message of her indifference in her response to a question regarding teacher expectations, “I didn’t care.” Her curt response seems to indicate that she did not feel a connection with the teachers of Shuttlesworth. Additionally, it indicated that she was not necessarily expecting her teachers to have high or low expectations or that their expectation level did not matter to her at all. Both of
these possibilities seemed to show a lack of relationship between the student and teachers.

**Findings 2: Counter-Story Building**

This research sought to understand what experiences shaped these perceptions of teacher expectations held by these students and their families. In this section, narratives and personal stories conveyed by the participants are shared to give insight into their viewpoints on teacher expectations addressing the research question “What experiences shaped these perceptions?” The process of counter-storytelling allows for the “untold” story to be heard, as the master narrative of schooling typically focuses on the voice of the majority culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). To capture the authentic voice of the participants, verbatim texts from the interviews are utilized to give thick, rich descriptions to the quality of the research (Creswell, 2007).

Using the analytical model of Solorzano and Yosso (2002), I used the actual words of the participants in the study and built a story of experiences, drawing on theoretical sensitivity and cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While I did not include all of the responses shared, I did include a broad selection representative of different aspects and experiences of the participants, so that a multi-varied perspective was gained. I, then, created general categories for this study’s purpose. The categories that follow are: (1) Positive Experiences, (2) Negative Impressions, (3) Fighting for Equity, and (4) Specific Negative Teacher Incidents.
Positive Experiences

Some participants described positive experiences with teachers that they felt had high enough expectations of them, in particular, although they may have felt overall that teachers did not have high enough expectations for African-Americans generally. Keisha Bell described her third grade teacher, the year she was first in a gifted and talented class and was one of only three African-American students. She stated,

And I think Mrs. Brooks recognized my need to develop an identity or she recognized something about me being one of the only Black kids in that class, because she pulled me aside one day and asked to have lunch with me. She wasn’t stern but you didn’t play with Mrs. Brooks. You know what I mean. You didn’t play. So, I remember that day she asked me to have lunch with her, and she didn’t do that to any other student…. And I remember and she just was so gracious and kind and sweet and friendly and personal to me. And I felt like I was talking to you know an aunt. And then of course after recess came in all the other kids it was back to you know. Like, you know what I’m saying. So, on a private level she really related to me on a one to one basis.

Another participant, Loretta Frederick, described a teacher that she felt had high enough expectations.

Mrs. Lane’s, she challenged me . . . It wasn’t so much, I know she cared about me, but she wanted me to take that extra step every time and when I thought I had done good enough, she said, “Umm, well you know, not good enough, you need to do more” . . . because I knew she loved me and I knew she cared about me, I
knew she wanted the best for me. In 6th grade I was the Mistress of Ceremonies for our graduation and she picked me. And you know that kind of gave me some more confidence, and so I’m playing around and she told me, “you know I expect so much from you and if you keep acting like this I am not going to make you Mistress of Ceremonies,” … I worked so hard, but every time when I got comfortable, too sure of myself, she knocked me right back down to reality and she put a little hurdle in front of me. I guess like a life lesson. … She took extra time with me . . . I think it was after my conference, we had triangular conferences with the mother and the father and the student and ours was last. And I was cleaning my desk, she and my mom were talking and …, they said, “Go clean your desk.” And I remember Mrs. Lane said I was special. And it’s funny that you, you know, just to bring that up. I thought I forgot that, but she would tell my mother, she said, “she is just special.” I think I have always felt that way and I don’t think it was special because she just liked me but I think she saw the potential in me and I think she knew I was, I had a good heart, even as a young kid and I don’t know, she just saw the good in me that I didn’t see.

Cameron Bell described a positive experience with his bioethics teacher, and he shared the following story,

I’m telling you Bob Hotchkins, you can ask everybody. He taught … AP bioethics. Yep. That man could teach. Boy, I’m telling you. As a matter of fact that was one of the only AP classes I’ve ever had that had other Black students in it. Because he was so well known widely for being such a great educator that
Black kids would go above and beyond. And that’s when I knew that some of these kids just weren’t being inspired by the faculty…There was like 30%, 35% Black kids that I haven’t seen in four or six years and they would take his classes because they knew that they would get treated fairly. And they wanted to learn from this man…I mean very chiseled blonde guy, six feet guy talks very deep. You’d think that he would just break your face…but no, he’s the sweetest guy in the world. I’m telling you we all, everyone did well . . . I mean you were, that was like, that was like one of the wow moments. Yea.

While the descriptions of positive teacher incidents were rare, these three descriptions are powerful, specific, and indicate particular experiences that the participants deemed as valuable and meaningful. The first example described a teacher who recognizes and addresses the experience of an African-American child and intervenes regarding her unique ethnic identity formation process. The second described how a teacher had high expectations of an African-American student. The third described a teacher who gained a reputation among the African-American student population as having high expectations and African-American students sought him out as a teacher because they knew they would have a good experience in his class and knew they would be “treated fairly.”

**Negative Impressions**

Sometimes a specific negative experience was implied rather than expressed. It was as if the participant could not put his or her finger on why he or she felt teachers had lower expectations for African-American students. Nicholas Baldwin elaborated, “Well,
the Secretary of Education talked about that... “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” So, I really believe that could happen. Now whether that was my personal experience? It’s hard to pull that out and recollect.” He followed up with saying, “I will say though that I know that I could have taken more rigorous courses than I probably did.”

Even when they felt like they had acceptable experiences, participants still had a general impression that teacher expectations for most African-American students were low. Keisha Bell stated,

I feel that Black students are undereducated in several different ways. I think teachers don’t extend themselves as willingly to Black students and I am speaking very generally because obviously my own experience is contradicting what I am saying. I think teachers, sometimes, teachers let Black students slide because they want to avoid confrontation and when the kid gets to the next level they have a teacher that does not let them slide and they don’t have the preparation that they need.

There was this general sense throughout the interviews that teachers did not have high enough expectations for African-American students. While many struggled in ways to describe it specifically and succinctly, the impression was that the expectations were lower for African-American students. This left a negative impression of teachers in general in the minds of the participants, as they reflected on their time in the Shuttlesworth school system.
Fighting for Equity

Another theme that arose when analyzing what experiences shaped the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families is fighting for equity. Maria Bell described a few instances of when she felt she had to strongly advocate for her children because she felt they were intentionally left out of a higher academic program. In one of her descriptions she spoke about her daughter in kindergarten and her exclusion from a special reading program. She said,

And I was a regular visitor to the school. Just to check up on things. And one day I went there to my daughter’s room, and there were kids sitting out in the hallway. Four little White girls, no a White boy and three little White girls, and they had this reading tutor who was working with them on their reading. This is when they were in kindergarten. So I went into Mrs. Wood and I said, “What’s that?” And she said, “That’s the reading group. I’ve taken out the children who know how to read and I give them special tutoring since they know how to read. The rest of the students in the class don’t.” I said, “Well, [my daughter] knows how to read.” And she says, “Well [your daughter] can’t be a part of the group because she’s four.” I said, “I’m sorry, somehow that doesn’t compute.” And she said, “Well, we couldn’t test [your daughter] because the test wasn’t normed to a four year old.” I said, “Well you know what, officially today she’s five and tomorrow you’re going to give her a test and the next day you’re going to put her in that reading group.” She said, “I don’t think we can do that and we’re going to have to see the principal about this because this breaks our rules.” I said, “No
problem.” So that was what happened. And it was, I think, that Ms. Woods resented me ever since that, because we’d been getting along. But I don’t think she was happy with the fact that I wasn’t permitting her to do it her way. She knew that [my daughter] could read, by the way, because we would go to the open house, I’d take [my daughter] to open house when [my older son] was in her class, and [my daughter] would sit there and read while we did the open house. So she knew that [my daughter] could read. So that was what bothered me.

Natalie Washington had a similar experience of fighting for inclusion in a higher-level course. When her daughter, Melissa Washington, matriculated to junior high school, she was dropped from the honors math classes and was placed into the regular level math courses and her mother described the experience as,

...many of the white students went to [the elementary school] then went to [the junior high school], and most of the white children were in that program, unlike the black children who lived in the neighborhood. So, [my daughter] was one of the few black children who were in the math projects. So, [my daughter] had this you know, legitimate reason to believe that she would continue to be in the honors. She came home and she was like, “I’m not in honors.” And I was like, “Well, let me go up to the school.” And I mean they were just, so I was ready to fight. And the counselor was like, “Oh, fine we’ll put her in the best math teacher’s class…I would want to get a feel for the teachers, because there was sometimes I didn’t necessarily get a good feel. I remember when one teacher said
something about [my daughter] saying, “Well, she doesn’t get it, she doesn’t get it.” I’m like, wait a minute, if she’s not getting it, you’re not teaching it.

Emmett Height described a similar experience when the school attempted to demote his daughter from AP Chemistry,

I went there daily until I felt she was getting on track…she came home and told me that they dropped her to a college prep class because she had a C-. She said that she had to report to the other class tomorrow. I said, “No, you don’t, you are going back to the same class.” She said, “I have to, they told me.” I said, “I paid their salaries, until I tell you to switch classes, you are not switching classes, I will be there in the morning.” So when I arrived and the teacher said he could not do anything because it had been done. So, I said, “Who made the decision?” The teacher said, “The principal did.” So I went to the principal and the principal said, “The teacher made the decision.” I said, “You guys are playing ping-pong with me.” I went back to the teacher and told him what the principal said. Basically, I told him that I am going to sit in the class and try to see what the problem is, to see how I can get my daughter back on track. He said, “[Emmett Height], we are going to start the class, we can’t do that.” I said, “Well, you are not going to start the class until you solve this situation.” I am not going to go through the whole detail – basically he ended up saying, “Okay.” The principal comes in and looks in the room and said, “Is everything okay?” He sees a big guy sitting in the front and I said, “Everything is fine.” By the end of the class, the teacher came up and
said, “[Emmett Height], I realize what you are doing. I would do the same thing for my daughter.”

All three of these stories gave detailed descriptions by parents of African-American students why they held their perceptions of teacher expectations. In each of the stories, the parents felt they had to fight for their children’s inclusion in an academically challenging program and that their students were not receiving equitable consideration. Although each situation was resolved with their respective student gaining access to the program, the parents were left with the impression that the teacher in question did not have high enough expectations for their child from the beginning, which was the source of the problem.

Specific Negative Teacher Incidents

Another theme that surfaced was specific negative incidents with teachers. Denise Bethune mentioned a time when her daughter was in elementary school and her interaction with her teacher was negative. She said,

Cause I know a teacher said to me when [my daughter] was in first grade, Miss Adams who had taught for hundred years and I asked her one day, being a new mother, I don’t care what the background is when you’re a new mother, you are still kind of timid about things, you know, and I had asked her once about [my daughter], how is she doing and her reply to me was how did she put it? “She is where she is expected to be.” When I told my mother that, she was furious. She said, “What does she mean? Where she is expected to be?” She said, “You go
back and you ask specific questions,” and I never liked that teacher. She was not an open-minded teacher. She was very biased. I never liked her.

This single negative experience, that took place in early elementary school, seemed to set the tone for the perceptions regarding teacher expectations for this mother and her family.

Noelle Frederick gave an example of a particular negative interaction with a teacher, when she talked about her daughter’s experience in a theater production in high school. She shared,

And I think I remember her theater production. [My daughter] came home, and she said, “Mom, Momma, I got a part. I got a part, guess!” *The Star is Born*, that’s what they were doing. And I said, “Oh, great, great.” And I said, “What are you gonna be?” And she said, “I’m the maid.” I said, “The what?” She said, “Mom, I’m the maid.” And I’m thinking to myself, “An all-White theater production class, and the only African-American female in the classroom is going to be the maid.” So I started to put my clothes on so I could go up to the school, and… I couldn’t get up there fast enough. And the theater teacher was Black. She was a Black female so. And I just told her, I said, “I don’t know what you’re thinking…but at this point it doesn’t matter.” But, I said, “You make her anything else.” She said, “Well, I’ll have to make her a man.” I said, “I don’t care. But she won’t be the maid.” And she gave [my daughter] these long lines, and she did superb.

Although this was not an academic course, Noelle Frederick equated this negative experience with the theater production manager of the school, alluding back to the
presumption that all representatives of the schools were teachers. She pointed back to this experience as being a part of shaping her perceptions of teacher expectations and as an example of as a negative teacher interaction.

Denise Bethune also mentioned an experience in high school regarding discrepancies in grading between her daughter and one of her daughter’s White friends. She shared,

Once my daughter had an English teacher I forget her name, she’d been there 200 years and she would complain … my child always had White friends… it is just people are people to her…And she had this little friend and they were very close and they would share their papers and she kept telling me, “Mommy so and so, we said practically the same thing and she got a whatever grade and I got a so and so [worse grade].” And this was in high school and after that my husband said, “You’ve got to go up there and see what is going on.” So I did and I had the other child’s paper with my child’s paper and I had no more problems. That was the end of that.

All of the examples highlight a particular incident that occurred between the African-American family and a teacher. The African-American family viewed the interaction as negative and viewed the teacher’s role as detrimental to their student. The descriptions of these experiences conveyed clear impressions of bias, stereotyping and racial discrimination. These negative teacher incidents contributed to the shaping of African-American families’ perceptions of teacher expectations.
Findings 3: Critical Race Theory

In this section, the data was examined using a Critical Race Theory lens and addressed the research questions “How have these perceptions influenced how African-American students approach school?” and “How have these perceptions influenced how African-American parents prepared and advised their child for school?” While the entire research study used Critical Race Theory as a framework, this particular section closely employed Critical Race Theory as an analytical tool by positing the participants’ experiences in the context of an American institutional structure, bringing to the forefront the role that race and power play in the interpretation of everyday life (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). In this section, Critical Race Theory analysis was useful because it further examined the relationship between the African-American community and institutional equity in schooling for populations of color and further clarified the ways in which the participants made meaning of school and their perceptions of their place within that institution (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The tenets of Critical Race Theory were used as the guiding constructs to examine the data and are categorized accordingly by permanence of racism, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, and whiteness as property.

Permanence of Racism Findings

The first principle of Critical Race Theory that I used to explore the data is that of permanence of racism. This tenet acknowledges that race plays a major role in any institution in America and approaches all institutions with the assumptions that race is relevant and salient and an undeniable influence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005; Ladson-
Billings, 1999). The social, economic, and legal fabric of policies and practices in American institutions, including schools, are beholden to a racialized context in which the non-dominant culture is continually marginalized (Aleman, 2007; Beratan, 2008; Green, 1999; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

The participants recognized that their school experience as African-Americans could be no different than the experiences of African-Americans in everyday American life. When she discussed her experience and views on lower expectations of African-American students in the Shuttlesworth school system, Loretta Frederick shared, “it’s a microcosm of the world. I mean it’s a microcosm of the society that we live in.” She attributed the cause of low expectations to society, not the teachers, when she stated, “it’s not even just teachers, it’s just people.” Cameron Bell reiterated this recognition that Shuttlesworth is embedded in a larger racist culture, “[Shuttlesworth] is not different, it is part of our continuum,” after he referenced, “you know the old ditty, if you are a Negro you are going to have to work twice as hard to get half as much.” These participants saw Shuttlesworth rooted in and designed to enact racism.

The participants witnessed that racism in discriminatory treatment of African-Americans in Shuttlesworth. Keisha Bell shared,

I mean I’ve heard bad White students and I’ve seen some White students be, I’ve seen White student get the like oh, Nancy kind of treatment from people in authority. That, that’s Nancy always coming to school high, what are we going to do with her. Whereas, for the Black kids, it’s like a
suspension. You know what I mean. So, I did see a discrepancy in how
the way students who committed similar offensives were dealt with.

Alisha Plessy shared a similar thought, “if Caucasian students and African-
American students are engaging in the same type of behavior, the African-American
students will be punished much quicker.” Emmett Height described a “pecking order” of
who was valued in the school system, “White males, then White females, Black males,
then Black females.” Alisha Plessy described a “pecking order” that incorporates social
class, “if you’re affluent you’re at the highest category, if your parents are involved,
that’s second, average White, average Black, in that order.”

Again, the theme of the role of class emerged repeatedly. Keisha Bell stated, “I
think there are socioeconomic factors involved that end up manifesting racially because
of the way our communities are arranged.” Greg Plessy had a similar supposition when
he addressed why he felt there was a difference of expectations for African-Americans
students, “And it’s maybe a social economical difference. Not so much a racial
difference, but it materializes itself as a racial difference, but in reality it’s a social
economic difference.”

The existence of different socioeconomic classes compounded the discussion of
race in Shuttlesworth and often lines of distinction were not able to be drawn between
race and social class (see also Analysis 1, Intersection of Race and Class). What was
made clear, though, was that somewhere in the intersection of race and social class, sub-
par treatment of a racial group, African-American students, was expected by the
participants.
Interest Convergence Findings

Interest convergence is defined as the willingness to initiate or yield to policies of equity only when the initiative benefits the majority population (Bell, 1980). Interest convergence claims that the true motivation behind social policy improvements is the self-interest of the dominant forces in the culture. Even if it seems as if social morality is the dominant driver of an institutional movement or policy change, interest convergence signifies that marginal progress for the non-dominant culture is just residual from a benefit of the dominant culture (Taylor, 1999).

Examples of interest convergence arose in the findings. Maria Bell felt strongly that the disparity in academic achievement between African-American and White students in the Shuttlesworth school system existed because it was allowed to exist despite available resources to treat it. “Yea, but it is a crying shame that a district as rich, intellectually rich with diversity, and with a legacy and tradition of success, however you want to define it, has not and cannot do more towards African-American achievement.” She later continued, “but we are [Shuttlesworth] …, if we cannot do this here with all the levy passage and parent volunteers and presidents of companies, then Milwaukee, Wisconsin or Peoria, they ain’t got a chance.” This parent acknowledged the resources of the community focused on general academic achievement, but highlighted that it fell short where African-American students’ achievement was concerned.

Maria Bell also shared how a group of parents brought the issue of African-American academic underachievement up with the superintendent of the district to make
real, meaningful changes. She said the superintendent was not willing to listen in the meeting and only wanted to highlight the achievements of the entire school district,

I think the achievement has to do with expectations … of the teachers … the parents of the students and somehow that hasn’t come together. I formed a parent group … and we tried to make [the superintendent] understand that he needed to have expectations for [our] kids . . . and [the superintendent] didn’t get it and the parents were frustrated and they left …. I wanted [the superintendent] to understand that … that they had to build some kind of mechanism installed in the system to fix the gap …. He came to a meeting with a video of how great Shuttlesworth was and … he put the video on and I said to [the superintendent] that’s not what we are here for and he just ignored me … and I said turn that off and let’s get to the point and [the superintendent] turned it off and left.

Maria Bell continued that Shuttlesworth was not only doing little to decrease the achievement gap, but, because many students, especially those from the dominant culture, were achieving in the school system, that the school system was actually increasing the gap because they only addressed the educational needs of the dominant culture.

I think that [Shuttlesworth] is increasing the gap. I think that they have just written off those kids. I think, I mean, how do you drive past the school and not see the kids hanging out like that, don’t have any kind of a
focus that’s worth anything, and it’s because they feel like it’s expected of them.

The Frederick family felt there was strategy and purpose at play in the Shuttlesworth district. Loretta Frederick felt that the district “cherry-picked” the African-Americans that they felt would achieve and invested energy in those select few. She described a method that went beyond typical tracking or ability grouping, but a method where they were “putting the kids they wanted to together.” She described this early grouping as “a core that traveled together, that flowed together. So it was like they had already identified a cohort…. And if they couldn’t bring everybody up together they were going to make sure this certain core got through the maze.” Noelle Frederick agreed with this storyline and hypothesized the thought process of Shuttlesworth,

‘Now we may not be able to save everybody, but we have to save our initial investment of what’s going on.’ … I can see where they [might] say … ‘we’ve got to have a certain amount and a product that we can hold up. … At the end I have to show that not only the White kids made it. There has to be a few others … that I can show you have had success, too.’

These participants speculated that the priority for educating African-American students centered on merely showing that some African-American students could achieve, not because of true interest in closing the achievement gap.

Other examples of interest convergence showcased teachers gaining personal benefits from the success of an African-American student. Keisha Bell discussed her college search. She was already accepted at one Ivy League School, wait-listed at
another and had several promising top college prospects. Nevertheless, a guidance

counselor sought her out to encourage her to apply to a local liberal arts college. She was

completely baffled why the guidance counselor would encourage her to apply to a lower
tier school than the schools where she was accepted already. She then found out that “the
[local liberal arts college] was [the guidance counselor’s] alma mater and she was kind of

on a recruiting mission for them and maybe wanted to get some Black student that had
good grades.” She went on to describe how the guidance counselor discouraged her from

applying to just Ivy League schools, that she needed to have a realistic fall back and that
the top name schools were “too much of a reach for her.” The participant felt the

guidance counselor wanted her to achieve academically, but only in a way that benefited

the counselor, by recruiting her to a college with which she had personal ties to and from

which she would receive a benefit from, if she convinced Keisha Bell to enroll.

Interest convergence was also prevalent in the athletics in Shuttlesworth,

according to the participants in the study. The Bell family son described one of his

African-American peers, a “four-star athlete” who played several Varsity sports for the

school district. However, he felt “that Shuttlesworth didn’t support him academically

enough.” He compared the student to “LeBron James at Saint Vincent-Saint Mary,” and

that he was “really was making money for the school as an athlete. He wasn’t

encouraged to excel in academics…he was getting Bs and Cs and I mean he was a bright

kid. Shuttlesworth used him.”

Alisha Plessy described her interaction with the tennis coach at Shuttlesworth

from whom she received a lot of personal and financial help.
I was probably the only African-American on the tennis team and I remember being given a lot of assistance being African-American. I guess because I am African-American they assumed that I couldn’t afford the equipment. They were like, “Don’t worry, we are going to get yours for half the price or for scholarship.” I remember my tennis coach being involved – but he had a vested interest in my achievement because he was my coach.

An example of interest convergence on a peer level in the Shuttlesworth school district involved Cameron Bell who was the only African-American in hockey in the school district. Additionally, he was one of the only African-American males in the Advanced Placement classes. He described his relationship with White students,

They were happy, they were thankful that they didn’t have to feel polarized…they were thankful that they could say, “What are you talking about racism? My best friend is Black. He’s the left wing on the hockey team. My boyfriend is Black. You know thanks [Cameron Bell]. So, like, I was that guy.

He recognized that his White peers accepted him on some level for himself, but also, because he served a purpose in their lives that they accepted integration and multiculturalism.

**Critique of Liberalism Findings**

The Critique of Liberalism is the next tenet that will be examined in the Critical Race Theory findings. To review, the Critique of Liberalism refers to the underestimation of the significance of race in society. This viewpoint is often realized by discussion surrounding “race matters are an issue in the past,” or that many in the
dominant culture claim to be “colorblind” (Decuir & Dixson, 2004), which makes race an invalid topic of discussion. The Critique of Liberalism also addresses that only small incremental changes have been made in social policy, yet somehow, these changes are applauded and used as an example of society’s “transcendence of race,” although the changes are mediocre at best. The influence of these principles has created barriers of inclusion for students of color in their school environments (Henfield & Washington, 2012; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Rosenberg, 2004).

The Frederick family mentioned that the diversity and liberal atmosphere of Shuttlesworth was a big part of their decision to move there,

…and I wanted to move into an area that intellect was accepted. I didn’t see [neighboring city] like that…They were probably more blue collar. And in Shuttlesworth there was a diverse population of people across all spectrums and that is why we made the conscious decision to move to Shuttlesworth. I think, personally, I find that people that are more educated who are financially more stable are more accepting of minorities. There is less fear factors, more tolerance, and that’s why I thought… Shuttlesworth would be better.

However, when Loretta Frederick attended elementary school, she felt that many of the community members, including the teachers and the superintendent, had prejudices and brought them, unknowingly, to class. After living in the community a few years, Noelle Frederick realized,

They say they treat all the kids the same, but that’s not true, because people are human beings. And I knew that. And I think [my daughter] was able to pick up
on that and that some of these kids were just invisible in class. And they did poor, very poorly . . . early on [my daughter] talked about how a lot of the male students in the school were smart, but they weren’t given opportunity. I think they looked over a lot of them, I think.

Although, they had entered the community hopeful for racial equality, the family came to realize that people of color were overlooked and that “colorblindness” did not mean equity.

This sentiment was also shared by the Washington family. Monica Washington came home and reported that her Advanced Placement teacher never called on her in class, although she often volunteered answers, Natalie Washington advised her to “hold your hand until she does. And tell me if she doesn’t call on you, because we have to make her see you.” This “invisibility” was also shared by Melissa Washington regarding her interaction with White students. She stated, “I don’t know if they saw me. I don’t think they did. I don’t think they cared at all. My existence didn’t make no difference to them.” Colorblindness seemed to be a part of the culture and community at Shuttlesworth, according to this participant. This created an environment where students of color felt there was a barrier between them and their peers and they were not included in the public sphere in the same way that mainstream students were.

The acceptance of mediocrity was also prevalent in the stories of the participants. Alisha Plessy said that the schools system, fostered mediocre, I think mediocrity would not have been an issue for me, had I been pushed a little harder. If when I wanted to drop to a lower level of geometry
class, I went to the counselor right away, I want to be in level 2 instead of level 3, it was ‘okay’ right away, there was never ‘why?’

This fostering of mediocrity in the African-American student body was reiterated by an experience of the Frederick family. Loretta Frederick reported that her teachers told her, “Oh, that B is okay.” When her parents discussed the situation with her teacher, the teacher said, “But, she’s doing wonderful.” The parents inquired, “What can she do to get an A?” Noelle Frederick went on to share her reflections on this conversation, saying, “And while I was talking to her, she’s looking at this Black child and saying she is doing wonderful and I incorporate race into that. Now I wonder if we were White parents, would she react the same way.”

Cameron Bell said the acceptance of mediocrity for African-American students led to lower expectations. He shared how during his college search, even though he was a top student, because he was African-American they expected him to attend different colleges than his White peers.

The teachers are going to high five you in the hallway…you will get into a college or whatever and you will go to Morehouse. I mean if you were a Black kid at Shuttlesworth…and you do well…you can go to Morehouse, you know…Not Harvard or Princeton or Brown, but you can go to Morehouse…it’s just a double standard.

The participant realized that there were expectations for college but they stopped short of being equitable and were certainly below the bar of what was expected of a White student.
Whiteness as Property Findings

The last tenet in which I will examine the data in this Critical Race Theory findings section is whiteness as property, which means that the possession of a certain skin color, namely White, conveys certain privileges (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). Because people of color can never possess this “property” or skin color, they are excluded from the benefits and therefore have a limited access to equitable treatment. Whiteness as Property is heavily embedded in the historical context of America (Harris, 1993) and is seen in today’s institutions, including schools (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Picower, 2009).

Throughout the interviews, many of the participants shared stories where Whiteness gave an advantage. Nicholas Baldwin stated, “I hate the fact that race can be used as a predictor.” Embedded in several examples were the concepts that Whiteness meant students would be in higher level courses, Whiteness meant their teachers expected more from them in class, Whiteness meant they would matriculate to a top level college. Melissa Washington even shared that a teacher was “kinder to the White students.”

The benefits given to White students, that African-American students were often denied, was made clear when Maria Bell shared a story about her daughter and her desire to take an advanced level course. Although she wanted to take the course, her teacher would not recommend her for the higher level. Maria Bell met with the teacher to discuss the situation. She described,

So I went along to Ms. Smith’s house and I showed her the grades in the computer and we sat down and talked about the grades. She opened her grade
book and I looked and I noticed that [my daughter’s] grade were higher than other students. And out of all the other students, who were White, were recommended for the special math class for the eighth grade, but [my daughter] wasn’t. And I said, ‘What’s going on here?’ She said she just didn’t think [my daughter] was ready and that she did not think she was capable. She doesn’t seem to be able to understand the concepts.

In this example, the White students, although their grades were lower were given access to a higher-level class, while the African-American student was denied access, although her grades were better. The mother attributed this ill-treatment to race.

Many of the participants shared that they felt White students had special access to the teachers because they lived in the same neighborhood, socialized with them outside of the classroom, and their parents were sometimes friends with the teachers. The participants felt this gave many of the White students an unfair advantage that they could never have. Emmett Height described an incident with his daughter where she was struggling in a course and the teacher was not addressing her academic needs, yet was addressing the academic needs of other students. He said, “and [the teacher] played golf with a lot of the White males. He had very close relations with their families.” Alisha Plessy described her brother’s tryout for the tennis team, he was excluded intentionally, and her father had to intervene, “That year they had an ‘insider selection’ for tennis, even though he played last year, they didn’t contact the house, wouldn’t let him play because he missed the tryout. My dad went to the principal to let my brother tryout. My dad felt it was a potential race issue.”
During this third stage of findings, the guiding constructs of Critical Race Theory served as an analytical tool. The participants shared that race mattered greatly in school, and they shared stories of racial discrimination. The participants also felt that the school turned a blind eye to the underachievement of African-Americans as a whole, only investing in a few African-American students from which they could reap benefits. The former students and their parents felt that, although Shuttlesworth seemed to embrace integration, the community was racially intolerant. Furthermore, White students received better treatment because of positive assumptions from and forged relationships with teachers.

Findings 4: Emergent Themes

The final findings section in this research study consists of examining the emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience. These topics emerged early on in the research process, during the data gathering stage. This stage of analysis addressed the last research query “How are the emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust and resilience relevant to and inform the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations?” Through this process I examined how these specific themes are intertwined with the families’ experiences, their relationship with school, and possible influences on their perceptions of teacher expectations.

Ethnic Identity Findings

The theme of ethnic identity is relevant to the research focus because of the assertion that the social bond and experience amongst the participants is that of race and
ethnic identity. “Race and ethnicity both represent social or cultural constructs for categorizing people based on perceived differences in biology (physical appearance) and behavior (American Anthropological Association, 1997). Scholars in the literature review discussed the unique formation of African-American identity (Cross, 1991; Ogbu, 1991; Phinney, 2003; Sellers, Morgan & Brown, 2001) and serve as the basis for this section of findings. The responses of the participants are now considered through the lens of ethnic identity to further understand the perceptions of their experiences within the institution and how African-American students experience schooling.

The participants made several references to how they viewed themselves. Almost exclusively, they made references to their race when they talked about who they were. Their race played a role in how they viewed themselves in the context of a student at Shuttlesworth. Melissa Washington referenced this identification with her African-American culture, even though she and her sister were mostly racially isolated in their advanced level classes, when she shared, “We were part of Black culture in our school. I was in class with White people, but I identified with Black people.” Loretta Frederick also shared her high salience of racial identification,

Yeah, I am Black. I view myself like that. I think one is a sense of pride and another is just, because you’ve just always shown you’re Black. You always know you’re Black . . . And I know I am carrying a lot on my shoulders, but I am accepting of that because I want people to see Black pride and that I am articulate and that I can sit here and have a conversation with you and it is ok.

Nicholas Baldwin viewed race as an integral part of who he was as well.
I look at it as a positive. I don’t look at it as anything negative. I’d say, ‘Well, I am who I am and I’m proud of who I am.’ I don’t have to meet any definition or description that you provide for me.

Although there was a strong identification with their race and it seemed to be a source of pride, the participants’ experiences were not always positive when interacting with their African-American peers, especially when it came to ethnicity. Cameron Bell recalled occasions when he was viewed as “not quite Black enough” and Keisha Bell shared that she was accused of “wanting to be White” by other African-American students. Several of the participants reported being called “nerd,” “Oreo,” “bourgeois,” “prissy,” “snooty,” and “goody-two-shoes” and all of the participants saw this name-calling by other African-American students in Shuttlesworth as questioning their racial identity because of their high academic achievement and Advanced Placement course load.

Likewise, the participants, who were all academically successful, did not always feel like they could identify with African-Americans who were not high-achieving. The son of the Baldwin family recalled early on that he and his peers who were high-achieving “knew that we were somehow in a different set than everyone else.” Ashley Height also noted this separation from the general African-American population when she spoke about her group of high-achieving African-American friends and how they identified themselves ethnically,

But I don’t have a very good understanding of what it is to be Black because my friends were kind of the same way I was. We would always say that we were
raceless. We understood what we were doing was about being Black and we always carried race on our back but our race didn’t think we represented them.

Race also played a role in how the participants perceived teachers felt about them. Keisha Bell said pointedly, “Some teachers just don’t like Black students, period.” The son from the same family said his deviation from expected social grouping of a stereotypical African-American students caused discomfort for his teachers. He said, “They didn’t like me . . . I wasn’t in a clique . . . no one could say I was in the band clique or the hockey clique or the cool kids clique or the hip-hop clique . . . and they really couldn’t take that. Because they couldn’t pigeon hole me.” Loretta Frederick also brought up a point of contention between students and teachers because African-American students were singled out for sitting together in a separated ethnic enclave. She recalled her teacher, asking, “Why were you all sitting in the back like that?” She felt that she and her peers were questioned only because of their race.

**Racial Socialization Findings**

Racial socialization is the process in which African-American parents communicate to their children about race. It can be a way for parents to prepare their children for a racially stratified society and can be influential in the way a person interprets his or her experiences (Stevenson, 1994; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Views on race can be taught directly or can be inadvertent. Racial socialization spans how one feels about their other ethnicity, can dictate how one feels about other ethnicities, and can communicate a racial hierarchy created by society. Often, the way a
parent interprets and communicates about race, can influence a child’s perceptions of their experiences through adulthood (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Ogbu, 2003).

African-American history as a source of cultural pride surfaced throughout the interview process. Nicholas Baldwin shared,

We used to have classes in our home when we moved to [Shuttlesworth]. We would have classes on black history in our house. And my mom would teach the classes, things to remember about Africa and we would study different words…this was above and beyond whatever else is going on, but that was something that was important to her. My mom had an afro like Angela Davis a little bit.

He then connected this history to African-American academic achievement in Shuttlesworth,

When you know the struggle for us in this country, us being African-Americans and part of the struggle about education…the “Talented Tenth” and Brown vs. Board of Education. And I just got to feel that some of our great, great leaders of yesteryear would not be thinking too kindly about the lack of us not taking advantage of these opportunities that people have died for.

He concluded by giving advice to future African-American students in Shuttlesworth with,

We have a proud legacy of academic achievement and the civil rights struggle…And to know that we have brilliant scholars, mathematicians, architects, that are part of our history, it is amazing when you think about the fact
that a fraternity like Alpha Phi Alpha could be founded in 1906 at Cornell University, where you had these brothers that came together…can you imagine how smart and how brilliant you had to be to be African American in 1906 and be at Cornell?

While Nicholas Baldwin focused on general African-American history, some participant’s stories centered on personal family accounts. Cameron Bell shared, “My grandfather, my mother’s father…he worked down the street over here on [an inner-city street] and one of the brightest individuals I’ve ever met…I mean he marched with Martin Luther, he marched with Dr. King in Washington.” Likewise, Noelle Frederick told a similar personal story of familial progress that she passed on to her daughter when she shared,

It was always my feeling that you don’t have to hate somebody else to feel good about yourself. You know what I’m saying? You can feel good about yourself because of who you are. Our history is so rich. And to come from where we’ve come from in such a short period of time and be where we are . . . we could not get where we are without White folks either. You know what I’m saying? So it was teaching her self-esteem without having to put someone else down or having to teach anyone hatred. That wasn’t the premise everything was done from. It was done more from who you are. I also wanted them to be able to deal with Black people in other classes and to have an appreciation for that because most of us are only first generation from the projects or no more than second generation from the projects.
Among the parents who were interviewed, there also seemed to be a strong desire and purposeful action for their children to know about their race and ethnicity and to counter the Eurocentric narrative of mainstream culture. Greg Plessy spoke of purposely naming his children Afrocentric names of the “black is beautiful” movement of the 1960s to assure his children were “proud of themselves because of their ethnicity.” Martha Height also shared that she wanted to counter the mainstream culture and instill a sense of pride in being African-American. She shared,

I think [Ashley Height] was very centered into who she was as a Black female because I wanted her to be. I didn’t want her to feel that because her hair was different, because her skin color was different, that it meant she wasn’t attractive, smart, and an intelligent individual and she knows that. I emphasized that a lot. Because she comes from a society that everybody wants to look White. Because our society expects Black people to look a certain way, and if you don’t, you are different. And she was different, because she wore her hair in braids and natural.

Additionally, parents in the study also wanted to assure that their children had a connection to the larger African-American community outside of Shuttlesworth and could relate to the general African-American population. Denise Bethune shared that they were concerned about the racial isolation that she might experience in Shuttlesworth. She stated,

As a matter of fact, my husband and I were very concerned about her living in the Shuttlesworth community with her being Black, because it’s a small community. . . it was not the real world for Black children to be honest with you. It wasn’t, it
wasn’t. My mother [the student’s grandmother] had said to me once, “Child, you need to help this child.” What did she say? How did she put it? “You need to have more contact with her own, so she’ll realize she is Black.”

Noelle Frederick also ensured that Loretta Frederick did not “get so far away from her folks, that she didn’t understand what was going on.” They emphasized a responsibility that their family had to the larger African-American population when they advised their daughter,

You can’t reach one, teach one from up here. Sometimes you have to come down here to be able to do that. You have to be able to talk to Bay-Bay’s mother the way she needs to hear it because she does not want to hear it from up here. And she’s not going to hear from up here because she feels that she’s being talked down to… And I still want our family and our cousins and those kind of folks to know that we are still who we are, we are real. I am still here for you.

Parents also imparted personal stories of hardship to their children. Denise Bethune shared how her husband could not get a job when they first moved to the area, although he had an exceptional I.Q. and was ranked high in the military. She described the situation as “blatant racism” and said that her daughter knew how hard it was for her father to get a job in his field. The mother shared that these types of “life experiences have gone into the rearing of their daughter.” She shared that the racism experienced by her parents (the student’s grandparents) affected how she was raised herself. Because her parents were both from the South in the Jim Crow era, she said, “…and I wasn’t even allowed to babysit White family’s children when growing up because my father did not
want to see me holding a White child’s hand down the street or pushing them in a wagon.”

Maria Bell shared a racially motivated hardship in a school setting. She spoke of when she was the first in her family to go to college and then law school. While in law school she shared,

My professors said that I was taking up space that White people should have and they said it to my face. They could get away with it then. In laws school, my tax professor told me he was giving me an F because I would never find work in this profession, number one. But number two, no one would ever ask me to do taxes.

The parents also shared stories of how they advised their students about race relations in school in order to prepare them for inequities they might experience. Denise Bethune shared,

I said you’ve always had all kinds of friends. You should continue this. Especially have one good white friend in your class and you study and share things with academically . . . especially when you go in to talk to that white professor. He’s going to share some things with her that he will not have shared with you. To know what’s really going on, you have that friend. And, ladies, as we sit at this table, many people will not agree with me but my daughter found it to be the truth.

Emmett Height shared,

We also emphasized to her that the world is a lot better than it was for my father and my grandfather and for your mother’s father and grandfather. But, America
is still not fair and equal and even if you have your education as a Black
individual you may not get the same rewards as if you were a White individual.
So, we kind of reminded her that even though you do all of this, you still might
not reap the rewards that your friend may. A person may be short and fat. But,
get over it. But, if you are short and fat and White, you have a better chance than
a short and fat Black person.

Martha Height added, “And that’s what’s important and I think that makes you into the
person you become educationally, intellectually and if you don’t have that strong
background and respect you can’t survive in our society.”

**Cultural Mistrust Findings**

The expectation that racism would continue leads this research into the next
section of findings. Cultural Mistrust is defined as members of one culture distrusting
those of another culture (Irving & Hadley, 2005). In the African-American community,
in particular, because there is a general perception that racial discrimination occurs daily,
there is an expectation that racism will continue (Greene, Way & Pahl, 2006; Seaton,
2009). Deeply seated in a historical context and the previous experiences of African-
Americans, there is little confidence that mainstream America would treat everyone of
African-American descent fairly (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). The cynicism towards and
lack of trust for Whites and White America has led many African-Americans to distrust
all American institutions, including schools (Gadsden, Smith & Jordan, 1996; Ogbu,
1991), and was an emergent theme throughout the interviews.
The notion that two separate communities existed in Shuttlesworth arose in the findings: a White community and an African-American community. Noelle Frederick shared, “I did realize, though, that not everybody was as warm and embracing of the integration that we provided in Shuttlesworth at the time.” Denise Bethune shared, “Shuttlesworth is very separate inside. People don’t understand how separate, the races, they function and how they live.”

Loretta Frederick spoke of the separation of the races within the schools, and how she only intermingled with other races for academic or school club purposes. “To me it was just like Shuttlesworth. We all go to our little mixed meetings. We have to do our business, and then everybody goes home to their separate worlds.” She continued, “We get together, we have our meetings, we have our different groups that we’re in and we do our thing. They go to their social world, and I go to my social world, and that’s the way it is.” She later stated, “My [academic] core group in school became more diverse. My [social] core group outside of school stayed the same.” Both Melissa and Monica Washington reiterated this separation between the student body population along racial lines when they shared that their friendships absolutely transcended economic lines, but along racial lines, “not as much.”

Denise Bethune shared that she felt “self-conscious” and “uncomfortable” around Whites in school. Loretta Frederick shared that, when she was invited to a birthday party in the upper elementary grades, she was not going to go because she would be the only African-American. She shared that the other African-American girl in the gifted classes had already turned down the invitation because she knew she would feel uncomfortable
and “was not going over there.” Loretta Frederick did go, but shared her hesitancy, saying, “I was safe at school, and I was safe at home, but I did not know if going over to her house, if I would be okay.”

One participant shared that they talked about race with her child, because she “knew race was going to be an issue.” Another participant shared that she knew many African-Americans “felt a conspiracy by Whites against Blacks.” Other participants were more adversarial with their responses and used phrases like “they couldn’t put anything over on us” and “we watched over his education like a hawk, because [our son] was a Black man.” One student participant said her mom “listened for the clues, to see if they were messing with her daughter” and another shared that they “didn’t feel safe and secure and always had to be on guard . . . I didn’t think anything would be fair. I didn’t look for it to be because I knew it wasn’t there.” One participant described it as “a double message. We want you to play with them, but at the same time, we want you to remember that you have to be careful, you can’t trust all of them.”

**Resilience Findings**

The final section is the examination of the emergent theme of resilience. In education, resilience is the investigation of a student’s ability to achieve regardless of social, physical, or mental adversities that arise in a student’s environment (Arrington & Wilson, 2000). Although, African-American students report having a higher stress level than non-minority students because of perceived racially motivated discrimination (Munsch & Wampler, 1993), African-American students do achieve academically and this is attributed to several different aspects of resilience, varying from internal factors to
external support (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Gayles, 2005; Marsh, Chaney & Jones, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008). The responses of the participants regarding the theme of resilience varied as well.

The participants echoed each other when it came to “owning” their education. Although the research is about perceptions of teacher expectations it was conveyed that the power of academic achievement did not lay in the hands of their teachers, but, rather, within themselves and their families. When Nicholas Baldwin was questioned directly about teacher expectations, he said that he could have taken higher level courses but did not put the responsibility of this on just his teacher, “I mean, I really could have taken a more challenging course load and maybe someone—my mom or my dad or teachers or somebody—didn’t push hard enough to do that.” Although Nicholas Baldwin recognized that he could have done more academically, and that others, could have ensured that he was challenged, he placed the ultimate responsibility on himself. Likewise, Noelle Frederick, after saying that the teachers did not have high enough expectations, followed up with, “but I think [Loretta Frederick’s] expectations were really coming from home and what had been instilled inside of her.” When Helen Bethune was asked the question of whether teachers had high enough expectations for her, she exhibited internal and externally induced resilience, “I didn’t care.” She then followed up with,

I really didn’t think too much about them…And I don’t think I really cared too much about anybody’s opinion really . . .I always felt kind of confident with who I was and you know there was enough stuff going on with church and family and friends, it wasn’t that big of a deal for me.
Although several of the participants took ownership of their education and seemed confident in who they were as students, there was a fear of living up to a negative stereotype (Steele, 1998), which motivated some to achieve academically. Loretta Frederick shared,

If I said the wrong thing it would have been you know, because I’m a Black girl. You want to say the right thing because, they may already have low expectations, so you have to be like extra prepared, smarter, a couple steps ahead of the game. So, that they don’t look at you like that… I knew that there was such a small group of us in these classes to represent the larger population that I have to speak for the group…in student council when we would have speeches or when we would have to represent the class. I felt like I was representing the black students in my class…I had a lot on me. I felt that I was carrying a lot of people with me.

Helen Bethune reaffirmed this added pressure of wanting to do well academically because she feared failure would be attributed to her race,

Yeah, I never want to be labeled as that Black girl who didn’t do right. We were talking about expectations and somehow the Black people were not expected to perform or do as well as White people . . . we are here together, but the Black people here are not going to do well, to me, it is a horrible thing to have associated with me, that it was just painful to me. I am not smart or I am not successful, just because I am Black. I am not saying people are looking for me to mess up, but they are like, Oh, you didn’t do that . . . because [your] Black.
There were also positive motivators for achievement that contributed to resilience. One theme that surfaced was that of high academic expectations as a natural part of the environment they grew up in. One participant mentioned “it was always an assumption that we would go to college.” A mother described her daughter’s family environment and the expectation of academic success as “Part of the air she breathed in our house. My sister has her Master’s...her godfather is a Ph.D. And when you interact around people that have degrees, you don’t look at it being different...it wasn’t like it was odd.”

Another family described their high respect for each other academically and said, “…so you know, we didn’t have to go outside of ourselves ever you know to look to anybody. You know people would ask me sometimes who my role models were, and I was like, my mother and my sister.”

Many of the participants mentioned a personal legacy of education in their family in their educational experience. Nicholas Baldwin spoke to this source of resilience, The other thing that really motivated me was just to know the success that my parents had in a real tangible way. My father graduated from Case Western Reserve in the fifties. He owned his own business. So, there were things that were realities in my life that showed me that I could do anything that I wanted to do. It’s not just academic, you know, something that I read in a book. This is my father on a day to day basis, managing his own national business, or my mom teaching in a school system, while I go to school, and those experiences were important.
Helen Bethune talked about the legacy of education in her family as a source of pride as well. She shared, “many Black people don’t have that – they can’t say that their ninety year old grandma has a Master’s degree.” She said Denise Bethune reiterated the significance of this and told her, “You need to understand that it is a special thing.”

Cameron Bell described his mother as a source of strength,

I knew where she had come from. I knew that she had grown up poor in the inner city and had struggled to get where she is without a lot of support. And I was proud of that. I was proud of where I came from and that had a lot to do with my success. I was extraordinarily proud of my mom and still am.

Another strand of resilience that surfaced was the participants’ belonging to an African-American academic peer group. Loretta Frederick shared,

I had a really good group of friends and we had healthy competition. And now that I look back on it, I didn’t see it then, but I see it now. We always wanted the best for each other…we always kept encouraging each other and you wanted to do as well as your friends. And we all did well and I think that really helped. Not directly with “Oh, I got this” or “Oh, I got that,” but we all wanted to succeed. And we would set goals…whatever you said people held you to it. What did you say about this? Or what’s happening with this? Are you still pursuing that? It was very healthy.

Melissa Washington also credited her peers with playing a major role in their academic success,
I would say that the group of people that I hung out with were pretty much like me academically…At least we wanted the same things…we consciously pushed each other…mediocre wasn’t good enough…you know, we had a really good support group I think, outside of home…if you weren’t planning on going to college, we looked at you like, what’s wrong with you? This is what you do… it’s that expectation that you do.

Likewise, Ashley Height spoke positively of her peer group when she shared, “They were all focused…all National Merit Scholars, all the girls in the group. So they were focused on doing well at school and having a social life, too. But, you know, balancing it.”

Some of the parents shared stories of supporting their student’s tight-knit academic African-American group by forming their own network with the parents. Maria Bell shared this interaction between the African-American parents when she said, “We talked to each other all the time and we got all the same rules. The parents met and discussed what those rules were going to be in advance. And we stayed in touch whenever there was any concern… and if all the parents have the same expectations of all the kids that hang out then they are all going to achieve because they know that’s what everyone is doing.” Loretta Frederick shared that her parents were friends with her friends’ parents,

The parents became involved with each other out of that little group…They were always making sure we were together, to support each other and to encourage each other… and the parents worked so hard to keep our little group of girls together, because they knew that if we did have each other, it would be easier.
There also was a message of education mattering more than anything else, even greater than race. Greg Plessy shared the importance of education and how he instilled that in his children,

I mean living in America, education is the vehicle to your success, you can’t succeed without education. So it is very important. There are ways you can succeed, but they are not respectable…There is a correlation to those that are motivated and income and there is a correlation between income and the level of education you obtain…And education is the vehicle to get what you really need…If you are growing up in this country and you want to be something, you want to do substantial things, it requires an education.

Maria Bell said, “I could look out and see people doing all kinds of things and I wasn’t concerned with what color they were because I figured anybody could do it and I could and so could my kids. She goes on to say, “Color had nothing to do with it. I refused to allow that to be a factor into what we wanted to obtain.” She continued with,

They knew that their race had nothing to do with their ability to achieve. They knew that from the day that they were born…I mean we addressed life as if there are no differences between you and everybody are the same. Some people want more than others and they work harder, but that’s the measure. If you’re willing to work you will get whatever you want, despite color. And I made it clear to them that would never be an excuse I would accept.

This section of findings sought to investigate the themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience. The participants shared how their ethnic
identity influenced how they viewed themselves and how others viewed them. The former students felt a strong sense of cultural pride because their parents emphasized a connection to African-American history and community. Equally stressed were stories of racism in preparation for hardships in a racially stratified society. An emphasis on the importance of education, the legacy of academic achievement, and the formation of peer groups were mechanisms participants employed to achieve academic success.

**Summary of Findings**

The eight families that participated in the study provided a wealth of data. The first section addressed the question of “What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American student and their families?” The answer to two specific questions from the interview protocol, “Do you think teachers had high enough expectations?” and “Do you think the teacher had lower expectations for Black students?” were examined for this step. The overwhelming response was that students and their families did not perceive that teachers had high enough expectations for African-Americans and that teachers’ expectations were lower for African-American students than others. The responses revealed that the participants saw the teacher as an extension of the institution and saw the institution as an extension of the world. The data also revealed that the participants felt that race and class were inseparable and often conflated by the teachers. The participants also felt that marginal academic performance was expected and considered acceptable from African-American students and that only a select few African-Americans were given the opportunity to rise above mediocrity. In
the findings, the research showed that there was a disconnect between African-American students and their teachers.

The experiences that helped shaped the perceptions of the participants were explored. In the second stage of findings, the data shared a few positive experiences that African-American students had with their teachers, but the participants placed emphasis on several negative incidents. While some families could not name a particular incident that occurred with a teacher, they were left with a negative impression regarding teacher expectations for African-American students. Other parents could pinpoint specific interactions that led to them believe that teachers expectations were lower for African-American students and stories of actively fighting for equity within the school system were also shared.

Using a Critical Race Theory lens, examples of the tenets of permanence of racism, interest convergence, whiteness as property, and the critique of liberalism all were found in the data. The third step of findings addressed the questions of “How have these perceptions influenced how students approach school?” and “How have these perceptions influenced how African-American parents prepare and advise their student for school?” The relationship between the African-American population and the institution of schooling were further explored in this process.

Finally, the themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience were discussed. The data revealed that these topics were relevant to the participants and intertwined with the participants’ experiences with their school and their
perceptions of teacher expectations. The findings gave significant insight into the ways in which African-American families perceive teacher expectations.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This research explored the questions: What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families? What experiences shaped these perceptions? How have these perceptions influenced how students approach school? How have these perceptions influenced how African-American parents prepare and advise their student for school? How are the emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience relevant to and inform the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations?

From the eight participant families, data was gathered through interviews. That data was analyzed in a four-step process that began with the examination of the direct questions regarding the perceptions of teacher expectations. Then, stories surrounding the answers were analyzed and the findings revealed the participants’ reasoning and uncovered counter-stories. This was followed by the findings within the data using a Critical Race Theory lens. Finally, the emergent themes were investigated by examining the relevant narratives.

In this section, I will discuss the findings further on the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations. I will examine how the findings relate to the existing literature in the field of education and the how the data inform the purpose, need, and significance of this study. The discussion is organized in the same order as the findings in chapter 4. The implications of this study, the direction for future research, the conclusion of this dissertation, and the implications of this study follow.
Discussion of the Perceptions of Teacher Expectations

What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families? The response was consistent and robust across all participants that teachers did not have high enough expectations for African-American students and that teachers had lower expectations for African-American students than for other students. Even when students felt that some teachers had high enough expectations for them personally, they qualified that they were the exception among African-American students.

Participants often conflated the term teacher with any authority connected to the school, be it counselors, coaches, administration or security guards. Participants viewed teachers as agents of the school system, rather than individuals that operated independently. This consistent interpretation of the teacher as representing the system in the minds of the participants is consistent with the tenet of Critical Race Theory, the permanence of racism (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2005; Maynard, 2004). The participants viewed school as an extension of society and, like all institutions in America, expected the school to harbor racist beliefs and actions. The participants’ interpretation also illustrated one of the emergent themes, cultural mistrust (Gadsden, Smith, & Jordan, 1996; Ogbu, 1991; Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001; Terrell & Terrell, 1981). The participants largely felt that neither the institution nor the representatives of the institution were trustworthy. In conclusion, the interpretation by the participants that the term teacher meant anyone associated with the school, that the school was representative of society, and that the school is not trustworthy, is neither surprising nor unexpected as it
aligned with existing literature and theory that indicates this is the way some African-Americans view the world.

Participants often could not determine whether teachers had lower expectations because of their skin color or their economic status. Whether it was race or class as the initial catalyst for lower expectations, the participants felt that the teachers were expecting mediocre academic performance from African-American students. This finding was similar to the scholar of Rist (1970, 1973) that links teacher expectations to a student’s social class. This finding also aligned with the work of Lightfoot (1978) that discussed how a student’s race, class, and gender factors into how a teacher perceives a student. This is reiterated in the work of Dusek and Joseph (1983) who also conclude that race and social class of a student influence the level of expectations teachers have for them. Historically, the role of race and class in the education system has led to the limited access of African-Americans to school systems of Shuttlesworth caliber. Although the participants have gained entry into the neighborhood and schools of Shuttlesworth, they felt restricted in their ability to receive a quality education due to racial and social class bias on the part of the authorities of the institution.

The majority of the participants were enrolled in high-level classes, yet they were viewed as the exceptions and not the rule for African-American achievement. The participants felt that White students were favored for higher-level classes and that African-American students were rarely selected for these same classes simply because White students were often given the benefit of the doubt regarding academics and African-Americans were not. Baron, Tom, and Cooper, (1985) and Demeis and Turner
(1978) found that teachers have more favorable expectations of White students than African-Americans students and research by Brophy and Good (1974), Cooper (1979), Braun (1976), and McDonald and Elias (1976) found that teachers are likely to treat students differently based upon whether they believe they are high-achieving or low-achieving, which, in turn, affects various teacher behaviors, inclusive of classroom placement. The participants’ sense about the unfair advantages White peers held in access to higher-level classes because of the sole factor, the color of their skin, is an illustration of the Critical Race Theory tenet, whiteness as property, where whiteness was the attribute they could never possess.

**Discussion of the Experiences of the Participants**

What experiences shaped these perceptions? The direct narratives and personal stories of the participants revealed both positive and negative experiences. The findings were based on descriptions with the tenet of Critical Race Theory of counter-storytelling, where the actual voice of the participants could be heard directly (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

While the general consensus was that teachers had lower expectations for African-American students, some participants shared stories of exceptional teachers who were a positive influence on their lives. The participants felt these teachers cared about them individually, had high expectations for them as scholars, and gained a reputation for expecting the best of all students, including African-Americans. These findings were consistent with literature showing how particularly valuable teacher expectations are to African-American students (Ferguson, 1998; Paul, 2005; Silver, Smith, & Nelson, 1995).
Similarly, Woolley, Strutchens, Gilbert, and Martin (2010) concluded that the positive correlation between teacher expectations and student motivation is particularly strong for African-American students. Scholarship regarding African-Americans who overcame the achievement gap emphasized that students excel when they feel like the teacher and school supports them (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Perry, 2011).

Some participants held undefined ideas about teacher expectations, similar to the students in the study conducted by Babad, Bernieri, and Rosenthal (1989, 1991) and Babad and Taylor (1992), while others held definitive ideas. Several studies confirmed that most students, even elementary age, hold definitive beliefs of the expectations their teacher have for them (Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2000; Weinstein, Marshall, Brattesani, & Middlestadt, 1982; Weinstein, Marshall, Sharp, & Botkin, 1987; Weinstein & Middlestaft, 1979).

The participants shared stories that supported this notion that the teachers treated African-American students differently than mainstream White students, as did Good (1981). Still others shared stories where they were at direct odds with a teacher as did Strayhorn’s (2008) African-American male students who felt negatively differentiated from other students in the classroom, suffered from embarrassment, and were humiliated or disrespected by a teacher. Several participants in this study felt they had to fight to overcome negative teacher assessment in order to receive an equitable education.

**Discussion of Critical Race Theory Findings**

How have these perceptions influenced how students approach school? How have these perceptions influenced how African-American parents prepare and advise their
student for school? The Critical Race Theory findings of the permanence of racism, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, and whiteness as property, will be discussed below.

**Permanence of Racism Discussion**

The participants felt the interactions with teachers could be no different than the interactions they, as African-Americans, have with the rest of the world, inclusive of low expectations and discrimination. There was a consensus among the participants of the study that race played a critical role in school, just like it did in the world. The participants were not surprised that teachers had low expectations of African-Americans and they seemed to almost presume that all teachers would have lower expectations. This belief that racism, bias, and discrimination are an expected part of the school system is consistent with the tenet of permanence of racism of Critical Race Theory, which posits that because the school system is an institution of America, race is central to the structure and culture of school, whether subtly or explicitly (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005; Maynard, 2004).

**Interest Convergence Discussion**

Participants felt that the school system did little to address the academic underachievement of African-Americans as a whole. Rather, the schools were interested in making sure there were just enough African-Americans with high achievements so a few student representatives of color could be showcased. Participants gave examples of teachers who paid them particular attention because the school system benefited from
their interaction, such as athletics or college recruitment. One participant gave an example of White student peers befriending him for social reasons, not just because they liked him, but to indicate their lack of bias toward African-Americans. The tenet of interest convergence explained that the driving force behind the actions of the school system, the teachers, the coaches and some White students were interpreted as self-serving. Actions that seemed to demonstrate equal treatment happened to produce more benefit to the dominant powers (Bell, 1980, 2004; Taylor, 1999).

**Critique of Liberalism Discussion**

The data showed that the participants felt that the Shuttlesworth community wanted diversity, but not to the extent that it disrupted the way of life already established in the community. Although it seemed Shuttlesworth was more embracing of African-Americans than neighboring suburbs, varying degrees of resistance manifested throughout the community. Some participants felt that the schools were ill-prepared to integrate African-American students. Substantial literature on the achievement gap has shown that academic institutions are a source of academic underachievement of African-American students. Howard (2006) and Lewis, James, and Hancock (2008) both discussed the high percentage of White teachers in the school systems and their lack of preparedness to interact with students of color. This lack of cultural preparation not only affected the teacher and limited their personal and professional development (McIntosh, 1988), but also created an atmosphere that has a negative effect on students of color (Lake, 1990; Kunjufu, 2002).
Participants felt that teachers expected mediocre academic performances from African-American students. Counselors recommended local and state universities, although their academic performance warranted Ivy League colleges. Dixson (2007) in explicating the critique of liberalism tenet of Critical Race Theory, cautioned that only minor changes to race relations are desired by institutions and real, lasting policies are not implemented. Decuir and Dixson (2004) concluded that institutions implement only small, incremental changes, giving the illusion that there is a movement towards equity, yet no real power shift takes place.

**Whiteness as Property Discussion**

Participants often felt that “race was used as a predictor” in Shuttlesworth. White students were afforded benefits because they were assumed to perform better academically and their families traveled in similar circles as the teachers outside of the classroom. A participant reported that although an African-American student and a White student could commit the same offense at school, the African-American student usually received harsher punishment. These experiences are embedded in the historic underpinnings of whiteness as property, a tenet of Critical Race Theory, where being White affords a person privileges which a person of color cannot obtain (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). These experiences spoke not only to a lack of fair treatment, but also to the reality that, as long as whiteness is seen as property, African-American students in the school could not experience equity.
**Discussion of Emergent Themes**

This discussion will address the research question of “How are the emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust and resilience relevant to and inform the topic of perceptions of teacher expectations?” These themes emerged early on in the research process and warranted further exploration.

**Ethnic Identity Discussion**

The participants certainly identified themselves as African-American. Even if they attended classes with mostly White students, they socialized with other African-Americans students outside the classroom, in the community, and during other social events in the area. As one participant summarized, “I identify with Black people.” This aligned with the scholarship of Phinney (2003) where persons of color identify with their cultural group, especially when in culturally diverse settings.

Although the participants identified as African-American, they did not oppose academic achievement. This is in opposition to Ogbu (1991) that theorized African-Americans resistance to the mainstream culture is heightened in involuntary minorities, a population that was historically incorporated for subservient purposes by force. Instead, the participants embraced their ethnic identity and their academic achievement and did not view these attributes as contradictory self-identifiers.

Findings showed that the high achieving participants were often not accepted by other African-Americans in the school. Many described incidents of name-calling because they were “not quite Black enough,” by an unspoken standard shared by the Shuttlesworth African-American community, as well as the larger African-American
community. While the accusation of “Acting White” did not cause participants to cease their pursuit of academic achievement as some of the students in Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) study, the accusation did cause distance between the participants and other African-American students who did not subscribe to high academic achievement or higher level courses, as seen in the work of Cook and Ludwig (1998), Neal-Barnett (2001), and Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, and Harpalani (2001).

Participants sometimes identified heavily with being African-American. At other times, though, the participants purported that race played a lesser role. The centrality of race in a person’s self-identification also varied within the participant pool. This variance in racial salience is consistent with Cross and Strauss (1999) and the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity proposed by Sellers, Morgan, and Brown (2001) and Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998), that both concluded the relevance of race is dependent on the individual, the situation, and their life development.

The participants’ identification of how they regarded “the race” as a whole, had little variance. Findings show that the participants consistently held a high regard for their race. The view that race placed in expectations was also equally consistent, and the participants asserted that teachers had a low regard for the African-American race. While Sellers, Morgan and Brown (2001) concluded that regard as a dimension of racial identity varies by individual, this research finds that the participants’ collective self-esteem, how one feels about one’s race and how one feels others perceive one’s race, was constant.
Racial Socialization Discussion

Many participants shared a strong sense of cultural pride. The families placed an emphasis on African-American history, such as African-American “firsts” and the Civil Rights Movement. Some families spoke about personal family history at home, the family’s connection to African-American historical movements, and the academic and economic achievements of their ancestors. Rodriguez, Umana-Taylor, Smith, and Johnson (2009), found that a strong sense of cultural pride is typically a message of elevated importance and is often passed down from generation to generation in the African-American community. Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, and West-Bey (2009) found that messages of cultural pride may contribute to better performance in school. Since all of the participants in this study excelled academically, their conclusion explained and supported the data in this research.

The participants also brought up the importance of being connected to all African-Americans, from those in the immediate community to those that were economically disadvantaged. The connection to all African-Americans is a part of racial socialization that is discussed by Demo and Hughes (1990) and Hughes and Chen (1999). They reviewed how racial socialization encompasses the entire group identity, how the group members relate to others outside the group, how the group members relate to each other, and how the group is viewed by others. The participants felt it was important to prepare their students for the connection to all African-Americans, not only to those living in Shuttlesworth and that race was the dominant factor that steered their group alliances in a pluralistic context.
Past stories of racial discrimination were often shared in the families and the student participants were well aware of the hardships that their parents and grandparents went through. The scholarship of racial socialization by Stevenson (1994) and Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, and Allen (1990), addressed how parents communicated to their children in preparation for a racially stratified society. This went beyond cultural transmission, the passing down of cultural traits (Berry, 1992), and entailed explaining the function of race in society and how race affects an African-American’s everyday life.

Many of the stories of perceived racial discrimination and bias experienced at Shuttlesworth were told by both the alumni and the parents. Although they were shared separately, it was readily obvious, because often the stories of the students mimicked that of the parent, that the student and the parent had discussed the incidents previously and may have even reflected on the event in question over the years. An accusation of cheating, the exclusion from a high level course, and the hardship of being the only African-American in the class were all shared as specific incidents by the students and the parents on different occasions and the role that race played in these scenarios were identical in their stories. Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006) discussed how there is a strong correlation between the way in which a child is racially socialized and how and an individual views the world in adulthood.

A few parent participants revealed that they had specifically prepared their students for a school that was unfair and discriminatory. Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, and West-Bey (2009) theorized that this preparation may have a negative outcome on academic achievement for students. However, the students in this study all excelled
academically. The findings in this study align better with Hughes and Chen (1999), who found that the preparation for bias can serve as a protective mechanism and a buffer for perceived racial actions.

**Cultural Mistrust Discussion**

The findings revealed a definite sense of separation of the races in Shuttlesworth. While many of the students were in class or in extracurricular activities with White students, their social center was in the African-American community. As one participant told, “we come together to do our business, and then everybody goes home to their separate worlds.” Although the community and the school appeared to be integrated, the social segregation played a role in the participants’ view of Shuttlesworth as still separated by race.

The participants also shared an uneasy feeling sometimes around Whites. This was inclusive of parent participants, who described feelings of self-consciousness and being uncomfortable around White parents. This also included student participants who were unsure they would be “okay” in a social setting where they were the only African-American person. Au (1980), Erickson and Mohatt (1982), Deyhle and LeCompte (1994), and Ogbu (1987) all discussed how barriers are created between the races because of cultural variances and that these differences create tensions in the interaction between members of these cultures in school settings.

Many of the participants anticipated race being an issue at Shuttlesworth and did not trust the school system to be fair towards African-Americans. Greene, Way, and Pahl (2006) and Seaton (2009) discussed the fact that many African-Americans had an
expectation of racism due to past experiences. Terrell and Terell (1981), in their scholarship concerning cultural mistrust, shared that there is little confidence in the African-American community for equitable treatment from White Americans. The consensus of mistrust shared by the participants directly parallels the work of Gadsden, Smith, and Jordan (1996) where African-Americans did not feel that the school systems had their children’s best interest in mind.

**Resilience Discussion**

In general, the participants seemed to take individual responsibility for their education while at Shuttlesworth. During their tenure, while they felt that teachers had lower expectations for African-Americans, they did not allow this to hinder their academic achievement in school. This sentiment aligned with Arrington and Wilson’s (2000) description of resilience as an ability to achieve regardless of social, physical, or mental adversities that may arise in a student’s environment. Although the participants recognized that being African-American in an educational environment that seemed to favor White students added a level of stress, also mentioned by Munsch and Wampler (1993), they were able to achieve academically.

A motivator for achievement, at least in the view of some of the participants, was the fear of living up to a negative stereotype of African-Americans. Many of the participants expressed feeling the pressure to represent the entire African-American race in their studies and their extracurricular school activities. Marsh, Chaney, and Jones (2012) found similarly that participants of their study had feelings of intimidation when attending a diverse school. However, whereas Marsh, Chaney, and Jones’ (2012)
participants found resolve and built resilience by joining after school activities that emphasized social diversity, the participants of this study never mentioned moving past the fear of living up to a negative stereotype of African-Americans. Rather, intimidation was a continual contributor to the psychological stress as advanced in the seminal work of Steele and Aronson (1998).

Many of the participants discussed the idea that academic achievement was just a part of their daily home environment and the fact that they were part of a legacy of academic achievement. In the literature regarding overcoming the achievement gap, Christenson, Rounds, and Gorney (1992) also noted that environments that set a general tone of academic achievement are more likely to results in student academic achievement. They, along with Clark (1983), also noted that parenting styles that have clear standards and expectations promote academic achievement. This literature supported the findings of this research and implied that a sense of resilience is fortified by a pro-academic environment and contributed to African-American student success. It is also worth noting that a high proportion of parent participants in this study were highly educated.

Peer groups played a role in academic achievement for many of the participants. Not only did the student participants mention the role of peer groups, but the parent participants also shared that they formed their own adult peer groups with other parents that held similar academic visions for their students. Cunningham and Swanson (2010) and Williams and Bryan (2013) also emphasized the positive influence peer groups have on academic achievement related to educational resilience. The findings of this study are
consistent with Datnow and Cooper (1996) who also found peer groups had a positive effect on African-American students, especially when attending a predominantly White school. Additionally, Yan (1999) asserted parents building networks with other families can positively affect student achievement. This is reiterated by the work of Carbonaro (1998) and Kahne and Bailey (1999) who both found that parent networks fortify scholastic success.

The importance of education was echoed amongst the participants. The role of education leading to a better way of life and as an obligation to one’s self, as well as the community, was repeated by several participants. This closely aligns with part of Gayles’ (2005) ethnography that found placing a high value on the correlation between academic success and a positive future helped shore up resilience in students. However, whereas the students who participated in Gayles’ (2005) study bracketed their academic successes as just a small part of who they were, to keep their ethnic identity intact, the participants of this study saw their academic achievement and their ethnic identity as the totality of who they were. In this study, the participants aligned more with the findings of Hemmings (1996) where students were able to “resolve conflicts between being black and being a model student” (p.22), rather than separating the two identities.

Two particular notions of resilience that were present in the literature did not surface in this study. The first was a strong emotional connection to the school, which the work of Goodenow (1993), Osterman (2000), and Voelkl (1997) all found to be a significant indicator of academic achievement. Yet, none of the participants mentioned this connection to Shuttlesworth specifically. Additionally, the love for learning did not
surface as a motivator. The absence of these two factors supported Ferguson’s (2002b) theory that African-Americans are driven by external motivators more than White peers. This finding also aligned with the study of Griffin (2006), where no participant, although academically successful, placed an emphasis on the love of learning as their motivation for achievement.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation sought to answer the question “What are the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families?” and “What experiences led to these expectations?” This study concludes that the perceptions of teacher expectations among African-American students and their families were not favorable and there was an overwhelming agreement among the participants that teachers did not have high enough expectations for African-American students and teachers had lower expectations for African-American students than others. The findings of this study led to the conclusion of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience were relevant to and informed the participants’ perceptions of teacher expectations. Although the participants were residents of Shuttlesworth, they were denied equitable education because of racial and social class bias and that, although Shuttlesworth claimed to value diversity, neither the community nor the school were culturally prepared to manage diverse student populations and were resistant to cultural integration. This conclusion is drawn due to the institutional focus on the needs of the dominant culture exclusively, the lack of fair and equitable treatment, and the mediocre expectations of African-American students. Further, it is concluded that, despite the
participants’ expectation of the racial bias teachers and other authorities in the school might hold, these African-American students and families did not allow it to hinder their academic achievement, but instead strengthened their progress by forging relationships with individuals within the African-American community who shared the same educational values.

**Future Research**

The emergent themes of ethnic identity, racial socialization, cultural mistrust, and resilience were explored as to how they informed the perceptions of teacher expectations. However, each of these themes merit individual extensive investigation, as they offered unique insight on the way in which members of the African-American community relate to the institution of schooling. Future research could explore these topics in greater detail, independent of teacher expectations. Racial socialization, which specifically examines how African-American parents socialize their children for a racially stratified society, can be analyzed by comparing the shared stories between a student participant and a parent participant. Ethnic identity can be further examined to study the unique developmental stages of ethnic identity formations in African-Americans in early childhood and adolescence.

Additionally, the trends across generations of African-Americans could be explored. It was surprising to see the number of parents in the study who held advanced education degrees, something that is relatively recent to the African-American community, generationally speaking (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2014). This observation could lead to the exploration of the rise of the Black
middle class and the role educational attainment and achievement plays in the formation of new African-American generations.

Teachers, administrators, and researchers alike must continue to explore opportunities that will give further understanding about the complex relationship between African-American students and the schools that they attend. Only then will we see improvement and academic success of all students and a true progression to a more just society. Likewise, the African-American community can draw on the internal and peer resources that were key to building resilience, which attributed to academic success. In sum, the way in which African-Americans socially negotiate their school environment can inform educational institutions to better educate and relate to a population that is typically marginalized, possibly leading to an improvement in academic outcomes.

**Implications**

The findings of this research on the topic of the perceptions of teacher expectations were particularly informative because while the teacher workforce is becoming increasingly White, the student body is increasingly of color (Howard, 2006). In an age where the notions of “a post racial America”, “colorblindness” and “race doesn’t matter” hold some sway in the general population, race and racism clearly concern the African-American community, which implies the potential for a worsening of the relational disconnect between the African-American community and the school system. There is a need for teacher educator programs at post-secondary institutions to increase their efforts in training pre-service teachers for diverse populations, to ensure
that they are truly compelling educators to establish meaningful relations with students of color, in a way that decreases racial barriers and improves student achievement.

Implications for a school that wants to practice equal treatment and expect high achievement from all students point to significant efforts on the part of the institution. Pre-conditions that include valuing cultural diversity and a sense of belonging for all races must be established in the school environment to supportive acculturative efforts (Berry, 1997; Kalin & Berry, 1996). Teachers should know that cultural barriers exist and actively counter the notion of cultural mistrust in their classrooms by establishing a sense of community that minimizes tensions common in majority-minority cultural relationships. Additionally, establishing relationships with the parents of students of color could improve perceptions of the institution. Actions that reflect equitable treatment and expectations and open communication that shows sincere care can help repair and establish healthy relationships between the educational institution and the African-American community. Because teacher expectations are particular important to African-American students’ academic performance and achievement, teachers must employ direct measures that demonstrate high expectations and their commitment to support the academic performance of all students.

Diverse communities must also make a concerted effort of inclusion. While the African-American families in the study lived in a community and attended a school that was racially integrated, they still felt that they were segregated from the mainstream community. To prevent community and school marginalization and isolation, cultural
diversity must be valued, mutual respect must be established and every population group must feel like that are a part of the community.

For African-American students to academically achieve, a level of resilience may need to occur and the establishment of peer groups with other student who share the same academic values can fortify the possibility of success. Furthermore, drawing on the strength of family support and African-American history and viewing education as the means for a better way of life can contribute to long-term academic success. Ultimately, a resolve between being black and being academically successful has to be reconciled in the mind of the student and a certain amount of “grit” is needed, as direct supportive from the institution may not be provided.

African-American parents must be active in their student’s education. This not only means academic supportive within the home, but also advocacy for their student within the school environment. Likewise, establishing parental networks with parents that share similar values can assist in forming a sense of community and support system for the entire family. Knowing the positive impact of cultural pride and family and African-American history, informs parents that relaying these stories can contribute to their student’s academic success.

All in all, for there to be large-scale advancement in the academic achievement of African-Americans students, the relationship between the institution of schooling and the African-American community must improve. While the participants of the study were able to successfully adapt to and maneuver through their school, there are many African-Americans who are unable to operate in a resilient manner that bypasses and overcomes
the need for equal treatment and high expectations. The role of racial reconciliation and equitable conditions is undeniable for long-standing change to occur that results in widespread African-American academic improvement.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A.

DATA FORMS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
Date:_________ Interviewer(s): ___________________ Graduation year ___________

Demographic data parent(s)/guardian(s) __ mother/guardian __ father/guardian

Current Relationship with alumnus

Educational background, include name of institutions

Work/employment status

Residency, Neighborhood

How long did you live in the school district - when your child(ren) was(were) in the school district schools?
At that time, did you live/spend time in a largely socio-economically isolated environment?…Racially isolated environment?

Were you, the parent, a member in community institutions or participate in community activities? Name the type of institution or activity most prevalent.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
Date:_________ Interviewer(s): ___________________ Graduation year ___________

Gender _____________ HS grade point average ___________

Current professional/educational status

Type of coursework (levels and concentrations) Dropped or failed courses? Chose easier courses/programs, how often?

What were your achievements, academic, social or artistic? What honors did you receive?

How many years were you in the schools? How many years were you in lower-quality schools as compared to this school?

What did you do in preparation for your post-school success? Any kind of preparation, informal, nonformal, formal training or schooling?
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Person(s) in Parental Role and Alumnus* Interview

A. List family members by approximate age/role, gender, mark present (P) or not (N) – (put details in notes)

B. Demographic Data (separate sheet)

*Bold = alumnus/i only questions

1a. In what way did you enjoy or appreciate your schooling and your education in general?

1b. In what way did you enjoy or appreciate your schooling and your education in general?

2a. What motivated or challenged you in school?

2b. What motivated or challenged you in school?

3. What do you think motivated or challenged your daughter/son in school?

4. How important is education for today’s youth? [both]

5a. How did your parents convey the importance of education to you?

5b. How did you convey the importance of education to your son/daughter? How did your parents convey that to you?

6. Prior to entering school, how did you prepare your daughter/son for school entry? Prompt: reading time with son/daughter and availability of books?

7. What did you do to ensure your daughter’s/son’s academic success? [both]
   Prompt:
   a. School, community and home related activities, other resources?
   b. Preschool?

8. What are the expectations you had for your son/daughter in respect to education?
   Prompt:
   a. His/her involvement in extra-curricular activities?
   b. His/her behavior in school?
   c. After school and at home in respect to his/her education?
9. What are your perceptions of your role regarding your daughter’s/son’s education?

10a. How did your parents speak with you about college?
   
   **What was your perception?** (of that conversation about college)

10b. How did you speak with your son/daughter about college?

11a. How did you study? What was your study routine while in high school?

11b. How do you think your daughter/son studied? What was her/his study routine while in high school?

12a. How did your parents assist you in school-related activities, such as studying and homework?

12b. What was your perception of that?

13. How often did you read with your child or in front of your child?
   Prompt: books, magazines, newspapers

14a. What factors do you attribute to your success?
   
   Prompt:
   a. Individual
   a. Home
   b. Peer, community
   c. School factors

14b. What factors do you attribute to your son’s/daughter’s success?
   
   Prompt:
   a. Individual
   b. Home
   c. Peer, community
   d. School factors

15. What influenced your decision to put your daughter/son in the schools?

16a. What hurdles or obstacles did you encounter in the schools and how did you navigate through them?

16b. What hurdles or obstacles did your family encounter in regard to schooling your child and how did you navigate through them?
17a. What are your perceptions of and your overall experiences with the faculty, staff, and administrators at the schools, particularly the high school?

17b. What are your perceptions of and your overall experiences with the faculty, staff, and administrators at the schools, particularly the high school?

18a. Describe your interactions with your teachers?

18b. Describe your interactions with your son’s/daughter’s teachers?

19. Could you talk about your understanding/views of the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites? [both]
   
   A. In terms of your daughter’s/son’s experience in the school system
   B. In terms of how you feel the system has helped to reduce the gap
   C. In terms of how you feel the system has reinforced or increased the gap

20. Do you believe the education system is set up to continue the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites? Why?

21. What has been your experience of the various enrichment, remedial, and special education programs in the system?
   
   A. Specifically in terms of your son/daughter?
   B. Was your child tested and/or tracked as gifted or disabled?

22. In what ways did you use tutors, teachers, conferences, etc.?

23. If you reached a point when you felt you were unable to assist with homework, what did you do?

24a. How much time did you spend studying and doing homework when in high school?

24b. How much time did your daughter/son spend studying and doing homework when in high school?

25a. How much time did you spend watching television, listening to music, and playing interactive games when in high school?

25b. How much time did your son/daughter spend watching television, listening to music, and playing interactive games when in high school?

26a. How important was your social life in the educational process?
26b. How important was your daughter’s/son’s social life in the educational process?

27a. Were you part of a tight social group in high school and how important was that to your educational process?

27b. Was your son/daughter part of a tight social group in high school and how important was that to her/his educational process?

28a. With what kind of informal or formal group (socio-economics, interests, known groups, e.g., jocks) did you mostly associate with as friends?
   Prompt: socio-economics, interests, known groups, e.g., jocks

28b. With what kind of informal or formal groups did your daughter/son mostly associate with as friends?
   Prompt:
   a. Socio-economics,
   b. Interests,
   c. Known groups, e.g., jocks

29a. What kind of informal or formal groups did you study with a majority of the time?

29b. What kind of informal or formal groups did your son/daughter study with a majority of the time?

30a. How did you see yourself in terms of groups?

30b. How did your student see her/himself in terms of groups?

31a. How important was your sense of ethnic identity to your self-concept.
   Prompt: ranging from in-group identification to racelessness?

31b. How important was a sense of ethnic identity to your son’s/daughter’s self-concept
   Prompt: ranging from in-group identification to racelessness?

32. Do you believe your daughter/son and your family experienced a value-difference with the mainstream at school? [both]

   A. If so, how did you respond to your child/you experiencing a value-difference with the mainstream at school? [both]
      Prompt:
      a. Sought association and legitimacy elsewhere?
      b. Was negatively impacted such as intimated or rejected?
B. If so, how do you remember that your family responded to your experiencing a value-difference with the mainstream at school?

C. If so or if your child/you did not experience a value-difference with the mainstream at school, how important was that in the educational process?[both]

33. Can you name or describe some of the various values and ideals your family held [at the time]? [both if appropriate]
   Specifically:
   A. Who were the heroes you spoke of?
   B. Were religious values important and how so?
   C. What were some of the values your family held about family life?
   D. Can you compare your values to what you think are mainstream American values?

34a. How did your friendships and/or social interactions influence your schoolwork?

34b. How did your son’s/daughter’s friendships and/or social interactions/experiences influence his/her schoolwork?

35a. Do you think your teachers had high enough expectations?

35b. Do you think your daughter’s/son’s teachers had high enough expectations?

36a. What does it mean to “authentically Black”?
   How has it impacted you?

36b. Was your son/daughter concerned about what it means to be “authentically Black”?

37a. How did other African American students see you, and how did that affect your participation in school?

37b. How do you think other African American students saw your daughter/son, and how did that affect her/his participation in school?

38a. How did you think White students saw you, and how did that affect your participation in school?

38b. How do you think White students saw your son/daughter, and how did that affect his/her participation in school?

39a. Do you feel the community played a role in your success? In what way?
39b. Do you feel the community played a role in your son’s/daughter’s success? In what way?

40. Did you have a sense of community while at the schools? How do you describe that community?

41. Did you feel like you were part of the community? How do you describe that community? [both]

42. Which aspect of school had the greatest influence on your daughter/son: academic or social?

43. Do you think that teachers in the schools, regardless of race, had lower expectations of Black students? [both]

44. Do you feel comfortable/confident when you are in predominantly White environment (classroom or part of town)? [both]

45. Do you feel comfortable/confident when you are in a predominantly Black environment (classroom or part of town)? [both]

46. Are your expectations and parenting style the same as your parents (for parents and for child), or totally different? [both]

47a. What did your parents do to show you they are proud of or disappointed in your school performance?

47b. What did you do to show your son/daughter you are proud or disappointed in his/her school performance?

48a. Was there ever a time you felt the school system was discouraging you from taking higher-level courses?

48b. Do you feel there was a time when the school system discouraged your daughter/son from taking higher-level courses?

49. What is your view of the distinction if any between middle class and working class? [both]
   Prompt: income vs. education

50. What kind of impact do you think social class has on schooling? [both]

51a. Did you experience a “fear of living up to negative stereotypes of minority intellectual inferiority”? 
51b. Did your son/daughter exhibit to you or speak about a “fear of living up to negative stereotypes of “African American intellectual inferiority”?

52a. Were you ever anxious about teacher perceptions?

52b. Was your daughter/son anxious about teacher perceptions?

53a. Did you view yourself and/or your friends as “not a good student”?  
Prompt: How did you feel about yourself in relation to that stereotype of “African American intellectual inferiority”?

53b. Did your son/daughter view him/herself and/or friends as “not a good student”?  
Prompt: How did you feel about your child in relation to that stereotype of “African American intellectual inferiority”?

Changing gears, we’d like to ask a broad or general question [to both]:

54. How do you define success? [both]

55. If you could put into a couple of sentences your recommendations for academic success, what would they be? [both]
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL

From: KIEHL, LAURIE
Sent: Monday, January 28, 2013 2:40 PM
To: xyu@kent.edu
Cc: SEEBERG, VILMA
Subject: IRB approval for ANNUAL REVIEW #12-001 - retain this email for your records
Attachments: 12-001 - Consent Form.pdf

RE: IRB #12-001 - entitled “Understanding the Experience of High-Achieving Black-American Students Who Migrated from Disadvantaged Inner City Areas to an Affluent Suburb”

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your Annual Review and Progress Report for protocol #12-001. It is understood that the research is continuing without changes. Protocol approval has been extended and is effective:

February 2, 2013 through February 1, 2014

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy requires that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB will try to send you an annual review reminder notice by email as a courtesy. However, please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials. Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 330-672-2704 or pwashko@kent.edu.
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REFERENCES


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