A NAME FOR THE PAIN:
EXAMINING THE CONSEQUENCES OF RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS IN K-12
SCHOOLING FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF ADULT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

A Dissertation by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

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DEDICATION

March 19, 2020
A Love Letter to the Blues

Dearest Blues,

It is to you that I dedicate not just this research, but each of life’s most meaningful accomplishments. Realizing that approbation of fanfare is typically reserved for paying homage to the likes of matriarchs, role models, patriarchs, parents, siblings, and friends - on this 51st celebration of both my birth and my first breath of life, my reflections reveal that it was my earliest lived moment when you and I were first introduced. Within seconds, long before learning to walk or talk, I became both a blues fan and a blues artist. I realize the audacity in this statement, especially considering the likes of B.B. King, Muddy Waters, and many other legends who have devoted their lives to an expression that Hendrix described as “easy to play but hard to feel.” But with all due respect to you, my dearest blues, I ask this question. Does not the life of every Black person in America reflect blues artistry? I say this with love and deep admiration, so I pray you take no offense to the following feedback, but to minimize your reach by viewing yourself as nothing more than a musical genre is something I find appalling. Instead, you are the soul of a people – relentlessly, unapologetically, tirelessly, and even magically weaving gold from straw; making something from nothing.

Do you remember being given nothing more than the slop that even the dogs refused to feast on? You added a little seasoning and a lot of love, and for generations since we have enjoyed soul food because of you. But it didn’t stop there. Never one to accept resting in the margins, you took Giant Steps away from the plantation, traveling Miles by Bird and by Trane, proving that you could express high intellect just as well as you depict deep emotion. From impoverished Black kids in the Bronx creating the global phenomenon hip-hop, to blood
transfusion technologies and everything in between, your emphasis on the third, fifth, and seventh notes of the musical scale; notes affectionately known as the “worried notes” create a soundtrack that is as much a part of America as classical music or opera. Wait a second, both of those expressive art forms come from Europe. Perhaps you, your worried notes, and all of your contributions are even more patriotic than those things depicted as such by common narratives.

So many encounters and experiences are responsible for your existence that I could not begin to name them all. A good friend summarized them by saying that you were “born from a strange brew.” It is your experiences that write the songs that cannot be played without the black keys, and define a country that cannot function without Black folks. It is your experiences and expressions that give the nation its backbone, its structure, and its soul. Blues, how could one dare claim you to be less than a patriot? After all, while you have never attempted to minimize recent accomplishments with false claims of making the country “great again,” you have always challenged its promises and inspired course correction by standing up for what is right despite the consequences. Actions such as an athlete kneeling during the National Anthem in protest of police brutality, or a King boldly proclaiming before a crowd of 250000 that “America has given the Negro people a bad check” demonstrate your dedication to me, so again, I dedicate this piece to you. You see, if these things that you put in place fall, everything else falls. Therefore my dearest blues, you are as patriotic as it gets… You are as American as it gets…

So I depart from traditional nomenclature, and rather than celebrating obvious suitors, I choose to celebrate your contagious melody, impetuous truth, and unwavering Blackness. With the delicacy of a potter, you mold beautiful expression from painful oppression, turning life’s most dire struggles into enjoyable journeys. You speak for me when I have no words, laugh for me when I am unamused, you fight my battles when I am defeated. Not much for emblematic
ballyhoo and celebrity fanfare, your moans and groans cannot be expressed by bold references to “rockets’ red glare” or musical modes named for Greek regions. Unlike the disciplined regiment of revolutionary drum rolls, your backbeat is as unpredictable as the sound of clacking chains and crackling whips, harsh winds and tumultuous waters. You take these things that hurt so bad and make them look, sound, and taste so good. Therefore, despite owing a dedication of gratitude to countless individuals, I choose you. Rather than paying reverence to individual persons by name, I find it more appropriate to recognize the Blues… the collective Black genius that sits boldly as the shrine of the oppressed… The segregation separating yellow brick roads from Blue Crossroads (Robert Johnson); The denied access to amber waves of grain; and the rusty ankles of “Mannish Boys” playing barefoot hopscotch in creeks of Muddy Waters (a reference to “Mannish Boy,” Muddy Waters). All are symbolic of everything that I love about you, yet despise about the socially constructed environment from whence you were birthed.

You are the beautiful quietude of nature after the passing storm - the hoop and holler of the tent revival - the sweet melody of doo-wop songs harmonized over trashcan fires - the innocent voices of ghetto children jumping rope and playing tag - the wisdom of the elders - the imagination of the youth - the warming embrace of motherhood - the smile on a child’s face despite being born into slavery - and the comforting sound of rain moistening and softening the bloodstained soils of rigid plantation fields. You are the urn carrying the ashes that are the remains of Black Wall Street and Rosewood, Florida. You, my dear friend The Blues, are all of these things and so many more. Therefore, by recognizing you, I recognize anyone and anything, everyone and everything, that has ever inspired me. You see, you taught us that Black stories cannot be written without using black ink, and that Black songs cannot be played without Black notes! More importantly, despite the country’s countless efforts to ignore you, you taught
America that without its Black stories, Black songs, and Black ingenuity, it is a country lacking substance and form.

To souls’ uninitiated, your lyrical content and compositional assembly appear simplistic. Therefore, your repeated cadence is often imitated, poorly I might add. Sure, even novice musicians are capable of playing and singing the correct notes, but how can one express wrong choices, wrong decisions, and wrong doings with the right notes? Doesn’t quite fit, huh? So maybe the right notes aren’t the right notes after all! Too clean… too naïve… too filtered… too predictable to tell the story of oppressed yet impressive people. Yeah, you taste best when served raw, like creek water lemonade or a salad of ginger and dandelion greens… The sweet harmonies of slave narratives sung beneath scorching Mississippi sunlight… Staggering physiques bathed in the sweat and tears of the ancestors battered shadows… fingers so strong that chords and riffs on six strings moan the unsung descants of sharecropper’s bruised hands… Dice games… con games… ball games… slap boxing… hand stands… hand bone… Hands that remove tall cotton that masks the sins of a nation, blowing to and fro, mimicking the call-and-response of congregational hymns or faceless silhouettes in antebellum hells; voices as distant as never, and as near as right now! The sick irony between the 12 peers who in no way resemble innocent men and the 12 bars that in no way fully capture the gambit of your expressive ideas… The irony between musical bars and prison bars and the quest to break free from both restrictive covenants… Indeed my dearest blues, you are the bittersweet symphony and constant reminder of the struggles that turn black coal into beautiful diamonds.

Thank you for your inspiration, for without you I would be nothing!

kh
What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim

Frederick Douglas, 1852
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To mom and dad (Jim Jr. and Claudette Harrison), thank you for showing me the true meaning of unconditional love; and to Todd, aka “baby bro,” thank you for sharing countless memories at a place affectionately known as 24th and Hillside. To Grandma Smithy and Daddy Bill, thanks for immeasurable wisdom and for chilling conversations from children of slaves. To my grandparents, Owen and Maxine Jones, and Jim and Dorothy Harrison, thank you for demonstrating courage, strength, and the value of family; and William Vann (grandfather) for breaking protocol to make the awkward yet necessary introduction. And to Ashley, thank you for inspiring me to understand that my life represents something greater than my own self-interests. To my blood family, Grahams, Smiths, Perkins, Graves, Burtons, Robbins, Vanns, Andersons, and Forrests, be mindful that we stand on the backs of giants. To my adopted kinfolk, the Lipscomb, Peete, Hawkins, Love, Hines, Willis, Lewis, Rogers, Evans, Griffin, Hunt, Brown, Sanders, Carter, and Young families, thanks for being part of my extended village.

To Mr. Henley, Mrs. Jennings, and the entire Grant Chapel AME Church family, your 50+ years of support are immeasurable! To Taj, Allyce, and Zarya - your brother (Amare) was robbed of such a beautiful and meaningful existence. Be great and allow his legacy to live on through your accomplishments. This is an obligation, not an option! To Dr. Fleming-Randle, for not so randomly stumbling into the bank and recruiting me for this life-changing program, and to my dissertation committee for challenging me to push the boundaries of my academic capabilities. Thanks also to my colleagues Deanna and Riccardo, and lastly, special thanks to the ancestors who endured centuries of racial terrorism in order for me to live a life unchained. This includes those who broke chains, read books, crossed bridges, boycotted buses, sat at lunch counters, and inspired future generations to continue pushing progress forward by any means.
ABSTRACT

Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily, verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271).” In K-12 public schools throughout the country, racial microaggressions and their associated biases tend to create social and learning experiences for African American Males (AAMs) that are less supportive and rewarding than those experienced by historically non-racialized populations such as White males (Williams, Kanter, & Ching, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the occurrence and aftereffects of racial microaggressions as they pertain to AAMs in the K-12 schooling pipeline. The study utilized narrative inquiry, and employed semi-structured interviews as means of extracting, examining, and interpreting data in the form of counter-stories of AAM study participants. The study employs an autoethnography technique, which allowed me to serve as both the researcher and a co-participant in the study. Through the conjoined lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Microaggressions Theory (MT), the study looked reflectively at the participants’ past schooling experiences and analyzed the manners in which microaggressions revealed themselves, as well as psychological and emotional consequences caused by such encounters. Study results suggest that multiethnic cultural norms dissimilar to traditional White norms are often ignored, attacked, or disregarded by classroom teachers and administrators, which in turn induces a culture of unhealthy schooling experiences.
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CHAPTER 1

Research on the persistence of racial inequality in American schooling since Brown v. Board of Education (1954) has consistently pointed out that the K-12 schooling experiences of African American Males (AAMs) have been historically marred by racially disparate conditions. The cumulative effects of these conditions have contributed to a culture in which healthy schooling encounters are compromised by unhealthy social interactions and ensuing psychological trauma (Henfield et al., 2014; Prager, 2011; Whiting, 2009). A considerable portion of the school-based racism encountered by AAMs stems from negative stereotypes and preconceived perceptions of black males, bolstering a tendency for white teachers and administrators to approach AAM students derogatorily and with remedial expectations (Steele, 2003). To varying degrees then, both the learning experiences and social encounters of AAMs are compromised by teacher perceptions, expectations, and behaviors rooted in negative racial stereotypes and biases (Ferguson, 2003).

Since contemporary students of color have not experienced the everyday burdens and discomforts associated with the overt discrimination of previous eras, some scholars argue that the American educational structure has entered a post-racial era of schooling (Ani, 2013). A social cognition known as the Obama Effect further emphasizes the illusion of post-racialism by asserting the idea that the election of the nation’s first African American president is symbolic of an end to racial inequality in the U.S. (Skinner & Cheadle, 2016). Though indicative of progress, these illusionary examples of equality are countered by the internalized racial orientations of some white teachers and administrators who engender a contemporary form of racial discrimination known as racial microaggressions (Franklin et al., 2006; Henfield, 2011; Henfield et al., 2014). This relatively novel notion of microaggressions was first introduced in
the 1970s to describe previously undefined conceptualizations of race-related slights and indignities (Pierce et al., 1977) but did not enter the popular imagination until 2007 (Sue et al., 2007). Sue et al. (2007) defined microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily, verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 271). Unlike de jure segregation and threats of physical violence, microaggressions seem relatively subtle and benign, with their perpetrators often unaware they are instigators of discriminatory actions (Sue, 2010a).

Even though microaggressions are often unintentional, their denigrating effects can still impose significant psychological harm (Solorzano et al., 2000). Due largely to the long history of racial oppression and White supremacy in the U.S., people of color commonly forfeit their emotional and psychological welfare in the process of subscribing to White cultural norms and protecting the feelings of White people that pertain to race and ethnicity (Liu et al., 2019). The process of adapting to these types of social practices in the hope of peacefully co-existing with Whites is usually not benign and has resulted in people of color compromising their own mental health. When attempts to acculturate to White standards and norms are unsuccessful, people of color are left to internalize their own experiences of racial injustice and cultural insignificance rather than challenging the ideologies of White supremacy (Liu et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2018). This is especially the case when racialized experiences are implicit and seemingly unintentional such as those imposed by microaggressions. In addition to the stress that accompanies harboring intense racialized feelings, Williams et al. (2018) asserted that a relationship exists between racial microaggressions and psychological un-wellness listing depression, post-traumatic stress, substance use disorders, anxiety, obsessive compulsive
disorder, and increased suicide risk as negative mental health outcomes linked to microaggressions. Physical and mental health professionals familiar with the nature of microaggressions have also focused attention on their potentially harmful effects to the physical and mental wellness of people of color (Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015).

While in recent times the concept of microaggressions has expanded beyond its original racial domain to encompass discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, and other areas of oppression (Sue, 2010b), this study looked at microaggressions from the perspective of their psychological impacts and consequences on AAMs’ K-12 schooling. Arguments attempting to nullify the existence and significance of racial microaggressions in schools posit that the physical walls of many American school buildings contain populations of ethnically diverse students (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Lilienfeld, 2017). However, looking beyond progress in integrating schools and classrooms, there are still significant forms of racial segregation and discrimination within the context of how students are viewed, treated, and educated (Farkas, 2003). Systemic barriers predicated on racial attributions have the potential to segregate school experiences despite these experiences taking place within ostensibly desegregated buildings (Steele, 2003). Racially inflected attitudes and interactions create discernible barriers between ethnically diverse student populations and desired outcomes (Allen, 2015; Ani, 2013; Brewster et al., 2013). Therefore, the concept of equal educational opportunity represents far more than merely occupying common physical space that was previously inaccessible to marginalized populations. In this study, I probed the personal effects of racial microaggressions on adult male high school graduates and framed microaggressions as a contemporary continuation of racially exclusionary school practices that lessen the quality of schooling experiences for AAMs (Allen, 2015; Davis & Otto, 2016; Henfield, 2011; Prager,
Within the context of reviewing the racialized recollections of the K-12 schooling experiences of adult AAMs, this study explored the consequences resulting from such experiences, as well as on the overall health, happiness, and well-being of AAMs in the K-12 academic pipeline.

Research Problem

In K-12 public schools throughout the country, racial microaggressions and their associated biases tend to create social and learning experiences for AAMs that are less supportive and rewarding than those experienced by historically non-racialized populations such as White males (Williams et al., 2018). Disparity in experiences are manifested academically through failing grades, lower graduation rates, and substandard test scores (NCES, 2018; Perie et al., 2005). Other observable misalignments exist in social, emotional, and behavioral realms as evidenced via higher than average expulsions, suspensions, and truancy rates; or shortcomings such as higher assignment to remedial and special education curriculum (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Haight et al., 2016; NCES, 2018). AAMs consistently rank among the bottom in all significant academic performance areas and among the top in all areas representing disciplinary and behavioral concerns (Blanchett et al., 2005; Haight et al., 2016). These factors suggest that veiled racial mechanisms in the form of microaggressions are prohibiting AAMs from becoming comfortably acclimated to the social and cultural climate of predominately White schools (Liu et al., 2019).

Negative perceptions of AAMs in K-12 create school environments in which they are likely to be confronted by implicit biases and indignities whose discomforts can detract from the social, cultural, and academic richness of school (Brewster et al., 2013; Chiles, 2013; Javius, 2016; Prager, 2011; Whiting, 2009). A consequence of microaggressions is that AAMs may
experience unhealthy school encounters that are largely racialized, precipitating not just academic shortfalls but also emotional abuse and psychological damage that adversely affects most every social and scholastic aspect of schooling (Franklin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2018). These shortfalls indicate that the social, emotional, cultural, and academic needs of AAM students often go unmet under the direction of White teachers and administrators (Warren, 2015). Additional evidence is seen in disproportionately high suspension and expulsion rates (Haight et al., 2016), a low, overall high school graduation rate of 78% (NCES, 2018), and by the sixth grade, achievement that lags two full grade levels behind their White counterparts (Prager, 2011).

As racism has shifted from the deliberate and overt discrimination of the past to the more equivocal conceptions prevalent today, racial microaggressions are at the forefront of these post-modern manifestations (Wang et al., 2011). However, it is important to note that since these forms of racial injustice are less glaring than those that have dominated typical and historical race narratives in the U.S. (Liu et al., 2019; Sue, 2010b; Wang et al., 2011), there is a tendency for perpetrators to view this differential treatment towards people of color as harmless (Solorzano et al., 2000). In fact, the dark cloud of blatant racism has been such a prevalent historical element of American culture that elusive configurations are overshadowed to the point their perpetrators are often unaware they are committing such behaviors (Rector-Aranda, 2016; Sue, 2010b).

The low visibility of microaggressions make them difficult to identify, justify, and track (Solomona et al., 2005; Sue, 2010b). Adding to the ambiguity of racial microaggressions is their seemingly innocuous dynamics that make them “difficult to separate from the sociopolitical dimensions of oppression, power, and privilege” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 171). The recipients of
microaggressions are often faced with the stress of being careful not to overreact to racism due to its position in challenging the innate privileges of Whiteness (Hossain, 2015; McIntosh, 1988) or to overreact to racism from typically oblivious perpetrators (Wang et al., 2011). The unintentional and tenuous nature of microaggressions, coupled with White privilege and the belief of perpetrators that no racism has taken place, creates an additional burden on subjects to internalize reactions to microaggressions in fear of being viewed as aggressive, confrontational, or hypersensitive (Torino et al., 2018).

While the stress and emotional damage caused by racial microaggressions may be less noticeable than those forms of racism that accompany blatant racial injustice, there are emotional and psychological consequences that exist nonetheless (Wang et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2018). The stress and psychological unwellness of internalizing emotional reactions to racism, compounded with the anger, embarrassment, and shame that coincides with being the targets of racism in this subtle form can be detriments to both the mental and physical health of persons who represent devalued populations (Sue, 2010b). Microaggressions are associated with “various aspects of psychological functioning, including depressive symptoms, self-esteem, anger, positive and negative effect, substance use, overall psychological distress, rumination, stress, and overall psychological well-being” (Torino et al., 2018, p. 70). Other associations have examined constructions of self-worth, frustration, self-blame, and confusion (Davis & Otto, 2016; Franklin et al., 2006; Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue, 2010a, 2017; Torino et al., 2018).

In this study, I analyzed AAM participants recollections of their K-12 school experiences in order to explore the educational implications of school-based microaggressions and the interconnectedness between these implications with mental and emotional wellness (Franklin et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2018).
Theoretical Framework

I selected Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Microaggressions Theory (MT) as suitable lenses through which to view the experiences of AAMs reflecting upon their K-12 schooling. I chose these theories based on my desire to capture organic participant perspectives rooted in the actual lived experiences of adult AAMs. In doing so, I explored these experiences within the context of racial microaggressions driven by negative stereotypes of AAM students’ vis-a-vis the biases of white educators. As a conjoined framework for studying and analyzing educational inequality, CRT and MT enabled me to examine cultural and structural components of the educational pipeline that establish and maintain separation between dominant and subordinate racial groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Within this matrix of segregated cultural experiences, “educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). This study explored the role that microaggressions played in forging these contradictory experiences for AAMs in K-12 schooling. More specifically, CRT and its counter-storytelling component provided a lens that enabled study participants to share their stories, through which I analyzed racial injustices in the form of microaggressions that occurred within the narrative of these stories and explored psychological and emotional consequences suffered by AAM study participants as a result of these racialized encounters.

CRT is an ambient framework that encapsulates a wide array of theoretical underpinnings that deal with race (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1995). More specifically, CRT is a broad lens that examines the role White privilege and White supremacy play in using race as a tool for maintaining a culture of dominance for Whites and subordination for non-whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Martinez, 2014). Though the concept of microaggressions
was introduced in the 1970s (Pierce et al., 1977), it was not until 2007 that it became popular scholarship (Sue et al., 2007) and in 2014 it entered the national mainstream (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

To provide a frame that analyzes the combination of social, psychological, and physiological impacts of racial microaggressions, Smith et al. (2011) introduced the notion of Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). This is the assertion that racism not only exists in subtle and less noticeable forms, but also fosters an internal battle that adversely impacts the mental and physical health of all racially subjugated people (Henfield, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Sue, 2010a). RBF also emphasizes and strengthens the earlier work of Pierce et al. (1977) and Pierce (1995) who implied that racialized experiences in historically White spaces are inevitable, and that these experiences induce race related and societal stress that hinder time, energy, and overall mental health. Other researchers have provided additional support that legitimizes the microaggressions concept, including exposing subtle racial language embedded within policies that protect White privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2017), a strong presence of microaggressions experienced by students of color in K-12 and post-secondary environments (Henfield, 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000), and daily social exchanges in the workplace and various other societal environments.

Despite the growing body of work of this nature, some scholars argue that research pertaining to microaggressions is still in an exploratory phase, and therefore many of the philosophies and discoveries that support the microaggressions concept have been challenged as undeveloped or underdeveloped (Lilienfeld, 2017). Therefore, as the more tenured parent of Microaggressions Theory (MT), Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides historical background, supporting studies, and tools that further strengthen MT. As a subassembly of CRT, MT narrows this broad lens for analyzing race and streamlines the focus on one specific facet of racial
apartheid--racial microaggressions. This study follows a current trend in contemporary scholarship in “examining racial microaggressions in education from a critical race perspective” (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

Perhaps the most significant tool of CRT for enhancing MT in the context of the present study was allowing the research to be viewed in a manner that would “depart from mainstream scholarship by employing storytelling” (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995, p. 1). Study participants were invited to share their feelings and perspectives of the role played by microaggressions in shaping their K-12 schooling experiences. At the same time, I utilized Microaggressions Theory (MT) to look at participants’ stories for specific trends pertaining to microaggressions and their ensuing consequences because “any exploration of the racial microaggressions concept must include examination of the cumulative nature of racial stereotypes and their effects” (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 62). Therefore, this study combined CRT and MT into a unified framework that examined the impacts of racialization on the K-12 experiences of AAMs via exposure to racial microaggressions. In the following sections, I provide greater depth and insight into these theories and explain how I utilized them to inform the study.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) dates to the 1970s, originating in U.S. law schools as an offspring of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which drew inspiration from traditional civil rights scholarship (Bell, 1995). Among its components, CRT confronts racial microaggressions directly by challenging the liberal notion of colorblindness (i.e., pretending not to see race) and the conservative notion of post-racialism (i.e., believing that racism is a thing of the past). CRT makes the argument that ignoring racism perpetuates and broadens the scope of racial injustice
and social disparity, essentially declaring that ignoring racism is in fact an act of subtle yet harmful racism in itself (Martinez, 2014). While broad in its scope of complex perspectives and arguments, CRT is unified by a pair of common interests: (a) understanding that White supremacy is progressively established and maintained with the law playing a role in protecting it and (b) attempting to transform systems of oppression that obstruct racial liberation (Harris, 1995, p. xiii). This framework provided a lens that enabled me to view race as a driver of racial inequality as well as to view the impacts of racial inequality on various facets of society, including education.

CRT embodies a vast range of historical, economic, and emotional considerations in confirming the role that race plays in determining social, financial, and academic inequality that exists between Whites and other racialized populations (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano et al., 2000). It analyzes forces that have contributed to the creation of a society by which one racial classification (White) is declared dominant and all others subordinate (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1995). Within these multi-layered disciplines, CRT attests that race is a socially constructed mechanism, purposefully designed in a manner that awards institutional powers to the dominant race while oppressing the rights of other populations, thus evoking a complex of superiority for those possessing the privileges that accompany Whiteness and inferiority for all others (Solorzano et al., 2000). Coincident with this belief of superiority is the empowerment and entitlement to engage in racist activity, often with minimal to no accountability (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Solorzano et al., 2000; Vaught & Castagno, 2008) coupled with an inability to relate to the perspectives of those who are oppressed (Hossain, 2015; Martinez, 2014).
Critical Race theorists posit that racism is a normalized rather than an aberrant feature of U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Within the belief that racism is an intrinsic characteristic, CRT contends that racism is so deeply embedded within the cultural fabric of American society that it exists in a manner virtually unnoticed and invisible (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; McIntosh, 1988). This racial occlusion has been established historically through systems of “force, coercion, consent, custom, and jurisprudential edifice” (Donnor, 2013, p. 199). Though rooted deeply in legal scholarship, CRT also borrows from Critical Social Science. Rather than solely depending on case studies, CRT utilizes sciences such as psychology, anthropology, women’s studies, and sociology in analyzing racial inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995).

CRT utilizes counter-narratives as a means of expressing views that cannot be demonstrated through existing techniques, reinforcing the sentiment of scholar Derrick Bell that “people enjoy stories and will often suspend their beliefs, listen to the story, and then compare their views, not with mine, but with those expressed in the story” (Bell, 1995, p. 902). By enabling and empowering voices that are typically unheard and providing the opportunity to present narratives that disrupt dominant beliefs, CRT counters the momentum of more subtle forms of racial discrimination such as those presented through microaggressions in which perpetrator narratives can easily drown out the narratives of recipients (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This is especially significant with regard to AAMs in K-12 schooling because (a) the roots of storytelling in the Black community are traceable to Africa prior to the passage to the Americas (Carter, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002); (b) school textbooks often lack culturally responsive pedagogy with regard to AAMs (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Paris, 2012); and (c) there is a void of culturally significant social experiences for
AAMs in K-12 schools (Allen, 2015; Brown, 2007). Richards et al. (2007) observed that current tools of instruction have the potential to marginalize the learning experiences of students of color. They explained, “Culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes and utilizes students’ language in instruction, respects the students’ culture and language in instruction, and ultimately respects the students’ personal and community identities” (p. 7). Failure to include culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom creates the likelihood of disconnects from school that range from academic underperformance in the early grades to dropping out in later grades due to alienation, depression, and other areas of psychological distress.

**Microaggressions Theory**

Microaggressions Theory (MT) is a work-in-progress with researchers continuing to contribute to the growing body of knowledge that supports it (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue, 2010b; Sue et al., 2008). (Sue, 2010b), a prominent voice in cross-cultural studies and one of the most recognized researchers on microaggressions, has acknowledged that the concept is relatively understudied. As the concept of microaggressions evolves, so does its usage in the field of education (Kohli et al., 2017), emerging as a primary concern of critical race theorists who consider microaggressions to be a key racial threat to students of color, both in K-12 and higher education (Henfield, 2011; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Smith et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2018).

The language of MT pays particular attention to the roles of the perpetrator and the primary target (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). The perpetrator is the party responsible for instigating the racist behavior, either subtly or unknowingly, whereas the target is the victim of the perpetrator’s racial slights or indignities (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A third role exists in the form of a secondary target. However, this study focused
on microaggressions that took place between perpetrators and targets rather than looking at secondary targets affected or offended by the perpetrator but were not necessarily the direct target of the microaggression (Sue et al., 2007). An example of a secondary target would be a Black male being offended from negative stereotypes expressed about Hispanics.

Sue (2010b) describes four themes that encompass the way microaggressions potentially affect the physical and mental wellness of marginalized individuals. These themes are (a) biological experiences that cause physiological reactions such as a change in blood pressure or heart rate; (b) cognitive experiences that create confusion and require additional analysis of the perpetrator’s intentions; (c) emotional reactions that evoke rage, anger, anxiety, depression, and hopelessness; and (d) behavioral changes and coping strategies in attempt to adjust to racism that may impact psychological or physical wellness. Smith et al. (2011) provides a similar analysis of the consequences of microaggressions as they pertain specifically to AAMs. In his analysis, he asserts that AAM victims of racial microaggressions experience extreme emotional, physiological, and psychological consequences, and that malignant consequences accompany the aggregation of racial stereotypes, racial narratives, and racial imagery represented by the biased and unjust lens through which Whites view AAMs.

Another factor that further complicates the schooling experiences of AAMs is the idea that AAM victims of racial microaggressions experience a dual racial consciousness (Du Bois, 2008; Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005; Smith et al., 2011). This notion of dual racial consciousness was first introduced in the early 1900s (Du Bois, 2008) suggesting that in historically White environments, AAMs are forced to bear the internal battle that concurrently wages the co-existence of individual blame beliefs and high systemic beliefs (Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005). Simply stated, AAMs experience the stressful and damaging internal battle that hinges back-and-
forth between feeling a sense of personal failure and feeling victimized by established governing and racially oppressive forces (Smith et al., 2011). Dual racial consciousness further emphasizes that for AAMs, there are significant emotional, physiological, and psychological costs associated with participating in historically White environments (Smith et al., 2011).

This study examined trends within the context of participant experiences to analyze how these experiences align with these themes and ideas. While the thesis of the study suggests probing for psychological distress, other consequences occurred. Remaining mindful that physical health resides within these themes assisted me in identifying consequences residing outside the parameters of psychological stressors. Though no major physical damage was revealed in the present study, this mindset assisted in identifying another interesting trend. A small body of research suggests that in certain instances, racism has the potential to have a motivating effect on students even while it hurts them (McGee, 2015; Sanders, 1997). Students may subsequently work harder, set more rigorous goals, challenge themselves, and exert personal initiative to overcome discrimination by disproving stereotypes and rejecting biases (Carter, 2008). Despite the overwhelming majority of the research supporting the notion of negative consequences that accompany racial microaggressions, the positive consequences of motivation and achievement emerged as common themes among participants of the present study.

As they pertain to AAMs in K-12 schools, racial microaggressions add to the complexity of attacking school aged children who are malleable and still developing their self-identity (Allen, 2015). Though this type of racism is often unintentional and not intended to be malicious, it has the potential to be far more harmful for adolescent targets who have yet to develop the cognitive maturity to make sense of racial injustice that is confusing even to adults.
The dynamics of diminished self-worth, frustration, depression, and other forms of psychological trauma can not only undermine AAMs curiosity to learn but negatively influence behavior and confidence (Sue, 2017). These effects, in turn, can bring on feelings of isolation, self-doubt, depression, and other psychological discomfORTS that youth may begin to identify with schooling (Davis, 2003; Rector-Aranda, 2016).

School reform has remained largely ineffective in creating learning environments that provide opportunities for non-white populations that are equitable to those of White students (Rector-Aranda, 2016). In the 66 years since the Brown (1954) decision, unequal school experiences continue to dominate the racialized landscape of American K-12 schooling (Ani, 2013; Noguera, 2017). The fundamental problem with the numerous remediative approaches implemented during this time is they habitually view school reform through a lens that looks outward at multiethnic school children and their families as the source of trouble rather than looking inward to see how schools and districts may be complicit in the problem (Howard, 2013; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Since microaggressions go largely undetected and are difficult to measure, the failure to examine the internal ineffectiveness of schooling while uncritically placing blame on students and their families allows a culture of racial microaggressions to not just go unnoticed but to flourish and expand in scope (García & Guerra, 2004; Liu et al., 2019). There is wide potential for speculative ideas surrounding why ethnically significant school reform often fails to look at racial disparity internally. One thought could be that schools and districts are unaware that racial biases exist; another is that they are afraid of what they may uncover by actively investigating the existence of microaggressions in their school buildings. Since every school and every district is different, the reasons are likely to vary from one location to the next. Regardless of the reason, the effectiveness of education reform is diluted when
schools fail to recognize that AAMs are not receiving fair and equal treatment (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Rector-Aranda, 2016).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the occurrence and aftereffects of racial microaggressions as they pertain to AAMs in the K-12 schooling pipeline. Through examining the individual perspectives of adult AAMs, the study looked reflectively at the participants’ past schooling experiences and analyzed the manners in which microaggressions revealed themselves, as well as consequences caused by such encounters. Within the context of exploring the ensuing consequences of this form of discrimination, I was particularly interested in examining the perspectives of study participants with regard to their psychological well-being and mental health. Therefore, the study identified the emotional and psychological impacts of subtle racial biases and dormant inequality with respect to self-confidence, self-worth, depression, stress, and other significant emotional and psychological gauges shared through the stories of participants. Because AAMs continue to encounter schooling experiences of diminished reward in the public education system, I analyzed through the experiences of my study participants the manner that psychological attacks against AAMs impacts their continued scholastic and cultural development within the K-12 schooling structure. This study will hopefully aid school districts, administrators, and teachers to better serve the socioemotional, cultural, and academic needs of AAM students by providing awareness of microaggressions as a racial threat that is largely undetected and often unintentional.

**Research Questions**

In keeping with my problem statement, theoretical framework, and study purpose, the following research questions were used to guide my investigation into the reflective stories about
the experience of microaggressions among AAMs who have navigated through the K-12 schooling pipeline:

- In what ways did subtle racial attacks against AAMs during their K-12 schooling influence their perceptions of safety, belonging, self-esteem, and accomplishment?
- In what ways did AAMs respond to microaggressions during their K-12 school years?
- What consequences do AAMs experience as a result of exposure to racial microaggressions in K-12 schooling?
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This literature review provides research and supporting information that aligns with the problem statement and research questions, speaking not only to the emergence, evolution, and existence of racial microaggressions suffered by AAMs during formative schooling, but also the ensuing consequences and aftereffects. The dominant narrative of AAMs in American society is predicated upon false biases and stereotypes, inaccurately assigning the majority of the AAM population the perception of a culture remnant of criminality, laziness, and inferiority (Skinner & Cheadle, 2016; Steele, 2003; Sue, 2010a). In school settings, these biases affect the treatment of AAM students by White teachers and administrators, creating inequality, additional challenges, and uncomfortable encounters for AAM students throughout K-12 (Liu et al., 2019; Sue, 2010b; Sue et al., 2008). The nature of these biases and the mistreatment that accompanies them established the basis for this research.

The Word Race

Examining the word “race” is a good starting point for research that deals with racial microaggressions. Dissecting the word race and its use in the English language provides a view of discrimination through the meaning of spoken words. It may be a coincidence that modern language assigns duplicity to the word race, defining differences in ethnicity and physical appearance with the same phonetic renderings used to delineate competitive sporting events or contests that measure speed and endurance. However, there are eerily strange similarities in the two conceptions of race from the standpoint that much like a competitive “race,” the social construct of race is also competitive, separating success and failure by establishing systems and processes by which success and its accolades, or failure and its ensuing agony are determined by
clear and distinct assignments of winners and losers (Haney Lopez, 1994; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). The failure of AAMs in schooling environments is evidenced socially, emotionally, and academically, prompting speculation that systemic barriers prohibit success outcomes for some populations and provide opportunities for others (Howard, 2008). It is significant to note that in K-12 schooling, AAMs continue to lose the “race” in every significant academic and social contest that is measured, tracked, and identified in determining success or failure (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017). Racial microaggressions represent a modern conception of racism that contributes to this failure (Smith et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2008).

**Racialized Experiences of African American Males**

Within the context of the competitive nature of racial orientation is a social landscape that demonstrates drastic incongruences between racial populations. Despite this reality, common mainstream narratives attempt to ignore and deny that racialized experiences are daily, normal, and common occurrences for all people of color, AAMs in particular (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008). While formative schooling tends to teach the history of the country in a manner that demonstrates civility and benevolence, the harsh reality is that some of the major early actions by which the United States were established include the attempted genocide of indigenous people (Maybury-Lewis, 2002) and the mass kidnapping and enslavement of Africans (Anderson & Span, 2016; James, 1992). Within this context of war declared upon African people, the African male image was reduced to deficit informed assumptions depicting intellectual inferiority and savagery as justification for the terror waged against him (García & Guerra, 2004; Sue, 2010a; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Today’s racialized experiences no longer reflect the blatant and overt kidnapping, human trafficking, and mass terrorization associated with slavery or the daily discomforts of segregation. Yet, the cultures of these
Racialized K-12 Educational Experiences of African American Males

K-12 schools have mirrored society-at-large as conceptions of racism have taken on multiple cosmetic renderings throughout history (Smedley, 2007; Span, 2015). Therefore, as microaggressions dominate the present-day landscape of racism, the racial landscape of K-12 schooling is not excluded. As a result, AAM students find themselves constantly under racial attack (Rogers et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2011). Learning and social development are forced to compete with the psychologically damaging mechanisms of racial mistreatment in the form of microaggressions (Smith et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2011). While microaggressions are likely not the sole cause for AAM social and academic misalignment, it is significant to note that AAM academic underperformance is largely experienced under the supervision of White schools, White administrators, and White teachers (Solorzano, 2018; Wang et al., 2011). One glaring statistic is that AAMs are suspended and expelled from school at a rate that is 2.3 times higher than White males (Toldson et al., 2015). Additionally, from 1992 through 2015, AAMs scored significantly lower than almost every ethnic population in both reading and mathematics, with no significant or sustainable improvement during that time (National Assessment of Educational
Progress, 2017). In 2015 alone, only 7% of AAMs demonstrated proficiency in mathematics and 17% in reading compared to national averages of 32% and 46% respectively (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017).

What makes the quality of K-12 education significant is the relationship between academic success and quality of life (Ross & Van Willigen, 1997). This is especially important due to the role that K-12 has been assigned regarding equipping students for college and career readiness (Glancy et al., 2014; Ward et al., 2013). Mental wellness, job equality, and financial stability are all facets where statistical analyses demonstrate disparities based on educational level, with more favorable outcomes associated with higher levels of education (Ma et al., 2016).

However, as significant as education is, the quest to obtain education presents unique challenges for AAMs that in turn create educational disparities and ultimately, quality of life disparities. Smith et al. (2011) conducted a study in which the experiences of 661 black men were analyzed with regard to a condition that identifies the difficult, excessive, and daily stress of racism as MEES (Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress). Using racial microaggressions, societal problems, and educational attainment as measurement variables, the study sought to explore racial microaggressions and racialized societal factors along with stress. The study concluded that stress hinders AAMs motivation and drive, and that racial disparities create learning environments that diametrically oppose those reflective of healthy and rewarding educational experiences. The study also concluded that racial microaggressions and societal problems contributed to 40% of the MEES experienced by study participants. While this is a factor that stifles educational achievement, the same study noticed higher levels of MEES as AAMs moved into higher educational realms.
Sue et al. (2009) conducted another study that yielded significant results on the impact of racial microaggressions. The qualitative study was comprised of a focus group of 14 multiethnic males and females ages 23 to 47. Perspectives were collected on the role that racial microaggressions played in their classroom experiences. Although the word “microaggressions” was not used in the data collection processes, the combination of a questionnaire and semi-structured open-ended interview questions extracted microaggressions related themes that led to feelings such as ascription of intelligence, assumption of criminality, and denial of racial reality. It is significant to note that without being guided to do so, participants focused primarily on White teachers when sharing their perspectives on racial tension they experienced in classrooms, discomfort around White students and instructors, and unsatisfactory resolution to any difficult dialogue that ensued. Ultimately, participants of the study shared that such experiences were energy depleting, which made it difficult to focus on the academic requirements. Participants also expressed experiencing strong physical, psychological, and emotional costs such as exhaustion, anxiety, frustration, and anger. Consistent with the previously mentioned study, participants of this study felt they experienced “invalidation, insult, and denigration” (p. 188) which compromised learning experiences and learning outcomes.

The Impact of African American Teachers and Administrators

Most consider the 1954 Brown v. BOE school desegregation decision a significant victory for the civil rights movement and a major milestone for the advancement of devalued racial populations (Ethridge, 1979; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Tillman, 2004). However, it was accompanied by opportunity costs that took a severe and damaging toll on African American communities throughout the nation (Tillman, 2004). Though segregated, all Black schools (Black and African American are used interchangeably throughout the present
study) reinforced the values of the Black communities they were responsible for serving, with African American teachers and administrators playing a critical role in driving this culture of the Black schools and Black communities co-existing as mutually beneficial entities (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). While the present study illustrates evidence supporting disparaging social experiences and failing academic results for African American males in desegregated schools, teachers and administrators of the pre-Brown era were dedicated to the African American community and to the needs of African American students (Tillman, 2004). Furthermore, rather than viewing African American students through a lens of deficit informed biases, African American teachers considered Black students to be intelligent and were committed to their success (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Javius, 2016).

Just prior to 1954, there were approximately 82,000 African American teachers who were responsible for educating 2 million African American children attending segregated schools (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). However, as student populations experienced desegregation, there was virtually no desegregation in teacher and principal roles (Ethridge, 1979). By 1965, over 38,000 black educators lost their jobs as White communities were adamant about not wanting their children educated by African American teachers (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). As a result, the teaching career that had once been a prominent profession for Black middle-class professionals had become a profession with limited African American exposure (Fairclough, 2004; Hudson & Holmes, 1994). By 1985, the number of Black college students choosing teaching as a profession declined by 66%, and by 2001 African American teachers represented only 6% of the teaching force for American public schools, whereas African American students represented 17% of the overall student population (Tillman, 2004). By 2018, Black males represented just 2% of public school educators nationwide despite students of color representing
49% of the total student population (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; NCES, 2019). This is particularly disturbing considering the findings of a study conducted by the Iza Institute of Economics which indicated that AAM students who had at least one Black teacher in elementary school had higher propensity to graduate high school, attend college, and were 40% less likely to drop out of school (Papageorge et al., 2018).

Mercer and Mercer (1986) stated, “A public school system without Black teachers is like teaching White supremacy without saying a word” (p. 105). This notion is consistent with other compelling evidence that indicates that as African American teachers began to disappear from American public schools, African American student experiences began to diminish (Fox, 2015; Hudson & Holmes, 1994). On the contrary, there is equally compelling evidence that demonstrates positive and rewarding experiences for Black students who were exposed to Black teachers while in predominately White schools. One example was derived from a study conducted on approximately one-million North Carolina students between 2008 and 2012 (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Results from this study depicted an approximate 14% decrease in expulsions and suspensions for AAM students who were exposed to African American female teachers, and an 18% decrease for AAM students who were exposed to AAM teachers (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). In the early 2000s, Project Star was another study worthy of consideration in making a case for the value of Black teachers (Dee, 2004). The study followed a cohort of 11,600 students from kindergarten through third grade, and demonstrated that Black students exposed to a Black teacher for one year saw a 3-5 percentile point increase in math and a 3-6 percentile increase in reading (Dee, 2004).
Racial Microaggressions

In the 1970s, Harvard Professor Dr. Chester M. Pierce coined the term “microaggression” to describe racial behaviors of non-blacks towards African Americans (Pierce et al., 1977). These “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 207) can be categorized into three types, which include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Allen, 2015; Henfield, 2011; Smith et al., 2011). Of these three forms of racial microaggressions, this study initially sought to focus on the two that are most readily characterized as unintentional or insidious -- microsinsults and microinvalidations (Henfield, 2011; Sue et al., 2009). However, the results of the study revealed the presence of microassaults as well. Though microassaults resemble a blatant reminder of traditional racism more so than something subtle and insidious, they are still considered microaggressions. This classification is assigned to this type of racism as “micro” not because it is small, but more so from the viewpoint that it is racism that occurs in the everyday functioning of society (Solorzazo et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007). Each of the three types of microaggressions is listed below as categorized by (Sue et al., 2007):

1. Microinsults are subtle and often unintentional insults that demean a person’s racial identity. An example of a microinsult in the classroom would be for a teacher to ask an African American student how they got into the gifted program.

2. Microinvalidations are words and actions that exclude or minimize a person’s cultural identity. “All lives matter” and “I don’t see color” are statements that represent microinvalidations. Essentially, microinvalidations suggest that the struggles or cultural significance of a group are insignificant and therefore do not need to be identified separately from those of the dominant culture.
3. Microassaults are different from the other two microaggressions. Microassaults are verbal attacks including racial epithets, name calling, and blatant, insensitive, and deliberate acts of racial malice, including acts of racial violence.

Henfield (2011) suggests these forms of racism have become increasingly common in classroom settings, and for African American boys, have been a major source of inferiority complexities and resentment, causing disconnect and rebellion due to a learning environment of discomfort, and one that is non-conducive to fruitful and rewarding academic experiences.

**White Supremacy and White Privilege: The Core of Racial Microaggressions**

White supremacy is at the core of racial microaggressions and other actions taken to segregate schooling experiences based merely on race (Liu et al., 2019). By description, White supremacy is the belief that the White race is superior to all others and therefore has the authority and entitlement to oppress and dominate other races with no repercussion (Hossain, 2015; McIntosh, 1988; Neville et al., 2001; Rector-Aranda, 2016; Solomona et al., 2005). Closely accompanying White supremacy is the idea of White privilege, which pertains to societal benefits and privileges available to White people only (Hossain, 2015; Neville et al., 2001; Solomona et al., 2005). McIntosh (1988), who is White, provides an introspective definition that White privilege is “an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious” (p. 1). This definition implies that White privilege, just like racial microaggressions, has historically become so embedded within the fabric of American cultural apparel that it appears normal rather than aberrant (Bell, 1995; Martinez, 2014; Rector-Aranda, 2016). Essentially, White supremacy and White privilege are tools used to create opportunities for Whites and to cast oppression upon non-whites (McIntosh, 1988). These oppressive forces are supported by judicial powers, tradition, and political
influence (Sue, 2017). Racial microaggressions represent one of several possible conceptions of racial injustice that occur in environments dominated by White supremacy and White privilege (Smith et al., 2011).

Unlike periods where blatant oppression of AAMs has been historically documented, modern conceptions of school racism targeting AAMs has undergone a facelift (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Kohli et al., 2017). Racist actions by individual perpetrators have become less popular as the new face of racism relies on systems of racial oppression that are protected by rules, laws, and established structure (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Emerging from these mechanisms is what Bonilla-Silva (2003) calls “the new racism.” This represents harmful racially motivated behaviors that are largely accepted by society and considered normal (Bell, 1995; Harris, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Some of these racial encounters have become so normalized that the perpetrators of such do not even realize their actions (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2009). Racial microaggressions represent one popular form of subtle and often unconscious racism that influences the learning experiences of AAM students (Smith et al., 2011; Sue, 2010a; Sue et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2018).

Like other racialized schooling experiences, racial microaggressions against AAMs represent efforts of White supremacy to protect White privilege (Liu et al., 2019). This form of racism attacks AAMs during their developmental years (Henfield et al., 2014), and is the basis for schooling experiences that are psychologically damaging (Wang et al., 2011) and assists in planting early seeds that influence AAMs to accept a culture of subordination at a young age (Henfield, 2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).
Narratives of White Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are continually expressed within the content of dominant White narratives and are present in most mainstream facets of society (Martinez, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For example, in sports it is common to hear commentator narratives that speak to the physical attributes and athleticism of African American male athletes while speaking to the intelligence of White male athletes (Dyson, 1996; Stone et al., 1999). The lack of African American role models in the news, and the overabundance of negatively portrayed African Americans in film and television provide a similar example of microaggressions in entertainment (Abraham, 2003). The extent of racial microaggressions towards AAMs is so abundant that in 2007, former Vice President Biden was guilty of expressing this form of racism in attempt to compliment his future presidential running mate Barrack Obama. Joseph (2011) shared a 2007 quote by Joe Biden demonstrating that racism is a normal part of day-to-day functioning, so deeply embedded within the daily mechanics of society that even intended compliments contain racial biases: “You got the first mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy.” While Biden’s intent was to congratulate the future president, he instead expressed biases that attempted to “recycle the vituperative stereotype of African Americans as the antithesis of well-spoken, intelligent, hygienic, or attractive” (Joseph, 2011, p. 398). The United States is so racialized that even the eventual running mate of the first African American President is guilty of unknowingly expressing racial microaggressions toward the biggest AAM political figure in the history of the country. Even at the highest levels of society, microaggressions represent a facet of the mainstream that is far-reaching, tangible, and real (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Joseph, 2011; Skinner & Cheadle, 2016).
Similar mainstream narratives falsely suggest that racism no longer factors into the schooling experiences and outcomes of AAM students (Davis, 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dixson, 2018). Contrary to these narratives, the social climate of the country is so heavily dominated by racially charged undercurrents that the first African American president was marginalized by his own ally and peer. It can therefore be assumed that defenseless AAM students are vulnerable, unprotected, and highly exposed to the dangers of these subtle racial indignities (Sue, 2010a). The harsh reality of the racial divide in this country is the presence of White narratives that subtly challenge efforts to counter the racial apartheid that negatively impacts the upward mobility of African Americans (Griffin et al., 2016). This mentality is supported by soundless and seemingly harmless forms of oppression that are essentially efforts to view cosmetic changes in racial structure as the end of racism, ignoring both its existence and its damaging consequences (Schofield, 2006; Wang et al., 2011). These myths of post-racialization are supported by both liberal and conservative White perspectives that drive the climate of racial microaggressions (Liu et al., 2019). The liberal notion of “colorblindness” is accompanied by an intent to declare a perspective devoid of bias, stereotype, and other racially motivated positionality (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, 2017). However, rather than its seemingly altruistic intent, “colorblindness” is harmful from the standpoint that it (a) negates the cultural significance of entire marginalized populations (Bonilla-Silva, 2017) and (b) assumes that racial classification does not limit a person’s opportunities (Gullen, 2011; Schofield, 2006). Therefore, pretending not to see color empowers dominant (White) perspectives and encourages ignoring the underrepresentation of people of color throughout all critical facets of society, including formative schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995).
The conservative belief is that racism is a thing of the past (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Milestones such as the end of slavery, the end of Jim Crow, and most recently, the election of nation’s first African American president are leveraged to support the position that color no longer plays a role in defining opportunities and outcomes, making the assumption that all Americans are given a level playing field, equal access, and equal opportunities (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Skinner & Cheadle, 2016). From this distorted lens, it is common for the conservative narrative to provide the false implication that all racism is reflective of events that are historically insignificant with regard to modern society (Bell, 1995; Martinez, 2014). This position fails to recognize new conceptions of racial injustice, opting instead to attack victims of racism for expressing their racially induced realities rather than supporting the individuals who share these traumatizing perspectives (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). These contradictory yet equally harmful sociopolitical perspectives indicate two separate white narratives that both ignore the racial disparities in education and their impact on the lives of AAM students (Abraham, 2003; Bell, 1995; Martinez, 2014).

Popular and dominant White perspectives further complicate the understanding of microaggressions for all African American students, males in particular (Chiles, 2013; Sue, 2010b; Sue et al., 2008). White teachers and administrators are not exempt from the overarching narrative that race is insignificant or that using race to explain disparities is an excuse (Solomona et al., 2005). With racial biases and stereotypes being the crux of racial microaggressions (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008), these ideas of post-racialism likely move teachers and administrators in the direction of believing they are exempt from possessing racial biases rather than being self-cognizant and challenging themselves to identify and correct racial misconduct that takes place in classrooms (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Gullen, 2011).
Race, Racism, and Racial Microaggressions

Understanding “race” and “racism” as they pertain to racial microaggressions requires more than merely analyzing words, comparing definitions, or exploring concepts that explain White dominance. To provide a deeper understanding of how racial microaggressions impact AAM students, it is helpful to also understand that the concepts of “race” and “racism” are not as self-evident as popular imagination would allude (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Haney Lopez (1994) attests that “race may be America’s single most confounding problem, but the confounding problem with race is that few seem to know what race is” (p. 6). While physical characteristics of ancestry and appearance are obvious identifiers in classifying race, the notion of race is far more complex than differences in skin complexion (Smedley, 2007). Race is instead a driving force that has produced racial categorizations that previously did not exist, reducing the cultural significance and identity of the entire European and African continents to White and Black, and the expansive indigenous tribes that span North American to Indian (Smedley, 2007; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). This creating of races has alienated and suppressed vast tribal practices, rituals, cultural differences, and traditions that expand each of these continents, forcing non-homogenous groups to socially exist as singular units, therefore supporting social science in the idea that race is “socially constructed” as opposed to something that has occurred naturally and scientifically (Haney Lopez, 1994; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). This social construction of race has been a driving factor for the advancement of White Supremacy with respect to all people of color and not just African Americans (Brown et al., 2003) This has been evidenced historically through actions such as “removing indigenous people or exterminating them, the military occupation of Mexico to the lynching, removal, and the exclusion of Asian immigrants on the West Coast” (Brown et al., 2003, p. x).
If microaggressions are in fact a component of race as a socially constructed mechanism, the question then arises, “Why create a racial structure?” As previously implied in this literature review, White supremacy is a huge influencer in determining, shaping, and driving racial structure (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hossain, 2015; Martinez, 2014; Solorzano et al., 2000). Positioning the myth of a superior race has justified the design and enforcement of intentional advantages for some and systemic disadvantages for others (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hossain, 2015; Martinez, 2014; Solorzano et al., 2000). In the United States, the White race has been dominant and has historically been entitled to advantages as a result of racial structure. Microaggressions are no exception to this pattern (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Martinez, 2014). Due to a longstanding history and tenure of subordination in this country, many would argue that the most noticeably subordinate group has been African Americans (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Harris, 1995). The sense of privilege and power that accompanies the White race has entitled Whites in this country to economic, political, and social capital that has been used to shape positive life outcomes and experiences (Hossain, 2015; Neville et al., 2001). Contrarily, race construction has created experiences for African Americans that are diametrically opposed to those of White Americans, and many of the same networks that make promises for an optimal quality of life for all Americans are in place to ensure the opposite for African Americans and other non-white populations (McIntosh, 1988).

The same forces that drive disparity and subordination in social and professional circles with multiethnic adults work just as diligently to marginalize and subordinate the schooling experiences of multiethnic K-12 students (Davis, 2003; Rector-Aranda, 2016). This is evidenced by the power of microaggressions to hinder equitable educational opportunities for adolescent AAMs in the same manner that adult AAMs are discriminated against with regard to jobs and
housing (Allen, 2015; Anderson & Span, 2016; James, 1992). This implies that race is a tool used to separate AAMs into subordinate spaces early in life in order to prepare them to maintain that same oppressive mindset throughout their schooling (Larson & Ovando, 2001). Smedley and Smedley (2005) reinforce the connection between race and opportunity sharing the belief that race-based societies hold that races are naturally unequal and must be ranked hierarchically with Africans and their descendants occupying the bottom rung of the social ladder.

In addition to recognizing that separation and hierarchical assignment of people into racial categories is not something that happens coincidentally and is instead something that deliberately takes place, it is also significant to understand that systems are in place to perpetuate and preserve this oppressive culture (Donnor, 2013; Harris, 1995). Schooling is a system that is not exempt from this harmful and oppressive design (Davis, 2003; Rector-Aranda, 2016). In fact, for many AAMs, schooling experiences represent their earliest encounters with racial disparity (Davis, 2003). From disallowing enslaved Africans from learning to read and write (Anderson & Span, 2016; James, 1992; Span, 2015); to legal school segregation (Warren, 1954); to the use of racial microaggressions in forging modern attacks on AAM students today (Smith et al., 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008); every era of schooling experiences for AAMs have been racially influenced and deliberately marginalized in comparison to those of White students.

Understanding racial structure debunks the myth of “reverse racism” or that anyone can be racist, therefore strengthening the idea that racism represents oppressive forces backed by institutional powers that people of color have never had in the United States (Solorzano et al., 2000). Therefore, although one may be prejudiced and dislike a person of another color, or use color as the basis for negative stereotypes and biases, these behaviors and beliefs do not
constitute racism when unaccompanied by the power to impose systemic barriers upon the lives of those being stereotyped or disliked (Doane, 2006). This country is predicated upon a history of oppression and discrimination in housing, voting, physical freedom, equal protection rights, and land ownership, with schooling experiences for AAM children impacted negatively as well (Griffin et al., 2016). All this institutionally enforced discrimination has been manufactured and executed by the design and systemic governance of White people (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Based on the idea that racism requires the power and ability to execute racist behavior, White people have historically been the only group capable of racism in this country and the only population capable of utilizing racism to marginalize the learning experiences of AAMs (Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

**Racism Specific to AAMs**

Though the notion of race has been used to oppress many multiethnic groups, exploring race and racial microaggressions from the perspective of AAMs is particularly intriguing (Allen, 2015; Brewster et al., 2013; Davis, 2003). From both historical and modern perspectives, the racialized experiences of AAMs are unique to those of other populations; even African American females (Davis & Otto, 2016). An earlier reference was made that compared “race” as a competitive event to “race” as a mechanism that differentiates people based on skin complexion and national origin (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Looking at “race” from this dual lens is helpful for better understanding the role that race has played in villainizing AAMs and the role this villainizing has played in forging disparaging educational experiences for AAM students (Franklin et al., 2006; Welch, 2007).

Racism toward AAMs in education has moved in a manner similar to that of a relay baton, taking on new conceptions with each exchange from one racial era to the next (Liu et al.,
2019; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015), but never departing from a reality deeply rooted in injustice and mistreatment (Anderson & Span, 2016; Span, 2015). Mainstream narratives have promoted false biases and stereotypes of AAMs throughout history and these harmful misrepresentations have been leveraged to justify the mistreatment of AAMs throughout significant facets of society, schooling included (Sue, 2010a). The following section of the literature review illustrates the evolution of racism in schooling moving from one conception to the next with regards to AAMs and education, and how each transition has been guided by a culture of mainstream bias that has been used to portray AAMs negatively in history and still today. These biases, when held by White teachers and administrators, create the foundation for harmful racial microaggressions that exist in today’s schooling environment (Liu et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2008).

**AAM Biases and Stereotypes**

Negative biases and stereotypes of AAMs are continuously promoted, emphasized, and reinforced throughout society (Hall et al., 2016). These forces are the result of systemic efforts, traditional beliefs, and mainstream depictions. They are instrumental in promoting and preserving the dichotomy of dominance and subordination between White and non-white populations (Martinez, 2014). All non-white populations are impacted by distorted portrayals assigned by popular White imagination and enforced under the systemic and governing mechanisms of White supremacy (Bell, 1995; Rector-Aranda, 2016). However, popular typifications of AAMs are among the most disturbing, with crime, laziness, and sexually aggressive behavior associated almost interchangeably with the existence of AAMs per the perception of the dominant mainstream narrative (Welch, 2007). In this country, the dominant narrative is that of the general White population (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Hossain, 2015; Howard,
More concerning is that many White perspectives go beyond assigning deficit informed stereotypes to individual AAMs, and go as far as making the assumption that these myths are inherent (Welch, 2007). This implies that in addition to the discriminatory nature of beliefs ranging from limited academic capacity to promiscuous rapists is the notion that these perceived AAM characteristics of intellectual inferiority and heinous character are genetically and scientifically significant (Smedley, 2007; Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

Disturbing portrayals of AAMs are reinforced through both mainstream media (Pierce et al., 1977) and common social settings (Haney Lopez, 1994; Smith et al., 2011). Scripted portrayals depict similar narratives to those of the news and current event media with underrepresentation in positive roles and over representation in highly exaggerated negative portrayals (Welch, 2007). Such perceptions are distributed socially as well through various circles of influence such as popular familial surroundings, church environments, neighborhood and community interactions, and common encounters among friends (Donnor, 2013; Haney Lopez, 1994). As this type of imagery is continually established and reinforced, it becomes common that AAM students are targeted by White teachers and administrators who are influenced by the mass exposure of these unwarranted biases.

These beliefs become harmful when AAM children become targets of adult teachers and administrators who view them through a lens that is influenced by these deficit informed perspectives (García & Guerra, 2004). For children who lack the cognitive maturity to effectively combat being the targets of racial injustice, such interactions have the potential to compromise healthy social engagement, academic development, and overall positive schooling experiences (Chiles, 2013; Kunjufu, 1985). Since microaggressions are a subtle manifestation of racially charged internal biases, negative mainstream images of AAMs assist in forming the basis
for microaggressions that target AAMs throughout K-12 (Henfield, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008).

**Male Specific Biases**

Slave traders and slave owners operated under the belief that through mentally and physically breaking the body and the spirit of the biggest and strongest male slaves, the women, children, and other male slaves would become intimidated and afraid to resist future oppressive actions (Anderson & Span, 2016; Hunter & Davis, 1994). Such acts of racial terrorism included physical abuse, humiliation, and murder in some cases, thereby depriving strong AAMs of dignity, honor, and self-respect, essentially reducing entire slave populations to humbly accept an existence of hopelessness and helplessness (Wilkins et al., 2013). The biases used as justification for destroying strong Black males were degrading, humiliating, and based on myths that White men were superior to African slaves (Nunn, 2008). The biases formed from these actions still have an influence on how AAMs are viewed today.

**Biases and Negative Images throughout U.S. History**

Popular images of AAMs as unintelligent, untamed, criminal, dangerous, savage, and uncivilized have been embraced throughout every era of American history and utilized as driving forces to establish and maintain racial agendas that protect White supremacy (Skinner & Cheadle, 2016). Systems of abuse and oppression emerged during slavery and were the catalyst for popular biases of the slavery era (Span, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2013). However, the mistreatment of AAMs and ensuing biases did not end with the abolishment of slavery in 1865 nor did the influence of these biases on the educational experiences of AAMs (Nunn, 2008). Since learning to read and write was largely forbidden for African American slaves, large populations of African Americans were illiterate immediately upon emancipation (Span, 2015).
This reinforced notions of African American inferiority throughout the popular imagination of Whites. This myth represented one of many layers of oppression compromising the esteem and confidence of many African Americans males (Brewster et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2016). These narratives of African American inferiority have stood the test of time and are the foundation for biases and stereotypes that AAMs still face in today’s racialized schooling environments (Welch, 2007).

Following slavery was the period of American history known as the reconstruction era, during which time education was something that African Americans either provided for themselves or experienced in separate but unequal schooling environments (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). AAMs continued to experience dehumanization by the mass promotion of White supremacist biases via print media, advertisement brochures, post cards, and posters (Dormon, 1988). Excessive Black skin, large red lips, and over exaggerated large white eyes were promoted as common physical characteristics of AAMs and were accentuated by narratives of laziness, intellectual inferiority, and predatory sexual desires (Staples & Jones, 1985). Images of this nature were utilized as propaganda to justify the continued oppression of African Americans, males especially. Along with voting rights and equal protection, schooling experiences were segregated based on the idea that African Americans were incapable of learning and far too uncivilized to coexist in a peaceful manner with Whites in the same schools (Crane, 1994). While these beliefs are not blatantly promoted in this manner today, these images of AAMs still form the foundation for beliefs that White schools use in judging AAM students (Steele, 2003; Welch, 2007).

Shortly after reconstruction and during the Jim Crow era, White supremacy continued to dominate mainstream narratives, so much so that the first motion picture ever screened in the
White House was D.W. Griffith’s 1915 film “The Birth of a Nation” (Stokes, 2007). Deficit informed perspectives were promoted utilizing White actors dressed in Black face to portray AAMs as sex-craved rapists lusting for innocent White women (Lang & Griffith, 1994). The same film portrays the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) not as a racially charged terrorist organization, but instead heroic and benevolent protectors of White virtue and valor; also emphasizing a position of power and superiority of White men over AAMs (Stokes, 2007). By some accounts, Griffith’s 104-year-old film would likely be considered outdated and irrelevant for meaningful dialogue and commentary on race as it exists in the modern era (Lang & Griffith, 1994; Stokes, 2007). However, negative images of AAMs today are still prevalent, and share similarities to those portrayed by Griffith. Therefore, again using the baton analogy, the conception of negative biases towards AAMs have changed hands, yet these racially charged biases continue to exist and they continue to depict the manner that racism shapes AAM experiences.

Images of African American inferiority and AAM biases continued to be the motivation for Whites to fight against desegregated schooling experiences through the civil rights era, with legal segregation not being overturned until 1954 (Ethridge, 1979; Warren, 1954). Even with the mandated desegregation of schools, African American students in the south attempting to attend some schools experienced violent protests, statewide political resistance, and even death threats (Bell, 2004). While the modern era of schooling does not present discomfort for AAMs in a manner this blatant and aggressive, the same deficit informed perspectives that fueled these actions are at the crux of disparaging schooling experiences for AAMs today (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Since this country’s inception, the mistreatment and negative portrayal of AAMs has been passed from one generation to the next, and AAMs who are educated by teachers
possessing these biases are subjected to psychological harm and unequal schooling experiences (Wang et al., 2011).
Chapter 3
Research Design and Methodology

In American society, the voices of AAMs have been historically suppressed, disallowing counter-narratives to disrupt views that are consistent with dominant and mainstream AAM stereotypes (Brewster et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2016). In this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Microaggressions Theory (MT) work in concert to provide theoretical perspectives that empower voices that are typically marginalized, devalued, and unheard (Brewster et al., 2013; Howard, 2008). Through the conjoined lenses of CRT and MT, the study looked specifically at the perspectives of adult AAM study participants who have experienced subtle racism during their K-12 schooling and analyzes the aftereffects through the eyes of these participants. This chapter describes the methods utilized within the study. First I describe the participants and design type, then explain data collection techniques, data analysis, trustworthiness, and researcher positionality.

Methodology: Narrative Inquiry, Autoethnography, and Counter-storytelling

I utilized narrative inquiry, autoethnography, and counter-story telling as means of exploring the experiences of adult African American males reflecting upon their K-12 schooling. While each of these research methods are explained in greater detail in subsequent sections of the study, it is initially important to understand how these methods align with the fundamental views of qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to provide a better understanding of “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). Merriam and Tisdell also state that qualitative research is “focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied, offering the greatest promise of making a difference in
people’s lives” (p. 15). The methodological approaches parallel the foundation of qualitative research as each is predicated upon collecting stories and therefore directly capturing the experiences and perspectives of those being studied (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For my study of AAMs, the stories and themes that emerged from these qualitative approaches generated a narrative from the perspective of people who have been traditionally marginalized, thus they offer counter-stories and perspectives that have also been marginalized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I was driven to share my personal experiences with this form of racial injustice, along with its ensuing psychological trauma, sadness, anger, and other adverse consequences. However, I was equally driven to hear the stories of others in order to examine their stories in relationship to those of my own. More importantly, I was driven by the desire for my research to challenge these harmful indignities and assist future AAMs in the K-12 schooling pipeline by adding to the existing body of research on microaggressions and their accompanying damage.

Autoethnography is the tool that enabled me to weave my story within the fabric of stories told by the study participants. This strategy conjoined both sets of perspectives to empower research enhancing the current body of knowledge that exposes and challenges a conception of racial injustice (microaggressions) that is toxic for AAMs in K-12 schools throughout the country. Such allowed me to weave my counter-stories around the narratives of my study participants, sharing similarities in our experiences, and from their responses, emphasize emotions and consequences that are familiar to my own life experiences (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Spry, 2001). Ultimately, this process allowed me to analyze the stories of others for microaggressions externally, while also analyzing my own experiences internally.
Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a research methodology based on collecting stories (narratives) from study participants and using the perspectives from these stories to obtain greater insight, understanding, and meaning with regard to how study participants view the world and interpret its meaning (Clandinin, 2006a). Therefore, rather than merely reporting happenings, narrative inquiry looks retrospectively at past experiences and attempts to shape and order events in a manner that provides a better understanding of personal actions as well as the actions of others (Chase, 2007), while also emphasizing the voice and positionality of the narrator in assessing the consequences of such actions and events over time (Clandinin, 2006b; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In doing so, “narrative researchers view research as verbal action – as doing or accomplishing something” (Chase, 2007, p. 65). With regard to the perspectives of AAMs and their K-12 schooling experiences, the action lies in offering a voice that challenges, defends, and informs perspectives that counter the dominant narratives pertaining to AAMs (Chase, 2007), and replacing typical narratives with discourse highlighting the uniqueness of human action (Clandinin, 2006a, 2006b; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). By yielding rich contextual descriptions that delve into the human experience, narrative inquiry is active in the sense that it can speak to AAM experiences in a manner that contradicts biases, stereotypes, and adverse narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2007) and provide deeper meaning than what is depicted by majoritarian surface narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

In addition to speaking directly to the strengths of qualitative research (Banks-Wallace, 2002) and its ability to encapsulate human experience and individual uniqueness (Creswell, 2007), it is also noteworthy to mention that meaningful experiences and rich narratives can be retrieved from a variety of mediums including oral, verbal, and written mechanisms (Clandinin,
2006b). However, what is more significant than the delivery methods are the answers to questions such as “for whom was this story constructed, how was it made, and for what purpose? What cultural discourse does it draw on or take for granted? What does it accomplish?” (Riessman & Speedy, 2007, p. 429). Answering questions of this nature provides insight into how individuals interpret the world, and make sense of personal experience in relation to cultural and historic discourse (Chase, 2007). These types of questions also help guide the study in a manner that provides insight that is particular and specific rather than general (Clandinin, 2006a, 2006b; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Riessman & Speedy, 2007), providing greater depth, value, and complexity in the understanding of a particular phenomenon (Clandinin, 2006a).

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) “the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 2). Through analyzing the “storied lives” of adult AAMs, I intend to capture raw emotions as they pertain to experiences with racial microaggressions, depicting pain, anger, disappointment, sadness, and other emotions that provide rich descriptions of racial encounters that AAMs experience in K-12 schooling.

**Counter-storytelling**

Among the primary motives of CRT include transforming laws in an effort to challenge White supremacy and pursuing emancipation from racial powers and subordination (Martinez, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling is a type of narrative inquiry that is a critical component of CRT (Bell, 1995; Harris, 1995); one that empowers marginalized voices to challenge White majoritarian narratives that “distort and silence the experiences of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29). This is based on the notion that “everyone loves a story and that well told stories describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers to
bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 49). Counter-narratives provide a powerful tool for challenging the status-quo of dominant White narratives that prioritize merit, objectivity, and colorblindness, while ignoring the existence of oppression and marginalization (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1995; Solorzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-narratives also provide an opportunity for marginalized voices such as those of AAMs, to challenge dominant narratives that declare them to be lazy, indolent, over sexual, criminal, and academically inferior (Skinner & Cheadle, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Steele, 2003). In other words, besides allowing otherwise suppressed narratives to be heard, the use of counter-stories also “allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). This method of data inquiry provides a worldview from the perspective of those who see the world through a lens of marginalization and subordination rather than privilege and dominance (Harris, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Counter-stories thus expose dominant myths that promote racial stereotypes and challenge privileged discourse as means of providing an understanding of “what life is like for others, and inviting the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 49). Therefore, narrative inquiry in its counter-storytelling form allowed me to collect perspectives of AAM schooling experiences through the eyes of AAMs as opposed to the traditional and dominant lens of White America (Hossain, 2015; Sue et al., 2008). Through highlighting these counter-stories, unheard and undervalued perspectives exposed the existence of racial microaggressions and their consequences, while also contradicting dominant perspectives that are rooted in racism, bias, and the protection of White privilege.
Autoethnography

As mentioned earlier, in addition to collecting narrative counter-stories from study participants, my own counter-stories are woven into these narratives so that my experiences serve as an extension of the contextual data provided by these stories. This describes the method of research known as autoethnography. It is an approach to scholarship and writing that includes writing (graphy) personal experience (auto) as means of interpreting cultural (ethnos) experience (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography enabled me to share, analyze, and include my own past experiences as an AAM navigating through K-12 schooling (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Clandinin (2006b) posits that narrative research is relational and suggests that at least some facet be autobiographical. She expressed that a researcher should share a relationship with the research interest and the role that it plays in their own life before attempting to hear the stories of others. She even advises to stay away from qualitative research that you cannot see yourself a part of (Clandinin, 2006b; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

The process of connecting personal experiences to culture is disruptive to research approaches that exploit cultural members (Ellis et al., 2011). AAMs are arguably one of society’s most targeted and most exploited cultural populations (Greenwald et al., 2003; Sue, 2010a, 2010b), so autoethnography is an appropriate method for collecting data with regard to understanding the perspectives of AAMs who have suffered marginalized schooling experiences, and challenging the systems that have created this disparity. The process of weaving my own counter-stories around those of my study participants enabled sharing similarities in our experiences, and from their responses, emphasized emotions and consequences familiar to my own life (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Spry, 2001). Ultimately, this process allowed me to analyze the stories of others for microaggressions externally, while also analyzing my own
experiences internally. In doing so, I was careful not to overshadow the stories of participants with those of my own, but instead use autoethnography as an additional tool to further emphasize the stories of participants by sharing similarities in their experiences with my experiences.

Whereas traditional and canonical methods of research may be limited in offering insight into the experiences and feelings of a study phenomenon (Spry, 2001), narrative inquiry, autoethnography, and counter-storytelling work together to provide insight into the experiences, feelings, and culturally specific outcomes of both the researcher and study participants (Clandinin, 2006a; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Utilizing autoethnography allowed me to share my counter-story in conjunction with the counter-stories of other AAMs to provide a “self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (Spry, 2001, p. 710). Therefore, autoethnography used in this manner “transforms the authorial “I” to an existential “we” (Spry, 2001, p. 711), allowing the researcher to study the phenomena “from the perspective of an interacting individual” (Denzin, 1997, p. xv).

The methods of narrative inquiry, counter-storytelling, and autoethnography individually and collectively reflect the qualitative notion of social constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This is the idea that reality is socially constructed and can therefore be used to create stories with themes to help better understand how reality is perceived (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since “people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are as they interpret their past in terms of personal stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375),” it is my belief that my story and those of AAM participants have provided perspectives of systemic school racism that are typically unheard, while providing insight that sheds light on microaggressions and their potential to cause psychological and emotional damage.
Data Collection and Analysis

This section outlines mechanisms integral to the data collection process including a description of how participants were selected, how narrative inquiry was utilized as a strategy to capture lived experiences, and an explanation of how contextual data was coded and categorized so that its meaning and relevant themes could be used to better understand participant perspectives in relationship to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participant Selection

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize that the idea of purposeful sampling is driven by the investigator’s desire to “discover, understand, and gain insight, therefore selecting a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 96). Based on this assertion, I directly interviewed AAMs under the assumption that the population being studied (AAMs) was the most qualified group for providing qualitative data pertaining to themselves. Unlike random sampling, this allowed me to identify characteristics that were crucial to the study, then find participants who specifically met that criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the specificity of my research questions goes beyond ethnic population, and is also particular to gender, age, and to a certain extent, specific perspectives.

While purposeful sampling was used as the only means of acquiring study participants, I utilizing two types of purposeful sampling techniques to broaden my exposure to potential study participants; homogenous sampling and snowball sampling:

Homogenous Sampling

Since homogenous sampling is the purposeful sampling type that aims to collect the perspectives of a population with similar characteristics and traits (Suri, 2011), this technique
enabled me to specifically seek the perspectives of AAMs between the ages of 28 to 40, who felt they were victimized by subtle forms of discrimination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Suri, 2011). I selected this age range based on my intent to speak with participants who were roughly 10 to 20 years removed from formative schooling. This criteria choice was based on the belief that such would provide recent enough schooling experiences that participants would recall them with some degree of accuracy, while also having the life experience and cognitive maturity to speak to these reflections from an adult and mature perspective.

**Snowball Sampling**

Snowball sampling is perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling in the sense that it enables tapping into organic social networks to acquire a specific participant profile (Noy, 2008). Therefore, this technique enabled me to solicit homogenous referral types from participants acquired through other means of solicitation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consistent with my desire to explore racialized schooling experiences through the eyes of AAMs who have lived these experiences, this sampling technique combined with homogenous sampling was used to “provide access to key informants who can help identify information-rich cases” (Suri, 2011, p. 3). Through acquiring information-rich cases, homogenous purposeful sampling and snowball sampling induced an in depth understanding of the study phenomenon (AAMs) rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002).

**Challenges and Final Selections**

From the pool of AAMs acquired through these methods, there were people who failed to show up for interviews, and others who failed to meet the study criteria. Eventually, five AAMs who met the criteria were invited to participate in the study. For consideration, potential participants must have completed grades K-12 in the American public schooling system, and
experienced encounters with some form of dormant or subtle racism during their K-12 tenure. Since I selected participants from a pool of African American men only, my study does not demonstrate gender diversity. Therefore, from the pool of potential applicants that I spoke with, I selected a final participant group who demonstrated diversity in ages, geographic location, qualities of life/living standards, and levels of education. Therefore, these methods of sampling were used as tools to select participants who despite having different socioeconomic and socioemotional backgrounds, shared intimate experiences with the subject matter, and thereby offered the greatest insight and depth (Suri, 2011). The study itself asked adult AAMs to reflect upon schooling experiences that took place over a decade ago, so probing was directed towards generating highly reflective and richly descriptive narratives (Patton, 2002).

**Recruitment Partners and Participant Screening**

My initial recruitment efforts involved reaching out to various local organizations and people of influence who I have relationships with throughout the Wichita community. Each of these organizations are pipelines to African American men in the community. This included predominately African American churches; The Wichita Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce; The Wichita Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; and Real Men Real Heroes. My reason for selecting African American churches was based on the assumption that these organizations would have AAM members that I could speak with. The Heartland Black Chamber was selected due to its heavy involvement with community reform and economic disparity reform, thus making them a conduit to AAMs throughout the local and regional area. The final two organizations serve mentoring needs of young men as part of their missions, so I hoped that they would serve as a resource for connecting with past mentees who are now adults or possibly the fathers of current mentees.
Through these channels, I attempted to schedule meetings to speak with membership about possible participation in the study and to distribute the recruitment flyer. Due to scheduling conflicts, I was never able to meet with the Links, and Real Men Real Heroes opted out after initially agreeing to assist me. I successfully held meetings with the Wichita Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce and with St. Mark United Methodist Church. The Black Chamber provided four prospects, with one being used for the study. Of the others, one did not qualify for the study and two decided not to participate. From the presentation at St. Mark United Methodist Church, three men expressed interest, but all three were outside the age parameter. One of the men in attendance who did not meet the age criteria referred me to an individual who did. This individual participated, then through snowball sampling, referred another individual who also participated. Finally, two participants were obtained through personal circles of influence. I was referred one participant by a mutual friend who was familiar with the nature of my study, and introduced to the other individual at a social mixer where the premise of the study came up in our conversation.

I scheduled and conducted screening interviews (Appendix A) to ensure that participants shared perspectives that were reflective of racial microaggressions victimization, as well as ask each individual for referrals of other AAMs who may have fit the participant criterion. From these interviews, I selected the five participants described above based on each (a) feeling that they experienced encounters in K-12 that were biased and unfair; (b) feeling that race played a role in these disparaging K-12 experiences; and (c) expressing that many of their unpleasant schooling experiences were subtle and innocuous and therefore difficult to identify and articulate. The small sample size accommodated my desire to acquire descriptive, detailed, and
passionate stories from participants to capture vivid depictions of racialized encounters as well as ensuing emotional responses and perceived aftereffects.

Once the final five participants were identified, an Informed Consent form and an explanation of the study and its goals (Appendix B) was administered orally and written to confirm their acceptance of participation in the study in adherence to the requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Prior to any participant contact, the study was first approved by the University IRB. It was my initial desire for all participants to live within the local region so that interviews could take place in the homes of the participants. I wanted them to be engaged in a real conversation and I wanted them to feel comfortable sharing and reliving experiences that could potentially associate with painful memories. However, based on various logistical factors, no interviews were conducted in participant homes. One was conducted in my home, two were conducted via video conferencing with individuals residing out of state, and two were conducted in private study rooms at a local library. Interviews were scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes and audio recorded, and the identities of all participants were protected by assigning pseudonyms.

Other Considerations

As a 50-year-old AAM, I feel confident that my own recollections of experiences with racism in K-12 are vivid. However, I do realize that being out of school for over 30 years warrants the risk of inconsistencies with how information is recalled. Reality monitoring is the name of the concept that reinforces the idea that the memory of certain experiences become diluted, declaring that over time, the memory of certain events become confused, discriminated, and distorted (Johnson et al., 1988). Contrary to the belief that time minimizes the quality of narratives, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that as humans “we restory earlier
experiences as we reflect on later experiences, so the stories and their meanings shift and change over time” (p. 9). Savin-Baden and Niekerk (2007) share a similar thought stating, “it is important to acknowledge and recognize that we use multiple voices and hold multiple perspectives and that we, and our stances, change and move over time” (p. 8). This suggests that over the course of time as we maneuver between the living of events and the telling of them, we change, our encounters change, and the world around us changes (Clandinin, 2006b). Therefore, rather than instantly assuming a story that changes over time to be reflective of a fading memory, it should also be taken into consideration that as one’s current state of reality evolves, so will their interpretation of the events and experiences they have lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Based on these two conflicting ideas that hinge between the belief that the quality of a narrative diminishes over time and the belief that the interpretation of an experience changes with new encounters that derive over time, I would assume there is some validity in both perspectives based on the notion that every person experiences and understands reality differently (Clandinin, 2006b). Therefore, analyzing my personal perspectives with respect to those of younger study participants provided the opportunity to identify how tenure of perspectives played a role in recognizing, identifying, and interpreting microaggressions. To further satisfy these two conflicting notions, I selected participants from the previously stated age range of 28 to 40. Again, this age range encompasses AAM who are roughly 10 to 20 years removed from high school. The strategy with this age group was to use study participants who are not so far removed from school that memories are diluted, or that reflections of racism depict an era of discrimination that cosmetically differs from the current schooling environment where microaggressions are a dominant conception. Meanwhile, the intent of this age range was to also seek the experiences of individuals far enough removed from school to have had at least a decade
of life experiences that may help them better reflect and understand encounters that took place prior to adulthood.

**Narrative Interviews**

I utilized narrative interviews as the strategy for collecting data from study participants. This method of data collection aligned with the purpose of the study and its desire to capture past experiences of participants. Since humans live storied lives, narrative inquiry provided a platform that enabled AAM participants to share past human experiences in the form of stories that provided the reader with a better understanding of these experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In most forms of qualitative research, some or all of the data is acquired through interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews were especially useful in this narrative research in the sense that open-ended interviewing encouraged active collaboration between the participant and the researcher (Creswell, 2007). This sense of collaboration gave participants a sense of ownership in the research, which in turn solicited participants to dig deeper and share more freely (Clandinin, 2006b), yielding contextual data that contained richness, depth, and meaning (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

As stated previously, the intent was to conduct personal face-to-face interviews in a relaxed and conversational manner, preferably face-to-face (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Based on various logistical barriers, I utilized videoconferencing through SKYPE as a contingency plan. This strategy stemmed from my desire to create an interviewing environment that encouraged stories that were open, honest, and authentic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). From these conversations, I was able to extract a collective body of shared personal experiences that spoke to subtle, yet harmful racism experienced during K-12 schooling. All interviews were digitally
recorded to ensure an accurate assessment and analysis of the perspectives and experiences of study participants (Lapan et al., 2012).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated “Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 110). Less structure allowed AAM participants to freely share their reflections and elaborate in detail their own unique perspectives of their K-12 experiences. Therefore, I utilized a combination of informal and semi-formal questions that spoke directly to the overarching research questions. Since less formal interviewing and open-ended questions remove many of the restrictions that would prohibit a participant from expressing themselves freely, this strategy created an environment that resembled a conversation rather than a traditional interview (Appendix C).

Analysis and Interpretation

Collecting data is essential to any qualitative study, but data is useless if the researcher cannot make sense of it (Lapan et al., 2012). Data analysis is the intricate procedure of moving back and forth through contextual data in an attempt to give the data meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This begins by identifying categories, themes, or findings in the data that speak to the research questions (Creswell, 2007). The preferred way of analyzing data is as it is collected in the initial phase of data analysis and continued throughout every phase of the process (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) shared, “without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming” (p. 197). In order to ensure that the data continuously made sense, my data analysis process began during interviews rather than waiting to listen to the recordings. Additionally, I took written notes of each interview that were used as a roadmap to help me remember important ideas and concepts when listening to recorded interviews. Lastly, I listened to the recorded interviews and transcribed them verbatim,
then combed through these verbatim transcriptions multiple times extracting themes that answer
the research questions and speak to the purpose of the study.

Since my primary method of data collection was narrative inquiry, I used narrative
analysis as the process for making sense of the narratives collected during interviews. Analyzing
contextual data to arrive at themes that hold across stories enabled me to analyze how
participants interpreted their K-12 experiences (Clandinin, 2006b). This was particularly useful
since people make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them (Bell, 2002).
Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that narrative analysis empowers the researcher from the
standpoint of “using the stories that people tell, analyzing them in various ways, to understand
the meaning of the experiences as revealed in the story” (p. 24).

I implemented the coding process by first transcribing all recorded data verbatim while
viewing it through the conjoined lenses of my theoretical frameworks (Microaggressions Theory
and Critical Race Theory). Within the context of the stories told, I extracted themes that
pertained to racial microaggressions as well as identified coding that spoke to the consequences
(positive or negative) that stemmed from encounters depicting microaggressions.

**Participant Overview**

As previously implied, it was my hope to acquire a range of eclectic individuals ranging
in age, location, and social involvements. Based on the collective experiences of the five
selected participants, I would definitely say that this task was accomplished. In addition to
demonstrating excellence in music, entrepreneurship, academia, science, and thespian arts, these
men are strong family members, community supporters, and positive role models. A large facet
of this study was driven by the notion that AAM students are attacked by deficit-informed biases
that have been unjustly and unfairly assigned to AAM boys that suggest them to be inferior. The
reflections, lived experiences, and career endeavors of these well-traveled, well-versed, educated, and sophisticated individuals is a direct counterpunch to the White supremacist narrative that depict savagery and substandard intellectual decorum as a commonality of the AAM population.

Table 1.

African American Male Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>K-12 YEARS/WHERE ATTENDED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kendall Kirby</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Jazz Bassist</td>
<td>Wichita, KS</td>
<td>1986-1999 – Kansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian Ernest</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Food Scientist</td>
<td>Bibb County, AL</td>
<td>1994-2007 – Alabama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Quality

General opinions are of no significance in scientific inquiry, so for a study to hold merit its findings must be supported by criteria that measures the value of the research. The quality of qualitative research is measured by its trustworthiness, which is determined by a combination of factors including dependability of the data, and whether it is valid, credible, and reliable (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Ultimately, trustworthiness strives to answer the question, “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). One of the harshest criticisms and biggest challenges to the validity of CRT based research is the notion that story-telling is an analytically
unsound research method (Kumasi, 2011). Critical Race Theorists counter this claim by maintaining that in social science, “truth” has been historically and socially constructed in a manner beneficial to the dominant (White) population (Bell, 1995; Kumasi, 2011). Therefore, rather than the creation of false narratives as some criticism alludes, storytelling empowers AAM participants to construct counter-narratives that challenge the dominant Eurocentric ideologies that plagued their K-12 schooling experiences (Harris, 1995; Kumasi, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggest that researchers answer questions on how the truth of the findings are determined, the applicability of the findings to other contexts, whether the findings would be repeated given similar context and subjects, and the degree to which the findings were determined by the study parameters and not the biases of the researcher. Qualitative researchers utilize processes such as thick description and triangulation in order to answer these and other questions on the usefulness of research studies and to depict the validity, credibility, and reliability of such studies (Tracy, 2010).

**Credibility: Thick Descriptive Data and Triangulation**

To ensure credibility, thick descriptive data was obtained, as using a counter storytelling narrative technique guided by open ended questions in a semi-structured manner encouraged a healthy flow of communication. The aim was for this to be almost conversational. Additionally, I am an AAM myself, thus AAM participants seemed less apprehensive about sharing experiences, particularly racialized experiences with me being a member of their own group. Keown (1983) stated, “Homogenous groups are generally more comfortable and open with each other.” (p.295). Additionally, AAMs in the study have endured similar struggles often with no opportunity to share these concerns as their stories have been suppressed by white supremacy.
and its ensuing dominant narrative (Bell, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The setting and data collection methods of this study offered a typically silenced voice the opportunity to offer a perspective, and with me representing the same population and the same struggle, a healthy exchange of conversation that was organic and transparent took place.

Triangulation assumes that if multiple sources, participants, frameworks, and methods of data collection were used, researchers would converge on the same or similar conclusions, thus making the research more credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2015). To broaden trustworthiness, I analyzed the racialized schooling experiences of AAMs through two different theoretical lenses (Critical Race Theory and Microaggressions Theory) as well as used multiple data sources (Flick, 2004). In addition to dual theoretical perspectives and complexity within the data, my interviews with AAM participants were valuable from the sense that there was a great deal of triangulation in terms of ranges of diversity in ages and life experiences (Flick, 2004; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Multivocality was for the most part accomplished in the collection of multiple perspectives, and therefore occurred organically as a byproduct of triangulation. The significance of multivocality was that of obtaining a variety of perspectives to demonstrate that the research was comprised of the participants’ viewpoints and not guided by the views of my own (Tracy, 2010).

Credibility: Peer Debriefing and Member Checking

The combination of me serving as researcher, analyst, and co-participant for the present study heightened the potential for researcher bias, therefore I used Peer Debriefing and Member Checking as additional means of ensuring credibility (Birt et al., 2016). Peer debriefing involved asking a colleague to compare the raw data to the findings to ensure that the findings were plausible and not overly influenced by my biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The peer debriefer
was very thorough and despite offering small suggestions, provided overall feedback that my biases do not influence the study.

The member checking strategy involved having each study participant review the transcription of their interviews to insure accuracy of their stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also had participants review the narrative that I constructed from their transcripts, which they also approved as accurate depictions of their stories. In addition to being “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do,” member checking is also an “important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (Maxwell, 2012, pp. 126-127). In addition to checking for accuracy, member checking was powerful in the sense that gave participants additional ownership in the study.

Since I utilized autoethnography as one of my narrative inquiry techniques, the process of utilizing my own experiences as means of enhancing the stories of study participants was powerful. However, this strategy also carried the potential risk of highlighting my biases and beliefs, while minimizing the experiences of other participants. Having study participants review their perspectives and check them for accuracy aided in ensuring that my voice did not overshadow or dominate the voices of the other co-participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For me personally, these combined strategies were effective and critical components for establishing credibility. I am passionate about the subject matter and possess strong internal biases about systemic racism in public schools, so these tactics helped to maintain the integrity of the study by allowing it to unfold organically rather than being influenced by my personal beliefs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Dependability

The extent to which there is consistency in the findings is defined by the reliability or dependability of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By providing a thorough explanation of the two frames that guided the study as well as providing thorough description of how the study was conducted, dependability of the study was strengthened. In the same manner that I collected rich and descriptive data to properly express the perspectives of my participants, I utilized equally descriptive language in expressing my findings based on these viewpoints. This ensured that the methodology was clear and understandable, and that the responses were thorough in supporting the methodological framework. The peer debriefer strategy, member checking, triangulation, and multivocality previously mentioned also assisted in ensuring that a high degree of dependability accompanied this study and its findings.

Research Ethics

Research ethics are significant, as such are necessary to protect human subjects from encountering inappropriate research behavior on the part of the researcher (Lapan et al., 2012). No interactions with human subjects took place until the study was approved by the Wichita State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Along with the completed study proposal that was submitted to the Wichita State University (IRB) was a copy of the consent form that participants were required to sign stating their intent to participate in the study, and a copy of the protocol questions that were utilized for the interviews. The research proposal also described the purpose of the study, the duration of the interviews, the description of the procedures, potential risks and benefits, and the role that participants would play in the study.
Though I was on a first name basis with all participants, complete confidentiality was administered, and participants’ identities where safeguarded. Rather than using their birth names, I reported my findings using fictitious names. All written notes from interviews are stored in a locked file cabinet in my home, and digital information including voice recordings of interviews are stored on my personal laptop, which is password protected and will be kept in a locked file cabinet when unattended. Five years after the completion of the study, all digital files and written notes will be destroyed.

**Researcher Positionality**

Solorzano (2018) shares a story that explains my positionality as well as the title of the present study. He states that after presenting on racial microaggressions for an audience of students and educators, an African American female student responded with tears in her eyes, “You’ve given me a name for my pain” (p. 94). Although I can recall experiencing racial microaggressions as early as Kindergarten, it was not until I became a doctoral student that I was introduced to this name to associate with my pain, so I understand the emotions of the unnamed African American female student in the story. Being unable to express my hurt or how I was being targeted further enhanced the pain that already accompanied these racial attacks. The pain I was experiencing was nebulous and nameless, yet it was very real and very hurtful, and I now feel empowered not only with the vocabulary to express my own experiences, but to also help others who have experienced similar experiences.

Consistent with Clandinin (2006b) that the researcher should live the research; a study requiring adult AAMs to reflect upon racialized experiences is applicable for my research from the standpoint that even as a middle-aged man, I find myself angered when reflecting within the sociohistorical contexts of schooling experiences that took place 40+ years ago.
Upon being introduced to the concept of racial microaggressions, I finally found a sense of relief in knowing that the racial slights and indignities I had experienced were not just something I had imagined. Prior to that, not only did I lack the vocabulary to share my experiences but was also blindsided by dominant narratives that made me question whether these experiences were authentic. The empowerment of new vocabulary coupled with reflective memories of these experiences are what fueled my desire to pursue the consequences of racial microaggressions as the research interest for my dissertation. Narratives are a core component of qualitative research from the perspective that they provide a source for understanding the human experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In fact, “narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures” (Bell, 2002, p. 207).

Critics of CRT suggest that theories of this nature are less scholarly and less culturally valuable than those methods that social science considers to be traditional (Ladson-Billings, 2000). This belief is based on the tendency to challenge research perspectives that conflict with methods consistent with dominant White perspectives based in dominant Euro-American epistemology (Carter, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000). One claim is that methodology of this nature impairs the researcher’s impartiality (Carter, 2003). Other arguments minimize literature that represents people of color, terming such as folklore rather than academic literature (Ladson-Billings, 2000). However, it is only natural for any researcher’s perspectives and background to foster some biases (Blair, 2004). Therefore, this criticism fails to acknowledge that social science research is rarely if ever truly objective (Blair, 2004). My research is like other race-based studies that critics suggest are based on folklore rather than scholarly literature from the standpoint that my biases, perspectives, and ideas on racial microaggressions are deeply
influenced by my personal encounters with this form of discrimination. However, I argue that rather than this positionality diluting the integrity of the study, it instead adds value from the perspective that I have experienced decades of discrimination in this manner. Therefore, my understanding of the research provides real-world orientation rather than mere academic speculation and analysis.

Due the nature of my personal relationship with racial microaggressions, it is likely that my study possesses less neutrality than typical research studies. Therefore, I remained mindful of my own biases and assumptions, and was pro-active and deliberate in making sure that my position did not influence research outcomes. This does not mean that I refrained from sharing my experiences, especially since they add value to the overall study. Being open, honest, and passionate about my own experiences with racial microaggressions during my own K-12 schooling provided an interesting cross-reference between my experiences and those of participants younger than me. With that in mind though, I was careful not to persuade the way that questions were answered by participants. It was also important to make sure that my story did not become the dominant story or overshadow those of participants. For the study to be truly meaningful, each participant provided responses that were authentic and free from external influence.

Prior to collecting interview data, I made some assumptions - Some were accurate and some inaccurate. I assumed that participants do not think about K-12 racism often, which was correct. However, I assumed they were bitter like me, and for the most part they were not. The participants chosen for this study ranged anywhere from 10 to 22 years removed from K-12, and most of them shared sentiments of rarely reflecting upon such experiences. Statements such as “Wow, I haven’t thought about grade school since I left it” were common in each of the five
interviews. However, all participants expressed gratitude for being selected for the study sharing sentiments like, “I’m glad you’re doing this” and “Wow, this study has forced me to revisit unpleasant encounters from a long time ago.” My primary assumption was based on my personal reflections of K-12 schooling being riddled with incidents of disparity, cultural incompetence, and outright attacks. I assumed that other participants would share similar experiences, and my assumption was correct.
CHAPTER 4

Other Issues and Different Answers – Seldom Heard Narratives

From 1960 to 1981, ABC aired a show called “Issues and Answers.” My parents' close friend, Dr. George Rogers was a professor and head of the Ethnic Studies department at Wichita State University during a portion of that time. Around 1979, frustrated with television programming that highlighted limited and primarily White cultural perspectives, Dr. Rogers purchased the local airtime that immediately followed “Issues and Answers,” and developed a program called “Other Issues and Different Answers” as means of highlighting seldom told multiethnic stories. Since the perspectives of AAMs are often overshadowed by dominate White narratives, I figured it appropriate to name the present chapter in honor of the foresight of Dr. Rogers. The present chapter moves AAM counter-narratives from the margins to the forefront just as Dr. Rogers did with various diverse populations four decades ago.

The different issues and other answers presented in this chapter provide some of the details of my own K-12 schooling experiences, while analyzing the personal stories of five adult AAMs who also attended and graduated from American public schools. Initially, my quest to attract study participants was difficult. After a few changed minds and being stood up several times, I was fortunate to eventually connect with a diverse and eclectic group of five 28-40-year-old African American males representing a wide range of personal interests, professions, geographic regions, and social profiles. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to ensure confidentiality. Member checking was also used to ensure that each participant approved the accuracy of their story. Table 1 below provides a brief overview on each participant, with assigned pseudonym, age, location, occupation, and the years they attended K-12:
A jazz musician (Kendall Kirby); a personal trainer (Credence); a higher education professional (Micah Goins); a food scientist (Julian Ernest); and a classical actor (Porter McNeil) represent a range of professions that are a far cry from biases that suggest African American men to be lazy, ignorant, and unlikely to achieve success in arenas outside of professional sports or rap music (Sailes, 2017). My own experiences of being unjustly placed in remedial reading in fourth grade, being told that I was not smart enough to take Algebra in the ninth grade, or being denied a role in “Annie,” just days after being told my audition was the best in the fifth grade class, suggests that the owners of these same biases would have never predicted many of my scholastic or life accolades either. In fact, such biases are the basis for the racial microaggressions that I encountered in K-12, so I probed to find out whether my participants encountered microaggressions in a similar manner.

The strategy of collecting lived experiences of study participants, while sharing experiences of my own was used to evoke emotional and cultural commonalities between the
racialized schooling experiences of each study participant and those that I personally experienced (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Despite being an active participant in the study, I was careful to utilize my story as means of enhancing those of the other study participants, and not allowing my story to become the dominant narrative. Thus, except for sharing the personal background that led me to this research, my experiences are woven throughout participant narratives rather than an in-depth standalone story such as those shared by other participants. In addition to expressing how each story connects with my personal experiences, assumptions, and biases, each narrative also highlights significant themes that emerged from the interviews. This chapter will begin with a brief introduction into my schooling and the value of parent advocates, followed by an in-depth look at the schooling experiences of each of my five study participants.

**Born to do this Research**

The writing of this dissertation began over fifty years ago with a newborn’s first breath of life. It was on March 19, 1969, that Jim and Claudette Harrison brought an 8-pound, 7-ounce son to the Northeast Wichita location that he would call home for the next 18 years. Despite the assassinations of civil rights leaders Medgar Evers in 1963, Malcom X in 1965, and Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, the young couple was optimistic for the latter part of the bittersweet decade that assigned death to these great civil rights leaders, while also giving birth to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Jim and Claudette had experienced racial injustice as both participants and spectators, including sharing personal friendships with peers who took part in the famous 1958 Dockum Drug Counter Sit-In that took place in Wichita, and would spark similar civil rights demonstrations nationwide (Walters, 1996). It was their hope that this decade would truly live up to the optimistic promise of soul singer Sam Cooke that “A
Change is going to Come,” while also birthing opportunities for their young offspring that they could have never envisioned for themselves.

Both Oklahoma natives, I imagine they reflected upon their individual segregated schooling prior to moving to Wichita. Claudette was midway through elementary school upon arrival to Wichita as a fourth-grade student, and Jim relocated to Wichita as a high school sophomore. Jim had been a better than average baseball player at a historic all black high school in Oklahoma City, but the culture shock of attending an integrated school for the first time was emotionally overwhelming and even frightening to a certain extent, so he opted to refrain from participating in anything extracurricular. He graduated from Wichita North in 1958. Claudette remembers blatant racism during her time at a newly integrated Wichita High School East. As she recalls, despite being the top student in her secretarial training class, she nearly failed the course based on success being contingent upon having a job for the semester. Nearly 60 years later, Claudette still expresses with disgust the memory of at 17-years-old, being continually told “we don’t hire coloreds.” That was in 1961. Now the young couple would be tasked with navigating a child of their own through an environment of integrated schooling that had proven to be anything but race friendly.

In 1971, the local school district in Wichita, Kansas, and the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights would enact forced busing of Black and White students to enhance other integration efforts (Tobias, 2012). Three years after forced busing, in February of 1974, the Harrisons brought home an additional new born son, while the eldest of the two boys would begin Kindergarten at Apple Elementary in August of that same year (1974). Now five years old, the elder Harrison child was destined to be a great student. He could already count to 100, read on a first-grade level, and write his name both in print and cursive. In addition to early
academic gifts, he was charismatic, witty, and demonstrated an aptitude for music and fine arts. The Harrisons had groomed the young child with love and support, and felt optimistic that he would participate in an era of schooling void of the discomforts that accompanied open racial epithets, Jim Crow laws, and legal segregation as they had experienced throughout their schooling. However, to both their surprise and dismay, the eldest of the two Harrison children would experience a new form of racism that was for the most part nameless, faceless, and nebulous. It was a type of invisible racism that Pierce et al. (1977) would eventually coin racial microaggressions; and a racial conception that would be preserved and maintained by mechanisms and structures that Bonilla-Silva (2017) would later describe as “racism without racists” in his book by the same name. Such would form the basis for attacks on the young Harrison child that were far less common and virtually undetectable in comparison to previous forms of racial disparity – leaving both the child and the parents confused, frustrated, and slightly helpless. Nonetheless, Jim and Claudette refused to give up; eventually finding answers to their questions, demanding change, and rather than accepting defeat, fought, and advocated against a system of schooling oppression that attempted to destroy their son.

Today, I stand proudly as both the student subject of this story, the ongoing legacy of Jim and Claudette Harrison, and the role that they played as advocates in navigating me through the toxic and tumultuous spaces of racialized schooling. At this time in my life, my schooling frustrations are years behind me, yet the consequences have lingered. After decades of holding grudges and animosity towards teachers, principals, and schools, it has been this research that has finally served as my therapy to move beyond painful experiences, and find solace in assisting others (parents and students) who may have faced or are currently facing similar obstacles. Therefore, as I reflect upon five decades of lived experiences and thirteen years of formative
education, I realize that my participation in critical race work is now an obligation and not an option. For those who ascribe to strong spiritual and philosophical convictions, one might say that this is my higher calling, my dharma, or perhaps something written in the stars. Regardless how one may choose to view it, one thing is inarguable - it is without question that I was born to do this research!

From the shared experiences and reflections of five AAM study participants, I realized that my encounters with microaggressions are not unique. Names of specific schools, teachers, and other details may vary between participants, but to wavering degrees, each participant experienced unique struggles and consequences, and each shared unique ways in which they responded to these obstacles. As these men shared their experiences and encounters, a gambit of emotions were revealed, expressed in forms ranging from uncomfortable laughter, sadness, and profanity when expressing unpleasant experiences, to smiles and demonstrations of sincere gratitude when reminiscing about positive encounters. Throughout the remainder of this chapter are detailed accounts of schooling encounters as shared from the perspectives of each of these men.

**Kendall Kirby**

Kendall is a 38-year-old professional jazz bassist, born and raised in Wichita, Kansas, who completed all his public schooling in the Wichita Public School system, and graduated in 1999. His current occupation as a band member for a world renowned and Grammy nominated recording artist requires him to travel the world, but he still considers Wichita home. I am a musician myself and was referred to Mr. Kirby by a mutual musician friend who is familiar with the nature of my study. After a brief phone screening with Kendall, I thought he would be a good fit, and we arranged to meet in December 2019 when he would be returning home from
touring. What was initially scheduled to be an hour interview, turned into a two-hour conversation with the two of us exchanging a variety of uncomfortable K-12 memories. Kendall shares his reflections in the sections below.

**An Introduction to Kendall**

*I feel fortunate to earn a living doing what I love the most (playing music), and traveling the world. Most of my teachers would have never imagined me being successful at this or anything else for that matter. Looking back at it, some teachers may had succeeded in destroying my future, but my parents, my church, and exposure to positive advocates seemed to help me out, man – especially my mom, man, she didn’t play. It’s messed up though man that black children don’t have protection against racism. Man, that’s messed up! I remember not being a good student, but it wasn’t because I didn’t understand the work man. Man, I just felt like I was having to fight all the time, so I more or less checked out most of the time, like the hell with this.*

Kendall continued to share his counter-story, revealing experiences that were quite like those of my own, so as he was revisiting painful memories, I was forced to do the same.

**White Is Right Biases**

*I remember in the third grade man, and a white girl said I touched her butt, man. I didn't touch her butt, man, I didn’t even know about stuff like that back then. But she just went to the teacher and said “Oh, Kendall touched my butt!” I think it was third grade man. Second or third grade? Me and the other guys (mostly white) - we was looking like, oh, we see your underwear, and we was laughing about it, you know, like kids do, but not on anything sexual. And she went to the teacher and accused me of touching her butt. They came to me, boy, and they made an example out of me, man! I don't remember how long*
it was because I was so young, but I feel like I was in time out or detention for months. Her parents even came to school and it was this big thing, man. Her dad was wearing a big ole cowboy hat. They were all upset. They never said anything to me, but it was like we were standing in line and the parents were there and they was like, pointing at me and stuff, like “that's him right there!” And I was like, damn... what are they going to do, kill me or something? You know, as a kid, I didn't know what the hell was going on! I’m like, all this and y'all don’t even believe me. I didn't touch her, man. Come on man, I was in the third grade. How old is that, like seven years old? Seven or eight? Yeah. Damn! It’s sad, but I was pretty much a little kid when I realized that a white girl’s word against mine made me automatically guilty, and that I could get in trouble based on a lie. After that I was afraid of white girls, man, for a long time. For a long time, I was like, “them motherfuckers is trouble... you get in trouble for them motherfuckers.” Even if you don’t do nothing, man, you will get the book thrown at you, man. Damn, they can just make something up and all of a sudden, you can be all fucked up. Damn! Wow! That was third grade, man!!! They had more or less labeled me a sexual predator based on this white girl’s word, and I was just a kid. I guess the White world we live in sees guilt in black men and innocence in white women even at a young age when nobody is even old enough to know much about all that yet, man!

Much like Kendall, I too remember being accused of and held accountable for a third grade incident that I was innocent of, with the burden of proof boiling down to my word against that of a white female classmate. Since my situation was not a sexual accusation, it may have been less intense than that experienced by Kendall. However, being blamed for something simply for being black is painful nonetheless. We both seemed victim to biases that were so
common, they had become a part of not just our individual teachers’ opinions, but the very framework of our early childhood and secondary schooling.

**Biases of Comfort and Familiarity**

You know, I think kids always seem to think “Teachers pick on me, man, or teachers don't like me, man.” But I think I had some experiences, you know, especially in middle school with teachers, music teachers, in particular that held me back a little bit, you know? And the only thing I could think of was that I was the only black kid in the class, in orchestra. Shoot, bad experiences man! The teacher was almost like I didn't belong in the orchestral setting, but back then, you know, I really didn’t mind because once I discovered jazz, you know, I was just like, you know, screw the classical shit man. But definitely I think it would have opened up some different doors if I had stuck to classical, plus I enjoyed playing it. It hurt me not to have something else that I could have relied on, you know, especially in college with scholarship opportunities and everything else. I worked my ass off to get first chair. I mean, I worked my ass off still I never would get past third chair, and even the kids in first and second chair would be like “Yo, Kendall, you should be here. How did I get this?” You know? And it made me think like, you know, damn, no matter how hard you work, when you’re black you’re never going to be first at anything. This frustrated me to the point that I eventually quit orchestra and started playing blues, jazz, and gospel, and that’s when I started playing electric bass instead of upright. It was kind of disheartening, because the stuff was already hard man – you know, classical music, and I put a lot of effort in to it only to see the fruits of my labor not paying off, years and years back to back, you know? I often thought that maybe the teacher had something against me because I knew that I could play. Even other people questioned
what was going on, and that was in middle school. I was maybe 11 or 12 years old at that point. That’s one of the first times I felt like this from a teacher. Like I said, I quit orchestra and went solely to jazz band, and he was the music teacher for the school, and of course, he was all for that, “Oh yeah man, play jazz!” He didn’t even try to discourage me from quitting orchestra. I was like dang, I don’t know what that was about but looking back at it, it seems like he was more comfortable with me playing music that he felt told a black story.

Kendall’s musical abilities seemed to challenge the preconceived belief that associates classical music with whiteness, and his teacher appeared threatened by that. This deficit informed belief is something some of the other participants became familiar with during K-12 also. Kendall went on to explain how this mentality sets the stage for code switching.

**Reverse Biases and Code Switching**

*Man, another thing that was a trip was that I had pressure on the other side too. The black side I guess you could say. My black friends used to tease me and say that I “talked white” or “played white boy sports.” I guess I wasn’t supposed to use proper English, and I was supposed to play the same sports everybody else played. I played baseball, but most of the black cats (cat is slang for peer or comrade) played football and basketball. I guess you go from being too black in some places and not black enough in others. Too black to play in the orchestra and not black enough to not get teased for playing in the orchestra. It’s all pretty stupid man if you ask me. People should be able to excel in different stuff without having to wonder whether it’s a black thing or a white thing. Who cares! If you are good at baseball, play baseball! What difference does color make. Either you can play or you can’t. The same goes for music.*
As Kendall was sharing, the first thing that came to my mind was participation on the wrestling team my junior year. I remember the stress of literally going back and forth between codes where “wrestling” was the proper enunciation around white teammates, and “rasslin’” was the expression of choice among black friends who were not on the wrestling team. The pressure of having to continually code-switch between socially constructed worlds of whiteness and blackness can be cumbersome for a child. If my life and that of Kendall’s are any indication, then these social barriers, coupled with unwarranted biases, have the potential to push kids away from certain social and cultural spaces and opportunities, thus lessening their opportunity to fully explore and nurture their gifts and interests. Kendall expressed, “Man after a while, it kind of wears on you emotionally. Going back and forth like that, you know?”

Biases Representing Emotional Abuse and Self-Esteem Attacks

When you initially approached me about this man and asked me, you know, about racism, the first thing I thought of was a white principal, man. And he came up to me, you know, he made a comment, “Kendall you'll never be nothing but a guy in a barbershop telling jokes.” Wow, you know, it was the principal, man! You know that's about the closest thing to blatant. It almost felt like he was saying, “you’ll just be some old broke ass nigga hanging out in a barbershop.” Offensive, man! I was like, oh, damn this brother here, he don't like me! Yeah, he said that shit and he was serious, man! I was like, you know, immediately, I was like, yeah, right. You know, I kind of laughed it off, but I remember it to this day, man. I was like, wow! You know, the audacity to say something like that. To a kid especially.... Because he's like an adult, and part of you is like, maybe he's right, you know? And, you know, you have to override that like "this motherfucker don't know what he's talking about!” But what made it worse was it embarrassed me in
front of my friends. It was in the hallway and he was loud, you know, and they were laughing. You know, it just stuck with me for what it was like, damn, I gotta do everything I can to make that not the truth. You know, because he was serious. Damn, you know, how he said it, I felt it! So it can be dangerous because it's subtle and it's hard to attack an enemy that you can't see. Especially at that age, you don't know. You look back as an adult and say, wow that was some racist shit. But as a kid you say, okay something's wrong. Is something wrong with me? You know, I think as a kid, you question yourself first. “Okay, is it me? Am I the one doing this?” So you fight like a kid fights. On the mild level I became the class clown, but as things got worse, I would rebel by stealing cars.

Reflecting back to two of my elementary teachers, Mrs. Heart in fourth grade, and Mr. McKnight in sixth, I recall vividly the pain of being predicted a failure. I cannot imagine anything much worse than hearing “Kevin, you’ll probably end up in jail someday” from Mrs. Heart, or “You probably should think about a trade instead of college” from Mr. McKnight. Therefore, I am definitely familiar with the feeling that accompanies a child being attacked in such a manner by an adult. Kendall goes back to the false allegation of inappropriately touching the white girl, this time sharing some of the consequences.

**Consequences: Fear, Self-Doubt, and Compromised Relationships**

I don’t think I had time to be angry about the false accusation. Instead, I was scared as hell. I think I even started believing it like, “Damn, maybe I did touch her butt.” Yeah. I was young but I realized, this was serious and I became instantly afraid of white women. Shit, I think I still am. It's like a sub-conscious thing. I got older and started reading about people like Emmitt Till and stuff, and maybe it was smart to be afraid of them
motherfuckers man! Hahah (very uncomfortable laughter) - Other than fears? I mean, I don't think I remember feeling anger, man. I just felt like, yo... I'm afraid. Like I don’t know what to do. Like, wow... I'm in trouble for something I didn’t do and it’s solely because I’m black. The whole thing made me confused on what is and what isn’t acceptable, and I think it affected my relationship with all girls for a while; white girls particularly man. You know, I remember teachers questioning me... “KENDALL DID YOU TOUCH HER BUTT?” I would say no, but they would yell at me and ask again later “DID YOU TOUCH HER BUTT?” And I would still say no, then they were like “SHE SAID YOU TOUCHED HER... WHY WOULD SHE LIE?” I don’t know... I don’t know why she lied, but why did I have to be the one lying? I never had a white girlfriend ever man! When I got older, I was like yo, I like black women. They (white women) come on to me and some are attractive too, but I’m afraid that I might get in trouble, you know? Whenever I do entertain the thought man that fear is right there. Then I’m like, Yo - Hell no! It's more trouble than it's worth.

My conversation with Kendall also forced me to revisit marginalized social enrichment and blatant attacks on my potential and against my character. I reflected once again not receiving the role of Daddy Warbucks in “Annie,” and how that discouraged me from pursuing theater until later in life; and I recalled standing in the hallway with two AAM elementary school classmates as part of a classroom game, yet the teacher from the neighboring classroom assumed that we were in trouble, walking by saying “What did you punks do now?” These incidents affected me in many ways, and it was interesting to see that Kendall experienced lingering consequences from very similar encounters.
More Consequences: Giving Up, Getting in Trouble, and the School to Prison Pipeline

There was a time when I was kind of taking my frustration out of the people, man, like, you know, kind of like bullying kids for a little bit. Later on, me and my brother even started stealing cars and acting out in other ways. That was like middle school. I remember my brother got caught and had to spend the night in Juvie (Juvenile Detention), and so I stopped doing that stuff man, I got scared. But yeah, you get so frustrated with how you get treated, and you keep being told stuff about yourself from adults who don’t have your best interest, and yeah man – you can easily get caught up in some bullshit, man! Then they reinforce that junk through stuff like detention and use of detention. You know, for stuff like being late to the class and stuff, you know. I mean, it wasn't no secret. Like in middle school, all the teachers knew that, you know, music was my thing. And so, you know, the big thing of the year was the school talent show. Stuff like that is what I lived for. So, the day before talent show I had a teacher just put me in detention the whole next day for being late to class and made me miss the damn talent show. Shit like that! I can remember, stories like that. I don't know if it was racially motivated. I don't know if she just didn't like me or what. But, everybody was like, Kendall you’re not going to the talent show? But I had to go to detention. Even some of the teachers were upset about it.

Kendall went on to mention racial disparities with detention, and how AAMs grow accustomed to being in detention, thus accustomed to being in trouble and being prepped for a future of incarceration.

It was nearly all black kids in detention. That’s one thing I remember and that's why detention became fun because all the homies were going to be in there. You know, it was almost like jail, man. And, you know, it eventually became like, okay, this sucks, but if I
know who all is gonna be in there, then it probably won’t be so bad. I kinda used this logic to justify a phase when I was kinda acting out a lot. You get comfortable in detention, so after a while, you got comfortable with trouble. In fact, you get comfortable with it to the point where you say it’s kind of fun. You start to say to yourself that all my friends are there, so maybe this is a way to kind of early on normalize black males to jail? I mean, because it’s like, you know, you’re late to class and you have to go sit in jail! I was never in detention for doing bad in class. If you were flunking, it was more like “okay or whatever.” But if you were late, then it was like the end of the world. That was more important than actually learning.

In mentioning the normalizing of detention, Kendall also mentioned eventually losing interest in school, and more or less giving up all together.

I started acting out, you know, bucking authority for a while. I remember one semester I had a zero grade point average. I had all Fs man and I did not give a damn! That was when my mom was sick too, so I really didn’t care. Nobody cared about me and what I was going through, so I just stopped caring man! Instead of meeting us where we are, it’s like they force feed us the book that was written for white people. You know, Carter G. Woodson talked about how the system is messed up. In a sense, it’s based off of how white people work. I don't know for sure, but maybe that's why a lot of other people just kind of give up too!

I reflected upon times that I too had given up, thinking back to Mrs. Heart’s fourth grade class and being placed in remedial reading. Despite the discipline I would receive at home for poor grades, I intentionally opted to no longer work on any assignments until this was corrected, pro-actively and willingly accepting an F in the subject. I went as far as throwing my reading book
out the second story classroom window of Apple Elementary School, here in Wichita, Kansas. I even stole the red grading pen from Mrs. Heart’s desk drawer, and wrote an F on every assigned reading worksheet as my way of protesting. Since a kid can only fight these battles in a childish manner, advocates are a necessity. Kendall speaks highly of the significance of black teachers as one source of advocacy.

**The Significance of Black Teachers and Parental Advocacy**

*Mrs. Powell was my fourth grade teacher and the only black teacher I had in elementary school. She made it a point for us to know about Dr. King and all those kind of people.*

*We would do these big elaborate plays about great black people in class. Now, I remember like in my earliest memories, parents coming in there mad like "I didn't send my kid here to learn about a black leader." When I look back on it, man, she was strong. You know, she was about us learning about us. Shoot, in that particular class there were maybe only a handful of black people but we still studied black stuff and cultural identity.*

*Having a black teacher like Mrs. Powell gave contrast, man. You know, her teaching style was totally different from the others, and she was just a lot more elaborate with her teachings. Hell, I don’t even remember the names of any of the other elementary school teachers, but she is the one to this day that I still remember. She encouraged us and gave us that little kick to know that black people can do great stuff man! Her whole classroom was full of pictures of black inventors and stuff. And, you know, that's how, like to this day, I have a picture in my mind of Garrett Morgan and the mask. You know, stoplights and all this stuff. People like Frederick Douglass. We would look at those faces all day and all school year. You know, they're kind of known after it is engrained in your head after a while man. Yeah, she was totally different. In my particular situation, I'm thankful*
for Ms. Powell who kinda instilled that information in me while I was there. Sometimes I just think, what if I was at a school where there were a bunch of Miss Powells? How different would that be for any of us? Teachers who knew how to teach and how to talk to you in a positive way. You know, like they do the white kids.

Although Kendall only had one black teacher in elementary school, she seemed to have had an enriching and lasting impact that exists to this day. At fifty years old, I can say the same for Mrs. Norton, my first grade teacher and the only black teacher I had in elementary school. I attribute many of my successes, even being a doctoral candidate today to the positive foundation provided by Mrs. Norton. Kendall went on to express that like having a black teacher, having encouraging and involved parents also played a huge role in helping him navigate through a racially flawed educational system:

You know, my parents were kind of militant black. They made sure we knew about the connection to Africa. My mom made us dashikis and stuff, and really connected us to that. When I really got into that, it was like maybe middle school. I'm thankful for that man, because it made me really realize the bigger picture of everything, you know? To know that there is more to the story other than what we learn from white teachers at white schools. I think it strengthened me in a way, to connect to ancient stuff. To know that Africa had culture and did business. A lot of us as African-Americans have been disconnected from that. And I feel like, you know, even our African counterparts know where they come from a lot of times. And so just knowing that in itself gives you a sense of pride like “this is where I am from. This is my tribe.” But shoot, you know, mom nem’ (abbreviation for mom and them, which in multiethnic social circles is a reference to mother and others, perhaps family members or additional allies) helped us to get to know
that man. I'm just thankful for that information around that time period because it gave me some kind of like, you know, different hope, you know? I mean, you know, if they're that great and those were black people, and damn I'm just finding out about this, that these are black people doing these great things then maybe I could do something great! Maybe I can be more than just a comedian in a barbershop, you know? Nothing against comedians and barbers, but he knew what he was saying wasn’t right. I thank God for my church, they helped me cultivate a lot of things by myself. Between my parents and my church, they really worked with me which helped me a lot.

Without my parents, I likely would have failed in school and been doomed in life, so I recognize the unparalleled value of parental advocacy. When kids face attacks against their character, their academic development, and their race, these forces can be destructive without the support of caring adults to assist with these emotional and psychological conflicts. Advocacy is important on one hand because AAMs face the burden of biases held by culturally incompetent teachers. On the other hand, the pedagogy is typically culturally deficient, so advocates are essential in this regard also.

**Cultural Pedagogy and Cultural Identity**

It seems like white teachers form the only opinion they have about black men and boys based off television and not talking to an 8-year-old kid and finding out for themselves that he is smart, creative, and willing to learn. That’s dangerous as hell man, cause’ if I’m 30 and you’re 8, you may start believing some of the stupid stuff I’m telling you. You know, based on biases that challenge that this kid is intelligent, so instead of providing more rigorous work so that he is challenged, they find more ways to discipline him. That shit goes all the way back to slavery man. This is not the same for white kids. When they
do good in math, they get harder math to work on. We get told to sit down and be quiet. But I’m creative and I need rhythm and movement, so I start nodding my head and playing air drums, and then I’m in trouble. Sit down and be quiet is not the right answer for me, so it probably isn’t for so many others. Man, it really sucks how they treat black kids!

Kendall went to on express his beliefs that maybe AAMs do not belong in white schools:

The way White teachers teach man is not natural, especially to, you know, Black people. We need to move, and rhythm is part of who we are in many aspects. When I think back to positive experiences, I still think back to my first black teacher, Ms. Powell. When we would work, she would have music playing in background, man. And it kind of kept us for the most part. Most teachers have a teaching style that is European man, you know, and they’re trying to get us to conform to a European teaching style and European learning standards. Some of us can adapt and some can’t. I think if I ever have more kids, I think I would take them to homeschool or a Black school man, that’s more centered towards urban youth and how to deal with them, you know? Like I said, a lot of these white teachers are coming from in the country and the middle of the sticks and ain’t never being around black people. White teachers have a tendency to negate how we learn and how it may be different, you know? And so instead of saying you just learn different, they diagnose you with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) or some other shit. I never was diagnosed with it, but for a while there I started reading stories, and started thinking “wow, maybe I was fucking up in class because I had something wrong with me.” Come to find out there wasn’t anything wrong with me, but ultimately, I feel like it was just racism, and life, and just not being cultivated with love you know? I think every kid,
every teenager goes through that. What am I? Who am I? Where do I come from? White kids get this information in school, and some blacks will and some of them don't, you know? Not too many kids will be lucky enough to have a first grade teacher like Mrs. Powell. I oftentimes ponder like if you never got the information, how did they deal with that? You know? How do you form a sense of identity to know anything about where you and your people came from? School doesn’t teach you anything about being black. Everything you learn is from a white perspective. Sure, we brushed over slavery, basically Jim Crow and all that stuff. But they never taught us about ancient Egypt. If they did, we were taught that Egyptians were White. Even in movies and pictures they were White people. I think that does something to you, man. If everything we see that is great is white, it makes you like “Wow... we ain’t got a chance.” You know, so that does something to you to see everything great in history is White people doing great things, but you yourself in chains or in minstrel depictions. And school reinforces that no matter how good you do or work, you always will be, second to somebody White.

Throughout his narrative, Kendall expressed delight in sharing the cultural identity he received from home, church, and just one black elementary school teacher. Coming from a similar support system, his story reinforced for me what I have always felt personally, but was delighted to find commonality with Kendall. Our parents, our church foundation, and one caring black teacher had an impact on both of our future trajectories. I will go as far as saying that these forces were critical components in saving both of us from a system that attempted to destroy our hopes, dreams, and future aspirations. While this speaks highly of the adults who operate with high degrees of love, compassion, and cultural competency, it exposes the significant risks
associated with lacking these competencies and sensibilities, thus failing to provide culturally enriched experiences for diverse student populations.

**Julian Ernest**

In one of my participant recruitment meetings at a local church’s men’s meeting, I left a flyer with a mutual friend who later called and informed me that Julian would be a good candidate. After a brief phone screening, I agreed, so we scheduled a time to converse. Since Julian currently resides in Alabama, we set up times for two separate SKYPE interviews. Born and raised in Bibb County, Alabama, Julian Ernest is a 30-year-old food scientist with two undergraduate degrees (education and biology), and a masters in food science. He recently returned to his rural hometown after working several years in a larger Midwest City. Julian graduated high school in 2007, but his schooling environment was somewhat different from the other participants from the standpoint that he is the only one who was educated in a rural area, whereas the others experienced schooling in heavily populated cities. This dynamic is significant because unlike the other participants, Julian grew up in an area where everyone knew one another. In fact, most of his classmates had parents who were classmates of his parents. However, knowing one another does not necessarily depict an environment in which cordial, healthy, and fruitful race relationships thrive. Here are Julian’s experiences, which begin with a quote that demonstrates the stinging aftereffects of one of America’s most historically segregated states.

**Sweet Home Alabama**

*Our school was integrated, but segregated at the same time. The blacks sat with the blacks and the whites sat with the whites. Even in the dining hall, whites and blacks didn’t sit together. There was no colored and whites only signs. We didn’t have that, but*
it was just like an unwritten rule. To this day, if you were to come to one of my high school’s football games like I went to last Friday, blacks sat on one side and whites sat on the other side. You may find one black or one white in the middle of the crowd, but essentially, the crowd is split down the middle.

When I think about Alabama, the first things that come to my mind are events such as the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, the Montgomery bus boycott, and Dr. Martin Luther King leading the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Even the fact that the bridge itself is the namesake of a former Ku Klux Klan grand dragon (Edmund Pettus) alludes to Alabama as one of this country’s premier epicenters for racism and injustice.

However, I was surprised to discover that although our geographic, population, social, and historical dynamics differ, our K-12 experiences were similar in many ways. We both found ourselves under attack, yet we both had the luxury of strong extended villages of love and support to help us overcome this reality. Julian describes his village in great detail in the subsequent section.

**It Takes a Village to Raise a Child**

*In K-12, we had a strong representation of African American teachers within our school system. My first African American teacher was in Kindergarten. After that I had an African American teacher in first grade who was actually my mom’s Sorority sister. Actually, I think my Kindergarten teacher was my mother’s sorority sister as well. Then in second grade I had another African American female teacher, and finally in third grade was my first time having an African American male teacher. I didn’t have another Black teacher in elementary school, but I had an African American principal fourth through sixth grade. That was my first black principal. My next African American...*
teacher was my reading teacher in sixth grade middle school, then I didn’t have another
AAM teacher until I got to high school. That was really positive for me! Having so many
Black educators early in my schooling, and having a Black man early on as well. That
really made a difference.

Julian went on to express the value of the combination of African American teachers, strong
parental advocates, and a close-knit community,

Another positive thing is that everybody knew everybody and of everybody. Teachers
knew the families of the students, which was particularly cool having that connection
between black teachers and black families; that was up through third grade. I thank God
for my parents, who were educated individuals themselves. They were able to fill in the
gaps of what teachers weren’t teaching about, and what I needed to be doing for the
betterment of my education and my learning skills. My church played a supportive role
too. All the elders in the church encouraged me in my education, music, and sports. I
was one of the top African American male students in my class at every grade level, but
there was actually a guy who was really smarter than me. His name was Justin. He
didn’t really have the backing that I had like my parents and grandparents were backing
me. He ended up going to college for a little while but ended up dropping out and went
to the Air Force. I think if he had got the same support that I had, he would have done
better in high school and college. Yeah, I thank God for my parents, grandparents, and
other people who backed me and supported me to succeed. I think everything would have
turned out different without them.

Despite other participants not speaking to this, it is significant to share Julian’s quote saying, “I
can show you a picture where my mom, dad, and grandmother were there for parent’s day,
grandparent’s days, fall festival and things like that. Most of the kids didn’t have that except for a handful.” This hit close to home with me for the simple fact that Julian and I shared commonality in our appreciation for the value of our extended families, grandparents in particular. I remember both sets of grandparents (maternal and paternal) being present at everything from band concerts to kickball games, as well as all parties equally taking active participation in scolding me for poor academic performance.

Unlike Julian, I cannot speak to the value of having four African American elementary teachers as part of my village, but I can say that the one that I did have was certainly a jewel. Mrs. Norton provided an environment of compassion and nurturing in first grade. In the course of just one school year, Mrs. Norton made a lasting impact by allowing me to see and feel what a healthy teacher-student relationship was like, and what I was capable of accomplishing as a result. Julian states about his four black elementary school teachers, “They laid a foundation by showing me that I was smart, and challenging me, and making me better. I think this carried me on throughout middle and high school.” I feel the exact same way about Mrs. Norton! From speaking about the value of having Black teachers as part of his extended village, Julian transitioned into sharing how White biases sometimes block similar healthy experiences with White teachers and administrators.

**White is Right Biases**

*Back in the day, my mom and dad wouldn’t let me have braids. Kids who did have culturally expressive hairstyles were labeled as thugs or trouble makers and stuff like that. We all wanted to wear hair and clothes that expressed our black pride, but all I ever wore was neat haircuts. My mom let me have braids one time, in like the 12th grade, and I ended up cutting it off or what not. She really didn’t allow that stuff mostly because*
she knew the racial biases and things like that, the bigotry, and what I would be labeled as if I expressed myself in that manner. I did dress nice at school – I did have a little swag, but you know as far as hairstyles, and the car I drove and things like that, everything was real basic. A lot of guys had earrings, I didn’t have holes in my ears – I wasn’t allowed to.

In a world where violent acts of racial terrorism are disguised by police badges, overzealous citizens, and gross misinterpretation of stand-your-ground laws, Julian’s mom seemed to be preparing him with tools that would hopefully lessen the impact of these dilemmas. My parents also disallowed piercings and tattoos, and they closely monitored my attire primarily for the same reason. However, they were staunch proponents of Black pride and culture. Ultimately, cultural pride is significant, but far less substantial than coming home alive. Finding balance within the context of these two extremes seemed to be a challenge that both of our parents shared, despite never meeting one another. Julian continued to share other incidents that highlighted White narratives while deliberately suppressing those of multiethnic students:

*Fourth grade was my first white teacher and that’s when a rough patch of my schooling began. There were times where I was blamed for things just because I was around but never got to the nitty gritty of what happened. I, along with other black individuals were accused of and took the fault for it along with white students having the privilege of not being chastised or anything like that, so we took a fault for a lot of things. I remember it like it was yesterday. I never received any star student cards or anything despite being a good student. Those opportunities just weren’t given to the black kids. I don’t think anybody black in our class got this stuff; maybe some of the girls did cause the girls were a lot quieter, but far as black boys in class, I cannot recall any of us ever receiving star
student cards or any special kudos or anything like that. We more or less just got left out. That was fourth grade, but in high school we got excluded too. I had yearbook staff experience in junior high, but in high school they didn’t let me participate or be anywhere close to the yearbook staff or any other club except Kappa League (a predominately black rites of passage program sponsored by Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity). Plus, because my dad was a politician in the city, I was a target because of the things he was doing – like putting proper sewage lines in the black neighborhoods, and trying to get more liberating programs in the black neighborhoods, and pushing against the grain to help black neighborhoods. I feel like it all kind of leaned back on me as a means to get back at him. So you know, it was more in there than I understood at the time. I didn’t understand politics; I was still a kid. But we knew where we stood with white teachers, cause’ we had a lot of white guys who wore confederate flag shirts and hats and stuff like that to school all the time and the school never said anything about it. It actually didn’t stop until we finally had a black assistant principal who said something about it. Man we weren’t getting MLK day off from school or nothing like that until they finally agreed that we could celebrate Martin Luther King only if we celebrated Robert E. Lee, so we had Lee-King day in Bibb County, since Robert E. Lee and Martin Luther King’s birthdays were around the same time. Can you believe that? They called it Lee-King day. Yeah man, they minimized civil rights royalty by sharing his celebration with that of a racist Confederate soldier.

There are additional biases that relate directly to white privilege and the dominant narrative that suggests a parallel between “whiteness” and “rightness,” or even “righteousness” to a certain extent. Sometimes these biases emerge as subtle invalidations, while other times they reveal
themselves as blatant attacks. Julian goes on to share narratives of being actively targeted simply for the color of his skin.

**My Skin is My Sin**

*One time, I had this white girl who said I grabbed her. Me and one of my white friends were walking past her, and the white friend admitted guilt, saying “No I did that.” They were ready to label me a predator. Once he (the White guy) admitted it, it went away and was never brought up again. He didn’t even get in trouble. It was a lot of White women who liked black men. Man, we couldn’t fool with them White girls. My mama said “Boy if you get caught off in them woods it’s all over with.” I think White women would sometimes have interest in us just to catch us up, but they didn’t really like us, they were just playing a game. Get us killed or put in jail, one or the other. They gone stick something on you!*

In addition to false sexual misconduct allegations, Julian shared other examples of being the victim to ridiculous AAM biases. He shared,

*It was times that I would get caught in situations that had nothing to do with me, and I’d be like “how did I get in this situation?” I would get in-school suspension for no reason. One time, a bunch of guys went and beat up this one White guy, and I had nothing to do with it. I was on the other side of the doggone PE (physical education) field or what not, and all of a sudden I got tied into it. They were like “Julian was there too! Julian was there too!” Because I was black, they automatically thought I was one of the guys that was there. Another time, I got jumped by two White boys when I was in seventh grade. This is real interesting. I ended up mopping the locker room floor with them, and uhm.... they didn’t get suspended but I did. That was really interesting, and my*
mom raised all kind of cane – It was bad!! They were trying to press charges on me.

One of the guys lied and said I started the fight and that he just jumped in to help. Once again, my black word against his white word, and guess who they believed? Honestly, I was cornered and felt I had to defend myself. Thank God that situation ended up passing by.

I am twenty years older than Julian, yet both of our schooling experiences seem heavily influenced by our ethnicity. He is from the south and I am from Kansas, yet other than small cosmetic differences, the bias and racial attacks we experienced were identical in many ways. I was never accused of touching a White girl inappropriately, but I cannot count the times that White girls accused me of things I was innocent of, yet I still received punishment based solely on their word. As far as the boys were concerned, Blacks and Whites at Apple Elementary had fist fights daily, but the White guys typically never got in trouble, so I could relate to how Julian felt about being punished for defending himself, and perpetrators receiving no reprimand. From Julian’s perspective, the implication is that disparity in treatment is largely based on deficit informed mainstream biases of AAMs. He shared,

**Traditional and Mainstream AAM Biases**

> When I was in sports and I was hitting all the homeruns and making all the points in the paint, and I was on the team with all the White people, I was getting invited to all their houses and stuff like that. It seems like as long as you’re hitting home runs, throwing strike outs, and making their kids look good in the process, you are respected. Now that we are older, I see the same people and they act like they don’t even know me anymore. The crazy thing is that they think we’re good enough to play sports, but they don’t think we belong in honors classes or college. I’ll give you an example. My high school
principal told my mom that I wasn’t college material and my mom didn’t tell me until later after I got my first degree, but she said to my mom that “He doesn’t need to go to college. He needs to go to a two year school and get a trade, and let that be his career.” I have no clue where she came up with this crap, ‘cause I was always a pretty good student. You know, engaged and all that. It had to be a prejudice thing is all I can think of. My mom said she was so glad that I proved those White people wrong by finishing college.

In a 1971 interview with journalist Michael Parkinson, Muhammed Ali shared a story that parallels Julian’s dilemma of being good enough to be applauded for his sports prowess, but not good enough to be accepted in White circles. In the interview, Ali explained that in 1960, after returning from winning the gold medal in Rome, and defeating two communist countries in the process – Russia and Poland, he was celebrated by white fans, yet not allowed to eat in segregated restaurants. He shares that he went to a restaurant wearing his medal around his neck, only to be told, “We don’t serve negroes here” when attempting to order. While his response of “I don’t eat them, so get me a cup of coffee and a hamburger” was witty and humorous, he was still forced to leave and was not served. Like Ali in 1960, Julian returned home only to realize that the same White people who once cheered for him and invited him to supper, no longer had an interest in being associated with him. In fact, due to his education and career, many even demonstrated feeling threatened by Julian.

**Competition Biases**

These folks really are fake. That’s how I know that racism is taught and not developed naturally. The reason I know that is because most of those kids weren’t like that when we were in middle school, and now it’s like a whole 180. I feel like racism is being taught
out here. When we were growing up, we could have fun – we could call one another – we could hang out. Our parents even seemed cool with one another, but when I got older my mom was like “Baby them folks was fake from the jump. We know how they are. We know where they come from, and we knew how they were when we were in school.” I guess it was just camouflaged. It opens my eyes to see that you don’t know who is real and who is fake. When I moved back to Alabama everyone wanted to be in my business but not because they were happy for me. Instead it was in hopes that I wasn’t doing well. They say things like “What you doing now?” and “Such and such is doing this, or such and such is working at the paper mill now, and such and such is doing that.” When they feel like you are doing better than them or their children, there’s no congratulations. If you’re doing better than they are then they don’t want to fool with you, but if you ain’t, then it’s like – “Oh that’s my buddy!” And I see those things clearly now.

Julian’s perspectives allude to the notion that for individuals who buy into the dominant narrative that accompanies white privilege and white supremacy, it is common to believe that African Americans are less competent, less intelligent, and less deserving of opportunities than their white counterparts. He continues his dialogue,

*I came to the Midwest expecting that I wouldn’t see too much racism, especially coming from the South and all. Boy was I foolish to think that. Racism hasn’t gone anywhere and it’s just as bad everywhere else. It’s just shown different in the Midwest. In the South, you know where you stand. In other places, they get into your personal space so that they can come back and stab you in the back. I had to learn the hard way that people are people, and the same biases exist wherever you go.*
Being from Kansas, I wish I could have warned Julian that the South in no way has a monopoly on racism, nor the fairytale that African Americans are less qualified and less deserving of opportunity than their White counterparts. As a child, I remember every teacher from the third through the sixth grade demonstrating visible frustration whenever I would outperform White students in spelling or mathematics. Not much had changed for me as an adult, with regards to outperforming White males in the workplace, but I am from the Midwest so I have grown accustomed to racism in this region. Unfortunately for Julian, he had to learn the hard way that Midwest racism may not look like racism at all when compared to Southern racism. Racism disguised by friendly gestures, smiling faces, and handshakes is much different from living in an era that celebrates Dr. King and Robert E. Lee on the same day. His story implies that not recognizing subtle racism caused him to trust too freely, and ultimately set him up for a series of problems that he was not expecting.

Cultural Relevant Pedagogy, Cultural Biases, and Academic Disparity

We had a test at the time I was in high school called the Alabama High School Graduation exam and a lot of people felt it was a racially biased test. For example, if you asked a black person something about Elvis Presley or the Beatles, they may know the math or the vocabulary but may get thrown off because the reference is not familiar. However, if you ask the same question using a deuce and a quarter (common African American slang reference for a Buick Electra 225), they may not have the same distraction and can focus on solving the problem. They can visualize the problem because it is familiar to them. This test was loaded with racially motivated questions. A lot of black kids didn’t finish high school because of those exams. You had to take and pass this in order to graduate. A lot of black students who made decent grades didn’t
pass and ended up getting a GED or didn’t graduate at all. The Black community came together to come up with preparatory courses that would help Black students pass the graduation exam, but before me, it was about 75% of the Blacks who didn’t graduate. I wanna say 2000s up to about 2005, 75% in each class didn’t graduate. I think this is part of the reason that I’m the only black guy to graduate college from my entire class of 2007. In our class of 215 graduates, 35 were African American males. Out of that 35, some were supposed to be in the class of 2006, but failed their grade and ended up in our class. Just like a lot of people started with me but ended up in the class of 2008. We had about five black women to graduate college out of our class too. The system just wasn’t set up for black students to succeed, much less instill in them the confidence that we could go on and be successful in college.

During the interview, I told a personal story that I had shared with another participant about being placed in remedial reading in the fourth grade. Julian shared an experience that implied the same belief that we were both excluded from more rigorous learning due to racist White biases that assume we (AAMs) are either undeserving or incapable of the same learning opportunities as our white counterparts. He shared,

*I didn’t understand it at the time, but a lot of the Black kids were assigned lower reading levels than white kids, so they were not exposing us to vocabulary that would expand us beyond our grade level. Most of the Black students were reading Cat in the Hat and Dr. Seuss books as opposed to white students reading the Charlotte’s Webs and all these books that would expand our horizon. We were in fifth grade and would be reading on a third and fourth grade level, and pretty much all the white kids whose parents were doing something in the community – they were given reading material on a seventh or eighth*
grade level. I could see if these kids were way smarter than us, but these same students were just on the same level as us in the second and third grade, now all of a sudden we’re supposed to believe that they got that much better than us in two school years? That’s crazy! Certain teachers just automatically put black kids in a lower reading level. I didn’t notice this until I started having white teachers.

In hearing Julian’s perspectives, I could not help but draw parallels between the consequences that he had either experienced personally or witnessed, and those that I had experienced and witnessed. He continued,

Oh man, they called us niggas all the time. Students did. Most of the time I don’t think teachers heard it, but we went back and told it but nothing was ever done. My mom taught me not to react and don’t put my hands on anybody or anything like that. She said “It’s an ignorant word, so don’t get in trouble behind it. If they call you a nigga, tell em’ your mammy is a nigga and keep it moving.” Now some guys, like this guy who was one of my neighbors who was two grades ahead of me, this guy called him a nigga; he threw him on his head and he winded up having a doggone brain hemorrhage. So I mean it was some guys out there who were from the real ghetto hood and didn’t have the same backing that I had or some of my other brothers and sisters had. I mean some folks fought tooth and nail. I never got suspended in high school. By that time my parents had groomed me on what to do and how to handle situations and things like that. So throughout my whole tenure of high school I was never suspended. I knew how to handle certain situations; I knew what to do and things like that. And I did have a Black history teacher in high school and man he didn’t teach the book only, he also talked about the
real stuff that wasn’t in the books. A lot of people didn’t like that but he taught it anyway
and ended up becoming the assistant principal of that high school.

Julian’s mentioning of Black students being attacked with racial slurs and no disciplinary actions
taken by adult staff was all too familiar. This may seem unbelievable, but I was reminded of the
daily soccer game at recess in which teachers would watch fourth and fifth grade students engage
in a competition where the team names were “niggas vs. honkeys.” This was during the time the
television mini-series “Roots” had created questions about race that 10-year-old kids did not
understand, nor have the mental capacity or life experience to discuss in a mature manner.
Therefore, childish curiosity and limited information manifested as pretentious and sophomoric
acts of foolishness such as this highly inappropriate exchange of not-so-harmless racial name
calling. Again, teachers were aware of this yet it was never addressed. Because of situations of
this nature, I was often angry and frustrated, rather than upbeat and eager to learn. Julian
expressed similar frustration, citing depression and isolation as outcomes of his mistreatment.
The common daily occurrences of name calling, fist fights, and no protection from adult
personnel were actions that Julian still expresses with disappointment today. He elaborates on
these feelings in greater detail below:

**Consequences: Anger and Frustration**

*So going into seventh grade, I still didn’t understand what was going on. I think my lack
of understanding caused me to be frustrated and angry a lot, and a lot of times, I would
fight at the drop of a hat before I let myself get bullied or pushed around. I had to learn
how to control my temper by high school, because some of those fights could have been
avoided, but maybe some couldn’t. On the other hand, I think if I felt protected by the
teachers, I wouldn’t have felt like I had to fight, but telling them what was going on and*
stuff like that, wouldn’t have done any good, I felt like. But still, it was painful to be mad all the time and not know really why I was mad half the time. Man, it was tough. It was just a lot of little stuff they did to show differences between us and the White kids. I remember in seventh grade, I started playing baseball, which I also played in college too, so I was pretty good. The coach of the baseball team - that’s how funny this is - the guy who was my baseball coach in the seventh grade is now the mayor of Centerville, and my dad is the vice mayor of Centerville right now. So, they had told us if we get in any trouble or suspended, then we would be dismissed from the baseball team. So I ended up getting into it with these white guys who considered themselves skinheads and I ended up getting into an altercation. So one of them started calling me a pussy and pushing me around, and they started talking about they were gone fight me at Burger King across the street from our school. So I said, why wait... we can do this right here – right now! So he and another two guys tried to gang up on me. So I ended up in an altercation with them. That was a war right there! I never got suspended from high school, but I ended up getting suspended from middle school for this fight, and I was kicked off the baseball team. There was another white guy on the team who I was friends with who was suspended from the team for being caught with secular books, like Playboy magazine and stuff like that. He ended up getting suspended but he didn’t get kicked off the baseball team. The double standard was that we were all told that if we were suspended, we would be kicked off the team.

In addition to physical altercations reinforcing the deficit informed notion of AAMs being aggressive and confrontational, such incidents have the potential for physical injury. It is fortunate that Julian escaped schooling with no major physical injuries, and equally fortunate that
we had no serious injuries at Apple Elementary. However, I am still in communication with
some of my elementary school classmates, and there were certainly some emotional wounds very
similar to those voiced by Julian.

**More Consequences: Excessive Detention and the School to Prison Pipeline**

*Like I said before, my first Caucasian teacher was in fourth grade. She was my mom’s
classmate. I don’t know why my mother thought it would be a good idea for me to be in
her class. I never got put in ISD (In School Detention) or anything like that until I got to
fourth grade. I never was a problem but I guess because I was the tallest in the class or
because I stood out, I felt that I was a target. I suppose a big tall Black kid was
intimidating for her, or at least it seems that way looking back at it. As far as I can
remember, I didn’t do anything to deserve detention other than being a large Black male.
Another time, we were playing football in PE (Physical Education) class. I was playing
receiver and happened to catch a ball over this White kid’s head. It just so happened that
my elbow came down on his head and hit him by accident, it was just a natural catch. He
went back and start crying and telling the PE teachers “Oh Julian hit me upside the
head” and “Oh I got a knot on my head” and I immediately got sent to ISD. It’s little
things like that. If you did something that hurt a White kid or if a White kid complained,
you got in trouble. When it was your word against theirs you never had a chance, even
when it was nothing more than active boys playing and an incidental accident took place.
There was so much more going on that my parents kept away from me, but my parents
reinforced that I wasn’t a trouble maker, so despite getting in trouble in school, I was
shielded from the belief that I was some type of a problem or that I deserved to be in*
Like Julian, I too found myself in trouble for no reason other than the complete cultural incompetence of my teachers and administrators. Thankfully we both had strong support from our families to reinforce to us that we were not the dangerous deviants they tried to peg us to be. I can see how easy it could be for one to find themselves caught up in the penal system, simply from the conditioning of AAMs that takes place in K-12. Julian is correct in thinking that the values and beliefs that are constantly engrained in students minds will in many cases become reality for those students. For this reason, he remained frustrated with the efforts taken to not just discipline him unjustly, but to try to acclimate him to being in trouble. He continues sharing other consequences:

**More Consequences: Lack of Motivation, and Depression**

*I felt like I was being picked on and I felt I was being deprived of certain parts of my education. I wasn’t motivated academically, but I was motivated to kick ass on the football field and basketball court. I think sports may have gave me an outlet to get some of my other school frustrations off my chest. I had a lot of penned up emotions, and in sports, I could be physical and aggressive and not be judged by White people. Although my mom and grandmother motivated me to do my best on my studies, by junior high I felt like I was damned if I do, and damned if I don’t. I became like “Let me just get through my work and get this over with.” I would go on a depression thing for one or two weeks and be to myself. Despite there being some depression there, I would pull out of it because I wanted to do better and not disappoint my family, but every day it was a fight.*
Survive and advance! It was stressful, but I would keep my head in a book, and would use sports as an outlet to let loose.

Julian explained how the racial stress experienced in K-12 still has an impact on him today:

*Being in a lower reading group stopped me from being outgoing. I wanted to run for class president in Jr. High – I didn’t. I wanted to run for certain offices – I had the charisma, and the attitude, and it’s in my bloodline because my dad is a politician. It discouraged me from being a part of different activities – even through college. It took for me to go to a Black college to get back on my heels of being part of the SGA and being part of student government, and showcasing my talents and skills. It even hurt me with my musical stance and things like that. I had people in the Black church who encouraged me that my music would take me a long way, but when I would go to school I had white adults telling me this and telling me that, and being in a system like that, it just like, it kind of seemed that what they said mattered more than anything, you know what I mean? You have strong advocates at home, but still believe this stuff after a while, you know, being a kid and having these ideas reinforced continuously by adults. Our white teachers just didn’t encourage us in academics. If you were an AAM and were going to make it out of Bibb County, it was most likely going to be for sports. But even that wasn’t always enough. I was a phenomenal athlete and I was encouraged to help them win games, but even after that, they would hide scholarship letters and college offers from me, so they still didn’t want to see me succeed at the expense of doing better than White kids.*

Physical altercations, lack of protection and support, and false accusations seemed as much a part of Julian’s K-12 experiences as scholastic enrichment and college preparation. Like many
parents of AAMs (mine included), Julian’s parents were dealt the dual pressures of helping him navigate through the social and academic tenets of schooling structures not designed for students of color, and training him for survival in a world where white sheets and police badges are equally dangerous. School racism in general and the biases of AAMs are seemingly not confined to a particular era or geographic location. Despite Julian graduating high school in rural Alabama in 2007, and me graduation in Wichita in 1987, I feel I could tell his story and he could tell mine.

Porter McNeil

Using snowball sampling, I received a referral to contact a potential participant who happened to fall outside of the 28 to 40-year-old age threshold as specified in the study criteria. Upon discovering this information in the screening interview, the initial prospect referred me to Porter McNeil. He is a 30-year-old classical actor who travels with various theatrical productions, but currently resides in New York City. He received a bachelor’s degree from James Madison University, in Virginia, and studied abroad to earn his master’s degree in London. He was born in Texas but comes from a military family, so his childhood was spent residing in various geographic locations. When discussing his schooling, most of the experiences took place in Texas and Florida, and he graduated high school in 2007 in Florida. Listed below is a brief depiction of Porter’s schooling as described to me over the course of two SKYPE interviews.

Early Schooling Experiences

I was a pretty precocious student, so I always liked school. I always liked learning and I was identified early on as gifted, so I guess you would call me nerdy. Yeah, I was very nerdy! I loved being at school all the time and I was always hyper involved in
elementary school and middle school. By the time I went to high school, I was in a magnet program, which was the International Baccalaureate (IB), which is an intense European-based college preparatory curriculum we had in Virginia Beach. They identified what they would call gifted students through a series of testing, and they would bus us from where we were living around Virginia Beach to this magnet school.

Generally speaking, my schooling experiences were extremely positive. I feel very grateful just for the medium of school itself. I feel like as a student if you are interested in what the teachers are teaching, they will generally respond positively to that, and that was my experience. I was a very enthusiastic student; always asking questions; always raising my hand; and to be honest, and especially during a lot of the formative years of my life, my teachers were heavy influencers of that. I had a lot of experiences that I still refer to today that helped shape me in a very positive way, so I am so grateful for the school system that we have in the United States, and the educational track that I went through. I feel like I definitely benefited from that.

Despite Porter’s praise for American schooling, the fact remains that the system is built upon a history of legal segregation and other forms of racial malice. He went on to explain specific incidents both in and out of the classroom that confirm this.

**Reading, Writing, and Racism**

My first experience with race was my mother telling me about a neighbor who was complaining about black people who had no idea that we were black. I don’t know why she couldn’t see that – I clearly look black as far as I’m concerned. But as far as schooling experiences, I think I first became aware that I looked different in first or second grade. I had this friend named Nathan who used to tease me and call me Nestle
Crunch because of my brown skin. And, you know, the majority of the students in our little group didn’t have brown skin. So they would say “you look like chocolate,” you know? They would say Nestle Crunch – that’s how they referred to me. That’s when I really started realizing “okay, my skin looks different.”

Despite being teased about his skin color, Porter views his past racial indignities as rare and isolated events, and views his overall experiences as positive. In the following statement, Porter recounts one of such adverse events that were less than positive in nature:

I remember very specifically. I had a friend. His name was Judd, and his mom was principal of the elementary school. And Judd, I guess, was in gifted because, you know, his mother was principal. I’m sure he was bright, too. He was a bright student. I remember him tell me, because we became friends, and I remember one day me, him, and these other boys, we were hanging out and Judd says like, “okay I’m having a birthday party this weekend.” And he said, “It’s going to be really fun.” And then he turns to me and says, “Porter, I’m sorry but you can’t come to the party because my mom said no black people allowed in the house.” And I remember thinking, “okay, and this means I’m somehow different even though we are friends and we are connected, your mom doesn’t see the similarities between us.” That was one of the first aha moments with race -- really I would say in retrospect, it was a learning moment. I don’t get to go to that friend’s party, and his mom was our principal. So, that was the first time that I had encountered having to deal with an authority in the system who did not perceive me through the same lens as other kids even though I was just as capable academically. You know, I had to be in order to be in the gifted program. I made the good grades, I was an eager and precocious student – all that, so why was my color an issue? So that was a
very disturbing yet memorable experience. It made me realize that I had to work twice as hard and that I had to be the best I could in everything that I involve myself with. So Kevin, I never had time to get caught up in race. I knew what I had to do, and I couldn’t let my skin color or anything else be the reason that I didn’t excel in school. I think I realized this at a pretty young age.

If school is truly a microcosm of society-at-large, then it makes sense that learning to socialize plays as much a role in our cognitive and social development as does math, science, and language arts. However, is it ever any parent’s intent to send their child to school to learn racism? For me, the discovery of racism was perhaps the boldest and most immediate of schooling lessons, especially in early education. Based on Porter’s story, he too seemed to have been unaware of racial disparity prior to it being introduced during K-12 schooling. In fact, as his story reflects, he seems to not have even recognized race at all prior to his early childhood schooling. Below, he shares experiences that depict the role that biases play in forging some of the racialized realities that introduce AAM students to racial disparity.

**Traditional AAM Biases**

_Around the time when I think the hip hop culture was becoming more commercially successful, you had groups like Kid ‘n Play and Kris Kross and all of that in the music and the lifestyle, the clothes, the chains, all that back East, you know. So, I remember we moved to Key West and I was in a new school. We moved kind of in the middle of the year. One of the first experiences that I had while living there – I was wearing – I had some suspenders on. During the school day one of my suspenders popped and so one was hanging off and the other was on. And, Kevin, you know, I was so nerdy I didn’t even know that was a style of Kris Kross and Kid ‘n Play. You know, they wore_
suspenders with a t-shirt under it and one might be hanging off. I had no idea. But I remember during the school day – I was in the 3rd grade – I was standing in the lunch line. The suspender was hanging off and I was standing there. My teacher grabbed me. She was an older lady by the name Miss Bieber. I just remember the energy. She grabbed me and jerked me aside. She was mean in the way she did it. Her energy was what I would say was myopic – very mean and dispirited in the way like she wanted to bite me like if she were an animal. She said, “Button up your clothes” in really tight lips. “Button up those right now! We don’t do that hip hop stuff here young man.” I remember her mouth was clenched and her teeth were really like tight and her lips were tight, and she was really angry at me. In retrospect, it was completely out of proportion to the degree of whatever she thought the offense was – completely out of proportion! Putting her hands on me, snatching me out of the line. You know, and as an adult, directing that kind of energy to a child. I was 8 years old and in my opinion that was completely uncalled for. I remember that did hurt. I felt ashamed. I didn’t know what I had done. I knew I had been attacked but I didn’t know why and why she had that kind of reaction from her and why when she said the word hip hop – no she said homeboy – we don’t do that homeboy thing here. I remember not really knowing what that was. I remember when I came back, I told Miss Bieber, “My dad said if you have a problem with Black people you can come to talk to him.” Her reaction was extreme embarrassment and she laughed in this very uncomfortable way as if she had been exposed and she said, “Oh no I don’t have a problem with Black people. My cousin is married to a Black person.” I suppose that gave her credit by association. I wonder to
The example shared by Porter reminds me of a personal experience from the fifth grade. At the time, I was fortunate to have recently been selected to serve as a page for the state capital in Topeka, Kansas. Representative Theo Cribbs was a member of the church my family attended, and asked me to participate. It was a great opportunity where state officials would select students to work in the capital building, running errands for state representatives and state senators, and in the process learn how state politics are conducted as well as receive financial compensation. Later that same week (after serving as a page), I had brought cornbread and beans to school for lunch. As our principal Mrs. Sandler was walking by, she noticed that I was crumbling my cornbread into my bowl of beans and immediately lashed out, ending her chastising rhetoric with “I wonder what Mr. Grubbs would think if he knew you did that!”

Never mind the implication that I had no father in the home and the notion to bypass my father and suggest that my role model and disciplinarian be Mr. Cribbs. Never mind not taking the time or consideration to properly pronounce Mr. Cribbs name. Other than not being physically grabbed, my situation was similar to that which Porter described. His teacher and my principal seemed to view us as a threat, but not because we were dangerous or violent. Rather than attempting to understand our cultural trends or our differences, we were attacked based on the cultural incompetency, shortcomings, and miseducation of these adults. I am not sure about Porter, but for me it goes as far as going through elementary school, never being noticed for anything positive or uplifting. It seems we are virtually unseen unless we are in trouble or for something negative.
I was very good at math. I loved math. I could figure out problems very quickly, and in third grade, I had a black teacher - Mrs. Shaw – she picked up on that, so when we did math assignments, I always finished super early and she would give me other things to do. I remember the following school year, on the first day of fourth grade, I took these math tests; very basic stuff; addition, subtraction, multiplication, very basic stuff. The teacher gave us a minute to do as many problems as we could on the page, and so we did the timed test. I finished all the problems and the next day, whoever had gotten the most right would win a prize. The next day, she got in front of the class – Mrs. Melinda was her name. And so she said, most people didn’t finish, and those who did finish, missed some. But there was one person who finished who actually only missed two. She got 98% and her name is Jody. And this is after she passed out all our tests, and she said “Jody, come up to the front.” So Jody got up and was glowing. But I remember also looking at my page, and I got 100%. Kevin! I finished all of the problems with 100% and not one wrong. And I remember thinking was “I guess she didn’t notice this.” So I raised my hand and I said “Hey, Mrs. Melinda” as Jody was walking up to the front. She turned to me and says “Yes Porter?” I got 100%!! And then she comes over and looks at my paper and she was surprised. She said “that’s right, I was wrong... I don’t know how I overlooked this. Maybe I was just grading them too quickly and just didn’t notice.” Then she said “class, I’m sorry – there was actually one person who got them all right and he got all of them done, and the winner is Porter.” Looking back on that, I sometimes wonder why it didn’t occur to her.
Among other similarities in our stories, one that immediately stood out was Porter sharing a school Christmas program where African American students were not represented. This immediately reminded me of seven years at Apple Elementary School and never seeing an African American student in a lead role in any school productions. Porter shared:

*In elementary school, I remember we did a Christmas show. The show had been designed so that none of the Black students had any roles and none of the Black students had any part and they were all in the back. That made a lot of the parents upset, because the school was extremely diverse in terms of student population. That triggered a lot of commotion among the parents. I remember all the black parents were upset and that they were complaining loudly. I think the principal and the music director were there and they clearly knew that they had upset the community. My mom got up there and I vaguely remember her in this conversation telling the principal and the music director that she was aware of how unjust that show was and how she didn’t understand how there weren’t any Black students who had any speaking roles nor were there any Black students in any prominent position on stage. You know, that was very clearly discrimination, I think.*

Porter’s examples of feeling invisible drew me into his narrative, clinging to each of his words as if those of my own. Sure, the faces and places were different, and the social parameters may have carried dissimilar cues, connections, and connotations. There are likely even cosmetic differences between our chosen courses of action as well as our interpretation of feeling unseen, unheard, and insignificant. Despite us living separate lives with unique individual stories, we shared commonality in the sense of a similar desire to be nurtured and enriched in a positive
manner; as well as sharing the reality of both experiencing subtle attempts by others to compromise these desires.

**Language Biases and Code Switching**

*People used to tell me I talked like a white boy and I never really knew what that meant. You know, I just thought I’m speaking the way I speak. I didn’t realize that there are these codes and this code switching that happens, especially with language. I think people can step into a paradigm that kind of informs them that there are certain parts of language that aren’t their own. I think that because I did own those spaces and that part of the language as my own, there were people within my own community – the black community – where that stood out.*

Porter continues speaking and shares examples of how using proper speech is perceived in predominately white circles.

*White people would always compliment how I spoke and would tell me that I would be first Black president. I remember thinking, is that all it takes – just being able to speak well? Is it really that easy? I think because of the sensitivity that Black people have with language, when we hear someone who doesn’t look like us say that “You are very articulate,” they might just be saying that about you as an individual, regardless of your race. But I think that because people like you and me growing up with people telling us you talk White, when a White person says “You are so articulate” to us, that can almost seem like a back-handed compliment. We sometimes take the subtext as the assumption that we shouldn’t be able to speak well – because of the color of our skin. I don’t think that every White person who says that means it in that manner. I believe that most people are fundamentally good people at heart. At the same time, I’m not so naïve that I don’t*
realize that some White people are saying that because they are truly surprised that a Black person uses proper grammar. That’s something to think about!

In continuing to discuss language, Porter shared another example that reinforces the dominant perspective in the context of whiteness and its prevailing narrative of privilege and entitlement:

When I got to middle school, teachers spotted my abilities with language, so they put me in these competitions – it was called forensics – it was public speaking – and we would have to learn these passages and we would have to recite these passages – these little stories in a competition format, and at the end of this there would be winners. I remember my first one. It was in the eighth grade. I remember I won. I remember after winning, I was walking with my trophy and I was waiting for my mom to come pick me up. And I remember there was a White women who walked up to me with her son, and her son had won second place. She walked up to me and she says, “You are the boy who took my son’s trophy.” And she walked away. I remember thinking “No, this is my trophy.” I remember her being an adult coming up to a child and it was almost as if she was trying to bite me in some way. But I don’t have any hard feelings. I can take you back to public speaking, winning state titles and championships and all that in high school, and those teachers who encouraged me to do that type of stuff – they are still in my life today, so despite this one bad example with a White lady who attacked me – and maybe it was more about favoring her kid than it was about race, I don’t know. But I have had some very positive experiences with White people as well as blacks – teachers especially.

I appreciated that Porter shared several positive encounters to offset every disparaging situation. This reminded me that despite the attempts of several teachers to compromise my schooling
experiences, it only took a handful of amazing teachers (black, white, male, and female) to make a positive difference in my education and my life. Exceptional White teachers like my junior year English teacher Mrs. Hooper, or my seventh grade History teacher, Mr. Poston provided great encouragement and mentorship. These individuals looked at the learning potential of students rather than viewing them through lenses of stereotypical imagery and implicit bias. I only wish I would have had more teachers who took their cues from these individuals. Based on the perspectives of Porter and other participants, it seems that all parties had better classroom experiences when racial biases were minimal or non-existent. Teachers who fail to minimize classroom bias run the risk of creating unhealthy and uncomfortable competitive friction between AAMs and teachers as well as White students. Porter describes this type of environment below:

**Competitive Biases**

_There were times in high school when I did realize that some students saw me as some kind of competition, but I didn’t realize it was because of race. I thought it was something else. As an adult, I do know that in some cases perhaps it was implicit bias and perhaps they had absorbed some messaging along the ways of society that had affected how they perceived themselves in relation to me, that maybe they weren’t even aware of. Therefore, I have become aware that people at times do perceive themselves in competition with me for whatever reason, and I think that a lot of that has to do with the paradigm in this space and time – in this society and what I represent. But I do think that a lot of times the way our social paradigm is structured, competition in relation to one another, unless you are friends who are building each other up, if you perceive someone as not on your team in any kind of way – whether that’s a racial team, whether that’s an intellectual team, whether that’s a religious team – I think that is unhealthy. So for me,
that has never been a form of motivation. That’s never been how I motivate myself. I am very intrinsically motivated and I become inspired rather than edged on by whether someone perceives me as not being able to do something. I don’t feel like I have to prove anything to anybody.

I am a very competitive and confident person, so I have always found competition to be a driving force for me and my accomplishments. Once I recognized this within myself, I used the biases of others as fuel to drive me to be better. In speaking with some of the other participants, I found this to be the case for them as well. Porter expresses competition in a different manner. Despite being aware that forces existed which viewed him as a competitive threat, and that some of this was potentially related to his race, he shared that he never needed that to fuel him to be his best. He did imply however that unhealthy competitive threats may be one source for his distrust for authority. He speaks of this distrust in the next section:

Consequences: Distrust of Authority

Incidents like not being recognized for being the only student with 100% on my math test made me process things differently. For me, one lingering effect is distrust of authority, and we can take that and expand it out to a larger thing as it pertains to the black man in society. I could have let it devastate me, but for me I think that I turned it into a healthy thing because I learned to be empowered through that. Here I was in just fourth grade, and I already realized that authority can’t be trusted, and that I need to be doing my due diligence; and it’s a subconscious thing. Thinking about the math test again, maybe it was an oversight, but maybe my teacher wanted the white girl to succeed because she saw herself in that student. Maybe her biases enabled her to see that student as one who
would be successful of the two of us. I don’t know. I do think that that goes on sometimes in some people’s sub-conscious.

I think back to getting in trouble in elementary school and requesting my school principal to contact my father rather than my mother who was recovering from a hysterectomy. Ignoring my request based on what I assume was the bias that an AAM fifth grade student could not possibly have a father in the home who was engaged in his upbringing, Mrs. Sandler (my principal) opted to bypass my father and contact my mother who was in surgery recovery. Situations such as this informed me that despite being taught to respect my elders, I could not trust the actions and intentions of all adults. It is saddening that schooling is the place where both Porter and I learned this valuable lesson. Porter would revisit this lesson again through marginalization that took place during his time in a very rigorous math course for gifted students.

**Consequences: Frustration with Rigorous Math**

*Like I mentioned earlier Kevin, I had an affinity towards math and I was good at math, but it didn’t occur to my parents how important it was to have the tools to compete. I remember in ninth grade, we needed this super advanced calculator to do Algebra and Trigonometry. Before the school year starts, we had summer assignments. We spent the summer with assignments and written homework, and before I started the program, I told my dad that I needed the calculator. I remember my dad was just like “I’m not buying you a $100 calculator,” and he got me this calculator that was like $10 – you know that calculator you have on your computer that does math, just like a flat thing. It was just like for addition, subtraction, and uh you know – division basically. I remember showing up in this class and I’m the only ninth grader in the advanced-advanced math class, and everybody has the calculator and I pull out this $10 basic calculator, and I remember*
how people looked at me you know? Sitting there with my calculator for the first couple weeks and not able to do the work that we needed to do because my calculator didn’t have the sophistication to do the geometry, trigonometry, all the higher level calculus and all the higher level stuff. My teacher noticed, so she gave me a calculator to use for class, but I couldn’t take it home because it belonged to the school. And so, because I was precocious and couldn’t take it home, my buddy would sometimes let me borrow his calculator and I would go home and try to figure out how to do this math work. I would either try to remember it when I was writing it down, or he would sometimes let me borrow his calculator when he finished and then, early in the morning before school starts, someone would let me borrow their calculator so I could finish the homework. I actually did pretty well, even though I wasn’t able to practice. I became skilled in doing the work, so I got A’s and sometimes B’s.

He continues to speak, explaining with frustration the feeling that he was not given a fair chance to continue competing in math at the highest possible level:

The next year, we were in a different level of the math, and the same thing happened over the summer. I don’t know why it didn’t occur to me – looking back – why didn’t I just save my own money and buy the damn calculator, but keep in mind, I was 14. I wasn’t thinking like that even though I was working over the summer at the pizza shop. But I remember the same thing happened and I had to have this calculator to do this work, yet the same argument – “I’m not buying you a hundred dollar calculator! You can do the work on the calculator I bought you.” Again, I don’t think my father understood the type of work we were doing, so all summer we had to do these summer assignments, and this particular summer, I couldn’t use my buddy’s calculator because he was in and out of
I tried the best I could to figure things out without the calculator, despite the core curriculum of these subjects being made around this instrument. When we started the class, my teacher Mrs. Tompkins handed back our assignments, and I didn’t do well on the summer assignment. I remember how she looked at me the first few weeks of class. It was a feeling Kevin, and I think you know that feeling - that I didn’t really belong there. There never was a question of why or an attempt to find the reason of why I didn’t do well. What’s the story there, you know? It was like he didn’t do well, and he doesn’t belong here. It wasn’t a good feeling. So the first test, I did okay – maybe like a C or something like that. I remember saying that I know that I can do this work but I don’t have the calculator, and uh, she said, “well I will let you borrow one from the school, but how do you know you can do the work?” I said, “well I did well last year and I got mostly A’s in the class.” Regardless, she made the decision that I couldn’t do the work and that I would need to redo the previous math class. It didn’t occur to her that maybe if she gave me the tools and gave me time to go through everything, I could do the work. We were still doing high level work, but it wasn’t the highest level work. I’m not sure why the school wouldn’t let my parents know that I needed this expensive device, but they never did. All of this may have contributed to lessening my interest in mathematics, and my career choice being non-math related.

Porter continues this portion of his story by sharing how this experience may have been the result of unwitting biases and how this ultimately discouraged him to the point that it changed his academic trajectory moving forward,

I was the only Black student in the advanced-advanced math program, and I was the first. The program was only five years old when we got there, and all the Black people knew
each other from the year before. So I knew, I was the first advanced-advanced Black student in the history of the program and I’m male. I wonder sometimes was she (Mrs. Tompkins) implicitly biased against me? Did she have a self-fulfilling prophecy? She was quick to believe I didn’t belong there after not doing well on one test. Rather than investigating further or offering ways that could assist in my success, she just made the decision that ultimately discouraged my trajectory in math. I’m not complaining, Kevin. I was still in the advanced math class, but I had already taken the advanced math the prior year and did well. I wonder sometimes – I started directing more of my attention towards language and the liberal arts instead of math, and I feel like part of the reason is because of that experience.

I am certain that my parents never missed opportunities to advocate for my education, but I can say that like Porter, I am familiar with a math teacher attempting to hold me back. This was my eighth grade math teacher Mr. Penske (a white man) who recommended to the school that I be placed in remedial math in ninth grade rather than Algebra. Fortunately for me, I had a strong system of advocates who protected me from this and other attacks. Porter describes similar advocacy channels below paying tribute to his parents, certain teachers, and even to himself as factors that helped guide him through K-12 successfully.

**Parental Advocacy**

*Academic success for me, and to an extent life success, started with my mother. Every home environment comes with its own dynamics. I do think that one of the things that was instilled from a very young age to me and my sisters was that we could do anything that we invested in or wanted to do. And that, I know, came from my mother. I think that my parents believed that we had access to all parts of society and all parts of culture. My*
parents were very young, so I don’t fault them for the things I have become aware of in how some of my friends who were also in gifted classes, how I saw their parents rearing them and supporting them through that process. But I think that the sense of freedom in terms of my perception of this society and my access to it have been instilled by my parents, especially my mother. I don’t know if they did that consciously. I think they did it based on how they saw the world.

Teacher Advocacy

I think teachers in general – are for the most part good. I do think there are some bad apples in the bunch. I’ve had good Black teachers and White teachers who have made a positive influence, some of both races that I am still in contact with today because of the influence they have had on my life. Unfortunately, there are some people who have been poisoned and have come into the system carrying biases. Generally speaking though, most teachers decided to become a teacher because they wanted to have a positive influence on the world and on other people’s lives, and I feel like that has been my journey. There was a bad principal in Texas, sure. There was a bad teacher who grabbed me and made some snarky comment about hip-hop, but at the end of the day and out of all the many teachers I had, it’s basically a handful, and I’m not denying that there are systemic problems in certain school districts and certain systems that definitely have to be addressed. And I’m not saying that just because I’m an individual who has had successful experiences, doesn’t mean that the system is not broken, because I think in lots of communities and for many people it is, and I don’t know how to fix it – it’s not my job, but you know I feel like we do have to put attention into figuring out how to raise the level of consciousness for all kids involved in it now. This is why I love your study – I
like what you’re doing. Having a study like this sheds light in areas where we still need work. If you are able to get your research published, you’re going to do a lot of good for a lot of people in a lot of ways and I feel very grateful to be a part of it.

Self-Advocacy

Like I said, we have this one life we have to live, and I think that this is something I’ve learned as an individual. I can’t spend all my time replaying moments. All I have is right now and the time forward, and I think that we should try to learn from the things that may have been negative or I could still be hurt by them, and I just don’t think we have time for that. I don’t think we’ve got time to be hurt by that. But that’s not to say that things don’t need to be rectified, so when people talk about the disparities that have happened, since the racism, the genocide, all those 100s of years since Africans have come here; you know, when people talk about that stuff, I’m like – we definitely need to rectify all that because we can still see traces of obvious disparities because of this insidious behavior. Just because I’ve had one or two experiences that are negative experiences, I don’t characterize my journey by those experiences. I feel that I learn and grow from them. But that’s an individual thing. As an adult, I look at how -- I’m very aware that just because I may have been able to navigate these spaces and come out fine, I realize how there are lots of students and lots of people who aren’t. We live in a system in which there are teachers and authority figures who have these biases, prejudices, and they have the ability to grade students, to suggest which students get to learn what, to influence the trajectory of these kids’ lives. That is very dangerous. So, I feel very grateful for my life. I definitely believe in justice, but as individual, I can’t be hung up on which person did this to me and why. You know, I don’t have time for that. I can just try
to use my life to maybe represent a healthy side, and we do have a lot to celebrate and be grateful for. And regardless of experiences that may have been negative, I think that part of a rich full journey, no matter what your background is and whoever you are, or what your struggle is, a part of a rich journey is having challenges and obstacles and growing from them. And that is a personal thing. I don’t say this to relinquish responsibility from any bad actors, but as an individual, as far as the emotional journey that I’ve chosen to walk through this life with, I just have to let it go to move forward.

From Porter’s perspective, the combination of involved parents, caring teachers, and self-motivation seemed to work in his favor. While I had the luxury of having one great teacher in elementary school, I can say that in middle school and high school I was fortunate to have several amazing teachers as part of my educational trajectory. However, no force was more impactful than my parents who defended me from biases such as those possessed by Mr. Penske (the eighth grade math teacher mentioned previously). He argued that I was not a good math student and that I was not prepared for high school mathematics. My counter-argument was that he would appear frustrated whenever I would request for him to explain things. My parents could care less about either argument. The meeting ended with my parents explaining to Mr. Penske and to my principal that I would be taking Algebra the following school year, and that there was nothing else to discuss. Mr. Penske looked my parents in the face and told them that this was a huge mistake and that I would certainly fail Algebra. My father in attempt to contain his temper said nothing, but I remember him giving the type of glare that you see on the faces of two fighters prior to a fist fight. My mother remained calm, and with a smirk on her face replied “I guess we will have to wait and see.” The next year, I received an A in Algebra each of the four quarters during my ninth grade year, and since ninth graders were still housed in the middle
schools at that time, it was convenient to honor my mother’s request and visit Mr. Penske to show him each quarterly report card.

**Credence Grace**

Credence is a 39-year-old gym owner, personal trainer, successful entrepreneur, and proud father of two small sons, ages three and five. He graduated high school in 1998, and received a Bachelor’s degree in Business Marketing from Kansas State University in 2002. The Wichita Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce allowed me to attend one of their monthly meetings, where I presented the nature of my study. One of the members felt that Credence was a good fit and had him contact me. After a brief phone screening, I agreed that his experiences aligned well with the nature of the study, so we arranged to meet face-to-face. Like myself, his entire K-12 schooling took place in the Wichita Public Schools. Following our conversation, we spoke about possibly having a second meeting. After combing through the data, I felt that I had what I needed, but we did have a brief telephone conversation just to clarify some of the recording that I was having trouble hearing. Listed below is how Credence views his K-12 schooling.

**Young, Black, and Gifted**

*I was the only minority male or female in the gifted program in elementary school. The only one! Since I was in the gifted program, I had to transfer schools several times. Between the gifted program and moving from the Westside to the Eastside, I attended four schools in five years. I wasn’t just the only black kid – I don’t remember any minorities being in gifted at any of the elementary schools I attended, but when I got to middle school, I wasn’t the only one. By middle school, I was still the only black kid, just not the only person of color. I had a lot of frustrations throughout my schooling, but*
once I got into gifted, school got a little better for me. Before gifted, I was bored in the regular classes. You know they always use their opinions on our kids, because they don’t know or care to know anything about us, so I would get labeled a trouble maker rather than a smart student or an active student. Never mind the fact that I would get my work done and it would be done correctly. I guess my teachers didn’t recognize that. So I would get done with my work then get restless and cause issues. The simple fix would have been to give me more challenging work. Instead, teachers assumed I was just a troubled kid. Funny how that was never the case with White students who had a higher than average aptitude. They seemed to always recognize the need to move them to more advanced learning, but for me I was a trouble maker - that’s typically the opinion. So instead of finding something academic that would keep me occupied since I was doing well, the assumption was “He’s a bad kid and prone to get in trouble.” I’m sure a lot of us could have qualified for gifted, but many slip through the cracks. I was fortunate to have a teacher who thought I should get tested, and like I said before, that helped a lot.

But being in gifted didn’t end my issues with school racism.

Credence continues to share his experiences being in the gifted program, expressing that although being in gifted isolated him from some of the frustrations of racial marginalization, there were an emergence of new and unique racial disparities that paralleled the gifted program specifically:

I had to test to get into gifted, so my academic capability was never really questioned.

My bigger frustration was that they didn’t understand where I was coming from, nor try to understand me in terms of cultural differences. My parents weren’t together, so as far as they knew, I was raised solely by a single parent. I was with my mom all the time, so I
feel like they made a lot of incorrect assumptions based on that and never tried to explore further to see that those assumptions were wrong. Typical assumptions – poverty, broken home, or whatever else they may have assumed incorrectly. Essentially, they had a lack of exposure to minority students and didn’t know anything outside of preprogrammed biases that they were comfortable with. So, when I had trouble understanding something, I was viewed as some frustrated and troubled kid who had problems in the home, whereas the white kids would simply have the assignment re-explained until they understood the content. Instead of caring that I understood the content, teachers would say “he seems frustrated, so let’s give him a treat.” So again, they wouldn’t take the time or have the care to teach me. They would try to make me go away by giving me a snack, but still I wouldn’t understand the assignment and they wouldn’t make additional attempts to explain it. I would simply ask for an assignment to be explained for clarity, and the response was like “You seem frustrated. Are you okay? Here, have a piece of candy.” The gifted work was hard and everyone had questions from time to time, but I was the only minority in most cases, and it seemed like I was the only student who they had a problem answering questions for. As far as they were concerned, White kids were curious and I was troubled and frustrated for the exact same behaviors. I wasn’t confrontational, I just wanted to understand the lesson. Instead, I was pacified with a snack!

Although I was not in the gifted program like Credence, we share the commonality of being victim to the cultural incompetency of our teachers. Fourth and fifth grades come to mind when I think about being labeled rather than being challenged with classwork that was more rigorous. In both grades (fourth and fifth) the top two math students in the class were me and a White male
named Jeff. Both of us were always the first two students to complete our assignments, with typically no incorrect answers. Jeff was continuously encouraged, received verbal applause from our teachers, and given more rigorous work. I was typically told to sit down and shut up, or to recheck my work. I eventually got tired of this type of mistreatment and since I could not get the positive attention that I desired for being good in math, I found that I could accomplish this by becoming the in-class singer, entertainer, and comedian. While this was not a healthy way to deal with my problems, from a child’s point of view it gave me the opportunity to live out my desires to perform for an audience, while simultaneously retaliating against my teachers. I would imagine that most students desire to be heard and understood, and will find ways to do so no matter how unhealthy. Unlike being the class clown like me, Credence’s method was to release his frustrations through leveraging his athletic gifts and talents. However, he even experienced racial discrimination for possessing these talents as he shared below:

**Young, Black, and Athletic**

Looking back on it, it’s interesting how I was not expected to be smart because I played sports – basketball and football. In fact, when I was in high school, there were two of us athletes in the International Baccalaureate program. This was like gifted on steroids – extremely rigorous curriculum. I think when my teachers first saw me in IB (International Baccalaureate), I think initially they thought I was in the wrong class. Anyway, there were only two athletes in the program, me and this one other guy – a White guy who also played football. He didn’t seem to have any problems navigating through sports and IB at the same time. If he didn’t understand something, they gave him help. They encouraged him and gave him the tools to be successful. My experiences were way different. I remember simply asking a teacher to explain something, and being
told blatantly, “You’re not going to get this.” It’s like, they didn’t even give me a chance to prove that I could do the work. He gave up on me before I even got started, simply making an assumption that I didn’t belong in the IB program based on, I don’t know, how I looked or whatever the case was. It was almost like elementary all over again, where teachers would do anything just to get me to go away. They just didn’t always like helping me for whatever reason. Another teacher encouraged me to choose one or the other – IB or sports, leaning heavily towards hoping I would choose sports, informing me that “It’s going to be really hard for you to do both.” The same teacher never said that to the White kid I mentioned earlier. They basically pushed who they wanted to see excel in there, and more or less discouraged who they didn’t. I think a lot of this was race driven. I regret this now, but I ended up dropping out of the IB program during my sophomore year. Of course, then high school became like elementary school all over again. After doing the most rigorous work the school and really the district had to offer, the regular classes weren’t challenging and so I was bored all over again.

I participated in high school sports, but not to a great extent. Therefore, rather than sharing my story, the story of Darius Wallace provides a better example. Wallace is the primary character in the movie “Finding Forrester.” Though a fictitious character, he mirrors the very real stereotyping of AAM athletes as experienced by Credence. Wallace is an inner-city black kid, whose athletic prowess awards him the opportunity to attend an elite, all white, college preparatory academy where it is discovered that he is an exceptional writer. Rather than being applauded for this skill, he is accused of plagiarism because, as the story reveals, it is believed that his essay is far too good to be written by a basketball player (Spigelman, 2002). The script could have very well replaced basketball player with black kid in the same manner that I
interchangeably substitute Black for African American throughout the present paper. While Credence does not come from a poverty-stricken home like Wallace, he has faced similar experiences of prejudice due to unwarranted biases that associate AAM athletes with unintelligent. In addition to biases of White teachers questioning Credence’s academic capacity, White peers often rationalized his athletic talent with stereotypes and racial myths. He shares,

   *My White teammates always wanted to make an excuse for my athleticism. I couldn’t be good because I worked hard, or because I trained hard, ate right, exercised or anything like that. Instead, there was always a discussion about some alleged extra muscle that blacks developed during slavery that makes us faster or able to jump higher. After a while, it gets annoying the stuff people come up with. I’m better than you at sports because I work harder than you or because I’m more talented than you, but it seems like they need something else, and they believe that hard work could never be the reason. I guess it goes back to the myth of being lazy or what not. I’m not sure what it is exactly, but it definitely is related to race. It’s like they had to have something they could say that would in their mind even the playing field and make an excuse for why they couldn’t beat me.*

I remember being in high school when sports commentator Jimmy Snyder (commonly known as Jimmy the Greek) was fired for making the statement that attributed African American athleticism to breeding that took place during slavery. Even now, I cringe when watching a sporting event where commentators overemphasize a narrative of athleticism with black athletes, and intelligence with white athletes. Credence continues to share additional biases that he encountered that are likely common for many AAMS.
Common and Enduring AAM Biases

Hair was always a big thing since our hair texture is typically different from White kids. “What do you put in it? Is it greasy? Can I touch it?” Things like that were common – we dealt with that all the time. I always found it kinda’ weird and offensive that White kids had the nerve to ask if they could touch my hair, but that happened. It was also weird to be under constant scrutiny of classmates who probably weren’t really trying to be racist, who knows. Maybe they were just young curious kids. It wasn’t just hair though. They would ask other questions like “What do you guys do different for Christmas” or “What type of food do you eat” and stuff like that too. Whether the intent was to be racial or not, I always felt like they were asking those type of questions to confirm what they learned at home or what someone told them about us, so it was all from stereotypes and biases. I’m pretty sure some of these conversations were heard by the teachers, but they never did anything to stop it. Most of them probably wondered the same questions, but that in itself is a problem that they didn’t seem to see anything wrong with that. White kids asking if they could touch our hair like we were at a petting zoo or something like that. Many of these kids were typically older than I was as well, so in addition to being culturally inappropriate, most of these kids were older and bigger, so there’s that element as well. It’s funny that a lot of the same kids who probably complained about Black history month and having to learn about Black people were interested in touching my hair for some reason. Especially when the whole hair design thing got popular. We used to get designs and things cut into our hair, and pretty soon, a lot of the White kids, well White guys, they would start trying to imitate those styles and trends.
Failure to understand African American culture can potentially compromise healthy academic and social schooling experiences. This applies to teachers and administrators, as well as students. As Credence’s counter-story illustrates, AAMs commonly witness the mocking of our cultural uniqueness rather than respecting and embracing them, yet those mocking our uniqueness often have the audacity to imitate it. When educators lack cultural competence, their implicit biases also have a tendency to spill into learning curriculum as Credence explains below.

**Cultural Identity and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

*When I think back, I never had the opportunity to learn about anybody who looked like me or any contributions from anyone other than White people. We studied American History every year, but learned very little about the passage or Black inventors. Other than in February, we didn’t get much. Even then, we would just kind of brush through it and move on. How do you expect a kid to reach for the stars when none of the stars that you celebrate in the classroom look like him? Even worse, how can you expect me to excel in school when you treat me like I don’t belong? I had a hard time because we had teachers who had no faith in the Black students and a learning curriculum that had no focus on anything Black, or any Black excellence. To add insult to injury, by the time I got to high school, I had a terrible guidance counselor who was just lazy and not helpful. She was White, and I don’t know if she was like this with the White kids or not, but she really could have cared less about whether or not I was successful. I remember spending a lot of time frustrated and even feeling isolated, because I just didn’t think I had a support system who wanted me to succeed. I think for a kid, that’s half the battle – having someone in your corner who is pushing you to be successful. I had my mom, and*
other family members, and people like that, but as far as in the school, I didn’t feel like I had anybody.

I was saddened but not shocked to learn that Credence’s lack of exposure to culturally relevant pedagogy was not much different from mine, despite our 11-year age difference. During my schooling, not only was cultural relevance not embraced – it was in many cases attacked. One incident took place in sixth grade. Prior to Martin Luther King’s birthday being nationally recognized as a holiday, my parents always took us (my brother and I) out of school to celebrate Dr. King’s legacy. I informed my teacher Mr. McKnight of the upcoming event and delivered a note from my parents excusing me from class. Though I handed him the memo in private, Mr. McKnight made a public spectacle of my parent’s request, seemingly attempting to embarrass me in front of my peers. This was almost 40 years ago, but I can quote him as if it were yesterday. “I don’t know why you people think that this should be a holiday. When people die, we bury them and forget about them. I don’t think this is a good idea. I think you need to be in school.” Strangely enough, George Washington’s birthday was the following month, during which time Mr. McKnight proudly announced how great a man he was, and how important it is to not just view this as a day out of school, but a true celebration of America. For Credence, the combination of no Black experiences, no guidance from his counselor, and a complete feeling of isolation and lack of protection led to frustration and even physical altercations which he discusses in part below.

Consequences – Frustration and Physical Altercations

I think it was pretty obvious that I was frustrated – I mean, there were signs throughout school. When I was in early grades, like second and third, I was fighting all the time. This was at Hike Elementary School. Other schools, the racism was subtle – you know,
kids asking about things they didn’t understand like hair and food. At Hike though, kids used the “N” word all the time. I had a lot of daily aggression because of this and ended up in a lot of fist fights, mostly with older kids. Kids are going to be kids, so if they learned to talk that way in the home, I can’t blame the teachers for that. What I hated though was that teachers would try to make excuses for this type of behavior when it came from White kids. Here I was in like second grade, and I was fighting fifth and sixth graders all the time. Instead of teachers investigating why older kids were picking on a student three and four grades younger, or trying to find out my perspective, they protected the White kids and turned it into questions about what I did to make them pick on me or to upset them. They had the audacity to think that I was the one instigating these fights with kids who were older and bigger, and never once saw that maybe I was the victim.

Thinking back to my schooling, never do I recall the school taking responsibility for negligent teachers, nor do I remember blame for much of anything being placed on White students. I had a fight with a White student named Ron who called me the “N” word several times. I told my fourth grade teacher Mrs. Heart but she nonchalantly blew me off, mentioning something or another about words being incapable of harming people. To say that words do not hurt may be one of the dumbest things I have ever heard, and even as a kid I felt this way. After several more inappropriate comments still referencing me by the “N” word and calling me his slave, I snapped and attacked him. I got in trouble for starting the fight, but he was never addressed for his grossly unsuitable conduct. He never bothered me again, but the school should have protected me from this type of attack that likely stemmed from behaviors Ron learned at home. Credence
explains in further detail how a student may feel when teachers and other adults fail to provide an environment of protection for students.

**Consequences – Isolation**

*There were definitely times that I felt isolated. My parents more or less raised me not to question or challenge authority, so that was always in the back of my mind, despite being targeted. So at times, I really didn’t feel like there was anyone who I could have a discussion about this stuff with. None of my friends were in gifted programs, so other than at practice, I really didn’t see most of them throughout the day. This was especially the case when we got into IB, because it’s almost like you’re in a separate school. They kept the IB students in a completely separate hallway with very little interaction with the other students. So, most of my friends didn’t understand what I was going through most of the time. A lot of my teammates were too busy teasing me to know that I was actually hurting. Things like laughing and saying “I see you’ve been with the smart kids all day.” Most of my teachers didn’t understand me to begin with, whether it be because I was Black, or because I was an athlete, or maybe something else. Either way, most of them weren’t advocates for me. So I more or less had to fend for myself and carry a lot of animosity inside. I just really didn’t have anyone I could share these things with. Like I said earlier, I finally got frustrated and no longer wanted to be in the IB program, so I ended up dropping out of the program altogether. I didn’t know what else to do at that point.*

We all want to experience feeling a sense of safety and belonging, but sometimes this comfort ceases to exist, even within the spaces where we are exceptional. When the protections that accompany fulfilling our basic needs are unavailable, a fight or flight mentality will potentially
emerge. For me it was quitting vocal music and theater in elementary school, and not pursuing these passions again until my senior year of high school. For Credence, this resulted in him dropping out of the IB Program. He shared that he regrets ever dropping out of IB, but despite that, is proud that he found ways to motivate himself and still go on to graduate high school and college.

Consequences – Motivation

Despite dropping out of IB, which I really shouldn’t have done, and I really wish someone would have tried to talk me into sticking with it. But despite that, I finished school with pretty decent grades, and was able to go to college and get my degree. I think part of this has to do with me pushing myself and having positive conversations with myself. I would tell myself “I am smart enough; I belong here; and I don’t have to cheat.” The same racism that tried to hurt me, and in some ways it did hurt me like with fights, and dropping out of IB, or getting a snack instead of getting help on lessons. But that same racism is what motivated me to prove my teachers wrong. I think I wanted to work hard and prove a point that I could be successful despite what any of them may have thought about me and despite whatever biases they may have had.

Credence’s counter-narrative speaks to resilience, and visiting with him reminded me that I have been resilient as well. We may have both given up on particular activities that we were passionate about. We may have even allowed ourselves to get pushed out of social spaces where biases made us feel unwelcomed. Through it all though, we both had supportive people in our corner who never gave up on us, and consequently, we never gave up on ourselves.
Micah Goins

Micah Goins is a 33-year-old AAM, born and raised in Newport News, VA. He attended predominately white public schools, but grew up in a black neighborhood characterized by drugs, crime, and other accoutrement symbolizing the perils of socioeconomic disparity. In 2005 Micah graduated high school, and in 2009 he received a Bachelor’s degree in Public and Urban Affairs from Virginia Tech. He is currently employed with a university in the Midwest where he serves in the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC). Micah’s work involves supporting adults over the age of 19 who are interested in returning to school. Prior to working with adults in continuing education, he ran afterschool programs in both Baltimore, Maryland and Richmond, Virginia, where he helped fifth through eighth graders with mentoring, tutoring, and homework assistance. Micah was an above average student in K-12, and is passionate about education. As a result, he consistently performed well in class and was afforded the opportunity to attend highly rigorous honors programs throughout elementary, middle school, and high school. I met Micah when hosting a mixer for a local organization called Urban Professional comprised of young multiethnic professionals. Our meeting led to a phone screening, which led to an in-person meeting to explore his K-12 schooling in greater detail.

Positive Encounters with Male Teachers (Black and White)

I had a Black female teacher in second grade, then didn’t have another black teacher until high school. Between then, I had some very good white teachers as well. The first black teacher I had in high school was my World History teacher my junior year, then again my senior year Government teacher. Both of these teachers were black males, but more importantly was just having exposure to male teachers in general. That was positive for me. I had my first white male teacher in eighth grade, which was also a
rewarding experience. I just think it is important to have someone who understands your perspectives both culturally, as well as from the perspective of gender, so we need more male teachers, period. Just having that representation is huge! Having AAM teachers was great for me, because it is something that I think dispels a lot of stereotypes, like Black men don’t have patience, because they were very patient with me. They were also mentors, advocates, coaches, etc. I had several great teachers, but the difference between the Black males and other teachers is that they pushed me even more. They wouldn’t let me slack off.

I had one African American male teacher throughout my schooling, and that was my middle school physical education teacher, Coach Jefferson. During ninth grade, following a school pep rally, Coach Jefferson requested for all the African American male ninth graders to stay for a separate meeting. Roughly 50 black males between the ages of fourteen and fifteen were challenged to change the narrative of how AAMs were viewed in our school. He informed us that we were all leaders and that the other students in the school would follow whatever social trends we established. He then challenged each of us to start wearing ties every Friday, guaranteeing us that the White males would soon follow suit. Two months later, over half the males in the entire school were wearing ties on Fridays. Coach Jefferson empowered an entire population of AAMs to witness our potential to lead and influence others. In addition to the influence of Black and White male teachers, Micah goes on to share positive experiences with female teachers in the same manner.

Positive Encounters with Female Teachers and Administrators (Black and White)

There was a time when I was uncomfortable, when I didn’t feel prepared. I think growing up, I didn’t ask for a lot of help ‘cause I didn’t want to be perceived as not
getting it, especially being the only black male in most of my classes. I knew I was smart and I knew I could do my work, or that I was just as capable of doing my work as any of my White peers. For some reason though, maybe being the only African American in some of the more rigorous academic settings may have given me a feeling that I was being over scrutinized. I don’t think looking back at it that I was over scrutinized, but back then it did weigh on my conscious just a little bit. It wasn’t until I got to high school that I forced myself to get over that, and I finally decided to get some help when I was having trouble in Geometry. I had a white female teacher named Mrs. Colfax who made time to sit down with me and work with me after school and is one of my favorite teachers to this day. Thanks to her, I was able to pass that class and do well, and I think I got a B. More than that though, she instilled in me the confidence that I could succeed even when things were tough. For me, this meant the world because whatever issues I was having internally about being the only black person in honors classes – this pretty much removed that doubt and empowered me to know that I was just as competent and capable as anyone else in this or any other class. This carried on in college being the only Black or only one of a few in Army ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps). As a matter of fact, I would say that my encounter with this one Geometry teacher is why even today I can walk proudly into a room even if I am the only African American male in the room, and feel like I belong there.

I have found that the greatest significance of having African American teachers is that they tend to be more culturally competent than White teachers. However, I think that when White teachers choose to look outside the lenses of privilege and implicit bias, they can be equally effective. That said, I had a White teacher in high school who in addition to being an exceptional teacher,
was very culturally aware and proactive in reaching students of all ethnic populations. This was Mrs. Hooper – my junior year English teacher. Early on, she noticed that I had a gift for creative writing and word placement, but I lacked a strong foundation for sentence structure, parts of speech, and punctuation. For no extra pay or recognition, she took time outside of her assigned schedule to ensure that I was equipped with the tools needed to be prepared for college. Thanks to Mrs. Hooper, I never received less than an A on any written essay in high school, college, or graduate school from that point on. Teachers like Mrs. Colfax for Micah and Mrs. Hooper for me were necessary and valuable for our scholastic enrichment. Within the context of sharing positive experiences with teachers and administrators, Micah goes on to share his encounter with an African American counselor in high school.

Counselors really pushed me too. They saw potential in me. I had a black guidance counselor who went to an HBCU, and because of her I applied and got into an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), Hampton University. I ended up choosing a PWI (Predominately White Institution) - VA Tech, because they gave me more scholarship money. VA Tech has a huge Army ROTC presence, and although Hampton is a great college, I wouldn’t have been able to receive the same funding as I did for pretty much serving my country while attending school, so ROTC was a great opportunity. But I appreciate her. My senior year, I was in the guidance counselor’s office every day learning about different colleges and what I needed to do in order to prepare. Making sure I knew when the ACT and SATs were being offered. Making sure I was enrolled in the best courses to prepare me for college. Anything I could do to better my post high school chances, she was there for me with ideas and solutions. I will say that I was
fortunate, because I would say that my teachers and counselors were very helpful in encouraging me and pushing me to do the right thing.

I had the good fortune of having an African American counselor and an African American assistant principal in high school also. Mrs. Janice and Mr. Samuel were their names, and I have a friendship with both of them to this day. What I remember the most about experiences with Mrs. Janice was that she placed an emphasis on resume building and college preparation early on, long before I even understood what resume building was. This came in the form of challenging me to take tougher courses rather than opting for the easy route, and encouraging me to start preparing early for the ACT exam. With Mr. Samuel, the encouragement came in the form of having an African American adult male present in the building everyday who would advocate for the AAM students. Sometimes this was as simple as a pat on the back or a handshake and words of encouragement, and other times it was forcing the school to find ways to discipline AAM students by means other than suspensions and expulsions. Speaking with Micah was refreshing, as it was also refreshing to speak with an AAM who had a great support system while in high school. Despite being a great student, Micah possessed the dual consciousness of wanting challenging himself to achieve optimally at school, which conflicted with the belief that good grades would be frowned upon by his peers. While strong advocacy along with the desire to achieve likely assisted Micah in overcoming this barrier, it was still something he felt worthy of discussing, as shared below.

**Young, Black, Gifted, and Dual Consciousness**

I would characterize myself as an above average student. A switch turned on for me after third grade when I started realizing that I wanted to make good grades for me. Once that switch turned on, I started making mostly all A’s. Sometimes A’s and B’s. I liked seeing
my name in the newspaper and recognition and stuff like that, so I was motivated to never look back. I was fortunate to have good teachers, and by the fifth grade, my teacher recommended me and two other classmates for the TAG program. Back in Virginia, that’s the Talented and Gifted Program. So basically, I tested for gifted and got in. I didn’t notice any different treatment, but I could notice that I was the only black boy in most of my classes, and that may have made me put additional pressure on myself. There may have been another black female in the class I think, but not until eighth grade Algebra. So, I also had a chip on my shoulder to do well being the only person who looked like me in certain spaces. I had to make sure I was representing my family, myself, and anyone else who looked like me, because I didn’t want to represent the stigma that “he’s not as capable.” I never wanted that so I pushed myself even more. So I didn’t really have teachers treat me like I didn’t belong in gifted, but I did feel a little pressure to not let myself and my family down. I feel like perception is reality in certain instances and perception of where I grew up created a dual pressure. I grew up in the hood (slang for ghetto or crime ridden neighborhood), so I’ll give you this analogy. In predominately white gifted circles, I wanted to do well to demonstrate that people from my neighborhood could be good students. On the other hand, I didn’t used to show people my grades when we got report cards. I didn’t show them because I had all A’s. Some of my classmates and some of my friends, I knew they probably didn’t do that well, and I didn’t wanna be that guy… I didn’t want to be the nerd. You know it’s a kind of image that I wanted to portray. I didn’t see that I should be proud and pull others up, but the way we grew up – sports was the thing and so I didn’t want to come across as someone who wasn’t cool.
Last year, I had the pleasure of meeting and spending time with Carlotta Walls LaNier – the youngest of the Little Rock Nine, and first African American female to graduate from Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. It was tremendously powerful to shake hands and cling to the words of someone who at just 14-years-old put her life in jeopardy so that Black students in Arkansas could be entitled to a quality education. It saddens me that the narrative has changed from taking pride in education, to feeling the need to hide or be ashamed of exceptional academic performance for fear of being viewed nerdy or uncool. I went through this phase myself, and I am saddened by my participation in this harmful mentality as well. The pressure of having to switch between survival codes in the White world and acceptance codes in the Black world is a dilemma that Micah is too familiar with as he explains below:

**Code Switching**

*In high school, I was asked to be in the choir. I was in band too. Back in those days, being in band wasn’t as popular as being in a high stepping Black College marching band. But I was the cool band guy and I was also in vocal music. We had a very well-known acapella choir called the Troubadours. We even wore these real fancy outfits, and I was the one Black kid singing at the country club in a fancy costume with the Troubadours. Where I’m from, you may get clowned for that so being able to navigate that was a skill within itself. I don’t think I have any regrets. What I experienced, I learned from it. I learned that you might not be comfortable everywhere. You have to sometimes carve out spaces for yourself and find your own niche. I had to develop that skill, because if I didn’t, I would have been very uncomfortable going off to college being one of three black people who graduated an ROTC corps of 700 at Virginia Tech. Virginia Tech is a Senior Military college like VMI, the Citadel, Norwich, and North*
Georgia. These are a step below your service academies, like West Point or the Air Force Academy in Colorado and the Naval Academy in Annapolis. When I got there, I was exposed to a whole new world because I had people there who said “My dad went to West Point” or “I didn’t get into West Point ‘cause I didn’t get a signature from a senator.” And those are the type of people I went to school with, and I didn’t have any contacts in the military. My dad wasn’t in the military so I really didn’t know. I would say my experiences being in those advanced classes in elementary school somewhat prepared me to be comfortable; able to adapt; meet new people; and make new friends. I don’t think I would have been able to graduate without those connections and things like that. Ultimately, if you didn’t have family foundation and code-switching ability - I think if I didn’t develop the skill to code switch, I would have went to those spaces and felt like I didn’t belong. I would have felt like I didn’t have agency, like I couldn’t speak up, like I didn’t have a voice. I would have felt like being a minority carrying that label of being less than - that would have definitely crept into my head. If you look around, that was the reality, but I didn’t feel uncomfortable shining or being ready to step up into leadership roles.

I was a little different than Micah with regards to being in predominately White spaces. He seemed to find ways to navigate past the discomfort, and compete in areas where he was the lone AAM, and I tended to avoid such environments at all cost. I remember going out for baseball my junior year and after one practice, never returning simply because I was the only Black kid there. I also remember being the very first African American student ever invited to participate in a social group called Junior Assembly (JA). JA started as far back as at least the 1950s – designed to teach dance and social manners to the children of affluent White people. As
groundbreaking as this would have been for me to become the first African American in this space, I failed to see the value and instead, was adamant about not being a part and not making history as the first Black student to enter this previously segregated space. Micah goes on to explain why he forced himself to function in such spaces, despite discomfort in many instances:

Black Faces in White Spaces

My chip on my shoulder was that I wanted to break stereotypes when in these settings. I wanted to be the black kid who was smart, articulate, well spoken, and in the same clubs you were in. For example, I was in the Mayor’s Youth Commission – that was predominately white faces. I knew I wanted to be in those spaces and be just as articulate and just as poised as the White kids. I was in the ninth grade when I was in the Mayor’s Youth Commission. Most of the Mayor’s Youth Commission were juniors and seniors. I remember, one day in Mayor’s Youth Commission, we were having a discussion, and one of the seniors was talking about Affirmative Action. He was arguing that Affirmative Action wasn’t a good thing. I had some thoughts in my head but I didn’t share them. I was younger and didn’t want confrontation. I was curious why he didn’t feel Affirmative Action wasn’t a good thing. I remember going home wanting to prove I was just as good and just as capable with or without it. That said, I think bias plays a role. I came in contact with people – especially in college – people who hadn’t had a lot of exposure to black people, so they were basing everything off of what they had seen or heard on TV or the common stereotypes. Black people like fried chicken and watermelon or whatever. They just didn’t know – they were just ignorant to certain things; just like I was ignorant to some of their cultural norms. For example, some of my friends who had
guns grew up hunting and were exposed to that early. In my neighborhood, if you had a
gun then it was typically for something else.

Micah went on to share that growing up in the South, you become accustomed to and even
immune to visual reminders and monuments that celebrate a legacy of racial injustice and white
supremacy. Therefore, despite being comfortable in many social and academic environments,
there were some areas that he knew to stay away from. He shares,

Newport News, Virginia is a diverse town with a strong military presence. You have Fort
Eustis which is an army post right there. So with the military, there’s a different type of
people from a lot of different places so diversity was common. Now, there are certain
pockets in Williamsburg where you try to stay away from. Williamsburg is a historical
city, lots of history. This is where the College of William and Mary is – the second oldest
college in the country and the oldest in the South. When you go there, it’s totally
different from Newport News. There are other counties surrounding that are
predominately white. When I was in high school, I didn’t want to go to some of the less
diverse counties for anything, and they didn’t want to see me there either, so the feeling
was mutual. I felt more comfortable driving through Norfolk or Hampton than those
counties like Gloucester County or Tabb County. Virginia has a lot of history. There are
racist statues. Schools named Stonewall Jackson high school and things like that. When
I got older and learned that those names are still there... Like Robert E. Lee and others,
after civil war and after emancipation those things are still so in your face that it took me
moving away to question “Why is that?” Why is that still that way? So now, I question
those things a lot more if that makes any sense.
When my brother and I were living in the South we got lost in Moody, Alabama. We somehow ended up driving down a long dark dirt road in the woods, and accidentally stumbled across Ku Klux Klan activity. Terrified, we turned the car around, with him driving 120 miles per hour on a dusty unlit road, until we finally got out of the woods and back on course. But even in Kansas, there are spaces and places that are uncomfortable. Sure, we do not have statues of confederate soldiers anywhere that I know of, but it only took one trip to Labette County and one trip to Andale, Kansas to know that I was not welcomed back to either of these places. In Labette County, I even had a White guy wearing a confederate hat tell me “You’ve got a lot of nerves showing your face around here.” This was 25 years ago, and I have never been back. With USD 259 being the largest employer of teachers in the state, I imagine some of our teachers come from these types of places. Perhaps this explains some of my less than pleasant experiences.

Micah had the unique experience of coming from a place where visual reminders of racism were normal, yet his encounters with racism in school were actually minimal. What was also interesting was that the biases towards him were also minimal from his perspective. Below he shares his experiences, which for the most part were pretty positive.

**Minimal Cultural Biases**

*I didn’t experience a lot of academic biases based on my race, but in my professional life, working after school programs and things like that, I have seen and heard teachers react to kids not so positively – saying things like “look what area he’s from” and “he’s a bad kid” kinda’ falling on those biases. Fortunately for me, I had a lot of teachers who weren’t judging me on these biases and stereotypes or judging me based on where I was from. Outside of sports, it wasn’t a lot of good coming from the area we grew up in Uptown Newport News. Warrick Lawns was my area I grew up. My neighborhood had a*
police car that had to sit in the parking lot because of the activity that went on in my neighborhood. If my teachers would have based me on the reputation my neighborhood had, then they would have given up on me so I’m thankful that didn’t happen. But I have witnessed adults giving up on kids for the same thing. I tried to advocate for those students as much as I could, but it does make you stop and think about all the students who don’t have that type of advocate to speak for them and fight for them behind the scenes. I did have this one incident though. I really felt like I should have received the award for Student of the Year in fifth grade. The recognition was based on grades, behavior, and recommendation from administration and teachers. I didn’t go back and ask why I didn’t get it, but I really wish I had. My gut feeling though was that I didn’t participate in the school play, so maybe he was more visible than I was. Then again, certainly one event like a school play shouldn’t have that much influence, should it? I was active in lots of other stuff besides the school play. Grades and test scores we were neck and neck, and we were both in the TAG (talented and gifted) program, so academically, I was just as deserving of it. Honestly, I feel I was more deserving academically. But I didn’t raise any objection to it. At the end of the year he got recognized and I didn’t. I got recognized for other things but I didn’t get the best award – Student of the Year. Later on, this young man and I went to the same college. I did the ROTC route and he did the civilian route. I didn’t want to think about it that way back then, but that’s one situation where there may have been some difference made based on race I would say.

Going into my fifth grade year at Apple Elementary, I promised my parents that I would stay out of trouble and do well in school. I started out performing pretty well, until one small incident
sent me into a backwards spiral. I am an entertainer at heart, so I have always enjoyed an audience, but my fifth grade teacher Mrs. Dossman robbed me of this and downward spiraling I went. The winner of the classroom spelling bee would compete against all the fourth through sixth graders in front of the entire school, and that winner would go on compete in a city-wide competition, representing our school against all the other elementary schools. I was one of the final three contestants remaining in our class. I remember wondering why my White peers had to spell simple one and two syllable words, but most of my options were tricky polysyllabic words. Toward the final rounds, my White classmate Theresa had to spell “stress” and my word was “euphemism.” It was not the difficult word that stumped me though. The word that eliminated me from the contest was “slay.” I truly believe that Mrs. Dossman deliberately confused me to eliminate me. Throughout contest, she used the word in the sentence that we were to spell. She could have simply said, “John will slay the dragon” and I am certain I would have spelled it correctly. Instead, she opted to use the word in the sentence that I was not required to spell, so when she said “This is not the type of sleigh that is pulled by reindeer,” I blurted out “Sleigh – S-L-E-I-G-H.” I definitely understand Micah’s pain in being overlooked for something he worked hard for. Young students eventually start to recognize racial disparity, and as Micah describes below, this sometimes causes one to seek White acceptance in unhealthy manners.

**White Acceptance**

Outside of not getting the Student of the Year award, I really can’t think of too many examples that hit me directly. I saw others and had friends who probably had it far worse than me, but between the gifted program and being in ROTC, I may have been shielded from a lot of that type of stuff. Most of my stuff came from peer students. Again,
I have heard “you talk white,” from black and white kids. Another thing was the wow or amazement from getting good grades or being a good test scores, and this came from both white and black kids too. I was a kid in class who wanted to be cool, so the older kids would copy my paper. Looking back on it, I don’t know why I was happy about this, but one of the White kids was copying off my paper, and in my head that was a good thing - it was acknowledgement that he seen what I was capable of doing. You won’t copy off the kid who isn’t going to get a good grade on the test. For whatever reason, it gave me validation to know that a White kid thought I was smart enough to copy off of. It was expected of my white counterparts to do well; it was expected of us to be rambunctious and loud, so I didn’t view it as a big deal at the time. I guess I was kinda’ desensitized to this mentality. But I had to think about it – I didn’t want to be viewed as the loud and unruly black kid. It goes back to who gets called or asked to come to the board. My white classmates were usually the first called, before me as well. At the time I didn’t feel bad, because I knew that I knew the answer. But I was happy that when I was called, I would get the right answer. Now looking back at it, even though I didn’t see it then, it may have been a case where they assumed that my White classmates had the answer or knew how to work the problem and I didn’t.

Like Micah, I too remember being overlooked. It seems like Mrs. Heart never called on me in fourth grade unless I was talking or not paying attention. We had started multiplying and dividing fractions, so I guess she thought that this would be an opportunity to embarrass me in front of my peers. Hoping to be called on, I engaged in conversation with my friend, deliberately talking every time she would attempt to instruct the class. To my satisfaction, she took the bait and called me to the front. I walked up slowly with my head down, pretending to be ashamed
and afraid. All the while, Mrs. Heart was taunting as if she were the fourth grader, saying things like “Oh no, don’t try to be bashful now. You had so much to talk about a minute ago, so you go up front and teach the class.” After a long slow walk, I finally arrived at the chalkboard, slowly grabbed the chalk, turned around, and instantly it was show time! I worked the problem correctly, explaining every step as well as a shortcut my mother taught me that Mrs. Heart most likely did not want the class to learn. Then I grabbed two chalkboard erasers and clapped them together rigorously until they formed a cloud of chalk dust in the air. Beneath the cloud of dust, I spun in a 360-degree circle, imitating Michael Jackson moves as best I could, then yelled “Tadaaaa” at the top of my lungs. The class roared in laughter and I was grabbed by my arm and taken to the office. I got in trouble, but in my young mind, it was well worth it. As Micah expressed through the excitement of having a White student copy off of his work and the disappointment of being overlooked in order to call on White classmates, it is frustrating to be treated invisible or as less academically competent than White classmates. During another incident, Micah experienced this same type of biased teacher mentality as an accusation of cheating, which he describes in the following section.

A Climate of Suspicion – Public Attacks and Private Apologies

I had a teacher one day who said, I read over some of your writings and some of you guys may have plagiarized. I had someone that wrote on the paper describing the author as “poignant.” She calls me out in class and asks me what the word means and I said it means sad or heart rendering. She could have spoken with me personally, but for whatever reason she saw fit to try to embarrass me in front of the class. She was shocked – she thought I wouldn’t know the definition. Whenever I find a word I don’t know, I look it up and learn it and add to my vocabulary. She threw me a softball there because I
knew what it meant. But afterwards she privately apologized, after publicly trying to humiliate. She apologized and said she really thought I had plagiarized and didn’t know what the word meant. I do wonder had I been White if she would have been surprised that I knew what the word meant. I don’t even remember what grade this was, but I’m thinking this was like fifth or sixth grade. I’m just not so sure that “poignant” is that far of a stretch for a student in the gifted program at that age, but apparently she thought so.

Like several previously shared perspectives from both myself and other participants, Micah’s incident speaks to cultural incompetence. Another commonality shared between several of us is the attempt to try to embarrass us publicly. Micah goes on to provide his viewpoints on culturally relevant classroom pedagogy.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

*We got absolutely no black history. In fact, I can honestly say that we didn’t get any of this anywhere in K-12. Fortunately, my family taught me these things. My grandmother lived to be 90. She grew up in Macon, Mississippi. My uncle told me she was the class valedictorian. She could spell and define any word in the dictionary. My uncle was an Eagle Scout. My grandfather was a rarity as a Black male helicopter instructor – a very high honor. In my family, I knew we had some strong people who were high achievers despite various challenging circumstances. As far as black history, I had to do my own research to learn about Stokely Carmichael, and Marcus Garvey; or that the Black Panthers weren’t a terrorist group at all. I learned about Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, but not Malcolm X. I always wondered as I got older, why not? From an educator’s standpoint, if Black, Brown, and Red faces were to know about great people who look like them, that would be revolutionary in reaching kids. We learn about all*
these slave owners and racists throughout history, and are taught that these are great men, and never once do we talk about their character flaws. Then we don’t get to learn about anyone who looks like we look, and I’m not just talking about African American students, I’m talking about everyone non-white. Now I won’t go as far saying that there is a systemic reason they don’t teach that in school, but it makes one think. Like I said before, I loved history enough to do my own studying, so I realized that I am standing on the shoulders of great giants who look like me, and have had to overcome in spite of, but everybody should know that. On second thought, well maybe it is by design. You won’t teach me about Malcolm, or Elijah Muhammed, or that Marcus Garvey wanted to build; or Black Wall Street; or the Red Summer; so when I hear those things now, it’s like wow! In our country, we support the military, but in 1919 you had the red summer where black people who served were getting killed, so how do you not teach that? I had to learn these things outside of the four walls of my school. We have the responsibility to teach each generation, or they don’t know. So everything taught as great is White in school. You had forces that countered that attack. What about peers who didn’t have that?

My mother often shares stories of attending segregated school in a little dusty one-room shack in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma. Fort Gibson was actually a confederate fort during the civil war, and both my mother and grandmother grew up in the same house on Lee Street (named for Robert E. Lee). She reminisces with great pride being far advanced in comparison to both Black and White peers once she began attending desegregated schools in Wichita, Kansas. My father has shared similar experiences, and both attribute their scholastic success in segregated schooling to teachers who cared; the required learning of Black culture and history; and the teachers being a part of their extended family. At an engagement where he served as a guest speaker, I heard
Wichita State University distinguished history professor Dr. Robert Weems say “We got everything that we fought for, but we lost everything that we had.” My life speaks to this trade-off in the sense that my parents experienced their early education in a manner that was nurtured with love and support, but in subpar facilities. I had better facilities without the support and encouragement. Pick your poison – segregated buildings or segregated experiences!

Fortunately, despite a lack of Black pedagogy and Black cultural significance, Micah had a strong family who taught these things in the home. I assume that in addition to other experiences he discusses throughout his narrative, the strong sense of cultural identity he received from home was a significant piece of his motivation to succeed. Below, Micah discusses facets of why he was personally motivated to succeed.

Consequences – Self Motivation

Dual standards create cognitive dissonance. There are none more patriotic than black and brown folks. We have bled in every war. Died in every war. Defeating the confederacy, there are black folks who served. When you have folks who fought, bled, and died, but can’t eat in certain places or have a cup of coffee in certain places? Now you say “we the people” and “liberty and justice for all.” To me those are hollow words if you don’t do it. One thing I do appreciate and why I was so wanting to join and serve in the military was because that was the closest thing to a brotherhood I have ever seen. You need all types of people to create the type of uniformity needed to accomplish military goals, but even within that institution it was segregated up to a point. I will say that it’s closer now to where it should be than where we are in American. I’ve had people buy my lunch when I was in uniform. I have friends still serving to this day on every continent. But I do think about the Pledge of Allegiance, and I think the words can
be meaningless if we don’t live them. They are equally meaningless if they don’t truly apply to everyone. What are the consequences of this dissonance? To me, a house divided against itself can’t stand. I think the reason is control, that we promote the differences. Virginia has the city of Lynchburg in it. Reading things like the Willie Lynch letter is disgusting. In order to separate people is to get them to dislike one another over their differences. If you do that, they will still be fighting the same fight hundreds of years later. I feel like White supremacy is real. It seems like it gets us to fight against each other. It extends to class with a ruling class and everyone else, but it’s disguised as Black and White. Fighting over the scraps. French Revolution type stuff – proletariat and bourgeois, by design. Black and White counterparts were both shocked that I was a strong student. My ninth grade biology teacher said that every test – the person with the highest grade will get an award. I set a goal to get the award and typically got the highest grade out of all his classes out of like four classes. I got an engraved seashell. I didn’t want anyone to see it – because I was embarrassed. Other than that, I got a lot of encouragement. Encouragement is great fuel to me. If you aren’t pushed to excel in an arena, then you typically don’t.

Micah’s final thoughts provide a nice conclusion to the five stories shared. His description of the dual mentality that many AAMs face sheds light on the constant balancing act that many AAMs feel pressure to perform, starting as early as elementary school. His succinct summary depicts the dilemma of honoring the country we live in, and in his case, serving. On the other hand, he expresses discontent that quests to become patriotic and loyal citizens are disrespected by actions that attack our belonging and equal entitlement to enjoy the liberties of this country. These attacks are based largely on an AAM race-gender combination that has been unjustly deemed
villainous. Pressures felt from the dual existence that AAMs are forced to live as American citizens are revealed in a variety of manners. Navigating between dual pockets of the English Language, living under the constant scrutiny of negative biases, and desperately seeking a sense of cultural identity are among the pressures faced by youth and adult AAMs alike.
CHAPTER 5

Themes, Implications, and Conclusion

The overarching goal of this study was to examine the consequences of racial microaggressions experienced by adult AAMs during their K-12 schooling. My personal desire is for the study to serve as an academic tool to assist current and future educators with equipping themselves to better meet the academic and socio-emotional needs of AAM students, as well as an engagement tool that assists parents of AAM students in better understanding and identifying the nature of racial microaggressions. As the literature review suggests, racial microaggressions likely represent one of many pieces to the complex and multilayered puzzle that continuously forges misalignments between AAM students and healthy schooling experiences. Through the counter-stories of the five AAMs who participated in this study, coupled with personal experiences of my own, our combined narratives provide a voice that speaks to the aftereffects of this nocuous form of racial targeting. Within the context of our collective accounts emerged an energy that embodied something far greater than the mere culmination of shared life experiences. Whereas a marginalized individual voice is often as unheard as the distant echo of a small stone splashing in the depth of a dark hollow well, the present paper demonstrates collective narratives that resound with the powerful voice and triumphant resolve of congregational hymns sung in African American church services, or deeper still, as songwriter James Weldon Johnson analogizes, “Loud as the rolling sea.”

Viewing these racialized perspectives through the conjoined lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Microaggressions Theory (MT) provided a framework that enabled analyzing various social inequities as they pertain to the schooling of each participant, paying particular attention to racial microaggressions as a critical dynamic for these imparities. Such also
provided a lens to examine the emotional and psychological damage of racial microaggressions particularly as these attacks pertain to AAM students. It is also interesting to note that participants of the present study revealed one positive consequence of microaggressions in the form of heightened desire and motivation to succeed. Through the collective voices of study participants, this chapter examines the implications of both the positive and negative paradigms of microaggressions, as well biases and other subtle yet dangerous inflictions that instigate them. These and other conclusions are based on the analysis of themes extracted from narratives illustrated in chapter four.

**Initiation Rituals**

As AAMs, we grow to understand that a series of painful and unpleasant initiation processes accompany Blackness and all things embodied within the parameters of its inclusive, yet not always enjoyable membership. Based on the reflections of the other AAM study participants, it is clear I have not experienced these harsh rituals and agonizing realities by my lonesome. Being initiated into the sometimes un-pleasantries of our ethnicity, we learn to live with these bitter and biased realities and their ensuing consequences, which are typically painful and enduring. However, the uninitiated, uninformed, and unconcerned may fail to recognize such incidents, or view such incidents as small and harmless situations that happened too long ago to hold significance in the current context. While the distorted lens of privilege may disallow some populations from recognizing the daily existence of racial tensions and stress types that Smith et al. (2011) summarizes as Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress (MEES), it is important to recognize that for individuals forced to live in this space, the costs are far from benign. The reflections of the AAMs who participated in this study reveal that racial
microaggressions are one of many continuations of the painful and racially inflected orientation processes that have historically defined the AAM experience.

**Little White Lies**

The voices of study participants indicate that some initiation rituals of the AAM experience are based on the existence of mainstream White lies and dominant White biases. The irony in the term “little white lies” is that there is typically nothing “little” about the lies that accompany White supremacy and White privilege. From a historical perspective, lies of this nature have falsely depicted Black men’s relationships with White women, as such has justified violence as means of protecting the perceived virtue and innocence of White women from the alleged savagery of Black men (Leonard, 2004).

Both Kendall Kirby and Julian Ernest experienced false accusations of inappropriately touching White girls as one of many possible cumbersome and costly obligations that supplement AAM membership. The murders of the likes of Georgy Stinney Jr. and Emmett Till, and the wrongful incarceration of the Central Park Five and countless others provides evidence that these deficit informed accusations and beliefs can in many cases lead to wrongful imprisonments and torturous deaths (Forbes, 2019; Leonard, 2004). In fact, the deadly combination of White lies and White jealousy have been so dangerous in some cases that thriving and autonomous Black communities have been pillaged and reduced to rubbish as a result (Dye, 1996). Therefore, the oxymoronic notion of a “little white lie” is further exposed by the blood stained soils of previously self-contained economic hubs such as Black Wall Street in Tulsa in 1921, and the thriving Black town of Rosewood, Florida in 1923 (Dye, 1996; Messer et al., 2018). Although the physical violence of the past is a far less frequent consequence of White
lies in the modern era of society and schooling, the psychological terrorization experienced by AAM K-12 students today can be equally damaging.

Some participants were lucky to escape being accused of touching White girls, but were not immune to White lies in other forms. Equally dangerous to verbally spoken lies that reduce beautiful dark complexions to stains symbolizing guilt and inferiority are the unspoken lies that White supremacy leverages in sustaining its itinerary - a dichotomous agenda of White dominance and Multi-ethnic subordination. For Julian Ernest and Credence Grace, the ability to defend themselves from physical attack was compromised as a result of lies that rest in the mind space of individuals brainwashed by biases suggesting AAMs to be angry, aggressive, and confrontational as well as inferior. In racially charged climates among students where physical altercations emerged, Ernest and Grace discovered their Blackness to be ample evidence for White teachers and administrators to assign blame and disciplinary action based on the prevailing notion of White innocence and Black guilt.

**White Lies as Microaggressions**

For the participants of this study, White lies instigated attacks in the form of microinvalidations and microinsults. The origin of historical racial biases suggests AAMs to possess deviant behavior rather than compassion, intelligence, and honesty. Therefore, most of my participants recognized microaggressions from the perspectives of adults who chose to view them through the lens of these selective and dangerous biases. For Kendall and Julian, microinvalidations revealed themselves in the form of teachers and administrators demonstrating very blatantly, their disbelief that an AAM could be telling the truth and a White female could be lying. Credence and Julian experienced similar biases when involved in fist fights with White male students. Rather than reviewing evidence that would have demonstrated that these
individuals were simply defending themselves, the assumption was made solely on race that these altercations were instigated by these AAMs. With no additional investigation or probing, the presumption of guilt was assigned solely on these biases, essentially invalidating positive character traits, prior behavior, and anything else that could have derived a feasible and fair conclusion.

Being falsely blamed for touching white girls or being falsely accused of starting fights provides examples of microinvalidations in the sense that they show blatant disregard for African American perspectives and viewpoints; and microinsults because such accusations attack the integrity of individual character based on no additional factors other than implicit biases attached to color.

**Consequences of White Lies**

Being falsely accused of touching White girls and being accused of starting fights represent just two of many White lies that revealed themselves in this study. Previously mentioned notions of inferiority, laziness, criminality, and sexual deviancy are also reinforced by a schooling environment where White lies thrive. What was also revealed is that the target of these lies (AAM participants) were subjected to consequences that were harmful and terrorizing. In some instances, participants expressed that they have moved past the psychological and emotional damage caused by these encounters, but others shared examples of long-term damage. Perhaps the most expressive in sharing the notion of lasting consequences was Kendall. His story revealed that being accused of sexual misconduct in third grade is something that hindered his social and academic development throughout the remainder of his K-12 schooling, and something that still has an impact on his intimate relationships to this day. Other participants (Kendall included) shared that the biases that invalidate any possibility of truth in their stories
resulted in emotional consequences such as fear, confusion, frustration, isolation, and relationship issues; schooling outcomes such as excessive detention and failing grades; and behavioral issues that manifested themselves in the form of bullying and in Kendall’s extreme case, auto theft. However, despite what seemed to be a series of consistent tumultuous experiences, these AAMs found the strength to not only complete school, but to attend college. Ernest and Credence, along with Porter and Micah are all college graduates with successful careers, and Kendall is enjoying a successful career as a professional musician. Each of them attributes a great deal of their success to strong parental advocacy. Kendall and Julian cite the presence of strong Black teachers and being introduced to culturally relevant pedagogy and cultural identity as additional significant factors.

Like other participants, I too recall teachers making excuses for White student perpetrators, assigning blame and innocence based on no evidence or other meaningful qualifiers, just skin color. I can also relate to the pain that these AAMs felt when falsely accused. As a kid, I cannot remember anything worse than being punished for actions and behaviors of which I was totally guiltless, left alone to ponder why my skin was viewed as such a sinful and heinous possession. I can even relate to painful depression, isolation, and the ensuing self-doubt and reevaluation of self-worth as shared by study participants as we each revisited painful incidents that at times may have caused us to second-guess our own innocence.

**The Invisible Black Man**

As inconvenient and as dangerous as White lies prove to be, they do not stand alone as the sole process for initiating AAMs for their subordinate position in society. Whereas study participants experienced being over-scrutinized and falsely accused under the microscope of White lies, they also revealed experiences of being hardly noticed when engaged in positive
activities or when seeking validation and positive reinforcement. In a sense, this diaspora of being micro-analyzed at one extreme, then virtually ignored at the other has at times caused AAMs to feel irrelevant, unimportant, and invisible. Ralph Ellison alludes to this notion of AAMs being ignored by society in his 1952 novel, “Invisible Man.” He wrote, “I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me” (Ellison, 1952, p. 3). In a sense, this is an expression that emphasizes the reality of the AAM invalidity in many societal circles, school included. It symbolizes that within the context of attempting to balance the tug-o-war between the quest for equality and the pressing restraints of oppression, we often go unnoticed, as does our culture, identity, and significant contributions. If such is truly the case, then perhaps the seemingly innocent slip of the tongue of a five-year-old Black boy who recites the Pledge of Allegiance saying, “Invisible with liberty and justice for all” represents as much a subconscious declaration of marginalization as it does the result of language skills still under development.

Several examples of feeling invisible were revealed through the voices of AAM study participants. Micah Goins being overlooked for student-of-the-year honors, Porter McNeil unnoticed for a perfect math exam, and Julian Ernest being part of a class where no AAMs were recognized as star students demonstrates the tendency of some teachers to reserve positive recognition for populations other than AAMs. Examples were revealed in non-academic school settings as well with AAMs being denied access and even pushed out of certain spaces. Some examples are Porter sharing that no multiethnic representation was displayed in a school wide theatrical production, Julian Ernest not being allowed to participate on the yearbook staff, Kendall Kirby’s example of deliberate attempts to steer him away from developing the skills to perform European Classical music, Credence Grace being made to feel as if he did not belong in the gifted program, and Porter being pushed out of the advanced-advanced math class. Within
the mode of invisibility as initiation, the virtual inexistence of culturally relevant pedagogy throughout schooling seemed to emerge among all participants. As implied through the eyes of these men, the efforts made to provide nurturing learning experiences for White students are virtually non-existent for Black students, AAMs in particular.

_Invisible Existence as Microaggressions_

Dominant White narratives tend to invalidate the cultural significance of AAM students, while suppressing inclusion opportunities. This racially disparaging reality stems from implicit biases and overtly White narratives, and forms a firm foundation for racial microaggressions to exist and thrive. While the initial assumption was that this study would reveal microinsults and microinvalidations, there emerged a couple of incidents that qualified as microassaults. This section of the study provides a summary of microinvalidations and microassaults that transpired during conversations in which AAMs shared sentiments of feeling unseen, insignificant, and irrelevant in the eyes of White teachers and White school leadership. The common mechanisms that support racial biases are promoted by imagery and propaganda that suggest AAMs to be unintelligent and lazy, so when rigorously engaged AAMs excel in their coursework, it tends to contradict the normal mode of thinking for many White teachers, and therefore AAMs in this study were not always recognized for such efforts. Other forms of invisibility materialized such as teachers ignoring racial epithets being spoken by White students as experienced by me, Julian Ernest, and Credence; or the allowing of White students to wear confederate memorabilia to school, as also experienced by Julian.

When AAMs are overlooked in spaces typically reserved for White students, or when AAM students have positive accomplishments ignored, this typically constitutes racial microinvalidations. One example from this study is Porter McNeil’s superb math performance
being ignored and overlooked despite him being the only African American student in the class. Most likely, the teacher did not overlook Porter on purpose. In fact, she apologized and quickly corrected the situation once he advocated for himself and brought it to her attention. However, elementary school students should not have to advocate for themselves. In most classrooms, one would think that the first person to finish the exam and the only person to correctly answer all the questions would stand out for their superior academic gifts. Considering that this was accomplished by the only Black student in the class, it would appear that Porter’s teacher was possibly too jaded by biases to recognize his exceptional classroom efforts. Micah Goins being overlooked for student of the year is another example of a racial microinvalidations of the same type.

However, despite microinvalidations representing a common and familiar attack against AAM participants, more aggressive attacks emerged. A third grade student being told that he cannot attend the party of the principal’s son because she “does not allow Blacks in her home” as experienced by Porter McNeil, or the celebration of African American culture compromised by commemorating the birthdays of Robert E. Lee and Dr. Martin Luther King together as Lee-King day, as experienced in high school by Julian Ernest provide examples of microassaults. Other examples of microassaults are Porter being aggressively grabbed and chastised for wearing what appeared to the teacher to be culturally inspired attire, and Kendall Kirby being told by his principal that he would never amount to anything other than a guy hanging out in a barbershop. While these examples do not represent being ignored in the traditional sense, they do represent the existence of invisible culture, invisible celebratory rituals, and invisible potential in the eyes of White teachers and administrators. To see no more potential in a future jazz musician than a barbershop jokester; to physically attack an 8-year-old for having a suspender come unattached;
and to dilute the legacy of Dr. King by sharing his celebration with that of a racist (Robert E. Lee) represents that the significance of these individuals has been so ignored that their cultural identity is seen as something threatening and new when it is noticed, and is attacked accordingly.

**Consequences of an Invisible Existence**

It is saddening to think that the promise of talented, intelligent, and gifted AAM students would be compromised by ignoring their very existence. Failure to recognize their accomplishments, failure to protect them from blatant racial attacks from White students, and marginalizing their voices and cultural identity resulted in anger, depression, humiliation, and confusion on the negative end of the spectrum. An 8-year-old Porter was confused as to why he was aggressively grabbed and spoken to venomously, and as an adult, Porter still wonders the motivation behind her aggression. What I personally found equally disturbing to the assault was teacher’s defense for this action, stating “I don’t have a problem with Black people. My cousin is married to a Black person.” This sad yet common response is essentially a passive aggressive declaration of the low cultural competency that is commonplace with White teachers. Another example is Micah as a fifth or sixth grader being falsely accused of plagiarism, with an attempt made to publicly humiliate him in front of the class because the teacher did not expect him to have a heightened vocabulary. There is also a high school aged Kendall who wondered in one breath whether his principal was correct in his barbershop comedian assessment, but was angered to profanity by this assertion in the very next breath. Adult AAMs (Micah and Porter) wonder to this very day why they were overlooked for the proper recognition when demonstrating classroom excellence. Julian and Credence both expressed feelings of depression and isolation relating to no protection from racial epithets and physical altercations waged against them by White students. And Micah and Kendall expressed a combination of frustration and humiliation...
from verbal and public attacks attempting to embarrass them. In speaking with participants, I recalled various similar experiences, so as participants shared their stories with me, their anger became my anger; their fears became my fears; their frustrations became my frustrations; and their depression and isolation became mine as their experiences forced me to relive those of my own. I was listening to their experiences and realizing that we each could have traded places and still had very similar schooling experiences.

On the other end of the spectrum, and on a brighter note, the stories of these participants demonstrated a spirit of resilience that has become synonymous with the African American experience. This resilience manifested itself as a positive consequence to racial microaggressions, motivating these individuals to accomplish greatness despite existing invisibly. Kendall may have stated this sentiment best, but each participant lived it. Kendall shared telling himself “I gotta do everything I can to make that not the truth,” when told by his principal that he would never amount to much. His promise to himself paid off in the form of a career that the high school principal who doubted him would likely envy today. Porter spoke a similar language, sharing his belief that life is too finite to get caught up in fighting every racial war, and how he instead chose hard work and academic excellence as his weapons in the battle against racial disparity. Micah looked at the disparaging conditions of his surrounding neighborhood and the relics and monuments displayed throughout Virginia that celebrate its racist past, and decided that excellence was an obligation to his family and to himself, not an option. Julian and Credence moved beyond being pulled into physical altercations, and began taking their frustrations out on football fields and sports courts, saving their positive energy for the classroom. Sure, there were setbacks such as Credence taking himself out of the IB program and Porter being moved from advanced-advanced honors math to advanced honors math. Other
setbacks may have emerged as well such as Kendall focusing solely on jazz despite his desire to continue playing classical music or Julian missing out on opportunities to participate in student government and year book staff. However, despite these setbacks, these young men were motivated to move beyond being invisible and accomplish greatness that today shines its light on them on musical and theatrical stages; in science laboratories; in the world of physical fitness and entrepreneurship; in higher education, and as role models throughout their respective communities.

**Conditioning for a Culture of Trouble**

In the early 1990s, one of the more popular rap artists was Oshea Jackson who performs under the pseudonym “Ice Cube.” In the song, “Rolling with the Lench Mob,” Jackson recites “A piece of cake it ain’t nothing but a party, cause’ in the county you know everybody!” Sadly, this reference of comparing jail to a fun party is indicative of a culture of incarceration that has become a normalized part of the AAM existence. Some sources suggest that AAMs begin being conditioned for a culture of incarceration as early as their K-12 schooling (Christle et al., 2005; Heitzeg, 2009). This notion is strengthened by four of the five participants sharing examples of excessive disciplinary actions used against AAMs in comparison to their White counterparts, as revealed through various assertions, most notably disparities in detention, suspension, and expulsion.

Participant Kendall Kirby shared that he eventually became comfortable with being in trouble and in some cases became so accustomed to it that he found it fun. Julian Ernest cited examples demonstrating that detention was not fairly administered between White and Black students, and that teachers looked for reasons to put Black students in detention even when completely innocent. This is consistent with the mentality that has produced countless graves
occupied by the remains of AAM victims crucified not under the presumption of justice, but rather that of assigning punishment to any Black man regardless of it being the right Black man, and regardless of innocence or guilt. Credence Grace mentioned that although he had no issues himself with detention or suspension, he noticed similar trends with AAM colleagues. Micah Goins’ schooling experiences were similar to Credence’s from the standpoint that he too managed to escape a culture of suspension, expulsion, and detention, and he credits positive experiences and healthy relationships with teachers and administrators as sources that steered him in a direction that many of his contemporaries fell victim to.

Unfortunately, the culmination of these experiences in conjunction with Jackson’s disturbing yet valid party analogy exposes the reality that schools are likely conditioning AAM students to normalize excessive school discipline in the same manner that AAM communities have become conditioned to view normalcy in the incarceration of AAMs. While the expectation of trouble is in no way normal, this culture of oppression is yet another grueling ritual in the process of initiating AAMs for existence in a society dominated by principles and tenets of White supremacy.

School to Prison Pipeline – Consequences of Conditioning AAMs for Discipline

Racial frustrations and inequality, coupled with an overall dislike for and fear of AAMs creates a climate in which AAMs become vulnerable to nouveau zero-tolerance disciplinary policies that result in disproportionate penalization in comparison to other populations, most notably White males (Haight et al., 2016; Toldson et al., 2015). This culturally biased imbalance of discipline establishes a foundation that makes the AAM population vulnerable to prison culture by establishing a schooling environment that constantly attacks and threatens their healthy schooling experiences (Kunjufu, 1985; Prager, 2011; Whiting, 2009). The stories of this
study’s participants support the belief that AAMs in K-12 are viewed as deviant and delinquent, and treated, conditioned, encouraged, and accused of deviant behavior accordingly. While none of the participants of the present study have been incarcerated, it would be interesting to utilize another study as means of examining the schooling experiences of previously incarcerated AAMs. Glaring commonalities shared between all participants included strong systems of advocacy and gainful social capital. It would be interesting to see if these traits are absent among men with less desirable post-schooling outcomes.

Julian shared that he had never been in any trouble until being assigned to in-school suspension several times throughout the fourth grade. Within this narrative, he shared that this was his first time ever having a White teacher, while also implying that his size and stature was always an issue for this particular teacher. Such suggests that a large Black kid through the lens of White supremacy and all its accompanying biases appears aggressive and intimidating. So much so that a typical boyhood altercation was interpreted as a deliberate physical attack as experienced by Julian during an innocent accident in physical education class, or minimal tardiness carrying greater disciplinary weight than poor academic performance, as experienced by Kendall. Credence shared that while his White counterparts were promoted and celebrated for completing assignments early, he experienced being labeled a troublemaker for similar efforts. This disparity is yet another example of the biases that prepare AAM students to acclimate themselves to becoming comfortable with disciplinary action, trouble, and distrust for authority.

**Biases – The Crux of the Matter**

K-12 experiences for AAMs are inflected by unfair attacks that are identified in the present study as initiation processes and rituals because of the unique manner in which they are
used to target AAMs. However, these maneuvers identified as initiation rituals essentially represent the lies, the jealousy, the ignorance, the marginalization, and the terrorization that sets the stage for racial microaggressions. In addition to recognizing these attacks, it is also important to explore why AAM students are subjected to these undesirable encounters. Implicit biases represent the core of issues pertaining to the objectionable treatment of AAMs, basing such behavior on deficit informed beliefs and superfluous stereotypes (García & Guerra, 2004). As a result, AAMs find themselves relegated to imagery remnant of sloth, ignorance, criminality, and other substandard depictions that create a culture where racial microaggressions thrive, and their usage and existence is justified (Skinner & Cheadle, 2016; Welch, 2007). Despite daily visible evidence of AAMs disproving such myths, reality is often clouded by the longstanding historical, legal, and structural support of these mythologies. Along with the desire to be superior to other races, White dominant perspectives carry the hope and desire for these myths to be true for the competitive purpose of maintaining dominance. Therefore, they are leveraged against Black male students in K-12 classrooms as has been demonstrated by the participants of this study. Consequently, as identified via the voices of the AAMs in this study, various gifts and capabilities were deliberately suppressed rather than nurtured or showcased. Additionally, the added pressure of code-switching emerged as another uncomfortable byproduct that AAMs have developed as means of accommodating the cultural incompetence of White people, essentially refraining from enacting culturally significant behavior and language that is already seen as invisible and insignificant in some cases, and socially inappropriate in others (Hill, 2009).
Traditional Biases

The revealing of the traditional biases that define AAMs through the eyes of White supremacy demonstrate a deep-seeded and unwitting miseducation about and misuse of African American culture as opposed to direct attacks such as being called names or denied access to certain restaurants and schools. The danger in society being dominated by an overarching story that is unapologetically White is that such can potentially disallow the contributions and influences of multi-ethnic people to be recognized, respected, and enjoyed. Our differences are not dangerous, but unique and valuable. Unfortunately, an adult who is so caught up in their own implicit beliefs may never receive exposure or personal development that challenges beliefs that are harmful and deficit based. This is a mentality that represents and categorizes the popular opinions of how AAMs are viewed and treated.

Credence and Porter were placed in honors classes because they were smart and because the regular curriculum failed to challenge them, not for the purpose of meeting a Black quota. Pacifying Credence with a treat rather than re-explaining the lesson or demoting Porter to a lower math class for the same reason represents a belief that these AAM students did not belong in these rigorous and highly challenging courses and an attempt to push them out. An environment where White students can ask questions and have lessons explained, but AAMs do not have the same luxury can be dangerous, painful, and intimidating. Even through the eyes of a child, the disparities are noticeable despite not having the vocabulary to speak to it. Unlike the other four participants, Micah shared very few examples of being racially targeted. However, he was never unaware of these biases existing, and despite feeling that his schooling was positive, he still felt discomfort in challenging White biases and sharing perspectives from his lens. As the only AAM serving on the Mayor’s Youth Council, he was reluctant to speak up and share his
points on affirmative action despite disagreeing with arguments against it. Julian’s principal recommended that he not attend college, and both he and Kendall were more or less told that their Blackness was enough evidence to assign them guilt. These experiences say to young Black males that they do not belong in gifted classes, their experiences do not matter, they are not smart enough for college, and they are sex craved liars. From ages five through 18, AAMs spend every day hoping to escape these methods of intimidation and terror waged against them, yet these prevailing biases continue to foster such attacks.

**Young, Gifted, and Black**

To understand how it feels to be judged by unfair biases, it is helpful to also understand being young, gifted, and Black. Within the context of sharing positive schooling experiences, Porter alludes to his involvement in the gifted program as an opportunity that may have shielded or softened the extent of racial attacks in comparison to other AAM students. He shares of the gifted program that “For the most part, when around other gifted students we were so involved with stimulating our minds that we were not even looking at each other in that space of noticing our racial differences.” No different than a flower that dies when it fails to receive sunlight and water, the gifts, talents, and dreams of promising Black children also die when neglected and not properly nurtured. Fortunately for Porter, despite being pushed out of a rigorous math class, he feels that he received proper support for his gifts to flourish. Some of the other study participants were placed in gifted academic programs also, so academic gifts are a good starting point for such a conversation. However, being gifted represents far more than testing well, or in some cases, being selected subjectively for the opportunity to be tested. As Credence shared of being the only person of color in gifted, “I’m sure there were others, but some of them may have
been looked over or just didn’t get the chance.” Hence, the young and black portions of this mantra are self-explanatory, but the gifted piece is less clear and more difficult to define.

Gifted needs to also take into consideration fine arts talents such as those possessed by Kendall (the jazz bassist) and Porter (the classical actor), athletic prowess such as Julian and Credence demonstrated through high school sports, and a high propensity for language arts as demonstrated by both Micah and Porter. The ability to cook, draw, dance, sew, and sing would be included as talents worthy for the distinction of gifted as well. I would assume this list to be endless, but far more important than a list of gifts is the failure to provide environments where these abilities can develop and flourish. While Porter and Micah both experienced varying degrees of good fortune in this regard, every participant does not share this testimony. Credence was a student-athlete who was identified as gifted, but shared disparaging schooling experiences that were vastly different than those of a White student-athlete and teammate. Rather than attempting to hone Kendall’s gifts, his ability to express himself artistically was taken away as punishment rather than used as encouragement to become a better all-around student, and Julian was denied opportunities with music, sports, school politics, and yearbook staff in a school where being called “nigger” was common and confederate attire was acceptable.

Perhaps the words and works of playwright Lorraine Hansberry provide better insight. In an adaptation of Hansberry’s writings for stage and later an informal autobiography, her former husband Robert Nemiroff created the title “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black,” in an attempt to explore this idea from Hansberry’s perspective (Nemiroff & Hansberry, 1995). While Hansberry’s experiences do not fully encompass the journey of every young, black, and gifted individual, they do provide unique perspectives and stories that demonstrate how the intersectionality of youthful rigor, marginalized ethnicity, and God given talent forge the Black
existence. From the perspectives of my study participants and from my own personal experiences, White schools have done a poor job of noticing gifts that reside within AAMs, and have therefore done a poor job of recognizing the existence and significance of these students. Thus, the biases of White teachers have overshadowed tremendous gifts and have therefore suppressed opportunities for AAMs to utilize them to their fullest. When a musician is discouraged from accessing all genres and musical forms; an actor is denied the opportunity to participate in a school play; an athlete is encouraged to withdraw from rigorous academics; and a good student is told that he should consider trade school rather than college, it is evident that biases and stereotypical belief systems can destroy hopes, dreams, and opportunities by failing to allow AAM gifts to expound.

**Code Switching**

African Americans in general deal with the constant pressure of code-switching. What this essentially means is that “fitting-in” requires accessing different language and social cues while navigating between predominately African American social circles and the traditional White narratives that dominate society. The microinvalidation of finding it surprising for an AAM to have command of the English language not only ignores the language capacity of a highly intelligent black student. Such also ignores the evidence of eloquent written words by Frederick Douglas during slavery; the profound speaking of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the principal voice of the civil rights movement; and the likes of wordsmiths such as President Barrack Obama, Eric Michael Dyson, and Ta-Nehisi Coates in the modern era. Throughout time, biases have tended to override clear evidence that indicate high intellectual capacity, language command, and professional and academic competency as demonstrated by AAMs.
Within the framework of code-switching and the assignment of human speech, there is a socially constructed notion that the English language can be divided into categories of “talking White” and “talking Black.” For some, this creates the frustration of having to maneuver uncomfortably through alternating databases of phrases, jargon, and social cues. For others, the frustration resides in the ridiculousness of assigning ethnicity to language. Micah expresses this sense of a dual existence through sharing that he often attempted to “talk black” in some social circles. He further emphasized this by sharing that he would sometimes hide his report cards or his participation in certain school activities (Mayor’s Youth Council and Singing Troubadours) because, despite these being valuable growth experiences, it may not have looked cool to his Black peers to make good grades, to perform in a costume, or to participate in a resume building program.

**Biases in Pedagogy**

The indictment below on the American schooling system are words from Carter G. Woodson’s “The Miseducation of the Negro.” Though published in 1933 in the heart of the Jim Crow era and prior to the banning of legal segregation, these words sadly carry significance today. Study participant Kendall Kirby made reference to Woodson in sharing his experiences, but other participants shared similar sentiments without mentioning Woodson’s name. Woodson’s words form an appropriate backdrop for the experiences shared with regards to the lack of cultural identity and pedagogy, and the potential dangers:

The educational system as it has developed both in Europe and America an antiquated process which does not hit the mark even in the case of the needs of the white man himself. If the white man wants to hold on to it, let him do so; but the Negro, so far as he is able, should develop and carry out a program of his own. The so-called modern
education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples. For example, the philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching. The oppressor has the right to exploit, to handicap, and to kill the oppressed. Negroes daily educated in the tenets of such a religion of the strong have accepted the status of the weak as divinely ordained, and during the last three generations of their nominal freedom they have done practically nothing to change it. (Woodson, 1933, p. 16).

Woodson’s words in 1933 echo sentiments that seem to appear in one conception or another throughout every era of time. Within this passage, Woodson seems to suggest that not only will African Americans lack proper cultural guidance in White schools, but that White institutions will attempt to justify White supremacy and convince African American children that their subordination is ordained by God. In the eighties, fifty years after Woodson, and decades after Jim Crow and legal segregation, Kunjufu (1985) declared that schools are an integral component of a “Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys.” The participants of this study and their experiences indicate that this mentality of racial oppression still exists in schools today, shedding light on the fact that Woodson’s words are sadly still applicable and relevant.

It can be argued that not only is mental and emotional health not nurtured in schools, it is actually under constant attack (Javius, 2016; Kunjufu, 1985). Larson and Ovando (2001) and Lewis (2003) share similar sentiments in suggesting that schools are structured to sustain institutionalized inequity rather than break down barriers of inequality. Therefore, based on these notions, American schools were not designed to educate multiethnic children of any racial
population, much less AAMs. Interviews with the participants of this study further strengthen the belief that a misalignment exists between the needs of AAMs and the offerings of White schools. In Kendall Kirby’s narrative, he goes as far as suggesting that both he and his only son have experienced issues to the point that he firmly believes that Black kids do not belong in White schools. He goes on to share that if he has any additional children, he will actively consider seeking a Black school for their education. Julian’s narrative echoes Kendall’s thought, sharing that his schooling experiences minimized his confidence for academics and politics, and that these were restored when he attended an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) for college. Even Porter and Micah, who both felt that racialized experiences were minimal in comparison to their rewarding experiences, expressed the benefits they each experienced by having a Black male teacher. In addition to exclusion from experiences and a lack of confidence in their abilities, every participant also expressed frustration with having very limited to no exposure to African American culture. Other reflections revealed experiences where participants felt that their Blackness was invalidated and disregarded such as Credence expressing frustration with “never having the opportunity to learn about anybody who looked like me or any contributions from anyone other than White people.”

Throughout their narratives, participants expressed delight in sharing the cultural identity they received from home and church, and those who were exposed to Black teachers remembered those experiences positively as well. Coming from a similar support system, these stories reinforced for me what I have always known personally, but was delighted to share commonality with others. Our parents, our church foundation, and other sources of social capital had positive impacts on our future trajectories. I will go as far as saying that these forces were critical components in saving some of us from a system that attempted to destroy our hopes,
dreams, and future aspirations. As mentioned earlier, it would be interesting to conduct this same study with participants who lacked some of the social and cultural networks similar to those shared by myself and the five participants of the present study.

**Minimal Cultural Biases**

With both Micah and Porter, there were instances of these men minimizing the existence and impact of cultural biases. As previously mentioned, Micah was overlooked for student-of-the-year honors and accused of cheating because he used a difficult vocabulary word on an essay, and Porter was overlooked for recognition for a perfect math score. Both men suggested racism as possible causes for these incidents, but neither was firm in asserting this to be the case. Both more or less implied that these attacks may have been oversights rather than deliberate and racially motivated actions, while at the same time neither completely ruled racism out. Additionally, both individuals spent more time discussing positive experiences, choosing not to dwell too long on negative encounters. With Credence, Julian, and Kendall, each experienced very similar incidents, but all three thought that such encounters were definitely the result of racism, and each shared perspectives that mirrored this belief.

What I found interesting is that there may be a connection between Micah and Porter’s similar perspectives and commonalities in their upbringing. Micah was affiliated with ROTC in both high school and college, and Porter spent his childhood living on military bases as the child of a serviceman. Both men suggested that from their perspectives, racism is far less abundant in military circles than in civilian circles, which may have influenced how they viewed racial microaggressions. The other commonality they shared was that their K-12 schooling took place in the South, even sharing some schooling in very close proximity to one another. Micah’s entire K-12 schooling was spent in Newport News, Virginia, and Porter’s schooling occurred in the
states of Texas and Florida, as well as Virginia Beach which is roughly a 40 mile drive from Newport News, Virginia.

Therefore, in addition to their military affiliation, the manner in which racism is viewed in Virginia may have some influence on both of their perspectives. With Micah mentioning the existence of statues, monuments, and other visual reminders of the historic racism of the South, it can be speculated that some areas of the South have far too many blatant reminders of racism for subtle forms such as microaggressions to be as noticeable. Mention of towns named Lynchburg and artifacts celebrating the likes of Stonewall Jackson and others, may depict a mentality that views being overlooked for outstanding academic performance as something other than a racial attack. Especially since tangible reminders of racism were bold, audacious, and daily occurrences that are uncommon in the Midwest and other geographic regions.

**Implications**

Like other damaging systemic barriers that exist both in education and society, proactive measures are needed in order to lessen the impact of racial microaggressions and improve schooling experiences for AAMs. Therefore, effectively addressing racial microaggressions will involve challenging the practices, policies, and theories responsible for instigating marginalized schooling experiences (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Massey et al., 1975). The present study was very intentional in its use of culturally engaging theory and data collection techniques (Critical Race Theory, Microaggressions Theory, Narrative Inquiry, and Autoethnography) with the belief that providing more enriched experiences for AAMs starts with first understanding schooling from their perspectives.

Exposing AAM perspectives of schooling revealed gaps in terms of how well schools understand and accommodate the learning and socioemotional needs of diverse student
populations (AAMs in this case), while also exposing gaps in parental understanding of microaggressions and other racially charged attacks towards their children. Conducting the research in this manner has derived implications that can be used to better inform both school personnel and parents of proactive roles each can take in providing more rewarding experiences for AAM students. Such implications include enhanced programming for cultural awareness, bias awareness, and culturally relevant pedagogy; looking inward at flawed procedures and processes rather than outward at students and families; creating robust advocacy and mentoring pipelines for AAM students; and creating programs that establish transformational partnerships rather than transactional encounters between parents and school personnel.

Enhanced Cultural Programming and Stronger Multietnic Personnel Presence

Based on the experiences of the AAMs in the present study and those of my own, there exist severe gaps between the cultural needs and desires of diverse student populations, and the White norms of traditional American schools (Larson & Ovando, 2001; Lewis, 2003). The present study addresses this misalignment as it pertains to AAMs, but from the findings of this study, it can be speculated that similar disconnects may exist with other diverse ethnic and social populations, as most will not reflect the values of White middle class society. Therefore, there is a need for schools to retrofit everything including professional development of teachers and school learning curriculum; to the social interactions between students and faculty; to parental engagement and the manner in which multiethnic families are viewed from the perspectives of White school personnel. Such efforts would evoke an environment of healthier schooling by better accommodating the academic and socioemotional needs of student populations that are rapidly becoming more diverse.
Efforts of this nature begin with district leadership offices. In addition to implementing, overseeing, and administering culturally relevant programming, professional development, and curriculum, it is also important that the ethnicities, values, and cultural experiences of district leadership are reflective of those possessed by the families served by school districts. Such efforts would assist districts and schools in departing from the notion that AAMs and their families are the sole source of academic and social misalignments, as well as encourage them to take ownership of their role in being complicit in marginalizing the schooling experiences of AAMs and other multiethnic student groups. While previously mentioned evidence suggests that AAMs are underperforming academically while being overrepresented in special education and disciplinary realms (González, 2012; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017), rather than making brash assumptions that attribute these shortcomings to poverty, single-parent households, lack of emphasis on education, and other deficit informed notions, schools should focus on identifying their role in fostering environments that are predatory rather than supportive with regards to student needs.

Superintendents truly desiring to provide healthier experiences for AAMs must be proactive and deliberate in the recruiting, training, and development of talent in central leadership positions. When commonalities exist between the cultural norms of central school leadership and those of students and parents, it is likely for central leadership to better understand and therefore better accommodate diverse student needs (Rector-Aranda, 2016). It is estimated that by 2027, the nationwide K-12 population of White students is trending to drop from 61% to 45%, whereas the student population of Black and Hispanic students combined will likely rise from 33% to 44% during the same time frame (NCES, 2019). Therefore, measures need to be taken so that leadership populations better align with these trends.
Both the collected data and the literature for this study support the belief that African American teachers have been positive influencers for AAM (Fox, 2015; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Therefore, in addition to being active in recruiting multiethnic leadership to assist in overseeing the needs of multiethnic students, there should be similar efforts to recruit and retain multiethnic teachers. While some of this may happen organically by employing a more diverse leadership team, additional efforts and programing would be required for obtaining impactful and meaningful results that are sustainable.

Strong collaboration between school districts and universities is a must for success in this area. For universities to be truly invested in the communities they serve, they must understand their civic responsibility to those communities, and therefore be equally vested in working with districts to increase multiethnic graduates with teaching degrees. From the perspective of school districts, creating district level positions to work actively with local and regional universities would assist in identifying potential talent, creating effective programs to nurture the talent, and providing resources and in some cases funding to support multiethnic students in becoming equipped for teaching K-12. Districts and universities working collaboratively in this manner is critical for improving schooling outcomes for all students, AAMs included.

**Bias and Cultural Awareness Training**

In addition to increasing the representation of multiethnic teachers and district leaders, it is significant to also look at ways for all teachers and building level administrators to better understand the cultural significance of the students they encounter. This includes providing training that enables all personnel to identify their biases, and having healthy discussions and dialogue on disarming these biases in classroom and peer-to-peer settings. In other words, it is human nature for individuals to possess deficit-informed biases of one another (Staats, 2016).
However, the damage of such biases can be minimized and school personnel can still be effective in reaching the very students they associate with these biases if personnel are aware that they possess these harmful opinions (Lin et al., 2008; Staats, 2016). Besides training and discussions that allow professionals to see their own biases, it is also necessary to have active and open discussion on best practices that assist teachers and administrators in constantly examining themselves with regard to their implicit biases, as well as examining the manner in which these impact healthy interactions with AAMs and other multiethnic student populations (Lin et al., 2008).

My suggestion is that districts staff specifically for a position that focuses solely on reducing marginalizing and disparity in schools. The stakes are too high and the outcomes too important for this initiative to be compromised by becoming one of many small tasks reporting to a staff professional responsible for multiple disciplines. However, even employing a professional with a singular focus is not enough, and districts need to also consider outsourcing to consultants who specialize in training and professional development geared towards increasing the cultural competency of school personnel. It is easy for an organization to become complicit or to overlook its own flaws. Bringing in an outsider will typically provide a more candid assessment of the racial disparities, cultural incompetence, and harmful biases that exist within schools. Such would also assist with producing outside-the-box methods of decreasing the exposure that multiethnic students have with uncomfortable racial encounters. Additionally, having an outsider who is not employed by the district minimizes the risk of complicity, which increases the opportunity for actions that examine and dismantle systemic dominance. Hosting celebrations of diversity with no ensuing critical discourse may provide a few feel-good
moments or conversations, but nothing substantial enough for sustainable progress. An outside perspective may recognize this and implement further and more impactful strategic initiatives.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Along the same lines as culturally equipping teachers and schools to better accommodate the needs of multiethnic students is the issue shared by several participants that their education involved no culturally relevant pedagogy. Lin et al. (2008) posits that though imperative for successful schooling outcomes with multiethnic students, a diversity curriculum is difficult to implement due to White teachers lacking knowledge and preparation, along with possessing fear and discomfort in the area of teaching a diverse curriculum. For this reason, it is significant to mention Mahoney and Schamber (2004) who highlight the value of teacher training and professional development that implements multiethnic pedagogical strategies, and critical discussions on current issues that depict negative biases. To better equip schools for this task, districts should consider a consultant to assist with facilitating these conversations and trainings designed to help teachers become better acclimated and more comfortable with culturally diverse pedagogy and curriculum. While the assumption can be made that universities are also striving to better equip future educators for this task, such is far too critical to leave to assumption alone. The previous section of the study suggests cultural awareness and bias awareness training with regard to how teachers view students and understand their cultural uniqueness. Similar strategies can be applied towards enhancing culturally relevant pedagogy as those discussed for bias and cultural awareness training. Again, these techniques included having a central leadership liaison work with both the district and neighboring (local and regional) universities, and outsourcing to a consultant.
Advocacy, Mentoring, and Parental Engagement

I know from first-hand experience the value of having parents who are actively involved and engaged in student schooling experiences. Oftentimes throughout my schooling, teachers and principals attempted to discount my parents’ engagement, making false assumptions that Black families have little regard for education (Brewster et al., 2013; Javius, 2016). As a parent, I recognized similar stereotyping as I began navigating through the same AAM biases that I had experienced as a student. This is beyond disturbing, considering my child started school a decade after my high school graduation. In addition to implying that very little had changed, it also implies that rather than probing to identify home dynamics, some school personnel make brash and incorrect assumptions based on nothing more than implicit biases that correlate with race (Reynolds, 2010). This notion of wanting to blame parents or to ignore parental involvement is yet another attempt to disguise White supremacy and its systemic structure rather than truly desiring to uncover real root causes (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, 2017; García & Guerra, 2004).

Yes, it is true that some parents will not be ideal candidates to actively engage with. Variables such as homes with incarcerated parents, addiction, extreme poverty, hunger, molestation, and various other traumatizing realities would certainly provide a far different landscape from that which I experienced as a student. Therefore, I recognize that not all students will have parents as involved and cooperative as mine were. However, schools must do a better job of evaluating opportunities to collaborate and partner with parents for student success (Brewster et al., 2013; Rector-Aranda, 2016; Reynolds, 2010). When proper assessment of this sort is not taking place, students are not failing school – schools are failing students (Javius, 2016)!
Positive mentors and advocates would be beneficial for any AAM student, despite their background or home dynamic. For students who do not have strong support in the home or parents capable of assisting with tutoring and homework, mentoring is even more crucial. Bringing successful AAMs and other ethnicities in contact with multiethnic boys who aspire to become successful creates meaningful relationships, builds confidence, and establishes opportunities to begin networking for the future. Another consideration is that AAMs often experience feeling excluded from meaningful and healthy schooling experiences in White schools (Dickerson & Agosto, 2015), so the need for healthy advocacy becomes paramount with regard to previously mentioned stakes such as failing academic performance (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017) and the connection of school failure with a high propensity for incarceration (Christle et al., 2005). With the growing concern of achievement gaps between AAMs and other populations, an increase in both formal and informal mentoring has been seen over the past few decades (Dickerson & Agosto, 2015).

With regards to formal mentoring programs, their growing popularity has created options that allow school districts to collaborate with organizations and social groups whose values best align with those of the district (Dickerson & Agosto, 2015). Therefore, unlike my schooling which failed to provide any such options, today’s district leaders have the luxury of deciding which organizations and people are a good fit for their students. Meanwhile, districts should seek partners who not only provide positive role models, but also employ African American traditions that will offset the lack of culturally significant experiences provided in traditional school curriculum. African and African American traditions of storytelling, expressive rhythm, dancing, and singing are a few of many options that can separate an ordinary mentoring experience from one that is truly extraordinary. While discipline and order will always hold a
place in mainstream education, saving AAMs requires more than rigid authoritarian approaches. Meeting students where they are to a certain extent, and incorporating activities that they will enjoy will likely provide experiences that are more meaningful, more engaging, and more impactful than simply talking “at” a group of AAM students with demands of what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Instead, the recommendation would be to temper mentoring approaches with a spirit of collaboration, support, and love.

Conclusion

As suggested throughout the present study, the combination of literature, empirical data, and findings based on participant narratives imply that for AAMs, schooling experiences consist of various unwitting racial attacks in the form of microaggressions. The same sources suggest that while poor academic performance and excessive disciplinary action are possible consequences of these unhealthy attacks, far greater stakes exist in the form of psychological and emotional damages. Therefore, there is an optimal likelihood for AAM students to suffer from compromised mental and emotional wellbeing as a result of being forced to participate in racially toxic schooling environments where microaggressions exist.

All three microaggressions types surfaced (microinsults, microinvalidations, and microassaults), emerging as incidents of disparity between Black and White students, ignored cultural identify, blatant favoritism towards White students, and countless other examples of unhealthy racial attacks. Shared experiences revealed microinvalidations through actions like not noticing strong academic performance of AAMs; microinsults such as shock and awe in discovering that an AAM has an expansive vocabulary or strong math skills; and microassaults as demonstrated through actions such as being attacked physically for choice of attire, being told that Blacks are not allowed in the principal’s home, and attempts to publicly embarrass students
in classrooms and hallways by inappropriately challenging them on everything from academic capacity to future potential.

In summarizing the consequences of these attacks, I have to start by examining my own responses. I recall a highly inappropriate reaction to being placed in remedial reading, which was dead wrong on my part. I refused to complete my assignments and physically hurled my workbook out of the classroom window. For the short-term, these brash moves masked my insecurities, convincing myself that the temporary applause from classmates masked my boiling internal dissent. Perhaps it is reactions of this nature that create the notion that AAMs should be placed in detention, suspended, or assigned to special education. While I agree that inappropriate outbreaks are worthy of discipline, both this research and the supporting literature maintain that situations of this nature are not properly vetted, and that actions such as mine are often in response to being attacked by White supremacy that exists within the walls of K-12 schools.

Battles of this nature often create environments of distrust for authority that extend into adulthood. The recent influx of unjust murders of AAMs armed with nothing more than toy guns, skittles, and cigarettes further promotes the discomfort, fear, and distrust that AAMs feel for White authority figures. However, it is important to note that this feeling of distrust begins early in K-12 schools and is reinforced throughout our lives. The self-perpetuating bias and mistreatment hidden beneath the guise of microaggressions represents at least part of the problem for undesired schooling outcomes for AAMs. This is a problem that feeds the school-to-prison pipeline, heightens discomfort for AAM students, and lessens the overall quality of healthy schooling for AAMs throughout the country.
One of the underlying problems in all of this is that when undesired behaviors of AAMs are reported, the backstories of what led to these behaviors are not. If reported, such evidence would indicate that maybe these kids are not bad kids or bad students. Sure, AAMs cut up in class, underperform in reading and math, and are among the highest population in special education, but why is this the case? Any claims of inferior intelligence or lack of interest in learning are invalid. This is evidenced by achievement gaps and shortcomings that expand as students continue to advance through grade levels. Therefore, other unseen facets undergird schooling encounters that are obvious and visible. In other words, something less detectable exists beneath the radar. The results of this study demonstrate that while racial microaggressions may not be the only cause, they are definitely a factor worthy of consideration and review, and definitely a huge part of the reason for the misalignments between AAMs and desired schooling outcomes.

Unfortunately, schools fail to consider the reality that these kids are under attack and are responding the best way they know how with limited life skills, limited social engagement, and limited cognitive development, as expected of an adolescent, pre-teen, or teenager. Both Kendall and Julian expressed mentally checking out at times and no longer caring, with Kendall being totally unconcerned with receiving all Fs and developing a pattern of disciplinary issues, and Julian experiencing episodes of extreme isolation and depression. This was not an issue of these students not wanting to learn. Based on their perspectives, these were issues of being thrust into a culture by which AAMs are unfairly viewed as a threat, and fighting accordingly. As shared through the lens of Credence who also expressed isolation and depression, many AAM children are taught not to question authority, so cultures of toxic schooling often go unreported. Thus, when schooling mechanisms tend to only look outward at AAMs and their families as the
problem, they fail to look internally at their own responsibility in dismantling systemic racial fibers that are typically older than the brick and mortar buildings where these racialized schooling incidents take place.

Kendall, Julian, and Credence all shared examples of being angry in addition to previously mentioned bouts with depression and isolation, and every participant shared examples of wondering why they were being attacked. In extreme instances, some participants even questioned their own innocence pertaining to false accusations, and their own self-worth when devalued by teachers and administrators. Kendall’s question sums this mentality up succinctly by wondering to himself “Maybe there is something wrong with me?” Various other questions emerged and demonstrated the stress and pressure of kids having to wonder things like “Why are you accusing me of plagiarism simply for using the word poignant?” and “Why are you snatching me by the clothes for nothing more than a suspender coming loose,” or “Why do you expect me to amount to nothing more than a guy who hangs out in the barbershop?” Other questions such as “Why am I being accused of inappropriate sexual misconduct?” and “Why do you believe the White kids, but it is so difficult for you to believe me?” also surfaced. In an environment where young minds should be challenged and healthy social encounters should take place, AAM students often have to temper their schooling experiences with these very unhealthy thoughts constantly nagging. These were the same questions, thoughts, and stresses that I experienced. I am thankful that I was finally able to understand my pain which also helped me to understand the pain experienced by these men. Just as I had not only discovered a name for my pain, but found liberation in doing so - I was happy to pay it forward. I am optimistic that each of them will do the same and that this study will provide a tool that assists many others in this constant racial are that all people of color face, especially AAMs.
CHAPTER 6

Reflections

The pawn is the most powerless and vulnerable unit in the game of chess. Considered dispensable, pawns serve on the front line of battle, and are sacrificed to protect and preserve pieces of greater hierarchal worth. To get the gist of the isolation, fear, helplessness, depression, and defenselessness that some of the study participants (myself included) experienced throughout K-12, imagine one pawn, occupying the center of the chess board by its lonesome. A highly visible target with no sense of protection, agency, or advocacy, exposed and under the destructive attack of systemic barriers and implicit biases. This analogy represents the schooling experiences for many AAMs as expressed through participant stories. Just as school segregation and blatant racial inequality were likely used to marginalize the experiences of the parents, grandparents, and other predecessors of myself and these study participants, racial microaggressions compromise the modern-day schooling experiences of AAMs. The stories captured for this study summarize the reality of racial attacks taking place in American public schools, and the manner in which racial microaggressions are utilized as weapons in modern conceptions of racial warfare.

Participants shared that these attacks felt uncomfortable and unfair, and that they intuitively knew that something was wrong, but as children, lacked the vocabulary to explain these experiences or even the maturity to understand and interpret the ensuing emotional state. Despite having loving and concerned parents, and unlike a stomach ache or bruised knee, we together experienced a nebulous pain that could not be easily pinpointed or identified. Therefore, even our parents were incapable of completely guiding us through a system of
oppression based on deficit informed biases and systemic attacks towards young African American male students.

For me personally, I remained angry and frustrated years after completing K-12, even decades later, still seeking an understanding of why my schooling was so painful and unhealthy. It was not until reaching my late 40s that I finally arrived upon a name to assign my pain – racial microaggressions! Earlier in this paper, I made reference to an African American female student who with tears in her eyes expressed a feeling of freedom when given “a name for her pain” after hearing Dr. Daniel Solórzano speak on the subject of microaggressions (page 62 of the present document). Although I did not physically cry, I felt similar sentiments as mixed emotions of joy and pain collided with new knowledge that awarded me the vocabulary to properly express agonizing past experiences, while finally identifying an enemy that for most of my life had been as nameless, undetectable, and invisible as my Black culture had been to most of my White teachers. I was delighted not just in sharing with other AAMs who had experienced similar dissonance, but also in their expressing similar feelings of freedom and empowerment from our conversations together. This section of the study provides a summary of the empowerment emerging from the culmination of our narratives, as well as inspiring thoughts and reflections awarded to me via this journey. I pass these reflections forward with hopes they will offer similar inspiration to others.

**Soul Brothers**

While I do not have literary references or empirical data to support certain personal beliefs, my five decades of living as an African American male qualify me to make statements, assertions, and assumptions that pertain to the AAM existence. Therefore, I have endured the rituals and initiation processes that entitle me to refer to AAMs who endure similar struggles as
“soul brothers.” Often used as a term of endearment and solidarity between Black men, the soul brother terminology extends a sense of family and belonging throughout a populous who have experienced common oppression despite differences in geographic location, religious belief, political ideology, and other dissimilar values and customs (Hannerz, 1968). Deeper still, “soul brother” represents survival efforts that have manifested over the past few centuries, as a vast continent of non-homogenous persons with varying customs, cultures, and languages, have been forced to exist as a uniform race.

Within the soul brother subculture, idiosyncratic beliefs are superseded by common threads of Blackness, much of which comes from places of pain. This mentality is solidified by the existence of non-verbal signs and symbols encoded with powerful messages of uplift and encouragement. Examples are countless, ranging from the proverbial head-nod shared between passers-by, to an assortment of rhythmic handshakes and fist bumps, to the prideful pointing of a Black fists toward the heavens mimicking silhouettes of John Carlos and Tommie Smith’s peaceful yet powerful protest in the 1968 Olympics. Such gestures represent numerous thoughts, ideas, and beliefs, including recognition of shared struggles, empowerment by any means, and a strong sense of pride and cultural identity despite systemic attempts to erase all accounts of such. Thus, the unspoken communication of the modern soul brother may very well be the byproduct of various undertakings such as African slaves learning to communicate across language barriers, hidden messaging encoded within rhythmic hand clapping, or encrypted wordings within the context of Negro spirituals. More important than the origin is the understanding that the symbolic movements and gestures of the soul brother support the common African American mantra that simply states “What’s understood doesn’t need to be said.”
Growing up in African American neighborhoods, attending African American churches, and being conditioned in African American circles of influence, it was schooling where I first experienced racial disparity. For most of the participants involved with the present study, this was also the case. After being under the nurture and care of parents, grandparents, pastors, and mentors who knew our potential and were genuinely concerned for our development and well-being, it was shocking to suddenly be thrust under the supervision of adults possessing dangerous biases, and in some cases, unhealthy intentions. However, the “soul brothers” who rendered experiences for the present study demonstrate that the biblical scripture “No weapon formed against me (us) shall prosper” (Isiah 54:17, The New King James Version) is neither hyperbole or allegorical with regard to the AAM experience in America. We share a past characterized by enslavement, Jim Crow, mass lynching, and legal segregation, and a present reality mired by numerous forms of modern weaponry, including the racial microaggressions that form the basis for this study. Despite these obstacles and the emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical pains that ensue, soul brothers have not just existed, but have made and continue to make significant impacts towards every meaningful facet of the world.

Therefore, as I reflect upon my painful past schooling experiences along with stories shared in this study, it is my desire in addition to accomplishing the previously stated goals of the study, that the accomplishments and greatness of Porter, Kendall, Julian, Credence, and Micah serve as a source of empowerment and inspiration for countless AAMs seeking the encouragement, uplift, and motivation to move past racial barriers, and in the spirit of African American astronauts Ron McNair, Guy Bluford, and Fred Gregory, reach for the stars – both figuratively and literally.
**Overqualified or Overcolorfied?**

In the spirit of inspiring future soul brothers that their trajectory for accomplishment is endless, it important to address and attack damaging narratives that take direct aim at AAM excellence. While the influence of AAMs is of far greater reach than professional sports accomplishments, it would be difficult to find a social phenomenon that carries clamor and fanfare that rivals professional football’s massively spectacled championship game that has become affectionately known as the Super Bowl. My memory toggles between quarterback Terry Bradshaw and the Pittsburg Steelers winning the Super Bowl in 1980, and the Kansas City Chiefs winning the most current 2020 Super Bowl under the direction of AAM quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

I think back to Mr. McKnight (my sixth grade teacher) celebrating Bradshaw’s success, while co-signing the popular myth of the era that African Americans were extremely athletic, but not intelligent enough to excel at the quarterback position. Based on study participant Credence experiencing similar biases as a high school athlete, some semblance of these insufficient notions seem to still exist, as they do outside of sports as well. Nonetheless, as this irresponsible adult continued using his classroom as a pulpit to preach reckless personal viewpoints with preteens, he further explained that Black athletes rely too heavily on their athletic gifts rather than developing the thinking skills needed for playing quarterback successfully. Perhaps I was too young to gauge the level of Mr. McKnight’s inappropriateness, but even at 11-years-old, I was aware enough to realize what he thought about me as a student. I remember thinking to myself that if he thinks that athletic AAMs lack the intelligence to excel in certain sports positions, then certainly his classroom expectations of me are low.
Ironically enough, Terry Bradshaw commentated the pre-game for the most recent Super and stated that Patrick Mahomes flashy and nontraditional style of play would “come back to bite him in the butt.” I assume Mr. McKnight has never met Bradshaw, and I do not suggest that Bradshaw carries the same bigoted opinions as those shared by Mr. McKnight. However, it is interesting that both White men view physical and intuitive gifts such as speed and creativity as detriments rather than attributes when such skills are possessed by African American quarterbacks. Reflecting back, I think about commentators complimenting and praising White quarterbacks like Steve Young and John Elway for spontaneous and intuitive play that mimics these very African American players being criticized.

Study participant Kendall experienced a very similar attack based on his desire to play classical music, as did Micah for his extensive vocabulary. Despite how unwitting and innocent these gestures may have appeared, thinking about such actions in greater depth sheds deeper light. For example, being bothered by a Black musician’s ability and desire to perform European Classical music not only marginalizes his musical experiences. This also reduces the complete evolution of a complex genre to a mere notion of “White Music,” which in turn is a detriment to both the development of the individual musician and the augmentation of a significant art form. Similar inferences can be made about attempts to deny AAM students access and ownership to certain pockets of the English language. Therefore, in a sense, these early 90s and early 2000s examples of racial microaggressions shared by study participants are not much different than attempting to convince a classroom full of Black and White sixth grade students that not only are AAMs less intelligent, but the very gifts that make us unique are the same skills that make us ineffective.
A Choice of Weapons

There are strong parallels between the counter-stories of participants in this study and life perspectives shared by Gordon Parks in his autobiographical book “A Choice of Weapons.” Parks shares how rather than complaining or resorting to physical violence, he instead utilized his creative and artistic talents to point a camera at the world, and leverage the gift of photography as a weapon against extreme poverty and harsh racial bigotry (Parks, 2010). Perhaps then, it is not just hyperbole that every participant (myself included) has been exposed to and involved with varying degrees of creative arts, and that each of us have approached racial disparity in a manner that pays homage to the legacy of Parks.

Within the context of identifying similarities between our choices of weapons and those of Parks, it is important to identify that the word “weapon” is not a word used to symbolize a tool for lighthearted conflict or moderate disagreement. Instead, it is noteworthy to recognize that the usage of this word is symbolic of life and death survival; protection from enemy attack; and all-out warfare. That said, remain mindful that racial microaggressions are not some soft and watered down remnant of racial injustice. Though this conception of racism is not as blatant and openly threatening as racial attacks of more recognizable form, these assaults still represent racial apartheid, racial terrorization, and racial warfare, and can only be defeated with proper and potent weaponry. Therefore, AAMs choice of weaponry for racial warfare is just as important as the weapons chosen by warriors and soldiers preparing for physical battle.

Like racist cowards hiding beneath the veiling of white sheets, racial microaggressions represent the hidden identity of White supremacy as it exists in the modern era. However, unlike burning crosses in open pastures and other visually disquieting vestiges, microaggressions are capable of stealth movement, equipped with the ability to infiltrate classrooms and other
seemingly safe spaces with minimal intrusiveness. In fact, these forces often attack so silently, that the target is unaware that such is taking place. Similar to invisible but deadly viruses that are undetectable to the human eye, these unseen commencements of supremacy and power are designed to destroy without warning on inclination. Therefore, like myself and the other participants of the present study, targets of racial microaggressions feel the pain and suffer the consequences, yet are often unaware or incapable of explaining what has taken place.

This leaves us with the question - how does one prepare for racial warfare of this magnitude? A question that takes us back to Gordon Parks. Within the context of attempting to survive a tumultuous existence, Parks dealt with homelessness, hunger, extreme racial disparity, and other perils symbolic of life-threatening hardship and dire misfortune. In his writing, he is honest about his involvement in physically dangerous encounters, including an altercation with an employer who refused to pay him for an honest work week. While this situation ended with Parks aiming a gun at a man he was fully prepared to kill, he soon discovered that aiming a camera and shooting pictures was of far greater reward and less dangerous than shooting bullets from a firearm.

Similar to Parks, there do exist some instances of physical altercations within the framework of the disturbing yet empowering narratives shared by some of the study participants. Though temporarily satisfying, these individual battles on school yards and playgrounds represent exactly what one might expect to find in such places, mere child’s play. Even victorious outcomes are in no way symbolic of real wins against the pressing restraints of social oppression. A nation predicated on over four centuries of biased legal jurisprudence, racially embedded political bureaucracy, and racialized police and military bullying is structured by
systemic supports that would certainly overpower and annihilate any attempt to engage in physical recourse or retaliation of any meaningful magnitude.

Contrary to violence, the Gordon Parks blueprint makes a case for AAMs to utilize their unique talents, traits, and characteristics as weapons to not just sustain, but to dominate and overcome oppressive barriers. Participant narratives demonstrate strong parallels to this notion of relying on being exceptional as weaponry, providing evidence of ingenuity and excellence as crippling blows to deficit informed beliefs of Black inferiority. While the use of the previously mentioned pistol did assist Parks in acquiring the weekly wages owed to him, this gain is paltry in comparison to the life quality and global recognition resulting from his true gifts and passions. Thank God Parks made the right choice, and instead of a life (or death) predicated by violence, he instead leaves behind a rich legacy of award-winning photographs, writings, films, and musical compositions simply as a result of his proper weapon selection.

Meanwhile, each of my participants are currently using their weapons to build legacies of their own. School boy fist fights as shared by Credence and Julian could have easily resorted in a life of violence and physical aggression, yet both quickly recognized that using their hands for personal training and scientific research was for more useful and impactful. Kendall choosing the upright bass and Porter’s choice to use his power of speech have been choices that have empowered these men to overcome adversity and to be great, while also inspiring countless audiences who are fortunate to marvel at their unique talents. Porter never suggested contemplating any unsuitable weaponry, but for Kendall, becoming a jazz musician is a far cry from the potential outcome of continuing to steal cars. Micah’s choice of weapons was to simply never allow his surroundings to define him. Coming from an impoverished neighborhood inhabited by issues with drugs, crime, and violence, he never allowed these factors to serve as
reasons to not participate in rigorous learning programs, cultural enrichment initiatives, and other traditionally White spaces.

It is only fitting that both the counter-stories of participants and the very existence of AAMs nationwide resemble one of Gordon Parks many choices of weapons, his creation of the fictitious character John Shaft for the movie “Shaft.” If the characteristics of a soul brother were captured in a photograph, Shaft would symbolize the look, the attitude, and the mentality that in a sense represents the survival traits symbolic of the AAM existence. I know personally, my schooling and my adult life have presented fears and barriers that I have imagined myself conquering in a poised, self-reliant, and heroic manner reflective of Shaft. Imagining a combination of good looks, street smarts, grit, and rapid-fire one liners that even the greatest comedians would envy, I envisioned being applauded while saving the day and kissing the girl. Though all AAMs may not share the same imagination, these characteristics of Shaft are very real survival strategies. Successfully navigating through a racially charged America requires thinking and reacting quickly, and doing so with a sense of poise and charm that disguises emotions ranging from virulent grief to raging dissent. Therefore, the co-participants of this study may not have lived these experiences through the lens of John Shaft, but they have lived them. More importantly, they have conquered them!

Although I am curious, it is not important whether or not Parks created the Shaft character under the influence of boyish imagination similar to mine. A fictitious character who in some respects is the Black counterpart to Superman is cool, but living and breathing AAMs represent something far cooler. Even the larger-than-life image of Shaft portrayed on a 70-foot-screen with high speed chases, explosions, and pretty girls is slight in comparison to the real life exploits of Parks and even some of the Black men I have come to know personally as mentors.
and friends. I can say the same for my own father whose example of manhood outweighs any
fictitious display of over-sensationalized toughness ever portrayed in television, film, or by
celebrity association. I can also say this about the soul brothers represented in this study and
throughout the world. As AAMs, we call ourselves brothers because we coexist in kinship
fashion. Though we share neither paternal nor maternal parents, we are the sibling children of
shared hardships and oppressions that solidify this kinship. Therefore, despite our shared pain,
we continue to perform as champions who overcome microaggressions and other enormous
adversity; doing so with what the late songwriter Prince describes as “an intellect and a savior-
faire.” Despite every attempt imaginable to remove us from existence, our unrivaled poise,
elegance, and innovation in leveraging our “weapons” is evidenced by our presence and
significant contributions to science and medicine, the arts, literature, athletics, and any other
meaningful framework of society.
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APPENDIXES
Appendix A

Screening Protocol

Greetings and thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. To ensure that you meet the criteria of the study and are an overall good fit, I have a few questions. Are you okay with moving forward with the screening process?

1. What racial orientation do consider yourself or identify with?

2. How old are you?

3. Did the majority of your K-12 schooling take place in predominately white American schools with predominately white teachers?

4. Where there any cultural barriers or cultural misalignments that caused stress or discomfort at any time during your K-12 schooling? If so, what do you think was the basis of this discomfort?

5. Do you feel that your race and gender had any impact on your overall schooling experiences?
Appendix B

Consent Form

**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a research study of subtle and covert racial discrimination targeted towards African American Males (AAMs) in K-12 schooling. I hope to explore the consequences of this type of racial discrimination on AAMs who are now between the ages of 28-40.

**Participant Selection:** You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an AAM; because you have identified the belief that you experienced racial discrimination at certain points during your K-12 schooling; and because you meet the age criteria of 28 to 40. Approximately 5-7 participants will be invited to join the study.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of interview questions with hopes of obtaining perspectives of racialized K-12 schooling experiences to determine the consequences of these experiences. There will be just one to two interviews that will last 60 to 90 minutes in duration. Examples of questions: *Describe in detail any encounters of subtle yet harmful racism you encountered during K-12? From your perspective, do you feel these behaviors were intentional?* With your permission, I will audio record and take notes during the interview.

**Discomfort/Risks:** There may be minimal to moderate discomfort in revisiting unpleasant racialized experiences from the past. Besides the possibility of moderate discomfort, there are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it.

**Benefits:** The benefits of this study are to identify racial discrimination that is unique to AAMs in the K-12 schooling pipeline. The results of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on systemic school racism, and will hopefully provide a resource to aid teachers, administrators, and school districts in better serving the academic and social needs of AAM K-12 students.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the research team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

Audio recordings of interviews will be kept on a password protected laptop until they are transcribed and then they will be deleted.
Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University and/or Kevin S. Harrison. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: Kevin S. Harrison at 316-978-5163 or kevin.harrison@wichita.edu, or my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson at 316-978-6392 or jean.patterson@wichita.edu. (If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:
  • You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
  • You are aware that this is a research study,
  • You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
  • You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

______________________________
Printed Name of Subject

______________________________
Signature of Subject

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Printed Name of Witness

______________________________
Witness Signature

______________________________
Date
Appendix C

Wichita State University
College of Applied Studies
Counseling, Educational Leadership, Educational and School Psychology

Member Check Form

Greetings (Participants Name):

Thank you for sharing with me your perspectives on some of the racialized experiences you may have encountered during your K-12 public schooling. For your convenience, I have attached a written transcript of our interview together. Please review the attached memo for accuracy to ensure that I have not miscommunicated, misrepresented, or misquoted anything that you shared during our time together. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me at 316-253-5541 or by email at kevin.harrison@wichita.edu. If I do not hear from you within the next 10 days, I will make the assumption that everything on the transcript is accurate. Meanwhile, thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule to be a part of this study.

Cordially,

Kevin S. Harrison
Interview Question Protocol for AAM K-12 Perspectives Study

Hello, my name is Kevin S. Harrison. I am a doctoral candidate from Wichita State University’s Educational Leadership program. I appreciate your willingness to assist me by participating in this interview. My research aims to understand the perspectives of adult AAMs on racialized experiences they encountered during K-12 and the consequences of those encounters. The name of the study is “A Name for My Pain: Examining the Consequences of Racial Microaggressions in K-12 Schooling from the Perspectives of Adult African American Males.”

You have been selected to participate in the study as an adult AAM who received their K-12 education in American public schools. You were selected because you have unique knowledge and experiences that will contribute to the research. Please keep in mind that I am interested in your perspectives about your experiences with racial injustice, discrimination, and biases.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversations. To ensure confidentiality, no names will be used when we report the results of the session. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our session so that I am able to make accurate analysis directly from your comments. The digital recording of our conversation will be transcribed and again, for confidentiality, the recording and transcription will be kept in a secure location for the duration of, and after the conclusion of, the study. This session will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. In the event you are not given ample time to share your responses, you may be asked to participate in a second interview which will also have a duration of approximately 60 minutes. Do I have your permission to record our interview?

(Review the signed Informed Consent with the participant)

1. Let’s start with your childhood and your background:
   a. Where did you spend most of your childhood?
   b. What type of student were you? Feel free to describe at each level (elementary, middle, and high school) if you feel this changed at different school levels).
   c. How old are you now?
   d. What do you currently do for a living?

2. Tell me about your schooling experiences:
   a. Where did you attend school?
b. What type of geographic area(s) did your schooling take place?

c. What are one or two fond memories that took place during K-12 schooling? How do these memories make you feel? What role do these memories play in shaping the person you are today?

d. Want are one or two disturbing memories that took place during your K-12 schooling?

e. What role do you think your race and gender played in the creation these or other disturbing K-12 memories?

f. What role do you feel race had in your academic successes or failures? How about social successes or failures? Behavioral?

3. I want to know a little bit about your teachers and other school staff:

a. Who was your favorite teacher in elementary school; middle school; and high school? What was the nationality of these teachers?

b. Who was your least favorite teacher in elementary school; middle school; and high school? What were the nationalities of these teachers?

c. From your perspective, in what ways were any of your negative teacher interactions based on you being an African American male (or black used interchangeably)? How do you think the biases held by these teachers played a role in these negative experiences?

d. From your perspective, in what ways were any of your positive teacher interactions based on your teachers not having biases about African American men?

e. Did you ever have African American teachers? If so, please share the differences in encounters (if any) with these teachers compared to white teachers. Also, if you had African American teachers, in what ways do you feel your encounters with these teachers were influenced by their white colleagues?

f. What was your interaction like with school staff other than your teachers (counselors, principals, school psychologists, etc.)?

g. What type of interaction did your parent(s) or guardian(s) have with your teachers and school staff?

I want to talk more specifically about racism and racialized encounters you may have experienced in K-12. Feel free to be as candid as possible:

h. How often would you say that you experienced racial discrimination or racial disparity throughout your K-12 schooling?

i. Describe in your own words, the types of racism you experienced? Probes: Were you called names? Describe some of the circumstances you thought were unfair? Describe how this made you feel?

j. Describe in detail any encounters of subtle yet harmful racism you encountered during K-12 From your perspective, do you think these behaviors were intentional?

k. From your perspective, describe the role that you think popular mainstream biases of African American males played in these racialized encounters? In what ways
do your K-12 racial encounters mirror those that you have experienced as an adult?
l. As a K-12 student, what vocabulary did you use in sharing your racialized encounters? If you did not share these encounters, please explain why you did not?
m. Describe the difference between your schooling experiences and those of your white counterparts?
n. Describe the difference between your schooling experiences and those of African American girls you attended school with?
o. If you can recall one or two specific stories that upset you, saddened you, or angered you, please share those stories?
p. Upon experiencing racial encounters, what were some of your reactions? How did you respond?
q. In what ways was your cultural uniqueness criticized (hair, clothing, language, personal preferences, etc.)?

4. I have a few more questions. This last set of questions deals with the consequences of the racialized encounters you experienced in K-12 schooling:
a. Describe your overall discipline and behavior during K-12 schooling? How were your behaviors shaped by racialized encounters?
b. What impact did racialized encounters have on your grades? On your school attendance? On your physical health? On your mental health? If there was an increase or decrease in academic performance due to racialized encounters, please explain?