Understanding the experiences of Black boys in suburban schools: An examination of social influences on identity, achievement and school relationships

Tyrone L. Weeks

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.emich.edu/theses

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

https://commons.emich.edu/theses/1082

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects at DigitalCommons@EMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@EMU. For more information, please contact lib-ir@emich.edu.
UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK BOYS IN SUBURBAN SCHOOLS:
AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON IDENTITY, ACHIEVEMENT AND
SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

by Tyrone L. Weeks Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School of Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Educational Studies

Dissertation Committee:

Christopher Robbins, PhD, Chair

Sylvia Jones, PhD,

Aaron Johnson, PhD,

Paul Ramsey, PhD

January 26, 2021

Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Will and Joyce Weeks, who have been the foundation of my life, whose lessons have instilled in me the most precious lessons that I have ever learned. Your support, commitment and example has instilled in me the strength needed to persevere throughout the journey of life. For this I will always be grateful. To my love, Stacia M. Weeks, your sacrifice, patience, and support has enabled me to move forward in this process while keeping the most important part of life in perspective. You keep me grounded. To my daughters Grace Marie and IvyRose, you both inspire me to be the very best version of myself and to strive to be a better person every moment of every day. To my son, Jamar, in so many ways being your father has given me the inspiration to be a “drum major for justice.” I also dedicate this work to my childhood friend, John C., who left this world far too soon. A society which normalizes the premature loss of Black lives, is a society in need of change. I hope that in some way I have helped towards creating that change.

We have witnessed an unprecedented time in the history of the global community as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic which will change our lives forever. Here in America the virus has had a particular affect revealing the pandemic of racism dispelling the notion of post racialism touted by many progressives. We, as such, are forced to examine the nature of systemic racism in our society and engage in authentic efforts to engage in not just courageous conversations on race but teach the importance of love and acceptance for all mankind or peril. Given the capacity of schools to touch the lives of every American, educational systems must consider its roles in either perpetuating racialized structures or focus on how it can intentionally disrupt racialized hierarchies. Our future lies in the choices we make today.
Acknowledgment

As a young man growing up in the city of Detroit, nothing in my early years would have suggested that my life would have been one of scholarship and advocacy. I am thankful for the process, as it has taught the value of patience. Knowing this, I am reminded of a scripture that I have clung to throughout my life, that every day has a new and different meaning.

*The trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. James 1: 3-4.* I am eternally grateful.

This work is also a tribute to the ancestors who made the ultimate sacrifice. The legacy of resilience, fortitude, and courage has given those that have followed the foundation to stand with straight backs and heads held high.

A very special thanks to my siblings, Wanda, Will, Anglia and Pierre, you have believed in me and supported me throughout my life and been the best siblings a brother could ever have. I would like to thank my uncles and aunts who reiterated the value of family. To my aunt Lucinda who spoke scholarship into my life from an early age when she consistently referred to me in the southern tradition of calling teachers “professor” even while studying as a college student. Those words echoed in my spirit and helped me to understand that my education was the result of visions of ancestors whom I never had the joy of meeting.

I would like to thank my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Christopher Robbins, for being so supportive throughout this process and for your calming presence, thoughtful critique, and sincere guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Sylvia Jones, Dr. Paul Ramsey and Dr. Aaron Johnson. Your collective wisdom and direction helped me to focus my thoughts and write a dissertation that met high standards.
Dr. Jones, you made me always consider the child development focus and harness my words to be selective and impactful.

Dr. Ramsey, your historical perspective helped me to unpack the moments that thread time together in a manner that brings a macro view to a modern-day concern.

Dr. Johnson, words cannot begin to express the depth of my gratitude for your tutelage, willingness to support, and the guidance that you have provided. Your self-less approach to passing along good deeds is a testament to your character, strength, and passion for the work of elevating the conditions of the Black experience.

A special thanks to Dr. Robert Carpenter whose guidance and support helped me to navigate a challenging time. Your kindness and concern for the well-being of your students is a testament to your character.

In addition to my committee members, friends, mentors, and colleagues in the work have aided in my growth and perseverance in this journey.

Dr. Victor Kennerly, my friend and mentor– your encouragement and standards for excellence has helped me to grow professionally as an educator, as a teacher, and facilitator. I am grateful that our paths crossed.

Dr. Jay Marks, my teacher and colleague, as a young educator in the field you provided an example to those of us who walked those hollow halls that young men could be smart, cool, and committed simultaneously. Thanks for being a champion for Blackboys.

I would be remiss if I did not thank and acknowledge two friends whose encouragement and “check-ins” provide me with encouragement and periodic refocusing. Atoya Martin has been one of my longest friendships and throughout the twists and turns of life our friendship has endured. I will forever be grateful for your support.
And Freda Didlake, your kindness knows no bounds. Your compassion, grace and gentile spirit has always inspired me to trust and believe in a divine plan. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Stacia. You have given me the greatest gift anyone could ever receive—a deeper understanding of the meaning of sacrifice, patience, and understanding. Each moment spent with you I grow to understand more and more what purpose truly is. Your giving nature and nurturing spirit have helped me to grow in ways that I could have not imagined. Your strength helps me to keep focus and live life fuller. I hope to be able to one day give back all that you have given to me.
Abstract

The achievement of Black boys in public schools continues to be a major focus of concern for educators and researchers. Consequently, educators and researchers have looked to issues of engagement and identity as key variables relative to achievement. Numerous theories point to adverse environmental factors contributing to the achievement disparities affecting Black boys in schools, but limited research has sought to elevate the voices of Black boys to understand how they identify with schools, as well as the social factors that contribute to their social and academic identities. In this qualitative research, focus groups were used to engage with Black boys and suburban, female educators to understand how their experience within school and in their personal lives shape their engagement in shared educational spaces.

The purpose of the research sought to understand the role that school-based factors play in influencing the schooling experiences of Black boys in suburban high schools in the Midwest United States by listening to the voices of Black boys. Additionally, this research examined how teachers experienced their roles as educators of Black students by identifying the factors that contribute to their roles and experiences inside of the classroom. This study consisted of two participant groups: One participant group consisted of sixty-three Black boys, with the other consisted of ten White women educators. The findings of this research concluded that Black boys benefit, both academically and socially, when taught by teachers who are trained in cultural competencies who share a commitment to creating learning environments that lift up the voices, cultures, and identities of Black boys that are centered on anti-deficit expectations.
# Table of Contents

## Dedication

## Acknowledgment

## Abstract

## Chapter 1: Introduction and Early Influences

- **Early Influences**
- **Background**
- **Institutional and Systemic Racism**
- **Foundations of Racial Segregation**
- **Stereotypes and the Impact of Stigmatization**
- **Statement of the Problem**
- **Imagery of Black Boys**
- **Purpose of the Study**
- **Significance of the Study**
- **Theoretical Framework**
  - **Social Identity Theory**
  - **Social Learning Theory**
  - **Critical Race Theory**
- **Definition of Terms**

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

- **The Historical Mis-Education of Black Boys**
- **Educational Segregation and Desegregation Efforts**
- **Property Rights, Suburban Living, and Cultural Capital**
Stereotype Threat, Socialization, and Identity Construction ................................. 29
The Construction of Stereotypical Identities ......................................................... 30
Black Identity Development ............................................................................. 33
Individual and Group Social Experiences ...................................................... 36
Social Interactions .......................................................................................... 38
Social Learning Theory .................................................................................. 40
The Role of Schools in Achievement Disparity ................................................ 41
Teacher Expectations ..................................................................................... 43
Adultification .................................................................................................. 44
Discriminatory Practices ............................................................................... 45
Challenges to Change .................................................................................... 46
Schools Based on the Premise of Meritocracy ............................................. 47
Student-Teacher Relationships ..................................................................... 49
Theoretical Considerations of Social Development ........................................ 51
Social Identity Theory .................................................................................... 51
Racial Identity Development .......................................................................... 51
Adultification and Images of Boyhood ............................................................ 53
  Socio-Ecological Development .................................................................. 54
  Social Interaction Theory .......................................................................... 55
  The Creation and Support of Whiteness .................................................... 57
Envisioning a New Normal .............................................................................. 55
Critical Race Theory ...................................................................................... 57
Abolitionist Teaching .................................................................................... 60
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Ethic of Care</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Qualitative Methods</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Setting</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Environment</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Environment</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation Criteria and Selection</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Structured Interviews</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Club Discussions</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience Surveys</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Validity and Reliability</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Analysis</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality and Ethics</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions of the Study</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1  Terms Used and Criteria Used to Evaluate the Credibility of Research Findings……………………………………………………………………………65
List of Figures

Figure 1  Research Questions………………………………………………………65

Figure 2  Thematic Findings with Student Participants……………………………83

Figure 3  Anti-deficit Social and Cultural Engagement Theory………………….126

Figure 4  Recommendations for Students, Teachers, Administrators, and Districts……………………………………………………………………127
Chapter 1: Introduction

I am invisible. Misunderstood, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus side-shows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or fragments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.

(Ralph Ellison, 1952, p.8)

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.

(Ronald, Edmonds, 1979, p. 23)

Early Influences

I was born and grew up in Detroit’s historic North End district, where my parents told of stories of Detroit’s glory days before the tumultuous riots of 1967 that changed the landscape of our hometown. They moved from a small, segregated town in Mississippi, to escape the racial tensions, sweltering heat, and history of enslavement that informed the social atmosphere of the area. The Great Migration, as this period in time would come to be called, began during the First World War, and would continue until the end of the 1970s. During this time, over six million Black southerners moved across the country to transform their lives (Wilkerson, 2010). My father, like millions of others, departed for the North—with nothing but hope and a belief in finding stable employment and opportunities in Detroit’s auto-factory industry. Following in the tradition of Henry Ford’s five dollars a day wage model, various automobile companies began to
provide a stable middle-class lifestyle for blue-collar employees, including those within Black communities. In addition, the pop and rhythm and blues cross-over music of Motown was the soundtrack of our lives.

The Detroit Public School District thrived with more than 299,000 students and thousands of employees at its peak (Grover & vander Velde, 2016). Although the school system had several high performing schools, the high school I attended garnered acclaim for its tradition of student advocacy and protest. The school became a symbol of racial unrest that spread throughout the city streets. In 1966, high school students staged a walkout at the school I would later attend. The students voiced concerns about the school’s curriculum and perceived lowered expectations by many of their teachers and administrators (Walker, 2009). These protests were a precursor to the riots that followed during the summer of 1967, said to be caused by violence between the Black community and police, but were due to increasing frustration over unemployment, poverty, racial segregation, police brutality, and a lack of opportunities.

The era of the 1960’s experienced by my parents was vastly different from my life in Detroit during the 1980s. Certain phenomena shaped Detroit’s social milieu between the 1960s and 1980s. The departure of Whites to the confines of the suburbs also known as “white flight” was one occurrence that shaped the city’s dynamic (Frey, 1979). White flight impacted the economic structure of businesses in the city’s urban center—as well as the demographics, public perception of decline, and expectations of urban schools (Clifford, 2017). Later, increased heroin use would transform into the crack cocaine epidemic that swept through the city decimating many of its neighborhoods, tearing apart many families and exacerbating the devastation that began in 1967 (Hagga et al, 1992). For those left behind following the mass exodus of White families who fled to the suburbs, the implementation of crack cocaine into
predominantly Black communities created a viable economic opportunity for some, and a much needed yet problematic release from the stressors of economic decay and scarcity for others. Easy access to illegal drugs became an outlet during an economically stratified society for those who sought to take economic control over their lives, even if it was at the expense of other community members. The inequitable sentencing propagated by the “War on Drugs” paved the way toward mass incarceration of Black men. Even though White men used and sold drugs at similar rates as Black men at this time, legal discretion fueled by racism led to harsher sentencing patterns (Alexander, 2019). The mass incarceration of Black men has impacted families and communities, which created a cycle of young Black men and children becoming leaders on the block and one of the driving forces behind drug dealing in the city since such activities provided alternative means of making money. The lure of fast cash left a path of devastation that moved throughout our neighborhoods, leaving behind vacant homes, abandoned businesses, and single-parent households.

Despite the circumstances, my parents were committed to providing both emotional and financial stability for their children and many others who viewed them as surrogate caregivers. Although the surroundings were rapidly changing, our home was a safe-haven from the ails that devastated our community. As I entered my preteen years, synchronous changes resulted from the transition to middle school and the departure of my older brother to pursue a career in the military. He left a collection of books he had assembled through the years that had an impression on my development. I became immersed in the works of Ralph Ellison’s (1952) *The Invisible Man*, James Baldwin’s (1963), *The Fire Next Time*, and Donald Goine’s (1973) *White Man’s Justice, Black Man’s Grief*. Texts such as these and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Haley, 1965) opened my eyes to the harsh realities of race, class, and inequitable power
structures. The exposure provided context towards understanding the economic decay of my community-and others during that time. It was Malcolm X (1965) who stated, “People don’t realize how a man’s whole life can be changed by one book” (as cited in Haley, 1965, p. 400) and those words were true in my case. Books helped to shape who I was then and the path that I would take toward becoming an educator.

Many of the other boys in the neighborhood did not have the same nuclear family support as I did because a two-parent household was rare. Certain components of single-parent households, such as isolation or abandonment, left many of the young boys from the neighborhood to engage in behaviors that would have long-term effects on their futures, the neighborhood, and the city. An example of this was my best friend, who chose the “street life” to assist his struggling mother with basic household expenses. His father was not around, and like so many others, his life choices during the summer following my first year of college eventually led to his untimely passing at the age of 19. My youthful naiveté left that summer-and was replaced with anger and depression. However, upon my return to college and with the help of my friends, I found cathartic restoration.

College took on a new meaning and a greater purpose. I earned a degree in secondary education with a plan to one day help boys find their voice and place in the world through reading, advocacy, and mentorship. I worked as a teacher in a suburban Detroit community in a prestigious university town with affluent residences and a highly regarded school system known for producing national merit scholars. Despite the school’s academic reputation, the school district experienced an achievement disparity, like many districts throughout the nation, among students of color. My positionality as a native Detroiter, a Black man who was once a student in the public schools of Detroit, and as an administrator and former teacher shape the background
shared and the questions asked, and it reifies my goals of providing more equitable educational opportunities for Black boys.

**Background**

Public school systems within the United States are responsible for educating the masses regardless of race or socioeconomic status. However, since its inception, there has existed institutional and systemic racism, racial segregation, racial stereotypes, and stigmas, as well as problematic behaviors promoted by institutional and systemic factors. These components shape the lives of the children who enter such spaces attempting to gain knowledge that might lead to their future social and economic stability.

**Institutional and Systemic Racism**

In his groundbreaking and frequently cited text, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, critical race theorist Derrick Bell (1992) argued that racism was an “integral, permanent, and indestructible” component of American society. The permanence of racism has been denied—but can be found in the history of this nation’s founding as an imperialist, colonialist, and capitalist effort. Racism, therefore, was one of the tools used to ensure the success of those goals, thus solidifying the use of social ideas of racial difference as a determining factor of one’s biological, moral, and intellectual capabilities. As a social institution within America’s larger structural system, public schools aid in maintaining the efforts and determination that this country was founded upon. Scafidi (2015) explained that the phenomenon of the achievement disparity was the result of the state of segregation under the current public education system (p. 1). As American communities have increasingly become more diverse since the 1980s, American schools have become increasingly more segregated. Further, the resurgence of segregated schooling experiences can be attributed to the income disparities between families.
The period between 1970 and 2009 saw increases both in the number of families living in affluent and low-income neighborhoods (Scafidi, 2015), yet these factors do not account for the inner school segregation trends that separate Black and White students within the same schools.

Following the 1967 riots in Detroit, President Lyndon Johnson ordered the Kerner Commission (1968) to examine factors that led to the riots throughout the country. Findings highlighted what many residents in urban cities had known all along: That despite the gains made by desegregation law and the Fair Housing Act, America had remained separated societies that were the result of the legacy of discrimination (Wells & Cain, 1997, p.3). There were two America’s, one White and the other Black, in which economic, social, and political disparity relegated Black Americans to the slums of its urban centers. The racial divide between the city and suburban lines was described as an impenetrable boundary between the black ghettos and the rest of the world (Orfield, 1988). Schools were not exempt from the impact of white flight, leaving some inner-city parents to seek educational opportunities for their children in the suburbs. As many White families left central city schools for suburban districts, segregation pervaded most schools, and is now sustained by boundary area zones that separate urban and suburban communities (Frey, 1979).

**Foundations of Racial Segregation**

In the seminal text *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois (1903) provides a historical account of race relations in the United States between Black Americans and European Americans by analyzing the psychological and sociological effect that race has made on the formation of human identity, society, and the American consciousness. DuBois (1903) poignantly identified the problem of the 20th century as the problem of the color-line (p. 1). He depicted the metaphoric but visible demarcation that divides society by race; on one side are those perceived
as being a problem, and on the other, exist those in positions of privilege and authority. The constructed legitimacy of Whiteness created barriers to advancement whose effects can be seen today. Contemporary underachievement of Black students in the nation’s public schools supports DuBois’s declaration that race is a predictor of how groups experience education and how schools maintain disparities based upon the color-line.

DuBois (1903) referred to the adjustments in society as being subtle, but singularly ingenious (p. 80). The era of the 1960s saw such adjustments in the form of boycotts, marches, and sit-ins. Despite the perceived gains of the past, social inequities remain prevalent today, validating what critical race theory scholars refer to as the permanence of racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Marginalized groups continue to experience separate worlds, not simply in the higher realms of social engagement, but also in school. Although we are more than a century removed from DuBois’s writings, the tentacles of discriminatory practices continue to stretch throughout society, leaving in its wake a legacy of obstacles that have created a perceived superiority of Whites and subjugated Black Americans to a second-class status in society. The framework of critical race theory was used as one of the theoretical frameworks in this research and will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 3.

Two major themes addressed by DuBois (1903) were the veil and the color-line, describing the role that racism has on the psyche. The veil is used to describe the ideas that exist in the minds of White Americans that support their ideas of the inferiority of Black people and their own superiority through the creation of practices and policies. The veil exists in the lives of Black Americans as an internalization of constructed notions of inferiority. The color-line is the metaphorical bifurcation maintained by the veil. The veil and color-line have been maintained
overtime-and exist today in the form of inequitable access and opportunities in the social institutions that comprise American society. One said social institution is schooling.

American public schools rely on compulsory standardized testing and tracking systems to survey the academic achievements of students and are maintained by notions of inferiority and superiority. These practices, also called hyper-accountability and hyper-standardization, have deleterious effects on the lives of Black students (Simmons et al, 2013). Black boys, as well as other students, are ill-prepared to take standardized tests and often fail, resulting in educational practices and labeling by districts, administrators, and teachers. Similarly, failing is sometimes internalized by students decreasing their motivation to achieve.

**Stereotypes and the Impact of Stigmatization**

The poor achievement of Black boys and public schools has been perpetuated by the practices of hyper standardization and hyper accountability. These practices have aided in the creation of deficit narratives about Black boys by maintaining stereotypes that suggest that Black boys are academically inferior. These stereotypes blame environmental factors, such as a culture of poverty, or the lack of parental involvement as the culprit as opposed to institutional racism (Lewis, 1961; Payne, 2005; Toldson, 2011; National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, n.d.).

de Grasse Tyson (1991) referred to the impact of stigmatization impacting Black students as an emotional tax that is levied by school systems on Black students. Ladson-Billings (2006) describes the tax placed on students of color as an educational debt that disproportionately impacts underserved and underrepresented students, leading to sustained social and economic inequities. Ultimately, these stereotypes can undermine the academic achievement and psycho-emotional development of Black students while increasing behavioral concerns (Hope et al, 2015). This research explores the behaviors of White women educators as they teach Black
teenage boys who attend suburban public schools. In addition, it explores the experiences of Black teenage boys as they navigate the suburban public-school terrain.

**Statement of the Problem**

To date, approximately half of all Black families in the U.S. live in suburban communities, which means that their children attend schools in the communities that they live (Parker et al., 2018). There is a gap in research related to the experiences of children of color in suburban schools, which also suggests that experiences of Black boys in suburban schools requires additional attention.

A review of our nation’s public schools shows that the division that separates schools by race and economics persists when Black boys enter suburban schools. When Black boys attend suburban schools, fewer are represented in rigorous college preparatory coursework (Ford, 1997; Williams et al., 2020), leaving suburban classrooms reflective of homogenous groups which mirror the schools of the Jim Crow era. The historical challenges experienced by Black children in public schools have aided in sustaining equities representative of the creation and maintenance of two divided nations, one Black and the other White (Kerner Commission, 1968).

An analysis of this history shows how access and opportunity intersect with racial and class privilege to create inequitable opportunities and communities in America maintained by residential and class-based segregation (Walker, Keane, & Burke, 2010; Gee & Payne-Sturges, 2004; Gorski, 2008). Examples of these practices include the passing of the 13th Amendment of the Constitution that abolished slavery in 1865 but also provided a clause that enabled the continuation of slavery in another form within the United States. It states: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (U.S.
This exists as yet another example of what Du Bois (1903) has described as subtle yet ingenious change that maintains systems predicated on privilege and the preservation of a perpetual second class. The 13th Amendment has disproportionately impacted Black American boys and men as this group enters the criminal justice system at staggering rates (Alexander, 2010; 2020). According to the Brookings Institute (2020), Black men make up 32% of state and federal prisoners in the United States. In 2017, Black boys made up 52% of offenders in the United States (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2017).

When students arrive at school during their formative years, we promote that, through these channels, kids will grow to become learners prepared for the various opportunities that life affords. For Black American youth, this trajectory is influenced by obstacles that come in various forms. One obstacle in life is the educational disparities that Black men face in society. Thus, as Black boys are tracked into less rigorous curricular experiences and are on the receiving end of disproportionate disciplinary practices leading to more days out of school resulting from school suspensions, these youth are subjected to parallel trajectories of being pushed out of school and onto the track of the criminal justice system (Wald & Losen, 2003; Falzone, 2019). The failure of schools to prepare Black boys for viable opportunities following their schooling experience can be seen in this group’s status as the highest percentage of students that dropout of school annually (Wald & Losen, 2003; Falzone, 2019). According to National Center for Education Statistic’s (2020) The Condition of Education report, close to 8 out of 100 Black boys and Black men between the ages of 16 to 24 drop-out of high school and college. Dropping out of school has long-term consequences for Black boys such as a lack of job opportunities, lowered wages and salaries, and a higher rate in the criminal justice system.

More than 50 years after the decision of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and its focus on
Creating equality of educational opportunity through school integration, racial gaps in achievement remain prevalent in America’s schools, especially in affluent suburbs. Although Black students attending affluent schools outperform those attending schools in urban communities, wide gaps in grades, test scores, and course-taking practices exist between Black and White students (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Ogbu, 2003). The topic of the Black-White achievement gap in suburban schools has generated much debate and fueled the development of school district coalitions such as the Minority Student Achievement Network (1999), which was formed to study the educational opportunity gaps that persist in suburban districts for the purpose of eliminating achievement disparities. Although many see the presence of Black students attending affluent suburban schools as progress and evidence of Brown’s success, racial separation in course selections and gifted and talented programs (Ford, 1998) continue to provide evidence to the inequalities that remain prevalent in these locations (Diamond, 2006).

The impact of tracking (Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Epps, 1975) in desegregated school systems serves as another barrier towards accessing rigorous curriculum in schools for Black students, impacting their long-term potential occupational and educational attainment. Epps, suggested that policies that desegregated schools were only re-segregated using devices such as tracking or selective use of suspensions and expulsions, which ultimately diminished the opportunities of minority students towards higher occupational and educational attainment (p. 302). Richard-Shavers (2007) suggested that data from achievement tests and tracking have been used to assign secondary students into college prep, general, or vocational programs, as well as special education classifications, and other labels on achievement abilities (Wheelock, 1994). Thus, White-Euro Americans are beneficiaries of privileges that have been passed down generationally through systems and practices based upon racialized beliefs that were the basis of
society following the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown. As stated by Lipsitz (1995), the American economic and political landscape gave different racial groups unequal access to citizenship and property while developing cultural practices that institutionalized racism. As such, the image of Black boys has been created and maintained by social structures outside of school. However, the images are so pervasive that they shape their experiences in school.

**Imagery of Black Boys**

Racist images associated with Black boys often portray them as adults prone to disruption and violence. The term used to describe this phenomenon is adultification. The adultification of Black boys results in the perception that they are less child-like, older, and menacing (Dancy, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Kunjufu, 1986). The adultification of Black boy’s results in the perception that they are older and more menacing than their rightful age (Dancy, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Kunjufu, 1986). Dumas and Nelson (2016) see the conceptualization of Black boyhood(s) as unimagined and unimaginable since they have been positioned as either developing into manhood or already men. Implications of these distortions are the disproportionate amounts of punishment they receive as well as the success of the school to prison pipeline (Darensbourg et al., 2010). Harper (2009) argued that the distorted imagery of Black Americans as prone to violence stems from the stereotypes that are associated with Black boys that are projected throughout media, film, and television. The frequency in which these images are saturated throughout American culture makes the impact of stereotypical imagery about Black boyhood and manhood inescapable.

Racist imagery has been popularized in films such as *Dangerous Minds* (Smith, 1995), *Stand and Deliver* (Menedez, 1988), *Lean on Me* (Avildsen, 1989), *The Freedom Writers*
(LaGravenese, 2007), and *The Blind Side* (Hancock, 2009). In each of these films, apathetic students of color display a lack of value toward education due to a plethora of sensationalized themes, including harsh living conditions, broken homes, and drug infested neighborhoods. The youth in these films find motivation only upon the arrival of a caring adult (many of which are White women) and only then is academic achievement pursued. These films demonstrate the common presence of stereotypes that are embedded within public discourse and driven by beliefs of intellectual inferiority. An example of the effect of the racist imagery of Black boys was seen during the murders of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown as the assailants of the youth approached the teens with reckless abandon based upon their perception of Black boys as being inherently sinister. The image of Black boys and men has been constructed by the majority culture, portrayed in television, film, media, reality television, and music videos, and is rooted in racial defiance (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2014). The racism that pervades society diminishes the light that dwells within Black boys, but it also has a lasting effect on everyone within its reach (Delpit, 2012). When paired with stereotypical imagery, the experiences of high-school-aged Black boys are often rifled with negativity and trauma at the hands of teachers and administrators. Furthermore, this is not just the case of urban schools, but also in suburban areas as well.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the role that school-based factors play in influencing the schooling experiences of Black boys in suburban high schools in the Midwest United States. To complete this study, the narratives of Black boys and White women educators were collected and analyzed in order to understand the relationship between the perception of those educators on racism, sexism, and identity and the impact it has on the
schooling experiences of Black boys who attend suburban high schools. The use of online focus groups and individual interviews were used to talk with Black boys, and online book discussions were observed with teachers. The significance of these two separate, but interconnected purposes lay in the relational experiences that Black boys enter into when arriving at school, and how the students connect with educators who statistically are more likely to be White women, and how each group comes to experience one another within the realm of school and popular culture.

There were several said to be relevant to the achievement of Black boys; therefore, the following factors were explored as part of the study: The socio-economic and educational background of the family, school climate, language background, and teacher attitudes towards Black boys (Papanastasiou, 2000, p. 5; Allen, 2010, p. 127). Relationships between Black boys and suburban school structures were examined using Bandura’s (1971) social learning theory to determine whether these environments are counter-intuitive to the learning, social development, and emotional needs of Black boys. Bandura postulated that learning is a social behavior that is constructed before it is performed (p. 8). If so, White students who have positive relationships and similarities with teachers are more likely to actualize themselves more readily than those who struggle to identify with the cultures, norms, and expectations that are driven in predominantly White structures. What individuals observe within classrooms, hallways, and experience in their interactions with teachers and administrators profoundly impacts how students see themselves as members of a larger community. Therefore, this research sets out to understand a specific student---Black high school-age boys in suburban schools, their expectations, and the perceptions had by the White women teachers who are often responsible for teaching them.
Significance of the Study

The education of Black students has become increasingly more important as schools grapple with national statistics that paint disparaging perspectives on the fate of Black boys in public education and beyond (Noguera, 2008). Alternative methods have become increasingly important to engage in authentic opportunities to successfully reform schools and to develop safe spaces for boys to actualize their potential. When referring to the significance of the need to protect and pursue education DuBois (1949/1970) stated the following:

Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds thought it might be? (pp. 230-231)

By adding to the research on the schooling experiences of Black boys, this research sought to understand the social factors that contribute to how these youth develop self-awareness, socio-emotional well-being, and efficacy in suburban communities. With this focus school reform can begin to approach the practice of educating Black boys and preparing educators through a humane and holistic perspective (Dye et al., 2017).

This study hopes to make an important contribution towards understanding the phenomenon of institutional racism in American schools as it intersects with boyhood and socioeconomic status. It explores structural practices within the schools that perpetuate societal stigmas, hierarchies, and oppression. As a means of exploring these phenomena through the perspective of Black boys in suburban high schools, there were several questions that needed to be asked:
1. How do Black boys narrate their experience of schooling?

2. How do schools’ advantage or disadvantage Black boys? Do Black boys narrate stories of support and/or opposition to the images of themselves that schools (un)wittingly present to them through school practices, including language use, disciplinary practices, and tracking?

3. How do White women educators in suburban schools understand the impact of racism, sexism, and identity within the framework of school, and how do these factors impact their experiences and those of the students in which they teach?

**Theoretical Framework**

To answer the guiding questions of this study, three theoretical frameworks were utilized: Social Identity Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Critical Race Theory. The three theories will allow for an analysis that will aid in understanding the relationship between identity development, social institutions and environments, and academic success.

**Social Identity Theory**

Tajfel and Turner (1985) indicated that social identity theory is a process in human development of self-categorization or self-appraisal. According to social identity theory, people classify themselves and others based upon social categories, such as membership in organizations, religious affiliation, gender, and age groups. Individuals use the process of categorization to define the characteristics for how they see others as prototypes of specific groups, which leads to stereotyping or type-casting individuals based upon a prescribed or limited view of the whole. In the formative years, youth use categorization to form meaning of their surroundings such as in color schemes, foods, and toys. As people mature, these
classifications take on physical elements and take on different characterization schemas (Ashford & Mael, 2001).

Social classification then becomes a tool used to define others and one’s self in the context of the larger environment. Dweck (2006) spoke to the impact that self-perception has on motivation and achievement. According to Dweck, those who believe that intelligence is developed possess a growth mindset and those who believe that people are born with a specific degree of intelligence are referred to as having a fixed mindset. Many researchers have examined the impact of self-concept on how youth develop into adulthood (Steele & Aronson, 1995), whereas others have specifically examined the factors of race and masculinity (Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Hooks, 2004; Platt, 2002; Sailes, 2003) on the development of Black boys as it pertains to self-esteem, self-concept, and racial identity (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Black boys are perhaps the most stigmatized ethnic group in the U.S. (Blake & Darling, 2000; Cokley, 2000; Mizzell, 1999) and have been cast with various disparaging labels. An examination of theory that contributes to the formation of social identity is fundamental to reshape the popular narrative that is pervasive in dominant culture. Social identity theory helps to answer the second research question due to the factors that shape school cultures (i.e., curriculum, policies, environment) have on influences identity development on students. Categorization is a common practice in schools witnessed in course groupings such as advanced placement, remedial, or special education. Students are often associated with terms such as at-risk, low-achiever, athlete, good kid, and hyperactive to name a few. As educators use these descriptors in their analysis of students many, youth respond by finding meaning in their school experiences and by personifying the terms often used to describe them. This study will provide students with an opportunity to analyze the perceptions and classifications that are used to categorize their
presence in school to understand how these identities shape their experiences and relationships with peers, teachers, and other staff.

**Social Learning Theory**

Bandura’s (1997) work on social learning theory and identification refers to a process in which a person patterns thoughts, feelings, or actions after another person who serves as a model (p. 214). The complexities of this process require that educators have a degree of self-awareness of their own views and how their beliefs impact the way in which they form relationships with students. Teachers who are self-aware understand bias and that implicit and explicit are normative aspects of racialized societies and understanding the presence of bias in school environments helps the students they teach by acknowledging their perceptions and the effect it has on relationships with marginalized groups (Swanson et al., 2002).

The connection between Black boys, school structures, and their relationships with teachers will be explored using Bandura’s (1971) social learning theory to examine how these relationships impact identity, engagement, and self-efficacy. A premise of social learning theory is that behavior is learned before it is performed (Bandura, 1971, p. 8). What is observed can serve as a metric for personal conduct while reinforcing belief systems that are anticipated based upon the norms that are structured for individuals and groups. Social learning theory will be used to address the third research question to understand how organized learning platforms can impact how educators come to understand their role in both perpetuating racialized structures in school and how through self-reflection they can adjust their perspectives and ultimately their practices through discussion with their fellow peers.

**Critical Race Theory**

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1998) attributed concepts of critical race theory (CRT) to the
The early scholarship of Derek Bell and Alan Freeman, who were discouraged by the slow-place of reform efforts and combined critical legal scholarship with civil rights strategies (p. 52). CRT provides a counter narrative through story-telling to reframe the discourse around race in America. Through this framework, the narrative in education shifts from one historically focused on a deficit model (King, 1991, p. 128) toward an analysis of diverse perspectives of culture, pedagogy, structural frameworks, and systems that are designed to maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions (Matsuda et al., 1993). CRT in education differs from other frameworks because it both identifies the pervasiveness of race and racism in schools, while challenging curricular, texts, and modalities of instruction that support a dominant narrative.

The following five basic tenets are the focus of CRT: (a) the presence of racism as a permanent component of the American experience, (b) the challenge of the dominant ideology of Whiteness as property, (c) the advancement of people of color through a social justice framework, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge (Solorzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000), and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective as aspects of identity. Critical race theory will be used to answer the first research question to understand how Black boys navigate racism in schools and grapple with deficit narratives often used to describe their age and racial group. Critical race theory enables scholars to examine the narratives shaped by dominant society by reframing the experiences that lead to the systemic inequities impacting minorities, and as such, this research will be used to add to the body of research on Black boys in schools, placing their experiences to guide student-centered school reform work. The use of these tenets in suburban classrooms that include students of color, and Black boys in particular can lead to liberatory forms of education based upon belongingness and care.
Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in this research, and are central in understanding the review of literature, the research design, and the findings of the research:

- **Academic achievement**: Academic growth as measured by formal or informal assessment in addition to global indicators, such as post secondary attainment and school grade point average (GPA).
- **Academic identity**: The appropriation of academic values and practices within a sense of self, reflecting the willingness and commitment to the practices of the academic community.
- **Black American**: Of or pertaining to American of Black ancestry, their history and culture.
- **Counter Narratives**: Referring to narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalized.
- **Micro aggression**: Everyday exchanges, usually brief, that deliver demeaning messages or subtle reminders about racial stereotypes.
- **Racial Identity**: Referring to a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group.
- **Resilience**: The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress.
- **Social Identity**: A person’s sense of who they are based on their group membership.
- **Self-Concept**: An idea of the self-constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the responses to others.
- **White Americans**: Americans of European ancestry.
• **White Identity Development:** To develop a positive White racial identity, individuals must be conscious of cultivating an understanding of the implications of race and racism within dominant culture in order to develop an identity that does not reinforce or seek to gain from White Supremacy.

• **White Supremacy:** The belief in “white racial domination” through the promotion of violence to ensure the presence of systemic racial structures and the preservation of whiteness (Bonds & Inwood, 2015).

These terms provide context for the study that surfaced from the researcher’s interactions with the Black boys and educators that participated in this research. The interpretations from these discussions and from the data were used to identify the most appropriate terms to convey the experiences they shared during these conversations. It is the hope that this work will add to the body of research centered on ensuring equitable learning environments for all students. It is through a commitment to equity that schools can shift from the predictably that has impacted so many youth that either were pushed out of schools or fled to safer spaces. Equity is not merely a practice to support the historically marginalized, but a restorative tool that can close the divide that separates students and communities.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This chapter provides a historical overview of the circumstances that have fostered varied educational experiences of Black American, high-school aged boys in suburban public schools. Inclusive of this are relevant theories, court decisions, and policies related to the educational experiences of Black Americans and how those components have or might shape the lives of Black teenage boys. Specifically, it reviews slave codes, Black codes, early educational philosophies of Black men, and several court cases such as Brown vs. The Board of Education - that would shape the future educational opportunities of Black teenage boys. It then examines theories that shed light on the racially gendered experiences (Smith et al., 2011) of Black boys in suburban schools such as social identity theory, social learning theory, and critical race theory. It also examines the role of schools and educators—particularly White women—as those who shape the experiences of Black teenage boys in suburban institutions. It concludes by exploring critical race theory, abolitionist teaching, and an ethic of care as those concepts that can lead to transformational educational experiences for Black boys. Collectively, these areas of review will allow for a thorough analysis of the historical and current experiences, barriers to achievement, and the supportive factors needed for Black boys to achieve in suburban schools.

The Historical Mis-Education of Black Boys: From Slave Codes to Law

On July 27, 2020, the House of Representatives of the United States passed the Commission on Social Status of Black Men and Boys Act designed to address the disproportionate number of Black boys and men hindered by the many inequities in existence throughout society. The chairperson, Congresswoman Wilson, declared:

Perhaps the most dangerous issue facing black boys in our country is racism itself. Too often they are perceived as criminals by the time they reach the age of five. They are
labeled delinquent, not rowdy. They are hardened criminals, not misguided youth…This treatment is reflected in social outcomes in such areas as education, criminal justice, health care and employment. More than one out of every six black men who today should be between 25 and 54 years old have disappeared from daily life. *Low rates of high school retention among black male students directly relate to the high rates of joblessness and incarceration. More than two-thirds of black male dropouts end up serving time in state or federal prison.* And while black males overall make up roughly 13 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 40 percent of all men serving time in state and federal prisons. (Congressional Black Caucus, 2020, para. 4; *My emphasis*)

Research by social scientists and educators solidify the contentions above by demonstrating that the racism faced by Black boy’s stems from a history of systemic racism coupled with images of masculinity that have rendered Black boys (regardless of age) violent, ignorant, and therefore, chattel either by slavery or prison. Upon their arrival to this country, enslaved Africans were relied upon and exploited for their durability as laborers. The exploitation of Black boys and men resulted in a process of controlling and regulating how Black boys and men maintained economic prosperity, self-determination, familial relationships, and liberation (Fultz & Brown, 2008). Specifically, realized codes and laws were enacted to control the achievement of the bodies and minds of Black boys and men.

Many efforts were used to deter the advancement of Black Americans following the United States Civil War, including the use of legalized restrictions known as Black Codes that were used to slow down reform and maintain the structures of the South. Black Codes were preceded by Slaves Codes and continued the process of legally controlling Black bodies and destinies through public policy ultimately leading to the 13th Amendment and Jim Crow laws
that were used to maintain systems of servitude through paradoxical laws that restricted Blacks from having full access to society (Roback, 1984). Southern detractors who opposed the education of Black Americans pushed for an educational system that would preserve a class of laborers for southern industries, whereas others advocated for an educational system that would prepare Black Americans to become viable members of society, both politically and economically (Spring, 2014, p. 50). An inequitable legal system enacted by de facto social norms and policies, which dictated the actions of Black Americans, would create opportunities for legal decisions that justified the criminalization of Black men and boys as well as legal segregation.

Although the 13th Amendment would abolish slavery, it would be followed by other oppressive acts used to hold Black Americans into a lower status in society. The ruling of the 1896 case of Plessy v. Ferguson would legally recognize the doctrine of separate but equal practices within the United States that would support the structure of two societies for the next sixty years. Homer Plessy, a resident of New Orleans and descendent of its French creole population classified himself as 1/8 White and used his fair complexion to pass for White, meaning that “the mixture of colored blood was not discernable in him” (Irons, 2002, p. 25). Plessy asserted that his ancestry gave him access to privileges that were reserved for the Whites. By arranging for his arrest, Plessy sought to expose the absurdity of a law that arbitrarily empowered railway conductors with the authority to enforce this form of caste system (p. 35). The court’s decision to uphold the constitutionality of separate but equal would cement the presence of de jure segregation until the ruling of the Brown v. The Topeka Kansas Board of Education decision (1954). The Brown decision addressed segregation in schools, but it was not until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that segregation in America would come to a legal ending.
Educational Segregation and Desegregation Efforts

The case challenged the ownership of Whiteness as a requirement to access privileges in America. Thus, Whiteness as a skin color served as an asset that afforded those from Euro-ancestry with privileges that enabled access and opportunities that were not afforded to people of color, an example of what critical race theory scholars refer to as Whiteness as property. The court ruled that no laws were violated by preventing Plessy from riding on the rail car. This ruling would cement the rights of states to maintain legal practices put in place to sustain the separation of Blacks and Whites in society. This era of history known as Jim Crow would challenge the federal government’s authority to influence segregation practices that were in place within the states. The historic case of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) came before The Supreme Court of the United States and set the stage to end de jure segregation in schools. The Court ruled that segregation based on race deprived children of equal educational opportunities (p. 483). The Brown decision reversed the Court’s ruling in the 1896 Plessy verdict, ending legally sanctioned segregation in schools and held them responsible for exercising desegregation plans (Johnson, 2019, p. 24).

The slow path towards school desegregation however, was marred by resistance from those opposing the law due in large part to societal obstacles that the law was not prepared or intended to address. The ruling’s emphasis of integration with all deliberate speed was a radical strategy that conflicted with the social and structural order of the time (Wells & Crain, 1997). Between 1958 and 1963 the U.S. Supreme Court heard only two school desegregation cases (Russo et al.,1994), and the decade following saw both success and challenges in the efforts to end segregation. The court would support the rights of Black students to choose which school they could attend in the case of Goss v. Board of Education of the City of Knoxville (1963).
ruling against the transfer clauses that was developed by its Board of Education because the plan permitted the segregation of schools violating the 14th Amendments Equal Protection Clause.

The second school desegregation case heard during this period was the case of McNeese v. Board of Education, Community Unit School District 187, Cahokia, Illinois (1963). The court ruled that the responsibility to ensure equal access to schools was with the state and that local educational agencies (LEA) should not rely on the federal government to address violations from local school districts that failed to address schools that violated student rights (Russo et al., 1994). These events took place while communities felt the backlash of integration efforts through various episodes of racial unrest and eruptions of violence in urban cities such as Detroit, Watts, and Minneapolis that led many Whites to vacate the inner cities for the confines of the suburbs, a process referred to as white flight (Frey, 1979; Bankston & Caldas, 2000; Crowder, 2000, Clifford, 2017). The cumulative redistribution of White residences and jobs out of urban cities (Frey, 1979) throughout the U.S. led to widespread urban decay and lower quality schools (Peterson, 1976) that lacked the tax base to withstand significant shifts in demographics.

Sweeping trends in racially motivated migration resulted in primarily White suburbs and urban centers densely populated by Black Americans. The schools in both regions sustained segregation based upon boundary deviations. The flight of Whites from many urban cities resulted in poverty-stricken communities that lacked the fundamental resources to maintain adequate housing, schools, or viable employment opportunities for the Black community. Orfield (1988) described the racial divide between the city and suburbs as an impenetrable boundary between the black ghettos and the rest of the world. Schools were not exempt from the damage of white flight, leaving some parents to seek educational opportunities for their children elsewhere.
Pivotal legislation in the decade of the 1960s aimed at addressing the inequities in society through the efforts of the civil rights movement. The movement towards equality would begin to gain traction and begin the process of dismantling the systemic oppression of Jim Crow. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 officially restricted discriminatory practices in employment and housing and put an end to voting restrictions. Schools districts that did not comply with desegregation law were penalized by restricted federal funding. The focus of these laws ended segregation practices and provided equal opportunities to Black Americans and Whites; however, the gap caused by the institution of racism in this country remained unaccounted for. Providing Black Americans access to public schools, employment, and housing did not eliminate the institutional inequities created by oppressive systems that provided Whites a platform of economic, social, and political capital based upon a 200-year head start (Wells & Crain, p. 2). Desegregation alone did not erase the racial problems that accommodated inequalities in society (Wells & Crain, 1997, p. 3).

The Kerner Commission (1968) addressed these issues, noting that despite the gains made by desegregation law and the Fair Housing Act (1968), America remained two separated societies that was the result of the legacy of discrimination; two Americas, one White and the other Black, wherein Black Americans were regulated to the slums of its urban centers (Wells & Cain, 1997, p. 3.). As time progressed, new cases would arise to challenge the social order of America. One case, Milliken v. Bradley (1974, 1977) that came before the U. S. Supreme Court in 1974 again challenged the scope and authority of the Court to intercede in the local operations of school districts (Russo et al., 1994).

The results of the case would limit federal authorities, resulting in local decisions to end school bussing programs within local districts, which was a solution in most desegregation plans.
The result of failed school bussing efforts continues to impact urban and rural communities across America in the areas of housing, education, and economic development. The demographics of urban, suburban, and rural communities continue to be homogenized. Yet, Black families have continued to strive toward economic and upward mobility.

Property Rights, Suburban Living, and Cultural Capital

The forward press of integration continued following The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which would impact schools in insidious and precarious manners. As integration became more prevalent in communities across the nation, many Black families that had once been locked out of suburban districts would choose to leave urban districts to access opportunities and resources that were afforded to affluent school communities. Those Black families with the economic resources to transition to suburban districts would leave behind an already marginalized group as part of the Black upper-class exodus (Graham, 1999). As suburban districts have increasingly become more diverse, Black boys in the suburbs continue to be minorities in districts that have not historically had representations of students of color, leaving behind a community composed of economically disadvantaged inner-city youth.

Bourdieu (1986) introduced the term cultural capital to describe the practices and functions within society that result in inequitable distributions of profits that reproduce into long term positions of influence either economically, socially, or politically. As such, cultural capital dispels the notion of meritocracy and supports the views of scholars like Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) who suggested that school inequities in the United States are direct outcomes of the historical intersection of race and property. With schools being a microcosm of society whiteness then becomes an advantage for students to engage levels of society that have been historically reserved for members of the society from Euro-ancestry. These preemptive
advantages refute the ideal that success in school is solely influenced based on hard-work or merit alone. To this extent, whiteness itself becomes an asset that enables those who possess it to be able to navigate society free from barriers. The origin of whiteness as property date back to the early colonizers of America who instituted laws to circumvent the natural order of the native lands taking possession and authority over the land. Property rights were restricted to White men landowners in society that resulted in generational wealth for those who had the legal right to own it. Property rights thus became the basis for cultural capital that has been passed down to create social hierarchies in society. Thus, when Black boys enter schools they are perceived as inferior, intellectually, and behaviorally, as whiteness itself is perceived as an asset in popular society and in schools.

As described, a legacy of limited movement, educational codes, and rights, legal precedents associated with property ownership, has placed an undue burden upon the lives of Black Americans who strive for, not only an education, but equitable protection and rights. As the percentages of students of color in our nation’s schools continue to increase, students who exist at the intersections of Blackness and boyhood are more likely than their White counterparts to be poor, live with one-parent, and drop out of school (Kennedy et al., 1986). Economically disadvantaged students often attend schools in economically sustained communities that lack the funding and resources to compete with their White counterparts. While this research features Black boys who attend schools in suburban communities, it is imperative to understand that they are still burdened by the inequitable circumstances that pervade most social institutions.

**Stereotype Threat, Socialization, and Identity Construction**

Since schools are one of those institutions, high-school-aged Black boys are forced to encounter behaviors and policies within schools that attempt to denigrate their existence despite
their families’ ability to live in suburban communities. In addition, Black boys at this particular age are constantly negotiating their identities and determining who they are and who they believe they will be in the future. Therefore, it is important to explore the stereotypes that are in competition with their attempts to develop as their authentic selves.

**The Construction of Stereotypical Identities**

In concert with the work of Wright and Counsel (2018), the term Black *boys* instead of the term Black *males* is used in this study. According to Wright and Counsel, the term boy is the recommended terminology when describing students who are children. Too often, Black boys are adultified (Wright et al., 2018) within popular society and perceived as being older and treated accordingly (Goff et al., 2014). The term Black *males* as commonly used in media diminishes the notion of childhood innocence, and catapults youth into a sphere of public consciousness often associated with criminal behavior and increases the likelihood of them coming into contact with dehumanizing experiences (Wright & Counsel, 2018, p. 4).

Barriers that stem from racialized stereotypes have to be considered when seeking to understand the various factors that contribute to the academic development of marginalized youth. In social identity theory, self-categorization is the process of defining one’s self within what is referred to as in-groups and out-groups; and although perception is key in the developmental process, it does not mitigate choice from personal activity and individual goals (Brewer, 1991; Hogg & Abrahams, 1988).

Numerous factors shape how Black boys come to form identity, including discrimination, perceived deficits based upon race, poverty, and gender stereotypes to list a few. Although various social risk factors occur at critical junctures in what Spencer (2002) referred to as biological development, race is just one factor that contributes to the socialization of lowered
expectations within dominant society, and Black boys are among the most stigmatized ethnic groups in the United States (Blake & Darling, 2000; Cokley, 2000; Mizzell, 1999).

The process of identity development in adolescents is one of the most crucial periods in life (Hauser & Kasendorf, 1983). As students enter into schools the relationships that students forge with adults and the message’s they receive from the lessons taught in both social interactions and curriculum help cement students’ personal identity and how they come to see their potential place in the world. As stated by Burt and Halpin (1998), much of what we think about ourselves is strongly linked to how we think that others see us. The authors stated: “If we receive or perceive negative or nebulous messages through our relationships with those with whom we are supposed to connect in a progressive manner, positive identity development is difficult to achieve” (p. 5).

White identity development (Helms, 1997) is sustained in schools through the normalization of whiteness as the standard as it pertains to achievement and social behaviors that maintain belief in hierarchical structures (Bonds & Inwood, 2015). As such, schools are used as systems to promote what Bourdieu (1977) described schools as instruments that reproduce the social inequalities in society through the perpetuation of predictable school failures based upon race and class. To address these systemic inequities in society, critical race theorists revealed how institutional racism unveils itself in multiple facets of dominant culture.

The presence of Whiteness served as a key instrument during the formation of this country and was used to validate the acquisition of lands from Native people and later Black bodies from Africa. Later, it would be used to justify the internment of Asians during World War II and remains present today when examining the economic and educational divide that has remained constant throughout history. As stated by Lipsitz (1995), the American economic and
political life gave different racial groups unequal access to citizenship and property while cultural practices institutionalized racism.

The presence of the dehumanization of Black boys can be seen today through media and television. One such case garnered national attention during a controversial advertisement from the H&M clothing apparel company. In this promotion, a Black boy donned a sweater that read, “coolest monkey in the jungle,” and despite its overt racial tones, the company denied that racism was a factor in the development of the advertisement. Other international events have provided additional examples such as the depiction of Black soccer players in Europe as apes (Jones, 2002). As mentioned by Goff (2014), the association between Black Americans and primates has been a long-standing stereotype of Black boys being aggressive and violent, deriving from the association of Blacks with Africa and apes. The history of the dehumanization of Black men as apes, provides a glimpse into understanding how Black boys are viewed as less childlike than their White peers (Goff et al., 2014). These images further shed light on the presence of racism in schools, the power of imagery and the norming of Whiteness as the basis for humanity in U.S. culture, where students of color do not experience the same basic social considerations (Goff et al., 2014, p. 527). The dehumanization of Black children impacts how we see them, what is believed about them, and how institutions interact with Black people in general.

To dehumanize is quite different than showing prejudice against someone deemed less capable or competent based upon their race. As defined by Haslam (2006), dehumanization is the denial of full humanness to others. It is a process of denying social protections that are afforded to some children and the exclusion of basic human protections to a particular group or group member (Opotow, 1990; Powell, 2012; Staub, 1989). This process has been seen in
education throughout history through the systematic and regular exclusion of Black students from quality schooling (Anderson, 1998; Blanchett et al., 2009; Blanchett, 2006; Fultz, 1995; Woodson, 1919), the exclusion of children of color from learning to read and write under the penalty of death during the era of slavery (Anderson, 1988; Litwack, 1999), and later through the segregation of schooling into inferior learning environments.

Today these patterns persist in the exclusionary disciplinary practices (Darensbourg et al., 2010) that push Black and Latino youth out of school or onto inferior tracks (Richardson-Sahaver, 2007) of learning opportunities. Further evidence of the dehumanization of Black boys is apparent when educators question the intellectual capacity of Black students based upon their race, as evident by the disproportionate rate of referrals into special education and the preponderance of these students being classified as learning disabled (Dye et al., 2017; Blanchett, 2006; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). On the national level, despite representing only 17% of the school-age children in the U.S., Black students account for 33% of the students identified as mentally disabled (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Some researchers attribute these statistics to the process in which students are identified for special education services because the referral process is based heavily on the perceptions of teachers (Donovan & Cross, 2002). This form of dehumanization is used to justify and support the need for educational disability programs used as methods to sort, stratify, and exclude Black students (Blanchett et al., 2009) into tracks of learning that lead to fewer opportunities into their adult lives.

Black Identity Development

Research on racial identity development posits that three aspects of self-awareness are essential towards understanding how people of color define their identities in environments where they constitute the minority population, they are (a) racial centrality, (b) private regard,
and (c) public regard (Chavous et al., 2003, p.1078). Racial centrality refers to the value place on being a member of a particular racial group; private regard describes how one views their racial group or the extent to which one has high self-esteem based upon positive beliefs on their racial group, and public regard refers to how an individual perceives that others view Black Americans (Sellers et al., 1998).

An understanding of racial identity is of particular importance when considering the high percentage of teachers of White Euro-American descent and their ability to effectively differentiate teaching practices to address the diverse learning styles of their students. Although effective teaching practices should be universally impactful towards teaching students from all ethnic backgrounds, the national school achievement disparities provide evidence that these methods are not working for Black students and boys in particular.

Cross (1995) suggested that racial identity development and change occurs through a positive socialization of cultural identity. Cross also suggested that racial identity serves as a paradigm by which individuals can positively confront and address negative life circumstances. In a study of Black boys enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), researchers found that students attending these schools viewed the environments as warmer institutional climates and expressed greater satisfaction with college, better adjustment to the college environment, and more willingness to persist through graduation (Spurgeon & Myers, 2008). This research suggested that Black boys who are supported by affirming their racial identity are more likely to achieve greater success and able to withstand negative stigmatization associated with particular racial groups. The process of developing similar environmental characteristics in predominantly White institutions (PWI) is of significant importance if
traditional schools are to have similar effects like those schools centered exclusively on supporting the academic and social needs of Black students.

The influence of group or collective identity on academic behaviors can serve as a link between helping teachers form positive relationships with students and teaching students to embrace having a cultural affinity, while dispelling the belief that Black students do not value education (Helms, 1990).

Racial identity development supports the premise of the influence of psychological racial group membership and identity development (Helms, 1990). Earlier research on the academic outcomes of minority groups have focused on the perceived deficits and stereotypes that have influenced students and led to gaps in academic achievement (Steele, 1995; Ogbu, 1991), but further attention needs to be devoted toward helping adults understand the positive factors associated with affinity groups.

In a study of Black male university students (Spurgeon & Myers, 2008), differences were found between students attending PWI’s and HBCU’s on internalization racial identity attitudes, physical self-wellness, and social self-wellness (p. 527). In their qualitative study, McDonough and Antonio (1997) showed that students who attended HBCUs displayed greater gains in academic achievement, social integration, and occupation aspirations. This study showed that absent from the pressures of racialized communities, Black boys in postsecondary schools are socially and academically well-adjusted and more likely to progress towards graduation and career opportunities. Limited research was found concerning Black youth attending single-gender schools at the middle and high school level to determine similar levels of success.
Individual and Group Social Experiences

Spencer’s (1995) work on phenomenological variants of ecological systems theory (PVEST) provided the backdrop for understanding how human development impacts the schooling experience of individuals and groups. By combining Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) work on ecological systems with a phenomenological perspective, Spencer (1995) drew connections between two key areas needed in the formation of meaning-making: identity and self-appraisal. For Spencer, identity formation is a process that combines self-awareness and contextualization of life experiences which results in subsequent life outcomes (Swanen et al., 2002, p. 75). Ogbu (2003) asserted that the context of life experiences is of particular significance in the case of American minorities, both voluntary and involuntary, who may experience marginalized positions in modern society differently based on their ethnic heritage and the construct of race within the American society. Ogbu and Simons (1998) defined voluntary (immigrant) minorities as those who willingly moved to the United States because they expected jobs or opportunities better than those available in their homeland (p. 164). This distinction disavowed the stereotype theory (Steele, 1992) suggesting that involuntary groups, such as Black Americans, choose to adopt oppositional cultural behaviors instead of choosing to invest in education as suggested by (Ogbu, 1991).

According to Fisher (2005), involuntary groups likely dis-identify with school because educators are not trained to be culturally responsive (Gregory et al., 2010) and the universal approach towards educating all students in similar manners fails to address the racial dynamics impacting diverse groups (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). If the external factors that shape the experiences of historically disenfranchised groups are not considered, then the dissonance in education toward educating Black youth will continue to be the pervasive narrative.
For Ogbu and Simons (1998), voluntary minorities experience life in America vastly differently because of their choice to migrate to this country, thus choosing to assimilate and adopt societal norms built by dominant culture. The researchers distinguished groups such as those from Amish, Jewish, or Mormon ancestry, who may suffer from discrimination, but are not dominated and oppressed like involuntary minorities whose ancestors were either conquered, colonized, or enslaved (p. 165).

Ogbu’s (1991) research on voluntary and involuntary minorities suggests that students develop identities in schools based upon their perceptions of cultural models and their interpretations of the limitations that are derived from structures within society that limit access and opportunities for historically marginalized groups (p. 169). As indicated by Ogbu (1991), minority students are more susceptible to what is referred to as oppositional cultural models of navigating schools based upon the perception that these spaces are not intended to meet their needs, and in fact are inherently designed to reproduce failures. As a result, school failure is not based upon the ability levels of its students, but heavily influenced by the value placed on respective students based upon their race. The results of these interactions between students and institutions can lead to the development of school and classroom climates where teachers can begin to view students as unmotivated, disinterested and apathetic towards their learning. The students on the other hand then view the institution and those representatives of it as not connected to their lives, resulting in the student withdrawing or behaving in a manner that is not conducive for success in environments concentrated by the dominant culture (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 178).

The focus of Bronfenbrenner’s framework (1979) is the impact of ecological subsystems within society on identity development that are categorized under three specific areas of human
development: (a) microsystems, (b) macrosystems, and (c) chronosystems. Microsystems refer to immediate or proximal influences in the earliest stages of personal development such as family influences or those derived from school experiences. Within the microsystem are connections between the human body, the emotional system, the cognitive system and biology; these patterns of activity experienced by a developing youth affect students in two ways---inwardly and towards others (p. 7). In microsystems, social roles are developed by interpersonal experiences and patterns of activities within societal structures that either permit or inhibit engagement reinforced through social roles (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 5).

Although criticized for not acknowledging the presence of social position factors such as ethnicity, gender, and the significance of social and economic processes in matters pertaining to racism, prejudice, and discrimination (Nichols et al., 2010, p. 29), Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) framework provided the basis of the conceptual and operational framework for understanding child and family development from an ecological perspective. These frameworks help to understand the various factors associated with human development, while taking into account the societal norms that shape and influence how youth of color come to know themselves through societal and cultural experiences that intersect to create marginalized groups within mainstream society.

**Social Interactions**

As argued by Gee (2000), when any human being acts and interacts in a given context, others recognize that person as acting and interacting as a certain kind of person or even as several different kinds at once. Gee would define identity as being recognized as a certain kind of person, in a given context defined by four perspectives: (a) nature-identity: a state, (b) institution-identity: a position, (c) discourse-identity: an individual trait, and (d) affinity-identity:
experiences. For Gee, identity is not static but is a fluid process state in which a person can possess multiple identities connected to their performance in society not to their internal states (p. 99). These social categories are constructed within structures that involve hierarchy and inequality, though multiple aspects of identity intersect in creating a unique experience of social powers and structures (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Students then navigate multiple identities that are activated based upon the environment and the expectations set for them. A student at home is likely to align their behavior based upon the norms of the home and, as such, the behaviors that follow are likely to align with those expectations that are set forth by the adults in that environment. When considering Black identities in schools, barriers that stem from racialized stereotypes have to be considered when seeking to understand the various factors that contribute to the academic development of marginalized youth.

The multiple risk model proposed by Rutter (1979) and Garmezy et al., (1984) recognized risk indexes as poverty, single parent, large households, low parental education, unemployment, and low-income communities and households. Additionally, experiences of racial discrimination served as risk factors for many Black children (Fisher et al., 2000; Wong et al., 2003). When stressors are combated by protective factors, youth who experience trauma can compensate for risks and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes (Masten et al., 1988). Protective factors are related to better outcomes in a high-risk sample, but not in a low-risk sample; in contrast, promotive factors are related to better outcomes for all children (Burchinal et al., 2008).

In several studies of cognitive and academic skills of Black children, parenting and language skills mediated and protected academic outcomes in high-risk student populations. (Krishnakumar & Black, 2002; Linver et al., 2002; Burchinal et al., 2006). Higher levels of self-
esteem are able to combat higher levels of stress exposure (Masten et al., 1988). In a longitudinal study conducted by Chickering and Reisser (1993), confidence and self-esteem were identified as the prominent variables necessary for Black student success and achievement in predominantly White college campuses. Other variables included realistic self-appraisal, management of racism, demonstrated community service, preference for long-range goals over immediate needs gratification, availability of a strong support person, successful leadership experience, nontraditional acquired knowledge, spirituality, and relationships with the extended family (pp. 190-192).

Cross (1995) suggested that racial identity serves as a paradigm by which individuals can positively confront and address negative life circumstances. In a study of Black boys enrolled at HBCUs, researchers found that the students viewed the institution as a warmer climate, expressed greater satisfaction with college, adjusted better to the college environment, and demonstrated more willingness to persist through graduation (Spurgeon & Myers, 2008).

Social Learning Theory

Bandura’s (1971) work on social learning theory, identity, or identification refers to a process in which a person patterns thoughts, feelings, or actions after another person who serves as a model (p. 214). The complexities of this process require that educators have a degree of self-awareness of their own views and how their beliefs impact the manner in which they form relationships with students. Teachers who are self-aware understand bias, implicit and explicit are normative aspects of racialized societies, and understanding the presence of bias in school environments helps the students they teach by acknowledging their perceptions and the effect it has on relationships with marginalized groups (Swanson et al., 2002).

The connection between Black boys and school structures and how the schooling process
contributes towards the development of successful patterns, or the lack thereof, will be explored using Bandura’s (1971) social learning theory to examine how these relationships impact identity, engagement, and self-efficacy. A premise of social learning theory is that behavior is learned before it is performed (Bandura, 1971, p. 8). What is observed can serve as a metric for personal conduct while reinforcing belief systems that are anticipated based upon the norms that are structured for individuals and groups.

Bandura (1971) and other researchers have concurred that social learning occurs on the basis of causal or studied observations of exemplary models; these influences can impact attitudes, emotional responses, and behavior be communal, familial, or experienced through social mediums such as film, television, and other pictorial displays (p. 10). These findings are important to note, as the perceptions and attitudes of students and teachers can be impacted by what they see and if the prevailing image is of inferiority, deficient, or inept then intentional methods must be employed to disrupt these socialized norms that can impact how students engage within learning environments.

**The Role of Schools in Achievement Disparity**

Research has concluded that no difference exists in the intellectual capabilities between African American and Caucasian students (Frankenburg & Dodd, 1967; Rippeyoung, 2006); nevertheless, national school data depicts a glaring disparity in the schooling experiences of students based clearly on the color-line (Noguera, 2003, p. 433). The data on the achievement disparities between Black students and their White Euro-American counterparts validate the claims that public schools do not work to meet the needs of Black students. In addition to the underachievement of Black students as a result of poor schooling experiences, Black students are considerably overrepresented in special education, juvenile justice, and correctional facilities.
• Black boys in education are often associated with bleak conditions and experiences (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Davis, 2003; Stayborn, 2008).

• Research has shown that academic problems hindering educational progress of Black boys begin early, hindering their ability to graduate from high school (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Moore et al., 2008).

• Teachers and counselors are far more likely to impose negative expectations upon Black boys as it relates to attending college than their White counterparts (Moore, 2006; Moore et al., 2008; Ogbu, 2003).

• Black boys are far more likely to be underrepresented in gifted education programs or advanced placement courses (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Moore et al., 2005).

• Black boys are also overwhelmingly concentrated in special education and are more likely to be classified as having learning disabilities (Levein et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2008; Noguera, 2003).

• Teachers and school counselors disproportionately track Black boys into low academic ability classrooms (Haycock, 2006).

• Thirty-five percent of state and federal male prisoners were Black even though Black Americans constituted only 12.4% of the United States population in 2006 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

• Black boys are three times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Black boys (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).
Teacher Expectations

The expectations that teachers place on students has shown to have influence on how students conceptualize their success as learners (McCall & Simmons 1978; Stryker, 1980). Scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2013) researched the role of deficit language, such as terms like “at-risk,” further marginalizes Black boys in a system of schools that disproportionately fails to service them equitably and thus continues to contribute to the probability of lower levels of school engagement (Waxman et al., 2002).

Black boys are subjected to social systems and beliefs that are transmitted through teachers in the form of lowered academic expectations (Harper, 2009), perpetuated by structural inequities, prejudices, biases, or ignorance (Tappan, 2006) that impact the behavior patterns into which students are expected to conform. As these students enter schools and rise through the ranks of grade-level systems, it becomes socially acceptable and expected for these students to flourish in specific areas of school. The images generated in society of Black Americans flourishing in the field of athletics, music, and dance become social norms that permeate schools. Black boys are then socially adjusted into a particular space in schools in which they are able to actualize their talents. However, the areas of scholastic achievement in mathematics, science, technology, literacy, and the arts and languages are expected to be reserved for Caucasian or Asian students.

For Black youth, identity development involves appraising or assessing one's social status as a member of a minority group member and deriving meaning from the social categorization often associated with being a part of a marginalized group (Swanson et al, 2002, p. 75). For Black students and boys in particular, the impact of negative self-perceptions can have lasting effects that reduce long-term possibilities; negative perceptions can also discourage students
from enrolling in coursework that is not typically associated with their racial group.

In the review of national statistics on the demographics of teachers across the country, it is reasonable to ask who will be there to educate and form positive relationships with Black boys in schools? As the population of students of color continues to increase in the nation’s schools, reaching upwards to 30%, while the population of teachers remains overwhelmingly White and mostly female (Ladson-Billings, 199, p. 130) and will be so for the foreseeable future (Grant, 1990; Haberman, 1989), the dynamics between Black boys and White teachers thus becomes a pivotal dilemma toward addressing Black student achievement. How Black boys are perceived in popular society must be examined to understand how the narrative around these students is revealed within the walls of our schools.

**Adultification**

One form of racism in schools is seen by the dehumanization and adultification of Black boys (Goff et al., 2014). Delpit (2012) exposed this aspect of American culture when she equated racism to an environmental climate condition similar to smog in the atmosphere that impacts everyone under its cloud, and as in the case of smog, any possible resolution will require systemic regulations and adjustments to the way people function in daily society.

The adultification or perception of Black boys as adults creates problems in educational settings (Burton, 2007), as the students themselves are seen as problems to be fixed. Dancy’s (2012) examination of DuBois’s question in his pivotal book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), speaks boldly to the paradox of being a Black male in society and in schools today. He rhetorically stated: How does it feel to be a problem? While all may have problems, Black male existence itself is a problem within a gaze (DuBois, 1903).

We are 65 years past the Brown (1954, 1955) decision, and the problem of educating
Black students still persists. This is not the result of some innate defect, but of an inability to address how race impacts the decisions that are made about where students go to school, what they are taught and how the standards for which they are assessed are developed. The marginalization of Black boys in schools continues as school remains segregated and the boundaries between the experiences of students from different heritages remain (Carter et al., 2014). The adultification of Black boys in society is a key theory towards recognizing the inequitable practices and the lack of patience shown towards Black youth by educators and people in positions of authority who often see these youth as inherently more mature, calculated, and menacing in comparison to their white counterparts.

**Discriminatory Practices**

According to a nationally representative study administered to parents in 2003, Black students are significantly more likely to be suspended than their White peers ($p < .001$). The report indicated that almost 1 in 5 Black students (19.6%) were suspended, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 White students (Kewel Ramani et al., 2007). A nationally representative survey of 74,000 tenth graders found that 50% of Black students reported that they had been suspended or expelled compared with 20% of White students (Wallace et al., 2008), and unlike other ethnic groups, the suspension and expulsion rates of Black students increased from 1991 to 2005 (Wallace et al., 2008). This research shows that the issue with Black boys is not based on data from oppositional cultures (towards school or upon their academic ability), but in the institutional unwillingness to adjust to their respective needs (Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2004). The impact of the school on the learning experiences of Black boys is related to how the students perceive school environments and the academic and behavioral expectations that teachers have for these students.
These statistics represent a failure by educators to understand the cultures of their students. When educators do not possess a cultural awareness of their students they are more likely to respond to student behaviors without the empathy or care needed to support them in their learning. Teachers who are not intentional about understanding the backgrounds of their students place them in jeopardy of school failure by supporting learning environments that are not conducive to their needs. Culturally responsive learning environments are committed to creating spaces where students feel welcomed, affirmed, and are congruent with their cultural identities. Recognizing the presence of potential cultural mismatches between Black boys and suburban educators can lead to the changes that are necessary to revamp professional development, curriculum, and practices to ensure that Black boys are no longer victimized by predictable school cultures that are not designed to meet their needs.

**Challenges to Change**

The purpose of this research was to examine how Black boys experience learning while attending suburban schools and how, if any, school-based factors influence their experiences and the relationships that are formed with educators in these environments. The review of literature relevant to this study has confirmed that Black boys who are supported by affirming their racial identity are more likely to achieve greater success and are able to withstand negative stigmatization associated with particular racial groups. Teachers in these environments must be committed to embracing the identities of their students and creating shared opportunities for students to engage in learning that is culturally relevant, rigorous, and centered on positive relationships and trust. The process of developing similar environmental characteristics in PWI’s is of significant importance if traditional schools are to have the impact of schools that are centered exclusively on supporting the academic and social needs of Black students. Challenges
to effect change are embedded in the fabric of the American social, economic, political, and academic culture. School districts must be willing to go against traditional structures and develop spaces specifically designed to engage Black boys in order to create the change in environment needed for these students to live into their full potential. Schools must create the type of home space that bell hooks (1990) refer’s to that are no longer driven by idealistic fallacies or the preservation of institutional practices that lack focus towards the humanistic needs of the children they are charged with serving. To do so, educators must examine how effort and achievement are measured and consider alternative ways to assess students in their learning.

Schools Based on the Premise of Meritocracy

Schools play a critical role in how students are influenced and the norming that occurs shape how they experience school and perceive their future possibilities. However, it is not the responsibility of schools alone to correct the societal conditions that have impacted Black Americans and other minority groups that have been historically disenfranchised. To do so would reinforce the notion that schools, as they are currently constructed, are designed to eliminate racial, economic, and political inequities in society. This assertion goes against the history of schools and how they were developed on the premise of meritocracy (Johnson, 2019, p. 17) that was designed to benefit only those in positions of privilege, which Black Americans historically have not been.

Freire (1970) said that education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression. Freire spoke to the finality of oppressive systems to maintain themselves at the expense of those who believe that through hard work and determination that a
balance of power (economically, socially, and politically) can be achieved. These beliefs do not align with an economic system that was based upon the forced acquisition of land from Native Americans and the forced acquisition of Black people and their subsequent forced labor (Lipsitz, 2005, p. 68). These societal contradictions can be witnessed by the continuous subjugation of Black Americans through the school to prison pipeline phenomenon (Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Skiba et al., 2002; Wald & Losen, 2003; Zeinberg & Schiraaldi, 2002), while simultaneously benefiting from their exploitation through a culture that promotes athletic prowess and entertainment excellence over scholarly achievement. Many would even contend that school failures are necessary consequences to an economic system that is based upon capitalism, to the extent that societies require a working class, a segment of the population is needed in order to ensure the economic stability of those in positions of authority. In Bourdieu’s (1977) examination of cultural and social reproduction, schools are described as ideological tools controlled by the economic elite that value bourgeois knowledge.

Research has shown that the issue with Black boys (Noguera, 2003) is not based upon an inability to engage in schools that is often projected, but in our unwillingness to adjust to their respective needs and of our failure to see them in their humanity. Schools today are not and have not been designed to meet the needs of Black students. Any effort to correct the condition of schools that is guided by the assumptions of societal equality is based upon a faulty presupposition, which protects the very system that has benefited from those who have been historically disenfranchised. When educators fail to see the systematic challenges that students of color experience in this country then, it reinforces a belief that the structure of the system is not the problem, but it’s the people who are living on the fringes of society who are the problem. If educators do not use data to question why schools function as they do, then how can educators
conceive of a school system that advances the needs of all children? Schools must be willing to engage in practices that place the voice and experiences of historically marginalized members of the community, such as Black boys, at the center of research, professional practice, and school improvement to create a new normal not driven by the failures of past systems. Examining the relationships between these Black boys and teachers should serve as an essential step in this process.

**Student-Teacher Relationships**

Throughout their K-12 experience, Black boys are statistically more likely to be taught by teachers who do not share their racial or gender background. Whereas in primary schools nationally, 89% of teachers are composed of White females and the percentage drops to 58% at the secondary level (Albert Shanker Institute, 2014). Although it is important to have educators who look like the students that they teach, the beliefs that teachers have for their students is also of importance when understanding the connection between teachers and students. This is not to suggest that Black teachers have the remedy to address the concerns impacting all students of color, or to equate any success from Black educators on teaching Black students to relatability alone, but evidence supports that educators of all races that are adept at educating students of color bring with them a focus on a culturally relevant pedagogical approach to teaching (Jean-Marie Pabon et al., 2011). Some may question if the racial demographics of teachers is relevant to the success of students and those teachers’ ability to engage with diverse student groups. As students encounter (Cross, 1995) teachers in the classroom, they begin to formulate views on their own identity by who they see in front of them, as well as by the content of the information being taught. Thus, the advantage for being a White student in America’s classrooms is heightened by both the historical implications of race in America, and the racial composition of
teachers and administrators that make up the vast majority of professionals in the field of education.

In a study of the consequences of the disconnect between teachers and Black students conducted at John Hopkins University, Papageorge et al., (2016) concluded the following regarding Black boys and their relationship with teachers:

White and other non-Black teachers were 12 percentage points more likely than Black teachers to predict black students wouldn’t finish high school. They also found that Black female teachers are significantly more optimistic about the ability of Black boys to complete high school than teachers of any other demographic group. They were 20 percent less likely than White teachers to predict their student wouldn’t graduate high school and 30% less likely to say that than were Black male teachers. For Black students, particularly Black boys, having a non-Black teacher in a 10th grade subject made them less likely to pursue that subject by enrolling in similar classes. (p. 222)

The student-teacher relationship dynamic is a key factor towards students actualizing their potential. If Black boys are more likely to be taught by educators who do not look like them and are subjected to bias, then the narrative of the achievement gap becomes less of a result on the ability level of students and more centered on how teachers interact with Black boys and the beliefs that teachers have for their academic success. Hyland (2005) stated the following regarding the culpability that White teachers have on educating Black and Latino students:

It would be unfair to assert that teachers are fully responsible for such racial inequality in education or that they are solely responsible for correcting it. However, we do know that teachers participate in the reproduction of racial inequality that can mitigate or exacerbate
the racist effects of schooling for their students of color depending on their pedagogical orientation. (p. 429)

It is important to reflect on the components of school practices to understand how its parts coalesce to form the system of public education.

**Theoretical Considerations of Social Development and Interaction**

**Social Identity Theory**

To understand and employ critical race theory means that educators that work with Black boys within suburban schools, one must consider the complexities associated with African American boyhood. In social identity theory, self-categorization is the process of defining one’s self within what is referred to as in-groups and out-groups, and although perception is key in the developmental process, it does not mitigate choice from personal activity and individual goals (Brewer, 1991; Hogg & Abrahams, 1988).

**Racial Identity Development**

Racial identity theorists posited that three aspects of the identity model are essential to the understanding of how youth actualize themselves in diverse spaces: (a) racial centrality, (b) private regard, and (c) public regard (Chavous et al., 2003, p. 1078). Racial centrality refers to the value place on being a member of a particular racial group; private regard describes how one views their racial group or the extent to which one has high self-esteem based upon positive beliefs on their racial group; public regard refers to how an individual perceives that others view African Americans (Sellers et al., 1998).

An understanding of racial identity is of particular importance when considering the high percentage of teachers of White Euro-American descent and their ability to effectively differentiate teaching practices to address the diverse learning styles of their students. Although
effective teaching practices should be universally impactful towards teaching students from all ethnic backgrounds, the national school achievement disparities provide evidence that these methods are not working for African American students and boys in particular.

Cross (1995) suggested that racial identity development and change occurs through a positive socialization of cultural identity. Cross also suggested that racial identity serves as a paradigm by which individuals can positively confront and address negative life circumstances. In a study of African American boys enrolled in HBCU’s researchers found that students attending these schools viewed the environments as warmer institutional climates and expressed greater satisfaction with college, better adjustment to the college environment, and more willingness to persist through graduation (Spurgeon & Myers, 2008). This research suggested that African American boys who are supported by affirming their racial identity are more likely to achieve greater success and able to withstand negative stigmatization associated with particular racial groups. The process of developing similar environmental characteristics in PWI’s is of significant importance if traditional schools are to have similar effects like those schools centered exclusively on supporting the academic and social needs of African American students.

The influence of group or collective identity on academic behaviors can serve as a link between helping teachers form positive relationships with students and teaching students to embrace having a cultural affinity, while dispelling the belief that African American students do not value education (Helms, 1990).

Racial identity development supports the premise of the influence of psychological racial group membership and identity development (Helms, 1990). Earlier research on the academic outcomes of minority groups have focused on the perceived deficits and stereotypes that have
influenced students and led to gaps in academic achievement (Steele, 1995; Ogbu, 1991), but further attention needs to be devoted toward helping adults understand the positive factors associated with affinity groups.

In a study of African American male university students (Spurgeon & Myers, 2008), differences were found between students attending PWI’s and HBCU’s on internalization racial identity attitudes, physical self-wellness, and social self-wellness (p. 527). In their qualitative study, McDonough and Antonio (1997) showed that students who attended HBCUs displayed greater gains in academic achievement, social integration, and occupation aspirations. This study showed that absent from the pressures of racialized communities, African American boys in postsecondary schools are socially and academically well-adjusted and more likely to progress towards graduation and career opportunities. Limited research was found concerning African American youth attending single-gender schools at the middle and high school level to determine similar levels of success.

**Adultification and Images of Boyhood**

In concert with the work of Wright and Counsel (2018), the term *Black boys* instead of the term *African American males* is used in this study. According to Wright and Counsel, the term boy is the recommended terminology when describing students who are children. Too often, African American boys are adultified (Wright et al., 2018) within popular society and perceived as being older and treated accordingly (Goff et al., 2014). The term *African American males* as commonly used in media diminishes the notion of childhood innocence, catapults youth into a sphere of public consciousness often associated with criminal behavior and increases the likelihood of them coming into contact with dehumanizing experiences (Wright & Counsel, 2018, p. 4). One example of the interchanging of the term African American male to
characterize Black boys as adults was evident in the case of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who was killed by the police while playing with a replica toy pistol at a local park. Another example occurred when 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was accosted by a neighborhood watch person while traveling to his home after an evening trip to a convenience store to purchase a bag of candy and ice-tea. Yet another example occurred when 16-year-old Kalief Browder was arrested for allegedly stealing a backpack and held in one of the nation’s most infamous jails for three years while awaiting trial. Each of these Black boys being treated as adults faced the brunt of consequences that stem from societies racist depiction of African American males.

*The Creation and Support of Whiteness*

The possession of Whiteness has influenced the structure of America which has passed down advantages throughout history. The inherent benefits can be seen in various elements of society including law, politics, schools, and other aspects of society where ownership of it has been proven to sustain systemic benefits for those from the Caucasian race. The result of which can be seen from implicit and explicit biases that dwell within one’s subconscious, that are also revealed in overt behaviors. These biases are often derived from social experiences that influence how we see ourselves and others within groups of which we identify with and those whom we view as outside of our community. The challenge for those that do not possess the benefits of whiteness have been known to lead sometimes grave consequential random interactions with those in positions of authority. Thus, the privilege of whiteness creates a security for those who possess it and for those that do not, the same level of comfort is not afforded.
**Socio-Ecological Development**

Ogbu’s (1991) work on voluntary and involuntary minorities posits that ethnic groups students develop cultural models of understanding based upon how they interpret structures within society that govern how groups actualize their identities in public spaces, such as schools (p. 169). As such, the lack of representation of diverse educators in schools creates a perception that academic careers are reserved for a particular group. When Black students do not see individuals that look like them in prominent positions within society it limits the scope for which they are able to see themselves within a future context. This is an equally challenging effect on students that are not members of historically marginalized communities. A lack of diversity in the context of school, in particular, in cases of teacher, administrator, and curriculum focuses, can reinforce notions of white supremacy in Caucasian students, as well as students of color. If schools are to replicate the success and culture of culturally inclusive institutions within traditional learning environment then researchers and educators must look to understand how these environmental factors promote and support academic achievement and social wellbeing.

**Envisioning a New Normal: Theories of Change**

Black boys in all schools, and particularly within this research, deserve opportunities based in both promising and new perspectives. Critical race theory, although not new, offers an opportunity for White women who are responsible for the education of Black boys, to check their privilege while dedicating their pedagogical practices to anti-racism and social justice. As has been shown, critical race theory is a framework that can disrupt the impermanence of racism by deconstructing White supremacy and White women’s fragility. Likewise, it welcomes the voices and sociocultural experiences of Black boys. Like critical race theory, abolitionist teaching as proposed by Bettina Love, provides educators and administrators with the freedom to eliminate
deficit-based thinking regarding Black boyhood, and replacing this focus with liberatory educational practices.

Educators must consider the implications of these systemic inequities and invest in opportunities to engage with Black boys early and often to close the opportunity gaps that result in predictable academic outcomes. The disparaging data on Black boys speaks to the influence of structured racism that is masked by disparaging academic data that covers up how schools maintain social hierarchies. Those educators who choose to use data to cover up failures on behalf of schools unwittingly are perpetuating historical stigmas associated with Black boys as being innately inferior or lacking appropriate environmental supports. Those committed to educational liberation of teachers and students must be both aware of these historical structures and willing to shift the focus of these narratives on systems of inequities that benefit White students at the behest of Black students. Lisa Delpit (2012) states the following:

African American children do not come into this world at a deficit. There is no achievement gap at birth. The achievement gap should not be considered the gap between Black children’s performance and White children’s performance – but rather between Black children’s performance and these same children’s exponentially greater potential.

An anti-deficit framework shifts the focus from the student and place emphasis on school systems, cultures of learning, and teacher readiness to engage students from diverse racial backgrounds. This focus causes for teachers to examine their teaching styles, the learning styles of diverse learners (i.e., Black boys) and cultures that promote excellence in school.

An anti-deficit model must be immersed in the curricula of teacher education and professional development opportunities for current teachers in order to be successful. Teachers must be trained to culturally competent practitioners that teach and value the significance of
pedagogy that promotes excellence. For Black boys, the lens must shift from being viewed as a potential problem to that of a scholar. Racial identity development is a key factor in the development of Black students. Those in the field of education should be compelled to examine the factors that contribute to these inequities. One highly theorized and successful method is critical race theory, as it analyzes the ways that inequities have historically been imbedded with American social institutions. Likewise, critical race theory can assist in theorizing mechanisms for change.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory provides a framework that can be used as a means of challenging the educational disparities faced by Black boys in suburban schools. The framework of critical race theory (CRT) challenges the structures of racism and uncovers how it is interwoven into society and used to perpetuate racialized ideals through the promotion of White supremacy, the term used to describe the advantages that White people possess in all social institutions, thus, creating a sense of capital that produces gains resulting in connections and resources through the shared racial identities of White students and White teachers (Frankenberg, 1997; McLaren, 1997b). Initially used to analyze the historical presence of race in legal studies, CRT sprang from the early scholarship of Derek Bell and Alan Freeman, who challenged the slow pace of reform efforts driven by a moral impetus by connecting legal scholarship with civil rights strategies (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.52). CRT infuses a broader scope of thought including sociology, gender, and ethnic studies, along with education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1997, 1998; Tate, 1997). CRT addresses the role of race in society and how the pervasive nature of racism has become a normalized American way of life. Different from its predecessor critical legal studies (CLS), CRT begins with the precept, that racism is a normalized tenet of American
society and because it is a normalized, when racial incidents occur in society, they are often unchecked because they do threaten the ideal of whiteness (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv).

The benefits of institutional racism as such are then transferred throughout society and show up through multiple facets of popular culture. In schools, academic disparities have been associated with cultural poverty; however, various factors are attributed to why success and failures occur in schools. Therefore, race becomes the dominant factor that contributes to the predictability of achievement and societal projection. Crenshaw (1992) adds how colorblindness attempts to remove the centrality of whiteness as a baseline for normal. Furthermore, the term colorblindness---used interchangeable with post-racialism---as Bell indicates, promotes a belief in racial neutrality that encourages White people to view racism as a thing of the past. As a result, when blacks are absent from certain spaces (i.e., professions, communities, schools), it is not because of systematic practices that lock them out, but a response to menial effort. Racial neutrality sustains covert racism by going less detected, leaving the recipient of it to ponder questions of self-doubt when being cast out of opportunities. This can be seen in schools when black students are not expected to participate in gifted and talented programs or advanced placement courses. These types of classes being viewed as typically for White students, while simultaneously giving black boys permission to excel in sports, entertainment, or music---areas that are more closely associated with the racial images of this demographic.

Critical race theorists argue that schools must infuse social justice practices as a means of advocacy to promote and support change in the lives of students and communities by helping the students to name their realities through various forms of story-telling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), which are used to create counter-narratives. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) identified three types of counternarratives: personal stories, other people’s stories, and composite stories (as cited
by Harper, 2009, p. 702). This focus addresses the first research question regarding how Black boys narrate their experiences in suburban schools. Using this perspective will bring their perspectives to the forefront—something that is not regularly done. In doing so, Black boys are provided with potentially transformational experiences, and if implemented within schools, there is the potential to dismantle the historical tropes created during the foundation of the country. This aligns with what critical race theorists argue—that schools must become agents of advocacy that promote change in the lives of students and their communities, by helping to rename their realities while subverting oppressive systems that promote racialized experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

CRT considers the inherent benefits of Whiteness in America and constitutes how the presence of race and property intersect to dictate the experiences of minorities in popular society. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) provide three central propositions for understanding race and property rights:

1. Racism continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the U.S.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights that historically have been granted disproportionately to Whites.
3. The intersection of racism and asymmetrically ordered realty markets creates an analytic tool through which we can understand school and social inequity.

Schools then serve as instruments to reproduce the social inequalities in society through the perpetuation of predictable school failures based upon race and class (Bourdieu; 1977). To address these systemic inequities in society, critical race theorists revealed how institutional racism unveils itself in multiple facets of dominant culture. Likewise, critical race theorists also demonstrate how the framework can be used to transform the experiences of Black students
particularly in suburban educational spaces in a way that is liberatory while also unveiling the practices, policies, and perspectives within those same spaces that uphold racially gendered ideologies about Black boys.

**Abolitionist Teaching**

To envision a new normal that is predicated on a belief that schools can in fact work for all students, schooling practices that seek to eradicate the inequities and that treat students humanely are vitally necessary. As Bettina Love (2019) shares in her discussion of abolitionist teaching explains, historically, we have worked to reform and change unjust systems, but those simply were not enough. Instead, educators (which includes administrators and perhaps teacher educators) must engage in freedom dreaming (Love, 2019). Love (2019) contends that freedom dreaming gives teachers a collective space to methodically tear down the educational survival complex and collectively rebuild a school system that truly loves all children and sees schools as children’s homeplaces, where students are encouraged to give this world hell. This is why deep study and personal reflection on the history of the US is so important to abolitionist teaching. (p. 102)

What Love describes means that we must actively reflect on our role in upholding disempowering educational practices that lead to the poor achievement of any student, but particularly Black boys. Likewise, we must examine the root of the issue, which means looking back at the problematic history of education in the United States to move forward.

**An Ethic of Care**

What critical race theory as used in education and abolitionist teaching have in common is its unnamed focus on caring for students who have traditionally been marginalized and underserved. Nel Noddings (1984) theorized the importance of using care as the foundation of
student and teacher relationships as well as the key purpose of education. Research conducted by Seimans (2012) examined the use of care centered practices with Black boys in schools and argues that many teachers and administrators assume that they are enacting forms of care by providing resources such as snacks or supplies or by preparing students to perform well on exams, but instead, the care that Noddings (1984) supported, and that worked, was a care based upon mutual engagement between student and teacher. This form of care moves beyond resources and skills but taps into the humanity of both Black boys and their teachers. It is this type of care that leads teachers and administrators to employ practices that are culturally relevant and that are liberatory in nature.

The perspectives in this section have explored the possibilities of support for Black boys. These perspectives build upon each other and can be used throughout urban and suburban schools to assist students of color advance socially and academically. These theories are important in the construction of a theory that considers a variety of factors that hinder the experiences of Black boys. Specifically, a theory that explores the relationship between anti-deficit perspectives, social and cultural development support in the lives of Black boys. One such theory is what I am theorizing as the anti-deficit, sociocultural engagement model.

The anti-deficit sociocultural engagement model promises to attend to the historical, and resulting, contemporary structural inequities faced by Black boys as well as students of color within urban and suburban public schools. This approach considers what is necessary to support the academic and sociocultural achievement of Black boys and calls for future research that embraces counter-narratives that depict success among Black boys in educational spaces. Likewise, this model seeks to explore the social and cultural forms of support that can ultimately help Black boys to achieve and places an emphasis on transformation and engagement through
practices such as early introductions to literacy, continuous mentorship, and a cultural of success.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided a review of the ways that the social institutions that make up the United States have worked against Black boys—even those who have been deemed able to succeed due to their living in suburban spaces. There were also considerations for theories and frameworks that help to explain experiences of Black teenage boys in suburban schools and the actions of the White women responsible for educating them. Likewise, opportunities to transform—not reform—were explained, and expounded upon in hopes to promote the academic and sociocultural success of Black boys. This research adds to the body of literature on Black teenage boys’ experiences in public suburban high schools and provides recommendations for freedom dreaming.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This research employed a qualitative design that included the use of online focus groups with students and teachers, pre- and post-surveys during the online meetings, and semi-structured interviews with students when necessary. These methods helped to collect and analyze the data needed to address the following research questions shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Research Questions

This chapter provides insight into the selected research design-including data collection and analysis-to complete this research; a description of the research setting and participant
criteria; researcher positionality and subjectivity; and the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that undergird this study.

**Research Design**

**Using Qualitative Methods**

A qualitative case study was conducted using data from two participant groups; one comprised of Black boys from a suburban high school and the second cohort comprised of 10 White female educators from a suburban district. A multi-modal design was used to collect data including focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and a survey of the student participants. This research sought to provide a platform for Black boys to share their experiences with peers from similar demographics within a structured environment and use this opportunity to discuss their perceptions about school and popular culture. The data from the research will be used to extrapolate themes from the voices and perspectives of the students to reframe the narrative that historically has characterized youth as “unintelligible” and “apathetic.” Additionally, this research sought the perspectives of White female educators to identify how the constructs of race, racism, and sexism are a part of school environments, and to provide opportunities for these educators to analyze the implications that each has on the students they teach, particularly, students of color. Through these sociocultural communication methods, the researcher sought to provide the participants, students, and teachers alike, with an opportunity to retell their stories and potentially lead to the reframing of the discourse on “at-risk” youth.

Qualitative research has been used in case studies to analyze the feelings and experiences of participants to “explore possible solutions” (Chenn et al., 2016). During the facilitation of the sessions, the researcher utilized guided questions and a discussion protocol to foster communication, which was used to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to share their
stories, if they chose to do so. The storytelling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) also provided the researcher with data that was used to develop themes that arose from the participant communications.

The student participant groups were administered a resilience survey prior to participating in the focus group sessions and following the completion of their final session. Smith (2015) noted that qualitative research offers alternative criteria for demonstrating rigor in reliability, consistency, and applicability. By providing the students with multiple opportunities to participate in the survey, the researcher was able to analyze the responses for consistency. As individuals are often influenced by their surroundings and the voices of others during group discussions, the survey instrument was used to determine if the responses remained consistent or if they changed following the peer-group positions (Michalowitz, 2007). The survey selected for this research was the California Healthy Kids Survey (WestEd, 1988), which is given as a means of measuring resilience, a key element in helping students navigate challenges in school and in their personal lives (Werner & Smith, 1992). The survey is administered to all students in the State of California to identify two resilience constructs: protective factors and resilience traits (Werner & Smith, 1992). Table 1 defines the research terminology used for this study.

Table 1

*Terms Used and Criteria Used to Evaluate the Credibility of Research Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative research terminology &amp; application to qualitative research</th>
<th>Alternative terminology associated with credibility of qualitative research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability - The consistency of the analytical procedures, accounting for personal and research methods biases.</td>
<td>Consistency - Relates to the trustworthiness by which the methods have been undertaken maintaining a clear and transparent path.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizability - The transferability of the findings to other settings and applicability in other contexts.</td>
<td>Applicability - Consideration is given to whether findings can be applied to other contexts, settings, or groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Semi-structured interviews were conducted of three student volunteers for further analysis of topics that surfaced from the discussions. Coding of data gathered through various data collection methods led to themes that categorized the findings in this study and addressed the research questions. Through the analysis of the data, the researcher was able to extrapolate themes from the interviews to understand how students connect with students from different cultural backgrounds and how book clubs have the potential to influence how teachers identify the needs of students. Following the six sessions that were scheduled for 60 minutes each, the researcher was able to interview two teachers who participated in the book study for further analysis of their perspectives on matters that arose from the discussions.

Trustworthiness in the research study was established by reiterating to the participant groups how the data was going to be collected, analyzed, and stored throughout the research study (Morrow, 2005, p. 250). All participant interviews were held virtually using the Zoom meeting platform. Each session was recorded and transcribed using the online transcription service Temi.com. Data from participants was stored on the researcher’s laptop and kept in a file on the laptop and stored at my home office. During the transcriptions fictitious names were used in place of the participants’ real names. A sociocultural qualitative research model was chose for this research to understand the relationship between identity and perceptions that the participants had towards the cultural, historical, and school environment that impact the lives of the participants, which include potential cultural differences in how Black boys and White female educators understand identity within similar school environments (Wertsch, 1995, p. 56).
Research Setting

School Environment

Situated in a Midwestern suburban community, the school district serves 9,300 students in grades pre-K through 12 in which 26% of the population are Black students. At present, the school district has two comprehensive high schools, one alternative high school, three middle schools, eight elementary schools, and one K-8 school. More than 1,500 students attend the respective comprehensive schools, in which 26% are Black Americans, and of this population, 14% are Black boys. The high school employs five counselors, all of whom are female, and one is Black American. The high school offers an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, Advanced Placement (AP), honors, and traditional curriculum. Since the inception of the high school, which was constructed in 1888, all building principals have been White American men.

Research Environment

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this research required alternative methods to collect data. This study was conducted virtually through the Zoom meeting platform. Zoom is an online-video conferencing service that can be used to conduct meetings or gatherings; it also has the capacity to record meetings. The virtual meetings allowed the researcher to conduct these meetings from the confines of home, thus ensuring the health safety of the researcher and the participants. The researcher facilitated the focus groups with the students regarding their lived experiences and facilitated book club meetings with teacher participants to determine how the presence of race impacted the professional practices within schools as carried out by teachers who are charged with educating students from various ethnic backgrounds.
Participant Criteria and Selection

The researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board prior to beginning the study in order to work with high-school-aged Black boys and their teachers (see Appendix A for IRB approval letter). Participants in this research included 63 Black boys from grades 9-12 and ten White female educators from the selected suburban, Midwestern community. The boys who participated in this study were from grades 9 through 12 constituting the following sample size: 23 ninth graders, 17 tenth graders, 16 eleventh graders, and 7 twelfth graders. Participatory consent forms were emailed to parents prior to the students’ involvement in this project (see Appendix B & C). For this research the principal investigator worked with school officials from a suburban high school in a Midwestern school district to identify students who met the criteria of the research study and to obtain their parents’ email addresses. Retaining the assistance of school officials in order to recruit participants allowed for a selection process that was objective yet related to the research goal, which upheld the criteria set by Sargeant (2012) of objectivity and appropriateness.

Communication with the parents and teachers included an introduction and overview of the research study (see Appendix D). An initial Zoom virtual parent and student meeting was conducted, during which parents, students, and teachers were informed that their participation was voluntary and provided with opt-out procedures. Participants were informed that their participation in the research study would not result in academic gains pertaining to their grades and that the project was designed to provide African American males an opportunity to use their voices to describe their experiences in schools. Parental consent was requested for student participation.
The findings of the research will be used to support educators in developing school cultures that are able to embrace the individual talents and gifts of Black boys through a commitment towards developing school spaces, policies, and pedagogical practices that elevate the schooling experiences of Black boys. The participants were informed that their involvement in the research would be anonymous and that pseudonyms would be used when the study was published to protect their identities. Students who participated in the study received a gift card following the first focus group meeting.

**Data Collection**

Data collection for this research included the following methods: a single-case study design; student resilience surveys; focus group interviews of students, including semi-structured interviews with student volunteers to continue the discussion of topics that arose during the focus group discussion; and a virtual book club with teachers reviewing the text *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo (2018). This text was selected for its emphasis on identifying how racism is transferred throughout everyday occurrences in American culture and how Whites respond to discussions pertaining to race and racism. The protocol for conducting the interviews was established for the purpose of providing the students with a framework in order to follow along in the interview process (see Appendix E).

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a common research tool used in qualitative research and applied to various sciences (Summan et al., 1991; Morgan, 1989). The benefit of well-designed focus group sessions is that they allow for the researcher to learn through the participants’ experiences during a limited period of time. To prepare for the focus group sessions, participants were given questions and topics in advance to familiarize themselves with the discussion points and to
maximize meeting time. Each focus group comprised ten students. As stated by Edmunds (1999), working with a small group of participants allows the researcher to serve as a guide or moderator in the discussion and enables the facilitator of the group to engage in complex dialogue and to draw out information (Berger, 2001).

In this research, student focus groups were guided by prompts (see Appendix F). The students were able to ask questions and engage in discussions, using their experiences to provide context to the research questions that were posed. The focus groups offered a platform for students to communicate their perceptions about school and an opportunity for me to seek to understand how their personal identities are impacted by the structures within schools (Ashby, 2011). Through this process, this researcher examined how Black boys grappled with common assumptions associated with them and examined if other Black boys shared a common meaning regarding race and identity (Berg, 2001). As indicated by Noguera (2007), students may have ideas and insights that are unknown to adults and that could prove helpful in improving schools if adults were willing to listen (p. 209). In addition, to focus groups, individual interviews were used to obtain a more complete narrative related to their experiences.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two participants to delve further into discussions that came out of the focus group meetings. A separate interview protocol was established for the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix G). Drever (1995) explains that semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in the direction that the participants want to take the conversation. Likewise, it is said to be especially useful when interviewing a small number of participants. The students who volunteered were rising seniors and quickly became vocal leaders in their focus groups. The semi-structured interviews allowed each student to share additional
comments regarding their experiences. Participants selected for the semi-structured interviews met one of the following initial criteria: (a) the student expressed interest in participating in the focus group, but was unable to do so because of scheduling conflicts, or (b) a student who participated in a focus group expressed interest in talking with the researcher one-to-one to elaborate on conversations stemming from the focus group. Each of the two 60-minute, semi-structured interviews occurred on separate days following the virtual Zoom meeting.

High school students are immersed in numerous social settings in which they are constantly assessed academically, furthermore, students are grouped into various social and extracurricular categories such as sports teams and clubs. The first interview enabled the researcher to gather information regarding the student’s experiences in school. The second interview focused on exploring the student’s perceptions of Black boys in their school environments and in a larger societal context, particularly following the recent events related to the death of George Floyd and the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviews provided an opportunity to engage in social and cultural conversations about race, identity, and their experiences in school, along with their connections with adults and peer groups. The interviews led to a discussion on short-term goals that could be achieved within the weeks and months and long-term goals to be achieved during the remaining years of high school and beyond.

The following questions were posed to the participants:

1. What are your ideas about various ethnic groups in your school community, and what ideas do you believe they have about you?

2. Do you believe that teachers have similar or different expectations for Black boys in school, and how does this play out in your daily experiences?
The goal of asking these questions was to explore the attitudes held by the participants about their ability to achieve, and the role that schools and school officials play in Black boys actualizing those achievements. Mickelson (1990) found that African American adolescents’ abstract and concrete attitudes towards their education reflected an “attitude-achievement paradox” (p. 44), which displays a sense of cognitive dissonance characterized by a positive regard for education despite lower levels of academic performance and educational attainment (Nichols et al., 2010). Michelson’s (1990) paradox has a deep history in the American public-school experience and has been explored by other researchers. As reported by Coleman (1966), Black students hold highly favorable attitudes towards education irrespective of their performance; Ogbu (1978) examined the belief that education provided a path towards upward mobility and personal betterment for Black and Chicano students; Patchen (1982) discusses the reverence that Blacks had for education despite their underachievement; and Sleeter and Grant (1987) described the faith and belief in education held by Black students despite failing to achieve. Using these historical studies as a guide, this research explored the experiences of Black boys as well as the belief of their teachers in two educational spaces—-the book club and the Zoom classroom.

**Book Discussions Groups**

As part of the exploration of teacher beliefs, the researcher facilitated six one-hour discussions that involved the analysis of the text *White Fragility* (DiAngelo, 2018) by teachers. The text was an avenue to engage in discourse on subjects related to race, racism, and sexism, to identify how these constructs influence their interactions with students, colleagues, and various stakeholders, and how the concepts impacted their work as educators. The researcher used guided questions from the author’s study guide to facilitate these sessions with the teachers (see
Appendix H). During each meeting, a teacher-participant volunteered to lead the discussion using the guided questions to facilitate the session. The researcher was able to observe through these sessions how the teachers interacted with each other when responding to questions and listened to how they made sense of societal issues that impact their own lives and the students they teach.

Drawing from ethnographic research principles of interviewing and gathering data, the researcher was able to participate directly in the teacher book club sessions engaging in communications relevant to the text, as well as other topics that were not directly related to the book club. As a participant observer, the researcher observed and listened to the discussions to ascertain how the educators made sense of the book and their work with students. The sessions would often begin with teachers talking about their families, pets, school environments, the social conditions stemming from the pandemic and racial unrest that had swept through many parts of the U.S. following the episodes of police brutality and the subsequent killing of George Floyd and the shooting of Breonna Taylor. The researcher’s participation in the book club session was necessary in order to understand the point of view and stories of the teacher participants. Researcher participation provided insight on how White female educators come to see themselves and their roles as teachers. Likewise, the researcher was better able to forecast how the behaviors of educators may impact the learning experiences of students (Ary et al., 2010; Jacobs et al., 2006; Milacci, 2003).

**Resilience Surveys**

The California Healthy Kids Survey (https://calschls.org) was administered to all students participating in the virtual meetings for the purposes of acquiring cross-sectional data, a snapshot of the students’ reality at a specific point in time. The CHKS is administered to all students
attending public schools in the State of California for the purpose of understanding the various external and internal resilience constructs associated with positive youth development (Constantine & Benard, 2001). The data from the surveys are used to inform local and state school agencies in their efforts to develop school resources such as needs assessments, program planning, program evaluation, and research to support effective practices for its students (p. 1). The survey comprises 113 items in three sections or modules in which students are asked to rate or rank various factors associated with resilience, perceptions on the achievement gap, and socio-emotional health. The survey is designed to measure school climate and safety and psychometrics to measure student wellness and youth resiliency.

Survey Validity and Reliability

In 1988 the CHKS was developed under the direction of a Resilience Assessment Research Panel to achieve the following objectives: (a) continue to build upon a strong and explicit research-based theoretical framework, (b) provide a comprehensive and balanced overview of external supports and internal resilience characteristics, (c) demonstrate cultural and developmental appropriateness for its population, (d) demonstrate high reliability as measured by internal consistency within scales and stability of response over time, and (e) demonstrate validity as measured among scales and associations between subscales and background characteristics and risk behaviors that are congruent with the research literature (Constantine & Benard, 2001).

To increase the reliability of the assessment process, the students completed three portions of the CHKS, a total of 175 questions, which included a mini-core module that focused on demographic and background information and a resilience and youth development module. The survey was administered prior to participating in the first focus group sessions and after the
completion of the last meeting. During each administration process the participants were provided three days to complete and submit the survey online. After completion, the surveys were gathered and mailed to test developer WestEd. for scoring. The results of the survey were then returned to the researcher by email for data analysis.

The audio recording capability of Zoom enabled me to gather specific information relative to the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The audio from the recordings were confidentially uploaded onto the online transcription service, Temi.com. After transcribing each of the sessions, I used the Microsoft frequency feature to identify recurring words from the sessions. Data from the sources will be analyzed by coding and transcripts, notes from the observations, and journals using a qualitative data analysis software program for coding to identify themes. By tracking the number of times, a particular word or phrase was used, the researcher was able to determine if the participants shared either a common perspective or experience. Nvivo provided options to code data sets that were used to identify themes that emerged from the sessions. The themes from this research will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Case Study Analysis

Methods employed in the present study to assess student concerns included a single-case study and administration of a risk assessment survey developed by WestEd. (Constantine & Benard, 2001). A single-case study was selected because it provides a rigorous experiential evaluation of an intervention that can provide a strong basis for establishing causal inference usually used in quantitative research (Homer & Spaulding, in press; Kazdin, 1982; Kratochwill & Levin, 1992; Shadish et al., 2002).

A SCD can provide an analysis of a causal relation of a specific set of participants that can later be used for replication of the intervention (Homer et al., 2005). A case study allows for
the investigation of a phenomenon affecting a single group through the analysis of events impacting that group from a broad analysis of institutions, policies, and systems. As such, case studies are key approaches to analyzing causality of events impacting a larger group by analyzing the experiences of individual members from that group (Gerring, 2004, p. 2004).

Composite case studies are used in qualitative research to gather aspects of the stories of people for the purpose of creating a collective narrative that is used to support a broader point of view. Case studies offer a real-world account of a phenomenon that is grounded not solely in theory, but in specific cases that can be used to draw inferences from theory. In this research, a case study composite provided an in-depth analysis of the participants voices in real-world context (Yin, 2013).

Although case studies are a commonly used methodology in research, some members of the research community have been scrutinized for focusing on singular examples (Achen & Snidal, 1989; King et al., 1994; Lieberson, 1991). Single case study designs are useful when examining the effect of a particular intervention. Using qualitative research methodology this study examined the effect that schools had on identity development and self-efficacy in Black boys attending a majority White suburban school and the perceptions of the teachers who are charged with educating students from diverse backgrounds.

**Positionality and Ethics**

As an African American male immersed in K-12 education, the value of this work is of particular importance; personally, and professionally, however, venturing into a research study centered on Black boys made it imperative to maintain a subjective position in this research. I am aware of my own experiences as an African American male, have attended predominantly White institutions, and worked professionally in an affluent suburban community, all of which may
have impacted over my perceptions, interactions, and interpretations. As such, it was more impressive to find ways to ensure that my own background did not affect the lens in which I conducted this research. As Fine (1992) wrote, it is imperative as a researcher to be self-conscious, critical, and a participatory analyst, but to not engage to the point of view where you sacrifice objectivity (p. 220). To monitor my subjectivity, I maintained and kept a reflective journal of my experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings throughout this experience and processed them in my field notes to be used in future writings regarding these experiences.

**Positionality**

As an African American male conducting research with a group of students that I have worked to support throughout my professional career, it was important for me to understand how my personal identity and experiences could have hindered my ability to be objective. To ward against being subjective with the research, I deployed multiple methods to address my potential subjectivity. First, I met weekly with my former colleague who is now a full-time professor at a local university within the State of Michigan. My former colleague is a limited liability counselor who earned a Ph. D in counseling and worked in K-12 education for thirty years before becoming a professor. Additionally, I kept a journal that I used to process my thoughts weekly and would discuss the comments of my journal during weekly check-ins. Lastly, I formed two support groups during the time of the research to provide an outlet to process some of the events that occurred during the tumultuous summer of 2020. The first group was a bicycle club with older African American men from the Metro-Detroit area that rode on every Saturday morning throughout various locations within the tri-county area. Cycling provided a needed outlet to process my thoughts, emotions, and feelings during a summer that had been unlike any of my lifetime. The second group was comprised of African American male educators,
clinicians, public officials, attorneys, and concerned citizens that met to discuss solutions to support our communities heal from the challenges that impacted local communities. I am thankful for these networks and the opportunities to have shared these experiences despite the challenging times that brought us together.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Throughout the duration of this study, there were various assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that were present. These areas are important to note as they provide a rationale related to why certain questions and decisions were made within the study and what topics or concerns should be considered in the future.

Assumptions of the Study

There are various assumptions that shaped the study design, the questions asked, and the interpretations of the data. The following assumptions informed the study:

1. Black boys are aware of the stigmas associated with being an African American male in the U.S.
2. Reasons for failures of Black boys may be the result of factors that are not attributed to academic capability.
3. White women educators are aware of the privileges associated with American Whiteness and understand ancestry in the U.S. and understand the power dynamic and racial hierarchy associated with this status.

Limitations

Elements over which the researcher has no control may limit the research design and the findings. These elements include time, financial resources, access to participants or venues, and assumptions regarding the validity and accuracy of the theory, methods, and instruments that are
the foundation of the design of the study. Value of data collected by self-reporting participants depends on the assumptions that respondents provided truthful, unbiased information. Because participants were self-reporting, there was not an independent source of corroboration. There was also the possibility of participant bias, underrating, or overrating their answers.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations provide a rationale to a particular approach in research that was taken in contrast to other methods that were not used; typical implications are due to available resources (Theofanidis, D. & Fountouki, A., 2018). The following delimitations were identified for this study:

- Survey, focus group, and interview data were the primary data sources used for this study.
- Student and teacher participants in this study were from one high school in one suburban community.
- This study did not examine African American students from other school communities or other ethnic groups to determine the presence of resilience factors present among these students.
- Additional participants from other communities may add to the scope of the research as it pertained to analyzing the text used in the book club from various socioeconomic perspectives.
- This study was conducted virtually using an online platform that may have impacted the level of engagement from participants.
- Each participant group was conducted virtually over a period of six sessions.
● Research on resilience, efficacy, and student voice might be better supported over a longer period of time.

● Research on how African American boys narrate their experiences in school and how student perceptions of personal identity and long-term life opportunities may be better supported with a larger sample size of participants, from various socio-economic backgrounds.

The sample size of the teacher group was a delimitation of this study. The findings cannot be generalized beyond the ten teachers who participated in the study. This study was conducted over the course of six one-hour sessions with each of the participant groups. Although the teacher group participants in this study showed that these teachers were able to examine a text on the topic of race and to examine its implications in their lives as educators and how this reveals itself within the structure of schools, there was minimal data collected to examine its structural implications on teacher practices.

Conclusion

The research design provided opportunities to explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants in the study, which made for vivid first-hand narratives. The data collected is used in Chapter 4 to discuss the common themes that arose during the varying conversations with Black boys in suburban public schools. Their voices provide a glimpse into their experiences as youth who are charged with navigating structures that challenge them academically through curriculum that is not always representative of their experiences as members of a marginalized community, and socially by challenging them to negotiate the intersection between race, gender, and class.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

In this chapter, the researcher presents the voices of Black boys as data that was used to identify emergent themes from their experiences as students attending suburban schools. First, I will first provide an account of the participants in this research to identify the conditions that surround systemic inequities that affect how students of color conceptualize their identities, access opportunities, and recognize institutional barriers contributing to their schooling experiences. Observational information obtained during discussion groups with White women teachers was presented to depict how these educators conceptualize societal implications of identity development and institutional privileges that may shape their work as educators and the relationships they form with students. The themes that were consistently throughout the narratives of the Black boys in the study were the recognition of unequitable policies and practices, the recognition of meaningful interactions and feelings of belongingness, the academic barriers and opportunities present in schools, and the value of student and teacher relationships. The themes presented in the book discussion with White women educators was acknowledging privilege, cultural competency, critiquing liberalism, and the celebration of difference.

Study Participants

During the summer of 2020, the researcher conducted six student focus groups comprising 63 Black boys between the ages of 14-18 in a Midwestern suburban school district. The students participated in six, one-hour sessions that were designed to help them unpack topics related to how privilege affords particular students benefits and why institutional incongruences persist in disciplinary practices and teacher expectations and the role this has on the schooling experiences of Black boys. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two of the most vocal students to provide an opportunity for more reflection on their experiences. The two
students that participated in the semi-structured interviews were interviewed for one hour, which provided a greater understanding of their experiences. Given that the boys within this study spend most of their time in a school with teachers who are predominantly White women, interviewing those teachers was an important facet of the study. These teachers became part of a book club that would discuss Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* in order to foster a conversation about their perceptions of how race has shaped their lives as educators and the role it plays when supporting historically marginalized groups, such as Black boys. In order to complete the research, particular settings were necessary. Due to unexpected circumstances, specifically the Coronavirus pandemic, the setting was limited to online activities.

**Research Setting**

The student focus groups, participant interviews, and teacher book club occurred using the online meeting platform, Zoom. The focus groups served multiple purposes ranging from an outlet to discuss their experiences as Black boys; an opportunity to reflect on the societal conditions affecting Black lives throughout the nation; and a structured weekly check-in to process their feelings, concerns, and beliefs within a structured environment. The students’ catchment school is located within an affluent suburban county. Over the last several decades the school community has experienced an influx in its students of color as their parents have moved away from urban centers and into suburban districts. In 2016, Black boys made up 13.07% students constituted 26% of the district's 10,079 students. What follows are the words of Black boys who shared their experiences navigating suburban schools. In addition, the experiences of White women (as they make up most public-school teachers) who teach them.
Findings: Black Boy Narratives

After thematically analyzing the discussions and interviews with the boys who participated in the study, four themes arose. These themes were inequitable policies and practices within their schools and classrooms; alternative spaces of meaning making and belonging discovered by boys who became part of a variety of extracurricular activities; academic barriers and opportunities as promoted within schools and by teachers; and finally, student-teacher relationships. Figure 2 highlights the four themes that surfaced from the research.

Figure 2

*Thematic Findings with Student Participants*

Each year, professional educators and policy makers engage their respective communities in conversations on ways to improve the quality of schools. Educators continue to explore reform
practices to support students in the development of the skills needed to be competitive in an ever changing world. Despite valiant efforts to fix schools predictable outcomes based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status remain prevalent and suggest that the challenges that students face are not impacted by institutional inequities alone, but also by deficit beliefs brought into the classroom (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). If schools are to develop systems that do not result in inequitable outcomes for Black boys, it is of critical importance to dedicate time and resources to understand their beliefs, assess their needs, and analyze the structures of schools to make the changes needed to reframe how schools’ function. In consideration of my critique that schools reproduce social inequalities and are not broken, but functioning as they were intended, I will highlight the voices of Black boys to elevate beliefs about school, teachers, and current policies that lead to systemic disadvantages in schools.

**Unequitable Policies and Practices**

Protecting the safety of students is one cornerstone of effective schools and an essential component of ensuring that the basic needs of students are kept at the forefront of educational goals, practices, and policies. To thwart potential threats and misbehaviors enacted by students with schools, zero tolerance policies first became a part of the landscape of public discourse in the 1990s seeking to provide continuity in how districts handled behavioral infractions against their students (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Zero tolerance policies sought to provide consistency in the responses that were used to address student misbehavior by enacting “predetermined consequences” that would be used to address student misbehavior be enacting “predetermined consequences” that would be used to address violations of school codes (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force,
The implied premise being that if the responses to student misbehavior were predetermined, it would deter students from making poor choices in school.

Early supporters of zero-tolerance policies portrayed those policies as objective and fair because the rules treated all students the same, regardless of race, economic status, or gender. Upon further exploration, the results of inequitable, and disproportionally affect the lives of Black boys more than any other group (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). These inequitable policies were a common theme among the participants of this study. During the conversations with the boys during the focus groups, the following exchange between Nathaniel and Raymond displayed how they perceived the difference in treatment that is administered to Black boys:

**Nathaniel:** I mean how black people get sent to the office a lot and you don’t really do anything. White kids just be all loud and talking, especially like the white girls, they target black girls trying to be cool. They call it “acting black.”

**Raymond:** I remember one time in fifth grade there was one white kid who got like 45 warnings. I got like two warnings and got sent down to the office and everybody noticed it and started talking about it.

Nathaniel and Raymond describe inconsistent treatment, a recurring theme brought up during the focus group discussions. Later in this discussion, another student added how he believes that teachers are intentional about separating Black students from each other and the impact that this has on him and his peers:

**Christian:** I thought the teachers did like, sometimes they used to separate the Black people from other Black people as well. Like they may like one Black person, one table, the rest of the table would be White students or something like that. Cause they would think that we’re going to talk when Black people are together or become rowdy in class.
Nathaniel: That’s literally what it was, like their actions by putting one Black kid at a table full of White kids and doing that throughout the classroom. It was making it look like what they thought about Black kids, like we’re going to be the ones that are rowdy. If they were to put maybe like one other Black kid at the same table, it would help a lot.

Although the dialogue between these students does not explicitly reference zero-tolerance policy, their examples suggest that the teachers were intentional in their efforts to separate or otherwise disparately punish Black students due to a belief in the likely misbehavior of African American students, a dynamic, whether named or not, that has been observed since the codification of zero tolerance policies (Robbins, 2008; McCray & Beachum, 2006). What may be perceived as a form of classroom management on behalf of the teacher was viewed as an attempt to isolate Black students from each other. The actions of this teacher reinforced what the students were saying regarding stigmas associated with African American students. During another session with the students, Jeremiah, a freshman at the school, spoke about some of the challenges he believes African American boys experience in school:

Jeremiah: Anything that goes on in school, I feel like for us we get, we have a shorter fuse with the teachers. It seems like times like we do the same thing, and they make it a lot bigger than it would be when I see some other kids do the same thing and nothing happens.

Other students in the group provided additional examples of the inconsistencies in treatment issued to Black boys. Christian, another ninth grader had this to say about a time when he requested a restroom pass:

Christian: It was like, uh, I wanted to go to the bathroom, and I was doing fine like the entire class and the teacher said no for some reason. Then two minutes later, a different
kid asked to go to the bathroom. She said, sure, when that kid was acting up the whole time. That shouldn’t happen. That was wrong…I was really angry about that because how are you gonna tell me no and you tell him yes?

The students’ descriptions of their experiences in typical school-related activities and their interactions with teachers exhibit what is referred to as microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2000). The term has been defined differently over the years, however the effect of it on the psyche and behaviors of the recipients remain the same. Pierce-Gonzalez and Wills (1978) defined it as “subtle, stunning, and non-verbal put downs” directed towards people of color. Davis (1989) added that microaggressions are “a disregard” for people of color that is rooted in the belief of White superiority. Others have defined microaggressions as acts of racism, overt or covert in nature, that are consistent but rarely investigated from at an institutional level (Delgado & Stefancic, 1992). These definitions align with the stories from Jeremiah and Christian.

When teenagers are subjected to adult behaviors that call in to question their acceptance within an environment that is promoted as safe spaces to learn and grow, academic struggles and behavioral conflicts are plausible consequences (Solórzano et al., 2000).

The youth often vacillated between statements suggesting that on one hand they believed that teachers had high expectations for students of color and on the other, that Black boys are not treated the same as White students or Asian students in school because of the beliefs that others have about their capacity to achieve. Teacher expectations was a major focal point of these interviews, and students provided several poignant stories on which areas they believe Black boys were accepted and which ones they were not pushed to participate in. The practices, policies, and behaviors upheld in school sometimes shaped the perceptions that Black boys had
for themselves, which was like the expectations for social-cultural acceptance established in other areas.

**Alternative Spaces of Meaning Making and Belonging**

For many African American boys, the process of finding meaning in schools is often limited to areas not associated with academic rigor, but instead associated with specific areas such as sports. Although an increasingly prominent aspect of American culture, sports have fostered unique expectations among African American youth (Lee, 1983), wherein sports are viewed as a viable method of social mobility for talented youth (Edwards, 1973; Ball & Loy, 1976; Talamini & Page, 1973). For far too many, sports are viewed as the most probable career aspiration for “making it out” albeit not statistically a viable one (Lee, 1983).

When discussing expectations, the students often went to sports as an area where they found acceptance from their peers and teachers, but also where they found a sense of purpose and affinity. One student, Lamar, a senior and member of both the football and wrestling teams, spoke about the dichotomy of competing in two sports that he believes to be heavily perceived as historically being reserved for certain racial groups:

**Lamar:** So, in terms of, sports or organizations, I believe that that is not true, but other people may see it that way. We shouldn’t be playing basketball and football or something like that. But it’s not necessarily like they’re trying to encourage just White people to go and play one of those sports or anything. It’s just kind of that way. If you enjoy the sport, go out and play.

Lamar spoke with passion about his desire to not be bound by perceived barriers associated with race as it pertains to sports. During Lamar’s senior year he was recruited by several elite colleges and universities for both football and wrestling before experiencing a season ending knee injury.
Lamar, like several of the other students, spoke of sports as a place of refuge where they could experience being the best at something, but during discussions on academics the tone of the communications shifted. Marcus, a senior, shared his beliefs about teacher expectations:

**Marcus:** If you’re an athletic Black male, whether especially tall there is like an expectation that you’re supposed to be doing something like athletic, there is this kind of, like from teachers, like they expect less. I do feel like teachers expect less of Black men. Like a Black man, just simply because like, I don’t know, stereotypes, especially like where I come from.

Marcus, who also competed on his school’s wrestling team, will be attending Morehouse College in the fall. Before arriving at his suburban high school, Joshua lived in Flint, MI, with his mother and younger sibling. Joshua spoke about the challenges of growing up in a community that had certain economic challenges and how it fueled him to earn “good grades” and to use school to better himself. This was a common theme that came through the discussions with the students. During the sessions, the students openly shared their beliefs regarding school, along with their perceptions of the essential qualities of effective educators, as well as their perceptions on those they believed viewed them with a negative pretense.

**Academic Barriers and Opportunities**

One of the essential questions posed during the focus groups was on the matter of teacher expectations. The students were asked if they believed that teachers held high expectations for them academically or if they believed that there were different expectations for them based upon their race and gender? Many students responded positively, stating that they had affirming relationships with their teachers and that the educators in their school were encouraging, but also treated them differently regarding their expectations for Black boys. The following passages of
text will reflect the comments of several students from the various focus groups that were
developed. The responses from the students were taken from various focus groups, but the
question that was raised was consistent; do you believe that teachers in your school have high
expectations for Black boys? If not, how are these expectations different from other students in
your school?

**Raymond:** Yeah, kind of, I feel like, um, African American males who like, I mean
work harder than they have to or harder than the rest of the kids because they get
discriminated against. Some of the teachers think that I feel like that’s what I feel that
some teachers think that African American students should be working harder and they
do, are meeting higher graders and everybody.
Raymond’s reflections on the pressure of how being a Black boy caused some angst due to his
perceptions of what others expected from him due to his race. Isaac expressed similar concerns
about his perception of how race has impacted his schooling experience:

**Isaac:** I feel like they want us to succeed, but I think that they come at us the wrong way
because not everybody learns the same and they come into a classroom thinking like, we
can do that right now. For some people it’s harder to study in certain environments, so
everyone learns differently.

These students expressed the need to almost overcompensate (Willer et al., 2013) in the
classroom by working “harder” in order to not fall victim to stereotypes associated with African
American males as lacking value for education or laziness when it comes to effort in the
classroom (Mehan et al., 1994). The description of the student reactions aligns to what has been
referred to as reaction formation (Freud, 1898) or the need to strive against narratives that
associate a particular group with disparaging characteristics.
Other students labeled teachers as either being supportive of African American students or not caring about the students’ success or achievement in the classroom. Lawrence spoke of these perceptions and the impact it has on students:

**Lawrence:** Some teachers try to help kids succeed more in school. The others don’t really care about it. So, they just let them do whatever they want or just don’t care about their work and don’t know how to make them put more effort into what they do at school.

**Xavier:** Some teachers did care, like if you are doing bad, they don’t try to help because they already think in a certain way about you. Like they’re going off stereotypes and stuff.

The students spoke of an awareness they had of the societal images associated with African American males and their own advocacy to control their narratives by defining their own lives. Christian stated,

**Christian:** We have to basically make our own image. People think of us a certain way and we have to try our best to work hard at making them think different.

Christian being cognizant of the impressions that White teachers had for Black boys developed a coping mechanism to ward off the effects of stereotype by developing a persona of how he wanted to be perceived by others. Myron continues to discuss the perceived inconsistencies he believed take place between Black and White students:

**Myron:** Well I feel like some teachers have different ways that they look at you. Like some things that you might do good and not put that much effort in your schoolwork then you’re supposed to do. But some of them, like if you have a Black teacher and a Black student that I feel like they have a good connection with you. Like if you have a White
and then a Black then it’s like, it’s kind of “iffy” if you know what I mean. Like they not going to trust you enough.

Although the students expressed that over the years, they had not had many African American teachers, those they had were able to motivate them “accountable” not merely for their conduct, but in their learning. However, the thread that connected African American and Caucasian teachers was based upon the relationships they were able to forge with these students.

**Student and Teacher Relationships**

The statements from the students provide examples of how the boys conceptualized the relationship barriers with teachers and helps to understand the culture of the school and its effect on students that are not members of the community. How they grappled with perceived obstacles reflects to some degree a desire to be committed to school, despite the challenges the institution conveyed. However, there were several affirming comments made regarding supportive relationships that communicated more favorably during the focus group sessions. Several students described occurrences with teachers and principals that not only connected with them, but also helped them feel safe and a sense of belonging. The characteristics of a caring educator are important to understand when seeking to cultivate these behaviors throughout institutions.

The second question that was presented during the focus groups was specific to the school culture. The researcher asked the students if they believed that their school environment was welcoming to students of color, in particular towards African American boys. What was unique about this segment of the interviews was that despite the many challenging experiences the students had with school officials, they could recall with specificity the moments and interactions with adults that I would call *moments of validation* or what Hall (2014) referred to as confirmation and disconfirmation. These reflexive moments echoed a sense of care that was
displayed by the educators that came across as subtle, but obviously meaningful to the students. Noddings (1992) defines care as the development of meaningful relationships that focuses on the demonstration of it between the one caring and the cared for.

**The Uses of An Ethic of Care**

The following excerpts provide context to what the students described between themselves and educators at their school. The discussions highlighted interactions that typify what Werner (2005) referred to as “protective” factors when addressing the elements needed to offset factors referred to as “risk” factors. Werner identified risk factors as “trauma, parental mental illness, alcoholism or criminality”, that have been associated with long term adverse developmental challenges (Dowdney, 2013). However, caring relationships have been found to have a positive effect on offsetting potential developmental risks in children (Dowdney, 2013; Werner, 2005).

**Compassionate Administrators**

Raymond, a rising junior, discusses the day he enrolled in school during his freshman year:

**Raymond:** I remember when I first stepped into the school, I went to the office with my mom. I saw Mr. Montgomery and the principal, they all like greeted me and I felt like comfortable in that situation. So, like, the community was like welcoming and cool. Like they don’t just walk pass you without saying, hi, how are you doing? And they give you power. Like they connect with you basically. They bring out energy in you that you don’t know you have.

During these discussions I would tactfully address the matter of racism in follow up questions, asking the students to be descriptive in their communications about the adults in their school when providing stories pertaining to their school-based experiences. The rationale for this
was to chronicle how the students described their relationships with adults at their school, particularly pertaining to descriptive language associated with the behaviors of the adults. For example, Michael, when referring to the school’s assistant principal, stated:

Michael: Our Black assistant principal, he’ll walk around and say hi, good morning to everybody and give you a fist bump and stuff.

Raymond shared a story regarding the school’s principal, a White male, that provide context to the positive relationships that adults can develop with students when embracing diversity and seeking opportunities to engage in transparent communication:

Raymond: Everybody at my school was nice and welcoming. They set a tone and just felt like a safe environment and comfortable. I think the principals, how they act matters the most. Sometimes not even the teachers. Sometimes it’s the principals because the principals are there to help you and if they’re acting like, pushing you and stuff, that’s supposed to be there to help you and can talk to you, about your problems. It makes you feel like you can just talk with anybody at school.

Michael: We have a good principal I think because he’s willing to learn from us because I’ll help him out sometimes. We were in a concert one time in the choir and I was in it, the principal agreed to sing with us and he was standing next to me and I noticed he was a little stiff and I had to tell him to loosen up and then he was a little like me. Yeah, it all worked out. The principals are open to ideas.

Michael and Raymond spoke with admiration about the relationships they had for their school administrators. When unpacking the language that was used to describe these principals the students used words such as “good,” “safe,” “pushing you,” a phrase used interchangeably with motivating someone. The students also recalled specific behaviors that were exhibited by
the principals like early morning greetings, a fist bump---a physical gesture of acknowledging someone and in Michael’s example, the principal was willing to accept direction and support from one student during a vulnerable moment. These acts helped to convey trust and was echoed during the student’s conversations about caring adults. 

This discourse continued throughout the sessions when the boys provided examples of teachers with whom they connected with from a relation standpoint, but also pertaining to what type of teacher could extrinsically motivate them to achieve. Marvin, a sophomore, described his relationships with teachers of color and White teachers delineating between the styles that he perceived each possess:

Marvin: I had this one teacher in middle school, she was a good teacher. She was African American and then I moved schools and went to the eighth grade and I had a few connections with the same teachers, but like most of the teachers at the high school were White. I think pretty much all of the teachers I had were White. So, I mean it’s changed a lot over the time I’ve been in school.

Another student, Isaiah who was a rising sophomore at the time of the interview discussed both the benefit and challenge of having an older sibling attend the same school prior to their arrival.

Isaiah: I’ve had a couple connections with white teachers because one of my siblings has been in their class and they know I can do better. I think that schools I’ve been to have been welcoming most time like when I’m tested for something. If I’m like my brother, like in seventh grade, my teacher, the science teacher, he was my brother’s teacher. It was one time he gave an assignment; he gave us the syllabus and it was due at the end of the week. But then the next day he came up to me and he said, do you have the syllabus? I said no. He said, wow, just like your brother. And that made me mad.
Marvin: So, judging you off of someone else?

Isaiah’s depiction over the concern of being compared to his older sibling caused undue stress with his relationship with that teacher but could have also affected how he viewed his brother and potentially, others who shared similar characteristics. Isaiah entered a new learning environment already at a disadvantage because of a predisposition that the teacher held for his older sibling, placing him in a position in which he had to grapple with internalized stress over the disparaging remarks of that teacher. Isaiah did not have the benefit of possessing the social capital or privilege that would give him the latitude of preconceived high expectations that are often associated with White or Asian students. Isaiah’s closing remarks in that exchange were the most poignant, “and that made me mad.”

Some researchers have described the impact of racial stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and microaggressions on minorities as racial battle fatigue based upon being exposed to continuous unwarranted degrees of stress based on the ideal of White superiority (Feagin, 2010; Smith et al., 2011). When dealing with microaggressions students need to have an outlet to report behaviors that make them feel “unsafe” or “uncomfortable,” but also important are having access to platforms in which the students can freely express concerns and process behaviors in order to address what could lead to internalized trauma.

Teacher as Warm Defender

The students would describe experiences with educators they had positive relationships by gender and racial background and eventually aligned these identities with styles of teaching. These teachers practiced care by not only taking the time to teach the material but also demanding greater from the students. This combination earned the respect of the students. The following exchange between Isaac and Lawrence provides such an example:
**Isaac:** I’ve only had connections with two teachers ever, two White teachers. One is a physics teacher. She’s really outgoing, she’s goofy and she’s just all around cool. If she sees I’m down, she knows what I look like when I’m upset, so she’ll come to me and ask if I’m good. Then I have another math teacher who teaches geometry and she’s also my track coach, so we already have that connection.

Lawrence spoke to his perception that female educators displayed greater empathy for African American students, but also acknowledged that his experiences with male educators had been minimal:

**Lawrence:** I feel like it’s the female teachers who have the more connections with students, women teachers in general, but also there’s only a few male teachers, like my biology teacher. I had a good connection with him, but he’s the only male teacher I’ve ever had.

**Isaac:** What? You’ve only had one male teacher and you’re going to the tenth-grade next year. I’ve had tons of male teachers. My history teacher, he’s like really out there. He’s easy to connect with. I connected with him because he’s always running and outgoing and he actually makes the history class interesting because history can get boring at times.

Lawrence discussed the impact that a male educator had in his life, while Issac expressed disbelief that Lawrence had gone through both elementary and middle school without having had a male teacher. The discussion on the impact of caring educators would continue between Isaac and Raymond:

**Raymond:** I feel like the male teacher’s kind of teach a little bit better. Like I don’t know, like the male teachers make the class more interesting.
**Isaac:** What about Ms. Jackson?

**Raymond:** Yeah, Ms. Jackson, she did a good job of teaching. She was funny. My old teacher at my old school, I remember her Mrs. Pettus. She’s kind of mean sometimes, but like she, she chill and cool and she’ll help you out a lot. She connected with you fast like she had you to think about life you know. I think, hey, nobody asked me that before. So yeah, and she’d be like hard on me and she’d contact your parents. I mean cause you’re supposed to act right regardless.

**Isaac:** I can tell you, nobody acted up in that class. Everybody acted up every other hour. As soon as they went down there, you said a peep, you were pretty much standing in the hallway.

When asked to describe the teacher, the boys stated, “She was African American, but she got to pretty much everybody.” Isaac was referring to the teacher’s ability to effectively engage students from various backgrounds. He would go on to express why he believed the teacher was effective at instructing diverse student groups, while maintaining a classroom environment that was firm, but fair.

**Isaac:** Definitely she was a good teacher. I miss her definitely. She was a good teacher because she was a disciplinarian. She wasn’t the kind of Black teacher that only focused on the Black students. She focused on everybody. She treated everybody the same and equal.

**Raymond:** But she did, she did like help you if you didn’t understand something she would ask you, like what would help you to understand it makes you kind of learn the lesson in a way that you would understand it.
**Isaac:** My physics teacher did that to me. I would always get B’s and C’s and A’s in her class; she knows when to turn on her goofy side and when to turn off her goofy side. She knows when to be serious and like stay serious throughout the whole time, and she can change in like a heartbeat. She could read people really well. She should have been a social worker.

Isaac later shared that his biology teacher was a White woman. The students shared that all the teachers, except for one teacher at the high school level, were White. The students’ experiences with African American educators were limited, but those they had occurred primarily at the middle school level. Lawrence recalled the directness of one of his former middle school teachers who was an African American female:

**Lawrence:** I had a good experience with my social studies teacher, Mrs. Johnson. She was pretty funny, but she never really “sugar coated” anything really. She yelled at times and just “kept it real.” She’d be like real funny at times. When we got serious, she always got real chill. But like most of the Black teachers, they got no filter. They understand that we kids, so they don’t cuss, but they know how to get your attention.

**Raymond:** I feel like Black teachers want you, like the Black kids to succeed cause that’s why they don’t play around like that with you. They want the best for you, the best for y’all and they don’t want you to fall into stereotypes that everybody thinks. Like they don’t want you to be poor when you grow up or like in jail when you grow up. They want you to be entrepreneurs, like the high “arching” jobs and like, be something in life.

Throughout the sessions, the students referenced behaviors from teachers that had the greatest impact on their personal experiences. This is significant when working to develop environments that meet the socio-emotional and academic needs of African American boys. Researchers have
sought to understand the connection between educational environments that African American students had the “greater academic performance” in determining what factors contributed to their success (McKown & Weinstein, 2002). Teachers who have been found to have a firmer grasp on classroom management (Pianta & Hamre, 2009) with the ability to create an environment where students feel safe and cared for have been found to match (Sandilos et al., 2017) with the needs of students from marginalized communities (Ferguson, 2010; Reyes et al., 2012). The comments from the students echo what researchers suggest, showing that they performed better when taught by what could best be described as “warm but demanding” educators (Sandilos et al., 2017). The researcher through the framework of a book club sought to understand if teachers from the majority demographic of educators in America, White females, convey either a match or mismatch with Black boys through their analysis of the text White Fragility (2018). The comments from the educators who participated in the teacher book club will serve as the basis for analysis of the relationships between Black boys and White female educators.

**Findings: Educator Perceptions and Transformations**

During this research, teachers were encouraged to share about their personal perceptions and experiences working with marginalized students. One of the mechanisms of engaging in these conversations was using a book discussion group. As part of the group, teachers discussed questions that were selected from DiAngelo’s (2018) “Discussion Guide for Educators” to serve as the basis for discussions during the book club meetings. The discussion guide was later developed by the author as a tool to support educators who sought to use the text as a teaching and learning tool in their professional practice. Each week chapters were assigned to be read prior to the meeting and a different teacher each week volunteered to facilitate the group discussion. During these sessions the teachers interpreted the weeks’ assigned reading by
responding to the questions assigned to the respective chapters. The following questions were selected from the discussion guide:

1. What are you implicitly or explicitly teaching students about racial norms? How do you know?
2. How has race impacted your life? If you are struggling to answer the question, why?
3. Why is it important to reflect on our teachers in our effort to uncover our racial socialization and the messages we receive from schools?
4. Practice explaining the differences between racism, prejudice, and discrimination in your own terms. Why is it important for students of all races to understand these concepts and the differences between them? What are historical or current examples of racism, prejudice, and discrimination that students can understand?
5. How does your school or classroom reinforce a racist ideology? How do you know?
6. Who or what benefits from the biological myths associated with race? How are biological racist myths perpetuated in school?
7. How does racial belonging play out in school? Do students of color feel they belong? How do you know?
8. How is the burden of race a reality for students of color? What are examples of how they feel burdened?
9. How does the good/bad binary impact how we talk about historical or contemporary figures in school?
10. How does your living and working environment reinforce your racial frame and ability to handle racial stress?
Acknowledging Privilege

As activist-scholar, Bettina Love (2019) theorizes, educators have the power to act as coconspirators and advocates for students by welcoming diverse and inclusive experiences. Likewise, by checking their own privileges, it is possible to change the narrative that has historically existed about marginalized students and communities. The book club sessions provided context towards understanding the experiences of educators who work in suburban communities and the mindset that these educators share regarding their experiences working with students from various ethnic communities. Although the sessions were guided by the *Educator’s Study Guide* (DiAngelo, 2018), the communications were often fluid, moving in various directions based upon follow questions and inquiries from the participants. The following exchanges between the teachers address the third research question and question three from the study guide:

**Karen:** One thing that came to my mind was just basically like really what we’re doing is educating ourselves because unless you have, at least for me, it’s hard for me to go into a conversation, or be a part of a conversation if I don’t have knowledge. And I think the more we immerse ourselves in conversations like this, or watch certain documentaries, things like that, we’re educating ourselves and then have more knowledge to either have the confidence to say something, to have a starting point for a conversation because we’re basing it off of things that we read or heard or saw. And so, it’s becoming a part of our experience because without the experience, you really can’t speak to anything effectively.

**Helen:** I think as an English Language teacher, we’re kind of in a different position when we work with our students because our whole job is to pretty much, you know, like celebrate their differences, or you know, or very openly have these small group
discussions with our students. And I think for the students and general education teachers, it’s a little bit tougher to talk about those types of things. I guess, in the general education classroom because there can be pushback or, I mean, who knows how the students will react. But I think if we are people in our buildings who can constantly be advocating for, you know, not just reading. I know one of our questions was about White authors, like we’re constantly reading the classic literature of White authors. Right, I mean, we have to be able to say in confidence and be able to speak up and suggest and kind of stop it in its tracks.

The teachers in this exchange spoke to the need to educate themselves to become more knowledgeable about the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and to unlearn behaviors that create deficit narratives on minority students. The teachers acknowledge the absence of professional training that is centered on the learning needs of African American students and their validation of the need to develop practices that connect with African American students (Hyland, 2005). As an English language teacher, Helen’s response highlighted the importance of understanding students’ backgrounds and the opportunity it affords her as a practitioner to engage students from diverse language backgrounds for their benefit, and to increase the likelihood of the success of the teacher regardless of their race. The methods in which teachers approach culturally responsive pedagogy is not determined by the teacher’s race, but in how the teacher views the practices of the school and how they choose to support their students (Hyland, 2005). Shannon, a high school math teacher, spoke about the subject of colorblindness and the role it has in working with students (DiAngelo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). She stated:

Shannon: That’s interesting, just the notion of colorblindness and, you know, you bring up about some of the benefits of being an EL educator because of the sensitivity that you
can, be very deliberate about supporting cultures of the various communities. And it almost seems that we need to think about African American students in the same manner. It seems that to some degree our thinking of African American students only happens in a negative sense. The EL teachers are able to be specific about that work from a cultural standpoint. The reason why I say that is because when you look at the school statistics, we know that African American students are disproportionately represented in special education. It almost seems that these kids are not receiving individualized support unless they are diagnosed as having a learning disability.

Shannon’s statements explore the significance of having a deeper cultural understanding of the individual students within their classes and school.

**Cultural Competency**

Margaret, a high school science teacher, spoke of the importance of visibility as it pertains to acknowledging all students (Langout, 2011) and the effect it has on empowering under-represented students and importance of developing relationships with African American students. Margaret stated the following regarding validating all students and working towards removing barriers that have historically compromised African American students from engaging in school:

**Margaret:** Well, I think what this reminds me of too, is kind of going back a little bit to that, um, to the Jackie Robinson story of changing the narrative. It wasn’t that, you know, he broke a color barrier. It’s just that they finally allowed someone of that talent to come in. It’s allowing women the right to finally vote. It’s allowing, it’s like we have to change the narrative of our history. One of my favorite movies of all time is *Hidden Figures* [Melfi, 2016]. I never knew that; I hugely loved the space industry. I’m a big NASA fan.
I did not know any of that about the background. Why are these people not in our history books? Why are they not actively part of what we are? I think that’s where my thinking is my push is this.

In this conversation, Sharon and Margaret discuss a movie as a reference towards examining aspects of history that have not been widely shared. This discussion further supports the need for diverse perspectives when depicting the American narrative, but further supports what the researcher discussed previously in Chapter 1 pertaining to the impact that mainstream society has on using media to control how people of color are depicted in mainstream society. In the film *Hidden Figures* [Melfi, 2016], which highlights the story of three African American women mathematicians and the significant contributions they had on NASA’s space program during its early attempts to place an American astronaut into orbit in the decade of the 1960s. Although positive in its approach, the discussion amongst the teachers displays a lack of cultural awareness that is essential when educating students from diverse backgrounds. A lack of cultural awareness affects not only the effectiveness of educators, but the learning experiences of all students.

The lack of awareness that Margaret speaks to supports the need to provide pre-service educators and current teachers with professional training centered on culturally relevant or culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive training provides teachers with both a broader frame of reference when connecting with all students and a barometer to gauge if the instructional practices that are being utilized help to develop academic proficiency and the efficacy students need to become critical thinkers, self-aware, and possessive of the consciousness needed to engage in the world (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
Kathleen, a middle school English teacher, spoke about the importance of diverse representation, particularly when choosing literary text, and the impact she believes it has on influencing student engagement and how it leads to an inclusive culture within classrooms:

**Kathleen:** When I started teaching one of the best conferences, I went to women were talking about literacy literature and good cultural literature. And they said, and I’ve kept this quote, every child in your classroom should see themselves in a book within the first two weeks. And that can be a child who’s living with a grandparent that can be a child who lives in apartments, not a house and are in books, reflective in the literature in every one of our classrooms reflective of the children that we teach every day. And it goes back to defining, you know, what is the right resources? It’s like, who’s defining what classic literature is?

Another topic arose during the discourse amongst the teachers that focused on rhetoric that was referenced in the text that the teachers expressed was a part of their districts’ culture as well, which was the notion of the good old days. Huang et al. (2016) suggest that they base the good old days on nostalgic memory of former times. In the text, DiAngelo (2018) stated the following regarding the good old days: She says, “as a white person, I can openly and unabashedly reminisce about the ‘good old days’” (p. 58). She goes on to define them as “romanticized recollections of the past…based upon a desire to “return to former ways” (p. 58). In the teacher discussions, Kristen would go on to discuss how the sentiment of the good old days shows up at her school, echoing DiAngelo’s position.

**Kristin:** Another thing that really struck me from this reading was that notion of the ‘good old days,’ whoever hears that, like we’d all be the same ad not talk about race. Things are just so tense now, how do we move past that song? I like country music every
now and then. I think that also connects with like, if somebody says, you know, the good ole’ days or talks about that kind of stuff and I’d push back, I’m like, yeah. The good ole days, they were good for you cause your White. Um, but then it’s like, I become the person who’s like, oh my gosh, she’s always brining up all these things. She’s always trying to bring the conversation down or things like that. So those two things are very related to me. Like somebody, you know, glorifying the past, but then also targeting me because I’m the one who has to bring up race or sexism or whatever it is.

Kristin would go on to talk about the subtle manners in which racism has become normalized in society and how covert acts of bigotry are only one example of racism:

**Kristin:** A lot of people associate racism with mean people, like kind people can’t be racist. People with good intentions can’t be racist, northerners can’t be racist.

The teachers during these sessions discussed the difficulty of engaging in dialogue with colleagues when witnessing comments or behaviors that convey racist overtones, even when affecting students directly. The teachers referenced chapters in the text that provide recommendations on how to specifically “talk with White people about racism” but applies to any ethnic group that mistreats students because of their identities. Kathleen spoke about these challenges:

**Kathleen:** Unless you truly experience something you really can’t or it’s hard to speak with that confidence. If you haven’t had the experience because you’re not dealing with it in a firsthand basis.

**Critique of Liberalism**

A tenet of critical race theory is the critique of liberalism which contends that the narrative that depicts society as that which progressively grows fails to acknowledge or consider
the systemic oppressive forces that prevent growth (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The critique of liberalism is a challenge for many White Americans socialized to believe in the progressiveness of modern society. These challenges were made clear during the reflections shared by the White women teachers in the book club’s discussion of *White Fragility*. One teacher, Helen, reflected on her childhood growing up in a midwestern community with parents she viewed as liberal progressives. I observed how this teacher grappled with the narrative that she told herself throughout her life that was put into question because of our discussion:

**Helen:** One thing that struck me then when reading the book was different quotes and like comparing my parents. Oh, well, my parents and I look back and I still struggle with the fact that I grew up thinking that my parents were the most liberal open-minded people, but it was based on our family experiences and their experiences. When I look at it objectively, yes, maybe for their generation, they were a little bit more open-minded, but I still find myself stuck in that white privilege. Simply because of the experiences of my upbrining, I was raised in a very homogeneous society. And so, my experiences still limit me, even though I was maybe taught to be open-minded. My parents, it was a situation where they were from the North, my dad was put in the service in the South. So I grew up hearing stories about how, you know, they have an African American girl babysit my brother, and you know, didn’t understand why she wouldn’t sit in the front seat and understand why she would only sit in a straight back chair and not turn the TV on or do anything other than literally watch the baby. That was just so inequitable.

The discussion with other educators catalyzed Helen’s self-reflection and examination. One passage from the text was the focus of conversation. DiAngelo (2018) stated the following:
In a white supremacist context, white identity largely rests on the foundation of superficial racial tolerance and acceptance. We Whites who position ourselves as liberals often opt to protect what we perceive as our moral reputations, rather than recognize or change our participation in systems of inequity and domination (p. 108).

This section of the text led to the following exchange between several of the teachers who talked openly about their criticism of being open-minded:

**Karen:** In our house, our open-mindedness was only based on those specific experiences, which is a whole lot different than now being in classrooms and being in an environment that has so many African American students who were trying to navigate White society. I realized just how limited my experiences are to support them in an equitable way.

Karen openly shared that her experiences with African Americans before becoming a teacher were nonexistent. During these sessions she openly discussed how the lack of personal experiences with students of color resulted in biases that she never had to face before working with students from diverse backgrounds. This transparency was a pivotal breakthrough in our discussions and resulted in a stream of consciousness where others joined in and openly shared their views on teacher bias in the classroom freely. Helen would raise questions on what specific courses of actions teachers can take when becoming cognizant of the impact of race and racism in schools:

**Helen:** Do you think it just comes to mine? Like what can I do for the students? What can I do today to make things more equitable?
In the absence of a uniform training from schools some of the teachers contend that it becomes a matter of personal responsibility to become both culturally aware practitioners and anti-racist educators (Kendi, 2019):

Elizabeth: For me personally, I go back to educating myself, providing myself more experiences. I’m more understanding, so that then I have something of an experience to fall back on.

Helen: You brought up a good point, like we’re in a position to do something wonderful. We can use our privilege for African American students, to you know, understand immerse ourselves in that culture so that you can better work with those students. We do this for other cultures, it really needs to be the same for all cultures, including African Americans.

Helen’s reflection is a display of the influence that guided workshops can produce when examining institutional practices, but also reveals the need for further organized professional development opportunities on culturally responsive teaching. Elizabeth would discuss a section of the book that resonated with her as it pertains to how she has previously labeled schools from a racialized connotation:

Elizabeth: One of the things in chapter three I wanted to go back and reflect on is the idea of good and bad schools, she talks a lot about segregation in schools. I bring that up because my daughter attended what would be deemed as good schools. Why would I let my daughter go to a school that I heard was a bad school? She goes to a school and gotten a great education. There’s nothing that haven’t offered her. Does that make sense? It’s a real frustration point for me.
Of all the educators who participated in this study, Kathleen was the only teacher that previously worked in a district that was primarily of African American students. She discussed her experiences as an educator in an urban district and why she selected to educate her own child in the district which she worked:

Kathleen: I experienced that when my son was younger because I lived near Detroit when he first started going to school and then due to separation we moved to the suburbs. And so, I wanted to keep him in his school and plus it was a school I worked at. And so, I had teachers, colleagues of mine that would be like, well, you live in the suburbs and you’re still bring your son here? And I was like, I have faith in you guys as teachers and the job that you’re doing. And even though I knew they were phenomenal teachers; they just still questioned the environment. And I was just like, you know, I faced that for years.

Helen expressed her disagreement with Kathleen’s decision validating what Delpit (2006) posits in her book, *Other People’s Children* that educators from privileged backgrounds contribute to the struggles impacting impoverished communities through the acceptance and promotion of racist beliefs regarding schools situated in urban centers:

Helen: I think that’s probably one of the hardest things I’ve fought against because quite frankly, you know, I’m just going to be blunt. I would have not allowed my daughter to attend that school period. End of discussion. No way, not.

During the dialogue, the teachers spoke about the variance of perspectives in their comfort level as it pertains to openly addressing colleagues that articulate racist beliefs and comments. While some are increasing in their comfort level expressing confidence to directly address colleagues, others believe that advocacy alone will not change systemic practices. The
contradiction in personal stance was observed when Helen, who throughout several conversations spoke about the importance of equity, access, and inclusion, also spoke against having her own child attend a district in an urban community. On the contrary, Kathleen had a different experience as an educator based from her time in which she lived near an urban community, worked in an urban district, and raised a child that attended the school where she worked. Kathleen’s experience enabled her to have confidence in the education that was offered from the school that she taught, so much to the point that once she moved to a suburban community, she selected to keep that child in a school that many would consider to be a “bad school” based upon the surrounding community.

This conversation was an example of the stigmas that are associated with urban schools and urban kids. The dissenting views regarding Kathleen’s decision was not only expressed by Helen, but also amongst her former colleagues who questioned her decision. The relevance to the current study is based on the narrative of suburban schools being inherently superior to urban schools, regardless of how they impact the academic, socio-emotional, and identities of African American students.

Throughout the sessions, the teachers expressed the need for change in the way that school systems prepare to engage students of color and the lens in which they work to resolve the inequities that maintain predictable outcomes by teachers and students alike. Elizabeth’s comments encapsulate the prevailing sentiments from the summer book club:

**Elizabeth:** I want to bring up an analogy that I thought of when reading the book. Let’s say a new medicine came out, but it only worked for half the population. They wouldn’t keep it on the shelves, we would give it to out to everyone to make everyone better. You would change it if it’s not working for everyone. When we think about education and the
public-school system, as it is now it is not working for everyone. It has never worked for everyone in the history of our nation.

The context of Elizabeth’s comments expresses the sentiments that came through the sessions and connect with the need to examine how schools currently function and the ways they reproduce dominant narratives of privilege, class, and achievement. The circumstances that surrounded the summer sessions, relating to the pandemic and national outcries stemming from police violence, created a space and opportunity to examine the basis of a society in which racism remains a force that impacts the perceptions and actions of those who seek change.

Each of the summer’s activities relating to this study, the student focus groups, survey, and teacher book club, helped to document the implications of social factors on identity development amongst students and teachers and display the need to have intentional opportunities to examine its impact to be cognizant of it and present enough to move towards a different path. The following section will highlight the emergent themes that came from these sessions.

**Recognizing Student Potential**

The teachers in the study shared their perspectives on the students they have worked with that were based upon their limited experiences of working with students of color. Most grew up in suburban, rural, and international regions that limited their exposure to racially diverse communities. Some even expressed not experiencing racially diverse communities until they entered college or the professional teaching ranks. As such, the backgrounds of the teachers in this study validate the national statistics that reflect an overwhelming population of White female educators. As previously referenced, 76% of teachers in America are comprised of White females with an average age of 43 (Albert Shanker Institute, 2014); and although schools are
increasingly becoming more diverse, America’s cities continue to be segregated based upon race and wealth making it increasingly unlikely that White female educators have daily interactions with African Americans outside of their school experience (Moore, Michael, & Penick-Parks, 2018). The researcher is not suggesting that White teachers are not capable of making connections with African American students or for that matter that African American educators successfully make connections with these students because of their shared racial backgrounds, but the importance of all educators to see the potential for excellence or what Whiting (2006) refers to as the scholar identity in these youth is needed to elevate the skills, gifts, and talents that African American students possess (Ford, 1998). The teachers spoke about the constraints they feel as educators and the inherent challenges to alter a structure that pervasively disadvantages African American students. Karen expressed the following:

**Karen:** It [the book] really made me think, it’s hard for me because I care so much for kids. When it comes to kids or people who are disparaged or the underdog and things like that happen, it’s really hard not to cry. It’s not just an emotional response, but a deep sadness. You know that these things are happening to people, but that it’s allowed to happen is so difficult to deal with. I don’t know, I don’t understand. So, I’m grappling with some of this.

Although the empathy shared here is a moving tribute to personal conviction, tears alone will not alter the conditions of schools or the educational plight of African American students who are victimized by low expectations and curriculum that disadvantages these students. The students expressed their own discontent towards simple gestures of kindness in favor of more pragmatic supports to dismantle the biases and stereotypes that are a part of schools. Raymond expressed the following towards these gestures:
Raymond: I see what they may consider to be care and compassion a lot of times, but it’s more like coddling and enabling certain behaviors and not pushing for excellence. When you think of programs, like robotics, when you think of science Olympiad, when you think of all these organizations and programs, African American students aren’t being pushed to participate in those programs.

This student sees the need to change the mindset of teachers that promote low expectations (Dweck, 2006). During the study several students shared past experiences with school that made them feel like they were “less capable” than other students at their school. Such a sentiment was shared by Nathaniel:

Nathaniel: I do feel like teachers expect less from black men, simply because of stereotypes, especially from where I come from. Because most people don’t talk to people, they don’t communicate with people, they don’t know where you come from. So, the expectation is if you do well you get praise. But if you don’t do well, it’s kind of like they expected it anyway.

To offset what researchers have labeled as cultural mismatches (Landsman, 2018) between African American students and educators from different ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic positions, educators must identify factors that contribute to deficit narratives. By understanding the internal thoughts that direct teacher actions, those who seek change can begin to prepare teachers to address their internal compasses and chart a different course that is based on developing an achievement paradigm within schools that develops the skills needed to access curriculum at high levels. Teachers must understand that African American students are not a monolith and come to them seeking engagement and connection. African American students are diverse in their interests, skills, and backgrounds, deserving of a schooling experience that
challenges them to achieve excellence for themselves and to dismantle the deficit narrative that is surrounding these students.

Taking time to learn about the needs and backgrounds of students is an essential step in the process of cultivating relationships with students that is not based solely upon the curriculum alone, but on the life that is being nourished. Students with their unique experiences require equally unique approaches towards their learning. Some scholars have provided solutions to the challenges that face African American students, several of which were referenced in this research. These solutions range from an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching to all male academies, however, as referenced by Tatum (2006), the significance of literary text in which students see themselves as essential characters in the global story that is discussed throughout the curriculum and not solely during Black History Month is critically important towards developing inclusive and equitable learning spaces. This is imperative towards making learning relevant to students, which connects to the second theme in my analysis. Brenda shared the importance of passing down lessons to her daughter on the importance of culture based on the teachings she received from her father. She now uses this approach to create a culture in her classroom that is reflective of all the cultures of her students. As she recalled the lessons from her father, the message that reverberated was “we have some unique.” She now shares these messages in her communication with her daughter and draws upon this philosophy to build cultural awareness into her lesson planning and preparation to build on the uniqueness of her students. This level of self-awareness is key if we are to set aside deficit perspectives and replace them with asset narratives.
Remembering and Preserving the “Good Old Days”

Throughout the teacher interviews a phrase was used by several of the participants referring to a time that was often used by colleagues and shared with new teachers as they entered the district. “The good old days” was used as a term of endearment referring to a time where teachers believed that they had greater autonomy over their days and a reverence for the latitude that was bestowed upon teachers during a period that was not so driven by high stakes exams. Kathleen, the most senior educator of the group, also referenced a time in her career where female educators had limitations on what positions they were able to hold in education:

I remember going to college in the eighties and telling people my goal is to become a principal, maybe superintendent, and people were like really? I honestly didn’t see that many women principals until I got to Michigan.

Prior to coming to Michigan, Kathleen grew up in a rural region of the country before moving to Michigan to attend college. She also spoke of a pivotal shift during the early stages of her career:

Kathleen: I think that when affirmative action did come into place, I think that there were a lot of discrepancies about how, or just about how women were so disadvantaged in general. And so, then I think that it also became a vehicle to support more women. But then unfortunately, it became about women. That was easier for White society to accept a woman as a CEO status, but a Black man or Black woman.

Kathleen’s comments provide context to tenets of critical race theory how interest convergence suggests how African Americans only receive benefits in society that ultimately benefit White interests. She would go on to state,

Kathleen: This provided a platform for the women’s lib movement to really take hold.

So, you got a chance to see more white women become elevated even though women still
make way less than white men do. It became an avenue for us to be able to step up, you know. I’ve seen it even in the school systems, if you look at our teaching force and the gender within say, the elementary schools, teachers are like 95% women.

Kathleen would go on to discuss the changing demographics that she has experienced in career that span nearly three decades in education. She stated:

**Kathleen:** The one thing that I’ve seen changed over the years has been the diversity of our principals and students. We’re seeing a lot more African American male principals than we’ve ever had before for sure.

The teachers would suggest that the rise in African American school leaders is directly attributed to the rise in the same demographic of students in the district. The district data as reported in mischooldata.com lists the African American population at 26%. Despite the growth in ethnic minorities including Asian students, the teaching ranks continue to reflect most educators that are White women. Since this is the case, work must be done to increase the recognition of White privilege, the use of culturally relevant curricula and practices, and the authentic embrace of relationships through the creation of student and teacher relationships.

**Conclusion**

The results of the participant data were used to identify the major themes presented in this chapter to address the research questions that were presented Chapter 1. The four themes that surfaced from the focus groups and the book club with the teachers provided context for the analysis of the data. The narrative of equality amongst students is often promoted in schools to explain away the presence of racism that affords Euro-White American students with privileges that are sustained by institutional practices in schools daily. The Western ideals of hard work and determinism add to stereotypes that shape White racial identity as the basis for social normative
behavior and associate being an African American with inferiority, fueling the racial hierarchy that is the basis of America and reflective in schools. The lack of acknowledging the history of privileges that are afforded to people of White-European ancestry sustains the inequities in society that are covered up by standardized test scores, school tracking, curriculum that lacks cultural depth, and systems that continue to marginalize youth of color into the fringes of achievement and ultimately societal opportunities.

The obstacles that hinder African American students does not hinge on their socio-economic status, or the composition of their families, as research has proven that African American students who come from two-parent, middle class households continue to be outperformed in comparison to their White and Asian counterparts. The challenge then becomes to understand why this happens and what can be done to resolve these inequities within the institution of school itself. The focus must shift towards not eliminating the achievement gap in schools, but in creating spaces where African American students are not compared to other groups, but instead a focus on guiding these students towards actualizing the potential that lies within each child regardless of race. Delpit (2012) stated that there is no achievement gap at birth, however, the various levels of capital (i.e., social, economic, political, racial) creates systems that either advantage or disadvantage students based on factors that are not associated with skills or abilities.

One such factor contributing to the experience of African American children is the ability of teachers to form meaningful relationships with them and to connect learning to concepts and curriculum that is both relevant to students from diverse experiences which connect to their current realities in a society that is impacted by race, while simultaneously denying the significance of its influence. Thus, authentically relevant teaching must begin with “seeing”
these students and debunking the notion of colorblindness. Although race is a social construct that has been created to classify people, it is the characteristic that our society has bought into, and until we can truly see the potential in all students and support teachers in their learning of factors that impact the schooling experiences of these youth, we will continue to perpetuate a cycle that reproduces racial hierarchies in this society. I will consider conclusions, recommendations, and implications for practice and further research in my closing chapter.
Chapter 5: Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of school-based factors on Black boys’ learning experiences and relationships in suburban school communities. Through my discussions with the participant groups, it became apparent that Black boys are so much more than achievement data that often characterizes them negatively. Their willingness to engage in endearing conversations to share their feelings, beliefs, and concerns typify a resilience (Werner, 1995; Goldstein & Brooks, 2013) in Black boys that cannot be measured in statistical achievements. The narratives provided an opportunity to hear the voices, stories, and perspectives of Black boys and White women—two groups with obvious surface differences, but a human connection felt through the discussion. Those connections served as a common thread that bound this research together. Those narratives were used to establish recommendations for creating learning communities where Black boys can excel in school and thereafter.

As noted in the literature review and the testimonies of the Black boys who participated in this study, schools disproportionately disadvantage Black boys based upon preconceptions that either produce or reinforce lower academic performance. Empirical studies of teacher expectations and student behaviors and academic development. As such, when Black boys leave their homes, they enter spaces constituted by individuals who do not match their gender or racial/ethnic and class identities. This becomes problematic to the degree that teachers have not evaluated their class-based assumptions and made appropriate changes to their practices, including the setting of student expectations. Based upon various categories of national school data, including graduation rates and school suspensions, the current climate and structure of schools does not work for Black boys, future supporting the recommendations made in this chapter.
While this research does not conclude that educators alone are the single factor impacting Black boys in America’s schools, the included narratives that include their school experiences provide insight about the aspects of current school culture that interfere with (and sometimes, rarely support) Black boys’ academic achievement in schools. I was able to identify strategies intended to connect educators and students in the development of meaningful relationships that can lead to practices in the classroom to curb the negative dynamics for Black boys’ in public schools. Furthermore, as schools are a microcosm of larger systemic inequities in society, they will continue to perpetuate narratives that justify a racial hierarchy in achievement until intentional strategies are used to interrupt the mechanism of school that predictably miseducates Black boys. From this point of view, the recommendations from this research have an added benefit of informing professional development opportunities for schools and broadening the scope of pre-service teacher preparatory programs by creating inclusive frameworks that are not only aware of the legacy of institutional racism, but prepared to engage in the work of developing practices and policies to address institutional racism that predictably impacts underserved communities. Thus, this research has led to recommendations for policy, teacher preparatory education, professional development, and practices to alter the predictable trajectory which impacts Black boys in schools. This chapter will discuss the limitations of the study, implications, and provide recommendations on policies needed to reimagine schools to meet the needs of Black boys.

Limitations

The opportunity to listen to the stories of the Black boys who participated in this study provided a glimpse into their lives and a starting point from which to further the work of developing learning spaces that meet the intellectual and social needs of Black boys.
Interviewing students from an affluent district, displayed that wealth is not a predictor for achievement in the case of marginalized youth and highlights how social challenges that are rooted in racial and economic hierarchies create opportunity gaps that sustain social and economic barriers for Black students (Gorski, 2008). As such, when Black boys attend schools in suburban areas, they are limited to certain aspects of the school that are stereotypically reserved for them, either intentionally in areas such as sports or structurally through systems such as tracking.

While the current research provided context to the impetus for the questions that led to this research, there were limitations derived from the study as well. One such limitation is my positionality as a Black man. I recognize how my past experiences have shaped my identities, and although careful consideration was taken in this research process, I understand how this may have shaped my understanding of the narratives shared by the student participants as well as the connections made with the student participants. The same factors that may have contributed to certain understanding and connections with the student participants, may have also led to possible barriers when interviewing the White female educators. Another limitation was the number of teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. Although the ten teachers who volunteered to participate in this study were presumably aware of the role that race and racism has in society based upon their willingness to participate in the study, it cannot be presumed that they are cognizant of how these factors inform their practices as teachers or if awareness can lead to a change of behavior. As such, a larger sample size of educators from multiple school districts from various economic and regional areas may lead to a broader understanding of the impact that White racial identity has on the experiences of Black American students. A fourth implication was the introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic during the study, which changed the avenues
from which I could meet with potential participants. The pandemic necessitated the use of the online platform Zoom to meet with students in groups, interview individual students, and conduct the book club for the educators. Finally, while this research study is replicable the findings may not be generalizable given the participant size.

Implications

The research from this study has numerous implications on the field of education and on public policy matters affecting the lives of Black Americans. By adding to the body of research on the schooling experiences of Black boys, this study adds a particular dimension due to its focus on the experiences of Black boys from suburban communities who attend predominantly White high schools. The findings of this dissertation demonstrate a need to construct pedagogical and curricula methods that will attend to the needs of Black boys. Specifically, it demonstrates that culturally relevant practices are necessary to foster academic achievement and positive social development of Black boys. Employing such theories and practices will allow Black boys to see themselves in the curricula used. Likewise, this research demonstrates the importance of authentic and compassionate relationships between Black boys and those responsible for educating them. This research indicates the need for the development of professional development opportunities grounded in anti-deficit and anti-racist theories and practices. The findings of this study also indicate that although Black boys in suburban schools are privy to resources usually designated for affluent community members, they continue to be marginalized by myriad practices such as tracking that aid in preserving inequitable hierarchies.

Recommendations

The data from this research enabled me to identify recommendations that will be utilized to not only structure schools differently, but serve as a resource to develop more inclusive school
cultures, curriculum, diverse pedagogical approaches, and overall public policies. This study sought to address the environmental challenges that contribute to how Black boys actualize their identities and opportunities in schools, but also addressed the systemic inequalities that are normalized in society through the weaponization of Black skin. A result of this culture has made it routine for institutional structures to fail to educate Black boys. The findings from this research point to a need for a reconciliation within ourselves and with Black boys to first acknowledge a culture that routinely abuses their bodies and minds, then to move towards policy development that dismantles structures that permit the use of tracking, inequitable funding systems, disproportionate disciplinary practices, and the suppression of black intellect routinely justified through abject poverty, criminalization, and ill-equipped educational systems. These steps will prepare participants to identify their internalized beliefs about Black boys, white privilege, and schools to develop the consciousness needed to be grounded in both reconciliation and restoration of schools to support the diverse needs of learners. However, awareness is not enough. These recommendations are intended to provide strategies that can be implemented, assessed, and retooled to implement an anti-racist and anti-deficit framework.

Through this study, I was able to work with the participants to engage each in authentic discussions on race, racism, and classism, to develop an awareness of how these factors contribute to the experiences of Black boys and educators in suburban schools. These recommendations serve as a baseline towards examining how schools socialize the behaviors and identities of Black boys in racially diverse communities, but more importantly, provide strategies that can be implemented to support classroom practices and develop school cultures that examine how we bring our identities with us into the classroom and the impact which it has on shaping the experiences of staff and students alike. Although it is important to analyze how racism
continues to rear itself in various aspects of society, it is more important that this research leads to policies and structures that can be implemented to dismantle the structures that I have discussed. Further research will be conducted to examine the effectiveness that these recommendations have on teacher practices and school cultures. To support this work the following section will outline the recommendations for working within this system to create change. Said change will not be quick, but will, instead, take time to transform an educational culture constructed to privilege certain groups over others. These recommendations will necessitate shifting the power structure that currently exists in educational institutions. These recommendations were constructed with a new theoretical approach at its center. This approach is what I am calling Anti-deficit Social and Cultural Engagement Theory (see Figure 3), which was explained in more detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Employing this theory as part of the recommendations will heighten the academic, academic, and cultural support of Black boys.

**Figure 3**

*Anti-Deficit Social and Cultural Engagement Theory*
The Anti-Deficit Social and Cultural Engagement Theory can inform how Black boys are supported by teachers, districts, and the community. Likewise, it should inform how future teachers are educated and the practices of current teachers. Finally, this theory can assist in promoting equity among the practices of academic leadership and school districts. Figure 4 depicts how the recommendations and is followed by a detailed explanation of those recommendations.

**Figure 4**

*Recommendations for Students, Teachers, Administrators, and Districts*

![Recommendations Chart]

---

**Community and Culturally Relevant Schooling**

Today, the comprehensive school model continues to be a sought-after model of educating students in districts across the nation and despite growing criticisms (Campbell & Sherington, 2004) and the changing needs of students, families, and communities, the framework of these schools has “maintained traditions that have outlived their purpose” (Noguera, 2007, p. 205). In the district where the study took place, this suburban community has two comprehensive high schools with a combined population of approximately 3,200 hundred
students. As reported in MiSchoolData.org (2020), the district graduated 96.56% of its high school students during the 2018–2019 school year and 97.27% in 2017 – 2018, which exceeds the state average by nearly 16%. However, the proficiency rate as measured by state assessments provide evidence of the disparity in achievement these students experience. In 2017, as measured on the NWEA test, which is given to measure proficiency and growth in mathematics and reading, 39.9% of African American students reached proficiency in comparison to 63.2% of White students and 64.6% of Asian students. More than comprehensive schooling, African American students can benefit from attending school models where the curriculum is taught by culturally competent educators using culturally relevant pedagogy to prepare them to develop the critical skills needed to be competitive in a changing society.

Ladson-Billings (1995) posits that culturally relevant pedagogy must focus on providing students with the opportunity to “experience success,” be grounded in an understanding of the cultural identities of the students, and focus on develop critical thinking skills needed to examine and dismantle the systemic practices that maintain oppressive structures. Culturally relevant teaching is an approach to teaching the celebrates the unique backgrounds that students possess coming from their ethnic communities and elevates their experiences through a lens that projects the assets of that community. Models such as this are not germane towards meeting the needs of African American students and have been developed and replicated within the Asian communities (Chong et al., 2010) and Hebrew schools (Afana et al., 2013). The reconstruction of schools to promote cultural identities of their students challenges the stereotypes and biases of educators by preparing them to be culturally competent advocates for African American students. Communities, schools, and businesses benefit when all its citizens are prepared to be vital members of society, but most of all, students benefit. We must be willing to engage our
schools in a radical approach to impact the African American male identity. Schools cannot do this alone. Community education programs must engage parents to have the skills to navigate educational institutions in schools and beyond. We must not only meet the needs of parents educationally, but also meet the needs of family health. Public health and medicine have historically reflected the racial inequities of American society as manifested in discrimination in medical care (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). Health and education must partner with businesses to prepare the black male to view himself as a potential scholar that has merit in our schools. The reconstruction of the scholar identity of the Black male as described by Whiting (2006):

This begins with a proposition guiding this model: (a) Black males are more likely to achieve academically when they have a scholar identity; (b) Black males are more likely to be viewed by educators and families as gifted or highly capable if they achieve at higher levels; (c) we cannot close the achievement gap or place Black males at promise for achievement unless we focus on their academic identities; and (d) the earlier we focus on the scholar identities of such males, the more likely we are to develop a future generation of Black male scholars who are in a position to break the vicious cycle of underachievement.

When our systems embrace change our students will be compelled to embrace a shift in their paradigm. The identity of the African American scholar will create an expectation of success in our schools that will withstand social inequities and redefine school cultures.

**Develop Free and Possibly Required Summer Learning and After-School Programs**

The so-called achievement gap cannot conceivably be closed within the current structure of schools. To do so would require that Black students exponentially increase their level of learning while other groups, notably White and Asian students, slow the pace of their learning in
To support the academic achievement and proficiency of Black students’ schools should consider developing summer and after school enrichment programs to exclusively address the apparent gaps in student achievement. Woodland (2014) contends that after-school programs encourage resilience for Black boys when they return to traditional forms of schooling by focusing on essential academic areas such as literacy and mathematics from a perspective that is relevant to the individual student. For after-school programs to exist and for traditional forms of education to improve, equitable funding must be in place.

**Evidence Based Practices and Assessments**

The professional development of teachers must be intentional in the efforts to be inclusive of the specific needs of Black boys to understand their cultures, background, and language to bridge the gap between teachers who statistically are more likely to come from racial and economic communities that do not mirror those of the students they are charged with teaching. School districts should consider various professional developments that are focused on cultural competency training for educators and develop assessment measures that are inclusive of the diverse learning styles. Additionally, teachers should be trained to employ assessment measures that are not solely based on traditional paper-pencil practices such as project-based assessments along with both oral and digital presentations.

**Funding to Ensure the Best Teachers Teach the Neediest Students**

Districts should be encouraged to assign their most effective and experienced teachers to the students that are often within the structure of school districts. The segregation within schools is preserved by internal decisions that are supported by practices where the most effective educators teach in courses where Black students are not widely present such as advanced placement, honors, and gifted and talented programs (Ford, 1998). To support this shift in
staffing, state and federal funding of schools should be tied to staffing classrooms that are most likely composed of students from historically underserved and underrepresented communities. Precedence for such practices is currently in place for districts with students from high poverty backgrounds or in the case of students with specific learning disabilities. As part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title I funds are provided to schools with high numbers of students from economically disadvantaged households. These funds must be directly used to support educational practices to support the learning of students which may include specific training for teachers and programming designed exclusively for families experiencing poverty. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides federal funding for students with disabilities and requires that school districts allocate those funds to staffing and support services for students with disabilities and requires specific reporting requirements on an annual basis to ensure their growth and development. There are additional mechanisms of support that should be implemented.

**Socioemotional Supports**

Educators that work to support Black boys should be aware of the risk factors associated with being a Black boy and be trained to support these students throughout their schooling experiences. Educators should be trained to recognize the unique needs for Black boys as it pertains to their safety, well-being, and work to cultivate safe spaces for them to actualize their identities. Districts should engage in research-based training that has been used to support students through adversities such as trauma-informed school training which focuses on understanding how adverse experiences impact student learning and behaviors (Cole et al., 2013). Trauma-informed schools equip staff with both the awareness and strategies to develop structures that respond to the needs of students in trauma with a specific focus on not re-
traumatizing students through their policies and practices. Utilizing psychometric training to support students can also positively impact school culture by placing the emotional well-being of students at the center of how they assess their effectiveness.

Despite tremendous efforts made by educators to earnestly prepare future generations, schools as they are currently constructed fail to meet the needs of all kids. To change the trajectory of schools, we must consider a fundamental question on the purpose of schools, which ultimately will inform how we develop strategies and structures to address inconsistencies that threaten the future of so many Black and underserved youth. We must examine the predictable outcomes of schools based upon race, gender, and socio-economic status and consider the role that schools have in preserving cultures that allow predictable outcomes to persist? One must ask, are schools really broken or are they doing what they are intended to do? Although the latter may be a difficult idea to embrace, it is not a far stretch from what many educational researchers and philosophers have expressed regarding the oppressive nature of schools and the methods they use to sustain marginalized groups and economically stratified communities (Bourdieu, 1977; Fanon, 1952; Freire, 2006). One does not have to look far to find evidence to justify either claim; however, if schools are to alter their current state, we cannot use the same thinking or structures that have created the problem. To do so we must reconsider how schools look, how teachers teach, and how we connect what students are asked to learn with what they already know and what they desire to become. These recommendations are intended to provoke the thinking needed to create the change our students, particularly Black boys deserve.

**Early Literacy Intervention**

Research supports the benefits of early intervention and early childhood education programs to support the academic development of students from racially marginalized and
economically disadvantaged communities (Heckman et al., 2009; Schweinhart, 2003). Specifically, Black students are being failed by the inequities that pervade American schools (Darling-Hammond, 2007). The problem worsens when we look at the literacy of Black boys in comparison to their White counterparts (Kunjufu, 2011). Black boys should be provided with opportunities to enroll in free pre-kindergarten programs and schools that are committed to exposing students to literacy tools that are culturally relevant and inclusive. Early literacy programs have been proven to positively impact economically disadvantaged communities resulting in higher academic achievement leading to greater economic and long-term occupational opportunities (Schweinhart, 2003). Rasheed (2019) discusses benefit literacy efforts that are inclusive of Black studies. The combination is necessary to increase literacy as well as an understanding of Black experiences—theirs and others. Early literacy interventions create opportunities for academic achievement early in the life of boys, which can continue to be supported using mentoring relationships as they grow older.

**Mentoring Support in Middle School and High School**

Schools should develop partnerships with community-based organizations that are designed to support the academic achievement and social development of Black boys through relationship development. Programs such as the My Brother’s Keeper, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, The Dream Kings, and fraternal organizations such as Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. provide mentoring opportunities for students through activities that focus on leadership training, decision making, study skills, job shadowing. Such activities provide Black boys with access to individuals in the community who can protect against some of the challenges that impact Black boys during their formative years.
Progressive K-12 Schools for Black Boy Achievement

Throughout this research many of the boys discussed the kinship they had with peers with whom they participated in sports with or whom they had similarities. A growing trend in urban centers across the country is in single-sex schools. In cities like Detroit, Chicago, and Atlanta, single-sex schools and academies are becoming a popular choice for parents and students who are seeking an alternative path from the current structure of schools. Some point to how these schools place emphasis on scholarship, togetherness, and service to humanity, as to what draws youth to these types of schools. For many of these schools that are in districts that service either economically disadvantaged youth or those from underserved minority communities. Critics suggest that the separation of students by gender is not the source of success for these schools, but that their success lies in the ability to develop relationships, their program methodology, curriculum, and focus on supporting student voice and choice in their learning (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005).

Despite the challenges that Black boys face in traditional schools we can find hope and guidance from models that have been able to meet the needs of Black boys from a cultural, academic, and social perspective. Further research on identifying what these schools are doing successfully can serve beneficial for Black boys and educators who are committed to eliminating systemic inequities in education. Schools such as Urban Prep in Chicago, an all-male academy for Black boys has garnered attention for its successful graduation rate of 100% for its senior classes for eleven consecutive years, of which every graduate were accepted into a four-year college or university as reported on the Illinois site for state board of education (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015). Another heralded program from Chicago is Butler College Prep which graduated 100% of its students in 2017 of which the average ACT score for the graduates
was 19.5, outperforming the national average of 17 for Black boys. Both schools are in and servicing students from low-income families. At the postsecondary level Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA, has served as a model of excellence for schools serving the needs of Black boys like with notable graduates of the like of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Maynard Jackson---the first African American mayor of the city of Atlanta, acclaimed actor Samuel Jackson, and Oscar-winning film director and writer Spike Lee.

To implement these schools nationwide in both urban and suburban districts, equitable resources including academic classes, sports, clubs, and services must be consistent with what is allocated to a traditional school. Consideration must also be directed towards presenting these schools as assets to address the myriad of challenges that students face due to the racist practices that are interwoven into traditional learning environments. All-boy schools can be structured to support social emotional growth centered on identity and provide opportunities for boys to develop coping mechanisms needed to grow into healthy adults. Furthermore, these schools should provide counseling services that teach students how to work through trauma and conditions that are induced through societies built upon racist practices to help boys to make sense of the day-to-day experiences of being a Black boy.

**Recommendations for Administrators and School Districts**

Conducting research studies on the experiences of Black boys and the practices that work to hinder or support them is important, but what is more important is used this research to create equitable cultures of schooling. This requires districts, administrators, teachers, and other school staff to commit to putting in the work necessary to become more culturally understanding, to acknowledge the intellectual capabilities of all students instead of a few, challenging Black boys
to perform to the best of their abilities, and create opportunities to foster a more diverse and inclusive work-force.

**Equity-Based Training**

In order to address the systemic challenges that impact the lives of underserved communities, educators must direct intentional efforts towards providing these youth with access to educators that are trained with the knowledge, perspective, and consciousness needed to provide students. This should take place within teacher preparation programs as well as professional development opportunities for practicing teachers. Such learning creates opportunities to close the barriers that are sustained by traditional methods of teaching and learning. Educators must be trained to recognize Black boys as assets and develop pedagogies that empower students to use their voices, skills, and interests in the classroom (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). To prepare educators to do so, K-12 schools and universities must engage pre-service teachers and current educators in equity-based training opportunities that utilize culturally responsive approaches to teaching. This requires the commitment from school districts, administrators, and teachers to seek out professional development opportunities to develop the skills and capacity needed to learn more about students, their backgrounds, and learning styles to develop effective strategies for diverse learners.

This type of training would employ a variety of practices to increase cultural competency. Educators and researchers, Sprott et al. (2020) outline the areas that should be covered in trainings and teacher-education that will transform the experiences of Black students in a positive manner. The topics include the inclusion of activities and practices that will encourage educator self-awareness (inclusive of an understanding of how teachers and administrators have hindered the lives of Black children), the development of pedagogical techniques that are based
in an understanding of the intersectional cultural backgrounds of students, the recognition and promotion of the intellectual potential of all students, the practice of creating curricula that is infused with cross-cultural knowledge, and activities that teach future and current educators how to demonstrate an authentic valuing of diversity and inclusion. When recognizing and working with Black boys in suburban schools, this means that all the techniques that were suggested for training be focused on the intersecting nature of race, gender, age, and place. Doing so will ensure that Black boys are supported enough to achieve academically and thrive socially.

**Equity-Based Hiring Practices**

Educational equity must be supported by policies that enable institutions to use the resources needed to develop practices to provide all kids with access to opportunities to meet their individual needs. Equity should not be confused with equal. An equity focus may require the reallocation of funds to support certain initiatives or in the hiring of staff members to provide a meaningful representation of teachers and administrators that reflect the demographics of the community. Carver-Thomas (2018) conducted a national report on the experiences of and necessity for increasing teacher diversity. There were various reasons why teachers of color are a necessary resource for students. Teachers of color increase the academic efficacy and performance of students of color (Carver-Thomas, 2018). In addition, hiring teachers of color fosters social-emotional benefits that stem from the relationship that develops between teachers and their students (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Finally, hiring teachers of color increases students, of color and White, feelings of belongingness as they believe they are cared for and challenged intellectually (Carver-Thomas, 2018). For other teachers, hiring teachers of color increases belongingness for other teachers, and increases teacher satisfaction, which decreases teacher turnover.
Likewise, there should be an increase in the hiring of administrators of color, which will increase academic efficacy for students, and belongingness for students and teachers. Employing practices within curricula and student-teacher interactions along with hiring diverse teachers will begin to create an equitable culture in school. Doing so begins to address the systemic challenges that have resulted in the so-called “achievement gap”, by directly undoing practices that have historically excluded underserved students.

**Conclusion**

Unlike any time in recent history, America’s treatment of Black boys has garnered critical attention as youth in school continue to be routinely marginalized by racist structures that normalize school failures based on inequitable practices that push Black boys out of school at an alarming rate. It is of the utmost importance that educators, particularly White women, seek to understand the needs of Black boys, not from the standpoint of being a savior, but to understand the multitude of factors that contribute to how students form identity and seek to understand how this shows up in their classrooms.

This research provided an opportunity to learn from these boys during a critical time in their lives and in the lives of Americans and people across the world. Coming together during a pandemic provided certain challenges, but also allowed for people to slow down and reflect on the importance of public health and human connection. At the backdrop of the pandemic were national pleas for justice and equal treatment under the law. The pandemic has taught valuable lessons that can be adopted by schools. We have witnessed that when important enough our society can pivot and go in a different direction. The same commitment must be shown to protect Black boys from both the harsh consequences that occur daily on the streets of America and in the future from the slow demise from an ineffective education. With these structures in place, we
may begin to rewrite our narratives on Black boys and begin to see them as assets in our schools, in our communities, and for all of humanity.
References


Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The Qualitative Report, 19*(33), 1-9. [https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss33/3](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss33/3)


http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1584736,00.html


[On-line]. Available: https://research.amnh.org/users/tyson/speeches/PhDConvocation
Address.html.


(Original work published 1903).


https://doi.org/10.1057/97802301057744_3


Psychological Review, 1-22.


distribution of compensatory education services: An interim report from the national
of Education.


education of racial and ethnic minorities. National Center for

Education, 60(2), 128.

qualitative research. Princeton University.

Exploring tensions in school-based yPAR. American Journal of Community Psychology
47, 28-45.


New directions for psychology and education. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Krefting, L. (1990). Rigor in qualitative research: the assessment of trustworthiness. The
American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 45(3), 214-222.


Mischooldata.org (Home Page).

*Educational Horizons*, 140-146.


Monger, J. (Ed.). (2007). Texas” School to Prison Pipeline: Dropout to Incarceration, the impact of school discipline and zero tolerance (Texas Appleseed) Austin, TX.


U.S. Department of Education.


Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).


173


APPENDICES
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

Date: 4 – 11 – 2021

IRB #: UHSRC-FY19-20-307
Title: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS IN SUBURBAN SCHOOLS: AN EXAMINATION OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON IDENTITY, ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS
Creation Date: 5-3-2020
End Date: 
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Tyrone Weeks
Review Board: University Human Subjects Review Committee
Sponsor:

Study History
Submission Type Initial Review Type Expedited Decision Approved

Key Study Contacts

Member Christopher Robbins Role Co-Principal Investigator Contact crobbin2@emich.edu
Member Tyrone Weeks Role Principal Investigator Contact tweeks@emich.edu
Member Tyrone Weeks Role Primary Contact Contact tweeks@emich.edu
Appendix B: Consent Forms

Investigator’s Signature_____________________________________

Date___________________________

Eastern Michigan University College of Education
Department of Teacher Education – Educational Studies Doctoral Program

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Tyrone Weeks and I am a doctoral student at Eastern Michigan University. I am doing a study entitled African American Boys and the Schooling of Suburban Youth: An Examination of External Influences on Identity, Achievement and School Relationships. The purpose of this study is to explore the school experiences of African American male students attending suburban schools to determine what/if external influences impact their perceptions of school, achievement, and post-secondary opportunities following high school. It is important to discover why and how these students experience school to inform school improvement, curriculum and teaching practices to be inclusive of the needs of these students.

Your student is being considered to participate in this research study. If you give permission, and your child is selected, the student will participate in a focus group interview and three individual interviews. The focus group will be structured to allow the students to discuss experiences related to race, perceptions, achievement and relationships and how these influence who they are to date. The first interview will be an autobiographical interview which will allow the student the opportunity to deeply reflect on his past and increase self-awareness concerning who he is, how he perceives, reacts to, and interact with others. The second interview will consist of questions pertaining to the students’ current academic experiences in school. What are their current grades, academic interests, programs of study, etc. The third interview will focus on goal setting and visioning for the future. The researcher will explore where the students see themselves in their remaining time in high school and in their adult lives.

Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. The risks from participating in this study are no more than would be encountered in everyday life; however, your child will be informed that he may stop participating at any time without any penalty. Your child may choose to not answer any question(s) he does not wish to for any reason. Your child may refuse to participate even if you agree to his participation.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the child, a name selected by the child other than the birth name and not the child’s name will appear on all of the information recorded during the interviews. All information pertaining to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in an
office at Farmington High School. No one at your child’s school will see the information recorded about your child.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study at any time, please feel free to contact Dr. Chris Robbins, advisor, at (734) 487-2776 or at crobbin2@emich.edu and Dr. Aaron Johnson, at amdj9265@gmail.com.

If you are giving permission for your child to participate in this research project, please check accordingly and sign the form below.

________Yes, I give my son permission to participate in the above study.

________No, I do not give my son permission to participate in the above study.

Investigator’s Signature__________________________________________

Child’s Name____________________________________________________

Parent or Guardian’s Signature____________________________________

Date_________________________________________
Appendix C: Minor’s Assent Form

Eastern Michigan University College of Education

Department of Teacher Education – Educational Studies Doctoral Program

Hello,

My name is Tyrone Weeks and I am a doctoral student at Eastern Michigan University. I am doing a study entitled African American Boys and the Schooling of Suburban Youth: An Examination of External Influences on Identity, Achievement and School Relationships.

You are being asked to participate in a research project that will help me learn about the external factors that influence the experiences of African American male students who attend suburban schools. During the focus groups the researcher will ask the group to respond to a list of prepared questions. During the first individual meeting, I will ask questions that will allow you an opportunity to deeply reflect on your past that will increase your self-awareness. The second interview will consist of questions pertaining to the students’ current academic experiences in school. What are their current grades, academic interests, programs of study, etc. The third interview will focus on goal setting and visioning for the future. The researcher will explore where the students see themselves in their remaining time in high school and in their adult lives.

You do not have to participate on this project. If you choose to you can stop participating whenever you want to. If you do not want to answer some of the questions, it is ok. You can refuse to participate even if your parents have said yes.

Your name will not appear on any of these documents. I will ask you to select a name different than your birth name. You can select any name that you are comfortable using. None of the teachers or other staff at your school will see the answers to the questions that I ask you. All of the answers that you give me will be kept in a locked cabinet in a room at Farmington High School. Only I and/or other people helping me will be able to know which answers are yours.

If you or your parent(s)/guardian(s) have any questions or concerns regarding this study at any time, please feel free to contact Dr. Chris Robbins, advisor, at (734) 487-2776 or at crobin2@emich.edu and Dr. Aaron Johnson, at amdj9265@gmail.com.

If you understand the information above and want to help in the research project, please sign your name on the line below:

___________Yes, I want to help in this project.

___________No, I do not want to help in this project.

Child’s Name________________________________________
Appendix D: Email Invite to Parents

Dear parent(s)/guardian(s),

My name is Tyrone Weeks, and I am a Ph.D. student in the College of Education at Eastern Michigan University.

My research interests are focused on examining the factors that influence how African American males experience life as students attending suburban schools. After discussions with your school’s administration and Dr. Jay Marks, Diversity and Equity Consultant Oakland Schools, your child has been identified as a student attending two summer learning institutes designed to support student voice, identity and achievement. You are receiving this communication as a result of your students’ participation during these retreats/summit. I would like to gain your support by allowing your child to participate in research study on African American males who attend suburban schools.

Should you agree to have your child participate, his commitment in this study will consist of two 45-60 minute individual interviews, one 50-60 minute focus group, and a brief survey. A component of this study will include a document and record analysis. Thus, I am also requesting permission to review each participants school transcripts and test scores.

Further, all participants attending the retreats will do so free of cost; those that participate in the individual interviews will receive a $50.00 gift card immediately after completion of the final interview. If you are willing to allow your child to participate, I will schedule the first individual interview following the retreat.

Thank you for your willingness to consider assisting me in my dissertation. I look forward to the opportunity to meet you soon.

Sincerely,

Tyrone Weeks  
Doctoral Candidate  
College of Education  
Eastern Michigan University
Appendix E: Protocol for Conducting Focus Groups

Summarize the purpose of the focus group with African American males who attend suburban school communities. The objective is to build understanding of the kinds of experiences that Black boys perceive as important to their success in high school, as well as the kinds of challenges they face. What we learn can be very helpful as we work to serve African American boys more effectively.

**Outcomes for the Focus Group Discussion:**

1. To better understand the impact of the schooling experiences of African American boys and ascertain the students’ perspectives on what steps high schools can take to help students better prepare for academic success.
2. To understand how African American boy’s define their educational aspirations and determine how to pursue them.
3. To understand what experiences/events/relationships African American boys perceive as critical to their success in their community.
4. To understand the challenges that may be unique to students who are people of color may experience as students in predominantly White suburban schools, how they address those challenges, and how they perceive their school as helping or hindering their development.
5. To understand what factors might remove or ease potential barriers to student success.

**Focus Group Outline**

Each focus group will comprise the following activities:
- Meeting overview
- Consent forms
- Participant introductions
- Discussion
- Summary
- Thanks

Approximate total time 50 – 60 minutes

**Focus Group Prompts (Pre-Discussion)**

1. **Introduce facilitator:** Hello, my name is Tyrone Weeks. I am a doctoral student from Eastern Michigan University.

2. **Explain purpose of the focus group:** The objective is to better understand the kind of experiences that African American boys have in school, what do they perceive as keys to success, and as factors that hinder them, as students in suburban schools.

3. **Explain desired outcomes and how gathered information will be used:** The findings from the study will be used in a dissertation presented to Eastern Michigan University. The students’ voices will be used to inform and prepare educators on best practices to prepare Black boys for high school success.
4. **Explain consent form and request signatures:** Because this session will be recorded (audio/video), the researcher is required to asked that participants in the focus group conversation sign a form that stipulates your consent.

5. **Audio taping/videotaping/note-taking:**  
   a. Video and audio recording is for the purposes of gathering information to inform educators on practices to support African American males, any footage obtained may be used in presentations at conferences and workshops.  
   b. No names will be used in the report or in the video.

6. **Describe the facilitator role:** My role as facilitator is to ask questions and keep track of your responses. As facilitator, I will use discussion prompts to guide the discussion and transitional statements to move our discussion along.

7. **Describe participants’ role:** Each participant is expected to do the following:  
   a. Share experiences and opinions, both positive or negative  
   b. Understand that there are no right or wrong answers  
   c. Respect the request that everyone is to participate in the discussion and fill out paperwork.

8. **Logistics**  
   a. 60-minute maximum  
   b. arrangements for restroom and water breaks

9. **Communication protocols:**  
   a. One person speaks at a time; no side conversations.  
   b. Monitor air-space – no one person dominates; every person has an opportunity to be heard and to share.  
   c. There are no right or wrong answers; the discussion is about your experiences in school and what we learn will help schools improve upon its work with students.

10. **Provide time for clarifying questions**

11. **Discussions**

12. **Surveys:** surveys will be administered at the conclusion of all focus groups and collected to be used in the researcher’s study.
Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction: Provide information on personal background and purpose of the study. Read consent form and gain permission to audio record interview.

**Interview One: Personal Background (45-60 minutes)**

1. Name and age (How were you named?)
2. Where were you born?
3. Is there any particular memory that you have about your life during your primary years?
4. Who lived in your house when you attended kindergarten?
5. How many siblings do you have?
6. How old are your siblings?
   a. Describe the relationship that you have with your siblings.
   b. Can you share with me a story or experience that best describes your family.
7. Is there a particular aunt, uncle or cousin that you are close to?
8. Who do you spend most of your time with? (peer, adult)
9. Who lives in your house now?
10. Describe your experiences as a student before entering high school.
    a. What were the educational expectations placed on you?
    b. Describe yourself as a student before high school?
    c. Describe your most memorable experience in school to date?
    d. Describe your relationships with your teachers?
    e. With your classmates?
11. Happiest memory in your family during your Middle School years?
12. How would you describe your relationship with your parent(s)/guardian?
13. How would you describe your relationship with your father?
Appendix G: Semi-structured Follow-up Interview

Summarize the first interview and explain the purpose of the second interview, which is to concentrate on the concrete aspects of the students’ experiences in schools (i.e. grades, cumulative grade point average, course of study, clubs, activities, athletics, etc.). Read consent form and gain permission to audio record interview.

Interview Two: School Experience

1. Describe your current academic status in school?
   a. What is your current G.P.A.?
   b. What does your G.P.A. say about you?

2. Describe the process you use to prepare for school?
   a. What are your studying strategies?
   b. Is there a specific location and time that you study?
   c. How many hours do you spend studying daily? Weekly?
   d. Do you belong to a study group?
   e. What are the demographics of the study group? (race, gender)

3. How did people other than your immediate family members and friends talk to you about high school?
   a. Please provide an example

4. What type of student activities do you participate in?
   a. Sports
   b. Student organizations
   c. Volunteer groups

5. What is your favorite subject, teacher, why?

6. Do the adults in your school have high expectations for you?

7. Do you believe adults have the same expectations for all races, ethnicities, gender groups in your school?

8. Do you attend school regularly now? (why/why not?)

9. What type of courses are you enrolled in?
   a. College Classes
   b. College Prep Classes
   c. Advanced Placement
   d. Honors

10. What college do you plan on attending?
    a. What are the academic requirements for admission to your school of choice?
11. What are your career goals after high school?
   a. What type of classes do you need to take in high school to be prepared?
   b. What type of classes in college do you believe you need to take to be prepared for this career?

12. Do you have a mentor or big brother type of relationship with anyone?
   a. Is the mentor a member of an organization, church, or community based program?
   b. How often do you communicate?

13. Do you have support at home and school?

14. What message has your parent(s)/guardian given you about the value of education?

15. Has anyone in your immediate family attended college? Extended family?
Appendix H: Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher interview questions taken from the DiAngelo Educators Professional Development Guide (2018, pp.3-10)

1. What is most uncomfortable to you when discussing race? Why? When did you first notice that talking about racism is uncomfortable?

2. What are you implicitly or explicitly teaching students about racial norms? How do you know?

3. Why is it important to integrate teaching about race and racism into your practice? What are your benefits and challenges? How can you meet the challenges?

4. How has race impacted your life? If you are struggling to answer the question, why?

5. Review the racial breakdown of people who control our national institutions on p. 31. What specific conclusions can be drawn from the list?

6. The author asks several questions about racial socializations and schooling on p. 35, including “Why is it important to reflect on our teachers in our effort to uncover our racial socialization and the messages we receive from schools?”

7. Practice explaining the difference between racism, prejudice, and discrimination in your own terms. Why is it important for students of all races to understand these concepts and the differences between them? What are historical or current examples of racism, prejudice, and discrimination that students can understand?

8. How does your school or classroom reinforce a racist ideology?

9. Who or what benefits from the biological myths associated with race? How are biological racist myths perpetuated in school?
10. As a white educator, what surprises you about backstage conversations you have been a part of? What surprises you about your stated beliefs about race and racism?

11. How does color blindness show up in school and how does it impact students of color? What evidence do you have that color-blind policies are not leading to more equitable outcomes for students of color?

12. How does racial belonging play out in school? Do students of color feel like the belong?

13. How is the burden of race a reality for students of color?

14. What examples do you have of white solidarity in action?

15. When have you chosen to be silent? What encouraged that silence? What was the impact of your silence on the racial status quo?

16. What are some connections between “deeply held white associations of black people with crime and the racial disparities in school disciplinary practices?”

17. What would be required of educators to advocate for equity for all?

18. How does the good/bad binary impact how we talk about historical or contemporary figures in school?

19. How does anti-blackness show up in schools?

20. How does your living and working environment reinforce your racial frame and ability to handle stress?