A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS: HOW SCHOOL RACIAL CLIMATE INFLUENCES BLACK STUDENT IDENTITY

by

SARAH N. BRANT-RAJAHN

(Under the Direction of Deryl F. Bailey)

ABSTRACT

Racial disparities in academic and discipline outcomes have been readily examined. However, most traditional research has explored this phenomenon from a deficit-approach, often seeking to understand what is wrong with Black students and their families that results in lower academic attainment and higher discipline referrals than other racial groups (Valencia, 2015). Alternately, researchers have begun to examine how oppressive systems and structures influence access to opportunities for Black students (Ford & King, 2014; Morris & Perry, 2016) and explore school racial climate (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Byrd, 2017; Golden, Griffin, Metzger, & Cooper, 2018). The American School Counselors Association (ASCA) Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2016) stated school counselors should “understand how prejudice, privilege, and various forms of oppression based on ethnicity, racial identity,…affect students and stakeholders” and “work toward a school climate that embraces diversity and promotes academic, career, and social/emotional development for all students”. However, there is limited recent research directly exploring Black student narratives of experiences with racism at school or research examining K-12 Black student identity.
This study integrates Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) as a theoretical framework and the School Racial Climate dimensions (Byrd, 2017) as a conceptual framework with a qualitative, narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1995) to research how Black students experience racism at school and how these experiences influence their identity as Black students. Data collection also includes collage inquiry, a visual-based approach that provided a tangible medium for participants to explore and story how their experiences have influenced their identity. This research demonstrates the importance of the need for school counselors to understand how Black students experience the school racial climate and advocate for and work toward an equitable schooling experience for Black students. Additionally, recommendations for school counselors and implications for future research are discussed. This study concludes with reflexivity discussing the researcher’s journey toward selecting the research topic and the data collection and analysis processes; as well as reflections on the researcher’s personal and professional growth from engaging in this research.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, Counselor Education, Multicultural and Social Justice, Critical Race Theory, Narrative Inquiry, Collage Inquiry
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DEDICATION

For my ancestors who did not have access or opportunity to seek the formal education they desired. For my family members and friends who inspired me to set out on this journey and saw my abilities to accomplish this way before I did but went on to eternal rest since I began - Grandma, Aunnie, Shaheed, Bernard, and Naomi. To my students, this work is for you. “When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.” – Audre Lorde
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Racial disparities in academic and social outcomes between Black students and other racial groups have long existed (Coleman, 1966; Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Palardy, 2015). Although the literature clearly demonstrates racial disparities between Black and White students, there seem to be two separate bodies of work looking at why racial disparities between Black and White students exist. The first body of work consists of literature that examined deficits of Black students, their families, and their communities as the context for why racial disparities exist in education (Fordham & Ogbu, 1996; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Lewis, 1959; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). The second body of work explores racial disparities in education considering historical, systemic, and structural oppression, as well as overt and covert racism (Gillborn, 2016; Milner, 2010; Valencia, 2015). The researcher shares the position of scholars who suggested inequities in access to opportunities, resources, and participation for Black students contribute to racial disparities in outcomes.

As an integral component of the comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors have been called to understand and be able to explain how socio-cultural factors may influence school performance; bring attention to systems of power that hinder students; and collaborate to provide culturally responsive interventions and curricula (American School Counselors Association, 2019). Therefore, understanding how systemic oppression and racism influence Black student outcomes and identity is essential. My commitment to social justice research and practice came through my own experiences as a Black student in K-12 U.S. public
schools and as a school counselor working predominately with students of color. Also, as a school counselor, I often had students express they felt mistreated, overlooked, and pushed to the margins while at school. I searched for evidence-based, culturally responsive school counseling literature focused on Black K-12 students and the research was limited.

The current scholarship was designed to add to the body of literature exploring how Black students experience school racial climate and Black student identity, as well as engage in dialogue about culturally responsive interventions. For the purpose of this research, identity is defined as how Black students fit into society academically and socially and society is viewed as the school environment. The current study is an integration of theoretical and methodological models that aim to uncover, name, examine, and disrupt systemic oppression through the voice of the disenfranchised (Clandinin, 2013; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Specifically, the current study seeks Black student’s narratives about experiences with racism at school and how their experiences influenced their identity. In this chapter, I discuss a brief history of Black oppression in education to centralize the Black experience and demonstrate the historical presence of racism in our education system, as well as current oppression in education. In addition, I discuss the role of school in the academic and social identity development of Black adolescents. I also introduce key constructs that help the reader have clarity about terms used throughout the chapters of the dissertation. Lastly, I introduce the study and share the structure of the dissertation.

**Brief History of Black Oppression in Education**

Commonly known, about five generations ago, slavery ended, and most newly freed Black folks entered society-at-large without knowing how to read or write English and without economic means for social mobility. Consequently, philanthropists and missionary organizations developed schoolhouses for Black youth and helped to educate or pay teachers to educate
students. Simultaneously, literate Black people opened schoolhouses. However, schools that served Black students received less financial support, their teachers received a lower salary, and the physical learning space was poorer than White schools (Bertocchi & Dimico, 2010). In the 1870s, Jim Crow laws emerged and encouraged that the educational system and schools, along with other public settings, should be legally racially segregated (Bell, 2017). In 1896, the well-known Supreme Court decision, Plessy vs. Ferguson, legalized separate, but equal public schools for Black and White students. Black schools continued to be under sourced and overcrowded. Black activists and organizations continued to fight for equal education and in 1954, the Supreme Court decision of Brown vs. Board of Education overturned Plessy vs. Ferguson and ruled that racially separate educational institutions were inherently unequal.

Eleven years later the Coleman Report (1966), titled, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, was published and noted as the first major study examining academic disparities between racial groups, as well as academic disparities between affluent students and students in poverty. Results demonstrated most schools in the U.S. were still racially segregated wherein 80% of all White students attended schools where 90 to 100% of students were White and 65-87% of Black students, depending on grade level, attended schools that were majority Black (Coleman, 1966). The report also demonstrated a clear gap in services and resources between Black schools and White schools wherein Black schools were more likely to have outdated textbooks, not enough textbooks, older school buildings, and “low IQ classes” and less likely to have accelerated curriculum and highly qualified principals and teachers, determined by advanced degrees (Coleman, 1966). Additionally, the Coleman Report (1966) found that on average, Black students scored 10 points lower on non-verbal, verbal, and reading assessments and about 12 points lower on mathematics. Also, results indicated that Black students were less
likely to have access to a “guidance counselor” than White students (Coleman, 1966). However, the report attributed racial disparities in academic outcomes to parents’ educational practices at home, a school’s geographic location, and characteristics of students (Coleman, 1966). Coleman’s discussion about why the achievement gaps existed resulted in decades of research focused on sociocultural factors influencing student outcomes, often ignoring an examination of systemic inequities in schools.

**The Current State of Systemic Racism in Education**

Despite over fifty years of research examining racial disparities in education, there has been little progress in closing academic and social gaps. Similarly, racial disparities in access, resources, educational opportunities, and participation in decisions still exist. The UCLA Civil Rights Project found that school segregation still exists at high rates across the U.S. and is most profound in the South, Northeast, and metropolitan cities (Epperly, 2014). Also, Black students have less access to advanced coursework (Wright, et al., 2017) and are overrepresented in lower-level classes (Valant & Newark, 2017) and special education programs (Aud, et al., 2011). Additionally, research demonstrated that classrooms with higher numbers of Black students had more negative contextual factors than classrooms with higher numbers of White students to include less effective and less qualified teachers, less supplies, and more students per teacher (Palardy, 2015). In addition to classroom inequities, Black students are being punished up to three times the rate of White students (Hilbert & Slate, 2014; Morris & Perry, 2016). The USDOE (2014) found such racial disparities in school discipline to be attributed to discriminatory discipline practices related to race, ethnicity, and nation of birth. Because high discipline rates often mean Black students are more likely to lose classroom time, racialized
school discipline practices among Black students accounts for one-fifth of the achievement gap (Morris & Perry, 2016).

Recent literature exploring racial and social gaps in education provided a counter-narrative to traditional research that suggested inequities existed because of an inherent lack of intellectual or social ability of Black students (Gillborn, 2016; Milner, 2010). Exploring racial disparities in academic and behavioral outcomes of Black students as an opportunity gap, helps to reexamine the phenomenon from a systems perspective (Milner, 2010). In repositioning the research perspective, the education system is held accountable for their role in failing Black students. For example, research examined the intersection of students living in poverty-stricken neighborhoods and school quality as a contributor to the achievement gaps. Scholars found about half of the Black-White achievement gap can be attributed to inequitable within-school resources (Bohrnstedt, Kitmotto, Ogut, Sherman, & Chan, 2015) and a portion of the achievement gap is related to between school differences such as funding and school policies and practices (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

**Maintenance of Oppression: Socialization of Black Students**

Socialization can be defined as the implicit and explicit messages a person or group of people receive about what it means to be a member of a socio-cultural or racial group (Harro, 2013). Harro (2013) described the cycle of socialization and stated the process begins before children are school-age, despite having limited messages about who they are and where they fit in society. As people enter early childhood they begin to engage socially outside of their households and consequently, begin to understand themselves in the context of a larger society (Harro, 2013). Upon entering school, children are intentionally and unintentionally taught systems of hierarchy and power, as well as messages about normed behavior, which is aligned
with dominant ideologies (Harro, 2013). Children learn that those who fit into the system are good and get rewarded and those who do not fit get punished, stigmatized, or discriminated against (Harro, 2013).

Although Black elementary school students are able to highlight that students of one race get treated differently than another (Wegmann, 2017), it is during preadolescence when Black youth begin to have a heightened awareness of messages that tell them who they are and inform how they see themselves in a social context (Cross & Fhagan-Smith, 2001). Because of this consciousness, Black preadolescence develop a high race salience, where they believe Black culture is of high importance, develop self-hatred and hesitate to identify as Black due to negative messages they’ve received about being members of the Black community, or they are aware of race in a social context but do not place any emphasis on race (Cross & Fhagan-Smith, 2001). By the time Black youth become adolescents, they begin to generate their own set of beliefs about their Black identity, however these beliefs are confirmed or redefined based on lived experiences directly related to their identity as a Black person (Cross & Fhagan-Smith, 2001). For instance, a Black adolescent may believe that being Black is beautiful, strong, and powerful, which provides a strong sense of social and academic identity. However, if Black students attend a school that ignores or devalues Black students, history, and culture, they may develop a negative Black self-concept. If Black youth continue to experience marginalization, the internalization of racism threatens academic self-concept (Okeke, et al., 2009), school self-esteem (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009), and school engagement (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, & Varner, 2013). Alternatively, if a Black student attends a school where Black students are positively received and Black history and culture are taught and celebrated, their positive
beliefs about being Black are substantiated and can result in confirmation of a positive self-concept.

**Key Constructs in Exploring School Racial Climate**

The current study focuses on how Black students experience racism at school and how these experiences influence Black student identity. In addition, the current study encourages school counselors and counselor educators to research, explore, and engage in culturally responsive and social justice practices. Therefore, the author will define (a) race, (b) racism, (c) systemic or structural racism, (d) marginalization, (e) oppression, (f) culturally responsive practices, (g) social justice, and (h) social justice research. Race is a social and political construct designed to categorize groups of people based on the color of their skin for the purpose of manipulating ideologies of superiority and inferiority (Tatum, 2013). Racism is the sum of racial prejudice and social institutional power used to create and uphold a system of advantage and oppression based on race (Tatum, 2013). Racism is not simply having a discriminatory belief but having the power to influence or carry out institutional policies and practices that shape society based on one’s prejudice beliefs (Tatum, 2013). Systemic or structural racism is a system of public policies, institutional practices, and norms that reinforce inequities to maintain White superiority and oppression of people of color (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2013). Marginalization is the process of pushing a specific group of people out of society-at-large by limiting their participation, access, and voice in society (Young, 2013). For instance, denying access to academic opportunities or the chance to share thoughts about a policy that will impact them or their community. Oppression is a systematic way of giving one social group more economic, political, and social power than another social group and justifying this imbalance of power by negatively defining the social group who has less power, resulting in normed
stereotypes of social groups (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2013). For example, believing Black students are lazy, unintelligent, or untrustworthy with no evidence to support the belief that all Black students fit this ideology. Culturally responsive practices are student-centered and utilize cultural knowledge to frame pedagogy and programs to make learning and the schooling experience more relevant and effective for diverse students (American School Counselors Association, 2019). Social justice is a process and a goal, wherein the goal is for all people to have equal participation in decisions that impact their lives and communities and equitable distribution of resources (Bell, 2013). The process of social justice research is the examination of historical and contemporary inequities in access, opportunities, resources, and participation and seeks to understand the psychological and social consequences of oppression on individuals and communities (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016). Social justice is the use of awareness and knowledge about oppression toward active engagement in eradicating oppression (Bell, 2013).

**Current Study**

The research questions that guided this study are: (a) How do Black high school students’ experience racism in U.S. public schools and (b) How do experiences of racism in U.S. public schools influence Black high school student identity? The researcher utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) as a theoretical framework; School Racial Climate dimensions (Byrd, 2017) as a conceptual framework; and Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2013) as a methodology to seek and examine Black student narratives about their experiences with racism at school and influence on their identity. CRT was utilized because it provides a framework to explore socio-political and institutional processes related to racism, privilege, oppression, and power Black students face (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). Additionally, the researcher utilized the School Racial Climate dimensions because it provided a framework to examine
interpersonal interactions and school socialization around race and culture (Byrd, 2017). A Narrative Inquiry methodology was used for this study to provide space for Black students to have authorship over their story and share their narratives authentically through storytelling (McAlpine, 2016). Participant’s narratives were collected using two semi-structured focus groups. Chapter 3 will outline and describe the integration of CRT, School Racial Climate dimensions, and Narrative Inquiry and the research study in further detail.

**Structure of Manuscript-Style Dissertation**

To engage in multiple dialogues about research that highlights the systemic and overt racism of Black students in education, as well as engage in potential research and publications addressing the need for increased social justice practices and research toward eradicating such racism, this dissertation follows a manuscript format. The current chapter provides an introduction of historical and contemporary issues of oppression in education, the role of education in Black student identity development, and concepts related to racism, as well as social justice and culturally responsive research and practice. In Chapter 2, I write a manuscript that reviews interdisciplinary literature and research. Chapter 2 is also a call to the field of school counseling to engage in social justice research to examine inequities Black students encounter in the school system and facilitate culturally-responsive interventions to eradicate inequities. In Chapter 3, I describe a Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2013) study exploring Black students’ experiences with racism and influence on identity of Black students. Also, Chapter 3 includes the methodology, findings, discussion of findings, limitations of the study, and future implications for research and practice. Lastly, in Chapter 4, I reflect on my personal experiences in relation to the study and the research process.
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CHAPTER 2

SIXTY-FIVE YEARS OF SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION IN K-12 EDUCATION FOR BLACK STUDENTS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND A CALL TO THE FIELD OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

1 Brant-Rajahn, Sarah. To be submitted to Professional School Counseling Journal
Abstract
There has been ongoing scholarship examining the Black-White achievement gap in U.S. public schools, often naming deficits of Black students and the Black community (Valencia, 2015). However, there is contradicting literature examining the role of systemic and interpersonal racism in schools and its influence on student attainment (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Milner, 2010; Ricks, 2014). Because school counselors are called to assess socio-cultural, economic, and race-based disparities and work toward closing gaps in student attainment (American School Counselors Association, 2016), it is critical that school counselors understand historical and contemporary literature about racial disparities in education among Black and White students. To this end, this article provides an overview of the Black-White achievement gap, historical deficit ideologies in examining the achievement gap, contemporary research examining systemic and interpersonal inequities, and implications of deficit ideologies and school-based inequities on Black student attainment and wellness. Suggestions for culturally-responsive school counselor practices and program development will also be discussed.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, Counselor Education, Multicultural and Social Justice Competence, Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling, Social Justice Counseling, Black Student Identity, Racism in Schools
Introduction

The earliest research examining racial disparities between Black and White students in U.S. public schools was conducted over fifty years ago (Coleman, 1966), yet inequities remain pervasive in our education system (Huang & Cornell, 2018; Wright, Ford, & Young, 2017). Although the counseling profession has long engaged in exploration about the influence of social environments on human development, this commitment has mostly examined individual deficits that have impacted behavior and under-examined sociopolitical contexts as stressors (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008). While historic disenfranchisement of Black students is a critical antecedent for racial disparities (Valencia, 2015), deficit narratives of inferior genetics (Williams, 2011; Yudell, 2011), oppositional identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), and the culture of Black poverty (Neville, Awad, & Brooks, 2013; Phillips, 2011) continue to frame beliefs about Black students and shape educators’ strategies for closing racial disparities in U.S. public schools (Paige & Witty, 2010). However, social justice, which is the fifth force in counseling, calls on counselors to address both individual issues and systemic issues of inequity and injustice that influence student wellness (Ratts, 2011). As school counselors serve over seven million Black students across the U.S. (Musu, National Statistics Center for Education and Fenster, & American Institute for Research, 2018), there is a great need to identify systemic and interpersonal barriers and culturally responsive strategies to decrease racial disparities and create an environment that fosters healthy development and wellness.

Social justice-oriented school counselors engage in assessment of student needs and develop interventions that consider the whole student to include sociocultural and political contexts and are preventative in nature (Crethar et al., 2008). Accordingly, this manuscript reviews Black-White racial disparities in education and the role systemic racism and school
racial climate play in the academic and social development of Black students. The literature discusses historical deficit narratives of Black student intelligence, achievement, and community, as well as interdisciplinary social justice counter-narratives that place systemic racism, opportunity gaps, and school racial climate at the center of the dialogue on Black-White racial disparities in U.S. education. Additionally, this manuscript serves as a call to the school counseling profession to engage in social justice research to examine the origins of race-based gaps in educational outcomes and social mobility of students. Furthermore, it is an appeal for school counselors to utilize their multicultural competence toward social justice advocacy and practices by addressing systemic and institutional barriers that impede students’ success (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2011; Crethar et al., 2008).

**Racial Disparities in Academic Achievement among Black and White Students**

Achievement gap discourse has highlighted student success and failures primarily of low-income students of color in comparison to their White counterparts. For example, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) Kindergarten class of 1998-1999 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002) examined Black and White students’ performance from kindergarten entry through eighth grade to explore patterns in the achievement gap. Scholars found White students entered kindergarten slightly ahead of Black students in the areas of reading and mathematics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). By the end of kindergarten, there was a three-point gap in reading scores and a five-point gap in math scores between Black and White students; however, by the end of the fifth grade, the gap had grown to a seventeen-point gap in reading and a nineteen-point gap in math (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). By the end of first grade, the gap had grown, and each year thereafter, inequities continued to grow (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). In another study, reports indicated a sixth
percentile point close in the math gap and a ninth percentile point close in reading between White and Black twelfth grade students (Hanushek, 2016). Also, scholars found that fourth grade average reading scores of White students were higher than the scores of Black students, but the White-Black achievement gap narrowed by 6 points from 1992 to 2017 (deBrey, et al., 2018). However, White eighth grade students scored 25 points higher on the reading assessment than Black students and the White-Black achievement gap was not measurably different from the achievement gap present in 1992 (deBrey, et al., 2018). Correspondingly, a meta-analysis of 30 studies from 1975-2009 that examined strategies for closing the achievement gap demonstrated that suggested methods have been statistically unsuccessful (Jeynes, 2014).

Racial Disparities in Discipline among Black and White Students

In addition to gaps in academic attainment between Black and White students, scholars purported similar disparities in the rates of school discipline (Huang & Cornell, 2018; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; White, 2018). Research demonstrated that Black students were up to three times more likely to be suspended from school than White students (Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Morris & Perry, 2016), although there was a lack of evidence that Black students were more likely to misbehave than White students (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Huang & Cornell, 2018). Discriminatory discipline practices were identified as a cause for the overuse of discipline impacting Black students (Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Such inequities are present as early as pre-K, where Black students only accounted for eighteen percent of pre-K enrollment in the U.S., but they accounted for forty-eight percent of preschoolers with multiple out-of-school suspensions (Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Scholars found inequitable racialized school discipline practices among Black students decreased their opportunity to be in the classroom to learn and accounted for one-
fifth of the achievement gap (Morris & Perry, 2016), leading to the discipline gap and the achievement gap being interconnected (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). For example, students who were suspended even once each year scored fifteen points lower on reading assessments than those who had never faced suspension (Morris & Perry, 2016). As scholars have sought to better understand and eradicate racial disparities in education, literature has seemingly demonstrated two perspectives wherein one considers deficits of Black students and their families and the other examines systemic oppression as a critical barrier to successful student outcomes.

**Historic Deficit Narratives: Black Student Academic Development**

Oppressive race relations in the U.S. have existed since the enslavement of Africans and have persisted as a social issue throughout the country’s history (Bell, 2017). U.S. school environments often correspond to societal dynamics regarding race, mirroring messages that depict deficits of Black people (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Consequently, discriminatory discourse has long dictated educators’ thinking about students’ failure; proposing students are unable to meet academic and social standards because of inherent motivational, behavioral, intellectual, and linguistic deficits (Valencia, 2015). Deficit-grounded research supported this dialogue by seeking to understand student failure through the exploration of students’ and parents’ deficits in comparison to White, middle-class, western norms (Valencia, 2015). Furthermore, such research has upheld White intellectual supremacy ideology and informed deficit-based policies and practices (Pollack, 2012) that legally maintained a level of school segregation (Cordon, Tope, Steidl, & Freeman, 2012; Reardon, 2015; Welsh, 2018) and marginalization (Allen, 2015; Bertrand, Perez, & Rogers, 2015). Literature highlights Black
intellectual inferiority, the culture of Black poverty, and oppositional identity as historic deficit narratives of the Black-White achievement gap.

**Black Intellectual Inferiority**

Black intellectual inferiority ideology can be traced in the research to the development of the Binet Simon Intelligence Scale (1905) as the first practical use intelligence quotient (IQ) test (Binet & Simon, 1916). Although Binet only intended for his IQ test to be used to identify learners who may have cognitive deficits, scholars modified his work and began to use the IQ test to rank intelligence among the general public (Yudell, 2011). The IQ test was then used to purport and uphold the belief that Blacks were genetically inferior to Whites (Gillborn, 2016) to justify racial and ethnic discrimination in employment, housing, and education (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2011). Intellectual inferiority ideology has remained evident in K-12 schools as teachers perceived Black students to have lower cognitive abilities and behavioral skills than White students (Gillborn, 2016) from the start of kindergarten (Minor, 2014). Deficit-thinking about Black student abilities has contributed to lower levels of enrollment in high-level, college preparation courses as compared to White students (Ricks, 2014; Valant & Newark, 2017) and overrepresentation in special education for learning and emotional-behavioral concerns (Artiles, 2011). Furthermore, racial disparities in class placement have been upheld by the use of bias standardized testing measures that claim to predict the abilities of all students on a normed scale without accounting for the role of systemic racism and oppression that is embedded in such testing and school structures (Leonardo & Grubb, 2018). Stigmatization associated with Black intellectual inferiority has marginalized and victimized Black students and influenced their self-image, academic attainment, and at-school behavior (Howard, 2013; Taylor, Hume, & Welsh, 2010). Educators and scholars who believe Black students are inherently inferior tend to also
believe the achievement gap is naturally occurring, and therefore, efforts to ameliorate racial disparities in student outcomes are purposeless (Paige & Witty, 2010). However, ignoring the social inequities and institutional oppression Black students experience in schools has a profound impact on the ability of Black students to achieve academically and socially (Darby & Rury, 2018).

**The Culture of Black Poverty**

In examining the culture of poverty, scholars discussed literature that highlighted a belief that at the intersection of race and poverty, a person is inherently set apart from normed behavior (Ladson-Billing, 2006; Rein, 2017). Although Black people in poverty are met with unique social factors that influence a student’s ability to perform well academically (Duncan & Murane, 2011), scholars have often named and blamed social ills in poor, Black communities as the scapegoat for racial disparities in education (Rothsetin, 2015; Paige & Witty, 2010; Valencia, 2015). For example, Reardon (2011) called the Black-White achievement gap an economic issue and highlighted trends in Black poverty to support such claims without discussing the historical and structural context of Black oppression as a contributor to economic outcomes in Black communities. Additionally, scholars highlighted that poor parents were less likely to enroll their children in enrichment activities prior to school entry and suggested a lack of such activities impedes academic success (Phillip, 2011). Also, scholars have portrayed Black parents in poverty as disinterested and uninvolved in their children’s learning (Rothstein, 2015). Such scholarship has supported policymakers messaging that Black folks just simply need to work harder and align with normed behavior if they want to increase their social mobility (Paige & Witty, 2010). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggested that this pressure to conform can result in the development of oppositional identity.
Oppositional Identity and the Burden of “Acting White”

As involuntary minorities in America, Black people face greater and more persistent forms of discrimination; therefore, they are a targeted oppressed group (Harris, 2011). Fordham and Ogbru (1986) held the position that facing discrimination and oppression taught Black folks that the American ideal of meritocracy did not exist for them; therefore, they came to deny education as the great equalizer. Also, scholars posited that Black people recognize they must assimilate to White dominant norms and speech to become socially mobile (Fordham & Ogbru, 1986). Consequently, Black students battle between understanding their African culture and their place in U.S. society, creating cognitive dissonance (Fordham & Ogbru, 1986) and double consciousness (DuBois, 1903) between academic identity and Black identity. DuBois (1903) viewed this dynamic as a Black person’s inner battle to always see themselves and measure themselves through the eyes of White society. However, Ogbru and Simmons (1998) contended this cognitive dissonance caused Black students to develop an oppositional identity to assimilation, or “acting White”. Scholars purported Black students would closely align themselves with their ethnic group collective identity which compelled them to underperform academically as a resistance to White norms of educational attainment or Black students would choose to perform well academically and be ousted by Black peers for “acting White” (Ogbru & Simmons, 1998). Alternately, scholars demonstrated there was not a significant difference in postgraduate aspirations or pro-academic orientations between Black high school students and their White counterparts (Diamond & Huguley, 2014).

Interdisciplinary Narratives: Opportunity Gaps and School Racial Climate

Although many argue that the U.S. is in a post-racial era (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011), racism continues to be a barrier that hinders equitable access and participation in services,
resources, and power (Crethar et al., 2008; Crethar & Winterowd, 2012), which impacts the
development of Black children and adolescents (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). For example, Black
students and families have continued to experience disparities in access, resources (Milner,
2010), and support programs (Boykin & Noguera, 2011) within the U.S. education system.
Additionally, scholars have demonstrated inequitable teaching pedagogy and practice between
Black and White students (Barton & Coley, 2009). Social justice approaches consider inequities
and injustices individuals and communities experience as members of a system (Crethar, et al.,
2008). Recent literature examining racial disparities in schools have taken a social justice
approach to discuss gaps in opportunity (Milner, 2010) and how students of color experience the
school climate (Byrd, 2017).

**Access to Opportunity: Inequitable Schools and Classrooms**

While U.S. schools are becoming more diverse, Black students are still most likely to
attend homogenous schools (Wright et al., 2017), often due to race and economic based school
zoning practices (Reardon, 2015). For example, students of color were more likely to attend high
poverty schools, while White students attended more affluent schools in suburban districts (Fry
& Taylor, 2012). Subsequently, students who attended lower-income schools had fewer
educational opportunities (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014), a dynamic that disproportionally
impacted Black students (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012). For instance, Palardy
(2015) examined the socioeconomic and racial demographics within a classroom, classroom size,
and supplies available to the teacher as contextual factors. Black students were more likely to be
in a classroom with more negative contextual factors than their White counterparts, in addition to
having a less effective and less qualified teacher (Palardy, 2015). Furthermore, classroom
inequities specific to classroom contextual factors within and between schools significantly
contributed to achievement gaps as early as the first grade (Palardy, 2015). Inequities are also noted by the Office for Civil Rights (2016) who found Black students were more than three times as likely to attend schools where fewer than 60 percent of teachers met all state certification and licensure requirements and were least likely to have adequate school counselor personnel. In addition to a lack of classroom supplies and qualified school personnel, Black students have less opportunity to access higher level courses (Wright, et al., 2017).

**Access to Services: Racialized Tracking and Institutional Sorting**

Whether Black students attended predominately Black schools or predominately White schools, access to advanced placement and gifted education courses remained limited (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012; Wright et al., 2017). More specifically, 81% of Asian-American high school students, 71% of White high school students, and 67% of Latino/a high school students attended schools where the full scope of science and math courses were offered, however only 57% of Black students had such access (deBrey, et al., 2018). Alternatively, Black students are overrepresented in special education programs (Aud, et al., 2011). For example, Black students only made up 15% of student enrollment in the U.S. in 2015, yet 16% of Black students were served in a special education program, which is more than White, Latino/a, or Asian student populations (deBrey, et al., 2018). Scholars suggested underrepresentation in advanced coursework and overrepresentation in special education may be due to racialized tracking, which can be defined as the practice of separating students for classroom instruction—disproportionally filling higher-level classes with White students and lower-level classes with Black students and other students of color (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Office for Civil Rights, 2016; Moore & Flowers, 2012; Ricks, 2014; Valant & Newark, 2017). Literature
suggested racialized tracking occurs because educators have deficit ideologies about Black student abilities (Valencia, 2015; Valencia, 2010).

**Overrepresentation in special education.** Black students were disproportionately referred to special education programs and were more likely to be diagnosed than White students (Javius, 2016). For example, Black students were 40% more likely to be diagnosed with a learning disability than White students (Kena, et al., 2014). Tatum (2012) suggested measures used to refer and assess students for special education placement are culturally and linguistically biased, which may contribute to the overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs. To combat high numbers of referrals to special education, a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) was established as a systemic framework to provide ongoing, evidence-based interventions and assessment to increase student achievement and potentially decrease student entry to special education programs (Beiser, Shillingford, & Joe, 2016). However, this model has not been conducted with fidelity and has often been used to highlight and focus attention on student behavior rather than seek out causes for academic underachievement (Javius, 2016). To this end, Black students are two times more likely than any other race group to be placed in special education for behavioral diagnoses (Aud et al., 2011). In addition to disparities in special education placement, Black students are most likely to be served in a more restrictive learning environment once served through special education programs (Banks, 2017); more likely to remain in special education programs (Banks 2017; Javius, 2016); and were among the least likely to graduate with a regular high school diploma (deBrey, 2018).

**Underrepresentation in advanced placement and gifted education.** Eugenics, or Black intellectual inferiority ideology, has continued to build advanced curriculum and gifted education as a White space (Wright et al., 2017). Similar to housing discrimination to desegregate schools,
the education system has created policies and procedures that inherently reduce access for Black students to advance placement and gifted courses, which racially segregates students among a physically integrated school (Ford & King, 2014; Wright et al., 2017). For instance, Black students were six times less likely to be enrolled in at least one advance placement course (Office for Civil Rights, 2016). Similarly, to the special education referral process, educators are often responsible for referring students for evaluation and consideration for entry into gifted and advanced placement courses. However, research suggested that educators are less likely to refer students of color for advanced courses and discourage students of color from entering advanced courses due to bias (Wright et al., 2017). For example, Ready and Wright (2011) found that teachers rated Black and Latino/a student’s academic ability lower than White and Asian students, and McGrady and Reynolds (2013) found that teachers believed Black and Latino/a students are less academically engaged than White and Asian students. In a fifteen-year analysis of publications examining the intersections of race, poverty, and gifted education, scholars found deficit approaches were used to investigate and discuss racial gaps in gifted enrollment (Goings, 2018), demonstrating the vastness of systemic bias around equitable access to opportunities for learning for Black students. Beyond hindered access to learning opportunities, Black students may also face disparities in access to a supportive and encouraging learning environment.

**Access to School Support: School Climate and School Racial Climate**

National School Climate Council defined school climate as the quality and character of school life determined by the experiences of students', parents', and school personnel (2007). School climate reflects the institutions' organizational structures; values, goals, and norms; teaching and learning pedagogy and practice; and interpersonal relationships (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickerel, 2009). As a component of school climate, school support highlights
students’ need for a sense of belonging and an ability to demonstrate autonomy, as well as support for their ability to meet high academic expectations (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Students who experienced supportive relationships at school produce more positive academic and behavioral outcomes than students who did not have these relationships at school (Buehler, Fletcher, Johnston, & Weymouth, 2015; Eccles & Roser, 2011). However, school climate research considers general relationships and student engagement (Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010) without much consideration for the influence of race and culture on student experiences (Byrd, 2017).

**School racial climate.** School racial climate picks up where school climate assessment and evaluation left off by examining students’ awareness of implicit and explicit race-based experiences and discrimination as factors influencing the academic experiences of students (Byrd, 2017). Byrd (2017) explored dimensions of school racial socialization to include cultural, mainstream, colorblind, promotion of cultural competence, and critical consciousness socialization. This research also included the intergroup interactions domain, exploring frequency and quality of interactions, as well as equal status treatment and stereotyping. School racial socialization occurs when messages about race and culture are communicated at school through formal curriculum and informal messaging (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). In addition, mainstream socialization often dictates to Black students that their values should mirror mainstream U.S. societal norms and traditions (Byrd, 2017), which often contrast with collectivism values of minority groups (Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Colorblind socialization overlooks and minimizes the importance of race in the lived experiences of students of color and how these experiences influence their world and the world around them (Byrd, 2017), which contributes to Black students feeling invisible (Allen, Scott, & Lewis,
Furthermore, colorblind socialization upholds White student biases by limiting the exploration and understanding of the history, culture, and traditions of people of color, as well as racial inequity (Byrd, 2017; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). However, schools have the power to increase critical consciousness by exploring power, privilege, and inequity across racial groups within the K-12 setting (Byrd, 2017). In addition to exploring school racial socialization, the school racial climate model examines how often cultural intergroup interactions occur, to include an examination of stereotyping and prejudicial thoughts about students (Byrd, 2017), as well as meaning made of these encounters. Also, there is a focus on investigating inequitable treatment among and across culturally different group of students in the areas of recognition, participation, and discipline; and school-wide opportunities for positive interactions and programming (Byrd, 2017). Scholars found Black students’ academics (Golden, Griffin, Metzger, & Cooper, 2018) and identities were directly and indirectly influenced by how they were treated at school (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez, & Sellers, 2012).

**Implications of Racism on Black Identity Development and Wellness**

Identity development models seek to understand how people come to negotiate personal identities through interactions with self, others, and social systems in our environments. In other words, identity development answers the questions of “Who am I?” and “How do I fit into society?” (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) asserted that in each stage of development, a person encounters a psychosocial crisis that can have a positive or negative outcome on personality development. Furthermore, he suggested that crises evolved from the psychological needs of the individual conflicting with the needs of society (Erikson, 1968). However, Erikson’s (1968) identity development model did not attend to the nuances of development for people of color whose crisis are often situated in oppression and marginalization (Cross, 1991). For example,
Black adolescents reported experiencing both overt and covert racial discrimination such as being called a name, being treated disrespectfully, expecting work to be inferior (Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015), and being talked down to, (Griffin et al., 2017; Mattison & Aber, 2007). In addition, Black students experienced less sense of belonging, a lack of opportunities for participation, and less opportunity to build relationships with school personnel as compared to White students (Voight, Hanson, O’Malley, & Adekanye, 2015). Consequently, Black students who experience a negative school racial climate may have lower academic achievement outcomes (Griffin, Cooper, Metzger, Golden, & White, 2017; Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009) and social development (Jia, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). The Nigresene Model, which has since been modified and retitled as the Model of Black Identity Development provides a framework for understanding Black identity development with considerations for such experiences with racial discrimination and oppression.

**Revised Nigresence Model: Model of Black Identity Development**

Since Cross’s original work on the Nigresence Model (1991), he conducted ongoing research with scholars that resulted in the revised model more readily in use today when working with Black communities (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). The model suggested Black identity development occurs in non-linear stages, and within those stages are clusters that detail how each stage may manifest in an individual. The first stage is the Pre-Encounter stage, which was originally thought to be Black self-hatred directly correlated to low self-esteem and poor psychological functioning. However, the revised model suggested an individual may be exhibiting assimilation, wherein they demonstrate a strong salience with being American and low connection to being Black. Alternatively, an individual may be anti-Black,
wherein they internalize negative societal messages and stereotypes as well as miseducation about the historical context of Black folks resulting in self-hatred. The second stage is Immersion-Emersion. This stage also includes two clusters: intense Black involvement, and anti-White attitudes. A Black individual who embraces everything Black and rejects White culture is said to be engaging in intense Black involvement. Upon learning about Black history and culture, Black folks may begin to feel guilty that they had lived a misinformed life to this point, but they may also feel empowered and come to find a sense of place in the world. However, intense emotional responses may also occur and result in a lack of forgiveness for Black folks who are in the Pre-Encounter stage and/or the adoption of anti-White attitudes. Adopting anti-White attitudes is the tendency to insult White people and White culture, which Hooks (1992) suggested is a normal response to trauma from White oppression or can be grounded in negative stereotypes of White people. Vandiver et al. (2002) purported anti-White attitudes can become a permanent part of identity or a Black individual may progress to the next stage, Internalization. During the Internalization stage, Black people can work through their anger, pain, and guilt, which results in full acceptance of their racial identity and self-love. In the healing process, Black people can move away from anti-White attitudes and still demonstrate love for Black heritage and culture. Critical incidents of racism and oppression can position a Black person to cycle through the stages again as they seek healing.

**Black Identity Development in Children and Adolescence**

Race is one of the first social categories children recognize, often identifying physical differences such as hair texture and skin color (Quintana & McKown, 2008). By the age of three, children made connections between race and behavior and by the age of five, children began to develop positive and negative beliefs about an individual based on racial group membership.
(Quinitana & McKown, 2008). Also, Black children as young as seven reported experiencing discrimination (Wegmann, 2017). As Black children moved toward stages of pre-adolescence and adolescence, the development of healthy social-emotional and intellectual norms became critical (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Lombaard & Naude, 2017), and it is during this stage of development that Black youth became aware of institutionalized racism in structures and systems (Quinitana & McKown, 2008). As Black youth continued to experience marginalization, scholars found the internalization of racism threatened identity (Cross & Frost, 2016), academic self-concept (Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Okeke et al., 2009), social identity (McKown & Strambler, 2009), school self-esteem (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009), and school engagement (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, & Varner, 2013). Additionally, Black students who experienced discrimination exhibited depressive symptoms, decreased self-esteem, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, sleep deprivation, and lack of motivation (Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, & Jackson, 2010). Furthermore, ratings on trauma scales (Carter, 2007) and supporting literature indicated experiences with racism resulted in symptomology that mirrored post-traumatic stress disorder (Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2010; Pieterse, Neville, Todd, Carter, 2011; Kang & Burton, 2014).

**Recommendations for School Counselor Educators and Practitioners**

The counseling profession has demonstrated that social environments influence healthy development (Crethar et al., 2008). A critical social environment for adolescence is school, which impacts Black student development nearly as much as family of origin (Jernigan, 2009). As a result, school environments that oppress and marginalize students of color may have a longstanding negative impact on Black students’ social and academic identity and mobility. There is a significant gap in the research examining racial gaps in K-12 schools considering
school racial climate (Golden et al., 2018); therefore, further research is necessary to better understand the influence of negative stereotypes, racism, and discrimination on the educational and social outcomes and identities of Black students. To understand this dynamic, scholars and educators must examine structural and systemic inequities in school systems’ policies and practices (Valencia, 2015) as well as race-based socialization messages and interpersonal relationships (Byrd, 2017).

To this end, this manuscript serves as encouragement to school counselors and counselor educators to engage in social justice research that deconstructs, analyzes, and names inequities in the U.S. education system and local schools specific to Black students. Additionally, school counselors and counselor educators are encouraged to engage in social justice practices that directly address the needs of K-12 Black students through enhancing positive school racial climate, challenging deficit narratives, and closing opportunity gaps. Because school counselors are uniquely trained, positioned, and called to provide culturally responsive services that embrace and affirm diversity, as well as advocate for equity in access for all students (American School Counselors Association, 2016), they should be at the forefront of collaborative efforts to explore school climate factors impeding student success (Griffin & Steen, 2011). Specifically, being a social justice-oriented counselor calls for school counselors to be multiculturally competent by understanding students’ cultures, values, and historical-social context (Ratts, 2011). In addition, school counselors should utilize their multicultural competence to co-develop goals with their students, families, and communities that focus on actively advocating for equity and justice for underserved and marginalized students, while also encouraging systemic social change (Winterowd, Adams, Miville, & Mintz, 2009; Ratts, 2011). By engaging in social justice practices, counselors have the opportunity to examine, prevent, and intervene in systemic issues
that may present as isolated individual student concerns, which can influence macro-level systemic change and healing for students (Chung & Bemak, 2012).

**Engaging in Social Justice Research**

Social justice research examines the historical and contemporary inequities in access, opportunities, resources, and participation and seeks to understand the psychological and social consequences of oppression on individuals and communities (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016). Because social justice research acknowledges inequitable systemic power and privilege and acts to challenge socio-cultural norms (Russell, 2016), it is ideal for the examination of school-based racial disparities among Black students and their outgroup peers (Crethar & Winterowd, 2012). Social justice research utilizes culturally responsive strategies from the conceptualization and development of investigation through the dissemination of findings (Lyons et al., 2013). While in the conceptualization and development stages of research, the researcher should become aware of how their worldview may influence their studies design and the interpretation of the data. Researchers should also be intentional about participant selection and work to ensure that participants represent the diversity of the school community, unless the researcher can justify why a subgroup is being selected. Once potential participants have been identified, scholars suggested that researchers build relationships with the community prior to data collection and involve community stakeholders as a part of the research design process (Lyons et al., 2013). Also, consider the potential risks and benefits of the research to the participants and the community at large (Lyons et al., 2013). Furthermore, scholars suggested that researchers consider utilizing data collection methods that balance power differentials and provide an opportunity for participants to share their authentic voice (Lyons et al., 2013). For example, allow participants to choose their pseudonyms; utilize groups instead of or in conjunction with
individual engagement; and employ qualitative methods or mixed methods in data collection. Also, scholars recommended using a research team to analyze and interpret the data and engage in member checking to mitigate researcher bias and consider alternate interpretations of the data (Lyons et al., 2013).

**Engaging in Social Justice School Counseling Practices**

Social justice research can inform school counselor interventions. However, school counselors also have a role as practitioners to develop and engage in culturally responsive social justice counseling (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). Scholars proposed school counselors explore how student issues can be connected to historical, ecological, psychosocial, cultural, and sociopolitical factors (Chung & Bemak, 2012; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Also, school counselors should be aware of their power, privilege, and oppression and how these influence their conceptualization of the presenting issue (Ratts et al., 2016; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Once school counselors have established a clearer understanding of socio-political and cultural factors and bias, school counselors are urged to consider how their worldview and the students’ worldview influence the counselor-student relationship. Subsequently, school counselors should examine the issue beyond an individual student concern and collaboratively explore institutional, community, and global implications and then co-develop goals that focus on actively advocating for equity and justice for underserved and marginalized students (Ratts, 2011; Winterowd et al., 2009). For example, initiate difficult dialogues with stakeholders and engage in consciousness raising about race-based inequities (Singh et al., 2010). Next, school counselors should identify potential culturally-responsive interventions that align with the needs of the student and community and then determine their best options based on their resources, access, and best opportunity to serve
students (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). School counselor interventions may include direct student supports, such as teaching students advocacy skills or macro-level interventions that deconstruct systems of power in your school, district, or state (Singh et al., 2010). After the school counselor chooses a culturally-responsive method, school counselors should identify methods of evaluating the intervention to examine its success in working with students (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018), and disseminate their results to stakeholders (Singh et al., 2010).

**Conclusion**

Although literature presented in this chapter demonstrated racism exists and has a profound impact on the development and wellness of Black people, there is still a gap in the literature examining school-based racism systemically, interpersonally, and how it influences K-12 Black student identity. Consequently, inequities and injustice continue to contribute educational disparities in which Black students are denied access to basic, yet essential academic and social opportunities that can help close achievement and opportunity gaps (Ford & King, 2014). Black students can no longer afford for systemic and interpersonal racism and oppression to be ignored as their emotional health, wellness, academic attainment, self-concept, and social mobility remain profoundly impacted (Crethar et al., 2008). School counselors are distinctively trained and called to identify local and national institutional policies that support or hinder student success and create systemic change (American School Counselors Association, 2018). As school counselors serve millions of Black students across the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), they must utilize their training and skills to serve as social justice practitioners, researchers, and advocates to engage in effective prevention and intervention that work toward eradicating systems of oppression and marginalization hampering Black student success.
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CHAPTER 3

EXPLORING BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND INFLUENCE ON BLACK STUDENT IDENTITY

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2 Brant-Rajahn, Sarah. To be submitted to Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development
Brant-Rajahn, Sarah. To be submitted to Qualitative Research Journal
Abstract

Racism occurs in schools everyday as youth of color experience systemic oppression through policy, pedagogy, and practice (Chapman, 2013; Milner, 2010; Valencia, 2015). Despite recognition that schools have a role in perpetuating societal racism, scholars often overlook this factor as a contributor to the academic and social outcomes of Black students (Hanushek, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016). Recent research indicates school climate and at-school relationships are critical to the development of a strong, positive self-identity and academic attainment (Byrd, 2015). The current study used a Critical Race (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) theoretical framework, a School Racial Climate (Byrd, 2017) conceptual framework, and a Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2013) methodology to explore how 11 Black high school student’s experience racism at school and the influence of these experiences on their academic and social identity as Black students. Findings demonstrated that Black students experienced blatant and direct discrimination and racism by staff and peers at school. Also, participants were very aware of systemic and structural racism and discussed negative race-based interpersonal interactions. However, findings also suggested that Black students have been socialized at school (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Hughes, McGill, Ford, & Tubbs, 2011) to not report or fight against racism at school. The study limitations and implications for future research and school counseling practice are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, Counselor Education, Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling, Social Justice Counseling, Black Student Identity, Racism in Schools, Narrative Inquiry, Collage Inquiry
Introduction and Rationale of Study

Racism occurs in schools every day as youth of color experience systemic oppression through policy, pedagogy, and practice (Valencia, 2015; Chapman, 2013; Milner, 2010; Kohli, 2008). Particularly, Black students are treated inferior, as they have fewer resources, higher rates of unqualified educators, and attend schools in poorer conditions than their White counterparts (Carter & Welner, 2013; Milner, 2010). Despite recognition that schools have a role in perpetuating societal racism, researchers often overlook these factors as contributors to race-based academic and discipline gaps. When these factors are researched, they are often explored from a deficit approach, arguing Black students and their families, as well as the environment of the Black community, are solely responsible for racial disparities in academic and social achievement (Valencia, 2015). However, school climate and at-school relationships are critical in the development of a strong, positive self-identity and academic attainment; this is particularly important when considering race (Byrd, 2015). Therefore, the current study is grounded in the belief that race-based academic and discipline gaps are instead opportunity gaps, which can be defined as disparities in access to quality schools and resources needed for students to be academically and socially successful (Milner, 2010). Race-based opportunity gaps are rooted in historical, institutional, and socio-cultural racism impeding access to a positive and equitable learning environment (Milner, 2010).

This research is important for the field of school counseling because school counselors have been called to be social justice advocates for all students (Grimes, Haskins, & Paisley, 2014; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010). In this role, school counselors should be aware of, understand, and appreciate cultural diversity, as well as collaborate with stakeholders to remove student barriers influencing academic success (American School Counselors
Association, ASCA, 2012). In addition, school counselors should address the needs of marginalized students through culturally responsive practices (ASCA, 2012; Griffin & Steen, 2011). As inequities in education remain prevalent in the U.S., it is imperative that school counselors demonstrate social justice advocacy on behalf of and with Black students. By exploring and challenging injustice, social justice advocates seek to examine ways oppression in systems can be addressed and deconstruct systemic racism, classism, feminism, heterosexism, ableism, and other forms of oppression (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008). As this is achieved, all students and their families will receive equitable access to education and participation in decision making that impacts student learning (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008).

**Understanding Black Identity Development**

Identity was defined by Erikson (1968) as “who am I” and “how do I fit into society”. Erikson suggested personality was developed in eight stages from infancy to adulthood, wherein each person experiences a psychosocial crisis that has a positive or negative outcome (Erikson, 1968). Each psychosocial crisis involved a psychological need of the individual that conflicted with the needs of society (Erikson, 1968). Although each stage of development involved a social component, individuals ages 12-18 years of age, experience the Identity v. Role Confusion stage where social perception is critical in the development of a sense of self and personal identity (Erikson, 1968). The Model of Black Identity Development suggested that race must also be considered in the identity development of Black people in the U.S. because they encounter a unique lived experience as a result of race-related historical, political, and socio-cultural factors (Cross, 1991). Considering Erikson’s psychosocial model and the Model of Black Identity Development, Black adolescents are at a stage where the social perception of who they are as
Black adolescents is critical to their identity development. Therefore, this study defines identity as how Black adolescents fit into society as a Black person.

**The Model of Black Identity Development**

Unlike Erikson’s model, the Model of Black Identity Development does not occur in isolated stages, rather individuals can hold multiple attitudes and beliefs simultaneously and to changing degrees (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). The four stages of the revised model are Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. The Pre-Encounter stage characterizes Black identity in two ways, Assimilation and Anti-Black. Assimilation represents a Black person who has a strong salience with being American and low connection to being Black and Anti-Black is described as a Black individual who has internalized negative societal messages, stereotypes, and miseducation about the historical context of Black folks resulting in self-hatred (Vandiver, et al., 2002). The Encounter stage is characterized by a Black individual having an experience or multiple experiences that propels them to reexamine their racial identity. The Immersion-Emersion stage includes two clusters, which are Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White. Intense Black involvement is described as immersed in Black culture and Anti-White attitudes is characterized by the rejection of White culture (Vandiver, et al., 2002). After learning about Black history and culture, Black people may begin to feel guilty that they lived a misinformed life prior to that point, but they may also feel empowered and come to find a sense of how they fit in the world (Vandiver, et al., 2002). However, intense emotional responses may also occur and result in the adoption of anti-White attitudes, which Hooks (1992) suggested is a normal response to trauma from White oppression or can be grounded in negative stereotypes of White people. Vandiver, et al. (2002) suggested anti-White attitudes can become a permanent part of identity or a Black individual may progress to the next stage. Lastly, the
Internalization stage is demonstrated by Black people fully accepting their racial identity and having self-love, while also moving away from anti-White attitudes. Biculturalist identity is also a part of the Internalization stage and is described as a Black person coming to accept the intersection of being Black with other cultural identities. It is critical for school counselors to understand Black identity development as they explore how historical and contemporary oppressive systems and interpersonal interactions influence Black student identity.

**Historical Barriers to Black Student Identity Development**

Historical deficit-grounded ideologies to include intellectual inferiority, the culture of Black poverty, and the theory of oppositional identity have served as barriers for Black student mobility. Oppressive ideologies of intellectual inferiority about Black student academic abilities have historically marginalized Black youth (Valencia, 2015; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). From the beginning of kindergarten, teachers perceived Black students to have lower behavioral skills and cognitive abilities than White students (Minor, 2014). Such bias can result in racial disparities in special education placement (Artiles, 2011) and enrollment of Black students in college preparation courses (Ricks, 2014; Valant & Newark, 2017). Also, stigmatization associated with Black inferiority have further marginalized Black students and influenced their self-image, at-school behavior, and academic attainment (Howard, 2013; Taylor, Hume, & Welsh, 2010).

**The culture of Black poverty.** At the intersection of race and class, Black students and their families often battle against deficit thinking about the culture of Black poverty, which stereotypes low-income Black families and names social ills of low-income Black communities (Valencia, 2015). For example, scholars and educators suggested that high crime rates and unstable families were to blame for racial disparities in academic achievement on standardized assessments (Rothstein, 2015; Paige & Witty, 2010). Additionally, Black parents who face
poverty have been portrayed as disinterested in their children’s learning (Reardon, 2011). Also, Black parents in poverty have been blamed for positioning their children to have an unstable education by being highly transient (Reardon, 2011). Such scholarship has presented a scapegoat for a system that is failing Black students, while also supporting policymaker’s decisions that preserve the oppression Black students face in the education system (Paige & Witty, 2010).

**Oppositional identity and the burden of “acting White”**. As involuntary minorities in America, Black people face greater and more persistent forms of discrimination; therefore, they are a targeted oppressed group (Harris, 2011). Scholars posited that as Black folks experience oppression, they come to recognize that the ideal of meritocracy does not exist for Black people (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Consequently, the Black community does not make academic achievement a priority because they do not view education as an equalizer (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In addition, Black people recognize the expectation to assimilate to White dominant socio-cultural norms to become socially mobile (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). As a result of oppression and pressure to assimilate, scholars suggested Black students battled between understanding their African culture and finding their place in U.S. society, creating cognitive dissonance in identity development (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Also, scholars proposed that this cognitive dissonance caused Black students to develop an oppositional identity to assimilation, or “acting White”. Consequently, scholars and educators concluded that Black students made an intentional decision to underperform academically in resistance to White norms of academic attainment (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998), providing another deficit-thought for Black students to overcome at school. Although scholars suggested Black students lacked a desire to do well in school as an intentional opposition to status quo White American expectations, recent research demonstrated no significant difference in pro-academic orientations or post-secondary
graduation aspirations between Black high school students and White high school students (Diamond & Huguley, 2014). In fact, parents of Black students held more positive attitudes toward education attainment than White students and their parents (Harris, 2011).

**Contemporary Narratives: Opportunity Gaps & School Racial Climate**

Although many have argued that the U.S. is in a post-racial era (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011), racism continues to hinder equitable opportunities for access to and participation in services, resources, and power (Crethar & Winterowd, 2012), which impacts the development of Black children and adolescents (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Contemporary narratives have explored racial disparities in education using a social justice lens which provided a framework to explore Black-White disparities in education that consider the inequities and injustices individuals and communities experience as members of a system (Crethar, et al., 2008). As a result of social justice-oriented research, scholars found that Black students and families continued to experience disparities in access and resources (Milner, 2010); and support programs (Boykin & Noguera, 2011) within the U.S. education system. Also, research suggested legalized school segregation occurred through school zoning policies (Reardon, 2015) and within integrated schools through racialized tracking for course placement (Wright, Ford, & Young, 2017). Additionally, inequities noted by the Office of Civil Rights (2016) found that Black students were more than three times as likely to attend schools where fewer than 60 percent of teachers met all state certification and licensure requirements. Also, The Education Trust found high-poverty schools, which disproportionately serve students of color, are more likely to have instructors teaching content that they did not receive formal education in or do not have a certification to teach (Almy & Theokas, 2010).
Racialized tracking and institutional sorting. Whether Black students attended predominately Black schools or predominately White schools, access to advanced placement and gifted education courses remained limited (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012; Wright, et al., 2017), while overrepresentation of Black students placed in special education services sustained (Aud, et al., 2011). Scholars suggested this may be due to racialized tracking, which can be defined as the practice of separating students for classroom instruction, disproportionately filling higher-level classes with White students and lower-level classes with Black students and other students of color (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Ricks, 2014; Valant & Newark, 2017). For example, Black students were 40% more likely to be diagnosed with a learning disability than White students (Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Also, Black male students, who only represented 9% of the total public-school population, accounted for one-third of the students in public schools served as intellectually disabled (Office for Civil Rights, 2016). Also, the Office for Civil Rights found entry to advanced placement courses were racially segregated, highlighted by only 10% of Black females being identified as gifted in 2013-2014 as compared to 57% of White females and only 9% of Black males being identified as gifted in comparison to 59% of White males (Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Additionally, Black students were six times less likely to be enrolled in at least one advanced placement course (Office of Civil Rights, 2016).

School racial climate. National School Climate Council (NSCC) defined school climate as the quality and character of school life determined by the experiences of students', parents', and school personnel (2007). However, school climate research does not give much consideration to the influence of race and culture on student’s experiences (Byrd, 2017). School racial climate fills this gap by examining student’s awareness of implicit and explicit race-based experiences and discrimination as a factor influencing the academic experience of students.
(Byrd, 2017). Scholars demonstrated negative school racial climate was associated with lower academic achievement outcomes (Golden, Griffin, Metzger, & Cooper, 2018) and social development (Jia, Konald, & Cornell, 2016) for students of color. Additionally, scholars found Black student’s identity was directly and indirectly influenced by how they were treated at school (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). For example, over 400 Black and Hispanic middle school students identified experiencing less sense of belonging, lack of opportunities for participation, and a lack of relationships with adults at school as compared to White students (Voight, Hanson, O’Malley, & Adekanye, 2015).

**An Integrated Framework**

The current study integrated Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), the School Racial Climate dimensions as a conceptual framework (Byrd, 2017), and Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2013) to conceptualize and design the study to include the research questions, data collection methods, interview questions, and analysis. The researcher examined the following research questions:

RQ₁: How do Black high school students’ experience racism in U.S. public schools?

RQ₂: How do experiences of racism in U.S. public schools influence Black high school student identity?

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed to explore racism, privilege, oppression, and power that marginalized populations face through socio-political and institutional processes (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). CRT suggests truth is subjective and created by an individual or a group. The overarching tenet of CRT is that racism exists in every facet of American society and it exists in common, everyday experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).
CRT explores the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of oppression such as classism, heterosexism, and ableism (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). The second tenet of CRT is to challenge dominant, deficit grounded ideologies of meritocracy and colorblindness and fight against White privilege that restricts freedom of others, while also encouraging and rewarding assimilation to White culture (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). The third tenet is the centrality of experiential knowledge, which recognizes that it is critical for people of color to have the opportunity to story their lived experiences through sharing narratives, counternarratives, and family histories (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009) to challenge dominant discourse. The fourth tenet is to explore race and racism from an interdisciplinary approach, considering both historical and contemporary contexts (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). The fifth tenet of CRT is a commitment to social justice action, highlighting interest convergence. Interest convergence is defined as policies that support the mobility of Black people are only passed when those in power will also benefit (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The tenets of CRT support the examination of systemic racism but do not address interpersonal interactions or the way youth are socialized in a school setting. Therefore, in addition to CRT as a theoretical framework, the researcher integrated the School Racial Climate framework dimensions to examine how Black youth encounter socialization at school and engage in interpersonal relationships with racial outgroup peers at school.

**School Racial Climate**

Researchers explored school racial climate, which focuses on interpersonal interactions and the socialization around race and culture in school (Byrd, 2017) through exploring curriculum and messaging (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Hughes, McGill, Ford, & Tubbs, 2011), influence on sense of belonging and motivation to learn (Byrd, 2015), and influence on academic
attainment and discipline (Mattison & Aber, 2007). The School Racial Climate framework was created as a result of several research studies that aimed to understand the role of race and culture in students’ schooling experiences and develop a multidimensional, comprehensive quantitative scale to measure these factors (Byrd, 2017). The framework consists of two domains (a) intergroup interactions, which explores the frequency of interactions, quality of interactions, equal status, and support for positive interaction and (b) school racial socialization (Byrd, 2017). School racial socialization seeks to explore how messages about race and culture are communicated at school through formal curriculum and informal messages (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). The school racial socialization domain includes the following six dimensions: cultural socialization, mainstream socialization, promotion of cultural competence, colorblind socialization, critical consciousness socialization, and stereotyping (Byrd, 2017). The researcher chose to utilize Narrative Inquiry to examine systemic racism and school racial climate to provide space for Black youth’s voices to be heard.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Forms of narrative work date back to early philosophers who used stories and characters to depict lived experiences and seek universal themes to make meaning of the world (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). Narrative inquiry extends this philosophical foundation into a methodology that is used to explore, understand, and express lived experiences of participants through observing and listening to participants stories through oral, written, and art-based forms that become interpreted texts (Clandinin, 2007). Similarly, to CRT, Narrative Inquiry examines phenomenon through a subjective lens that considers the human experience as culturally, socially, and institutionally situated and constructed (Clandinin, 2013). The researcher listened to participant stories and lived alongside participants as they shared their experiences, and heard
their narratives as truth (Clandinin, 2013). By recounting their life experiences naturally through storytelling, Black youth had power over the authorship of their story and the researcher was able to co-construct a narrative that was reflective of the participant’s experiences (McAlpine, 2016).

**Method**

**Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study (Creswell, 2014). The criteria for participants in the study included the following: (a) be between the ages of 14-18 years old, (b) identify as Black, (c) and currently be enrolled in a public U.S. high school. There were eleven participants in the study who were all members of a youth enrichment program located in the southeast United States. This youth enrichment program was selected because of the programs mission to develop and nurture academic and social excellence in children and adolescents of all races, but most of the youth served through the program identify as Black, Hispanic, or Latino/a. The sample included seven females and four males. Four of the participants attended predominately White high schools and seven of the participants attended predominately Black high schools. Participants attended five different high schools.

**Prior to The Study**

After IRB approval and prior to the first focus group, the researcher selected a masters level counseling student with research experience as a research assistant. The researcher trained the research assistant in completing observational field notes and completing the story grid for collage inquiry. Also, the researcher piloted the use of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) (Zapata, Fugit, & Moss, 2017) and collage inquiry (Chilton & Scotti, 2014) with five students who met the sample criteria for the study. The results of the pilot study suggested that the images selected for Visual Thinking Strategies would stimulate dialogue about schooling experiences, but not
necessarily about race dynamics at school. Collage inquiry seemed to provide a creative and engaging way for participants to author their story and share multi-dimensional narratives.

**Data Management**

Participants created a pseudonym for themselves for the research project. Consent and assent forms containing legal names of the participants were stored in a locked file cabinet separate from collected data. Audio recordings were stored in a password protected electronic platform. Participants transcribed interviews, field notes, and analytic memos utilizing students’ pseudonyms and were uploaded to NVivo, with access restricted only to the researcher.

**Data Collection**

After receiving IRB approval at the host university, potential participants were identified by the youth enrichment program coordinator based on the sample criteria. A recruitment flyer was provided to the youth enrichment program coordinator to share with potential participants. Parental consent forms were distributed to the students who met the sample criteria. The researcher met with potential participants to discuss the project. Also, the researcher engaged with potential participants parents to explain the study. Parents of minor participants received a consent form for their child/ren to participate, minor participants received an assent form, and participants who were eighteen years of age received a consent form. Each consent form detailed the scope of the project, what participants were going to be asked to do, how information would be used, and statements about anonymity and confidentiality. Parents and participants were given a week to review the consent and assent document and decide if they were willing to participate in the study. At the end of the week, signed consent and assent forms were collected. Students who expressed interest completed a demographic questionnaire to ensure they met the sample criteria. Each participant received a $45 gift card.
Four qualitative data collection methods were utilized to examine and triangulate the convergence of different data sources and identify salient themes within each of and across participants storied experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Data sources for this study included three focus groups, collage, observational field notes, and analytic memos. Observational field notes documented participants’ pseudonyms, ages, grade levels, genders, races/ethnicities, and activities during interviews, to include emotional responses of participants throughout the research process (Saldana, 2016). In addition, reflective field notes were completed after each focus group to detail descriptive thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and ideas about research participants and participant-researcher interactions (Saldana, 2016). The researcher wrote analytic memos using the MEMO format throughout the research project to detail a trail of decision-making processes, reflect on what was occurring in the data, and be aware of confirmed or changing perspectives of the researcher (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). Analytic memos served as a cross reference for the analytic process and theme development (Saldana, 2016).

**Participant Group Interviews**

The study had eleven participants. Four of the participants were in one focus group and seven of the participants were in another focus group. Participants were placed in a focus group based on their availability to meet with the researcher. However, the groups ended up being divided by racial demographics of the schools they attended. The focus groups were facilitated similarly with both student groups. Each student group engaged in two group interviews. The third group was for member checking (Creswell, 2014), however, some participants were unable to participate in the member checking group and the researcher followed up with them individually. Focus groups were chosen for this study because they shift the balance of social power, both in the sharing and validation of individual and collective stories and in numbers, by
providing a safe space where the participants outnumber the researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Each focus group was 65-75 minutes and was audiotaped. Observational field notes were collected by the researcher and research assistant.

**Initial focus group.** The purpose of the initial focus group was to gain a better understanding of how students experience racism at school. The author utilized Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to stimulate collaborative discourse (Zapata, Fugit, & Moss, 2017) about Black student experiences in schools. VTS is an art-based strategy that uses pictures to increase reflective and critical thinking about a phenomenon to draw out diverse perspectives and stimulate dialogue (Zapata, Fugit, & Moss, 2017). The researcher selected three images that depicted Black students in school (see Appendix A for the three pictures). Participants were given one minute to review each photograph and were then asked the same four questions for each photograph:

(a) What is going on in the picture?

(b) What makes you say that?

(c) What more can you find/see in the picture?

(d) How does the picture make you feel? (Zapata, Fugit, & Moss, 2017).

The researcher listened to participants’ responses and encouraged reflection of content for meaning (Yenawine & Milner, 2014). In addition, the researcher named similarities and differences between participants observations of the photographs and stimulated discourse that sought to help participants draw connections between their responses and their lived experiences (Yenawine & Miller, 2014). Next, the researcher asked the participants semi-structured interview questions and probing questions about their school racial climate. The researcher and the
research assistant debriefed after the group to identify potential issues with data collection methods, discuss biases, and share initial reactions to student narratives.

**Second focus group.** The second focus group occurred one week after the first focus group. The purpose of the second group was for the researcher to ask follow-up questions that derived from the first focus group. Then, the researcher utilized collage inquiry to gather descriptions of participants lived experiences with racism at school and its influence on their identity. Collage is an art-based, visual approach created by using found images or materials, fragmenting them, and attaching them to a surface to depict events, experiences, and knowledge (Chilton & Scotti, 2014; Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Collage actively involved participants in the research process through the gathering and selecting of images that shared their truth related to experiences of racism at school and influence on their identity. Furthermore, collage inquiry served as a culturally responsive approach because it allowed Black youth participants to critically analyze and share their stories in a creative way (Reif & Grant, 2010) within their own cultural context and from their point of reference to bring awareness to social inequities they face (Finley, 2017). In addition, collage helped participants bring unconscious associations to the surface to reveal layers of knowing (Chilton & Scotti, 2014).

To facilitate students creating a collage during the focus group, the researcher modified van Schalkwyk’s (2010) Collage Life Story Elicitation Technique to align with the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. Participants were asked to consider their experiences with racism at school and create a collage that represented how they believe these experiences influenced how they view themselves. Participants were provided with a medium, 18 x 24-inch poster board, blunt scissors, liquid glue, and magazines to include fashion, hair, sports, home living, and cooking magazines that provided racially diverse images. Participants were instructed
to use a minimum of eight images that consisted of pictures or words from magazines provided. Participants had thirty minutes to complete the collage. The researcher and the research assistant observed participants during the process.

After participants completed their collages, each participant had up to ten minutes each to verbally share their collage. The author asked the participants to tell a story about each image on their collage and describe what each image means to them, how the collage made them feel, and how the images they presented represented how they saw themselves. The researcher also asked participants to give their collage a title. As participants shared their collages, the researcher and research assistant completed a story grid to document the order the images were storied, document the images participants used, and write key points about the narrative participants shared about each image. The story grid had six columns with headings as follows: (a) metaphorical image used, (b) experiences (in relation to each image), (c) meaning made, (d) influence on identity, (e) researcher summarization, and (d) coding (see Appendix B for the story grid). The researcher and the research assistant debriefed after the group to compare story grids, discuss group dynamics, share initial reactions to students’ narratives and collages, and discuss preliminary emerging themes.

**Final focus group.** The researcher shared preliminary salient themes based on data analysis with the participants using a directed, focus group for member checking (Creswell, 2014). Participants provided their feedback on the identified themes and engaged in final discourse about the phenomenon. Some participants were unavailable for the final group and participated in individual member checking.
Data Analysis

The focus group interviews, collages, and field notes collected were used as data. Following Creswell’s (2014) guidelines, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings and then developed focus group transcripts. Interviews were uploaded to the latest version of NVivo. The researcher and research assistant read the focus group interviews and made general notes about experiences of racism at school, reactions to these experiences, and mentions of influence on identity. Next, they engaged in deductive coding. Deductive codes were developed by integrating the tenets of CRT and the dimensions of the School Racial Climate framework. CRT tenets used for deductive coding included the following: (a) racism occurred, (b) intersectionality, (c) deficit thinking, (d) inequitable opportunities, and (e) interest convergence. The School Racial Climate dimensions utilized for deductive coding included the following: (a) cultural socialization, (b) colorblind socialization, (c) critical consciousness, (d) cultural competence, (e) school-wide efforts, (f) intergroup interactions, (g) discrimination, and (h) stereotyping. Following deductive coding, the researcher and research assistant independently completed inductive coding of the first group interview to create space for participants voice to be more clearly heard (Bendassoli, 2013). Based on the first round of deductive and inductive coding, the researcher developed a codebook. The researcher conducted a second round of coding using the established codebook.

Collage analysis. A story grid was used to assist in the analysis process. The story grid documented the images participants placed on their collage, as well as the order participants storied their images and meaning participants attributed to each image. The story grid also helped the researcher and research assistant begin to see themes within and across collages and document their interpretation and summarization of participant’s collages. The researcher and research assistant debriefed immediately following the second focus group to compare story
grids and discuss our summarization of each participants’ collages. During the next stage of analysis, the researcher created an individual transcript of each participants narrative of their collage. The researcher used the codebook to code the collages, adding codes when necessary.

**Polkinghorne’s model of analysis.** Polkinghorne’s model of analysis treats stories as data and uses thematic analysis to determine themes across stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). The researcher identified commonalities that existed across data sources to identify shared experiences and examine relationships within or among the narratives by categorizing codes across data sources (Polkinghore, 1995) using NVivo. The researcher examined characters of the narratives, identities performed or named, the non-verbal responses of the narrator, and the non-verbal and verbal responses of group members to students storied experiences. Next, narratives were reorganized and examined as parts within participants stories to co-create a whole that demonstrated an accurate, coherent representation of the data (Coulter & Smith, 2009). As the researcher analyzed the data, salient themes emerged.

**Member checking.** After salient themes were identified and clearly defined, the researcher met with participants for member checking (Creswell, 2014). Participants provided their feedback about the themes and collaborated with the researcher to adjust themes were necessary. The researcher reviewed her notes about the participants’ comments and in some cases, revised or included new narratives. The researcher and the research assistant met to discuss the final themes.

**Data Trustworthiness**

Multiple data collection methods were used including narratives prompted by Visual Thinking Strategies, semi-structured interview questions, and collage inquiry. The researcher facilitated three focus groups, collected observational field notes, and wrote analytic memos allowing for
triangulation of data for theme development (Patton, 2015). A research assistant was utilized to write observational field notes, complete the collage inquiry story grid, and code transcripts. In addition, the researcher engaged in member checking to improve credibility and validity of recorded data through receiving feedback on the accuracy of understanding and representation of narratives related to the phenomenon and providing a space for participants to share additional information related the phenomenon, if necessary (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) and the School Racial Climate dimensions (Byrd, 2017) shaped the research questions for data collection and deductive codes for data analysis.

Findings

A thematic analysis uncovered themes from participants narratives shared during a semi-structured interview and from storied collages. The findings are shared in three ways. First, the author shares the collage narratives of each participant to provide the reader with each participant’s authentic voice as they shared how their experiences of racism at school influenced their identity. Second, the author shares findings from each research question separately by naming and describing themes. Third, the author presents a case that cohesively reflects the participants lived experiences with racism and how it influenced their identity development.

Participant Demographics

Two participant groups were formed based on the availability of the participants. Participants in Group One attended predominately White high schools and participants in Group Two attended the same predominately Black high school. It is also important to note that all the participants were members of the same youth enrichment program and participation in such programming can have a profound impact on academic and social identity development and mobility of Black students (Bailey, Bradbury-Bailey, and Gueh, 2018).
Table 1. Participants demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Group One</th>
<th>Group Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mya</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group One School Profiles.** Participants attended four different high schools in neighboring southeastern counties where Black students represented 20% or less of the population; approximately 40% of students receive free lunch; and 8-10% receive reduced-price lunch. The graduation rate is 83-88%.

**Group Two School Profile.** Participants attended the same high school in a southeastern county where 85% of students are students of color and approximately 55% of students identify as Black; approximately 20% identify as Hispanic; 15% identify as White; and 2% identify as Asian. Approximately 90% of students receive free lunch. The graduation rate is 84%.
Participant Narratives

Here, the author shares each participants narrative based on their collage. Participants were asked to consider their experiences with racism and create a collage that represents how their experiences have influenced their view of self. Also, the author discusses themes which emerged within and across the narratives. Group One narratives are:

Max. Max named his collage “Randomness”. Max’s storied his collage:

This is a baseball and he’s (the pitcher) throwing a tomato at you saying the word issue. But to me I feel like it’s like people throwing a name on you. So, saying like, ‘oh, he's hood or he might steal a lot or something like that’. And then for the baseball I felt like I’m like the green (a reference to baseball when the coach gives the batter the okay to swing at any good pitch) and that’s like anybody just able to, trying to steal your opportunity; trying to take if from you. And then I have him (a football player) on here because I remember him playing football and he wasn’t supposed to get in cause he was a freshman. Everybody like doubted him but he ended up getting through. I mean, I feel like everybody just had doubt on him, but at the end of the day he prevailed and did the job that he was supposed to do. I got the hockey team here because they are always in a group and you always got to keep yourselves like with close friends that you know you can trust and put yourself around. And I um, got the cool fish on here because to me they look kinda fake, and I mean, they just looking at the one goldfish like they plotting. So I had the girl passing the ball, um you can’t really hog something all the time. Oh and this is...if he does something good he can’t stop smiling even in practices. So its
saying like, he dunked on somebody or shot a three, he'll always keep smiling the whole day. And I feel like that's me.

Although Max named his collage “Randomness”, his collage had a cohesive story of limited power. For example, Max felt like he was voiceless in determining his own identity because society has decided who he is already based on his race. In addition, he points out that he has limited access to opportunities because they are being stolen from him. However, like all the participants, Max has found a way to function amidst disenfranchisement. For instance, Max describes an athlete who defied the odds, which serves as encouragement and hope that he too will prove everyone wrong.

Mya. Mya names her collage, “Will you accept me?”. Mya storied her collage:

At the top, um I chose mainly Black woman because obviously that's my race, and I think they look really pretty and I had a fashion magazine. I put the word cheap because at my school, cause me dressing how I dress, compared to the other people, they think I look cheap because I don’t wear name brands and stuff like that. And I put feminine because I am not a tomboy at all. Um, I picked fashion because whenever I'm at school I get to wear my hair, however I want to, and I get to basically set the trends. I put stars right there because basically I want to be a star one day. Um, I put graceful because I want to carry myself gracefully and respectfully. I put looks right here because I get a lot of looks whenever I have a new hairstyle or something and I put fake right here because people don't call me fake, but they think my hair is fake. And how I talk is fake. I put another collage (group of pictures) right here which basically says I feel like a stand out in a crowd and its over here with all the Black women and the word under, because basically I feel like Black women are kept under. That's pretty much it...I liked the way it turned
out. I like the diversity of the different types of African American women, that were in there...I basically feel more empowered because I see all these beautiful Black women on there, and they are like serving looks and their makeup is just on point and they look really confident and happy with themselves.

Mya intentionally selected images of Black women whose skin tones and hair styles vary, as a representation of the many ways Black women can be beautiful. Although Mya sees herself as a combination of the beauty portrayed on her collage, she poses the question, “will you accept me?” Similar to Max, Mya recognizes that her self-view is not how others see her. For example, in the first focus group, Mya shared that all her characteristics make her unique and she has come to embrace her differences. However, Mya’s collage demonstrates others have been unable to celebrate her because of negative views about her hair, her clothes, and her use of language. Also, like Max’s feelings of powerlessness, Mya feels Black women are held down despite the beautiful, standout women Mya feels Black women are.

Noah. Noah named his collage, “Stereotyping”. Noah storied his collage:

I put this picture right here, the surfboarder, a climber, and a bike rider and I cut the head off because you don’t expect for it to be like a Black person so like if I wanted to do that you might think, you’d probably think it was somebody else, if that’s what I wanted to do, you know. Um, I put this group of people right here, it’s like Mexicans or Latinos, like separated, like everybody’s in a separated group like how this group of girls here and this group of boys here, they’re close together. And you got this one person over here, Black skin color feeling left out or just stay distant cause they can’t relate to other races or something like that. Other races could assume that I play football, like chicken, like Jordans, or you know just stuff like that just because of the
race I am. And our race as Black people, we think everybody, like every White girl, likes Starbucks, and they just eat, every White person, like eat healthy and stuff like that. Or White people don't expect us to eat healthy or drink Starbucks. so vice versa too. You see this golf person right here. He has a crowd cheering him on. He has support behind him. I'm doing good over here too. I don't have any support. Um and I'm doing just as good as he is over here. This one (a picture of two White guys with one White guy helping the other walk), and not just the Black race, but other races too. We don't like to help each other out. It's like everything gotta be a competition. Now you see somebody helping somebody up, helping walk somewhere. And this last one right here. See this man right here. This man represents a student or something. And she (the teacher) asks him who do you live with, you live with your mom or your dad, not knowing the background he has. She has a whole family at home, you know, uh, our teachers don't expect us to live with both of our parents, most of the time. I guess, I guess that's really what I got.

Noah highlighted many stereotypes of Black people to demonstrate other racial groups have decided who they think Black people are to include the foods they eat, the type of activities they participate in, and what their families look like. Similar to Max and Mya, Noah recognizes that views of Black identity are made without an attempt to understand the identity of a Black person as an individual. Distinct from other participants, Noah challenges the idea of meritocracy as he describes an image on his collage that depicts him being just as good as his White classmate but not having anyone cheering for him, while he watches White classmates get a lot of support and praise.

Robin. Robin named her collage, “Just Me”. Robin storied her collage:
This represents my style because I am kind of old school and vintage and they might look at me crazy but I don’t care. And then these two, ok, those two right there, they like represent my future and schools, well the schools I want to go to because I want to be a physical therapist. Okay. And then this one right here represents me always smiling because I never show my weaknesses. And then this one right here, It’s hard to tell because It’s like Black on Black. She wears different hairstyles and me, I don’t like to keep the same hairstyle. And these two right here, um, I like to cook and I like to try different things. And the last one right here, I like to party and have a good time, but I don’t like to hang around like the same crowd, I like to visit with different people. (The collage) makes me feel good because it’s like I’m not ashamed of how I am because I know a lot of people, they might try to hide it but me at the end of the day like, I had to live my life.

In narrating her collage, Robin described not wanting to be boxed in to one way of being. For example, Robin likes to have diverse friends and multiple friend groups and highlights that she likes different types of food. In addition, Robin shares that she is not ashamed of who she is. Similar to Mya, Robin had internalized negative messages about her identity as a younger student but worked to overcome those messages and now celebrates being who she is.

Across the four collages presented in the first student group, each of the participants feels they are voiceless in determining the way others view them because of stereotypes at the intersection of race and gender and each of the participants ask to be seen and accepted for who they are as individuals. Although there were similar key points highlighted by all the participants, there were also differences. For example, Robin and Mya shared how they built a level of resilience to negative messaging about their racial identities and have come to accept themselves, however,
Robin only shares her current positive views of self without discussing the identity struggles she previously had due to race-based negative messaging. Alternatively, Max and Noah’s collage narratives bring attention to identities that have been placed on them as Black males but do not challenge these stereotypes by providing a counternarrative describing how they see themselves. Group two shared their collage narratives:

**Bobby.** Bobby named his collage “Black Power”. Bobby storied his collage:

*These two pictures, right? This like that women, like the beauty of Black. Okay...Black people mostly say Black women are ugly and get pregnant. But it’s a lot of power behind that. Women are like, like power. It’s a leadership to it. See there’s like, like, a big coaches life, showing that people have leadership. Like Alpha. I felt like that’s the Alpha role. There’s beauty of Black people like, I’ll put in words...Like, but there’s a pretty Black man. And this picture (image of a man who looks like Martin Luther King, Jr.), I mean it’s like a symbol of power. Down here I wrote ‘All Lives Matter!!’. So, you know, it’s really not just about only Black lives, like we should all be just sitting together, like we all on the same planet. But at the same time Black lives do matter. Then this says, ‘The Black always in first place’, because we are good at everything. And ‘when you go Black you won’t go back’. Same thing; like because of who we are. Our power.*

Bobby’s collage focused on a counternarrative of what it means to be Black. He discussed Black males and females from a strengths approach, naming Black folks as good, as leaders, as beautiful, and as powerful. Bobby also spoke about hope for social racial integration.

**Rainbow.** Rainbow named her collage, “Be You!”. Rainbow storied her collage:

*The first thing that I chose was my quotes. Um, just cause like, I feel like it’s a good quote*
for everybody. It says ‘Most people mollify psychic pain by attacking back; we yearn for revenge. But achievement striving is better. It opens the mind to the possible, instead of hitching it to the horrible’ and I feel like that’s a good point because it is like, it just goes to show like revenge is not always the answer. Like when it comes to racism and stuff, I always say when it comes to like, you know, people mistreating me. I got good vibes only on here because I live by that and I got Cardi B besides it (good vibes only). That’s because I love Cardi and I feel like she’s a person that demonstrates a really good example because she's always just herself. She never like, you know somebody she’s not.

Um, I have the girl from Wakanda, I mean from Black Panther on here. She just like, she likes science and technology just like me with all the different gadgets and stuff like that. Um, I have this lady on here cause she's just smiling, well like she lived her best life. Um, and then I have like four little quotes on here. ‘A change will come’. We could, you could go ahead and, um, ‘stop and smell the roses’. (‘Live your life written’ on the collage)-Meaning just like, you know, just like live your life. Don't think about all the negative. ‘I guess build yourself up buttercup’. Self-explanatory. Just, you know, have your confidence, you know. Be you and ‘keep calm and carry on’. Certain stuff gets to you but...just go on, with your best life, just do you. And ‘it's time to take action’ even though like revenge it’s not the answer. But I do feel like we are allowed to take action. Like we have the right to take actions about racism and stuff like that. Like we can still stand up for ourselves and defend ourselves and stuff like that. And I just live off that cause.

When the researcher asked how Rainbow what she was thinking and feeling as she made her collage, she shared, I put things that I relate to and things that I feel like other people could
relate to. And how we all are like, everything that we're talking about, like racism and stuff like
that and how we can like go about it and just, just stuff like that.

The first quote that Rainbow used described experiencing racism as psychic pain. As she
continued to describe what this quote meant to her, she shared that the pain of racism creates an
almost natural response of wanting to do harm to those who harm you. Similar to participants in
the first student group, Rainbow is committed to defying the odds placed against her at the
intersection of race and gender so that she can claim her success as her revenge. Also similar to
participants in the first group, Rainbow shared her appreciation for the idea of just being able to
be yourself. Unique to Rainbow’s narrative is a discussion about wanting to fight against racism.

**St. Patrick.** St. Patrick named her collage, “How I Look at Life”. St. Patrick storied her
collage:

*I put on mine, basketball, because I played basketball. It was helping me get through like
a lot of things emotionally. Another one of my pictures is a lady who looks like she’s
successful, so I’m going to say that’s my ultimate goal. Um and education because to be
successful you have to be educated. And I put a little girl with a little boy, which one is
White and one is Black because I don’t discriminate friend wise. If I feel like we clicked
then we clicked. It doesn’t matter what race or because you are.* The researcher asks St.
Patrick to talk more about basketball helping her overcome what she’s experienced. *St.
Patrick stated, I would say I've experienced a little bit of racism playing basketball from
different teams, but I'm playing so I'm not worried about that. Like what you think or how
you think I look or anything like that...These pictures based on how I look at life.*

St. Patrick was the only participant who identified as an athlete. She shared that she has
encountered racism as an athlete traveling to other schools that do not have many Black students.
However, she chooses to ignore such acts of racism and puts her energy toward her goals within the game and for her life. Like Bobby, St. Patrick advocated for social racial integration.

**Larry.** Larry named his collage “Culture”. Larry storied his collage:

*I picked this one because it was diverse (a photo of five women of varying racial or ethnic backgrounds). Then you got him because he’s a Black basketball player. Then I put Muhammad Ali. He was like. All right. Here it says, ‘a Black man and his barber’*. That’s a very special relationship right now. Serena Williams, She’s a Black tennis player. Okay. Uh, I picked this picture right here because it has only White boys playing football together, which was probably in like the 1950s and forties. Then kind of like that, there has been some change, some progress. Uh, these three guys (athletes), I picked them for the same reason. This one right here, he’s a Black artist.

Larry’s collage utilized sports to highlight what the author saw as ‘a back then and right now’ concept to demonstrate progress in access to opportunity in the Black community to identify the hope he has for life’s possibilities.

**Pebbles.** Pebbles named her collage “Diverse World”. Pebbles storied her collage:

*So I’m going to start with this one. I started with this picture because I felt like we need to have like more groups of people make movies and like this, like this show, it's like two Black dudes and two White dudes that came together. And then, um, this says, ‘bold and blessed’ and I guess she wrote the book telling people about the Black culture. And then this picture down here I chose, it's like a little girl. Like I say it’s probably an African dress, showing like the culture of it and how beautiful the culture is. And then I picked this quote. ‘How do kids cope?’ And it’s to say, to get a sense of how high school, how school age children think about how they treat others or whatever. And then I chose it*
because most school age kids feel like they have to fit in with certain groups of people or they feel like they had to be somebody else. But most school age students, they, they just get along with different races no matter what. And no matter what anybody tells them.

Then I picked this one and it talks about like Black people's hair three ways, to rock the new looks and whatever. Basically, saying that no matter what, you're still beautiful and you know how like different people are about our hairstyles. The hairstyle doesn't make the person the personality makes the person. I picked these two girls who are maybe going to a party. A Black girl and a White girl. So, they're just going out to have fun and they're like smiling and laughing 'cause they understand and they don't care about what everybody else thinks about it. The researcher stated, ‘So, I noticed that you had here Black and White folks over here and here. Do you have diverse friends?’ Yes. Because most people just think, oh it's not okay to have this certain person as a friend because of their background. You're noticing that. But really, it's not about that. It's really about getting to know the person, my personality, what we are thinking or feeling. Other than that, I feel like people should put our differences aside. Actually, get to know a person for who they are because of what happened back during that time, we wasn't born to see everything. Do anything.

After I stopped recording, Pebbles shared that she struggles to make Black friends because she hangs out with different race groups and she doesn’t think a lot of her Black peers agree with mixed race friend groups. Also unique to Pebbles collage, was her discussion about how children cope with feeling like they must fit into a group and the idea of feeling like you must modify who you are in order to find a friend group. Like Rainbow and the participants in the first group,
Pebbles was looking for freedom to be herself and be accepted for who she is. However, Pebbles was looking for this acceptance within and outside of her racial group.

**Shaquana.** Shaquana named her collage, *’Black Girls Rock’*. She storied her collage:

Okay. So on mine I put a ‘Black Girls Rock’. I put Tiffany Haddish on here because she's a Black person and they call her to a unicorn or whatever and you know, it really goes to show how you can one day be in something just by doing something that you love and you do every day. Like her breakout movie was Girls Trip and she said at first she didn't even know where her next dollar was coming from. And to do that movie and to just blow up like that was amazing. I put Fantasia because that’s my girl. She was a teenage mother. Then she went on American Idol and then she won and that was pretty powerful. And she got the voice of a goddess. I put Black girl’s hair products because you know, black girls, our hair is our personality as a part of our style. You know, the way we were, it is expressed as our mood. Like say this right here, you know it’s a little nappy, but you know what I’m saying? If you on that vibe, I'm comfortable, I can put it in braids and I can say that I’m Sassy. I can shave it all off if I wanted to and it would still be expression. So yeah, that's mine. I think I had the best poster Black Girls Rock. That means we just being ourselves with our personality and you know, and we rock like rock the boat. When I was putting it together, I was like, I really don't know what to put, but you know these, these things that I chose is what speaks to me. Tiffany, she makes me laugh but instead it's just, she makes me want to sing and these hair products makes me want to slick my hair. My poster was Black Girl Magic you guys. No matter what skin type you are, light or dark, you still beautiful no matter what.

Similar to Bobby and Mya, Shaquana spoke a lot about the power and beauty of Black women as
a counternarrative to the dominant negative view of Black women. After I stopped recording Shaquana shared that the women on her collage serve as motivation for her because of the obstacles they overcame to obtain success.

**Shelia.** Shelia’s collage only had a few images and she shied away from providing a detailed narrative of her collage. Shelia did not provide an explanation for her hesitation in sharing her collage. The images on her collage were of Black women. Shelia referred to one image on her collage saying, “*She just looks successful. You can be successful in life. The rest of it, I don’t know*.”

Cohesively, participants in the study were consciously aware of their experiences with racism at school specific to teachers and peers. Participants had a desire to be accepted without adapting their Black identity but felt voiceless and powerless in fighting against racial outgroup definitions of Black identity. As a result of their experiences with racism, participants engaged in methods to protect themselves at school. Participants modified their identity to align with social norms or they engaged in socialized silence. Participants who engaged in socialize silence did so by ignoring incidents of racism to avoid confrontation, rejected that a specific incident was racism, or engaged in rumination, wherein participants questioned if the suspected race-based experience was brought on by their own actions. In addition to protecting themselves, participants sought to recover their identity and find internal power through external means by seeking positive views of self through Black media representation to include Black music artists, actresses, leaders, and athletes. Also, some participants sought internal power and over time, were able to accept and celebrate their Black identity regardless of experiencing racism at school.
**First Research Question**

The analysis presented five overarching themes demonstrating how Black high school students experience racism in U.S. public schools. Three of the themes were teacher focused: (a) discriminatory practices by teachers, (b) negative stereotyping by teachers, and (c) limited exploration and celebration of Black history. Also, three subthemes emerged within discriminatory practices by teachers: (a) inequitable discipline practices, (b) inequities in teacher support, and (c) devalued and demeaned by teachers. Two of the themes were peer focused: (a) the n-word and (b) segregation within integrated schools. Although all the participants shared experiences involving teachers and peers, narratives from participants who attended predominately White high schools emphasized peer-related experiences with racism and participants who attended predominately Black high schools shared more teacher-related experiences with racism.

**Discriminatory practices by teachers.** Black students experienced discriminatory practices at school through unfair or prejudicial treatment based on their race in three ways to include inequitable discipline practices, inequity in teacher support, and devaluation of their abilities.

**Inequitable discipline practices.** Regardless of gender or racial demographics of schools attended, participants experienced and witnessed racial disparities in discipline practices of their teachers. For example, Max and Robin both attended predominately White schools and described incidents where Black students received a harsher consequence for the same actions of a White student. Sixteen-year old Max shared:

*Well, in class one day I walked in with my hood on, and we can't wear it in her class because she thinks we might have our earphones in. So, she makes us take it off. So, I*
took mine off, and we sat down, and one of my friends came in, and he had his hood on, but he wouldn't take it off. She, like, she asked nicely like four times, and then he just wouldn't take it off. So, he, I guess, he was mad that day, I don't know. And then she sent him out, and then three White kids come in there, and they had their hoods on, and she just asked nicely like two times, but they just get more work, and the work they got wasn't even that hard. Cause I looked at it, actually.

When the researcher asked Max how often he witnessed Black students receiving different consequences than other racial groups at school, he responded, “more than I should.” Similarly, sixteen-year-old Robin recalls being chastised by a teacher for her clothing and then witnessing the same teacher overlook a White student who wore the same type of shirt. Robin stated:

I remember it was one morning, it was around like picture day or something like that. Um, and it was just like Caucasian teacher I never had. And um, I think I had wore like an off the shoulder top. Um, and that day I had like white pants. So, at the time we could wear that, but now we have restrictions so we can't. Um, so I was just like, walking in the hallway. So, like my first period class and she was just like, oh, you can't wear that. Like you have to like pull it up or something like this. I was like really, but, but I was like, okay, I did it anyways. And it was another Caucasian, she didn't have on the same shirt as me, but it was still off the shoulder. So, she walked by and she knew the same anything. It's like we have on the same off the shoulder. But how come I got to pull mine up?

Participants Bobby, Larry, Pebbles, Rainbow, and Shaquana who attend predominately Black schools shared that they witnessed Black students receiving discipline referrals and consequences more than other racial groups at their schools “everyday” and “all of the time”.

For example, Shaquana and Rainbow engage in dialogue about how they often play argue with
their friends and sometimes horseplay. Shaquana shared:

*Have you ever play argued with somebody and they be like ya’ll chill out, ya’ll chill out.*

*That’s {teacher}. Every time I say something in the classroom, she be like Shaquana, I
think you’re serious. You’re really about the fight them. And I be joking. She irritates me
with that cause like she do it every single day.*

Rainbow agrees and adds:

*That happens to me too. Like one time me and somebody were play arguing and there
was a teacher standing right there and she called security, she called [the administrator]
and everything and she was like, I think they’re about to fight for real and we told her no,
we were just joking and she was still like I think you’re going to fight for real.*

Participants note that some other racial groups at their school engage in similar behavior, but the
teachers’ response is different. Shaquana and Rainbow believe that their teachers respond
punitively to Black girls because of the belief that “Black girls are fighters”, which they believe
makes their teachers nervous.

**Inequities in teacher support.** Eight of the participants, regardless of school attended,
named teachers who they believed provided more academic support to White and Hispanic
students than to Black students. Although participants agreed that the disparities were race-
based, there was a debate about inequities in support being due to racist teachers. Also, there
were mixed thoughts regarding most teachers providing inequitable support or if there were just
some. For example, Shaquana shared:

*Like he’ll like, if any Caucasian or Hispanic student ask him a question, he’ll like answer
it all nice and stuff but as soon as a Black person asks him a question, he’ll be like, ‘did
you not just hear it when I said it.’ But if someone else of a different race asked it’ll be
different.

Bobby followed up saying:

*I ain’t gonna lie. I ain’t being racist but like a majority of these White teachers, they
racist.*

Some of the group members disagreed, stating they didn’t believe a majority were racist. For
instance, St. Patrick stated: *“I don’t really agree with what you (Bobby) just said because it’s
some teachers out here that really do care”*. Bobby responded:

*Yeah but some of them, most of them don’t. Like most of them don’t. It’s like
5 percent of White teachers at this school that will help you and 95 percent
they just don’t.*

All the participants referred to at least one teacher they felt held bias against Black students,
however, students who attended a predominately Black school referred to multiple teachers who
participants identified as racist or engage in inequitable practices based on race. Also, it is
important to note participants were able to name at least one teacher, race unspecified, they felt
went out of their way to support them. In addition to inequitable discipline and teacher support,
participants felt their teachers demean them.

**Devalued and demeaned by teachers.** Seven out of the eleven participants described
experiences where they felt their teachers devalued and their academic abilities or demeaned
their character or culture. Mya, a seventeen-year-old student, shared:

*I asked one of the teachers there (at school) if she could like slow down a little so I can
write down the notes and stuff. And she was like if you can’t keep up with the work, then*
As one of few Black students in her school and the only Black student in the class, Mya felt that her teacher responded this way because the teacher already did not think Mya belonged there because of her race. Upset by her teachers' comments, Mya responded to this encounter by leaving the classroom. Her teacher wrote an office referral and Mya received in-school suspension for leaving the classroom without permission. Although she understood that it was against school rules to leave the room, embarrassment and anger encouraged her decision to leave. She had, once again, been made to feel like she did not belong somewhere that she had the right to be.

Like Mya, Robin shared an experience from late middle school/early high school:

_"I did have this one teacher, I felt like she was trying to like degrade me because, well she's Caucasian as well. Um, and she was, well we were talking about like our career goals or something like that. And she had asked me what I wanted to be, and I was like, oh, I want to be a physical therapist when I'm older. And she was just like, oh well that's going to be hard to get there. It's going to be a hard journey or something like that is, she was like, you'll be better off doing something else. And I just said, well you think I can't do it like what you mean...like that kind of ticked me off. But I mean I didn't say anything else about it._

Differently from Mya and Robin, Rainbow witnessed her friend’s character be directly and publicly demeaned. Rainbow stated:
She [the teacher] told one of my friends, cause we were walking to find [the teacher] and she was like ‘why you not in class? You ain’t never gonna be shit. You never, you ain’t never gonna graduate. You ain’t never gonna amount to nothing’ and stuff like that. Rainbow believed the teacher responded this way because the teacher had the idea that Black students are always trying to cut class. Alternatively, Bobby shared that he feels degraded by one of his male teachers who tries to imitate Black culture, stating:

*Its like for example, let me think of one. Like (my teacher) he acts like, like it makes me feel the wrong way. He talk like he one of us, like he all hip and shit. (group laughter). I just hate it though…but like (my other teacher) he talks like that too but you know, he understands like where we come from and where we at.*

What Bobby shares here is a layered thought about the way White teachers can be offensive when mocking Black culture whether with positive intentions or negative intentions. But Bobby also presents the idea that one White teacher may be able to engage with Black students this way if there is understanding of Black culture or perhaps a White teacher who grew up around Black culture, versus a teacher who does not have an understanding of or lived experience in the Black community. A similar fine line emerges in another theme as well.

**Negative stereotyping by teachers.** This theme emerged from students describing experiences where they felt stereotyped by their teachers. At the intersection of race and gender, Black female participants often felt stereotyped because of their voice tone and volume, as well as social mannerisms when they talk, and Black males felt perceived as thugs. Noah shared a narrative that depicted negative stereotyping, but also a deficit counternarrative. He stated the following:
I kind of get stereotyped a lot, especially being from [where I'm from]. It's just like you see the Black dude, he mean muggin, but once you start talking to him, he cool, and then to a teacher I might look, I might look like a thug or something. Then if they see my grades and be like, hey this man got all A's and B's, and he quiet in class, like, so.

Bobby explained that teachers “think the Black kids in this school smoke in the bathroom and all that. And like all the Black kids, somehow, all of them gang bang.” During his collage presentation, Bobby also shared his perspective of how he sees Black females experience negative stereotypes stating, “people mostly say Black women are ugly, they get pregnant and stuff, but behind Black women is power, there is leadership to it.” Also, at the intersection of being Black and female, Shelia, a sixteen-year old female and high school junior shared, “they just think that like all Black girls are like ratchet and ghetto and fight all the time.” All the participants agreed that negative stereotyping is a part of their daily lived experience. Although they all shared being affected by their teachers’ images of who they are, they also shared that they have become accustomed to facing it.

**Limited exploration of Black history and culture.** This theme emerged as students shared the lack of opportunities they have had to learn about or celebrate Black history and culture at school. Students agreed with Shelia that learning about Black history is “more of an elementary school thing.” Students had similar experiences to Mya who shared that she only learned about “people who are already mainstream...like Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela, Harriet Tubman.” Noah noted that there was not any attention given to learning about Black history or Black culture. He stated the following:

*You don't really focus a lot on Black, Black idols and stuff like that...I'm sure there's plenty out there. You don't hear a lot about them though. We don't get enough credit and*
notice, especially when it's White teachers teaching it. There's always somebody that you hear about that's White and did something...There's like a whole assignment on them.

Mya added:

Like they'll speak on the Black people, like a Black inventor or something or someone that created something, but then you'll hear about this White man that came along, and he redid something to it and now that's what we know it as today...And we'll spend a moment on the Black person and a bunch of time on the White man.

Larry and Bobby recalled one assignment they each had while in high school that encouraged learning about someone in Black history; however, the teacher did not cover any content on Black history or culture, rather they assigned a project for students to seek knowledge on their own and present to the class.

**The “n-word”**. During dialogue about race-based peer dynamics at school, profound discourse about the use of the “n-word” as a racial slur and as a social greeting occurred. There was some variation in the use of the “n-word”, where students who attended a predominately White school had been called a nigger by students or staff at their school but all participants encountered members of all racial groups using the slang term of the n-word, nigga, to address one another and Black students. Only one student who attended a predominately Black school reported being called the racial slur and it was by a teacher. Common among both groups of students was a reflection on the use of the word nigga by White and Hispanic students at their schools, stating “they say it more than Black people”; “we gotta hear it every day”. Also, both groups debated about if it was okay for racial outgroup members to use any version of the “n-word”. For example, Noah shared:
It's around me just not to me. Um, my first year [at my school now] ... everybody was outside. I don't know why I still remember it, but two White guys, I'm just standing there. I don't know anybody. I'm new to the location. What's up my [n-word], I turned around. He slurred his words. What's up my nnnn... He talking to another White dude behind me. He just cut it off. I ain't know what to think. I didn't know it was going to be like that.

Noah shared more experiences like the narrative above. He has come to accept students of all racial group using the slang version of the word in general conversation if they are not greeting him using the word and they do not call him the word. However, some participants had been called the n-word as a racial slur.

Max spoke quietly and shared:

I'm kind of good. I mean I don't really interact with people I don't know... I've only gone up to like five Hispanics, and they said something negative... I've like went up to some Whites...I remember one of the Whites saying, ‘uh, I don't know you nigger’...I just go like, oh well, at least I know not to talk to him...I'm just trying to be a friendly person. And then you just go directly at me.

Max shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. He removed his hand from his mouth and shifted forward in his seat. He added that he told the teacher about the incident, and the teacher said she would tell the school counselor. Max never heard anything from the school counselor, and the teacher did not follow up with him either. Max was taught that reporting racism does not result in change or consequences.

Similar to Max, Rainbow had been called a racial slur, but by a teacher. Rainbow shared that she and her brother had the same teacher at different times and experienced blatant racism from the teacher. Rainbow stated:
She would just always like cuss at us, snap at us, call us fools, she would walk up to us and hit on us like this [she demonstrated being hit with one open hand near her shoulder]. One time she called us niggers.

As students shared their stories, there was an intermittent dialogue about why the “n-word,” in various forms is so readily used by races who do not identify as Black. Some students believed that it was used intentionally to “get under your skin,” some thought that other race groups “don’t understand that there is a deeper meaning” to the word and that others attribute it to other racial groups growing up around Black culture.

**Segregation within an integrated school.** Despite racial integration, students described the peer dynamics at their schools as completely or mostly racially divided. For example, Larry shared, “It was a little Mexican group, a Black group, White group, White kid right there, just like that.” Mya, who attends a predominately White school, described her school stating:

> For me and my school, there's not that many Hispanics or Blacks. So, all the Hispanics and Blacks, they end up with each other, and then the Asians, there's not that many Asians. There's like four or five at the whole high school. But you're mainly see them hanging out with like the popular people doing like track and golf and stuff like that.

Noah named the racial dynamic as “segregated,” but added that some students are in mixed-race friend groups. Similarly, Shaquana, who attended a Black school, agreed that there was segregation, but stated that sometimes “they kind of sort of mix” and “sometimes they stay to themselves.” Shaquana also noted that they “don’t really have no racist problems expect for a few selected students” because no one “really wants to be openly racist because you know, you can’t be racist to a school that’s majority Black.”
Unlike Shaquana, Robin has always attended predominately White schools. Robin recalled being in kindergarten where she approached a group of Hispanic girls on the playground at school to play and “one of the Hispanics, she was like, oh no, you can't play this because you’re Black; we only play with Hispanics.”

Although the participants recognized racial segregation within their schools, some participants believed that their schools worked well this way and others felt that there should be a push for more inclusivity and diversity in groups and throughout the school.

Figure 1. How Black students experience racism in schools

Second Research Question

The second research question asked how participants’ experiences with racism at school influenced their identities. As stated previously, identity was defined as how a participant fits into society as a Black person. For the purpose of this research, society is viewed as the school environment. The analysis presented four overarching themes that represent how participants experiences with racism influenced their identity: a) emergence of critical consciousness, (b) socialized silence, (c) use of experiences with racism as internal motivation, and (d) external
means to recover self-image. Socialized silence presented three subthemes: (a) avoiding confrontation, (b) rejection of racism, and (c) rumination.

**Emergence of critical consciousness.** Students’ experiences with racism made them aware of the oppression that impacted them and their school communities. Gaining knowledge about ways systems and structures were created and sustain inequity is a step in developing critical consciousness (Ginwright, 2010). Because participants’ schooling experiences did not include exploration of privilege and oppression, some participants sought knowledge about Black history and culture independently, and others learned from their first-hand experience with oppression. St. Patrick, an 18-year old high school senior, explained her recognition of racism by stating:

\[
\text{We've tried, and it's not completely over. It's been decades, and nothing has really changed, nothing really changed. We actually have freedom that's it, but like no new change, and they're even more racist. It's just like they say, it goes down from generation to generation because that's how they're taught.}
\]

Similarly, Noah believed that White students were taught racism. He stated the following: “I mean and kids right now, you can't even blame them cause that's how they, they raised like to be the way they are in the home system they are in.” At the intersection of race and socioeconomic status, Rainbow suggested the following reason for the racial divide:

\[
\text{I think the White students stay to their own more because like we can't relate to what they go through just like they can't relate to what we go through. White students they don't really, White students they have White privilege, and I say that because they don't go through the same stuff as us, maybe like money wise or something they might go through something like us, but not racial wise.}
\]
Rainbow also spoke to her awareness of the deficit messages Black students hear and how she believed these messages impacted the way Black students see themselves:

> And some people act the way they do because they've been told all their lives that they won't be anything...Like you never gonna be nothing, just gonna be in the streets and stuff like that and that's just a mindset... so that's what they (Black students) gonna do.

**Socialized silence.** Because participants have readily experienced a negative school racial climate, direct racism, and discrimination participants have come to believe that racism is to be expected. For example, Noah shared, “To be honest, I'm nonchalant about it now. In this world, it just is what it is. So that's what I do”. Consequently, participants do not see a need for addressing their experiences with racism directly or indirectly, through reporting.

Additionally, unique to Max’s narrative was that he was the only participant who reported racism to a teacher at some point during his K-12 career, and it went unacknowledged by adults in his school. Since that time, he has not shared his experiences with anyone, not even his parents. He stated the following: “I just felt like it wasn’t that big because racism is a thing.” Socialized silence presented in four subthemes: (a) avoiding confrontation, (b) rejection of racism, (c) rumination, and (d) internal motivation.

**Avoiding confrontation.** Participants encountered stereotyped threats as they chose silence to avoid solidifying stereotypes about Black people being confrontational. For instance, Rainbow, Robin, and Mya were intentional to demonstrate anti-stereotypical responses when they encountered racism, which for them meant ignoring it. Similarly, Max said, “I’ll move back or I’ll just leave it alone...when they’ve said something negative, I’ve just left it alone because it's drama I don't want to start”. He also acknowledged that his experiences with racism have
made him “move differently...like how I act, behave, and react.” Robin agreed and stated: “I always smile; I never show my weaknesses.” And Rainbow shared:

Experiences with racism make you angry, but you have to focus on the good vibes, the positive...smile through it all and live your life and enjoy it. Don’t think about all the negative.

Rejection of racism. Although students shared experiences of systemic racism, microaggressions, and blatant racism, they also attempted to reject the notion that these experiences were racist. It is important to note that students who responded with rejection of racism attended a predominately Black school or previously attended a predominately Black school. One participant, Noah, described his beliefs about racism:

Racism is not that bad anymore. Like I'm not going to say it's not a bad 'cause it is in some parts, but, like, the black who do get noticed. They get noticed, it's just a lot of newer people like rappers and stuff like that. Like White people listen to what we listen to and not like how it was back then. So, they, they like what we like, the same thing.

Shaquana agreed with Noah and shared her belief:

Well when racism goes away, it goes on to another person, but I feel like Black people we get a little bit of racism, but now it's more towards on the Hispanic people, you know, like with Donald Trump and like the wall and stuff like that, and it shifts from one group to the other group, and when they get done with the Mexicans who, who else is there?... You don't know who they're going to go to the next, but it's going to be on some other race.

In some cases, students made excuses for their teachers’ negative race-based behaviors. Rainbow said, “Well she already told us that she’s an only child so like she just always gets things her
way." Shelia provided a similar response stating that teachers are “just sensitive.” And St. Patrick believed that “some teachers just shouldn’t be teachers.”

Rumination. Rumination is a focus on self as a possible cause for one’s distress or circumstances (Brondolo, et al., 2009). In the context of examining oppressed groups, rumination occurs when members of a marginalized group question if they are to blame for the negative beliefs society holds about them (Brondolo, et al., 2009). As participants attempted to process how their experiences influenced the way they function in society, they began to question if Black people have some responsibility in the way White people respond to them. Although Bobby was adamant that his teachers were racist, he suggested that Black students brought it on themselves by stating:

*I ain’t gonna lie, it’s not even all like the teachers...some Black kids they don’t know how to act at school so they be like ya’ll can’t do these things because ya’ll don’t know how to act...Cause like I said like majority of Black kids in this school do all that smoking in the bathrooms and all that.*

Similarly, Noah believed that Black students engaged in negative behaviors that warranted deficit narratives and inequitable treatment towards Black students. He stated:

*If anything, you see Black people being ignorant and stuff. Like Black people, some Black people, especially in this generation down here in this county, they don't have no self-control with just trying to do too much.*

At the intersection of race and gender, St. Patrick and Shaquana agreed that Black female students are negatively stereotyped as being aggressive and ignorant because of the exhibited behavior of some Black female students. St. Patrick shared that she thought, “It’s how you put
yourself out there. People only think of you some type of way if you're portraying it.” Shaquana stated:

You know what, sometimes the stereotypes they give on us, we really cause them on ourselves, like the way we be acting and stuff. Not saying it’s all our fault, but sometimes we be causing it on ourselves because if you look at who fights at school, it’s the Black females.

Use of experiences with racism as internal motivation. Despite students experiencing racism in various forms and attempting to protect themselves from the damage these experiences can cause, they all reported that they have made conscious decisions about using their negative experiences as fuel to prevail anyway. Robin shared:

I’ll just say okay cause, when stuff happened like that. I just like, I don’t know, that motivates me to go harder and it pushes me…it’s not so we can please them. But like so we can say we did it, or we made it this far and like it’s no going back.

Similarly, Mya shared:

I've grown to get used to it and I think for me it motivates me more because everybody's like, ‘oh, you're going to be pregnant by even by the time you're even 17’; ‘you're not going to graduate.’ And I mean it hurts when I hear it at first. So, it gives me more motivation to be striving to do better. Prove everybody wrong.

External means recover self-image. The participants referred to the way Black students were negatively viewed by school staff and racial outgroup peer members. While narrating their collages, ten of the students made reference to how Black representation in media through sports, acting, and music helped them to feel good about themselves and identify life’s possibilities in spite of the obstacles they faced specific to race, and at the intersection of race and gender or
race and economic class. This theme is presented through two of the collages, as this theme only emerged in the storying of participants’ collages:

![Figure 2. Larry’s collage representing use of Black media to recover self-image](image)

Larry included images of Kayne West, a college basketball player, and Serena Williams because they represented change and progress for Black people, which served as hope for Larry as he aimed to defy the stereotypes placed against him.
Rainbow storied the images on her collage describing Cardi B as someone who inspired her to not seek “revenge” for racist experiences and instead drove her toward “achievement.” She stated, “Cardi B...she’s always just herself. She never like, you know, acts like somebody she’s not.” Rainbow also stated, “I have the girl from Wakanda, I mean from Black Panther on here because ...she is into different gadgets and stuff like that.” For Rainbow, this character representation made her feel proud to be a Black female who loves science-technology, despite it being against the stereotypical norm for females or for Black people.
Figure 4: Influence of racism on Black student identity

The Case of Michael: Experiencing Racism from a Black Student Perspective

Michael is a seventeen-year-old high school junior. Michael identifies as Black and male. He attends a predominately Black high school but has also attended predominately White schools during his K-12 career. Michael describes his school as somewhat racially diverse because Latino, Asian, and White students are enrolled in his school but, he feels like his school is racially segregated. Michael shares that each racial group stays to themselves for the most part. Generally, mixed race friends’ groups are only formed when students play on the same sports team or when a person of one race grew up in a community with other racial groups. For example, if a White student grew up in a Black community, they may relate to Black students more than White students and therefore have mostly Black friends. Michael is aware of racial segregation within his school but thinks that everyone staying with their own race works well for his school, however, he is aware that some students feel marginalized by this dynamic.

Daily, Michael personally encounters or witnesses his teachers engage in discriminatory behaviors toward Black students. For example, some of Michael’s teachers ignore his requests for help when he is struggling with content or an assignment but readily offers support to White
and Latino students. Michael also sees teachers only reprimand Black students for behaviors that all the racial groups at his school engage in. For instance, Black students have been removed from class for refusing to take off their hoodie when asked, but White students were not removed, and Black girls are often sent to the office for play fighting because teachers are scared, they will actually fight. Yet, Latina students engage in similar behavior but go unaddressed. Also, Michael often feels devalued and degraded by his teachers because they don’t believe in his abilities or desire to do well and verbally assault him, even calling him “a dumb ass” once. Michael believes his teacher’s actions are probably connected to the negative stereotypes his teachers have about Black people. For example, Michael is often initially stereotyped by his teachers as a thug, but he is academically focused and has high grades. He also feels like teachers think all Black boys gang bang and smoke marijuana. Michael thinks his teachers have negative, deficit-based stereotypes about Black female students too. For instance, Michael thinks that his teachers believe Black females are ratchet and only care about fighting and being sexual. He even thinks that his teachers just expect Black female students to end up pregnant. Although Michael does not think that all Black people can be characterized by these stereotypes, consistent messaging has socialized him to wonder if Black people’s behaviors cause such stereotypes and the racism they experience.

Michael is also concerned about his teachers ignoring Black history or culture in their lessons and in the books that students are assigned. He is unsure if Black history and culture are not taught because teachers don’t have enough knowledge to teach it or if it’s because they don’t think it’s important enough to learn about or teach. Michael’s last memory of learning Black history, outside of lessons on slavery, was late elementary school and even then, he learned about the same civil rights leaders each year. In addition to more settle experiences with racism,
Michael has also encountered blatant racism and discrimination from peers and teachers. In fact, he has been called a nigger by a White student at his school and by a White teacher. Additionally, students from all racial groups use the word nigga as a social greeting and in conversation. At some point, he was bothered by the use of the word but has now become quite complacent about its use if the person saying it doesn’t mean any disrespect. However, he is still conflicted about White people using the word at all.

Due to experiences with racism at school Michael has developed an awareness that racism is demonstrated in many forms. However, he does not have a clear understanding of systemic and structural racism and oppression and how it manifests in his daily experiences. Michael used to think racism was a big deal but now he feels nonchalant about it because he has come to understand that racism is a part of the world and is to be expected. Also, Michael is undecided about the severity of racism and its influence on Black people’s ability to live freely in the U.S. For example, he recalls the progress that Black people have made since the civil rights movement and feels that many White people don’t have hatred for Black folks anymore, demonstrated by their adoption of Black culture. But this thought is also conflicted because he is unsure if White people engaging in Black culture is adoration and acceptance or cultural appropriation.

Although Michael feels influenced by critical incidents and daily encounters with racism, he does not share these experiences or his thoughts about racism with his family or school staff. Michael learned that when he addresses racism, he supports the dominant view of Black people as confrontational. In resistance to this stereotype, Michael attempts to avoid all conflict. Michael also engages in rejection of racism by questioning if his negative encounters with racial outgroup members experiences of racism or just people being rude or disrespectful in general.
Because of the current racial climate toward “Hispanic people” Michael also questions if racism has shifted away from Black people. Simultaneously, Michael believes that if people are racist toward Black students, it could be Black students’ own fault. For instance, Michael thinks that a lot of Black people don’t demonstrate self-control and act ignorant, as a result, other racial groups think less of Black people and act accordingly.

Despite experiences with racism and conflicting views on how it influences identity, Michael is determined to use his negative experiences as internal motivation to defy negative stereotypes and be successful in life. He often uses media images and representations of Black athletes, actors, music artists, and activists to restore a positive image of himself and Black culture. These representations encourage him to feel good about himself and life’s possibilities, despite any barriers he may face.

**Researcher Positionality**

My lived experiences as a Black student in U.S. public schools and as a school counselor encouraged me to engage in this project. As a Black female who attended K-12 public schools in the U.S., I experienced systemic and overt racism at school. I first attended predominately Black schools and later attended a school where I could almost count all the Black students in the school on my hands. I instantly felt out of place. Over time, I became two people. The assimilated version of myself showed up to school every day and then the sides that presented more of my Black culture would show up when I was back in my home town on weekends. However, over time, the two started to merge and suddenly I wasn’t assimilated enough to fit in with my White peers and I wasn’t quite Black enough in spaces with some of my Black friends. At school, I was often othered because of my hair, cultural style of dress, and use of language. My teachers did not pour into me in the way they did White students, often dismissing me or
ignoring me all together. I was called nigger for the first time at school when a White student, who I was friendly with, became upset with me. This, among several other critical incidents, reshaped my identity. I now longer cared to attempt to blend in, play nice, or smile it off. Instead, I disengaged from my school community socially and academically, which resulted in my not attending school often, earning poor grades, and presenting with a negative attitude when I was present. During my junior year of high school, a new school counselor, who happened to be White, took the time to simply speak to me and inquire about my experiences and goals. This changed the course of my life. Instead of not graduating from high school at all or at least not on time, I graduated, went on to be a first-generation college student, earned a master’s degree in counseling, and am now earning a doctorate degree. As a school counselor serving 95% students of color, I continuously heard teachers negatively label Black students, engage in deficit thinking about Black students and their families, and resist building positive relationships with Black students.

Because I felt silenced for most of my youth and as a school counselor, I witnessed similar oppression occur against Black students, it was critical that my research provided the space for Black students to share their authentic voice about their lived experiences. Therefore, engaging in research where I could be alongside students and co-construct a narrative that was reflective of their experiences was also essential. Although my experiences are valid and inevitably played a role in my interpretation of student’s narratives, I recognize my story is not the only experience that speaks to this phenomenon. Therefore, engaging in social justice research using Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) and Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2013) provided a platform for the voices of silenced Black youth to be heard about their school racial climate and how it influenced their identity. In addition, Collage Inquiry
(Chilton & Scotti, 2014) provided a space for participants to author their authentic and uninterrupted stories about their experiences.

**Discussion**

Black student’s experiences with racism at school were described in this study in several areas of their public-school career. First, participants described how they encountered discriminatory practices from their teachers through inequities in discipline and support and that they felt devalued by their teachers. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggested that Black students are up to three times more likely to be suspended from school than White students (Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Morris & Perry, 2016). In fact, discriminatory discipline practices can result in Black students losing classroom time contributing to one-fifth of the achievement gap (Morris & Perry, 2016) In further support of this finding, previous research found that Black students perceived having less support at school than White students (Buehler, Fletcher, Johnston, & Weymouth, 2015), fewer opportunities for participation and access to relationships with adults (Voight, Hanson, O’Malley, & Adekanye, 2015), and reported being treated differently than other racial groups at school (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). Findings from the cited literature and from the current study also support Critical Race Theory’s tenet of Whiteness as property, as well as White privilege, where racial status allows for the allocation of social benefits to the dominant race while oppressing the allocation of social benefits to minority groups which upholds systems of dominance (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Secondly, participants described combatting negative stereotypes from their teachers. Research indicated that Black students facing racial stereotyping is both a historical and current experience as Black students frequently encounter deficit-thinking (Valencia, 2015), experienced as microaggressions (Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015). Participants also discussed the use of the racial slur, nigger, as well as
its alternative form nigga. Hope, Skoog, & Jagers (2015) found that Black adolescents readily experienced being called names and being talked down to. However, there is no literature specifically exploring the use of either form of this word and its’ influence on Black youth. What was unique to the dialogue about this racial slur was the conversation around the acceptability of all racial groups use of the word nigga in general conversation with racial ingroup peers and in addressing Black students. Participants concluded that hearing the word so often has made them mostly numb to its use. The main tenet of Critical Race Theory suggests that racism is a common, everyday experience that members from all racial groups come to accept or overlook (Delgado-Stefanic, 2017). In addition, participants may be encountering internalized racism which suggests people of color who experience racism begin to develop beliefs and behaviors that support racism. Also, Black students may see themselves as victims of racism which results in the student denying the power they have to address and potentially amend a situation.

Participants reported consistently that their schools were racially integrated based on enrollment but were segregated within the school building based on racial identity. Although there is no literature that directly addresses the influence of social racial segregation within an integrated school, there is research that suggested systemic policies and practices that support racialized tracking and sorting inherently increased Black students segregation from other racial groups within a physically integrated school (Ford & King, 2014; Wright, et al., 2017). Furthermore, participants consistently reported having limited exploration of Black history and culture in school, which Byrd (2017) referred to as school socialization, which communicates messages about race and culture, even when not directly addressed (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). Therefore, findings suggest culturally relevant pedagogy and lessons, as well as positive race-
based messaging at school are critical to Black students sense of belonging and school engagement.

The second research question sought to understand how Black high school students’ identities were influenced by their experiences with racism. Participants storied collages demonstrated they were fighting to claim their own identity as a Black youth. Many participants discussed society labeling them and trying to name their identity for them based on their race. Most participants felt boxed in by society’s limited ideals and expectations of them and had a strong desire to defy negative stereotypes about Black people. Participants who felt limited by society also voiced a desire to be accepted by others. However, some participants used their collage to depict the strengths they see in being Black, highlighting Black power, Black excellence, and Black beauty. These participants demonstrated pro-Black attitudes and high racial salience (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002) and did not feel constrained by other racial groups perceptions of them. All the participants redefined negative race-based experiences to serve as encouragement toward success.

Through thematic analysis of storied collages and narratives, emergence of critical consciousness emerged as a theme, wherein participants voiced how they came to understand racism and its influence on self and the world. All the participants storied experiences with overt and covert racism at school, which indicates awareness of racism and challenges common notions about neutrality and meritocracy in K-12 education. However, only some participants were cognizant of systemic oppression and its role in the experiences of racism they faced. Second, participants described socialized silence, which the researcher and research assistant interpreted as a means of protecting themselves from the psychological implications on identity from experiences with racism. Although there is no literature that examines socialized silence in
relation to identity, research demonstrated oppressed populations may engage in avoidant coping strategies, to include rumination and resisting direct confrontation to decrease negative feelings or outcomes associated with stressful situations (Brondolo, et al., 2009). In addition, participants silence may also occur because of adultism. Adultism is a form of oppression which can be defined as the prejudice and systemic discrimination adults have against youth in combination with the power adults have to impart their bias views that result in the exclusion or ignoring of youth beliefs and attitudes (Delong & Love, 2013). Similar to racism, adultism restricts power to the dominant group of adults even when important decisions are being made that affect youth’s lives at school (Bell, 2013). At the intersection of adultism and racism, Black youth may feel powerless, have a negative self-concept, and experience feelings of worthlessness (Bell, 2013), which may further contribute to their resistance in externally naming and fighting against racism at school.

Participants also consistently reported that they have made a conscious decision to defy deficit thinking and produce counternarratives to negative stereotypes about Black students and people. Also, what was unique about this finding was participants’ use of Black athletes, music artists, authors, and leaders represented in media outlets as a source of external support to recover a positive view of Black identity. Although some may view consciously combating racism internally as resilience, Black youth are profoundly impacted by experiencing and fighting against racism. For example, experiencing discrimination can result in a lack of motivation (Carter & Forsyth, 2009) and difficulty concentrating (Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, & Jackson, 2010). In addition, internalized racism threatens Black students school engagement (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, & Varner, 2013), school self-esteem (Dotterer, McHale, &
Crouter, 2009), and academic self-concept (Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley., 2009).

**Study Limitations**

There are several limitations of the current study. Participants attended schools in neighboring counties with similar county-wide racial and economic demographics and had not experienced K-12 education outside of this geographic area, therefore results may demonstrate experiences specific to communities in this southeastern area. In addition, participants were mostly high school juniors and seniors which does not provide a full scope of the K-12 experience. Additionally, it seemed difficult for participants to recall specific experiences from elementary and middle school because they were far removed from their time enrolled in primary schools. Participants were also separated into two groups that were homogenous regarding the racial demographics of the schools they attended and having a heterogeneous group may have deepened the findings about the Black student experience. Additionally, the findings suggested that both the ways Black students experience racism and the influence on identity are multi-layered, therefore examining each research question as an independent study is a recommendation for continued research. Also, the researcher facilitated limited focus groups, but engaging in additional focus groups may have allowed for deeper exploration of both research questions.

The researcher used collage inquiry as a data collection method for this study. Although participants were engaged and the method allowed participants to share their experiences with racism from their own context, there are considerations for future research using collage inquiry. First, I recommend a smaller participant group with four to six participants, because I found time management around sharing collage narratives to be more difficult with my larger participant
group than my smaller participant group. Second, I would check-in individually with each participant as they are working on their collage to ensure participants clearly understand the instructions and are moving toward completion of their collage. There was one participant in the current study who appeared to be working diligently throughout the allotted time, but only had a few images on her collage and was unable or unwilling to story them. Also, participants in the current study had thirty minutes to complete their collage, but most participants were still working on their collage at the thirty-minute mark, therefore, I would extend the time an additional fifteen to thirty minutes. In the analysis process, I found that already understanding the cultural context of participants narratives to be helpful in interpreting and co-constructing meaning. Therefore, I would also recommend that researchers using collage inquiry have, at minimum, baseline knowledge about the cultural context of their participants and their lived experience prior to engaging in collage inquiry.

Lastly, there were issues of bias that may exist with the researcher and the research assistant in their interpretation of the data. For example, the researcher and the research assistant closely identify with the participants as Black, and with female participants as Black females. Also, the researcher and research assistant have encountered racism in the U.S. K-12 public school system and it has, at varying points, influenced their view of self and their position in society. Because the researcher and research assistant closely identify with the participants and the research topic, they had to be cautious about inferring their own experiences and meaning making onto their participant’s narratives. The researcher used several methods of trustworthiness, including member checking, to mitigate bias, however, an external audit of the data may have also served as an additional moderator of bias.
Implications for School Counseling Practice and Research

Although research has indicated that the school environment is critical to Black student academic and social identity and mobility, a gap exists in the school counseling literature about how a school counselor can positively impact school racial climate for Black students individually and school-wide. The findings of this study emphasize first, that Black students are experiencing racism at school, and second, the importance of school counselors being aware of the racial dynamics of their school, how it influences their students abilities to succeed, and the role they can play in creating systemic and individual change where needed. The findings suggested that school counselors should engage in self-examination about their biases and deficit thoughts about Black students. School counselors should ask themselves if they are providing equitable support to all students and if they unconsciously or knowingly engage in racialized academic tracking when recommending courses or have biased views of Black students when discussing post-secondary options and careers. Also, school counselors should seek to develop cultural competence about the Black students that they serve, considering the intersections of gender and class, as well as identities that students may openly share with the counselor. Additionally, school counselors should seek Black students’ narratives to understand how they experience school and examine the school’s racial climate and its influence on Black students. In addition to narratives and other qualitative inquiry, school counselors can encourage their local school or district to use quantitative measures, such as the School Climate for Diversity-Secondary Scale (SCD-S), which examines school racial climate for a multidimensional perspective, uncovering informal messaging that can create a negative learning environment (Byrd, 2017).
Findings suggest that Black students need a safe way of reporting incidents of racism and consistent school guidelines about addressing acts of racism. In addition, students need to process racist encounters. It is within the school counselors’ role to name their offices’ as a safe space for reporting incidents of racism and can create a space for healing and relationship restoration. Although Black students may need individual support, findings also suggest that Black students need school-wide interventions and supports. To this end, school counselors can develop culturally responsive environments, practices, and programs. For example, create classroom lessons and school wide programming that encourages social integration and interaction of racial groups and develop small groups that address the needs of Black students. School counselors can also collaborate or consult with school stakeholders to include parents/guardians, students, staff, and community members to integrate information about and celebration of Black history, culture, and traditions into their comprehensive school counseling programming. Also, findings suggested that it is critical for school counselors to examine structural and systemic inequities in their schools (Valencia, 2015) and engage in consciousness raising dialogues about race-based inequities (Singh, et al., 2010). For example, explore school data to examine rates of discipline, advanced content placement, RTI referrals, and special education referrals and placement through a social justice lens. If school counselors find disparities, co-develop interventions that address structural racism to deconstruct systems of oppression in schools (Singh, et al., 2010).

Also, findings suggest that one method of increasing positive messaging about Black students is to be intentional about Black representation in the media and literacy tools school counselors and staff use in practice and throughout the building. For example, ensure that posters in the school counselor office, classrooms, and hallways have Black people on them; include
images of Black people on presentations when applicable; and when using literacy tools as a part of lessons or groups, choose books with Black characters and stories that speak to the Black experience. After choosing culturally-responsive methods, identify methods of evaluating the intervention(s) to examine success in working with students (Rattus & Greenleaf, 2018), and disseminate your results to stakeholders (Singh, et al., 2010). School counselors should consider partnering with counselor educators to publish evidence-based interventions to better inform the field of school counseling. Findings from this study also present areas for further inquiry to include an independent examination of the second component of this study to gain a deeper understanding of Black student identity development.

Conclusion

The integration of narrative inquiry with a critical race theory framework and the school racial climate dimensions provided a space for Black youth to explore the multi-dimensional levels of experiencing racism at school, while also giving them authorship and power over their stories. Additionally, the use of focus groups as a data collection method provided participants with built in support that encouraged them to be authentic and open about their experiences. Although the study had limitations, the power of giving Black youth a space to give voice was quite profound and provided a counternarrative to the idealistic images’ educators have about equitable schooling experiences. This work also lays a foundation for further exploration of school racial climate specific to relationships between Black students, staff, and peers.
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CHAPTER 4

REFLECTING ON THE EMERGENCE, PROCESS, AND ANALYSIS OF A NARRATIVE INQUIRY ABOUT BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM

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Abstract

This chapter describes the process of the researcher coming to choose the research topic and questions, as well as developing the study and analyzing the data as it connects to my lived experiences with racism as a Black student in K-12 public schools and witnessing racism in schools as a school counselor. Narrative inquiry requires that the researcher come into relation with the participants to gather in-depth stories about participants experiences (Clandinin, 2013). This chapter reflects on my experiences as a Black youth in schools as I came to learn what being Black meant and how I fit into society, which led me to this study. It also provides a reflection of my research journey to include choosing a theoretical and conceptual framework and data collection methods, as well as my approach to analyzing the data and writing the findings.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, Counselor Education, Narrative Inquiry, Collage Inquiry, Reflexivity
**Introduction**

Reflexivity encourages the researcher to engage in ongoing critical consideration of how their personal experiences impact their research design and outcomes. Unlike positivist research approaches, qualitative researchers philosophically believe that research is not completely objective and therefore requires the researcher to engage in self-examination (Bishop & Shepard, 2011). To engage in reflexivity throughout the study, I utilized reflexive journaling and analytic memos to record awareness of my reactions to participants, data, and the research experience (Bishop & Shepard, 2011). Being intentional about reflexivity helped to raise my consciousness about how I was positioned within the research and my role as a participant in the research process (Bishop & Shepard, 2011). As a Black, female who was once a Black adolescent, public-school student, I was closely connected to this work. From choosing my research topic to engaging in the literature search, as well as in data collection, analysis, and the writing up and discussion of findings, I was often brought back to the place where I first recognized being Black mattered.

**Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality**

**Choosing the Research Topic**

I came to choose my research topic because of my own experiences as a Black K-12 student and as a school counselor in the K-12 setting. My earliest recollection of racism in schools occurred when I moved from my hometown, a predominately Black urban community in the northeast to a White suburban community less than twenty minutes away from one another. It was also when I knew that being Black meant something; in fact, it was my first conscious awareness that I was Black. I was only in late elementary school then, so I didn’t have the language to express my experiences, but I remember feeling othered almost from the start. In the
beginning, I was the only Black girl in my grade. I was stared at and examined; no one was mean or hateful, but they were curious about me. At the time I wore my hair in cornrows. White classmates would ask me questions about my hair and always wanted to touch it. They made comments that shared their shock at how soft my hair was because they expected it to be rough like a “brillo pad”. Although I became friends with White classmates over time, it was always clear that I never fit in that space. And after a while, I didn’t quite fit in with Black friends from my old neighborhood either. So, I floated for a few years. Just going through the motions of going to school but never finding a sense of belonging there.

In middle school, more Black students came to my school and there was a culture shift. Most of the White students cliqued up in their own groups and all fifteen of the Black students across the middle school grades were in one group. Like what my participants experienced; my school had a few White students that hung out with Black folks. But the Black community formed naturally, and it felt like we innately knew what it meant to stick together in a school with all White students and staff. There was a sense of security in having a community.

In high school, there were even more Black students, but still, there were only about thirty of us. And we also had an all-White teaching staff. My district had an alternative school and it seemed like our teachers were rooting for all of us to get placed there. Seemingly, I was either invisible to teachers or a problem for teachers. Teachers who overlooked me would walk past me and not speak but would speak to the White students. Teachers would greet students as they came into the classroom and wouldn’t greet me. Teachers would call on students with their hands raised, but never me. But when I talked in class or was accused of being a disruption, I was suddenly seen, but only as a problem. Then there were my White peers. White classmates who thought it was comical to use urban vernaculars when they approached me. Then there were those who
engaged in cultural appropriation by trying to adopt parts of what they thought it meant to be Black. And then there was the blatant racist. The ones who tried to make it clear to me that I was not on their level.

For the first year or so of high school, I accepted this dynamic, but eventually, school became uncomfortable for me. Eventually, I stopped going to the classes where I felt disrespected by teachers or peers and then I stopped going to school all together. I started to attend school regularly again during my junior year of high school after it was reported to my parents and me that the number of absences I accrued would result in me not being able to graduate on time from high school. That semester I enrolled in an elective course about law and government. We had to do a report on an issue of injustice, and I chose Amadou Diallo. About a year prior, unarmed Amadou was shot at 41 times by plain-clothed New York City police outside of his apartment because they mistook him for a rape suspect. The officers were charged with second degree murder but were acquitted at trial. My report unleashed all the anger and frustration I had experienced since moving to my White suburban neighborhood. I spoke about stereotypes and the intersection of race and immigrant status. Most of my classmates reported on issues in other countries or concerns about animal care. And there I was, naming racism, raising consciousness, and setting myself up for backlash by talking about Amadou Diallo. Although my teacher appreciated my report, I was further marginalized from my peers. But what also happened as a result of this report was that I became the Black voice about every issue discussed in class after that. My teacher seemed very proud of himself for acknowledging that as a Black person, I might see the issue differently, which I did. But I realized that my relationships with teachers were quite dichotomous; either I was invisible, the problem, or I was the voice of the oppressed. That same year a White classmate, who I had always been friendly
with, was the first and only person to call me a nigger and it happened at school and in class. I think this was the first time I was able to define racism for myself. I came to understand that just because someone smiles at you, or speaks to you, or is willing to sit in a class with you doesn’t mean they are incapable of racist acts. Racism didn’t have to look like hatred, and it didn’t have to be lynching’s. Racism didn’t have to be protestors on the school lawn demanding segregation. Racism was inherited. Racism was about keeping me in my place. It was born out of miseducation and misguided ideologies. Racism could show up in a White person that I had named a friend.

**Empowering this research.** During my junior year of high school, a new school counselor came to my high school and she chose to invest in me. Because of her encouragement and support, I started to believe I could attend college. I choose an HBCU to find my place; to find my voice. It was at this HBCU that I learned about my true history and the power of Black people. It was here that I was first inspired to pursue graduate education with the purpose of acquiring knowledge to disrupt systems of power and prevent Black youth from feeling disconnected from the world. After working in the mental, behavioral, and substance abuse sector, with youth, I found that the one thing they all had in common was a negative schooling experience. I chose to be a school counselor because I was invested in positive youth identity development, which is a direct reflection of my feelings of powerlessness as a youth and the experiences of my clients. As a school counselor, I served mostly Black and Latino/a students, within a county whose leadership was largely White. Systemic racism and oppression were pervasive. Teachers would often write referrals that stated students were aggressive toward them or they felt threatened and these seemed to be key words that would automatically result in a student’s suspension regardless of actions that demonstrated a student engaging in aggressive or
threatening behavior. Students often voiced that teachers used deficit grounded language and negatively labeled them, resulting in students disengaging from the school environment and growing to dislike even attending school. Consequently, they earned lower grades, and they did poorly on assessments. Although I could name systemic racism, I had not yet acquired the skills necessary to fight against it on behalf of my students. I applied to a doctoral program that emphasized social justice with the intent of learning how to examine racism and work toward eradicating racism in schools.

Developing the Study

This study was developed because of my own experiences as a Black person in the U.S., as a Black student in the U.S., the history of oppression and racism of Black people, and the current state of Black oppression in education. As I was conceptualizing and forming this study, it became clear to me how connected I was to it and that it would mean providing a space for Black youth to give voice their experiences, which was a source of liberation that I didn’t have as a Black youth. Because I recognized the personal and cultural relevance of the power of stories, it became increasingly important that I be intentional to ground the study in a framework that believed racism is real, a systematic way of examining it, and a natural way of exploring it with youth. It was with this lens that I chose my theoretical and conceptual framework, as well as my methodology, but it was not an easy process.

My first design of this study was in a qualitative research course during my doctoral program. I utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) to ground my study, but I piloted the study as a phenomenology and engaged in individual interviews with participants ages 18-23. I found that CRT was an ideal framework for a study focusing on racism in education, however, I was unable to get the depth that I was seeking. Although I always had
an idea that I wanted to facilitate research directly with youth, I choose 18-23 under the belief that they would be close enough to their K-12 experience to share relevant experiences related to the research questions. However, the age of my participants seemed to be problematic because some of them were unable to recall specific incidents, could not remember details of experiences, or could not identify when the incidents occurred. When I decided to work with youth populations, my methodologists and I engaged in dialogue about how individual interviews may create an imbalance of power. I explored culturally-responsive studies conducted with youth of color and found that facilitating focus groups provided both a sense of community when having difficult conversations and allowed me to share power with participants. I reframed my study as a phenomenology, grounded in CRT, utilizing semi-structured group interviews.

By this time, I was an official doctoral candidate and was preparing my dissertation proposal. I was reading scholarly article after article trying to really wrap my head around what direction I wanted this study to go in. What did I really want to know and what did I think the school counseling field needed to know? I came across a series of publications on school racial climate which led me to the work of school psychologist and educator Christy Byrd (2017). Although Byrd’s (2017) final measure of school racial climate was quantitative, Byrd had conducted several studies prior to the formation of the measure which informed the examination of specific dimensions of school racial climate. After further exploration, I selected the school racial climate dimensions as my conceptual framework to structure my interview questions and inform my data analysis.

I wrote up the methodology for my dissertation proposal and emailed it to my methodologist. My methodologist called me about a week later and said, “are you sure you want to do a phenomenology because it really, really sounds like you want narratives of lived
experiences”. I wasn’t sure if my methodologist was right, so I enrolled in a narrative course the next semester. My methodologist was right. Everything about narrative work fits with my philosophy and it felt so natural to me. One area I briefly explored while in the course was the use of visual and art-based methods within narrative work. I later explored visual and art-based methods in more depth through a qualitative data analysis course and originally felt that photovoice would be ideal for providing youth participants a second way to express their experiences and identity. But after much consideration about the time commitment and responsibility I was placing on youth participants to carry out photovoice on a condensed timeline, I made a final decision to utilize collage inquiry. I found that collage inquiry would serve the same purpose of photovoice, which was to provide an alternate medium for authentic youth expression. Also, collage inquiry could occur within the focus group which would minimize monopolizing the time of my participants. After gaining a lot of new knowledge and changing the components of my study several times, I finally felt that my methodology would answer my research questions with my participants as they had space to naturally share their voice and perhaps experience liberation.

**Collecting Data**

As a Black female who has encountered racism in U.S. public schools as a former K-12 student and witnessed racism in U.S. public schools as a school counselor, I was not surprised by many of my participant's stories. However, what did amaze me was my participants' awareness of racism and their ability to articulate their experiences and connect it to their view of self. Also, I was shocked by my participants' eagerness to share their experiences. Many of them stated that no one had ever asked them about racism before, but they were glad to have the opportunity to talk about it.
Although my participants' experiences were very similar to mine and the students I served as a school counselor, some of my participant's narratives did not mirror my experiences and in some instances, I had strong emotional reactions. For example, participants were very apt to name a racist encounter but were hesitant to negatively label the teacher or student who initiated the racist encounter. It seemed that participants equated engaging in a racist act with being a bad person and although participants agreed they see many of their teachers as racist, they didn’t see them as bad people. Similarly, participants often rationalized the racist behaviors of their teachers or peers. Also, participants debated the appropriateness of other racial groups using the word nigga in common conversation and to address Black students. I have very deep-seated beliefs about this issue and was staggered by the level of acceptance my participants had to the use of any form of the n-word by other racial groups. I left one of the focus groups feeling distressed upon realizing how complacent my participants were with facing racism daily and how much of who they were was intertwined with being normed to racism. My participant's responses to incidents of racism left me thinking a lot about how they had been socialized to be silent. I had also learned to be silent about racism and spent a significant amount of my early adulthood battling with the fact that I never told my parents about my experiences, never reported incidents of racism, and only confronted racism during one encounter when I was called a nigger. Because of my silence, it has become critically important for me to create a space for Black youth to share their voice. So as participants were sharing their stories for this study, I came to see my experiences more clearly and gain insight into the ways I was covertly socialized at school to hid parts of myself and not share my voice, because it was clear that my voice did not have value in the space. I felt a sense of liberation and healing as if my story was being told too. But also, my participants had an opportunity to break their silence, even if it was just for a
few hours. Participants had shared their stories, openly, proudly, boldly, and seemingly, fearlessly. But as the focus groups ended, I began to wonder how quickly the participants would retort back to silence or if having the space to share their voice once would make an impact on their lives long term. Of course, I hope for the latter.

Reflecting on Analysis and Writing

My methodology included a plan to engage in analytic memoing and reflexive journaling as soon as possible following the completion of each focus group. Also, following each focus group, I debriefed with my research assistant to exchange thoughts about observations we noticed during the focus group. Often, we spoke about group dynamics, themes we heard from participants narratives, key differences between participants narratives, and less verbal participants. We also spoke about the non-verbal communication of participants to often include anxiousness, incongruent affect, and frustration. We also engaged in discourse about data collection methods. One conclusion we came to was that although the use of visual thinking strategies at the start of the first focus group seemed to be a smooth way of initiating the conversation about racism, it did not produce any data that helped to answer the research questions. In addition, there were many interpretations of the photographs and several of the participants focused more on the details of the pictures rather than seeking connections or noting a lack of connection to the photographs. If the study were duplicated, I would not utilize visual thinking strategies or perhaps, I would use them in a different way.

Once the focus groups were over and all the focus groups were transcribed, I took a few days away from the study and checked in with myself. Admittingly, I was emotionally drained. But after a few days, I was re-energized and ready to code. I had previously decided on my deductive codes based on CRT and the school racial climate dimensions, but as I began to code, I
found it difficult to overlook areas of the data that were so critical but did not align with my deductive codes. Although I had already planned to engage in inductive coding, for some reason, I just couldn’t shake some of the critical narratives. For instance, one participant told a story about a race riot that broke out at her school after a Black student held up the Black power fist at the conclusion of a Black history assembly and was suspended for his actions. The participant shared that peers skipped class and marched the hallways with signs stating, “White lives matter” and “Black lives matter”, and “All lives matter” while shouting and banging on doors and walls. Also, one participant engaged in respectful debate with another participant about the state of racism, where one participant believed that racism is not as bad anymore because White people listen to “our music and wear our clothes”, while the other named those actions “cultural appropriation”. This struck me because the miseducation about what racism is and how it manifests across the U.S. continues to result in misinformed thinking about systemic oppression and creates colorblind mentalities even among Black youth. However, I was also struck by the other participants' knowledge of cultural appropriation and her ability to clearly defend her position.

Because I was grappling to find meaning in relation to the whole with critical narratives that did not seem to align with any emerging themes, I took time to write about these narratives and how I was feeling about them as experiences and potential meanings.

Upon finishing coding, I was conflicted for a little over a week about how I wanted to move forward in identifying themes and writing the findings. It was the first time during my study that I felt completely stumped. After a lot of avoidance, I realized that I wasn’t lacking the knowledge to move forward, but I was afraid of not getting it right. For me, analyzing the data wrong wasn’t only about completing a dissertation, it was about misrepresenting the voice of my
participants. But, with encouragement from my support system, I decided that I had to start somewhere to even give myself the chance to analyze well or to fail. I coded the transcripts in NVivo, so I decided to start there. I ran a series of analysis to explore which codes I used the most and which seemed to be individual experiences. Then I continued to sort the codes I used the most, considering commonalities among the codes. I finalized my codebook and engaged in another round of coding for each transcript. Because I wanted to give each participant space in the findings to share their voice, I initially attempted to write each participants story separately with subsections categorized by theme. Although this ended up helping me in the analysis process, it did not really do the study justice. I struggled most at this time. I engaged in avoidance, indecisiveness, and even had some somatic symptoms. During my phase of procrastination my eldest daughter, who is in middle school, encountered her first experiences with racism at school. My daughter's experiences brought me back to my why for this research. Generations before me had experienced such racism, I experienced, and now another generation facing the same racism but now, often in newly presented ways. For a moment, I felt defeated, but my support system quickly reminded me that this was exactly why work sharing about the Black experience from the voices of Black people is needed as a part of the fight against injustice in schools and society.

**New Questions**

Although all the participants had been resilient to racism and their experiences with racism had not stopped them from having academic, social, and life goals. I wonder if part of the reason participants were able to maintain such resilience is because they have all been able to identify at least one teacher that they feel encourages and supports them. They have also all had the opportunity to take part in an enrichment program which may have served to strengthen their
academic performance, their goal setting, their understanding of self and position in the world. Also, I began to wonder what it costs Black youth to build up this level of resilience to protect their psychological well-being and appear unscathed in the face of oppression. And if there are psychological, emotional, or physical consequences, are they short term or do they have a long-lasting influence on identity?

**Conclusion**

The study I first envisioned did not occur, but the questions I sought to answer with participants and the literature I hoped to bring to the field have certainly come to a culmination for this work. Four years didn’t seem like a long time when this journey began but so much has changed, including me. I have grown intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. This process has tested my tenacity and my passion for scholarship, and I have surprised myself every time. I am thankful to have access to amazing mentorship and learning opportunities that I can utilize to educate and uplift others. And now that this part of my journey is coming to an end, I feel empowered to embark on future opportunities to do this work and work toward answering all the new questions I have related to marginalized students in U.S. schools.
References


APPENDIX A

VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES (VTS): PHOTOGRAPHS
### APPENDIX B

**COLLAGE INQUIRY ANALYSIS: STORY GRID**

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<th>Collage Image</th>
<th>Direct Quotes from Transcript</th>
<th>Researcher Analysis</th>
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