THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE ADOLESCENTS IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was conducted to discover, understand, and describe the educational experiences of African-American females within a predominantly White, suburban school district. Attention was given to intra-racial interactions between African-American female students raised in a predominantly White suburb and African-American female students raised in predominantly African-American urban areas. The participants’ perceptions of academic experiences, social experiences, race, and school culture were analyzed, interpreted, and verified for accuracy, allowing for a greater understanding of their lived experiences as African-American adolescent females being educated within a predominantly White suburban setting. Practical applications for educators and parents are also included.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my son, A.J. – you inspire me to never accept less than
my best
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Growing up as a biracial child, issues of race were always salient for me. My mother and father, Donna and Henry Jenkins, ensured that I had a strong identity. My childhood was filled with dolls of every color, trips to multicultural events, friends of all races, and books that taught me of my African, Indian, and European heritage. I remember talking about my family in terms of different ice cream flavors – my mother and brother were vanilla, my father was chocolate and I was swirl.

Even as a young girl, I was proud of my family and I thank my parents for working so hard to instill that in me. Looking back, it never seemed forced – it just was. My parents have sacrificed many things to ensure that my brother and I were supported – including relationships with some members of their families. I have never met my mother’s father – not because he died before I was born, but because of the ignorance and hatred he has for an entire race of people. As an adult, I realize how many things my parents gave up in order for our family to thrive. When faced with any choice, they always chose us and I just hope they know how much I love them and that I appreciate all that they have done.
My father is who I turn to when I feel unsure because he always has the answers I need. My mother is my best friend – she is always there whenever I need to talk, cry, laugh, or just be. I cannot even begin to describe the love and respect that I have for my parents. They have always supported me. I thank them from the bottom of my being for shaping me into the woman that I am today.

I also wish to thank Alex, my fiancé, for offering his support throughout this process. He has always supported my academic endeavors and pushed me to “do big things”. Alex has challenged me to push myself beyond my limits and I know that I am a better person because of him.

Next, I would like to thank the members of my committee. Dr. Hinkelman graciously agreed without hesitation to sit on my committee when I was in need of a third member. I thank her for helping me during this stage in my academic career. I would also like to thank Dr. Dixson for all of her help. She has offered support through this process by recommending articles and challenging my thoughts and decisions. From the beginning, I have felt at ease with Dr. Dixson. I thank her for offering guidance throughout this process and providing me with support. I could write all day about my feelings and thoughts of Dr. Miranda. She has made such a tremendous difference in my life that I don’t know where to begin. When I started graduate school five years ago, she was there as my advisor. Through the years, I have come to see her as a mentor and friend. It was her passion for diversity that drew me to the School Psychology program, but it was her love of the students that made me stay to pursue a doctorate degree.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Between the years 1990 and 2000, racial and ethnic diversity in suburban areas increased from 19 percent to 27 percent (Frey, 2001). Due to stereotypical portrayals of urban areas by the media, the notion that everything urban was less than desirable became a popular belief in American society (Fotsch, 1999). Research indicates that individuals of all races began to relocate to suburban areas for two main reasons: (1) racial and social class prejudices; and (2) the perceived notion of higher performing suburban schools and lower crime rates (Golba, 1998; Frady, 1985; Kozol, 1991). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, African-Americans comprised one-tenth of the suburban population in the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas (Sigelman & Willnat, 2000). Currently, it is estimated that as many as one-third of African-Americans now live in suburban areas (Wiese, 2004). Therefore, with the rapidly increasing populations of African-Americans in suburban settings, it is important for educators to understand how African-American students experience living within predominantly White suburban areas in order to
help provide educational support for the students. According to Tatum (2004), “a number of African American adolescents have come of age in predominantly White communities, and understanding their experiences can provide us with insights into key issues in school desegregation” (p. 117).

While studies have been conducted on African-American students within predominantly White educational institutions, few studies have addressed the specific topic of African-American adolescent females and their perceptions of being educated within such an environment. According to Davidson (1996), African-American female students are one of the most unrecognized groups of students in predominantly White settings and therefore require specialized attention. African American adolescent females educated in predominantly White suburban school districts are grappling not only with their personal, racial, and gender identities, but they are doing so in an educational environment that may not understand or be able to fully support their development. By allowing African-American females to discuss openly their educational experiences, it is hoped researchers and educators will be better able to understand how to facilitate academic achievement, promote social acceptance, and enhance the overall quality of education for African-American females educated in predominantly White suburban environments.

Previous research conducted with African-American students has found that the experiences of African-American female students within predominantly White suburban communities may be more difficult than those of African-American males
(Banks, 1984; Hamm & Coleman, 2001; Tatum, 2004). For example, when studying factors in the racial identity of Black youth in White communities, Tatum (2004) found that “the opportunity to build supportive relationships with both Black male and female peers was very important for all participants, but seems especially significant for Black girls in predominantly White communities” (p. 133). It has been reported that females place significant importance on personal friendships (Gilligan, 1982). Clark (1989) found that African-American females are most likely to select peers of their gender-race group as work partners within the classroom setting. It was also noted that African-American females expect more intimacy and emotional support from close friends and intentionally keep the group of close friends small in number. Al-Mateen, Webb, Christian and Donatelli (2000) noted, “one might speculate that the African-American adolescent female, who values highly close relationships with her peers, would be very vulnerable in a predominantly white environment. Not only may she find fewer friends with whom to bond, but she may find herself in a peer group that has antipathy toward her ethnic group” (p. 27).

In studying the experiences of African-American adults living within suburban areas, Sigelman & Willnat (2000) indicated African-American adult suburbanites might possess one of three varying identity characteristics: assimilation, transplantation, or identity persistence. It was found that most African-American adults experienced identity persistence – an attitude that emphasizes attitudinal unity among all African-Americans. Conversely, when studying Black youths in
predominantly White suburbs (mean age = 12.8 years old), Banks (1984) found that African-American children socialized within predominantly White suburban communities are likely to become attitudinally assimilated into White society, leading to a disregard for Black culture. Thus, there appears to be a distinction between the experiences, or the perception of those experiences, of African-American adults residing in suburban areas and African-American children raised within suburban areas. This dissertation research explored how the area of residence as a child and young adolescent impacts views of race by examining how African-American females raised in different environments (White suburban and Black urban) perceive African-Americans and African-American culture.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study was to discover, understand, and describe the educational experiences of African-American females within a predominantly White, suburban school district. According to Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995), African-American girls are often silenced: “These girls have voices, they are perfectly capable of first-person speech, but as they will say repeatedly, nobody listens, nobody cares, nobody asks what they are feeling and thinking” (p. 1). Specifically, the researcher was interested in exploring how academic and social experiences impact the lives of the young women, what factors affect their perceived school experience, and how they interact socially within the school community. Academic issues such as involvement in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, the infusion of African-American centered topics into the academic
curriculum, and perceived educational expectations by teachers and students were addressed in addition to non-academic issues such as participation in extra-curricular activities (e.g., sports, dances, etc.), social networks (friends), familial support, and acceptance by peers. Furthermore, intra-racial interactions between female students raised in a predominantly White suburb and female students raised in predominantly African-American urban areas were explored.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study examined the educational experiences of 11 African-American females attending high school within a predominantly White suburban school. The participant’s views, beliefs, and perceptions offer insight into the lived experience of coming of age as an African-American female who, by inherent nature of American society, is subjected daily to racism and sexism. Previous research has found that young African-American women experience cultural alienation, physical isolation, marginalization, and “othering” within predominantly White educational settings (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Lei, 2003). According to Lei (2004), “the mass media has systematically portrayed cultural images of African American females based on myths and stereotypes...in which African American women represent the antithesis of white American conception of beauty, femininity, and womanhood” (p. 163). The social acceptance of such cultural images increases the “othering” of African American females and has been used to justify the oppression of African-American females in American society.
The current study not only explored how the participants made meaning of their experiences and how they perceived themselves in relation to those experiences, but also how they perceived African-American females from differing settings (predominantly African American urban vs. predominantly White suburban). In doing so, this research provides understanding of the lived experiences of the participants, allowing the opportunity for educators within predominantly White schools to fully support their African-American female students.

1.4 Researcher Questions

Due to the limited research focused specifically on the perceived experiences of African-American adolescent females within predominantly White suburban settings, this study was exploratory in nature. The aim was to achieve a better understanding of their lived experiences, including how African-American females interact with their peers and the beliefs they have about African-American females raised in different settings (predominantly White suburban vs. predominantly African-American urban).

The research explored the following research questions:

(1) What are the lived academic experiences of African-American females in a predominantly White suburban school district?
   a. How do these experiences differ between females raised in a predominantly White suburban environment and females who move into that environment from a predominantly African-American urban environment?
(2) What are the lived socialization experiences of African-American females in a predominantly White suburban district?

   a. How do these perceptions/experiences differ between females raised in a predominantly White suburban environment and females who move into that environment from a predominantly African-American urban environment?

(3) How do African-American females raised in different settings (i.e., predominantly White suburban vs. predominantly African-American urban) perceive African-Americans from the opposite educational setting?

1.5 Perspective of the Researcher

This dissertation research examined the experiences of the African-American female students within the racist and sexist educational institution. This is not to imply that the educational setting intends to be racist or sexist, but that societal norms and the patriarchal country in which we live make it so. In addition, the researcher hoped to challenge racial and gender stereotypes of African-American women that have existed for generations. As a biracial woman with an African-American heritage, the researcher has been affected by such racial and gender stereotypes and hoped to give the young women involved in the study a chance to voice their experiences. By providing the participants with the opportunity to voice themselves, the researcher hoped to enable the students to relate how they are impacted academically and socially by an environment that, by inherent nature, stereotypes them according to race and gender. Additionally, the researcher hoped
to provide the opportunity for the female students to self-reflect on their own educational experiences within the predominantly White suburban school setting.

1.6 Biases and Limitations

The main bias brought to this dissertation study by the researcher, a biracial woman with African-American heritage, is toward improving the educational experience for all students, with special focus on African-American females. The researcher has acknowledged the bias, and she attempted to ensure that findings were objective and fair by incorporating many safeguards (see sections 3.4 and 3.5 for discussion of the safeguards).

A limitation of the study was the time allotment of the study. The survey and interviews were conducted over a brief period of time and consisted mainly of the students’ current experiences within the predominantly White suburban educational setting. By not conducting a longitudinal study, the researcher limited the breadth of the study to approximately six months. Additionally, by choosing to gain information through interviews and a survey, the researcher limited the type of information gathered. Conducting observations of the participants or following them through a typical school day was not possible. However, the researcher believes the information gathered is representative of the participants’ experiences and is confident in the findings.

Finally, the specific experiences of African-American female students within a predominately White suburban educational setting were explored.
Therefore, no attempt should be made to generalize the findings of the study to
other populations of high school students.

1.7 Definition of Terms

_African-American and Black:_

These terms were used interchangeably. Although the students defined
themselves in the study, a distinction between Black and African-American was
drawn for the sake of discussion and in anticipation that student participants might
request clarification:

- Black refers to any individual who is descended from African heritage,
  including any African country, the Caribbean and/or the United States.
- African-American refers to any individual descended from African heritage
  who is indigenous to the United States, but does not claim any specific
  African country and/or Caribbean nation as their primary source of identity
  (Quarcoo, 2004).

_Attitudes_

An individual’s learned tendency of certain feelings or moods towards
objects, people or circumstances.

_Ethnicity_

A social construction that indicates identification with a particular group of
people based on common ancestries who share cultural traits such as language,
religion and dress.

_Gender_
Socially and culturally constructed characteristics attributed to the different biological sexes.

Perceptions

A reference point for behavior that influences how people (1) remember past experiences, (2) understand present events, and (3) anticipate future events (Purkey & Novak, 1996).

Race

A distinct population of individuals that is distinguished on the basis of skin color, facial features, and genetics from other populations of humans.

Student

An individual enrolled within an educational institution.

Suburban

An inhabited area of individuals that is located outside city limits.

Urban

An inhabited area of individuals that is located within city limits.

White, European American, and Caucasian

These terms were used interchangeably to represent any individual descended from European heritage who is indigenous to the United States, but does not claim any specific European country as their primary source of identity.

1.8 Conclusion and Chapter Overview

In conclusion, this study focused on African-American adolescent females and their educational experiences within a predominantly White suburban school.
district. As previously mentioned, there is a dearth of research studies focused on
the academic achievement of African-American students in general, with some
research about African-American students in predominantly White settings or about
African-American females in urban settings. This study explored the experiences of
African-American females in a predominately White suburban educational
environment. The goal was to provide the opportunity for the students to give voice
to their experiences, allowing for deeper understanding by the research community.

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one includes an
introduction to the research and guiding research questions. Chapter two provides an
in-depth review of the literature and relevant findings. Chapter three provides a
description of the methodology that was utilized with particular attention given to
procedures to ensure accuracy and objectivity. Chapter four reviews the findings
based upon analysis of the data. Finally, chapter five offers a summary of the study
and includes recommendations for educators within predominantly White suburban
districts and for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

That man over there say a woman needs to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped me into carriages or over mud puddles or gives me the best place...Ain’t I a woman? Look at me. Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head me...And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well and ain’t I a woman? I have borne 13 children and seen most all of them sold into slavery and when I cried out a mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me...and ain’t I a woman?

- Sojourner Truth 1862

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will present an overview of research pertaining to the racial and gender identity of African-American adolescent females within the United States. Included in this review will be a discussion of the literature that has laid the foundation for research of this kind. Topics that will be explored include: the historical and sociopolitical experiences of African-Americans within the United States, the racial identity of African-Americans, general adolescent development, African-American adolescent identity development, the identity development of African-American females, and the educational experiences of African-Americans.
including a brief review of educational attainment for African-Americans, African-American students and academic achievement, and parental attitudes on identity and academic achievement. Also discussed will be African-American migration to suburban areas, the attitudinal differences between African-Americans living in urban areas and those living in suburban areas, and African-Americans living in a predominantly White suburban community. Many researchers (e.g., Banks, 1996; Cross, 1971, 1998; Fordham, 1997; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; hooks, 1984; Helms, 1986; Ogbu 2003; Sue & Sue, 1990; Tatum, 1997) have contributed to this body of literature.

2.2 A Brief Overview of the Historical Experiences of African-Americans

It has been proposed that the concept of race began as a way to classify human beings (Smedley, 1993). This classification system was used for two distinct purposes: to interpret the various phenotypical differences between humans (e.g., skin color, hair texture, facial features, etc.); and to create a hierarchy of the appeal of different groups of people based on physical appearance and interpreted dispositional and moral qualities. The subjective classification of humans was, in some cases, used as a means to understand differences between people for medical and scientific reasons as well as to interpret differential qualities of character, primitiveness, morality and temperament (Frederickson, 1988; Jones, 1991; Montagu, 1964; Van den Berghe, 1967). According to Carter (1995), race is defined as “a sociopolitical designation in which individuals are assigned to a particular group based on presumed biological or visible characteristics such as skin color,
physical features, and in some cases, language” (p.15). Smedley (1993) noted that race was created to capitalize on the physical differences between groups of people and was “a major tool by which the dominant whites constructed and maintained social barriers and economic inequalities; that is they consciously sought to create social stratification based on visible differences” (p. 22).

The hierarchical structure of the racial classification system is an integral tool in the social construction of America. The classification system has been utilized to establish social demarcations, elevate the White race, and justify the oppression and exploitation of racial groups deemed inferior in intelligence, physicality, morality and culture. Acts such as the institutionalization of the enslavement of Africans and the legalization of Jim Crow laws are only two examples of ways the racial classification system was utilized to show the assumed inherent inferiority of African-Americans to Whites.

The history of African-Americans in the United States is unique from other racial group histories. The influence of slavery has survived well beyond the conception of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, and continues to have an effect on a system that “classifies people into human/subhuman, master/servant, adult/child, owner/owned through techniques that have survived in both overt and subtle forms” (Kitano, 1997, p. 124). Ogbu (1988) uses the term “involuntary immigrants” to describe African-Americans. This not only helps to emphasize the fact that the first Africans were brought to America unwillingly, but also gives light to the issue that Africans were stripped of their sense of self through this barbaric
act of power. When Africans were first brought to American soil, they represented many different African cultures. However, after being sold as slaves, they were disseminated throughout the country and systematic efforts were made to extinguish their respective native cultures (Kitano, 1997). Through this dehumanizing act, family units were destroyed, cultures were dismantled and the stage was set for the white/nonwhite, superior/inferior hierarchy to exist.

2.2.1 Early Psychological Findings

In 1896, the idea of “separate-but-equal” came to exist with American society (Edwards & Polite, 1992). In that year, the case of *Plessey vs. Ferguson* was brought to trial when Homer Plessey, an African-American man, sued a railroad company after he was physically removed from a train and arrested when he attempted to sit in the “White’s only” section of the train. Plessey’s argument was that segregation was illegal under the Fourteenth Amendment, which had been ratified in 1868 to ensure equal protection under the law for newly freed slaves. However, the Court held that the railroad complied with the more recent Civil Rights act of 1875, which guaranteed that all Americans had the right to public accommodations, not that public settings must be integrated. When Plessey refused to leave the “White’s only” section of the train, the police were called and he was forcefully removed from the train for not complying with the rules. The Court ruled that separation of the races was constitutional as long as equal accommodations were made for African-Americans, allowing institutional racism to become an accepted practice of the times. According to Edwards and Polite (1992):
Segregation as practiced in the American South became more pathological, institutionalizing more than simple inequality. Segregation institutionalized inferiority. It produced a people who spent nearly every waking moment of their existence being reminded in ways great and small that they were less than, not as good as, not as responsible as, not as valuable as – not as human as – the white race of the species. These are the kind of racist assaults that wound the spirit, brutalize the psyche, erode self-esteem. (p. 40)

Prior to 1930, most research focusing on racial issues centered on the idea that Whites were inherently superior to African-Americans and every other racial group. For example, John E. Lind, a white psychiatrist, published two articles that focused on the psychology of the Negro in the first volume of *Psychoanalytic Review*. Lind and his colleague, A.B. Evarts felt that by studying the more “primitive and inferior Negro”, researchers could discover how the White mind may have worked and operated at an earlier evolutionary stage (Cross, 1991). In this publication, Lind wrote of a psychological complex he noted during his studies:

This complex is based upon the social sub-ordination of the Negro in the United States, and as the most obvious racial distinction serving to set him apart from the more favored race is his color, I shall refer to it hereafter for the sake of convenience as the “color complex”. That color complex is present even in Negroes presenting no evidence of psychosis might almost be accepted as a truism. I shall mention however, a few evidences of this. In the somewhat primitive theological conception which obtains among
Negroes, the Deity is personified as a White man, the angels also are White. Apparent exceptions to this must be noted. I have seen works of art for sale in stores catering to the Negro trade, representing scenes in Paradise, translations, etc., where the celestial figures were Black, a startling, vivid Black. The motives prompting such production, as well as those which might actuate their purchase and their acceptance as a faithful representation of the future state are probably a note of defiance, a protest against the orthodox color scheme of salvation, and by inference a recognition that the latter does not exist. But these are exceptions and the rule which will be verified by anyone who has had considerable dealing with the Negroes is that the future blessed state according to their ideas is one in which they will display a spotless integument and the first ceremony in the ritual of their entrance to Heaven is the casting aside of the ebony husk…Whether then we accept or deny the hypothesis of the ubiquity of the color complex in the mentally normal Negro, no exhaustive study of psychoses in Negroes is necessary to show that it exists in very many of these and often molds largely the topography of the delusionary field. (Lind, 1913, p. 404) Lind’s comments on the psychological complex may be seen as the precursor to many landmark studies on Black identity. By writing that African-Americans feel they must cast aside the existing “ebony husk” before gaining entrance to Heaven, Lind laid the foundation for future research on self-hatred, Black identity and other studies on racial attitudes. The seminal works of Eugene
and Ruth Horowitz (1936, 1939) and Clark and Clark’s (1939, 1940, 1947) now famous “doll studies” provided “evidence” of self-hatred through a preference of White stimuli exhibited by young children, influencing theories of negativity and self-esteem. Books such as *Mark of Oppression* by Kardiner and Ovesey (1951) and Clark’s (1955) *Prejudice and Your Child* focused on the view that self-hatred was a persistent theme in the personality and identity development of the majority of African-Americans. When such literature was added to the studies published by the Horowitz’s and Clarks’, the concept of African-American self-hatred exploded into the general public. By 1960, and until the early 1970s, many assumed that African-American self-hatred was a heavily documented theory (Porter, 1971).

It was during the Black Power movement that the concept of Black identity came to existence (Cross, 1998). The Black Power movement transformed the identity and consciousness of African-Americans through the “redefinition of the constituent groups’ identities and political consciousness” (Cole & Stewart, 1996, p. 99). This redefinition placed such an influence on racial dignity that many African-Americans viewed themselves and their culture with pride, rather than with shame or hatred as was insinuated in the earlier literature on African-American racial identity.

As a result of the changing social environment, an influx of models and theories centered on African-American racial identity abounded. The models and theories attempted to help psychologists and other professionals be more sensitive to the racial issues affecting society. With the social uprising of the 1960s and ‘70s
came an interest in Black identity by social and behavioral scientists, professionals and the general public. For example, in 1971, Charles Thomas wrote *Boys No More*, a piece that attempted to explain the changes in behavior and self-concept that African-American adults were experiencing through a description of identity transformation (Jones, 1998). At the same time, William E. Cross, Jr. was in the process of developing his stage model of Black identity development, also known as the theory of Nigrescence. According to Jones, Cross was interested in understanding the reasons behind the changing level of activism that appeared to be occurring within the African-American community.

2.3 Identity Development

2.3.1 Cross’ Theory of Nigrescence

Most of the first Black identity models were based either on Cross’ (1971) model alone or in combination with Thomas’ (1971) model. However, Cross’ model (1971, 1978, 1985; 1998) has been one of the most highly researched and cited of all proposed identity models (Helms, 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990). His model of Black identity, which was originally based on four or five stages of racial identity development, is known as the theory of Nigrescence. Nigrescence is a resocializing experience that “seeks to transform a preexisting identity (a non-Afrocentric identity) into one that is Afrocentric” (Cross, 1991, p. 190). In the model, there are five stages of Black identity development: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization and Internalization-Commitment.
During the first stage, the Pre-encounter stage, the focus is one of a pre-existing identity. Individuals within this stage may have an attitude of low salience and not give much thought or attention to race issues. However, it is also possible for an individual within this stage to be hypersensitive to race matters, which may lead to anti-Black or social-stigma attitudes where race is viewed as a problem or source of embarrassment or hatred. Either way, if an individual views race with limited personal salience or extremely negative salience, it is likely an event will occur that will cause the individual to rethink that viewpoint. This leads the individual to the second stage of Nigrescence.

During the Encounter stage of Nigrescence, an event occurs that catches the individual off guard and clashes with the pre-existing thoughts. Thus, the Encounter stage consists of two steps: the event and the reaction. People may experience the same event but view it in different ways. As such, the event must cause the individual to rethink thoughts and actions exhibited previously. The Encounter “engenders a great range of emotions; guilt, anger, and general anxiety may become energizing factors” (Cross, 1991, p. 201). This influx of emotions causes the individual to decide to change their thoughts and behaviors.

The third stage, Immersion-Emersion, is characterized by the desire to shed old thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviors. Values associated with the previous self are rejected while images that directly conflict with the previous self are embraced. Because the individual is more knowledgeable of his or her previous self, the “new” self becomes attracted to symbols of the new identity and rigid ideologies.
(Cross, 1991). During the Immersion portion of the stage, the individual immerses himself or herself into the culture. This immersion of culture is reflected in literature, art, conversations, food, clothing and every other aspect of life. For some, a “Blacker-than-thou” (Cross, 1991) syndrome appears. During this time, confrontation, bluntness, labeling, passing judgment on other individual’s varying degrees of “Blackness”, and feelings of hatred and negation of White people may occur. At the end of this portion, the focus moves toward a pro-Black theme of selflessness, dedication, commitment and desire to destroy racism. An end of the oversimplified ideologies of the Immersion phase characterizes the second portion of this stage, Emersion. During the Emersion phase, the individual begins to integrate the new identity. With this integration comes an acceptance of the strengths and weaknesses of African-American culture and people. In addition, a positive non-stereotypic view of African-Americans is formed and the individual is left with a greater sense of self (Cross, 1998).

It is important to note it is possible for the individual to become fixed within the third stage, resulting in “regression”, “continuation/fixation” or “dropping out” (Cross, 1991, p. 207). Regression occurs when the individual experiences negative feedback from the identity search and results in the individual regressing toward the Pre-encounter self. Continuation/Fixation also occurs from negative feedback such as painful confrontations or perceptions of Whites. This feedback results in an extreme dislike for Whites and a reverence of all things Black. Dropping out is characterized by a lack of involvement with Black issues. This individual may not
regress to the Pre-encounter stage, but may “take a break” from it all until a time when they reengage. Another possibility is that the individual simply moves on to other things in life, possibly thinking of this experience as their “ethnicity phase” (Cross, 1991).

The fourth stage, Internalization, is characterized by feelings of inner security, more flexibility, and more tolerance of others (Sue & Sue, 1990). A new identity has evolved as a result of working through the challenges of the previous stage. According to Cross (1991), the internalized identity performs three functions in the individual’s everyday life: (a) to defend and protect the individual from psychological insults that occur as a result of living within a racist society; (b) to provide a sense of belonging and social anchorage and; (c) to provide a foundation or point of departure for carrying out transactions with all people, cultures and situations.

The fifth and final stage, Internalization-Commitment, is often combined with the fourth stage, as there is no difference other than the factor of sustained commitment (Cross, 1985). Individuals within the fifth stage devote an extended amount of time to finding ways of transforming their personal sense of Blackness into a more general sense of commitment than maintains their way of living. In essence, the fourth stage is symbolized by the internalization of values while the fifth stage is symbolized by the behavioral manifestation of those values.

*Additional Theories on African-American Racial Identity.* Following an initial profusion of nigrescence theories, some researchers expanded upon the
original framework. For example, Helms’ theory of racial identity is actually comprised of four separate entities: the Black identity development theory, the People of Color identity development theory, the White identity development theory, and the People of Color-White Interaction model. The first three theories describe the varying racial identity statuses of individuals within the major racial groups in America in addition to the conditions under which changes in racial identity development occur. The last model, the People of Color-White Interaction model describes the “superordinate-subordinate dyadic interactions in different racial configurations, the types of interaction that occur, and how the relationship might affect the likelihood of movement or stagnation in racial identity development within these contexts” (Thompson & Carter, 1997, p. 18). Together, the four theories combine to form what is generally known as Helms’ racial identity theory.

For the Black identity development theory, Helms (1986) amended Cross’ 1971 model to suggest that each stage be viewed as a “world view” in that individuals use different cognitive templates to organize racial information not only about themselves, but also about other people and institutions. Helms (1989) later revised her theory to include bimodal stages. During the Pre-encounter stage, an individual can be active (the person deliberately idealizes White culture while rejecting African-American culture) or passive (the person assimilates into White culture and is highly motivated to be accepted by White people). The Encounter stage begins with the individual feeling as if they have no identity and culminates with the individual feeling as if the identity they wish to have can be found rather
than developed. Once the person realizes the identity must be developed, entrance into the third stage ensues. As this stage already consisted of bimodal characteristics, there is no relevant difference between Helms’ and Cross’ models. The fourth and final stage of Helms’ theory is comprised of an internalization phase and a commitment phase, much like Cross’ stages four and five.

2.3.2 Adolescent Identity Development

Although Cross (1971) describes the process of racial identity as one that unfolds in late adolescence and early adulthood, research suggests that racial identity examination may begin during early adolescence (Tatum, 1997). Erikson’s (1950) theory of development provides an overview for generalized adolescent identity development.

Erikson (1968) labeled adolescence as a time of crisis that is characterized by the opposing forces of “Identity vs. Identity Confusion”, where the adolescent begins to establish a new sense of understanding for his or her personal identity and place within society. Erikson’s (1950) chapter, “Eight Stages of Man”, proposed a theory of development where the individual passes through eight stages: (a) Trust vs. Mistrust; (b) Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt; (c) Initiative vs. Guilt; (d) Industry vs. Inferiority; (e) Identity vs. Identity Confusion; (f) Intimacy vs. Isolation; (g) Generativity vs. Stagnation; and (h) Integrity vs. Despair. This model encompasses the entire life, with the stages accounting for infancy through late adulthood. Erikson’s stage theory has been considered the “starting point for most of
contemporary identity research since it provides the foundation for understanding the processes underlying adolescent identity formation” (Muuss, 1996).

In 1966, James Marcia expanded and elaborated on Erikson’s stage theory, with particular emphasis on the “Identity vs. Identity Confusion” stage of adolescence. Marcia proposed the adolescent stage consisted of four distinct identity statuses: (a) the identity-diffused subject, (b) the foreclosure subject, (c) the moratorium subject, and (4) the identity-achieved subject. In Marcia’s theory, the identity-diffused subject has not yet experienced an identity crisis; therefore, issues of identity are not of importance. In addition, the individual has not yet made a commitment to a set of beliefs. During the second status, the foreclosure subject has not yet experienced an identity crisis, but has begun to make definite commitments to goals, values and beliefs. However, these commitments are the result of interactions with parents, friends, and other forms of socialization. Thus, these commitments are not the result of personal searching or exploring and are accepted as true without scrutiny. In essence, the individual in this status passively accepts as their own the beliefs, values and attitudes held by significant others. The third status, moratorium, is defined by an acute state of crisis or exploration. The individual finds fault with previously held beliefs and values and begins to actively search for personal identity by experimenting with alternative roles and beliefs. The final status, identity achievement, occurs when the individual resolves the identity issue. The self-chosen commitment to a belief or value assists the individual in solving the identity crisis.
Although the statuses may be perceived as developmental or ordinal, one does not need to progress through the stages in order. In fact, it has been proposed that the third status, moratorium, is the only status truly necessary for identity development as it is the status that requires the individual to search and explore for a new identity (Muuss, 1996). In addition, researchers have noted that once an individual achieves a status, it is possible to regress, a term Marcia (1980) coined as "status regression" (Adams & Fitch, 1982, Waterman, 1982). The progression and regression through the stages indicate a change or crisis occurring within the individual’s life that requires a shift in identity.

2.3.3 African-American Adolescent Identity

Adolescence is a time when decisions are made about school achievement, career goals and interpersonal relationships. During this stage of life, the individual reaches a point where he or she can think about and reflect on the past, present and future. Questions such as “Where did I come from?”, “Who am I?”, and “Who will I become?” illustrate the inner thoughts that eventually aid in forming the adult identity. However, it is important to remember that while the general process of identity development may be similar for all adolescents, the content varies greatly for African-American adolescents. In addition to determining who they are as individuals, minority adolescents face the additional task of determining what their racial heritage means to them and how it affects their everyday functioning.

Roberts, Mosley and Chamberlain (1975) studied racial identity and found age differences in young girls using the Clark doll method. Girls aged three to four
preferred White dolls, while girls aged six and seven preferred the Black dolls. In addition, Spencer (1982a) found that children around age three years of age chose White dolls or photographs of White children as preferable. In a subsequent study, Spencer (1982b) also found that African-American children around nine years of age exhibited Afrocentric values in choosing Black dolls more frequently. Murray and Mandara (2002) postulate the trend of White-based choice in both Black and White children between the ages of three and six years but abrupt change in choice after seven or eight years of age for Black children is an example of the importance of both cognitive readiness and societal context. They view racial identity as a developmental process – as children grow in age and experience, they become more aware of race matters. For example, Phinney and Tarver (1988) examined the racial attitudes of early adolescents between the ages of twelve and fourteen years of age. In the study, participants were given a qualitative interview that addressed the importance of race and racial incidents. A number of the participants indicated they were not only aware of racism, but they thought about how their race will influence their future (Phinney & Tarver, 1988).

2.4 African-American Females’ Identity

African-American adolescent females face a unique task: determining their identity within a society that devalues both African-Americans and women (hooks, 1991). The social context in which African-American females develop an identity is both racist and sexist – a phenomenon that has been studied by numerous social scientists (e.g., Beale, 1970; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 1991; Reid, 1988). However,
while it should be noted that American society devalues all women, there is an inherent inferiority for African-American women due to the notion that White women are idealized and Black women are assigned a subordinate status (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996).

Historically, the superior/inferior hierarchy created during slavery influenced everything from laws to socially constructed ideals of beauty. According to Jordan (1968), the identity of African-Americans was heavily influenced by the supremacist views of the White male English Voyagers who went to West Africa to trade goods with the people. The Englishmen described the West African people as being “black”, which, according to Jordan, was seen negatively. “White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil” (Jordan, 1968, p.7). As a result, the West African women were viewed as unattractive and of less importance than White women. This negative perception continued through slavery, and some argue, today (Collins, 2000; Fordham, 1997; hooks, 1984; Jones & Gooden, 2003). Jones and Gooden (2003) found that African-American women shift their identity in attempt to deal with the racist and sexist misconceptions they face daily. According to Jones and Gooden, “Black women in America have many reasons to feel this deep sense of dissatisfaction. As painful as it may be to acknowledge, their lives are still widely governed by a set of old oppressive myths circulating in the White-dominated world” (p.2).
Mullings (1997) found that dominant White ideologies have denied African-American females the right to construct their gender identity using their own words, leaving them to hang on the margin of womanhood when compared to White women. According to hooks (1984), “to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body” (p.vii). Many African-American female scholars have found that African-American women’s identity is socially constructed as the “Othering” of White women., meaning that the identity of African-American women is constructed in relation to their White counterparts (Collins, 1991, 2000; Fordham, 1996; hooks, 1995).

Sociohistorical stereotypical representations of African-American women continue to be portrayed in the media (Jewell, 1993). Cultural images of African-American women that are based on the stereotyped characters generated during slavery (e.g., the “mammy” and the “jezebel”) represent the antithesis of American beauty, femininity and womanhood (Lei, 2003), which are used as justifications for the limited access African-American females have to societal resources. However, Jewell notes, “the paradox is that as long as African-American women must assume responsibilities for themselves and their families, due to a social and economic system that limits opportunities for African-American males and females, they will continue to possess these qualities” (p.65).

Despite the negative stereotypes ascribed to African-American females by the White, dominant society, Collins (2000) indicates that the “Self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others” (p. 113). On the
contrary, African-American females tend to create relationships within the framework of their communities and families, distancing themselves from the objectification by the larger society. Collins (2000), asserts the “connectedness among the individuals provides Black women deeper, more meaningful self-definitions” (p.113).

2.5 African-Americans and Education

Thompson (1974) found that “The Blacks’ struggle to acquire a ‘good’ education has been long, frustrating, and dangerous” (p.168). At one time, it was believed that African-Americans did not possess the genetic ability to pursue academic endeavors (Banks, 1996). Furthermore, it was believed that educating African-Americans would disrupt the social order because education would encourage rebellion and discontent within African-Americans. This led to the implementation of legislative prohibitions against the formal education of African-Americans, enacting the institutional guidelines that ensured the continuation of oppression.

2.5.1 A Brief Overview of Educational Attainment of African-Americans

The formal education that was provided to African-Americans between the years of 1550 and 1812 was done so primarily through the church and missionary schools. According to Jordan (1968), a few African-American children attended formal schools, but “the vast majority of Negroes, slaves and free, grew old and died with very little formal education or indeed any education at all” (p.133).
A school system for African-Americans in the North was founded by the Freedman’s Bureau in 1865, mandating the creation of public schools that would enable African-Americans to attain equal status with Whites within the social, political and economic realms (Frazier, 1966; Ogbu, 1978). Unfortunately, once schools were established, it was difficult to keep them in operation. According to Jordan (1968), “to some extent practical difficulties stood in the way; money, buildings, and suitable instructors were hard to obtain” (p. 354). Although some White teachers accepted African-American students in their schools and classrooms, prejudice and racism made it virtually impossible. As a result, the New Jersey Abolition Society recommended that African-Americans should form their own schools taught by African-American teachers. Unfortunately, the fact that education was not state-supported resulted in limited financial assistance for African-American schools (Jordan, 1968).

The legal sanction enacted following Plessey vs. Ferguson (“separate but equal”) enabled Whites to benefit greatly, permitting the separation of educational funding, materials, and settings. As a result, from the late 1800s through the first half of the 20th century, the education of African-Americans eventually became more industrialized and was led by the economic trends that shifted the focus from the field to the factory (DuBois, 1903; Ogbu, 1978). By the mid-1950s, African-American people were facing high rates of unemployment within their communities and low levels of academic achievement for African-American students (Hood, 1973). According to Hood (1973), “with the decreasing number of low-skilled jobs
available to them as a result of automation and other changes within this country, Blacks faced the grim facts of their condition in an affluent society” (p. 9). Further, “Blacks as other Americans, learned that the type and quality of education that one received varied with one’s position on the economic and social ladder of society in the United States” (Hood, 1973, p. 13).

In 1950, Kenneth Clark was called to testify in the case of Brown vs. the Board of Education (Edwards & Polite, 1992). The suit actually consisted of five different cases where the educational settings of African-Americans were viewed as unequal. The case intended to prove that the psychological, intellectual and financial damage caused by segregation precluded equality. Kenneth Clark was asked to testify in an attempt to prove the psychological deleterious effects on the psyche of the African-American child. According to Edwards and Polite, Clark noted:

These children saw themselves as inferior and they accepted the inferiority as part of reality. Segregation was, is, the way in which a society tells a group of human beings that they are inferior to other groups of human beings in the society. It is really internalized in children, learning they cannot go to the same schools as other children, that they are required to attend clearly inferior schools than others are permitted to attend. It influences a child’s view of himself. (p. 46)

The 1954 ruling in the Brown vs. the Board of Education case found that “separate but equal” should not exist within public education because “separate
education facilities are inherently unequal” (Edwards & Polite, 1992, p. 46). This ruling overturned the previous ruling of *Plessey vs. Ferguson*.

2.5.2. African-American Students and Academic Achievement

The academic performance of African-American students relative to White students indicates that, in general, African-American students perform at a lower academic level than Whites. According to the 2004 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the average African-American twelfth-grade student achieves lower test scores in both reading and math than the average White twelfth-grade student. When researchers attempt to describe the relationship between academic achievement and racial identity development, there appears to be two opposing viewpoints. On one hand, racial group membership is seen to require the student to develop maladaptive coping skills, such as a raceless or oppositional identity (Fordham, 1996). Conversely, some researchers feel racial group membership protects and enhances academic achievement (Phinney, 1990; Tatum 1997).

It has been proposed that some African-American students cope with stereotype threat by adopting a strategy of *racelessness* (Fordham, 1988, 1996; Tatum, 1997). In doing so, Blacks take on the mannerisms, attitudes and characteristics not generally associated with African-American culture. This allows the student to downplay their association with the Black community (Fordham, 1988). In essence, the student assimilates into the White group by avoiding activities and behaviors that might lead others to associate the student with the Black community. For example, Tatum (1997) cites a student response during her study on
racial identity development. The student, who is the only Black student in his advanced-study classes, recalls:

“At no point did I ever think I was White or did I ever want to be White…I guess it was one of those things where I tried to de-emphasize the fact that I was Black…I didn’t want to do anything that was traditionally Black, like I never played basketball. I ran cross-country…I went for distance running instead of sprints”. (p. 63)

Tatum (1997) concludes the student “felt he had to show his White classmates that there were ‘exceptions to all these stereotypes’” (p. 63). While engaging a strategy of racelessness helps some students cope with high academic achievement, it is not necessary to reject their Black identity to do so. Instead of becoming raceless, “the student may become an emissary, someone who sees his or her own achievements as advancing the cause of the racial group” (p. 64).

Supporters of the notion that racial group membership can impede academic achievement by requiring the student to develop maladaptive academic coping skills, such as Fordham and Ogbu (1986), postulate that some Black youth have learned to recognize existing systemic barriers to success. As a result of realizing the systematic exclusion of African-Americans from full societal participation, some African-American students distance themselves from achievement-related behaviors that would ensure educational success due to a belief that success and prosperity are unlikely or even unachievable, thereby forming an oppositional identity (Fordham
& Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1988). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) state oppositional identity occurs when:

subordinate minorities regard certain forms of behavior and certain activities or events, symbols, and meanings as not appropriate for them because those behaviors, events, symbols, and meanings are characteristic of white Americans. At the same time they emphasize other forms of behavior as more appropriate for them because these are not a part of white Americans’ way of life. To behave in the manner defined as falling within a white culture frame of reference is to “act white” and is negatively sanctioned. (p. 181)

According to Tatum (1997), academic achievement is not a stereotype attributed to African-Americans, but instead is associated with being White. Thus, if academic success is more often associated with being White, the African-American student experiencing oppositional identity will actively avoid achieving academically. In essence, oppositional identity is useful in two ways: (a) it helps to protect the individual from the negative psychological effects of racism and (b) it acts as a buffer between the individual and the dominant group (Tatum, 1997). In addition, it has been found that some African-American students tend to devalue areas of academics in which Blacks have traditionally been unsuccessful. This devaluation acts as a buffer to protect the student’s self-esteem against failure (Graham, Taylor & Hudley, 1998; Hughes & Demo, 1989).
Some students reject the notion of academic success due to fear of “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1990). According to Ogbu (2003), students in his study said that it was “not normal for a Black person to behave like a White person because it implied renouncing Black identity” (p. 203). When asked if African-American students who are academically successful and African-American adults who are professionally successful abandon their Black identity, it was found that elementary and middle school students did not think so. However, when high school students were asked, the response indicated that some successful Black students and adult professionals were viewed as abandoning their culture and racial identity. Reasons for this perceived abandonment included acculturation into the White culture as a student and professional survival strategy. Acculturation by the students was said to begin early during the educational process. Once the student was placed in the higher performing classes, he or she would be surrounded by Whites and would begin to think, talk, and behave like a White person. The higher performing classes would lead to college admittance where the individual would be surrounded by more White people and would then learn to think, talk, and behave even more like a White person. Through this acculturation, the individual “lost their racial identity, because they no longer interacted with other Blacks” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 207). The abandonment of racial and cultural identity by successful Black professionals is viewed as a survival strategy. According to the students in Ogbu’s study, Black professionals had to learn to “fit in” with highly educated Whites.
Consequently, the Black professionals were forced to adopt the attitudes, behaviors and speech patterns of Whites.

In addition to the aforementioned reasons, the students provided other explanations to why some African-Americans equated high academic achievement with White behavior. One reason was due to inadequate historical knowledge of the struggle of African-Americans for education. In essence, Black students who did not have the knowledge of the fight for equal access to education believed that only White people developed the cultural value of academic achievement. Other students felt poor performing students used the notion of academic achievement indicating “acting White” behavior as a ploy to discourage their friends from striving to achieve. Another reason provided was that individuals who assert successful African-Americans abandon their culture and racial identity, believe so as an expression of their anti-White establishment tendencies that are due to the secondary position of Blacks in society. According to Ogbu (2003), when asked why some Blacks equate high academic performance with acting White, a student in stated:

Traditionally, in American society, it has seemed like we have been under oppression. For example, there were laws simply to oppress Black people…So because of the [oppression] Black people came to believe that it was always good, you know, if you could find some way, just somethin’ small, you know, just to annoy society…so that you could go against society…you see all these White people get up on the stage and talk about
education this and education that. And you [as a Black person] just gonna [i.e., say to yourself], “Well, I don’t care what you [got in mind],.” And so you don’t [you don’t behave like White people to make good grades]. (p. 211)

Researchers who support the notion that racial identity fosters academic achievement propose that a deliberate, self-chosen affiliation with African-American culture promotes academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2003; Murray, Stokes & Peacock, 1999; Tatum, 1997). African-American students who embrace their race and ethnicity experience a strong, healthy self-concept and indicate that pride in one’s race is a constructive tool towards academic achievement (Tatum, 1997). Higher levels of academic success were found in students whose parents socialized them to be aware of racially-motivated barriers to their future (Murray et al., 1999). In addition, Tatum (1997) found that an awareness of racism and discrimination may prompt African-American students to develop alternate modes of expression that allow them to experience a positive self-concept. According to Chavous et al. (2003), a strong affiliation with the African-American community has been linked to having a strong education ethic, which has been found to be a motivating result of an awareness of the historical struggles of African-Americans for equal educational access. Finally, Chavous et al. found that Black students who expressed an idealized racial identity profile with high levels of racial centrality, public regard and private regard reported the highest level of academic achievement.
2.6 Parental Influence on Identity Attitudes and Academic Achievement

The Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological systems theory can be used to understand the development of the African-American identity by examining the four spheres of influence (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem) on the child (Cross, Strauss & Fhagen-Smith, 1999). The microsystem, which is influenced by the child-rearing strategies parents use to prepare the child for existence in an oppressive environment, refers to the child’s immediate environment that consists of the home, school, neighborhood and any other setting the child experiences (McAdoo, 2002; Tatum, 1997). The mesosystem refers to the connections between the microsystems. As many African-American children grow up in segregated neighborhoods, peer groups are usually monoracial, which emphasizes the African-American self as “other” when compared to the mainstream ideals encountered in school (Cross, 1998). The Exosystem consists of the mass media and other sources that influence identity without direct contact with the child. The macrosystem, which consists of the three previous systems, holds the residual effects of slavery and racial discrimination. This leads the individual to develop a racial identity that is either positive or negative (Cross, 1998).

Socialization can be defined as the preparation of children to accept adult roles and responsibilities in society through the teaching and learning of beliefs, values and patterns of behavior (Boykin & Toms, 1985). The most important source of socialization, especially for preschool and elementary-aged children, is the parents (Demo & Hughes, 1990; McAdoo, 1985).
Racial socialization has been defined as raising children to be physically and emotionally healthy despite the stress of an environment in which being African-American is perceived as negative by the dominant society (Peters, 1985). Greene (1992) defined racial socialization as the legacy of skills that are both explicitly and implicitly passed down through parents and extended family members to children in an attempt to deflect and negotiate a hostile environment. Additionally, Stevenson (1993) defined racial socialization as the process of helping children integrate a sense of self within a hostile environment. These definitions all symbolize the importance of teaching African-American children various coping strategies needed to live productively and develop a positive self-concept despite living within an oppressive society.

The racial socialization of African-American children by African-American parents generally takes one of two forms: passive, which ignores racial issues and reactive, which deliberately addresses racial issues. According to Murray and Mandara (2002), the reactive approach relates positively to the formation of healthy psychological functioning. Murray et al. (1999) found that parents who create warm, nurturing, and supportive environments that emphasize group pride and coping strategies for dealing with racism help to promote healthy psychological functioning and racial identity formation in their children. Additionally, parents who combine direct teaching and modeling of strong ethnic identification have shown successful transmission of attitudes, skills and values that are consistent with African-American culture (Spencer, 1983).
Extending the two forms of racial socialization, Spencer (1985) proposed three new categories: race-conscious, race-neutral and race-avoidant/class conscious (Tatum, 2004). Race-conscious African-American parents actively seek out African-American playmates for their children and encourage involvement in traditionally African-American cultural activities in an attempt to promote a positive African-American identity in the children. Race-neutral African-American parents do not make any sustained efforts to include African-American children in the playgroup or attempt to influence their children’s playgroups on the basis of race. Class-conscious parents emphasize socioeconomic status as the most important reference group and may be considered race-avoidant to the extent they distance themselves from other African-Americans (Tatum, 2004). While utilizing these categories, Tatum (2004) conducted a study on the racial identity development of African-American youths in White communities. Her findings indicated that “the educational experiences of all of the participants suggest that White-dominated schools, which formally and informally perpetuate the racial order, can work to undermine” the foundation of African-American identity built by race-conscious families (p. 132). This is an important finding due to the fact that racial and ethnic diversity in suburban areas increased from 19 percent to 27 percent between the years 1990 and 2000 (Frey, 2001).

2.7 African-American Migration to Suburban Areas

During the last half of the 20th century, “millions of American families moved to the suburbs in quest of their version of the good life – peace and quiet,
safe streets, good schools, convenient shopping…In one metropolitan area after another, the suburban diaspora left large numbers of African-Americans behind in central cities, thereby fostering a split image of urban America as African-American and suburban America as white” (Sigelman & Willnat, 2000). In 1972, Wirt, Walter and Rabinowitz, et al. stated the suburbs are “the white man’s tribal reservation, isolated from the growing blackness of the core city” (p. 35). Hence, the general assumption became that “urban” was code for “Black” or “African-American” and “suburban” for “White”. In fact, Friedman (2006) asserts that the term “urban” has become a catchall phrase for anything related to Black culture.

With this dichotomous view came stereotypical ideas of the two settings. “Urban” has come to be associated with negative words such as: loud, dangerous, poverty, hardship, crime and gang. As noted above, it has also become associated with “Black” and “African-American”. Negative images of urban areas constructed by the media continue to perpetuate these stereotypes. For example, the television show Cops was described by Fotsch (1999):

*Cops* sets up a simplistic dichotomy between ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’. This portrayal constructs the criminals or suspects in the show as inherently ‘bad’ or inferior people. The idea that poor urban residents as a whole are immoral and irresponsible comes through most when the officers in *Cops* are called to the scene…the police peruse the run-down homes of the poor finding evidence of drug abuse, very little food in the refrigerator and generally unhealthy living conditions. In sum, the social hierarchy which is
mapped out in the poverty of the inner city and the wealth of the suburbs is portrayed as a natural consequence of the lack of moral and responsibility among these inner city residents”. (p. 116)

Fotsch also asserts that television shows such as *Cops* and other forms of media help to construct a subtle racist and overtly stereotypical view of urban dwelling African-Americans as lazy, unlawful and lacking the “American” value of hard work that is necessary to succeed in society.

Besides the stereotypical views of urban areas, there is the overriding notion that urban schools (and therefore the education that is obtained) are inherently inferior to suburban schools. In 1985, Blacks and Hispanics dominated 23 of the nation’s 25 largest school systems, which boasted schools that were increasingly overloaded with students, under-funded by the government, and under-staffed by teachers who had less training and received less pay (Frady, 1985). It was found that there is a large disparity nationwide between the spending on education between urban and suburban schools. In the inner city, the amount expended per student is $5,590. However, in suburban schools, the per student expenditure averages close to $11,000 (Kozol, 1991), leading researchers to examine the effects of such discrepant funding. It has been noted that students in suburban schools are more likely to have advanced educational resources in the form of the most recent versions of textbooks, computers in the classrooms, and highly skilled teachers in addition to other skilled personnel (counselors, tutors, etc.). Conversely, urban schools often have outdated textbooks, structural damage to the school itself and inexperienced or new teachers
(Golba, 1998). As Gross (1985) noted, “the group that inherits pencils and typewriters in the age of the microchip will discover itself, unfortunately, without the aptitude for the best jobs in the coming century” (p. 184).

Kozol (1991) completed a study on American public schools in five major U.S. cities and found that African-American students in urban schools were not receiving equal educational opportunities as compared to their White counterparts in suburban schools. According to Golba (1998), “declining test scores, racial and social class prejudices, and inadequate school facilities have people abandoning the urban schools” (p. 3).

2.7.1 Attitudinal Differences Between African-Americans

African-Americans currently make up approximately one-tenth of the suburban population in the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas, meaning that about 3 in 10 African-Americans live in a suburb (Sigelman & Willnat, 2000; O’Hare & Frey, 1992). According to Sigelman and Willnat (2000), this growing suburbanization of African-Americans may trigger a wall of separation between the “urban” and “suburban” African-Americans, causing a distinction of class and status within the race.

Sigelman and Willnat (2000) conducted a study on the attitudinal differences between African-Americans living in a predominantly African-American urban area and in a predominantly African-American suburban area. By examining the attitudes of African-Americans living in an urban area and those living in a suburban area, Sigelman and Willnat considered three different theories:
assimilation, transplantation, and identity persistence. The assimilation theory posits a large difference in the attitudes of African-Americans who live in the city and those who live in a suburb. In this theory, as African-Americans begin to think of themselves as suburban homeowners, their old identities (based on ethnicity and religion) fall by the wayside, leaving an attitude of new social status. The transplantation theory asserts that suburban areas do not change the attitudes of the inhabitants, but that the inhabitants held middle-class attitudes all along and brought those attitudes with them to the suburban neighborhood. Finally, the identity-persistence interpretation emphasizes attitudinal unity among African-Americans. In this theory, the history that African-Americans share as a people is so salient that the identity of African-Americans is unaffected by where they reside. Results of their study indicated that the identity-persistence theory best accounts for the experiences of the African-American people studied. However, it should be noted that the study consisted of adults and was conducted in primarily African-American settings, which may not generalize to younger ages or African-Americans living in a predominantly White setting.

In 2004, Lacy conducted a study comparing African-American parents living in a predominantly White suburban community and African-American parents living in a predominantly Black suburban community. The study concluded that middle-class Blacks who move to suburban areas tend to experience strategic assimilation: the ability to retain connections with the black community, yet have access to majority White colleges, workplaces, and neighborhoods. Thus, the black
community was seen as a place for socialization and healthy identity formation, even if the parents chose to live and be educated in a predominantly White suburban area.

2.8 African-Americans in Predominantly White Suburban Settings

According to DeCuir and Dixson (2004), “because of the legacy of racism, schooling is problematic for African-American students, particularly those students attending predominantly White schools…for such students, feeling culturally alienated, being physically isolated and remaining silenced are common experiences” (p. 26). African-American adolescents educated in predominantly White, suburban school districts are grappling not only with their personal and racial identity, but they are doing so in an educational environment that may not understand or be able to fully support their development.

In 1984, James Banks conducted an ethnographic study that considered the attitudes and self-concepts of Black youth in predominantly White suburbs. According to Banks:

Black children socialized within predominantly White suburban communities are likely to become highly attitudinally assimilated into White society and that this kind of assimilation may have complex effects on their racial attitudes toward Blacks and their levels of ethnocentrism. As attitudinal assimilation increased, these children became increasingly more positive toward their schools and neighborhoods and more positive toward Whites, but less positive toward Blacks. (p. 16)
Additionally, Banks noted that the African-American females in the study had a more difficult time living in the predominantly White suburb. According to Banks, the females liked their neighborhood less than their male counterparts and also had a slightly more negative attitude toward African-Americans. This suggests that African-American females experience White suburban communities differently than African-American males. Unfortunately, while research has been conducted on African-American students in predominantly White settings (see Banks, 1984; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ogbu, 2003; Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996; & Tatum, 2004;), and African-American females in predominantly Black, urban settings (see Evans-Winters, 2005; Fordham, 1988), less focus has been given to the specific experiences of African-American females in predominantly White, suburban settings. In her previously mentioned study on African-American youth in White communities, Tatum (2004) noted that the African-American males appeared to have “options” available to them that their female counterparts did not, namely more tolerance by their peers if they engage in interracial dating and easier acceptance into the social networks of the school environment.

2.9 Conclusion

Today, many prominent educators and researchers such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, William Cross, Jr., bell hooks, Beverly Daniel Tatum, James Banks and many others have researched and written about the experiences of African-Americans within the general American society as well as within educational settings. From their writings we have learned about the identity construction of
African-Americans within the racist institution that is the United States and the racial and gender identity construction of African-American females within their racist and sexist environments. We have discussed the hardships African-Americans have faced in the pursuit of equal educational opportunities and how racial identity impacts educational achievement. In addition, the trend of African-American migration to suburban areas was discussed with attention given to how such acts effect African-American parents and students.

Unfortunately, there is much less research on the specific experiences of African-American adolescent females within a predominantly White suburban setting and how their racial, gender and social identities are constructed within and affected by those settings. In speaking of African-Americans, Stevens (1997) noted that “the experience of isolation/separation from the group can be problematic, painful and may contribute to poor mental health…moreover, disconnection from one’s cultural reference group not only generates guilt and shame, and creates cultural dissonance, but also deprives the individual of the psychological supports needed to cope with the stress of a racist society” (p. 3).

In addition, evidence of the effects and experiences of moving to a predominantly White suburban setting after growing up in a predominantly African American urban setting is not evident in the literature. Given the increasing numbers of African-Americans moving to predominantly White suburbs, this topic should be addressed to supplement the current research on African-Americans. Additionally, issues relating to the interaction between African-American students raised in an
urban environment and African-American students raised in a predominantly White suburban environment should be addressed.

Authors such as Chavous et al. (2003), Sellers et al. (1998) and Harper (2004) have indicated the need for qualitative inquiry into the lives of African-American students and their educational experiences. Additionally, Gibson (2005) noted that “more qualitative research needs to be conducted on black adolescent females” (p. 203). Qualitative research allows the participants to speak for themselves and narrate their reality. As such, this qualitative research study on the educational experiences of African-American adolescent females living within a predominantly White suburban community provided opportunity for the adolescent females to tell their own stories, allowing for more accurate findings.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.4). Through interpretive practices, the world is transformed into series of images and representations that allow the qualitative researcher to study and interpret phenomena in their natural settings. Interpretation is derived from the meaning the researcher and those being researched bring to the phenomena being studied. Qualitative research stresses the “socially constructed nature of reality” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 13) and questions how social experience is both created and given meaning. It is grounded in the German idealist school of thought and was created in opposition to the use of quantitative methods in social science research by researchers in the field of anthropology, education, sociology, criminal justice and social psychology.

Quantitative research is used to measure and analyze phenomena within a sample in order to determine a relationship between variables that is statistically reliable and can be generalized to the larger population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).
According to Rist (1982), quantitative methods are limited in capturing the richness of the phenomena being studied. As a result, Rist found “as evidence accumulates that quantitative methods are in an intellectual cul-de-sac where new development depends only upon expanded software quality, many researchers are looking elsewhere and reassessing what it means ‘to do science’” (p. 439). Differing from quantitative inquiry, qualitative research is concerned with the qualities, processes and meanings of phenomena that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, or intensity and is “characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, (with) the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and a richly descriptive end product” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Qualitative research aims to gather information about the lives and sociohistorical context of a given people/situation. Various theoretical perspectives are used to understand (e.g., interpretive perspective), emancipate (e.g. critical perspective) or deconstruct (e.g., postmodern perspective) the underlying structure of a phenomenon. These perspectives allow the researcher to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participants’ perspective (Merriam, 2002).

Due to the limitations of quantitative methods to answer social questions and capture the richness and diversity of phenomena, the current project was completed with the use of qualitative methods. Using qualitative methods allowed each participant to speak for herself and voice her own lived reality of her experiences as an African-American female in a predominantly White suburban educational setting. According to the interpretivist view of qualitative theory, researchers must
study the environment through the people who have constructed meaning from that environment (Cusick, 1973). Thus, in agreement with Cusick, the researcher believes the meaning an individual derives from the environment is significant in how she chooses to live life and perceive herself in relation to that environment, resulting in a set of beliefs and actions.

3.1.1 Phenomenology

According to Creswell (2003), phenomenological research calls for the researcher to identify the “essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in the study (p. 15). In phenomenological research, the researcher strives to understand and accurately describe the lived experiences of the participants. Creswell (1998) summarized the major procedural issues impacting phenomenology as follows (p. 54):

1. The researcher must understand the philosophical perspective behind the approach and be able to bracket his or her own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon in order to understand it through the voices of the informants.

2. The researcher writes research questions aimed at exploring the meaning of that experience for individuals and asks individuals to describe their everyday lived experiences.

3. The researcher collects data through interviews and transcribes them in preparation for analysis.

4. The researcher describes the essential essence of the experience, recognizing that a single unifying meaning of the experience exists.
Although there are multiple forms of qualitative inquiry, phenomenology was best suited for this study in that phenomenology calls for the researcher to understand a concept or phenomenon, while ethnography, grounded theory, case study, and biography call for the researcher to draw a portrait of a cultural group, develop a theory, examine a specific case, or study the life of one individual, respectively. The researcher wanted to help African-American females “tell their stories” of what it is like to be an African-American female in a predominantly White suburban school. Thus, in using the phenomenological approach, the researcher was able to study the phenomenon by interviewing multiple girls and helping them tell their collective stories. It required the researcher to suspend her own presuppositions (see section 3.4) and take a fresh, unaltered view of the phenomenon is question. As stated by Husserl (1931), researchers interested in phenomenology should “set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking and learn to see what stands before our eyes” (p. 43).

3.2 Research Questions

The main objective of this study was to discover, understand, and describe the educational experiences of African-American females within a predominantly White suburban school district. According to Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995), African-American girls are often silenced: “These girls have voices, they are perfectly capable of first-person speech, but as they will say repeatedly, nobody
listens, nobody cares, nobody asks what they are feeling and thinking” (p. 1). Accordingly, the research questions were as follows:

(1) What are the lived academic experiences of African-American females in a predominantly White suburban school district?
   a. How do these experiences differ between females raised in a predominantly White suburban environment and females who move into that environment from a predominantly African-American urban environment?

(2) What are the lived socialization experiences of African-American females in a predominantly White suburban district?
   a. How do these perceptions/experiences differ between females raised in a predominantly White suburban environment and females who move into that environment from a predominantly African-American urban environment?

(3) How do African-American females raised in different settings (i.e., predominantly White suburban vs. predominantly African-American urban) perceive African-Americans from the opposite educational setting?

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Theoretical Framework

It is the belief of the researcher that the world consists of multiple truths which are subjective to each individual. As it is also the belief of the researcher that these truths are constructed and upheld on the basis of power (both social and
political), the researcher has concern for groups that have experienced various oppressive acts. The researcher is a biracial woman with an African-American heritage who is interested in topics of diversity, with specific concern for females and individuals of African-American descent. The study was developed from these interests, concerns, and beliefs in relation to African-American females.

According to Crotty (1998), the theoretical perspective of a study should be an extension of the epistemological assumptions of the researcher. The researcher’s epistemological assumption lies in the belief of self-determination; individuals are active participants in, and have the ability to shape the nature of their own existence; even though that existence is impacted by the conditions they inherit (e.g., race and gender). However, it is important to remember that qualitative research interprets the beliefs of individuals and attempts to give voice to the individuals and phenomena studied.

Qualitative studies are interpretive by nature (Cusick, 1973), and the researcher’s interpretive lens is influenced by Critical Race Theory (CRT). Furthermore, the review of literature pertaining to African-American adolescent females compelled that the methodology of this study be informed by CRT and critical theory perspectives. Critical theory in educational research challenges traditional assumptions that have influenced mainstream knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it. Critical theory acknowledges that research
inherently involves power issues and privilege maintenance, recognizing that all research is authored and constructed by a raced, gendered, classed and politically-oriented individual (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Critical race theory (CRT) extends critical theory by grounding basic assumptions in a multicultural perspective. CRT has five basic assumptions (Decuir & Dixson, 2004):

1. **Counter-storytelling.** Counter-storytelling allows researchers to “analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Using CRT allowed the researcher to analyze the participants’ voiced perceptions and experiences of being educated in a predominantly White suburban school and helped gain understanding of what life is like for them within that setting. By dialoging with the girls about their personal experiences as African-American females educated within a predominantly White suburban school district, the researcher was able to draw together their collective stories into a powerful statement of what it is like for them as an “other”.

2. **The Permanence of Racism.** CRT “begins with the notion that racism is ‘normal, not aberrant, in American society’” (Delgado, 1995, p. xvi) and racism is considered a natural occurrence because it is woven into the very fabric that is the United States. However, discussions of race and the effects of racism/racist acts are relatively rare within the academy (Omi & Winant,
1994). Thus, due to the lack of research specifically focused on African-American females educated within predominantly White suburban settings, this study may help to spark conversation about this phenomenon and specific challenges the girls face.

3. **Whiteness as Property.** CRT argues that, in relation to educational access, advanced courses are almost exclusively accessed by Whites (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and that African-American students are generally grouped into lower-level courses. By examining the courses available to the participants along with the courses they enrolled in and the reasons they made those choices, the study examined how advanced courses were viewed as the “property of Whites”.

4. **Interest convergence.** CRT also argues that White people have received the most benefit from civil rights legislation. For example, Ladson-Billings (2003) found more White women have received benefits from affirmative action hiring policies than has any other marginalized group. Under this tenet, acts that may seem beneficial for people of color are mainly in place because they serve a greater purpose for the institution (e.g., courses offered on African-American literature help the district gain/maintain a reputation of acceptance and promotion of cultural diversity).

5. **Critique of Liberalism.** CRT critiques the liberalist view of the civil rights movement as “flawed because it fails to understand the limits of the current legal paradigm to serve as a catalyst for social change because of its
emphasis on incrementalism” (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 403). There are two concepts included within this tenet: meritocracy and colorblindness (DeCuir-Gunsby, 2007). Meritocracy is the idea that hard work will result in success, regardless of the race of the individual. Colorblindness posits that race is not recognized or considered, but that it is the individual who matters. Neither meritocracy nor colorblindness consider the race of an individual, therefore neither considers the inherent racist nature of American society; however, both encourage the assimilation of minority groups into the majority White culture.

The African-American female participants in this study interact daily with a society that is both sexist and racist. Thus, the experiences of the young women in this study were best reviewed by a methodology informed by critical race theory, making CRT the most natural perspective from which to tell their stories.

Research supported by qualitative inquiry and interpreted with critical race theory tends to be descriptive in nature and seeks to transform structures that perpetuate inequities (Quarcoo, 2005). This dissertation research project has been developed with these assumptions in mind and hopes to contribute to the literature on African-American adolescent females in predominantly White educational settings. By combining aspects of the aforementioned methodologies, the researcher hoped to help the participants voice their perceptions by ensuring the findings were drawn from their lived experiences.
3.3.2 Setting

The research occurred in a high school located in a suburban district of a large Midwestern city. Touted as one of the most diverse suburban districts in the metropolitan area, 86.5% of the population is classified as White, 8% African-American, 3.3% Asian, and 1.3% Hispanic. The high school population consists of approximately 2,300 students in grades 9-12, with approximately 78% of students classified as White, 15% African-American, 3% Multiracial, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% Hispanic. Of these students, 7.9% were considered economically disadvantaged, 0.8% had limited English proficiency and 15.3% were students with disabilities. The school received an “Excellent” rating during the 2005-2006 school year by the state department of education, passing all 12 state performance indicators. Additionally, 95.3% and 90.2% of all students were found to be proficient in reading and mathematics on the state graduation test, respectively, with the state standard set at 75%. African-American students exceeded the 75% state standard on all academic areas assessed, with the exception of science. The scores of African-American students within the district exceeded the scores of African-American students attending most of the other suburban schools of the city.

During the 2006-2007 school year, the high school offered over 250 courses within the following areas: Art, Business, Computer Science, English/Language Arts, International Languages, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education/Health, Science, Social Studies, Special Education, Technology Education, Vocational Education, and Work and Family Life. There were also courses offered within
Career Centers to prepare students for direct employment as technically-skilled workers. Although none of the 250+ courses were specifically designed around African-American issues (i.e., African-American Literature or African-American History), the school offered a two-year program with a global/multicultural focus that specifically required that the student “respect diversity and demonstrate an interest in global and multicultural studies”. Thus, students who showed desire to work with and learn about issues of diversity were able to apply for this program, which was taught at a neighboring university in the afternoons.

This study not only adds to the growing collection of research on African-American students and academic achievement, but also offers new information to the research base in the form of qualitative understanding of student experiences and the viewpoints of differing areas of residence. Furthermore, this information will assist the school in helping to foster student achievement and will provide insight into ways to strengthen the school community. When the research idea was originally discussed with the principal, he was very interested in conducting research that would help him better understand the experiences of the African-American students in the school.

3.3.3 Participant Selection

As noted by Patton (2002), one of the largest differences between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies is that of utilized sampling procedures. While quantitative research calls for random sampling procedures that allow for later generalization to the general population, qualitative research utilizes purposeful
Purposeful sampling emphasizes sampling for cases that are rich in information (Patton, 2002):

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term ‘purposeful sampling’ (p. 230)

For the study, the researcher collaborated with the high school principal and counseling staff to identify potential student participants for the study. Students were selected based on the following criteria:

- Identified as African-American on school records
- Female
- Attended the school district throughout her school career OR transferred to the district during high school from a predominantly African-American, urban school district.

Criteria were based on these characteristics because (a) racial identity development unfolds during adolescence (Cross, 1971; Phinney & Tarver, 1988; Tatum, 1997), (b) previous research posits that the social context in which African-American females develop an identity is both racist and sexist (Beale, 1970; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 1991; Reid, 1988), and (c) while research has been conducted on African-American students in predominantly White settings (Banks, 1984; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ogbu, 2003; Shorter-Goode & Washington, 1996; & Tatum, 2004;), and African-American females in predominantly Black, urban settings (see Evans-
Winters, 2005; Fordham, 1993), little focus has been given to the specific experiences of African-American females in predominantly White suburban settings.

After gaining IRB approval to conduct this study (see Appendix I), each family in the population pool was given an envelope containing an informational letter to parents and a permission form for them to complete if they desired for their daughter to participate in the study. Once their parents signed the permission form, the girls returned the forms to school and placed them in a locked box (the keys were kept by the researcher to ensure confidentiality). After obtaining the signed permission forms, the researcher contacted each family to discuss the project and answer questions they may have had about the project. The original idea was to limit the number of participants, but after speaking with the families, it became clear to the researcher that this was a topic of great interest and the families were concerned with their daughters’ educational experiences as African-American females within the district. For example, many families expressed appreciation that their daughters would have a chance to be heard, with one mother expressly saying that “it’s about time somebody asked”. However, another mother expressed concern and even disagreement with her daughter’s participation in the study, reporting that her husband had signed the consent form because she would not. This mother felt this research wouldn’t make a difference in her daughter’s educational experience because “nobody cares” and said she felt the school district and society in general were not concerned with the well-being of her daughter; that this project was only
going to benefit the researcher (by helping to complete graduation requirements) and would give her daughter false hope of being heard.

As is true with qualitative research, the researcher hoped to obtain the “richest” information possible to help understand the research question. According to Patton (1990), “sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (p. 184). Although some qualitative researchers provide general guidelines for sample size, Patton states researchers should not use a fixed number of participants:

What should happen is that purposeful sample be judged on the basis of the purpose and rationale of each study and the sampling strategy used to achieve the study’s purpose. The sample, like all other aspects of qualitative inquiry, must be judged in contexts – the same principle that undergirds analysis and presentation of qualitative data (p. 185).

All participants who (1) returned signed permission slips, (2) met all the aforementioned criteria, and (3) signed assent forms were allowed to participate in the study. In order to better understand the educational experiences of the students in relation to their past experiences, the participants were separated into two groups, depending on the community in which they were raised: six girls were raised within the predominantly White suburban district of study, and five girls transferred to the district of study from a predominantly African-American urban area (see Appendix A for a description of the participants).
3.3.4 Data Collection

As each method of data collection has its own strengths and weaknesses, there is no single method that can be trusted enough to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Patton, 2002). Thus, multiple methods of gathering research are often used within qualitative research (Glesne, 1999). The current study utilized three types of data collection: (a) survey, (b) focus group interviews, and (c) individual interviews.

Survey: Surveys are generally used to provide a numeric description of trends, attitudes, opinions or thoughts of a population by using data gathered from a sample of that population (Crewsell, 2003). However, for the purpose of this study, a survey was used to help the researcher know where to begin interview questions. By providing the researcher with an idea of how each participant felt about various topics, the surveys provided part of the foundation for the interview questions. The survey (see Appendix B) consisted of questions ranging in topics related to socialization (e.g., friendships and dating), academics (e.g., coursework and future plans for college), and personal beliefs in relation to race and gender. Results of the interviews were analyzed for general themes and the themes were used, in conjunction with other information (see below), to develop the interview questions.

Interviews: The interviews were less “question and answer” and more “conversational” in an attempt to engage the participants in dialogue and obtain their descriptions of their educational experiences in a predominantly White school district. The use of dialogue allowed the creation of equal relationships by talking
with, rather than to, the participants. This helped lead to a deconstruction of the participant’s own experiences and, in the case of the focus group interviews, provided availability to connect with the experiences of others. “Dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination” (hooks, 1989, p. 131). All interviews were audiotaped, lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes and were conducted during lunch periods, study halls, after school, or on weekends, depending on the schedules of the participants. In addition, all interviews were designed to include a specific combination of interviewing approaches: informal conversational review and general interview guide. The informal conversational review can be considered as an “unstructured” interview and is the most open-ended of all interview approaches, offering a high level of flexibility (Patton, 2002). The questions are not predetermined, but stem from natural conversation about a particular topic. As the researcher met with the principal and counseling staff, many topics were discussed, ranging from dating to participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Also, during the initial meeting with the participants, the researcher passed out a survey and had informal discussions with the group about their feelings of the school. These conversations, in addition to data from the survey, information collected during the review of literature, and the researcher’s personal experiences, were utilized to create the questions for the general interview guide used during the focus group interviews and individual interviews.
The use of an interview guide helped to ensure each participant in the study received the same general structure of questions (Patton, 2002). Because it is more structured than the “unstructured” informal conversational interview, it is often referred to a “semi-structured”. Although the interview consisted of a list of open-ended questions, this type of data collection procedure allows for the researcher to add or subtract questions, depending on the responses of the participant. Thus, it takes into account the constantly changing nature of qualitative research (Patton, 2002).

*Focus Group Interviews.* The purpose of a focus group is to “promote self-disclosure among participants” through the creation of a comfortable, permissive environment (Kreuger & Casey, 2000, p. 9). According to Kreuger and Casey (2000), the five characteristics of a focus group are: “(1) people who (2) possess certain characteristics and (3) provide qualitative data (4) in a focused discussion (5) to help understand the topic of interest” (p. 10). The focus group discussions helped determine the perceptions and feelings of the participants about their experiences in a predominantly White, suburban school district.

The focus group interviews consisted of guided questions pertaining to the educational experiences of the girls and allowed for further discussion beyond that of the actual questions (see Appendix C). According to Kreuger (1994), “smaller groups of 5, 6, or 7 participants not only offer more opportunity for individuals to talk but are considerably more practical to set up and manage” (p. xi). As such, each participant participated in one focus group centered on her educational experiences.
from a social and academic perspective, with attention given to differences perceived in growing up in different communities. The groups were divided between those participants who grew up in the predominantly White suburban school district of study and those who moved into the school district from a predominantly African-American urban school district.

Focus group interviews were transcribed and data were analyzed prior to the individual interviews. This allowed the researcher to provide each participant a copy of the analysis of her respective focus group prior to her individual interview. Thus, the participant had the opportunity to review the findings and make any corrections or clarifications. When asked prior to beginning the individual interview if the analysis was accurate, each of the participants agreed with the analysis of her respective focus group.

Individual Interviews: Individual interviews consisted of questions assembled from the themes extracted during analysis of the focus group interview data (see Appendix D). This allowed the participants to discuss themes and concepts in a more detailed fashion, in addition to allowing the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ personal experiences. In addition, if a participant was hesitant to discuss a topic of interest during the larger focus group interviews, the more personal setting of the individual interview may have provided the comfort level needed for the participant to discuss that issue.

All interviews (focus group and individual) were audiotaped, transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. As stated by Janesick (2003), “qualitative researchers do
not hire people to analyze and interpret their data. This is a critical difference
between the two paradigms (qualitative and quantitative)” (p. 63).

3.3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected during focus group and individual interviews was
analyzed (See Appendices E and F) using traditional phenomenological analysis
methods as outlined by Moustakas (1994). The researchers completed the following
analysis procedures: (1) epoche, (2) horizontalization, (3) textural description, (4)
synthesis of themes, and (5) construction of essence.

Epoche. According to Field and Morse (1985), the concept of epoche is
central to phenomenological research in that the researcher brackets his or her own
preconceived ideas about the phenomenon in order to better understand it through
the voices of the informants. For the current project, the researcher recalled her own
previous experiences (both educational and social) as a biracial female with
African-American heritage, which were all meaningful and worth reflection as they
have had a tremendous impact on the woman she is today. Through this bracketing
process, three major experiences came to the surface: (1) the experience of visiting a
majority White suburban high school during her own high school years at a
predominantly African-American urban high school and feeling, at that moment in
time, that her education and academic preparation were substandard in comparison
to those of the White suburban students; (2) as an adolescent, grappling with her
personal and group identity, including what it meant to her to be a woman of color
and how society viewed her; and (3) the friendships (both personal and professional)
that she was fortunate to have for support throughout her growth into womanhood. Through many conversations with friends and many hours of personal reflection and journaling, the researcher felt able to separate her own experiences and disconnect from those memories, allowing for a sense of closure. As the researcher moved through this process, she became more open and receptive and was able to fully concentrate on, listen to, and most importantly, hear, what the participants’ said about their own experiences without coloring it with her own feelings, thoughts or presuppositions. Thus, through this process, the researcher gained the ability to accurately tell the lived experiences of the participants in the study.

*Horizontalization.* The researcher reviewed transcribed data collected during the focus group and individual interviews and identified significant statements made by the participants. Each statement was treated as having equal worth and a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements was developed.

*Textural description.* The significant statements were then clustered together into units of similar meaning. The units of meaning allowed the researcher to group similar statements of the participants’ experiences and develop a list of general themes.

*Synthesis of themes.* The themes were synthesized into a description of the collective experiences of the participants.

*Construction of essence.* The researcher constructed a composite description of the meaning and essence of what it is like to be an African-American adolescent female attending a predominantly White suburban school district.
To summarize the data analysis process of the study, participants were contacted after the researcher received signed permission forms. The researcher discussed concerns the parents may have had and then met with the participants to discuss the study and hand out assent forms. After receiving signed assent forms, the researcher distributed surveys for the participants to complete and conducted a brief informal conversational interview with the participants as a group. After reviewing the results of the survey and considering information collected during the review of literature and all the informal conversational interviews with the participants, their families, and the faculty, the researcher developed an interview guide to provide structure to the interviews. Focus group interviews were conducted with both groups of girls, the data were analyzed and emerging themes were shared with the girls for their review. Upon receiving agreement that the themes were accurate, individual interview questions were developed and individual interviews were conducted and transcribed. Transcribed data from the individual interviews were analyzed and general themes and descriptions were shared with the participants for their review. None of the participants expressed concern or the belief that information should be added or changed because they felt the researcher accurately captured their lived experiences.

3.4 Researcher Subjectivity

Researcher subjectivity has the “capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Thus, it was
very important for the researcher to undergo the experience of epoche – to understand that her life experiences had the potential to influence her interpretation of the data and lead to an inaccurate or skewed description. For example, as stated in section 3.3.5, the researcher is a biracial female with African-American heritage who attended high school within a predominantly African-American urban school. Furthermore, she was an honor student throughout school and for a long time has been interested in topics of racial diversity. She has taken many courses focused on African-American history and has participated in many inner-city activities involving mainly African-American youth. As noted previously, the researcher reflected upon her own presuppositions related to the topic of study, both independently and through conversations with friends. Most of the researcher’s friends are professional women (doctors, social workers, legal aides, psychologists, etc), and many of them are African-American. Through past “girlfriend” conversations of growing up “in tha’ hood” vs. “in the ‘burbs” to more serious conversations of racial identity, the discussions helped shape the researcher’s views of race, identity, and education. All these experiences, along with an extensive review of literature, influenced the researcher’s assumptions entering the study, which were as follows:

1. African-American females experience schooling differently than other students, including African-American males and White females.
2. African-American females may have more social difficulty attending a White suburban school than do African-American males.

3. African-American females raised within predominantly African-American urban settings may feel a stronger, more positive, relationship to the Black community.

4. African-American females raised within the predominantly White suburban district of study may feel more comfortable within the White community.

Although, as noted previously, the researcher spent many hours reflecting upon her biases in an attempt to accurately reflect the lived experiences of only the participants, she understood that she may unintentionally color the findings with her own thoughts, feelings or biases. Therefore, specific safeguards were utilized in an attempt to produce a more accurate study.

3.5 Trustworthiness

3.5.1 Triangulation.

Triangulation is the process of utilizing multiple sources and methods to collect the richest data corpus possible. Triangulation “serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (Stake, 2000, p. 44) and allows researchers to ensure validity and reliability from a qualitative standpoint (Merriam, 2002). According to Janesick (2003), Denzin identified four basic types of triangulation in 1978:
1. Data triangulation: the use of a variety of data sources in a study.

2. Investigator triangulation: the use of several different researchers or evaluators.

3. Theory triangulation: the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data.

4. Methodological triangulation: the use of multiple methods to study a single problem. (p. 66)

The current study utilized three of the four identified types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation and methodological triangulation.

*Data triangulation.* Data triangulation occurred through the following:

1. African-American females who attended school in the predominantly White suburban school district for their entire school career.

2. African-American females who moved into the district during high school after attending a predominantly African-American urban school district for their previous educational schooling (kindergarten through at least eighth grade).

3. Students of varying academic achievement levels.

*Investigator triangulation.* The researcher employed the following methods to ensure investigator triangulation:

1. Peer review: As described by Merriam (2002), peer review, peer debriefing or peer examination can be conducted by a colleague of the researcher either familiar with the research or one new to the topic. The peer reviewer for this
study was familiar with qualitative methods and was be able to: (a) help the researcher in clarifying her thoughts, (b) probe any researcher biases and, (c) challenge presumptions or interpretations throughout the study (Schwandt, 2000).

2. Research group: Similar to the peer review, the research group acted as a sounding board to keep the researcher on track. The researcher is currently a member of a research team of graduate students who meet regularly to discuss current research topics. Numerous members of the research team agreed to meet with the researcher and assisted in the data analysis process.

3. Member checks: participants were provided with an interpretation of their focus group and individual interview transcripts and were asked to ensure the validity of the interpretation. This practice not only afforded a way to verify findings, but was also viewed as a way to provide the participants the “courtesy of knowing what the inquirer has to say about them” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 156).

Methodological triangulation: The researcher employed the following methods to ensure methodological triangulation:

1. Focus group interviews
2. Individual interviews
3. Survey data
The use of the above methodological procedures helped the researcher ensure that the study was credible and offered evidence of the reliability and validity criteria set forth by the field of educational research.

Although qualitative and quantitative research differ in many ways (methodology, analysis, etc.), each has ways of establishing research validity. While quantitative research relies on internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, qualitative researchers engage in parallel procedures that examine the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.5.2 Credibility

Because the researcher is the center of the analytical process, the credibility of the study is dependent upon the credibility of the researcher (Patton, 1990). One way the researcher was able to ensure the credibility of the research was to determine if the constructed realities of the participants matched the realities as represented by the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The accuracy of the representations was examined through the use of the aforementioned member checks. Each participant had the opportunity to examine how her reality was represented in the data analysis.

An additional strategy the researcher employed was that of using multiple techniques to ensure the integrity, validity and accuracy of the findings (Patton, 1990). Strategies utilized included data triangulation, methodological triangulation, and investigator triangulation. Although the terms “reliability” and “validity” tend...
to be viewed as quantitative in nature, they have a place in qualitative research as well. For example, the aforementioned triangulation is an example of internal validity in qualitative research.

3.5.3 Transferability

In qualitative research, external validity is generally obtained through the use of thick, rich description (Merriam, 2002). This was obtained through providing an adequate database with “enough description that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the studied phenomena, and thus whether it can be transferred” (Merriam, 2002, p. 29). Additionally, by maximizing variation of the purposely selected sample, the researcher increased external validity. Therefore, due to the diversity in the participants interviewed (i.e., where she grew up, her academic achievement, etc.), results can be transferred to a greater range of situations by readers (Merriam, 2002). As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the degree of transferability is dependent on the situation at hand and the similarity between the contexts, in that “if Context A and Context B are sufficiently congruent, then a working hypothesis from the sending originating context may be applicable in the receiving context” (p.124). However, it is important to note that Lincoln and Guba warn that qualitative researchers do not “specify external validity of an inquiry because they cannot; he or she can only provide the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 136).
3.5.4 Confirmability

In quantitative terms, reliability often depends upon the instruments used in the study. As noted previously, the researcher is the primary research instrument through which all data is collected (Merriam, 1998). Thus, in qualitative research, reliability and confirmability have to do with the researcher. Over time, with training and practice, the researcher becomes more reliable and techniques become more confirmable. This is why the previously mentioned techniques of analysis (e.g., triangulation) are so important. By employing such methods, the researcher was forced to become more reliable and the research gained confirmability (Merriam, 2002). Despite the procedural safeguards in place, it remained important that the researcher be self-reflective of her subjectivity (epochee) and disclose her personal biases openly (Pushkin, 1988) in order to provide confirmability to the study.

Authenticity

Authenticity occurs when the goals of the researcher are in synch with the needs of those being researched (Spradley, 1979). To inform the participants and their families of the attempt by the researcher to balance the needs of the participants and the researcher, the researcher was very upfront and honest with all potential participants. Participants were informed within the informed consent documents that this project would help to fulfill requirements for a doctoral degree. In addition, conversations were conducted in which the researcher spoke with the families to ensure they understood this was a topic of great personal concern to the researcher.
and that the researcher would not attempt to complete such a laborious intensive
task without true passion and dedication to this topic. As noted previously, a mother
voiced concern that the main reason for this study was to help the researcher
complete her graduation requirements by providing a topic for her dissertation.
Through conversation with this mother, the researcher was able to convey that this
project was much more than something that would help the researcher graduate; it
was a true passion and desire to help young African-American females find their
voices that truly fueled the fire.

3.7 Reciprocity and Other Ethical Considerations

3.7.1 Reciprocity

One of the greatest responsibilities of a qualitative researcher is the act of
reciprocity (Patton, 2002). Ideally, reciprocity should be provided to research
participants as acknowledgement for sharing their experiences. Reciprocity to each
participant included food and beverages during the interviews and the opportunity to
discuss issues of importance to the participant relative to her school experience. In
addition to the reciprocity provided to the participants, reciprocity was given to the
school as appreciation for approving the study. Reciprocity to the school included
the sharing of relevant information pertaining to the participants’ ideas of ways to
improve the educational experiences of African-American female students and
feedback on the overall research results. In order to protect the confidentiality of the
participants, all identifying information regarding the participants was withheld
from the information shared with school officials.
3.7.2 Ethical Considerations

Because the study was based on close involvement with participants through interviewing procedures, the researcher closely followed guidelines set forth by the Council of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the American Psychological Association (APA). These guidelines are in place to protect the well being of the participants and researcher and involve issues such as confidentiality, honesty, and informed consent. Consequently, if ethical issues had emerged during the length of the study, consideration would have been given to the participant first and foremost. In preparation for the study, the researcher completed an on-line course required by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and followed guidelines set forth by the Board.

Summary

This chapter detailed the topic of the research study and recapped the research questions that guided the study. It also reviewed the basic qualitative phenomenological structure and explained the research design, including the researcher’s theoretical framework and data collection procedures. Finally, researcher subjectivity, trustworthiness, authenticity, reciprocity and other ethical considerations were discussed. The following chapter will present the findings of the study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings generated from the analysis of the focus group and individual interviews in addition to a brief description of each participant. As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to discover, understand and describe the lived experiences of African-American females within a predominantly White suburban school district. There was particular interest in how African-American females perceive academics and socialization, and how these perceptions differed based on the environment in which they were raised (predominantly White suburban or predominantly African-American urban). In addition, the researcher was interested in how the females viewed each other in relation to the environment in which they were raised (urban vs. suburban). As such, the following research questions were asked:

1. What are the lived academic experiences of African-American females in a predominantly White suburban school district?
a. How do these experiences differ between females raised in a predominantly White suburban environment and females who move into that environment from a predominantly African-American urban environment?

2. What are the lived socialization experiences of African-American females in a predominantly White suburban district?

   a. How do these perceptions/experiences differ between females raised in a predominantly White suburban environment and females who move into that environment from a predominantly African-American urban environment?

3. How do African-American females raised in different settings (i.e., predominantly White, suburban vs. predominantly African-American, urban) perceive African-Americans from the opposite educational setting?

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

4.2.1 Participant descriptions.

In order to provide a better understanding of each participant, a brief description follows:

_Mia_: Mia is a demure, soft-spoken ninth grade student who has attended the district since kindergarten. She participates in many extra-curricular activities, including cheerleading, track and field, band, jazz band, student council, and choir. Although she participates in many activities, Mia does not describe herself as a popular girl. She thought that participating would bring popularity, but specifically
noted that the stereotype of the “popular cheerleader” does not apply to her. However, she shared that she enjoys attending school in Liberty. Mia lives with both parents, who were also raised in the district and attended school in Liberty. She has a high grade point average (3.7 on a 4.0 scale), wants to go to an ivy-league college and plans to take honors courses next school year.

*Jade:* Jade is a very boisterous young lady and exudes an aura of confidence. A freshman, she has attended the district since kindergarten. Jade is an avid dancer in a professional ballet dance troop and has danced in many culturally-related productions, including *The Chocolate Nutcracker* and *The Adventures of Pan*. She lives at home with her mother, father, and two younger brothers. Jade describes herself as a very open person and spends time within the nearby urban area, interacting with family members and friends. Jade plans to attend a four-year college and study dance.

*Linz:* A sophomore who has attended the district since kindergarten, Linz is very quiet and laid-back. She played on the basketball team, but quit because she “couldn’t commit to it”. Linz plans to go to technical college and open her own Auto-body repair shop that specializes in customizing for high-end consumers.

*Jordan:* Jordan, a junior, has an easy smile and is very likeable. While she appears soft-spoken at first, she can be very funny and outgoing once she gets comfortable. Jordan has attended school in the district since kindergarten. She lives with her mother and has an older sister who she describes as “super smart” who attends a local university and studies medicine. When she was younger, Jordan
played soccer in the nearby city, but did chose not to play for the district because she thought the team was very “cliquish” and didn’t feel like a member of the team. Jordan plans to attend a four-year college.

**Melissa:** A freshman, Melissa is very involved in sports and other extracurricular activities. She is a member of the school soccer and softball teams and plays intra-mural volleyball. She lives with her mother, father and younger sister. Melissa is a friendly young lady who is very articulate and thoughtful. She plans to attend a four-year college and become a pediatrician.

**Erin:** The only senior in the group of participants who have attended the district since kindergarten, Erin is very outspoken. She appears to be a natural leader and participates in some extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to contact Erin after numerous attempts (including going to the school and calling her house multiple times) to conduct her individual interview.

**Kira:** After transferring to the district from another state, Kira said that the transition to the district was difficult. Kira is an outspoken young lady who appears very passionate about her surroundings. She participates in an after-school program aimed at providing young African-American girls with positive role models. Kira lives with her mother and younger cousin. She talks of having a very close relationship with her mother and older sisters, who are very interested in African culture. Currently a sophomore, Kira has attended the district since 9th grade. One of two girls in the study to participate in honors courses, Kira plans to attend college and study psychology.
Abby: Abby is a very strong-willed, quiet young lady - she knows who she is and make no apologies. A sophomore, Abby is involved in honors and is the only participant who takes Advanced Placement (AP) courses. She transferred to the district from a nearby urban district last school year and is a member of the jazz band. She plans to attend college and hopes to have a career as an international corporate lawyer.

Alaska: Alaska is a self-proclaimed “clown”. She likes to have fun, has an easy laugh, and appears very outgoing. A junior, Alaska transferred to the district this school year from a nearby urban school district. She lives with her mother, step-father, and younger siblings. Alaska shared that her mother moved to Liberty because her younger sister had a difficult time socially in the urban public schools and her mother felt that she would fare better in a predominantly White suburban setting. She is a member of the track and field team, but she said that she doesn’t like it and only continues to participate because it might result in a college scholarship.

Ce-Ce: Ce-Ce is a junior who transferred this school year to the district from an urban city in the state. She lives with her mother, who was transferred to the area because of her job. Ce-Ce is very quiet and appears to be trying to “find her way”. She reports that she is very athletic and that she was a member of a sports team for the school, but quit because she did not feel support from the coaching staff.

Tamara: A senior, Tamara is a very impressive young lady. She is articulate and appears to be comfortable with who she is. Tamara transferred to the district
during her sophomore year from an urban school district in the state and reported that she has made positive changes in her life. A strong student who is involved in many activities, Tamara has received many college scholarship offers from traditional colleges and HBCU’s. She lives with her mother and younger siblings. She is concerned with her younger brothers and how they will fare in the district academically. Tamara is involved in many school-related activities, including marching band, concert band, and choir. She is also a member of an organization aimed at young African-American women, which she describes as a “high-school sorority”.

4.3 Theme Emergence

As discussed within chapter three, analysis began with horizontalization of significant statements. Each statement was treated as having equal worth and a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements was developed. Once developed, the list of significant statements was analyzed and the statements were then clustered together into units of similar meaning (See Appendices E and F). These units of meaning allowed the researcher to group similar statements of the participants’ experiences and develop a list of general themes. Following this, the themes were synthesized into a description of the collective experiences of the participants in relation to general academic, social and extra-curricular experiences (See Appendices G and H). At this point, the researcher met with the research group to ensure that the themes were accurate representations of the actual statements made by the participants. All themes and transcripts were discussed with the research
group until 100% consensus was reached regarding the analysis of the participants’ lived experiences. The themes were then shared with the participants for their review and input. All participants agreed with the analysis of the statements and themes that were developed.

4.4 Presentation of Findings

As is characteristic of trustworthy qualitative research (Patton, 1990), rich descriptions in the form of quotes and narrative speech were used to help fully capture the lived experiences of the participants as African-American females within a predominantly White suburban school district. Because the data was collected through interviews, some of the quotes reflect the dialect and slang that the girls use on a daily basis. Care was taken not to alter the true essence of their meaning and words; as such, the quotes reflect verbatim what was said during the interviews (focus and individual). However, the school and district name has been changed in addition to any names of individuals, cities or schools stated during the interviews in order to protect the identity of the community and the participants in the study.

Although the ultimate purpose of this study was to discover, understand, and describe the educational experiences of African-American females within a predominantly White suburban school district, the researcher felt it was necessary to first discover and explain how the participants perceived their experiences. Thus, the researcher examined the meaning, process, and context to which the participants attributed their perceptions.
The majority of participants described their experiences in either a very positive or negative fashion. For example, Mia said “Well, I like it. It’s fun here”, which was representative of the females who attended the district for their entire academic career. However, Tamara, a student who moved to the district during high school, stated that, “It’s good. It’s definitely educational...It’s definitely a good school. And you can tell that – coming from a school that wasn’t really academically strong. As far as the students...the student body...I don’t like it.”

Again, Tamara’s statement was representative of her respective group (females who moved into the district during high school). After probing deeper and asking the participants more questions relating to their experiences in the predominantly White suburban school district, information poured from the girls, supporting the suggestion of Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995) that African-American girls are often silenced: “These girls have voices, they are perfectly capable of first-person speech, but as they will say repeatedly, nobody listens, nobody cares, nobody asks what they are feeling and thinking” (p. 1). Once the girls were asked what they were feeling and thinking, they became fountains of information overflowing with knowledge of their lived experiences. The information was gathered by the researcher and categorized into the following themes based upon their perceptions: (1) General Perceptions of Academic Experiences, (2) General Perceptions of Social Experiences, (3) General Perceptions of Race, (4) General Perceptions of Females From the District, (5) General Perceptions of Females That Move into the District
from Urban Areas, (6) Benefits of Attending the District, and (7) Drawbacks of Attending the District.

4.5 General Perceptions of Academic Experiences

Due to the breadth of the general perceptions of the participants relating to academic experiences, the themes were categorized into subthemes. The theme of academic experiences was separated as follows: (a) teacher expectations, (b) teacher relationships, (c) extracurricular activities, (d) honors/advanced placement courses, and (e) lack of courses on African-American culture.

4.5.1 “...they give you respect as long as you respect them...”: Teacher Expectations

Most of the participants agreed that the teachers in the school provided them with a positive academic experience. The girls noted that, overall, the teachers were available to them if they had questions and offered assistance when needed. However, the girls did not feel that many teachers went “above and beyond” the basic teacher duties. As Mia stated, “well, some of my teachers give me more attention if I need it – like in math. Math isn’t my thing. But mostly, they do the basic teacher thing”. Kira agreed with Mia, saying “they have supported me...not a lot, but...like, I can’t say that they didn’t...but it wasn’t much”. Jordan offered a more positive view: “they [the teachers] are helpful. They make time for you out of class to help you. They give you respect as long as you respect them.” This appeared to be a topic of contention among the girls, with some feeling that the teachers treat African-American students differently and expected different
behavior. For example, Jade felt that “some of the rules that we have are applied
more for us than they are for the rest of the student body”. When asked to elaborate,
Jade told of an African-American female friend whose cell phone (which are not
allowed to be used in the school) was confiscated while a White male continued to
talk on his cell phone nearby. As other girls began to share their stories, Mia offered
the following insight:

I just want to say that some people at this school think some of the teachers
gang up on the Black people, especially the Black girls. They think he’s
ganging up on them but he’s not...he’s trying to teach them what to do. They
say they don’t care what he says, but I’m sorry, like, when you are in his
class, you need to do what he says. Have good posture. Don’t get an attitude
when he says something. And when he yells at them for that, they think he’s
ganging up on them. But he’s not. Just do what he says.

Jade agreed, saying that “part of the problem is that a lot of Black students take it
the wrong way when a teacher tries to help them or get them to act the right way and
they get an attitude. And then the teacher snaps back. But if you listen the first time,
then it won’t happen”. By the end of the discussion, most of the participants agreed
with these statements, stating that some of the African-American students in the
school did not respect the teachers and could not expect respect in return.

When asked about specific expectations of teachers in relation to their
academic achievement, many of the girls indicated that the school has high
expectations for all of the students. However, Abby offered insight into a specific
interaction she had with a teacher in relation to her previous predominantly African-
American urban educational setting. She said that the teachers did not expect her to
excel in her Honors classes and were surprised to learn that . As the only African-
American student in the class, Abby felt that “the teachers were just kinda skeptical of me in the Honors classes. Yeah – when like, my mom first did the teacher parent conferences or whatever, they didn’t even know that I came from [the city] - they just assumed that I came from here. I guess because of the way I talked and the classes I was taking. Like I couldn’t have come from [the city]”. All of the girls noted that there was an unstated feeling that African-American students were not expected to excel to the same degree as their White peers. Jade felt that African-American students are “not expected to go as far as a White student is, or excel as far as a White student.” She went on to discuss an additional underlying belief specifically about African-American students who transfer into the district from urban settings, saying that “as an African-American, you are expected to fail. But, like, not me. I’m a good student. I’ve been going to Liberty since I was little.”

Tamara acknowledged that the school has a rigorous curriculum, saying that the school has higher requirements than her previous school, but that the higher expectations have motivated her to be a stronger student. Similarly, Alaska said “I wish I could have started here earlier. Like, if I could have been here in sixth grade...I would be so much farther ahead than where I am now. Like academically.”

4.5.2. “...when I first came here it was hard, not knowing anyone or having any Black teachers around or feeling that I could have any connection with my teachers...”: Teacher Relationships

The most agreed upon topic discussed with the participants is that they would like to see more teachers of color. Although most teachers in the school are
available to the students if needed, most of the participants did not feel they could connect as well to someone of another race; not because of the racial difference, but because of the perceived differences between the people. Tamara discussed an incident where a student was called a racial slur and she went to the guidance counselor and a teacher for support, saying that the “guidance counselors do the best they can, I guess, but it always seems to come back to this race thing. They feel like, “just ‘cuz you’re Black I can’t relate to you the way you want me to”. And sometimes it really is like that...”. However, she went on to say that she was just looking for someone to talk to about the incident, not someone to solve the problem. She then went on to describe when she spoke with a teacher about the incident:

There was this one teacher who was the first White teacher who was actually open minded as far as talking to her about Black people. Because there was this one thing where somebody was called a Nigger on the bus and she said “I don’t know what it’s really like”, but she was still able to really relate to me and I was shocked because I was expecting her to just brush it off.

Being in an environment where they don’t have many adult figures who “look like” them appears to be a hardship for some of the girls. As stated by Kira and supported by the participants within her focus group, “we had a lot of Black teachers at my last school and it was cool, you know, having someone around who could relate to you.”

4.5.3 “...I’m the only Black person in my AP class...” : Honors/Advanced Placement Courses

Thus far, we have discussed the experiences of the participants as related to teacher expectations and relationships. However, in addition to teacher expectations it is also important to understand how the students respond to those expectations. As
such, the researcher asked the participants how students in the school view Honors and Advanced Placement courses. There were two views of this topic, apparently separated by age. The younger students felt that African-American students do not participate in advanced courses because they are afraid of being viewed as “Acting White”. The older students felt that it was accepted to take advanced classes, but that they personally don’t take the courses because they are afraid that the class would be too difficult or because their schedules won’t allow it. Two of the girls currently take advanced courses (Kira and Abby), but many plan to take them next year, saying that they didn’t care about the perceived stigma. Jordan said that she feels taking advanced classes is a good idea because “those classes will prepare you for life...But other people may not see it as that way because they are afraid that other people will perceive them as acting “White”, which I don’t even know what it is – I mean how do you “act” White?” As will be discussed later (see section 4.7), “acting White” is a common concern of students in the school.

4.5.4 “…there are things to do, but Black people choose not to participate…”:

Extracurricular Activities

As with Honors and AP courses, the participants felt that African-American students choose not to participate in some extracurricular activities due to the fear or being perceived as “acting White”. Club activities (Key Club, Chess Club, Environmental Club, etc.) are particularly viewed as being for White students. As stated by Jordan, “the school does have clubs and stuff, but those...I don’t know any Black people that are involved in any of those. Like there is one called FOCUS and
one that deals with discrimination and no Black people participate.” Tamara agreed, saying “let alone regular clubs, like FCCLA or Key Club. I was in FCCLA – it’s Future something Career Leaders of America – but I was like, the only Black person”. However, Melissa offered the following insight:

The Black people just aren’t taking advantage of it. I think people expect us to have programs just for Black people because it looks like we have programs just for White people, but it’s that Black people just aren’t joining so it looks like only White people. Like, if you just get into something, then it won’t be all White anymore.

The participants acknowledged that there was an intimidation factor involved in being the only African-American person in a group. As Alaska said, “you know, it’s a group thing. If the group does it, everyone else will.” But Tamara pointed out that most African-American students “don’t feel it. They don’t feel it appeals to them.” She noted that most African-American students do not feel a part of the school community, so they choose not to participate in anything extra.

Many of the girls stated that they participated in the athletic programs offered by the school. They played on many sports teams including soccer, cheerleading, basketball, softball and tennis. One of the common experiences for the participants was that they were one of the few, if not the only, African-American female on the team. With the exception of Mia, who described one of her teams as “one big family”, the girls all mentioned that being on the team was difficult for them. Erin shared that “I don’t personally associate with my team outside of practice or games or team meals” because she did not feel comfortable with them outside of
the game. Many of the girls did not feel connected to the team and some were so uncomfortable that they had already quit a team or were considering it:

Mia: That’s probably the only reason I’m considering quitting band. It’s not like, ‘cuz there are White people, it’s ‘cuz...there are too many of them.

Ce Ce: I just recently quit my team. Because, basically I was the only Black person there...there were like six different coaches...and none of them knew my name. And I started wondering, ‘so what do they refer to me as when I’m playing out there? What do they call me?’...it made me uncomfortable, so I quit.”

The lack of participation in extra-curricular activities appears to be two-fold:

African-American girls are choosing not to participate in extracurricular activities because there are limited (if any) other African-American girls on the teams; however, African-American girls already on the teams may not continue to participate because there are so few African-American girls on the team.

4.5.5 “...my mom moved here because my sisters said it was one of the better schools...”: Reputation of the school/district

All of the participants agreed that their parents have high academic expectations. Many of the participants who moved to the district noted that their parents specifically chose this district for the strength of the academic curriculum. Likewise, many of the participants who have attended the district since kindergarten agree that their parents specifically chose to move to the community for the schools. Jade said that her parents “grew up going to [the city] public schools and they wanted me to achieve way more than they did. And I’m living in Liberty and they lived in [the city], so it’s already a big achievement for them to be here.” Mia’s
parents went to Liberty schools and have made the choice to raise their family within the community. Mia said that her parents “really care about grades. They both graduated from Liberty, so they know Liberty’s expectations and they have the same expectations – no C’s.” Overall, the participants overwhelmingly agreed that the district has a strong academic curriculum and they feel that they are being prepared to be successful after high school. All of the participants plan to attend college and most of the underclassmen (freshmen and sophomores) have already started researching college scholarships and attending college fairs.

4.5.6 “…February is the only time you see anything at all…and that’s not much…”:

Lack of courses on African-American culture

Although the participants are pleased with the general academic curricula, they are concerned with the lack of courses that offer information specifically about African-American culture. For example, Kira shared the following experience:

I know we should learn about the presidents and stuff like that, but I think we should learn more about Black people. Like last year in Global Studies, we took a whole semester about slavery, but she [the teacher] just kept missing things about it and kept skipping over things that I knew should be included… but she didn’t want to explain it, I guess. I think we should have more African-American classes here so the kids who did grow up here know more about their culture.

Alaska agreed with Kira, saying that her mother “gets mad at me when I don’t know a lot of things about my culture. But I’m like, I’m not taught about it…she gets mad because they don’t teach it.” While all the participants agreed that they would like to have the opportunity to take courses on African-American culture, Tamara stated that ‘just giving us the option would be appreciated…but then, at the same time, we
would have to deal with the ignorant comments from the White kids, like “Oh, I’m gonna sign up for the Black class”. The participants agreed with Tamara and indicated that they were also concerned with the apparent lack of concern for African-American issues. Many participants discussed their concerns with the lack of acknowledgement of Black History Month:

Mia: I wanted to say that this school doesn’t do much about culture. I mean, it was the last week of February, and they didn’t even put a poster up.

Tamara: And even last year, they had parts of Martin Luther King’s speech posted up around the school. I mean, at least they did that. This year? Nothing.

Abby: People are saying that they don’t do much for Black History Month, and, like, I went to my friend’s house once and asked her if she knew what month Black History Month was. And she didn’t know. I had to tell her and she didn’t know why I was so mad about it...I was upset. They don’t care about it.

Most of the participants agreed that they wanted the district to address African-American issues more frequently. There was the belief that White students and African-American students that were raised in the district did not receive enough education about African-American culture and that this was why there are so many difficulties with being an African-American student within the school. Due to lack of knowledge about African-American culture, many students rely on stereotypical beliefs perpetuated by the media when interacting with each other. Additionally, the participants did not feel that they were viewed as a part of the main school – more as a separate subgroup. As Jade stated, “sometimes it’s like you’re left out of things
‘cuz of your color.” This statement brings us to the perceived social experiences of the participants.

4.6 General Perceptions of Social Experiences

The perceived social experiences of the participants have been grouped into four broad topics: (a) expected behavior, (b) familial expectations, (c) friendships, and (d) dating.

4.6.1 “...I don’t want to change the way I talk or who I am for anybody, but I guess I have to...”: Expected Behavior

Overwhelmingly, the participants felt that African-American females are viewed in a negative light by society and, by extension, within the school. A stereotype that was repeatedly mentioned when asked how African-American females are perceived was that the girls are seen as “loud and obnoxious”; even by other African-American females and African-American males. For example, Jade shared that “even the Black guys at our lunch table say that every Black girl at the table is loud – I mean, I know I’m loud, but not around them!” Many of the girls acknowledged that their behavior was dependent on the people they were around. Kira stated that “all it takes is one person. You know, if it’s a group of us and only one person is loud, then we all get the label. That’s just how it is.”

In an attempt to distance themselves from the stereotype, many of the girls choose to distance themselves from people who act in ways that support the stereotypical view. Erin said that there appears to be a “separation between the Black girls. There are those who can associate themselves with the White girls and
are set with what they want to do in life and are focused on academics. Then there are the girls who are here basically for social reasons.” This statement implied that African-American girls attend school for social reasons, and was supported by Melissa who said that “you’re not totally sure if you want to hang around people who are of your own race, or with people who are the right people to be with – the people who do well in school.”

Although many of the girls appeared to have internalized the message that African-American females act in ways counterproductive to academic achievement, they did not think the message applied to them personally. Kira offered the following statement:

When they are loud in the hallway, I tend to pull myself back because I don’t want to be included in that whole “loud” stereotype of how Black females are...have you ever seen me yell in the hallway? Have you ever seen me hit someone in the hallway? No. Because I don’t think it’s right that we put that out, like, us girls, us teen girls, us teen Black girls put out this stereotype that we are always loud, we’re always rough in the hallway. I mean, you can have that stereotype for her, but not for me, because I don’t do that.

Kira’s statement implied that, while she understands there are negative views of African-American females, she has the ability to monitor her own behavior and try to reduce the likelihood of being placed into the category. Similarly, Tamara has figured a way to successfully navigate within the school: “I try to feel people out and figure out how to be, and you know, once I get cool with somebody, then I talk the way I normally do...I mean, I don’t want to change the way I talk or who I am for anybody, but I guess I have to.”
Tamara, like the other girls who moved into the district, felt a pressure to assimilate into the school culture, saying the students feel they must change who they are in order to do well in the school. Alaska offered insight into a challenge that some students face when they move into the district:

A lot of the Black kids are loud. I’m not gonna lie. They are loud. It’s like, extreme. Like, they think “I’m not going to change just because I go to a White school. I’m going to stay how I am”....they just don’t seem to adjust well at all.

When asked how they made such successful transitions to the environment of the school, the girls shared that they had to change their attitude, speech, and behavior. However, Tamara revealed that the pressure to conform to the standards is daunting at times and that the stereotypes placed upon them weigh heavily:

Sometimes it's just easier to act like they think you should – you just get tired of it. You know, like ‘if you really want me to be ‘that Black person’, I can be’. But why go there?

The constant stereotype that African-American women are loud and obnoxious is a common theme for the participants. However, the two groups of girls appear to view the phenomenon differently. While most of the girls who grew up in the district feel the stereotype does not apply to them, the girls who moved into the district feel the need to assimilate into the culture of the school to prevent the negative stigma from affecting them personally. Ironically, the girls who grew up in the district feel they are penalized for that very assimilation by their extended family and African-Americans who reside outside of Liberty’s boundaries.

4.6.2 “…they talk about my ‘Liberty education’. Well, I’m sorry… I don’t speak Ebonics…”: Familial Expectations
All of the participants who attended the district since kindergarten spoke of interacting with African-Americans outside of Liberty. When asked about their interactions with African-Americans outside of the district, the girls revealed that they are viewed as having a “Liberty accent” and are labeled as the “Liberty girls” by African-Americans who reside in the nearby urban area. Another issue that was discussed is that of their extended family. As Erin stated, “my family tells me that I have been living in Liberty too long. People get mad when I correct them and they talk about my ‘Liberty education’. Well, I’m sorry that I’m being grammatically correct, you know? Like, I don’t speak Ebonics.” Mia agreed, saying “yeah – what’s the problem with being proper?” These statements implied that the girls have difficulty interacting with African-Americans who view them as different from other African-American girls and touched on the possibility that their assimilation into Liberty’s culture has hindered their interactions with African-Americans who do not live in the community. This phenomenon will be discussed more in depth in section 4.10.

4.6.3 “…no one interacts with each other outside their own group…”: Friendships

When asked about friendships within the school, the girls noted that the school was very “cliquish” and that people tended to stay with one group. However, many of the girls stated that they chose not to stick with one group of friends because they did not want to be labeled and did not want to limit themselves to one type of friend.
Many of the girls shared that they have friends who are White and that they sometimes feel outcast by the other African-American students for those friendships. Mia shared that “I hang out with White people mostly and it’s weird because it’s the Black students who make fun of me and call me “White”...because I do hang out with them”.

Other participants shared some of the perceived difficulties with having friends who are not African-American:

- Melissa: I have a lot of friends who are White and when you’re talking to them, they make racist comments, but like, try to cover it. Like, they say ‘not you’ or ‘no offense’.

- Jade: They ask stupid questions, like, ‘what would you do if I called you a Nigger?’... most of my friends are Black now. I still talk to my old friends who are White, but not as much as I used to.

Tamara offered insight into the phenomenon: “I realized this was all new to them and they never had someone they were comfortable around as far as Black people. You know, someone they could ask questions.” Most of the girls agreed with Tamara, saying that the questions did not appear to be malicious in nature, but rather curious due to their lack of exposure to African-American culture.

As the group discussed the experience of having White friends, Jade shared what happens if they don’t have any White friends: “people who don’t associate with the White crowd – they are automatically ‘Ghetto’.” Thus, there appears to be a double-edged sword: if the girls choose to have mostly White friends, they are labeled as trying to act “White”, but if they don’t have any White friends, then they
are labeled as “Ghetto”. However, most of the girls did not appear to fall victim to this thought process and chose to be friends with many different types of people.

4.6.4 “...I think the White guys are scared to talk to a Black girl...”: Dating

Just as the participants shared that friendships in the school tend to be viewed as mono-racial, dating, at least for the African-American females, is also. It was decidedly agreed upon that African-American males dated outside of their race, with most of the girls saying that the majority of African-American males in the school will date someone who is not African-American (usually White females).

When asked why they thought that was, Jade said “this one guy told me ‘we date all the White girls because there is more of ‘em. There’s more of ‘em, so we might as well date them.’...and then there is the whole ‘Black girl attitude’ thing”.

Kira shared a similar, but more negative, statement by one of her male friends: “I asked this Black guy in my class why he was going with a White girl and he said that is was mostly because most Black girls act ‘ghetto’ and are fat.” Thus, the negative stereotypes about African-American females appear to have an effect on how African-American males within the school view them.

While it is common for males to date inter-racially, it does not appear to be as common for African-American females. However, some of the girls have dated White males, and one felt that White males treated them better because African-American males “sometimes think they are players”. Although some of the girls had dated White males in the past, most felt that White males didn’t want to date African-American females. Kira said she thought “the White guys are scared to talk
to a Black girl. Like we gonna say ‘get out of my face – what are you doing?!?’

They think that Black girls are ‘Ghetto’ and they don’t want to deal with it”. Tamara agreed, saying:

Everyone already has their set friends and preferences and they know that...they go by what their friends think of them...and his friends would be like ‘Are you serious?!? Are you really dating a Black girl?!?’ It would just trip them out. I know this White guy – me an’ him are real cool and...the way people look – it’s like, “What?!? What are you doing?!?”

Melissa, who appeared disillusioned with the topic, felt that “it’s like the White males don’t want to date Black females. And the Black males think they can date anybody they want. So that leaves, like, half the people.”

Most girls chose not to date someone from Liberty, saying that it is not because of a lack of options, but because they did not want the students in their “business”:

Alaska: If you date someone from here, everyone knows about it and has something to say. Like the whole school knows.

Jordan: I don’t date guys from here because everyone is in everyone else’s business. But I date guys from other suburbs.

Tamara: My personality has to match his and be at, like, the same level. And here, a lot of the guys are real quiet and I need somebody who can handle my energy. Plus everyone gets in your business here.

Although dating is an activity people may begin to participate in as an adolescent, these girls do not seem bothered by their reported lack of options. Whether some girls dated within the district and some outside, they all mentioned dating someone (if their parents allowed them to date) at some point and did not appear to be frustrated with this aspect of their social life.
4.7 General Perceptions of Race

Many of the discussions with the participants were interwoven with the terms “acting White” and “acting Black”. This appeared to be a common phenomenon within the school, but when asked what the terms meant, the participants were not able to give concrete definitions. Thus, in-depth conversations with the groups yielded what appears to be generally agreed upon concepts.

4.7.1 “…Black people call me ‘White’ and White people call me ‘White’…”: “Acting White” and “Acting Black”

According to the participants, the concept of “acting Black” includes engaging in negative behaviors. The participants responded that “acting Black” can include the following characteristics: having a negative attitude, being rude, being disrespectful, acting out in class, “clownin’” (acting silly), being loud, talking slang, and “acting Ghetto”. Thus, it is the understanding of the researcher that “acting Black” is counterproductive to academic achievement and is viewed negatively by students within the school. The participants verified that the researcher’s concept of “acting Black” was correct.

Many of the participants agreed that “acting Black” and “acting Ghetto” were used interchangeably. As such, the girls were asked what it meant to act “Ghetto” and Jade offered the following definition: “when you’re loud and obnoxious”. Notice that this is the same description given when asked how African-American females were viewed in the school. Thus, it can be further postulated that African-American females are viewed with the same negativity as “Ghetto”.

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Many of the girls shared that they are viewed as “acting White” by other students. At first glance, one might assume that “acting White” is the opposite of “acting Black”; therefore, if “acting Black” is viewed as negative, then “acting White” must be positive. However, this characterization is not meant to bolster the image of a person, but rather to illustrate that the person is not accepted as part of the African-American community.

The participants shared that when people don’t fit the expectation of what other students expect (i.e., an African-American student who is quiet, wears certain clothing, has White friends), they get targeted for being placed into the “White” group. As Tamara shared, “...nobody accepts anybody for who they are, so they automatically put them into a category, like, ‘if you’re not acting this way, I can’t talk to you’”. And it shouldn’t be that way.” When the participants were asked what it meant to act “White”, Tamara offered the following explanation: “Using proper English. The way you dress...like, I would probably get clowned for wearing Hollister or flip-flops when it’s cold outside.” Alaska agreed, saying, “I got called ‘White’ at my old school for wearing Vans [brand of shoes] to school. They called me ‘White’.” This statement indicates that this phenomenon is not limited to Liberty, but is common in other schools.

4.7.2 “…why are you saying that...it doesn’t make sense...”: Confronting Stereotypes

Many of the participants expressed confusion over how a person can act “White” or act “Black”. They feel that it is impossible to “act a color” and don’t
know why the terms continue to thrive. However, although many of the girls expressed this belief, many of them used the terms within their answers, signifying to the researcher that the phenomena of “acting White” or “acting Black” is deeply immersed within the student culture.

Some of the participants recalled times when they actively attempted to call attention to the terms. Abby shared the following account:

A lot of students will tell me that I’m not Black...they call be an Oreo because I am ‘Black’ on the outside and ‘White’ on the inside. And, like, I’ll ask ‘how am I not Black?!?’...and they don’t know what to say. So it’s like, ‘okay then – shut up!’

While Abby’s story is one of few where the participants openly challenged a stereotype about themselves, many of the girls expressed that they don’t agree with the labeling that occurs.

4.8 General Perceptions of African-American Females Who Attended the District Throughout Their Academic Career

4.8.1. “...we’re more laid back...”: Perceptions by Females Raised in the District

When asked to explain the differences between African-American females from the district and those who move into the district, girls from the district stated that they appeared to have a different approach to school. Jordan reported that:

Black females that grew up in Liberty are used to not being so loud. Like not being the center of everything, like every fight...or the center of everything that goes on between Black people...you can be off to the side and mind your business.

Erin agreed with Jordan, saying that girls from the district are
...more laid back. We mind our own business. And I think we can, um, can like, hang out with other people outside our own race. Like we have more flexibility socially.

When asked why they felt girls from the district choose to interact in such a way, Jordan replied that “I think it’s taught or expected that you don’t bring attention to yourself.” Melissa also shared that “girls from here are usually more quiet...you just have to learn to fit in with your surroundings.” After talking with the girls, the researcher felt that they had assimilated into the majority culture at an early age and view themselves as very different from the girls who moved in from predominantly Black urban districts.

4.8.2 “…out here, everyone is so sheltered…” Perceptions by Females Who Moved to the District

When asked about the girls who are from the district, the participants who moved into the district stated that they thought the girls were very sheltered and not as accepting of them as they could be. When asked to elaborate, Tamara said the following:

You have the new girls and the girls who have lived in Liberty all their life hangin’ out with White girls...they aren’t going to start acting like they want to hang out with the Black girls who are new because they don’t think they can find a common ground.

She went on to discuss how she had a difficult time when she first moved to the district because she used slang and her speech reflected her previous urban surroundings. She went on to say:

So I had to adjust the way I said stuff – like people would look at me and be like ‘I don’t understand what you are saying’...you know, my speech really had to change...they never had a Black friend who talked that way because
they grew up in Liberty and speak the same way they [the White students] do, so it was a bit of a challenge.

Tamara and the other girls in her group felt that it was necessary to change the way they interacted in order to be accepted into the school community. However, they also felt the need to retain a sense of who they were.

4.9 General Perceptions of African-American Females Who Moved into the District from Predominantly African-American Urban Districts

4.9.1 “…they forget they are in Liberty now...”: Perceptions by Females Raised in the District

As stated earlier, girls from the district tended to view themselves as different than girls who moved into the district. Many girls reiterated that they have been raised to act a certain way, and they feel that many of the girls who move into the district do not act that way. In fact, three of the participants expressed fairly strong opinions about girls who move into the district:

**Erin:** We grew up here and when someone moves in, we already have the mindset that girls from [the city public schools] are wild and loud.

**Jordan:** You have no choice but to do the best you can and acting the way that the girls from [the city public schools] do is not the way to get the job done.

**Mia:** Girls from [the city public schools] forget where they are. They forget that they are in Liberty now.

Mia went on to express discomfort with interacting with girls from urban areas, saying:

I’m not very comfortable, I mean, I’m okay with them, but they aren’t really around me because I hang out mostly with White girls. I mean, I’ve lived in
Liberty all my life and they are coming from [the city] and see me and they’re like ‘why do you act White’? And it’s like, I’ve lived in Liberty all my life, what do you expect?

It appears that the girls who move to the district are viewed as ‘other’ when compared to girls who grew up in the district. Whether it is because of the way they speak, the clothes they wear, or the way they act, the girls from the district noted a distinct difference between themselves and girls who moved into the district from predominantly African-American urban settings.

4.9.2 “...they think we’re ‘ghetto’...”: Perceptions by Females Who Moved to the District

The girls who moved into the district are well aware of the perceived differences between the two groups, but they don’t feel that they necessarily fit into the category reserved for them. For example, Tamara acknowledged that, overall, girls who move to the district are seen in a negative way, but that she found a way to circumvent that label:

“I’m outgoing – I’m a people person, so when I came here, I was friends with everybody and people can’t fight that. As much as they are like, ‘ohhh, she’s Black, she’s new, I don’t know...’... the next thing you know, they tryin’ to put your number in their phone.”

Tamara, like the other participants in her focus group, appeared to feel that, although the negative stereotype about girls from predominantly African-American urban areas exists, she is able to combat it by showing the other girls that she does not fit that stereotype.
4.10 General Perceptions of the School Culture

When asked about the underlying norms of the school, many of the participants had mixed reactions. Alaska reported the following:

“I don’t have a problem with being here, but some things are like...some things I can’t control...like some kids making stereotypical comments...other than that, it’s okay. It’s just that people don’t know to watch what they’re saying around other people. They just get carried away and comfortable with their friends and they think that they can do and say whatever. There’s this underlying shadiness going on.”

Overwhelmingly, the topic of “shadiness” that kept resurfacing with the girls was the high usage of the term “Nigger” and “Nigga” by students within the school. Many of the girls felt that, while the terms may be used often in popular culture, they should not be used within the school, especially by White people. However, the girls who moved to the district appeared to feel that the words were used so often that they weren’t viewed as a big deal by the student population. In fact, many of the girls felt that part of the reason the terms were so commonplace was because White students were never told to stop by the African-American students. Following are some statements made by participants who moved to the district:

Alaska: Some White kids think they can say whatever they want around here.

Kira: They [the White students] are so used to the Black people around them acting the same way they do, so when they say stuff like “Nigger”, it’s not a big deal to them.

Tamara: They [the White students] don’t care because the Black people who have been here don’t say anything because they have never had to deal with being around any Black people who get mad when White people say that.
This topic appeared to be the most sensitive to the girls; many of them felt that the African-American culture was not respected or valued and the fact that the terms were used so often by so many indicated disrespect on a daily basis. The girls even made mention of a substitute teacher who used the terms “Nigger” and “Colored” when addressing African-American students. Jade described the substitute by saying, “she’s off. She’s like 90 years old. She’s crazy. She be callin’ us Niggers and stuff”. This comment was extremely disturbing to the researcher and the researcher asked the other girls if they had any interaction with this teacher or had heard her say the racial slur. The girls reported that they had not personally heard the teacher say the word, but that their friends had reported stories to them. When asked if they shared this with the administration, Mia responded that she hadn’t gone to the principal, but that other people had and nothing changed. When asked if they told their parents about this incident, the girls said that they had not for one of two reasons: (1) their parents would tell them that this is how the real world is and that they will have to learn how to get along in the racist world, or (2) their parents would cause problems at the school, which would in turn cause problems and/or embarrassment for them. Due to the fact that none of the girls in either group reported actually hearing the substitute use such language, the researcher considered the possibility that this was an incident that may have happened in the past and has been passed down from student to student through the years. However, whether the comments were made in the past or present, they were damaging to the students and
caused them to feel alienated from the school and disrespected by the administration.

4.10.1 “...the hardest thing about growing up here is not growing up around other Black people...”: Drawbacks of Attending the District

During the interviews, it appeared to the researcher that most of the negatives involved with attending the district were all related to the lack of cultural diversity and lack of acceptance of African-American culture. Issues included lack of coursework on African-American culture, acceptance and use of racially-degrading language, and the existence of negative stereotypes about African-Americans (with stereotypes about African-American females being discussed the most). Tamara summed up her assessment on the phenomenon in one statement:

Black people here are so frustrated as far as trying to figure out where they fit in. You know, to see White people driving in with their confederate bumper stickers on their cars and comin’ in here talkin’ reckless about Black people period. It’s ‘cuz nobody had the courage to step up and explain that that’s just not how to be. It’s just not like that anymore.

Mainly, the girls who moved into the district were concerned with the lack of minority teachers and administrators. Those who attended the district throughout their academic career were more concerned with other residual effects of being raised within a predominantly White suburban district. Although some of the girls felt that growing up in the district gave them “more flexibility” socially, they did not feel as comfortable with African-Americans outside of the community. Jordan offered what she felt was a negative consequence of growing up in the district: that
one of “the hardest thing about growing up in the district is not growing up around other Black people”.

4.10.2 “...I was mad at my mom for moving here...but now I can see why she wanted to move here...”: Benefits of Attending the District

By far, the participants agreed that the most beneficial aspect of the district was the strong academic curriculum. In spite of all the perceived negative issues discussed during the interviews, all of the girls stated that they would stay at the school if given the option to attend school elsewhere. Tamara shared the following view:

I know for me...coming here has really made me appreciate the academics...it’s definitely a good school. And you can tell that coming from a school that wasn’t really academically strong...it has motivated me to be more strong academically. It’s helped me become more open-minded to basically get used to a different type of living.

Kira agreed with Tamara, saying:

I was mad at my mom for moving me here, but now that I make good grades and better friends, I can see why she wanted to move here. To give me a better life...my life has changed a lot.

Participants also feel that they have been prepared to succeed in the “real world”, as Liberty is “just a small sample of what the world is really like”. They feel that there are positive and negative aspects about every school, but the district offers such a strong academic program that they are willing to overlook some of their more negative experiences.
4.11 Summary

The previous sections of this chapter offered a thorough description of the themes and subthemes extracted from the interview data. These themes and subthemes were developed through careful analysis by the researcher and research team. The following chapter will extend this analysis and use the extracted themes and subthemes to answer the research questions, provide conclusions, and offer discussion as to how these findings can be transformed into recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study attempted to explore, understand, and accurately describe the academic and social experiences of African-American females attending a predominantly White suburban high school, with specific attention given to the area in which the participants were raised (predominantly White suburban vs. predominantly African-American urban). The researcher constructed the study in such a way with the hope of being able to help the voices of the girls to be understood, acknowledged and, most importantly, heard. By providing the girls with the opportunity to give voice to their experiences, the researcher hoped to learn more about the phenomenon, but also wanted to ensure that the participants knew that others care about their experiences and want to hear their stories. Findings were verified with the participants to ensure that they are an accurate representation of the participants’ individual and individual voices. While the previous chapter detailed the themes and overall findings of data from interviews conducted with the
participants, the current chapter will extend these findings and use tenets of CRT to discuss how they relate to the research questions that guided this study.

5.1.1 Interpretation of Experiences Using CRT

Through the use of interpretivism (Schwandt, 2000) and CRT (Bernal, 2002; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado, 1995) as theoretical guides, the educational experiences of African-American females within a predominantly White suburban school district were explored. After analyzing the data and reviewing the themes, the following tenets of CRT emerged: (1) counter-storytelling, (2) the permanence of racism, (2) Whiteness as property, and (3) the critique of liberalism.

Counter-storytelling. There has been extensive research on the achievement gap and lack of academic achievement of African-American students, specifically African-American males (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Fine, 1991; Fordham, 1996; Williams, 1996). Possibly because more African-American females experience academic success and outnumber African-American males as much as 2:1 at institutions of higher learning (Jaschik, 2005), one may assume that there is no need to be concerned with the educational experiences of African-American females. However, as indicated by the participants in this study, they too face hardships, although not in the same way as African-American males. Contrary to what some may assume, all is not well with the educational experiences of the African-American females attending this predominantly White suburban school. Thus, we will discuss their collective stories which counter the idea that the experience of African-American
females in predominantly White suburban settings is overwhelmingly positive and not in need of examination.

*The Permanence of Racism.* The permanence of racism within the educational setting was evident throughout the stories of the participants. From the use of racial slurs by a substitute teacher to the regular use of the word “Nigger” by students within the school to the perceived differential treatment of African-Americans by the faculty, all of the participants told stories of their personal experiences with racism within the school.

The topic that caused the most emotional reaction from the participants is that of the substitute teacher who reportedly used racial slurs on a regular basis. Although the participants were unable to say that they had personally heard any racially-demeaning language used by the teacher, all of the girls knew the teacher by name and knew of her reputation. In addition, when asked why students, specifically African-American students, chose not to speak with the administration about the substitute’s language, the participants shared that they did not think the administration cared enough to do anything to hold the teacher accountable. One student shared that her friend had told the administration, but that they did not do anything, so she didn’t see the point of continuing to complain. When asked why they did not tell their parents, some of the girls said they believed their parents would tell them they had to accept that this attitude is one they will encounter again and again, supporting Bell’s (1995) statement that “racism is a permanent component of American life” (p. 13). Thus, some of the girls had already been
exposed to the reality that American society is inundated with racism, and that they, as African-American women, are now, and always will be, affected by racism. In addition, the feeling that the administration would not do anything if they were to complain further supported this tenet of CRT and the idea that racism is a permanent fixture in American culture.

The girls also discussed the relative commonness of hearing racial slurs used by White students within the school. Many of the girls stated that students use the words “Nigga” and “Nigger” within the classroom, lunchroom, and hallways – that they are an accepted part of the student language. In addition to offensive language, some of the girls discussed seeing White students displaying various confederate paraphernalia (clothing, bumper stickers, belt buckles, bandanas, etc.) on school grounds, which are often viewed by African-Americans as racially-charged items. The apparent comfort felt by White students in bringing such items suggests the school culture allows them to feel comfortable to do so, supporting the tenet that racism is permanent within the school culture.

Although the girls stated they were bothered by the language and confederate items, few shared that they have confronted White students on their usage. Those who did state that they “called the other students on it” were girls who have moved into the community from predominantly African-American urban areas. Many of the girls who moved to the district shared that they felt the racist actions and accepted racist behaviors within the school had not been challenged by the African-Americans who grew up in the district because it was all they had ever
known. This feeling was supported by the girls who grew up in the district – many of them agreed that “it is what it is” and that there was nothing they could do about it – even though it bothered them.

Possibly because the girls understand, whether consciously or subconsciously, this tenet of CRT (the permanence of racism), they all stated they would continue to attend the school if given the choice to go elsewhere. They feel the academic curriculum offered at the school is so strong that they are willing to overlook the racial stereotypes, racial slurs and differential treatment they feel occurs within the school, because as one participant stated, “it [racism] happens everywhere”.

Whiteness as Property. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), access to high-quality curriculum has been almost exclusively utilized by White students. In Liberty, Advanced Placement and Honors courses are indeed usually filled with White students. The girls noted that, although many of the African-American students may be eligible to enroll in the courses, most of them do not. The girls’ shared a variety of reasons why this occurs: the classes may be viewed as too difficult, the students may not see the need to take such strenuous courses, or the students may be afraid of being seen as “acting White”. It is this last statement, “acting White” that supports the tenet that high-quality courses are viewed to be the property of White people. Within the school culture, it is the norm that White students take advanced courses and African-American students do not; therefore if an African-American student enrolls in an advanced placement or honors course,
she runs the risk of being labeled as “acting White”. Although nine of the eleven participants have Grade Point Averages above 3.0, only two of them chose to participate in advanced courses this year. However, many of the girls stated that they plan to enroll next school year because they realize the courses “will look good on college applications”, demonstrating they understand having a college education will widen their career opportunities and increase the likelihood of having a more financially stable adulthood.

Another experience that supports this tenet of CRT is that of the experiences of the girls who do partake of the advanced courses. They each spoke of being one of the few (if not the only) African-Americans in the class and of the differential treatment by the teachers that followed. Specifically, Abby noted that her teachers showed skepticism when she enrolled in the class, but that she had been able to prove to her teacher that she has the ability to complete the work. Thus, not only is it understood within the student culture that African-American students do not take advanced courses, but it is the perception of those students who do take the courses that this concept is believed within the teacher culture as well.

Although none of the girls who grew up in the district are currently taking honors or Advanced Placement courses, two of the girls who moved to the district do. When asked why they chose to enroll in advanced courses, the girls said they want to challenge themselves and get the best education possible. Kira spoke of seeing a big difference between Liberty and her previous environment and that she has come to appreciate all that Liberty has to offer – “a way to have a better life”.
Both girls appear to have internalized the message that having a good education will help to better their lives.

Another example that relates to this particular tenet is the annual school tradition of Homecoming and Prom, celebrations that honor a male and female as Homecoming or Prom King and Queen. The students select the King and Queen, and the participants shared that, to their knowledge, there had not been any African-American Kings or Queens until four years ago. At that point, an African-American female was Homecoming Queen and, since that time, African-American males have always been a King (of either Prom or Homecoming). However, there has not been an African-American Homecoming or Prom Queen since. When asked why the girls thought the African-American girl won Queen that year, they stated it was because she “hung out with the White people”. This further supports the tenet of Whiteness as Property in that the title of Homecoming Queen, a term that holds a connotation in American culture of respect and dignity and sets the female apart as a figure that represents the school, is generally reserved for White females.

During an interview, Mia shared that she personally experienced the phenomenon. When discussing her participation in extra-curricular activities, Mia shared that she tried out for the cheerleading squad because she liked the idea (gleaned from movies and other forms of media) that cheerleaders are popular and revered by the student body. However, Mia said that “it’s not that way for me. I’m not popular...we (the cheerleaders) don’t have slumber parties...at least, I don’t.” Mia shared that her expectation, formed from the stereotypical ideal of what it
means to be a cheerleader, was not reality. As the only Black cheerleader on the squad, Mia felt a sense of misplacement – that she did not belong and was not accepted as the “typical cheerleader”. Thus, cheerleading in Liberty appears to be yet another example of something that is viewed as something White females participate in.

The Critique of Liberalism. During the interview process, a few of the participants shared that they were seen as “just another student”. In fact, Melissa shared that she felt “the teachers really see you as…they see everyone as the same person, as grey. It doesn’t matter.” While this view differs from reports by most of the other participants, it supports another tenet of CRT – the critique of liberalism; specifically colorblindness. Somewhere within her educational career, Melissa gained the idea that the students are all viewed as the same by the teachers in the district, indicating she has internalized the idea that teachers do not (or try not to) consider the race of a student when interacting with them. However, the race of an individual is such a large component of their identity and reality that to ignore it means to ignore that individual. As stated by DeCuir and Dixson (2004):

Remedies based on equality assume that citizens have the same opportunities and experiences. Race, and experiences based on race are not equal, thus, the experiences that people of color have with respect to race and racism create an unequal situation” (p. 29).
By attempting to treat all students “equally” and ignoring the impact that race has within the school, the teachers actually are doing a disservice to African-American students.

5.1.2 Research Question 1

What are the lived academic experiences of African-American females in a predominantly White suburban school district? How do these experiences differ between females raised in a predominantly White suburban environment and females who move into that environment from a predominantly African-American urban environment?

Overall, the participants felt the academic curriculum was the most impressive aspect of Liberty. The school performs well on national standardized tests and is well-known for the high academic performance of the students. However, when asked what they would change, all of the participants noted cultural diversity and increased awareness and teaching of African-American culture. They felt that the faculty should receive diversity training to help them relate better to African-American students and that the staff itself should be more diverse. For example, Kira noted that she currently has a teacher who demands students use Standard English while in class. She then shared that shortly after moving to the district, she used slang while in the class and, although she was not intentionally being disrespectful to the teacher, she was removed from the class for not using Standard English.
With the exception of the substitute who reportedly uses racial slurs, the girls did not share any blatantly offensive experiences with the teachers. Although they did note some instances where they encountered questionable interactions with the teachers, the girls “excused” the behavior as ignorance. They appeared to accept behavior deemed “possibly prejudiced” because the teachers aren’t used to having many African-American students in their classes and “don’t realize what they’re saying”.

Extracurricular activities were viewed as something that African-American students did not overwhelmingly participate in, whether due to a lack of interest or because they would be one of few African-Americans participating. Many of the girls played sports, but they noted there few, if any, other African-American females on the team. This lead to feelings of isolation and even caused some girls to quit playing sports. As stated by Al-Mateen, Webb, Christian and Donatelli (2000), African-American adolescent females value close friendships with their peers, thus if they are not accepted as part of the team or feel “othered”, they are less likely to bond with their teammates. This was supported by Erin who shared that she did not associate with her team outside of practice, games, or team meal because she did not feel close to her teammates.

The girls’ views about their academic and extra-curricular experiences did not differ much depending on the area in which they grew up. However, girls who were raised in the district appeared to be more assimilated into the culture of the school and community, but, as Mia stated “I’ve lived in Liberty all my life, what do
you expect?!!?”. By growing up in the district, the girls have been exposed for many years to the expectations of African-Americans in general and particularly to the expected behavior of African-American females. They have internalized the message that they should distance themselves from the girls who move into the district, mostly because they have learned the “expected” social behavior from them as African-American females while the girls who move into the district have not. The next section will address the social experiences of the participants.

5.1.3 Research Question 2

*What are the lived social experiences of African-American females in a predominantly White suburban school district? How do these experiences differ between females raised in a predominantly White suburban environment and females who move into that environment from a predominantly African-American urban environment?*

The overwhelming description of African-American females attending Liberty was that they were “loud and obnoxious”. There appeared to be a social expectation that the girls were supposed to be boisterous and call attention to themselves – one participant noted that it seemed like the African-American girls were viewed as entertainment: “It’s like you have to entertain them. Like you are...just entertainment. Like we’re just hilarious – you know, tell another one. Like it’s just that funny. Like – wow, my culture is that funny.” Although this caricature of what an African-American female is appeared to be woven into the consciousness of the girls, none of them ascribed to that behavior. All of the girls spoke of the
phenomenon as something that somebody else does – not them. This “othering” may be viewed as a form of coping with the stereotypical views within the school culture and provide a way for the girls to separate from the negative stereotype.

Many of the girls shared that, in an attempt to combat this stereotype, they do not call attention to themselves by minding their own business and being “quiet” in the hallways and classrooms. Some participants purposely distanced themselves from African-American girls who were perceived as “loud” to ensure that they would not also receive the label. Thus, some of the girls felt that they did not have a connection with other African-American females in the school and did not appear to want a relationship with them. When discussing their friends, the girls appeared to separate into in one of two directions – (1) have a variety of friends who represented multiple cultures, or (2) have mainly White friends. One of the girls noted that the majority of their friends were African-American.

All of the participants noted that dating was difficult in Liberty and that African-American males appear to have more dating options than African-American females. While it is acceptable for African-American males to date inter-racially, African-American females are not often given the option because the White males usually do not show interest in dating African-American females. Additionally, the girls noted that African-American males often criticize them for dating inter-racially. Despite this obvious double-standard, many of the participants shared that they challenge this view “sometimes”, but mostly “ignore them because they’re (the African-American males) just being stupid”. Whether it was due to choice, or lack
of options, or pressure not to date inter-racially, most of the girls reported they were not dating anyone at the time of the study, thus further isolating and alienating themselves from the school community and offering another example of how their experiences differ when compared to White females attending the school.

There were notable differences in the socialization between the girls who grew up in the district and the girls who moved into Liberty during high school. The girls who grew up in the district noted they were often targeted as the “Liberty girls” by African-Americans outside of Liberty and were seen as different – even as far as having an “accent”. Many of the girls who grew up in Liberty had limited experiences with African-Americans and reported they were more comfortable around White people than African-American. However, some of the girls who grew up in Liberty spent time within the African-American community, usually by design – participating on sports teams in the city, spending time with extended family in the city, attending church in the city, etc. These girls noted they are as comfortable with African-Americans, if not more so, than with Whites. The girls who moved into the district reported feeling very comfortable with both African-American and White people. However, a few participants noted that it took them a few months to a year to become comfortable with White people after moving to the district from a predominantly African-American urban school district. In addition, while the girls who moved to the district reported feeling comfortable with White people, they stated they continue to feel a higher comfort level with African-Americans.
5.1.4 Research Question 3

How do African-American females raised in different settings (i.e., predominantly White suburban vs. predominantly African-American urban) perceive African-Americans from the opposite educational setting?

When asked how girls from the opposite setting were viewed, the girls from both groups readily offered descriptions: girls from Liberty were viewed by the opposing group as “sheltered”, “not knowledgeable about Black culture” and they tended to distance themselves from African-American students who move to the district. The girls who moved into the district were viewed by the opposing group as “loud”, “obnoxious”, “wild” and they sometimes “forget they are in Liberty now”. It appears the girls who grew up in Liberty have been acculturated to display certain behaviors - one participant noted it was “expected not to bring attention to yourself”, which appeared to be a way to separate themselves from the “loud” girls from the city. However, most of the girls who moved into Liberty also reported that they don’t like to call attention to themselves. Thus, it appears that, by becoming assimilated into the school culture, African-American females learn that they should remain “silent” and not call attention to themselves. This is a phenomenon noted by Fordham (1993), in that “being taken seriously also means dissociating oneself from the image of ‘those loud Black girls’”(p. 22). This states that, in order to succeed within the educational setting, African-American females must distance themselves from the negative stereotypes about African-American females that permeate their school culture (e.g., that African-American girls are loud).
5.2 Conclusions

The aforementioned assumptions (see section 3.4), were validated by the findings of the study:

5. African-American female experience schooling differently than other students, including African-American males and White females.

6. African-American females believe they experience more social difficulty attending a White suburban school than African-American males.

7. African-American females raised within predominantly African-American urban settings feel a stronger, more positive, relationship to the Black community.

8. African-American females raised within the predominantly White suburban district of study feel more comfortable within the White community.

The participants’ stories illustrate their unique experiences as African-American females within the school. The lived experiences of the girls are unique in that, although African-American males share some experiences with African-American females (i.e., stereotypical views that African-Americans do not take advanced courses, racial slurs, etc.), African-American females are also faced with specific stereotypes about them as women (i.e., loud and obnoxious). These stereotypes are damaging not only to their self-esteem, but are damaging to their
interpersonal relationships with other African-American females. Due to the stigma attached with acting as a “typical Black girl”, many of the young women, whether consciously or subconsciously, change their behaviors to assimilate into the school culture and begin to view other African-American females as “loud and obnoxious”. By separating themselves from African-American females who are perceived as loud and obnoxious, they are attempting to distance themselves from getting the very label attributed to their specific racial/gender group.

Furthermore, African-American females face different social obstacles in that inter-racial dating is not as readily accepted by the school culture as it is for African-American males or White females. As a result, most of the girls do not date within the school community, further isolating and alienating themselves from the school community.

In reviewing the literature for this study, it became apparent that suburbia is viewed as a place of opportunity and salvation for many people, regardless of race (Frady, 1985; Gross, 1985; Golba, 1988; Kozol, 1991). Suburban schools are viewed as superior to urban; children who attend suburban schools are viewed as having better education (Golba, 1998). Higher levels of education have been linked to higher paying jobs and higher levels of socio-economic status. Thus, possibly in striving to have a better life for their children, as many as 30 percent of African-Americans are now living in suburban settings (Wiese, 2004). However, this study is one of many that shows the experiences of African-American children attending predominantly White suburban schools are not always positive. Although African-
American females are succeeding academically and attaining higher levels of education than African-American males, the participants in this study shared that they are experiencing racism, isolation, and alienation from the school setting. Furthermore, although some showed skills of *strategic assimilation* (Lacy, 2004), others were not able to move back and forth within the Black and White communities. Specifically, African-American females raised in predominantly African-American urban environments reported a higher comfort level with African-Americans in general. Most of the girls who moved to the district continued to be involved with the African-American community and tended to have more knowledge about African-American culture. In addition, two of the participants were involved in community activities focused on mentoring younger African-American girls. The girls appeared to be more comfortable with themselves, tended to have friends from many ethnic and cultural groups, and appeared able to code-switch as needed (even though most of them had not heard the actual term, they described engaging in code-switching during interviews).

African-American females raised within the predominantly White suburban community reported a high comfort level with White people. Some of the girls also reported being comfortable with African-Americans, but those girls were involved in activities within the African-American community, such as attending a Black church or having family within the city that they often visited. The participants raised within the community reported feeling they were able to interact more easily
with White people than the girls who moved into the district, thus giving them a perceived advantage within the larger American society.

5.3 Discussion and Implications

As previously mentioned, research has been limited as to the specific social and academic experiences of African-American females within predominantly White suburban schools. Furthermore, there is little research on how African-American adolescent females raised in predominantly White suburban areas view African-American adolescent females raised in predominantly Black urban settings and vise-versa. However, increasing numbers of African-American families move into predominantly White suburban areas every year. Thus, this topic potentially has great impact on the lives of young women, the African-American community, and society as a whole.

Due to the increasing numbers of African-American females attending predominantly White suburban schools, educators should be concerned with the experiences of the females as it is these experiences that the girls perceive, ascribe meaning to, and react to accordingly. For example, if an African-American female feels that she is “othered” by the school culture, she may react in one of a multitude of ways: by distancing herself from school activities or adopting an oppositional identity (Fordham, 1996) and acting in a stereotypical manner (loud, obnoxious, etc.). Unfortunately, both of these responses limit the experience of high school and may negatively impact her academic achievement and subsequent future. Another response may be to distance herself from the Black community and other African-
American females. This could pose the most damaging result – in not being comfortable with herself and not having a strong personal identity as a Black woman. In today’s inherently racist and sexist society, having a strong sense of identity and support within their cultural heritage can act as a buffer against acts of oppression and discrimination. As educators, it is our responsibility to nurture all students, embrace their individuality and help them to form a strong identity that will, in turn, help them to succeed in life.

During the course of this study, the participants were actively developing their idea of what it means to them to be an African-American woman. Because identity develops throughout adolescence and early adulthood, the year in which this study was conducted offered just a small snapshot of the many issues impacting the development of the girls’ identity. Issues ranging from racist and stereotypical views within society toward African-American women to personal views of what it means to be an African-American woman were at the forefront of discussions during this year.

In discussing their lived experiences, race appeared to be the most influential aspect of the girls’ experiences within the district, supporting a basic assumption of CRT – that race impacts the lives of African-Americans more than anything else in American society. The girls were blatantly reminded of the fact that they were “different” than the majority culture on a daily basis – whether by teachers and students who used racially-charged language, or if they were called “White” by other African-Americans. This constant reminder always kept “othering”, either
from the majority White culture or from the African-American culture, at the forefront of the discussions. Many of the participants appeared to struggle with the usage of stereotypical language; feeling that such language was not necessarily representative of them or African-Americans they know, yet continuing to use the language in their daily conversations. In addition, some of the girls appeared to be experiencing the internal conflict of feeling a need to distance themselves from other African-American females, yet feeling isolated if they were to do so.

In addition to race, the girls were also determining how their gender impacted their lives. Thus, as African-American women, they are confronted daily by societal norms that are inherently racist and sexist. The arduous task of forming a healthy identity in an environment where they feel little to no support weighed heavily with the girls. Some appeared to understand racism exists in our society and felt the views of the majority culture did not necessarily accurately reflect them as an individual. However, some of the girls appeared to have internalized the messages and were faced with the internal struggle of believing in the stereotypes and feeling the need to distance themselves from the stereotypes and the African-American community. Other girls appeared to have a strong racial and gender identity and felt the need to prove the stereotypes wrong by refusing to be silenced, yet succeeding academically and sustaining friendships with girls of multiple races and ethnicities. Most of the girls who moved into Liberty and the girls from Liberty who had ties to the African-American community appeared to feel this need to be an
emissary (Tatum, 1997), yet they all discussed the pull to change themselves to fit better with the school culture.

5.4 Limitations

This study provides an in-depth discussion of the experiences of 11 African-American females attending a predominantly White suburban high school. However, only the experiences and perceptions of the participants were obtained. The perceptions of parents, teachers, coaches, principals, and other faculty (school psychologist, school counselor, etc.) may have provided additional information about the phenomenon and offered a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. Furthermore, observations of the school climate may have offered additional information about the relationships between the students and teachers, providing the researcher with additional data.

5.5 Recommendations for Educators and Parents

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, suggestions are offered for educators within predominantly White suburban school districts. These suggestions are offered not only for the support of African-American females within the districts, but also for the improvement of basic educational practices and policies.

5.5.1 Recommendations for Teachers

1. Teachers should partake in cultural diversity training to help understand the normative behavior of African-Americans and other racial minority groups. By learning to understand the nuances of various cultures, teachers will be
better able to relate to the students and offer support, thereby helping to lessen the feeling of isolation described by many of the participants. In understanding the different cultural behaviors, teachers may be more apt to discourage the continuation of stereotypes about African-Americans and other racial minorities within and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, by understanding various aspects of cultural diversity, teachers may be able to reflect upon their personal beliefs and change potentially damaging stereotypes they may have about African-American females.

2. According to the findings of this study, many of the participants did not feel close with any of their teachers, which was reported to be a disappointment to some of the participants. Many of the girls spoke of a teacher that they had at one point that they could turn to in time of need, but the majority of the girls reported that these teachers taught in their previous school (either in another district or in a middle school in Liberty). Thus, teachers should work to improve student-teacher relationships to help increase the likelihood the students would turn to school personnel for help or support.

3. Some of the girls in the study reported they chose to distance themselves from other African-American girls because of the negative stereotypes attributed to African-American females. Therefore, teachers should make an effort to include students in activities that require intense interaction with all students, so as to combat the idea that people are uni-dimensional.
5.5.2 Recommendations for Principals

1. Principals should offer and ensure that teachers participate in professional development courses on cultural, racial and gender diversity to help increase their understanding of African-American females.

2. Principals should closely monitor African-American enrollment in advanced courses (Honors and Advanced Placement) to ensure that students participate. If it is noticed that African-American students do not participate in the courses, steps should be taken to actively recruit them.

3. Many of the participants were discouraged by the apparent lack of interest in African-Americans, even during Black History Month. Thus, principals should develop cultural activities and school presentations that address African-American culture. These presentations should be offered year-round so it does not appear African-Americans are considered only one month per year.

4. Principals should make a sincere effort to hire a diverse staff. As participants reported they had few, if any, African-American teachers, specific steps should be taken to acquire highly qualified African-American teachers and staff so the students do not feel so isolated within the school. Furthermore, it has been suggested that African-American teachers may be able to help
African-American students by becoming role models and/or mentors (Gay, 2000).

5. Principals also should make effort to offer courses on African-American culture (i.e., African-American History, African-American Literature, African-American Studies, etc.). Due to the prominence of racial slurs, racist behaviors and stereotypical views, students of all races would benefit from learning about African-American culture.

5.5.3 Recommendations for Parents

1. Parents should ensure their daughters are engaged in activities focused on African-American culture. This exposure to African-American culture will ensure the girls gain a feeling of respect and appreciation for their culture. Furthermore, parents should attempt to ensure their daughters participate in activities that offer interaction with African-American young women so they are able to form positive relationships with other females who share their heritage.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should focus on gathering data from school personnel who interact with African-American females attending a predominantly White suburban school district. Principals, teachers, coaches and other faculty should be interviewed to examine their perceptions of the students, which would help to provide a more complete picture of the girls’ experiences within the school setting. For example, a study examining the perceptions of African-American female behavior may help
illuminate the ways in which the teachers perceive their interaction with the students. Teacher perceptions may then be compared with the reported experiences of the students, and similarities and differences could be compared to examine how different participants view the same phenomenon.

To examine how these perceptions and experiences evolve as the girls age, younger participants may be targeted for study. Females attending elementary or middle school may be able to provide how belief systems begin and at what age the stereotypical academic beliefs are introduced into the school culture.

Replication studies should include the following information: (a) What is the socio-economic status of the girls and how does this impact their experiences?; (b) What are the parental beliefs of the school and how do they impact the experiences of the participants?; (c) How does the girls’ current level of racial identity impact their experiences? This information has the potential to offer valuable information regarding how the girls socialize within the school and how their parents influence their identity formation as African-American females.

Follow-up studies should include African-American female high school students who transferred to predominantly White suburban districts during elementary and middle schools (grades 1-8). These studies may provide insight to the obstacles the girls face during earlier grades, how the participants reacted, and how those events impacted their current experiences. The findings of this type of study may help to inform educators about procedures and programming needed during elementary and
middle school to support the healthy identity development of African-American females and ways to provide positive educational experiences.

5.7 Final Thoughts

This study accurately represents the perceptions of African-American females who participated in this study who currently are being educated within a predominantly White suburban school district. Thus, it offers an accurate description of their reality as African-American females within a predominantly White suburban school. Through the use of CRT, which operates under the understanding that American society is undeniably and inherently racist, this study helped illuminate the experiences of these girls. By sharing their stories with the researcher, the participants allowed the researcher a glimpse into their lives and, as importantly, an understanding of what it is like to be an African-American adolescent female attending school within a predominantly White suburban school district.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
Participant Demographic Information

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<td>Mother</td>
<td>Urban</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Mother and Step-father</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ce-Ce</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
<td>Urban</td>
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* Information was not collected due to lack of participation with individual interview
APPENDIX B

SURVEY
SURVEY

Pseudonym (fake name): ____________________

Age: __________________________

Grade: _________________________

Have you attended Liberty schools for your entire academic career?  Y  N

Please rate the following statements according to how well the statement applies to you. There are no right or wrong answers, but it is important that you answer each question according to how you honestly feel. To mark your answer, please circle the letters that correspond with how you feel about that statement. The ratings are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>(A)</td>
<td>(D)</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Education is important to me  SA  A  D  SD
2. What I am learning in school is relevant to my life  SA  A  D  SD
3. I participate in classroom discussions  SA  A  D  SD
4. I am comfortable answering questions in class  SA  A  D  SD
5. I am comfortable asking questions in class  SA  A  D  SD
6. The teachers and other faculty at GLHS treat African-American students fairly  SA  A  D  SD
7. My closest friends are African-American  SA  A  D  SD
8. I have African-American friends  SA  A  D  SD
9. I have friends who are not African-American  SA  A  D  SD
10. My closest friends are not African-American SA A D SD
11. African-American girls are loud SA A D SD
12. I am pretty and/or attractive SA A D SD
13. The images of beauty in the media influence how I see myself SA A D SD
14. The males at GLHS find me pretty and/or attractive SA A D SD
15. I have more male friends than female friends SA A D SD
16. My friendships are more important to me than school SA A D SD
17. My friends belong to the same social class as I do SA A D SD
18. There is a difference in the girls who grew up in Liberty and the girls who have moved in from “urban” areas SA A D SD
19. People act differently depending on where they grew up (Liberty vs. somewhere else) SA A D SD
20. African-Americans from Liberty “act White” SA A D SD
21. African-Americans from urban areas act “ghetto” or “street” SA A D SD
22. There is a separation between students who have money and students who do not SA A D SD
23. The students at GLHS get along with each other SA A D SD
24. I like myself SA A D SD
25. There are no problems with race at GLHS SA A D SD
26. There are no problems with class or money
27. My friends support me
28. My friends are motivated to achieve academically
29. I talk differently depending on if I am around White people or African American people
30. Other African-American students talk differently depending on who they are around
31. The African-American males at GLHS date White females
32. The White males at GLHS date African-American females
33. I would date a White person
34. It bothers me to see African-American males date White females
35. It bothers me to see African-American females date White males
36. There are negative stereotypes about African-American females at my school
37. There is a separation between the races at GLHS
38. There is a separation among the African-American students at GLHS
39. There is a separation between African-American females at GLHS
40. Race means more to students at GLHS than money and class
41. Money and class mean more to students at GLHS than race

42. I would consider attending a HBCU
   (Historically Black College or University)
APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCRIPT

(Some questions were taken or adapted from Gloria Gibson’s dissertation research)

1. What does it mean to be African-American in your school and community?

2. How does (has) being African-American affect(ed) your school experiences in your school?

3. Tell me about what it is like as an African-American female in your school.

4. How do other students in the school view African-American females?
   4a: How do African-American girls view each other?
   4b. What are the major tensions between different students or groups of students in school?

5. Do you feel there is difference between African-Americans who grew up in this district and African-Americans who have moved into the district from a predominantly African-American, urban environment? If so, what?

6. How have your parents or guardians influenced your academic achievement?
   6a. How have your friends influenced your academic achievement?

7. How have your parents or guardians influenced your racial identity?
   7a. How have your friends influenced your racial identity?

8. When do you notice your race/class/gender inside or outside of school? Can you think of a time when your race/class/gender made a difference in a situation either inside or outside the school? What was the situation and how did you handle it?

9. Do you feel that issues of race/class/gender are discussed in school? Does the school bring adequate attention to these issues? If so, in what ways?

10. How do you feel about interracial dating and friendships?
    10a. How do your friends feel about it?
    10b. How do your parents feel about it?
11. How is your current school different or similar to previous schools you have attended?
APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. **What is it like going to school at Liberty?**
   a. What classes are you taking? Do you feel challenged by the coursework? Are you now or have you ever taken honors/AP courses? Would you if you could? Why/Why not?
   b. Are you planning on going to college? Where? Why are you thinking about that school?
   c. Tell me about any extra-curricular activities you are involved in.
   d. How has the faculty supported your academic achievement? In what ways, if any, could you have been supported more?
   e. How are different students perceived in the school?

2. **What are the students like in Liberty?**
   a. How are they perceived by each other?
   b. By the faculty?
   c. By the community?
   d. What are some of the differences between the students?

3. **What is it like to grow up in Liberty?**
   OR
   How has your life changed since you moved to Liberty?

4. Tell me about your social life? (Family, significant others, etc.)

5. What activities do your family participate in together? What activities are you involved in outside of school?

6. Hypothetical situation: If you could were asked to build a school and community, what would you want the school to be like? The community? Why?

a. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most comfortable, how would you rate your comfort level.
APPENDIX E

HORIZONTALIZATION AND THEME DEVELOPMENT OF STATEMENTS BY PARTICIPANTS WHO ATTENDED THE DISTRICT SINCE KINDERGARTEN
General Perceptions of Academic experiences

Teacher expectations

1. I think some of the rules that we have are applied more for us than they are for the rest of the student body

2. It’s just, it’s different ‘cuz you’re not expected to go as far as a White student is, or excel as far as a White student, but, I’m doing fine. I’m doing better than half the White girls that I know

3. I just want to say that some people at this school think some of the teachers gang up on the Black people, the Black girls... they think he’s ganging up on them, but he’s not – he’s trying to teach them what to do. They say they don’t care what he says, but I’m sorry, like when you are in his class, you need to do what he says. Have good posture, don’t have an attitude when he says to do something. And when he yells at them for that, they think he’s ganging up on them. But he’s not. Just do what he says

4. See, part of the problem is that a lot of the Black students take it the wrong way when a teacher tried to help them or get them to act the right way and they get an attitude. And then the teacher snaps back. But if you just listen the first time, then it won’t happen

5. The teachers are harder on the Black students. Like they take their phones and stuff. And White girls are always homecoming queen and stuff

Teacher relationships

1. Just the way they act towards, like, the Black students. They – I don’t know...it’s like if you have a White teacher. Like last week, I’m sayin’, like, Ms. *Smith*, (others laugh, saying *Ms. Smith* is crazy), she’s a substitute. She’s off. She’s like 90 years old. She’s crazy. She be callin’ us Niggers

2. Some teachers give me more attention if I need it – like in math. Math isn’t my thing. But mostly, they do the basic teacher thing

3. They [the teachers] give you respect as long as you respect them

4. The teachers really see you as...they see everyone as the same person, as grey. It doesn’t matter

5. There’s this one girl on my team who has the same skin tone, but her hair is really different than mine. And, like, the coach can’t tell us apart. He announced her first name and my last name over the school intercom. And we had been playing for the team for a while, but he couldn’t tell us apart. It was very frustrating
Extracurricular/School activities
1. The Black males are [homecoming] kings. Until my freshman year, all the queens and kings were White and then *Karen* was the first Black person and then she set a trend for each year after that. There is usually one every year… But it’s never a Black female

2. Liberty picks their sports early. Like, early. Middle school – if you aren’t the best, don’t try out in high school. There’s no chance of getting on the team. Don’t try out if they don’t know about you

3. I personally don’t associate with my team outside of practice or games or team meal or anything like that, um, just because I feel like a lot of them are fake

4. There are no programs for Black people – I mean there is the step team

5. There are things to do, but Black people choose not to participate. Like I chose to do band, choir, student council, cheerleading

6. They had played together since they were younger and all knew each other, so I didn’t really fit in. It wasn’t fun

7. I think people expect us to have programs for just Black people because it looks like we have programs for just White people, but it’s that Black people just aren’t joining so it looks like only White people. Like if you just get into something, then it won’t be all White anymore

8. There’s this one girl on my team who has the same skin tone, but her hair is really different than mine. And, like, the coach can’t tell us apart…he announced her first name and my last name over the school intercom. And we had been playing for the team for a while, but he couldn’t tell us apart. It was very frustrating

Honors/Advanced placement courses
1. Black people aren’t supposed to be in those classes [AP/Honors courses]

2. Well, I feel that it is good because those classes will prepare you for life and people should take them if they can. But other people may not see it as that way because they are afraid that other people will perceive them as “acting White”, which I don’t even know what it is. I mean how do you act “White”?
Family influence/expectations
1. My family tells me that I have been living in Liberty too long. People get mad when I correct them and they talk about my “Liberty education”. Well, I am sorry that I am being grammatically correct. You know? Like, I don’t speak Ebonics

2. My parents grew up going to Columbus Public Schools and they want me to achieve way more than they did. And I’m living in Liberty and they lived in Columbus so it’s already a big achievement for them to be here. And they, of course, they expect me to exceed what they have done ‘cuz I have lived in Liberty all my life

Lack of acknowledgement of African-American culture
1. I wanted to say that the school doesn’t do much about culture. I mean, it was the last week of February and they didn’t even put a poster up

Reputation of the school/district
1. I think Liberty tries to hide some of the stuff that happens here. ‘cuz Liberty’s supposed to be one of the good schools, academically and stuff, and they are trying to hide some of the bad things that they don’t want everybody else to know

Benefits
1. there are a bunch of different people here so that kinda prepares you for what’s outside of Liberty

2. I don’t know any advantages [of being a Black female in the district].

3. I’m a good student. I’ve been going to Liberty since I was little

Drawbacks
1. [the hardest thing about growing up here is] not growing up around other Black people

2. My family tells me that I have been living in Liberty too long. People get mad when I correct them and they talk about my “Liberty education”

3. Sometimes, it’s like you’re left out of things ‘cuz of your color. Like you are supposed to fail in life. As an African-American, you are expected to fail

General perceptions of Social Experiences

Expected Behavior
1. But like, I’ve lived in Liberty all my life, so what do you expect?
2. It depends on how you act. Like, if you are really loud or really quiet – some people be like intimidated or scared, but if you’re quiet, you get looked over like you aren’t even there

3. (The stereotype is that) all Black females are loud & obnoxious

4. Yeah, like even the guys at our tables – they say that every Black girl at the table is loud – I mean, I know I’m loud, but not around them

5. I think some of the rules that we have are applied more for us than they are for the rest of the student body

6. It's just, it’s different ‘cuz you’re not expected to go as far as a White student is, or excel as far as a White student, but, I’m doing fine. I’m doing better than half the White girls that I know

7. At least in our grade, I can’t speak for any other grade, there is a separation between the Black girls. There are those who can associate themselves with the White girls and are pretty much set with what they want to do in life and are focused on academics, and then there are the ones who are here basically for social reasons

8. I think it’s like...I don’t know…’cuz if you’re a Black girl and on the squad then you are supposed to be ditzy and dumb and blonde I guess. But, you don’t. Like, I’ve cheered since I was little and I don’t do that. I don’t act like that

9. People who don’t associate with the White crowd – they are automatically ghetto. “Oh you’re ghetto, blah, blah, blah”. No – I’m not ghetto

10. I mean its like kinda hard not to associate yourself with White people when White people are all around you

11. What’s the problem with being proper?

12. You are not totally sure if you want to hang out with people who are of your own race, or with people who are the right people to be with; the people who do well in school

13. Sometimes, it’s like you’re left out of things ‘cuz of your color. Like you are supposed to fail in life. As an African-American, you are expected to fail

Friendships
1. It’s like I guess sometimes I hang out with White people. It depends on where I am. Student council is all White people, band is all White people, jazz band is all White people, choir is all White people – it’s everywhere.

2. I think it’s different from middle school to high school because like I used to have a lot of White friends, but now...Like, the White girls I used to talk to, like we’re still cool, but we’re not as cool as we were last year. We like, if we see each other in the hall, we’ll say hey, but like we used to go out to the movies together and eat lunch together, but it’s not like that anymore.

3. I hang out with White people mostly and it’s weird because it’s the Black people who make fun of me because I do hang out with them.

4. Mostly the Black people hang out with the Black people. And White people with White people. There are a few who mix in, but mostly everyone ignores them. No one interacts with each other outside their own group.

5. I have a lot of friends who are White and when you’re talking to them, they make racist comments, but like, try to cover it, like – “oh, not you” or “no offense”. But it is kinda like they are judging.

6. You are not totally sure if you want to hang out with people who are of your own race, or with people who are the right people to be with; the people who do well in school.

7. The high performing Black students all have White friends, so they are kinda split up.

8. I would say most of my friends are White, but I also have another group of friends that don’t hang out with the other group. I am closer to my White friends. I grew up with them.

9. Sometimes [the White students] get on my nerves. Like, they ask stupid questions, like ‘what if I called you a nigger?’...Most of my friends now are Black. I still talk to my old friends who are White, but not as much as I used to.

10. I don’t have any Black friends.

**Dating**

1. I think one issue is that it’s okay for the Black guys to date White girls, but they have a problem if we date White guys.
2. Yeah – it’s like 90% of them date White girls. But it’s not like anyone says anything, but I think the Black girls have a problem with it

3. I think the White guys treat you better

4. Black guys sometimes think they are players

5. When I dated the White guy, he like catered to me every second of the day

6. I mean if you date someone from here everyone knows about it and has something to say. Like the whole school knows

7. I don’t date guys from here because everyone is in everyone else’s business. But I date guys from other suburbs

8. It’s like the White males don’t want to date Black females. And the Black males think they can date anybody they want. So that leaves, like, half the people

9. Like people in my family – like I used to date this white guy and um, everybody used to be like “why are you dating him?... And my aunt was like, “why are you going out with the white boy?” and like my cousin, his kids are mixed and she’s like “I told my son not to marry a white person – they just going to use you”. But I don’t think it’s like that

10. I have been out with a couple of White guys and Black guys. The White guys are nicer

**General perceptions of Race**

*Acting White*

1. I think a lot of Black people think that “oh, if you’re in band, you’re a nerd. Stay away from me, ha ha”…………… I don’t think so. Band was just hard, that’s why I stopped. Like, summer band is hard getting up and marching and everything – its hard, that’s why I stopped

2. I think it’s like...I don’t know…’cuz if you’re a Black girl and on the squad then you are supposed to be ditzy and dumb and blonde I guess. But, you don’t. Like, I’ve cheered since I was little and I don’t do that. I don’t act like that

3. I think my dad forgot what it means to be Black. He’s married to a White woman…He associates himself with the upper scale. He does the golf thing and the country club thing and stuff like that and is just not the norm of what Black people would do. Personally, it’s an embarrassment
Acting Black

1. (The stereotype is that) all Black females are loud & obnoxious

2. Yeah, like even the guys at our tables – they say that every Black girl at the table is loud – I mean, I know I’m loud, but not around them

3. At least in our grade, I can’t speak for any other grade, there is a separation between the Black girls. There are those who can associate themselves with the White girls and are pretty much set with what they want to do in life and are focused on academics, and then there are the ones who are here basically for social reasons

4. I went to West, and everyone says it ghetto, but it not….. A lot of Black people come from West

5. People who don’t associate with the White crowd – they are automatically ghetto. “Oh you’re ghetto, blah, blah, blah”. No – I’m not ghetto

6. What’s the problem with being proper?

7. Like, if you are part of the loud group, you just see it as normal. But to me, it’s pretty annoying. I don’t see the point of being so loud all the time – trying to get attention. ‘Cuz that gets them in trouble

8. Except for the stereotypes that we are all loud and possibly not as intelligent

9. You are not totally sure if you want to hang out with people who are of your own race, or with people who are the right people to be with; the people who do well in school

10. I could act like it [like I am a part of the Black community]. I could act tougher and be louder

Confronting stereotypes

1. I think it’s like…I don’t know…’cuz if you’re a Black girl and on the squad then you are supposed to be ditzy and dumb and blonde I guess. But, you don’t. Like, I’ve cheered since I was little and I don’t do that. I don’t act like that

2. I went to West, and everyone says it ghetto, but it not….. A lot of Black people come from West
3. People who don’t associate with the White crowd – they are automatically ghetto. “Oh you’re ghetto, blah, blah, blah”. No – I’m not ghetto

4. They don’t understand that ghetto is a certain type of area that you live in, not the way you act

5. And they just think that is something is different from the norm then its ghetto

6. If you are light everyone is considered to be the same. Everyone is seen like the same

7. People say I have “White” hair, but my mom is a hairdresser – she knows how to do hair. I mean, my hair is not thick – it’s not nappy

8. It makes me want to try harder b/c some people feel that the Black students shouldn’t do as well as the White students. It makes me want to step up and do better

9. it has kinda pushed me away from Black females because I don’t want to be seen as loud or annoying or rude

**General perceptions of relationships between African-American female students**

1. At least in our grade, I can’t speak for any other grade, there is a separation between the Black girls. There are those who can associate themselves with the White girls and are pretty much set with what they want to do in life and are focused on academics, and then there are the ones who are here basically for social reasons

2. And like you get made fun of because of the way you talk

3. Like the other group act like they don’t know how to act. So, I can’t be with them

4. it has kinda pushed me away from Black females because I don’t want to be seen as loud or annoying or rude

5. I’m not comfortable with Black people because they don’t accept people from the suburbs
General perceptions of females from the district
By females from the district
1. Some Black females that grew up in Liberty are used to not being so loud. Like not being in the center of everything, like every fight or the center of every thing that goes on between Black people. Like you don’t have to be in the center – you can be off to the side and mind your business

2. I think it’s taught or expected that you don’t bring attention to yourself. Like Black girls who aren’t from Liberty bring attention to themselves a lot

3. You just have to fit in with your surroundings

4. You have no choice but to do the best you can and acting the way that the girls from Columbus Public Schools do is not the way to get the job done

5. We’re [girls from the district] are more laid back. We mind our own business. And I think we, um, can like, hang out with other people outside our own race. Like, we have more flexibility socially

6. The girls from [here] are usually more quiet

General perceptions of females from outside the district
By females from the district
1. We grew up here and when someone moves in we already have the mindset that [THE CITY] are wild and loud

2. Girls from [THE CITY] forget where they are. They forget that they are in Liberty now

3. You have no choice but to do the best you can and acting the way that the girls from Columbus Public Schools do is not the way to get the job done

4. I’m not very comfortable, I mean, I’m okay around them, but they aren’t really around me because I hang out mostly with White people. I mean, I’ve lived in Liberty all my life and they are coming from Columbus and they see me and they’re like “why do you act White?” And it’s like, I’ve lived in Liberty all my life, what do you expect?

5. Lots of Black girls who move here are quiet when they first come, then they usually kind of, go towards the people who look like them and dress like them. Then, after a while, once they get comfortable, their true personality comes out
6. I’m not comfortable with Black people because they don’t accept people from the suburbs

7. They [Black girls who moved into the district] really don’t accept us [Black girls who are from the district] or whatever. And they are more louder

School Culture
1. The Black males are [homecoming] kings. Until my freshman year, all the queens/kings were White and then *Karen* was the first Black person and then she set a trend for each year after that. There is usually one every year...But it’s never a Black female

2. Q. So, it’s always Black males, but never Black females except for *Karen* that one year, what four years ago? Yeah. Q: What do you think it was about *Karen* that made her so different? She associated herself with the White side of the school. Q: Okay. How did she do that? She was in a lot of things, like student council. She was like, a really popular person. And she made the smart decision of not associating herself with people who are, I guess, not the best examples to be around and I guess in her class that was, like the best thing to do - hanging around the White people

3. I think a lot of Black people think that “oh, if you’re in band, you’re a nerd. Stay away from me, ha ha”........... I don’t think so. Band was just hard, that’s why I stopped. Like, summer band is hard getting up and marching and everything – its hard, that’s why I stopped

4. White kids use drugs way more than a Black student would, I think. ‘Cuz I’ve seen a lot more White students selling drugs or doin’ ‘em than I’ve ever seen a Black person doing them

5. Like the Black kids smoke weed but White kids do nitrous oxide and crazy stuff

Ideal School
1. It’d be diverse. Um, like an ordinary suburb, I guess. It’d be a lot more Black people so they would be happy instead of upset because there were a whole bunch of White people

2. I would help out families that couldn’t afford...the basic necessities. So it would be like Oprah’s school. I would do something like that – I thought that was very sweet. The school would be for people who couldn’t afford to put their child in a good school

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APPENDIX F

HORIZONTALIZATION AND THEME DEVELOPMENT OF STATEMENTS BY PARTICIPANTS WHO ATTENDED THE DISTRICT SINCE HIGH SCHOOL
General Perceptions of Academic experiences

Teacher expectations

1. People used a lot of slang where I come from and here people talk proper and this teacher used to get mad at me for the way I answered questions in class, and I use a lot of slang and he would say, “no, you have to talk appropriate here”, and I was even kicked out for talkin’ slang

2. The teachers were just kinda skeptical of me in the honors classes. Yeah – when like, my mom first did the teacher parent conferences or whatever, they didn’t know that I came from the city – they just assumed I came from here. I guess because of the way I talked and the classes I was taking. Like I couldn’t have come from the city

3. The faculty is pretty good. Sometimes, they might say comments that they might not intentionally mean to come off racial or prejudice, or anything. But the classes only have like one or two Black people in it, so they don’t realize what they’re saying

Teacher relationships

1. There’s this one teacher who is racist. She calls us out our name and stuff like that

2. I’ve had two substitute Black teachers, but that’s it. I haven’t had any other Black teachers

3. We had a lot of Black teachers at my last school and it was cool, you know having someone around who could relate to you. And when I first came here, it was hard, not knowing anyone or having any Black teachers around or feeling that I could have any connection with my teachers

4. They can be really mean and nasty sometimes. Like just give you looks and stuff like that – you know, watch you closer

5. I mean the guidance counselors do the best they can I guess, but it always seems to come back to this race thing. They feel like “just ‘cuz you’re Black I just can’t relate to you, like, the way you want me to”. And sometimes it really is like that. If it’s something like somebody called somebody else a nigger, then they’re like “I don’t know how much I can really say without feeling like I am offending you”. Cuz they have been brought up the same way these Liberty kids have. And they don’t want to talk about it

6. There was one teacher who was the first White teacher who was actually open minded as far as talking to her about Black people. Because there was this one thing where somebody was called a nigger on the bus and she said
“you know I really can’t speak on it because I don’t know what it’s really like”, but she was still able to really relate to me and I was shocked because I was expecting her to just brush it off.

7. Man, at my old school, I used to hear dogs and stuff all the time. All these drug busts all the time. But that’s part of the stereotypes – urban Black schools verses these suburban schools – out here, they have yet to do something like that unless they are alerted. But a lot of people talk in this school and it’s not necessarily to other students – it’s to the teachers! And to the security. But then, I’m not the type to put everything on blast – unless it is about safety. So, I told him some stuff, but he already knew. I mean I care enough to say somethin’… but as far as if you mad and you Black - at this school - you ain’t tryin’ to help nobody. You all for self. Because that’s how you feel already. You feel alone so why try to help the people who will probably feel you a part of it anyway

8. They have supported me...not a lot, but...like, I can’t say that they didn’t. But it wasn’t much

9. I had summer school here and the teacher was showing us around the school. And she’s like naming all the areas – like that’s where all the people who smoke hang out. And then we went down here to where all the Black people hang out and she’s like “I’m not going to tell you what this place is cuz it’s politically incorrect.” And I was like, what is it then? And she wouldn’t elaborate

**Extracurricular activities**

1. The school does have clubs and stuff, but those…I don’t know any Black people that are involved in any of those

2. I guess it’s like that whole lame thing, like “oh – you lame cuz you in Key Club or FCCLA”, but it’s like whatever

3. I just recently quit softball. Because, basically I was the only Black person there. And one day my mom came home and asked me to ask the coaches if they knew my name. There are like six different coaches. And I asked them, and none of them knew my name. And I started wondering “so what do they refer to me as when I’m playing out there? What do they call me?”. It made me uncomfortable so I quit

**Honors/Advanced placement courses**

1. Some of those classes are majority White, but there are a lot of Black people who have the option of being in the class and for whatever reason, they’re not able to or just don’t feel the need to. And I feel like that’s one of the
things that people are really missing. I think that you should take advantage of being in the classes

2. I’m the only Black person in my AP class, but in my honors class there is one other Black girl. And I can tell my teacher, like has a difference and like a preference between the two of us. Cuz like, seriously, she’s more ghetto than me and like, most of my teachers don’t even know that I moved here, they just assume that I have live here all my life – so… you know, I just think it is ignorant to act that way

Family influence/expectations
1. My mom gets mad at me when I don’t know a lot of things about my culture. But I’m like, I’ve never been taught. And, like, Assata Shakur, she taught me all about her – I would have never known anything about it if she didn’t. She gets mad because they don’t teach it

2. For the most part, my mom, she likes the fact that, cuz of my achievements…she looks at it like the whole “underdog” thing. Cuz Black people are seen as the underdog. My mom really likes that kind of stuff. She really likes to see Black people doing good things. You know, doing big things, making stuff happen, because there are so many people who doubt Black people and our culture in general

3. My mom is not really that into it, she’s like “I know that I’m Black and should know about Black history, but I’m not going to go to the African...like, the...” but she still teaches me about like what happened in our culture – she still teaches me thing about things like that, but my sisters teach me so much more. If I have a question, I just go to my sisters

Lack of courses on African-American culture
1. Cuz like, people say that they don’t do much here about Black History Month, and like, I went to my friends house once and asked her if she knew what month Black History month was, and she didn’t know – I had to tell her and she didn’t know why I was so mad about it – and I was like upset about it. They don’t care about it

2. February is the only time you see anything at all. And that’s not much

3. I know we should learn about the presidents and stuff like that, but I think we should learn more about Black people. Like last year in Global Studies, we took a whole semester about slavery but she really like, she just kept missing things about it and kept skipping over things that I knew should be included, but she didn’t want to explain it, I guess. I think we should have
more African-American class here so the kids who did grow up here know more about their culture

4. They only have classes like British Lit. Just giving us the option would be appreciated...but then, at the same time, we would have to deal with the ignorant comments from the White kids. Like “Oh, I’m gonna sign up for the Black class”

5. And even last year, they had parts of Martin Luther King’s speech posted up around the school. I mean, at least they did that. This year, nothing

6. I would offer more African-American studies classes for the simple fact that there aren’t many classes like that offered and if they are, there’s a White teacher teaching them

**Reputation of the school/district**

1. You know, I think that Liberty, when they have a problem, what they try to do is hide it. Like, “there was a fight in the hallway” – “oh really, well someone else can deal with it”. I mean there must have been like four fights this week. There was so many fights and you don’t hear about it unless your friends tell you. Like, the teachers won’t talk about it. And that’s what I like. Like, at my old school, you would hear about it and that’s how the school got a bad reputation. But like, everyone is in everyone’s business

2. She [my mom] moved here because my sisters said that it was one of the better schools and it would be a better environment for me

3. I wish I could have started here earlier. Like, if I could have been here in sixth grade like my sister, I would be so much farther ahead than where I am now. Like academically

**Benefits**

1. She [my mom] moved here because my sisters said that it was one of the better schools and it would be a better environment for me

2. We moved here because...my little sister...she acts White...and my mom was afraid to put her into one of the schools in [the city] because she didn’t know what...’cuz like it’s harder there – you have try and fit in and do whatever you can and my sister is not that type of person

3. I would rather be here. There’s drama here, but not as bad as there

4. Yeah – I feel like I would be lost if I went back to my school in [the city]. Because my friends, even my Black friends that I would to go to school with
– they’d be like “Oh you’re in gifted and talented” because I used to be in GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) when I was in elementary school and they used to clown me for that.

5. I just felt really motivated and I do what I need to do here. I still talk to my best friend back in [the city] – we’re alike in many ways and I know that she doesn’t have anybody down there motivating her like I have friends out here motivating me and I try to do that for her.

6. I would rather be here. Like I said earlier, I have been considered to be pretty much White my whole life.

7. It’s just a battle. Period. I know exactly what she is talking about. Like being in a Black school and doing that whole thing. Trying to keep up like da da da da da da – trying to be “Black” and all that – and then you come here and have to change your whole way as far as the whole being White thing and…its just a struggle.

8. And like out here, I really do appreciate the academics. That’s something I got into my sophomore year – you know - let me just focus on that stuff. I realized that pleasing people is not that important to my goal in life. I already know what I want to do and if that means just doing my work and having friends outside of school – that’s fine. I don’t come to school for socialization anyway.

9. My life has changed a lot. I started to take everything more seriously – my grades, my friends, my clothes. Like, my friends now don’t do drugs or anything. I’ve done better since I moved here.

10. I was mad at my mom for moving me here, but now that I make good grades and better friends, I can see why she wanted to move here. To give me a better life.

11. Education-wise, it’s definitely a good school. And you can tell that, coming from a school that wasn’t really academically strong.

12. This school has higher requirements than my old school so I had to catch up.

13. It’s motivated me to be more strong academically. It’s helped me become more open minded to basically get used to a different type of living. Like I’ve never been used to living somewhere where there are million dollar home and students come to school in Lexus’s and all that. I’ve never got to school with people who have money, so it’d helped me get use to that. But
there are people around who are still like me – you know, trying to make money, may not have as much as others

14. Basically because of the academics. And being around Black people who are motivated. Like my friends and I are all on the same path, and I didn’t use to talk about that stuff with my old friends. And then the whole social aspect is here too, so the fact that they want to talk about school too – man, that’s great

15. I wish I could have started here earlier. Like, if I could have been here in sixth grade like my sister, I would be so much farther ahead than where I am now. Like academically

**Drawbacks**

1. Black people here are so frustrated as far as trying to figure out where they fit in. You know, to see somebody driving in with their confederate bumper stickers on their cars and coming into the school talking reckless about Black people period. It’s ‘cuz nobody has ever had enough courage to step up and explain that that’s just not how to be. It’s just not like that anymore

2. Sometimes is just easier to act like they think you should – you get tired of it. You know, like, if you want me to be that Black person, I can be. But, why go there? You know? Like you have to entertain them. Like you are just entertainment. Like we are just hilarious – tell another one. Like it’s just that funny. Like – wow, my culture is that funny

3. As far as the students, the student body, I don’t like it. It’s not the type of student body that’s very welcoming. So if it was someone who wasn’t as open-minded, it might be hard to fit in

**General perceptions of Social Experiences**

**Expected Behavior/Behavior**

1. So I had to adjust the way I said stuff – like people would look at me and be like “I don’t understand what you are saying” - so I had a big change - You know, so my speech really had to change

2. I try to feel people out and figure out how to be, and you know, once I get cool with somebody, then I talk the way I normally do

3. At my old school there wasn’t any White people. So when I came here, there was White people everywhere, so I just have to adjust to it

4. I mean I don’t want to change the way I talk or who I am for anybody, but I guess I have to
5. Yeah – at my old school, you know not to talk about nobody. You know not to run your mouth about nobody or you’ll get a big consequence – like a beat down

6. Out here, everyone is so sheltered, nobody accepts anybody for who they are, so they automatically put them into a category

7. They automatically think, that you know, “she’s not trying to be friends with me, she’s trying to be friends with all the Black people – she ghetto” you know, all that. But I’m more open-minded – I’m not going to try and shut somebody out just because they’re White

8. Sometimes is just easier to act like they think you should – you get tired of it. You know, like, if you want me to be that Black person, I can be. But, why go there? You know? Like you have to entertain them. Like you are just entertainment. Like we are just hilarious – tell another one. Like it’s just that funny. Like – wow, my culture is that funny

9. [The students here are] fake. Very fake

10. As far as the underclassmen, like a lot of them...it’s starting to get bigger and bigger. It’s starting to be more Black people and more minorities coming in to the school – kinda like taking over

11. Like, at first, the Black people tried to stay to themselves in the hallway. Now they trying to break out their stereo and dance and tryin to turn the school out. You know, trying to exert that power. They got more numbers, so more power

*Friendships*

1. They’ve never had a Black friend who talks that way because they grew up in Liberty and speak the same way they do, so it’s a bit of a challenge

2. And then I realized - this is all new to them and they never had somebody they were comfortable around as far as Black people. You know someone they could ask questions, you know, like, “what does that mean”?

3. Well, I mean, it’s not like I have a lot of Black friends, but I don’t really, like, talk about people, so it doesn’t really matter to me

4. They automatically think, that you know, “she’s not trying to be friends with me, she’s trying to be friends with all the Black people – she ghetto” you
know, all that. But I’m more open-minded – I’m not going to try and shut somebody out just because they’re White

5. I have friends all over the place. I have White friends here (points), White-Black people here, I have Ghetto-Black people friends here. So I am like all around the world with friends. Like I said, I’m a nice person and I get along with everyone

6. I’m very comfortable with White People. In my eyes, they are no different than us

7. Most of my friends are White. And when we first became friends, they always ask me all these Black questions just because they didn’t know. And like, this one time, like, maybe in January, I asked them if they knew when Black History month was. And they didn’t know. They were like, “it’s not that we don’t care, it’s that we never learned it”. And that’s crazy. Like in my middle school, we had a daily question about Black History and you could win prizes and stuff. And even last year, they had parts of Martin Luther King’s speech posted up around the school. I mean, at least they did that. This year, nothing

8. I kinda see people as people – not based on their color. It’s more about their personality

**Dating**

1. Like a lot of White girls who go out with Black boys and Black boys who go out with White girls – it doesn’t really matter

2. Well, some of my friends care. Its more like seeing a Black guy with a White girl that gets a lot of Black girls frustrated, but then like, I’ve heard a couple of White boys say “I came out of a White woman so I’m going to marry a White woman”. They just don’t think it’s right at all and will just say “it’s not right”

3. Yeah – this one guy told me “we date all the White girls because there is more of ‘em. There’s more of them, so we might as well date them.” And then there is Black girls and the whole “attitude” thing...

4. Yeah – I asked this Black guy in my class why he was going with a White person and he said that it was mostly because most Black girls act ghetto and are fat – they don’t like to go on diets and stuff like that
5. I think the White guys are scared to talk to a Black girl. Like we gonna say “get out of my face – what are you doing?”. They think that Black girls are ghetto and don’t want to deal with it

6. Everyone already has their set friends and preferences and they know that, especially in a society where I know, for me and a lot of people that I know, they go by what their friends think of them and changing that up – his White friends would be like “are you serious – are you really dating a Black girl?”. It would just trip them out

7. My mom could care less. She doesn’t care –she said as long as he treats me right. My mom was like “well, he’s bringing his girlfriend home” and I was like “oh okay – what’s she like” and she said “she White” and I was like “what?!?!?” (laughs). When I met her, I didn’t know she was White – I had met her before and I thought she was Hispanic or something – I think it was her hair, but when she came to the house, she had blonde hair and this little shirt with ripped jeans and I was like “ooohhhh – you White!” (laughs), “but she was real cool – me an’ her have had conversations and she has made it clear that she’s not dating him just to say she dated a Black guy – she really cared about my brother and I can tell that he really cared about her. He didn’t make a big deal about her race or anything – he never commented on it, it was just like, ‘this is my girlfriend’”, and that’s how I think it should be. At first, my mom was just like “I don’t know” because, you know, just the way the world sees it as far as, like, things that were going on in the media with Black men raping White women and stuff like that – she was afraid that people would get the wrong perception as far as what their relationship really was about and then, you know if something happens and they break up and then she turns on him and tries to say “he did this to me” and stuff like that. She didn’t want anything like that to happen to him, and she still worries about my little brothers and she doesn’t want them to date White girls or anything because in Liberty, I’ve seen guys leave the school because they got a White girl pregnant and they didn’t want…their parents were all upset and saying stuff about the other kid and he just ended up changing schools. So it…but my mom got past it and she really came to accept the girl

8. I like guys who are sort of, um…like the way I am. My personality has to match his and be at like the same level. And here, a lot of the guys are real quiet and I need somebody who can handle my energy

9. I don’t date guys from here…because here, in Liberty, everyone’s in everyone else’s business. No one wants to stay to themselves. Everyone wants to spread rumors
General perceptions of Race

Acting White
1. I’ve always been considered an outcast ‘cuz like, even Black people call me White and White people call me White, so, it’s just whatever

2. Proper English. The way you dress. There is a difference. Like, I would probably get clowned at my old school for wearing Hollister or flip-flops when it’s cold outside. I got called White at my old school for wearing Vans to school. They called me White

3. Like, a lot of students will tell me that I’m not Black and like, since, like middle school, they call me an Oreo because I am Black on the outside and White on the inside. And like, I’ll ask, “how am I not Black?” like, I know I’m not Ghetto – I’m the first person to tell you that I’m not – but...

4. Back at [my old school], they used to call me White. I hate that – like when people say “you act Black” or “you act White” – that’s just dumb. So they told me that I act White, so I thought maybe if I come to a White school, it’d be different. But I fit in with the Black people who are trying to “act White”, so I don’t know (laughs)

5. The Black students that don’t act White say that I act White. I don’t know. Maybe it is the way that I pronunciation words. I don’t know

Acting Black
1. You have to act ghetto

2. Sometimes is just easier to act like they think you should – you get tired of it. You know, like, if you want me to be that Black person, I can be. But, why go there? You know? Like you have to entertain them. Like you are just entertainment. Like we are just hilarious – tell another one. Like it’s just that funny. Like – wow, my culture is that funny

3. A lot of the Black kids are loud. I’m not going to lie. They are loud. It’s like, extreme. Like, they think “I’m, not going to change just because I go to a White school. I’m going to stay how I am”. I don’t know – they don’t seem to adjust well at all

Confronting stereotypes
1. Sometimes is just easier to act like they think you should – you get tired of it. You know, like, if you want me to be that Black person, I can be. But, why go there? You know? Like you have to entertain them. Like you are just entertainment. Like we are just hilarious – tell another one. Like it’s just that funny. Like – wow, my culture is that funny
2. Man, at my old school, I used to hear dogs and stuff all the time. All these drug busts all the time. But that’s part of the stereotypes – urban Black schools verses these suburban schools – out here, they have yet to do something like that unless they are alerted. But a lot of people talk in this school and it’s not necessarily to other students – it’s to the teachers! And to the security. But then, I’m not the type to put everything on blast – unless it is about safety. So, I told him some stuff, but he already knew. I mean I care enough to say somethin’… but as far as if you mad and you Black - at this school - you ain’t tryin to help nobody. You all for self. Because that’s how you feel already. You feel alone so why try to help the people who will probably feel you a part of it anyway

3. Like, a lot of students will tell me that I’m not Black and like, since, like middle school, they call me an Oreo because I am Black on the outside and White on the inside. And like, I’ll ask, “how am I not Black?” like, I know I’m not Ghetto – I’m the first person to tell you that I’m not – but...

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General perceptions of relationships between African-American female students

1. Some Black girls don’t like the way other Black girls act, so they pull themselves away and go to another group

2. Like, when they are loud in the hallway, I tend to pull myself back because I don’t want to be included in that whole “loud” stereotype of how Black people are. Because I don’t think it’s right that we put out that, like us girls, us teen girls, us teen Black girls put out this stereotype that we are always loud, we’re always abusing boys in the hallway, we’re always rough in the hallway. I mean, you can have that stereotype for her, but not for me because I don’t do that. So I’m not comfortable with that type of Black person. But the type of Black people that I’m comfortable with is, you know, I’m not telling you to be fake, but you know, also I am comfortable with Black people who are themselves, they are smart about what they are doing – they think about their actions before they do what they’re doing

3. Like, a lot of students will tell me that I’m not Black and like, since, like middle school, they call me an Oreo because I am Black on the outside and White on the inside. And like, I’ll ask, “how am I not Black?” like, I know I’m not Ghetto – I’m the first person to tell you that I’m not – but...
General perceptions (in the district) of females from the district  
By females who moved to the district

1. They’ve never had a Black friend who talks that way because they grew up in Liberty and speak the same way they do, so it’s a bit of a challenge

2. Out here, everyone is so sheltered, nobody accepts anybody for who they are, so they automatically put them into a category

3. There are the ones who are new and haven’t been living in Liberty all their life, so they think, “oh, this girl’s been sheltered, she don’t know what it’s like to have to deal with being Black”. And like, puts her into this category as being a White girl and it’s like you get to a point where you don’t embrace….don’t know really who you are. So you’ll have the new girls and the girls who have been in Liberty all their life hanging out with White girls – they aren’t going to start acting like they want to hang out with the Black girls who are new because they don’t think that they can find a common ground

General perceptions (in the district) of females from outside the district  
By females who moved to the district

1. They think we are ghetto. Loud. All it takes is one person. You know, if it's a group of us, and only one person is loud, we all get the label. That’s just how it is. Even if it isn’t true

School Culture – Interaction with White students

1. Some White kids think they can say whatever they want around here

2. They are so used to the Black people around them acting the same way they do, so when they say stuff like “Nigger”, it’s not a big deal to them

3. They don’t care because the Black people who have been here don’t say anything because they have never had deal with being around any Black people who get mad when White people say that. They feel that there is not really enough of us here to stand up to them

4. They have never had that experience where someone has corrected them

5. Cuz like, people say that they don’t do much here about Black History Month, and like, I went to my friends house once and asked her if she knew what month Black History month was, and she didn’t know – I had to tell her and she didn’t know why I was so mad about it – and I was like upset about it. They don’t care about it
6. They only have classes like British Lit. Just giving us the option would be appreciated...but then, at the same time, we would have to deal with the ignorant comments from the White kids. Like “Oh, I’m gonna sign up for the Black class”

7. I’m very comfortable with White People. In my eyes, they are no different than us.

8. When I first starting going here, I noticed that the White people weren’t really as...open, so it takes...they were the type you really had to warm up to. Now it seems different – now they feel like they can talk to me outside of class and chat without feeling the need to make a comment about me being Black (laughs) – try to pull a little joke, you know, trying to do a little “what’s up girl” or “hey homie”

9. I don’t have a problem with being here, but some things are, like…some things I can’t control, like some kids making stereotypical comments and stuff like that. Other than that it’s okay, it’s just that people don’t know to watch what they are saying around other people. They just get carried away and comfortable with their friends and they think they can do what everyone else does. Overall, it’s okay, but there is this underlying shadiness going on

10. Like, when I first came here, I was like “all these White people – I’m not going to get along with anyone”, but back at [my old school], they used to call me White. I hate that – like when people say “you act Black” or “you act White” – that’s just dumb. So they told me that I act White, so I thought maybe if I come to a White school, it’d be different. But I fit in with the Black people who are trying to “act White”, so I don’t know (laughs)

**Ideal School**

1. I would add more African-American clubs, you know something that they could learn more about African-American culture. Me and my mom were talking the other day about how they have a US History class to learn about White people all day, everyday. And I want a class where they could learn about Martin Luther King more, not just during Black History Month. Learn about all the great things that Black people did in the world. Not only for one month, but like everyday

2. It would be, it would definitely be diverse. From all kinds of people – Islanders, Asians, Hispanics, Black people, White people, just a lot of definitely biracial, mixed people. Be a lot more community events that pertain to everybody – not just one type of culture. Those are always fun, I would have those. The schools, definitely the faculty would be as diverse as
the community, so each person in a classroom can be like, “hey – I have a person in this school who looks like me, thinks like me.

3. I don’t think I would exclude anyone for any specific reason. But it would probably be a lot of people that came from the same background as me, but are trying to better themselves. Kind of offer a new start for the families. What would the school be like? I would offer more African-American studies classes for the simple fact that there aren’t many classes like that offered and if they are, there’s a White teacher teaching them.

Concern for African-American Males
1. I think the guys need to do something like this. Because I think the guys would actually do something about it instead of sit here and talk about it to you, then go back to class like nothing happened. They are more proactive. Like the girls, we talk about stuff, but they still act the same way outside of the room.

2. I hope something changes because my little brothers will be here soon. And, I don’t…I mean, maybe somebody could do something for the guys ‘cuz they are struggling! They really need someone to talk to. It would be so beneficial because they need a chance to get it off their chest. You know that stigma of being here – Black men and Liberty just don’t fit. Unless you trying to act like a puppet – you know do what they want you to do, act the way they want you to, they can’t be themselves, you know.

Participation in the African-American Community
1. Outside of school, I am in Zeno’s club. It’s a club for young African-American girls – it’s sort of like a high-school sorority. We have different chapters in different regions.
APPENDIX G

SYNTHESIS OF THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ATTENDED THE DISTRICT SINCE KINDERGARTEN
General Themes: Educational, Extra-curricular, Social

Educational

Two different views:

- There is differential treatment by the staff at GLHS. The rules are upheld more for Black students – the rules are stricter. For example, it was discussed that, although cell phones are not allowed in school, White students talk on their phones all the time. One student commented on how she witnessed a Black student’s phone taken away, but not the White student who also walked by the administrator at the same time.

- However, some of the girls feel that the teachers don’t single the Black students out, but that the teacher are only trying to help the students “better themselves”. The students should just listen to what was advised and do it instead of getting an attitude. The girls feels that some of the Black students take it the wrong way when a teacher tries to help and then get an attitude, causing the teacher to react. It could all be avoided if the students listened to the teacher in the beginning.

Liberty expects academic excellence from all students – Black and White. However, Black students who succeed academically may be perceived as “acting White” by other Black students.

Black students choose not to participate in school activities, making the activities appear “White” – example, sports, after-school programs, etc. There are no activities or groups specifically aimed towards Black students/Black culture. Activities that are available are attended mostly by White students. Even if the girls want to join an activity, they feel overwhelmed if they are the only or one of a few Black students in the activity/group.

Advanced courses (AP/honors) – some students (younger) feel that it is hard for Black students to be in the classes – viewed as “acting White” – others (older students) feel it is okay. However, some girls participate in the advanced coursework anyway.

“Nigger” and “Nigga” are common terms used within the school – it is seen as a basic part of the informal social language within the school.

Common social knowledge is that Black students are not expected to excel as a White student does. However, many of the girls indicate they have average to above average grades.

Kids in the school are grouped by the middle school they attended – MS East is viewed as the “rich” school and has mostly White students, MS South is viewed as
the school with “the drugs” and MS West is the “ghetto” school. MS West has the highest Black student population.

Girls appreciate educational aspect of Liberty – on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being highest, most rate as 9 or 10.

The girls feel their parents expect them to achieve – they were said to have high expectations. The girls feel that their parents view having their children attend Liberty is a big achievement – especially for the parents who are from other areas. All parents expect professional behavior from the girls and hold them to high standards.

Social

In Liberty, Black females are viewed as and expected to be “ghetto” (loud, obnoxious) – even by Black males and other Black females.

In particular, girls who are not from Liberty are viewed as loud – “they don’t know what it means to be in Liberty”. The girls said that they (girls from the district) are expected to behave in a certain way (not loud, not obnoxious, etc.). It was said that the girls who are not from Liberty “forget that they are in Liberty now” and possibly want attention. Girls from Liberty are expected not to bring attention to themselves – they are expected to mind their own business and “get the job done”.

There is a separation between the Black females – those who can associate with White girls and are focused on academics vs. those who are in school for social reasons. Again, it was noted that those who associate mostly with White girls run the risk of being labeled as “acting White”.

It is socially accepted for Black males to date White females, but it is not okay the other way around. However, when asked about interracial dating, it is accepted by the group and it was noted that “White guys treat you better” because “most Black males are disrespectful and try to be players”. It was stated that Black males “put on a front and try to act cool”, but White males “cater” to the girls and are not as into the “player” mentality.

Parents accept interracial dating – are more focused on how the males treat the girls than the race of the boy. However, some of their extended families are not as accepting and hold stereotypical views of White people.

The girls mentioned having a hard time with family members who do not live in Liberty. The girls are seen as having an “Liberty accent” and having a “Liberty education” – meaning that they act differently as a result of being educated in Liberty. One girl noted that she doesn’t “speak Ebonics” and that they are brought
up to “be proper”. Another girl noted that the girls don’t want to be known as loud, obnoxious or uneducated, so they don’t act that way.

They also mentioned having a difficult time with non-family members outside of Liberty – they are seen as the “Liberty girls”. Are told they speak differently. It was mentioned that they prefer not to date males from Liberty – they don’t like their “player” attitude. But they find it difficult dating outside of Liberty because they are seen as “Liberty girls”.

They noticed a change in their group of friends from middle to high school – while it used to be okay to hang out with White girls, they now have social pressure in high school to hang out with the Black girls. If the girls hang out with mostly White girls, they feel other Black students make fun of them for “trying to be White”. However, one girl mentioned that if she wanted to participate in a “Black club”, the other Black students would not accept her because she is seen as “trying to be White” because of the way she speaks, dresses and who she chooses to socialize with.

The girls are not as impressed with the social aspect of Liberty – on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being highest, most rate it as 4 or 5. They feel that people make fun of each other and that the school is unsafe due to weapons and drugs (younger students).

**Extracurricular**

The clubs and activities are viewed as “White”, but the girls do not have a perception of being “left out”. They would like to participate in a club/activity that focuses on Black culture/ issues, but there is not an apparent desire from the overall student population for that right now.

Homecoming kings can be Black – it is accepted. However, it is not accepted for Black females to be homecoming queen. One exception is a Black female who “acted White” – she associated herself with White students, participated in many extracurricular activities with White students, and chose to be friends with only White students.

The girls play a wide variety of sports – cheerleading, basketball, soccer, softball, cross-country, track and field. However, in order to play, you have to get into the sport early (or be very, very good). There are not many Black females on the sports teams (1 or 2 Black females per sport). Exception is cross-country – it was described as “one big family”. In general, the girls don’t associate with their teammates outside of the sport – feel that the (White) girls in Liberty are “fake”.

There was mention of racial “grouping” by some coaches – the girls feel that some coaches see them as the same because of similar skin tone.
The district has what the girls described as a feeder system for sports – if you play sports early (younger grades), you are more likely to make the high school team. If you transfer to the school or play with another organization (e.g., little league), it is hard to become a member of the team.
APPENDIX H

SYNTHESIS OF THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ATTENDED THE DISTRICT SINCE HIGH SCHOOL
General Themes: Educational, Extra-curricular, Social, Misc.

*Educational:*

Differential treatment:

- The teachers respond differently to Black students than they do to White students. Ex: Black female got a detention for playing around in class, White student told a “Black” joke in the same class and did not receive any reprimand until the Black female pushed the point.
- One student noted that a teacher did not know the Black female students’ names in her class. The teacher kept confusing the names and did not appear concerned about learning their names.
- Differential treatment of Black students – those who “act White” are generally left alone. Students who are “loud” call attention to themselves and get in trouble.

The girls’ biggest adjustment is being around so many White people. Their previous schools were more racially mixed or were majority Black. The girls mentioned feeling social pressure to change who they are, but also feel personal need to maintain a sense of self.

Students from Liberty view the girls who moved into Liberty as the “experts” on Black culture. It was mentioned that they are seen as “educational source” to the White students and some Black students who have grown up in Liberty. They feel that they are expected to “educate” people because the school does not educate the students on Black issues/Black culture.

Liberty does not offer many experiences focused on Black culture – one example given was that some students did not know that February is Black History month. Liberty has an African-American Reading Week, but is only available for students in English class. There are not any courses offered on African-American issues/culture. Students mentioned they would appreciate having option of taking a course on African-American studies instead of the currently offered English Lit and British Lit.

The girls don’t feel that the faculty addresses Black issues. They also feel that they are not sensitive to Black issues – example: they discussed the phenomenon of White students were using the word “Nigger” – when a student addressed it with a faculty member, she was told that the teacher didn’t really know what to say/do because they couldn’t relate. One exception was given – even though the teacher was White, she listened and tried to support the student. However, it was noted that this event was the exception – not the rule. It is more likely that the teachers will not acknowledge the event or will brush it off.

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The girls noted there was a very limited amount of Black teachers/staff at the school. They don’t feel they have anyone to relate to and wish for more Black faculty to support their educational needs. The girls also noted that there is a rumor of a racist substitute who calls the Black students names (“Nigger”).

They feel there is a general unwritten rule in their school is that Black students are not expected to excel as much as White students when it comes to academics. They noted the underdog syndrome – that Black people are viewed as the underdog. There is a feeling of pride when Black people make accomplishments not usually connected to Black culture (e.g., going to medical school, doing well in school, etc).

AP/Honors classes: Although many Black students at Liberty are able to take the classes, most choose not to – the girls think that it may be because the students view those classes as a “White” thing and don’t want to be viewed as “acting White”. However, girls in the group participated in the classes (and reported being one of few Black students in the class, if not the only Black student) – they viewed it as an opportunity to give them a better education. They commented that it is very difficult work, but they were able to do the work.

Their parents very focused on academics - ask about tests, homework, etc., and have high academic expectations for the girls. They want the girls to achieve higher success than they did. The parents moved to Liberty for the educational system and/or family support.

Some feel a need to help friends from previous school friends succeed. They will discuss academics/college with friends. Noted that they didn’t have that in the previous school – that they wanted to help their old friends like their new friends have helped them.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being highest, the students rated their academic experience in Liberty as 9 or 10.

**Extracurricular:**

Not many of the girls participate in sports. One girl mentioned that she quit her sport because the coaches did not know her name – she was one of two Black females on the team, and wondered what the coaches called her while she was on the field.

Clubs/activities: The school has clubs aimed at diversity, but Black people do not participate. Participation may be low because Black students don’t see the point/need for it. Or they may wait until their senior year when they need activities for college applications. The girls noted that they would enjoy activities/clubs that
focus of Black issues – however, it depends on who attends (it’s a group thing – if the group does it, everyone will want to).

**Social:**

Black people in general are at times seen as “entertainment” in Liberty. Specifically, Black girls are viewed as “loud” and “ghetto” (whether they are or not). It was mentioned that “all it takes” is one girl in a group of friends to act “loud” for everyone to view the group as “loud and ghetto”.

Girls in Liberty (Black and White – more White than Black) get into other people’s business – very different than the girls’ previous school/environment where it was generally known not to gossip/talk about other people’s business.

The Black females are split into cliques/groups. Black girls from Liberty are viewed as being “sheltered” and hang out with White girls. They noted that the girls from Liberty feel that there can’t be a common ground between the two groups (the girls in this group don’t necessarily agree – some appear able to associate with both groups).

There is high racial tension at Liberty – White students use the term “Nigga/Nigger” daily. White students (and Black students from Liberty) have little regard for sensitive issues. The girls are frustrated because the environment has been this way for so long that people just accept it. Even Black people who have grown up in Liberty accept it and never address it.

If a Black female hangs around mostly White girls, she is seen as “acting White”. People in Liberty expect Black females to act “ghetto”.

There is a difference between girls from Liberty and girls who moved to Liberty – the way they dress, talk, act, etc. It was something that they had to change when they moved to Liberty. However, one girl mentioned that she was “clowned” for wearing certain brands at her old school – was teased for wearing “White” shoes.

Interracial dating is accepted, but some girls in the group expressed that it bothers/frustrates some of their Black female friends. It is more socially accepted that Black males date White females.

Black males have stereotypes against Black females – that Black females “act ghetto” and are fat. It is not common for White males to date Black females – possibly due to intimidation and stereotypical belief that Black females are “ghetto” and “loud”.

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The girls feel supported by some of their friends to succeed academically. Some ask about colleges, others don’t discuss it at all.

There is less social pressure in Liberty than in their previous schools, but the girls feel more academic pressure. They feel like they don’t have to worry as much about fashion, etc.

Their parents have mixed feelings about interracial dating – some parents worry about the stereotypical beliefs of community and worry about the safety of their children when they date White people.

Their parents/immediate family (sister) teach and infuse Black culture at home. Take trips to cultural fairs, etc.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being perfect, most girls rated their social experience as a 9 or 10. One rated it as a 4.

**Misc:**

There are lots of racially based items in Liberty (e.g., confederate clothing, belts, bumper stickers, etc). The staff (a Black security man in particular) makes sure the students remove such items before entering the school.

Safety: The girls feel safe – Liberty has lots more security than previous schools. It was stated that Liberty had its own “investigative squad”. Liberty reacts to things much differently than previous schools – much faster to involve security (example: put the school on lock down when a student trespasser would not leave the exterior school grounds).

Drugs: Much more common than in previous school. White students take “harder” drugs (coke, meth, X, etc.), Black students sell weed but don’t engage in the hard drug use. Mentioned the stereotype that Black students are thought to do more drugs, but noted that this was not the case.