

RACE & CLASS: AN INTERGENERATIONAL STUDY OF  
PRIVILEGED AFRICAN AMERICANS EDUCATED IN  
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE AND INTEGRATED SUBURBAN  
SCHOOLS

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation sought to better understand the K-12 school experiences of middle and upper income Blacks educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban school systems. Through the narratives of six (6) participants—four females and two males (split evenly between Generations Y and Z)—the study contributes toward knowledge on African American *within-group* differences and perspectives on K-12 school experiences.

The theoretical frames of social location and trust were used to help guide this investigation. Through social location, I sought to understand the interconnectedness of one's race, class, and gender and how these locations impact school experiences. Through the theoretical frame of trust, I sought to understand “overall” participant confidence in the educational processes (academic and social) they underwent.

While findings from this dissertation matched some of what is already well-documented on the K-12 school experiences of Black American students in general, by focusing on within-group differences relevant to class and generational grouping, key variances in experiences (not often reported) were revealed. For example, as the study was intergenerational in scope, there was a clear generational divide among study participants in terms of their views relating to how race impacted their K-12 school experiences. Despite the fact that most felt that their schools were not sensitive to their needs as African Americans, race seemed to be less of a concern with Gen Z'ers than with Gen Y'ers. More specifically, while participants from Generation Y were explicit in stating that race had an impact on their school experiences, Generation Z was hesitant to say that race influenced their experiences. Interestingly, as all participants dealt with

racial stereotyping, the biggest perpetrators of such stereotypes were peers and not educators.

The influence of socioeconomic class on school experiences was also significant as most participants felt that their economic status influenced their cross-cultural interactions. In addition, while the social location of gender was not heavily emphasized in this dissertation, there were variations in perspectives stratified across gender lines. Taken together, a major conclusion was that one's social location (inclusive of generational grouping) cannot be ignored when taking into account the academic experiences of African American students as a whole.

Finally, this dissertation highlighted the overall confidence each participant had in the educational process they experienced (academically and socially). Although all encountered some tough circumstances directly related to their social location, everyone felt positive overall about their school experiences—perceiving the academic training they received and inter-ethnic social interactions, as an asset.

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Within the broad realm of multicultural education, there is much research on the school experiences of low-income African American students—particularly within the urban context. However, research centering on the academic experiences of privileged (i.e., middle to upper income) African American students is extremely limited (Dotterer, McHale & Crouter, 2009; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). Generalized across socioeconomic strata, most of what is known about African American school experiences is based on research conducted with low-income African Americans or comparative studies that center on divergent ethnic groups (Dotterer, McHale & Crouter, 2009; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). Hence, *within-group* differences are rarely investigated.

The indiscriminate practice of generalizing the school experiences of African Americans without taking into consideration distinctions such as “social class,” or even the interplay between one’s race, class, and gender is problematic in that bias in sampling has the potential to arise. Further, as it relates to “deficit beliefs” (Milner, Tenore, & Laughter, 2008, p. 20) or commonly held attitudes about the intellectual inferiority of African Americans to Whites (Milner, Tenore, & Laughter, 2008) as well as other negative portrayals and ideas about African Americans, a *single story* (Adichie, 2009) is rehearsed and reinforced without regard to within-group differences (Sirin & Sirin-Rogers, 2004).

In her July 2009 TED Talk presentation, “The Danger of a Single Story,” novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie clearly articulated the perils and consequences of rehearsing a singular aspect or *story* of experience for a group of people without regard to variations. Pointing to a duality in the power of stories in that they have the ability to empower and malign, Adichie indicated that by depicting a people as one way (and only one way) over and over again, the consequence is, that is what they become (TED Talk, 2009). By and large, popular images of African Americans depict this group as helpless, social misfits, academically lazy and underachieving, belligerent, and socioeconomically disadvantaged. While these negative portrayals are reflective of some within the African American community, they are not representative of all. Unfortunately, to the detriment of African Americans as a whole, this stereotypical, singular story of the Black experience is fed to the masses consistently. Sadly, many have bought into it—Black and White alike. Be that as it may, the major problem with these “rehearsed negative stereotypes” are “not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete” (TED Talk, 2009)—incomplete representations of the African American community. Subsequently, the consequences (whether intended or unintended) are that deficit beliefs about African Americans prevail, which, unfortunately impacts experiences—even within the confines of a school.

The school experiences of middle and upper income African American students attending predominantly White and integrated suburban schools is a thin area in the body of research on African American schooling as a whole. This topic is important to me because I was that student—an African American, female, upper middle-class student, having grown up in largely White suburban neighborhoods and having attended both predominantly White and integrated suburban K-12 schools (private and public). In

efforts to direct more attention towards this largely overlooked area in the body of research, this study sought to understand the K-12 educational experiences of middle and upper income African American Generation Y and Z'ers who had been educated in predominantly White or integrated K-12 suburban schools—particularly as it relates to school experiences surrounding race and class.

It is important to speak to the significance of the intergenerational design of this study as Generations Y and Z represent the most ethnically diverse (ARC, 2011; ncsu.edu, 2013) generations in American history. Further, research demonstrates that both Gen Y and Z'ers are the most racially tolerant generations in the U.S. (Kingston, 2014; PRRI & Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, & World Affairs, 2012; ARC, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2010). These generational characteristics are very important as it relates to the ideology of a “post-racial America.”

The notion of the United States being post-racial first gained popularity during the 2008 election year with the installment of America's first African American President, Barack H. Obama. This monumental election year along with national demographic changes in which minorities are projected to become the statistical majority by 2050 (Taylor & Cohn, 2012; ARC, 2011) has “fed into a common narrative in mainstream media that race and racism are no longer significant barriers to success in our nation” (ARC, 2011, p. 1), inclusive of school contexts. By looking into the school experiences of middle and upper income African American Gen Y and Z'ers educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools, insight can be gained into America's current racial climate. Throughout this study, “African American” and “Black” will be used interchangeably. What follows is a section on defining key terms.

## **DEFINING KEY TERMS**

Within the context of this dissertation, “school experiences” refers to encounters relevant to student academic performance, social adjustment (e.g., feelings of belonging and community) in the school environment, and perceptions of one’s identity as it relates to matters of race and class within the context of being educated at predominantly White or integrated suburban schools.

To characterize what is meant by “predominantly White schools,” I looked to the definition of what is a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Christopher Brown II & Elon Dancy II (2010) describe PWI’s as “institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (p. 524). In relation to this dissertation, predominantly White schools, refers to K-12 educational settings in which the student enrollment is comprised of 50% or more of those persons who are considered “White” or European Americans.

In contrast to a predominantly White school, an integrated or otherwise racially heterogeneous school is a school in which the student body is comprised of a diversity of racial/ethnic groups, who’s individual share of the student population does not exceed 50%.

“Generation Y” (a.k.a., Gen Y or Millennials) refers to those persons born between the birth years of 1977 to 1994 (Freestone & Mitchell, 2004; Schroer, 2012); while, “Generation Z” or Gen Z, are those individuals born between 1995 and the present (Schroer, 2012).

Concerning “privilege,” it is important to make a distinction as it relates to the African American experience vs. the White cultural experience. In her 1988 paper,

“White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies,” Peggy McIntosh refers to White privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets” (p. 1) that White people can cash in on a daily basis—all while remaining oblivious to its affordances. These unearned privileges—largely based on skin color—consist of a myriad of benefits. Some of the benefits outlined in McIntosh’s article include having the ability to shop with the assurance of not being harassed or followed by store clerks; being able to turn on the television or see a range of print publications in which your race is positively and widely represented; being able to see your race highly visible in academic curriculum; and even being able to conduct financial transactions (i.e., writing checks or using a credit card) without your financial reliability being called into question. Sadly, as these privileges are largely based on skin color, those who are not White often do not enjoy the same level of social prestige—even if they have the income or educational background that presumably would provide such privileges. As such, within the context of this dissertation, it is important to define what is meant by privilege when referring to African Americans. For the purposes of this study, “privileged” African Americans refers to those Blacks who are or were reared in economic conditions that “are markedly more *financially* [emphasis added] stable” (Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, Davi, 2007, p. 19) in that they are situated as middle or upper income.

“Upper income” refers to upper-middle class, as I was unable to find any contemporary, peer-reviewed literature, centering on the school experiences of wealthy or “upper class” African Americans. Finally, while “bourgeoisie” refers to the “middle-

class,” a more detailed explanation on characteristics of the Black middle-class is offered in the next section of this dissertation.

### **THE BLACK BOURGEOISIE: AN OVERVIEW**

*“The stereotype of the working-class Black or impoverished Black is one that Whites, as well as Blacks, have come to embrace and accept as an accurate and complete account of the Black American experience.”*

- Lawrence Otis Graham

Despite the common portraiture of African American students as being poor, most Blacks are not impoverished and span the spectrum of socioeconomic levels (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004; Patillo-McCoy, 1999). In fact, the majority of African Americans are considered to be members of the bourgeoisie, or “middle class.”

Patillo-McCoy (1999) suggests that the “middle class” is a “notoriously elusive category based on a combination of socioeconomic factors (mostly income, occupation, and education) and normative judgments (ranging from where people live, to what churches or clubs they belong to, to whether they plant flowers in their gardens)” (p. 13). Similarly, Kochar & Fry (2015) argue, “there are many different ways to measure America’s ‘middle,’ including by people’s education, occupation, wealth, social values or some combination” (p. 1). However, as the U.S. Census Bureau does not have a formal definition of the middle class (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), there is no official or universal classification of who comprises the middle class in America (Kochar & Fry, 2015). Because the African American community as a whole has historically earned lower wages in comparison to its White counterparts, and has endured inequitable practices in occupational opportunities, Patillo-McCoy (1999) contends that the idea of a Black middle class has been even more obscure (Patillo-McCoy, 1999).

As there is no “accepted definition of the ‘middle class’ in the United States” (Renwick & Short, 2014, p. 1), trying to characterize exactly who makes up the “Black middle class” is somewhat complex. Renwick & Short (2014) note that median household income is often used to define the middle class. Specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau uses “pre-tax cash to define [those] medians” (Renwick & Short, 2014, p. 2)—the same of which is used to define poverty. While the U.S. poverty line is considered \$15,000 or less annual income, the median household income was \$51,939 as of 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Median household income is also categorized by race. For example, as of 2013, while the median household income for Asians was \$67,065, it was only \$58,270 for non-Hispanic Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). In contrast the median household income for Blacks in 2013 was only \$34,598 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Even so, from the vantage point of using the 2009 U.S. median household income rate, 33.1% of African Americans had annual household incomes of \$50,000 or more. Further, 28% of African Americans had household incomes ranging between \$25,000 and \$49,999. Taken together, 61.1% of the roughly estimated 41.7 million African Americans (Centers for Disease Control, 2013) were either lower-middle (a.k.a., working class), making between \$25,000 – \$49,999 per year, middle-middle class, making \$50,000 – \$99,999 per year, or upper-middle class and wealthy, having incomes upward of \$100,000 or more as of 2009—thereby statistically demonstrating that most African Americans are not impoverished, as one could easily assume in terms of what is portrayed in the media and even scholarly literature.

In contrast, a sizeable number, 23.5% of the nation’s African American population as of 2009 had household incomes at or below the poverty line. Further,

15.4% earned incomes ranging between \$15,000 and \$24,999 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Given the manifold injustices African Americans have had to endure in the U.S., coupled with a significant number in the Black community being poverty-stricken, the relatively new economic and social gains made by some members of the overall Black community, do not erase the importance of continued research and focused attention on the impoverished Black American sub-cultural group. For example, I would be remiss if I did not mention a seminal work by award-winning author, Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. In the book, Kozol (1991) incites a scathing rebuke against America's unequal system of schooling as he offers an inside look into some of America's worst public schools, largely attended by low-income African Americans as well as other racially oppressed and marginalized ethnic groups. In the book, Kozol (1991) documents unseemly disparities such as underfunded, unsanitary, understaffed, and physically deteriorating school environments in cities such as East St. Louis, New York, Chicago, and even our nation's capital—Washington, D.C.

The disparities that many of America's poorest children have to endure, revealed in Kozol's book, are deplorable and deserving of more attention. Increased concentration should serve toward helping to tear down inequitable practices and daunting oversights in America's public school system so that all of our nation's children—red, yellow, black, white, brown, rich, poor, and those in between—have access to a quality education, thereby increasing everyone's opportunity for greater success. Nevertheless, despite the need for ongoing attention and research on the school experiences of low-income African American students, this should not serve as justification for generalizing the entire Black community as being wrought with poverty.

Lacy (2007) contends that the United States has two distinct groups of middle class African Americans, the “fragile Black lower-middle class, a group that falls behind the White middle class on key measures of middle-class status; and the stable Black middle class, a group that is virtually indistinguishable from its white counterpart on most standard economic indicators” (p. 2). In her book, *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class*, Lacy (2007) notes that 65% of the Black middle class consists of the lower-middle class. She points that this group is typically characterized as earning less than \$50,000 annually, have not earned college degrees, and are not concentrated in white-collar professions—many of whom are in clerical or sales based occupations (Lacy, 2007). In terms of where this group typically lives, Lacy (2007) notes that the majority “live in racially segregated neighborhoods that are either inclusive of the Black poor or contiguous with chronically poor Black neighborhoods...[and]...live with high crime rates, poor municipal services, and underperforming schools” (p. 2). It is important to interject here that regardless of where an African American falls on the middle-class continuum, the majority live in predominantly Black neighborhoods (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004; Patillo-McCoy, 1999), which are inhabited according to class (i.e., working-class Black neighborhoods, wealthy Black neighborhoods, etc.).

In contrast, Lacy (2007) notes that members of the stable Black middle class (who as of 2000 made up 35% of the Black bourgeoisie) typically have income earnings of \$50,000 or more annually, have acquired minimally a bachelor’s degree, and are in prominent white-collar occupations, such as engineers, doctors, corporate managers, and attorneys. Concerning the types of neighborhoods in which this sub-cultural group typically lives, their communities do not “suffer from the relentless social and economic

maladies that plague poor communities” (p. 3)—quandaries such as high crime rates and underperforming schools. Comparing and contrasting the stable Black middle class to the White middle class, Lacy (2007) asserts, “In terms of sheer numbers, this group, composed of high-earning middle-class Blacks, mirrors its White counterpart in the same income category, which constituted 47% of the White middle class in 2000” (p. 3).

In light of these statistics concerning the Black middle class, it stands to reason that the school experiences of this sub-cultural group deserves concentrated attention in the body of scholarly research. As such, this study sought to understand the K-12 school experiences of what Lacy (2007) characterizes as the “stable” Black middle class as well as upper income African Americans who have been educated in predominantly White or integrated suburban K-12 schools. What follows is my insider perspective as a member of the Black bourgeoisie.

### **THE BLACK BOURGEOISIE: AN INSIDER’S PERSPECTIVE**

*“Folks don’t want to hear about rich Blacks unless we’re playing basketball, singing rap music, or doing comedy on TV.”*

*- Lawrence Otis Graham*

In his highly controversial, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009 article, “Black and White on Martha’s Vineyard,” Touré, African American journalist, social commentator and co-host for MSNBC’s *The Cycle*, used the term the “Only Ones.” In referring to the “Only Ones,” Touré was not speaking of the infamous English rock band. In his use of the phrase he was referring to Blacks who are social elites and professionals who are typically one of the few, if not “the only African American in the room”—proverbially speaking. Touré notes that these Only Ones “typically break into fields or companies that admit few Blacks, move into neighborhoods where few Blacks live, and send their kids to mostly

White schools” (p. 1). He goes on to say, “They [the Only Ones] aren’t running from their own—they’re chasing after the best they can get. They aren’t assimilationist; they’re ascensionist” (p. 1). It is important to interject, that it would be safe to say a number of “Only Ones” fall into the economic category of being a part of the stable middle class or upper class.

Touré’s usage of the phrase “the Only Ones” resonated immediately with me because that essentially was the story of my life. As an African American Gen Y’er, I did not grow up impoverished, I lived in predominantly White suburban neighborhoods, and my entire K-12 school experiences were spent at predominantly White and integrated suburban schools (public and private). In fact, not only was I one of the few Blacks at the schools I attended, sometimes I was the only African American student in my classes. Further, both of my parents (who remained married to each other until my father’s death in 2012) were highly educated professionals, and oftentimes were the “Only Ones” as it related to their career paths. In essence, I did not fit the stereotype of Black Americans that renowned African American Washington D.C. psychiatrist, Dr. Carlotta Miles, so eloquently described in her interview on CNN’s *Black in America 2*. During the interview, host, Soledad O’Brien, asked Dr. Miles, “Do you think most Americans have no clue that privileged, wealthy, well-connected Black people exist in decent-sized numbers?” Dr. Miles’ response was that these privileged African Americans were “invisible” because they did not match the stereotypical portraiture of Black Americans—those characterized by (in her words) “poverty, failure, victimization, and mediocrity.”

My parents had humble beginnings, both growing up in poverty in the inner city of Los Angeles, CA. Although intimately acquainted with economic dearth, my parents

were not defined by this condition and subsequently accomplished much. While financially speaking they grew up underprivileged, they came from families who instilled in them a spiritually-rich, academically-focused, family-oriented, and uplifting ideological foundation that taught them the biblical mantra, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13, The New King James Version). It was this “rich” mindset (which is not bound by race, class, or gender) that empowered my father to earn four degrees—one bachelor’s and three advanced degrees (one of which was his Doctorate of Public Administration from the University of Southern California). As an “Only One,” my father held many high-powered white-collar, executive jobs, the last of which was a vice president position at a Southern California city college prior to his death. In like manner, my mother, another “Only One,” received both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and became a pediatric nurse practitioner—which she has been for more than 25 years. Currently, she works as an assistant professor for the school of nursing at a well-respected private Christian university. Further, both of my maternal grandparents had four-year degrees. What’s more, my maternal grandfather received his master’s degree. With this type of legacy, the importance of education and the foundation of being able to accomplish much through God was planted, cultivated, and harvested in both my sister (who possesses an MBA) and me.

My connectivity to the larger African American community was mainly through my church, which had the reputation of being a prominent Black Seventh-day Adventist Church, because it’s membership was comprised of many highly educated Black professionals. Aside from my weekly church service attendance or church-related

activities, my interactions with other African Americans included spending time with my extended family such as the occasional trip to my grandparents' home, holidays, and family reunions.

In this unique position as an Only One, I was essentially what Cookson & Hodges-Persell (1991) referred to as an “outsider within” (p. 220) because I straddled two worlds—White society and the broader African American community. Growing up as an upper middle class African American, I never fully fit into either the dominant culture or a sub-set of my community. In sum, I was too Black to be fully accepted by many Whites, and too “white-acting” to be fully accepted by many African Americans—at least to those who did not have a similar upbringing as myself. To this day I can still recall the pain of being put down by some of my White peers because of my skin color, one young lady commenting, “I don’t like you because you’re Black” and my White principal (whom I spoke to about the situation) shrugging her shoulders and nodding her head as if to say “get over it.” In addition, I can remember the rejection I experienced by other Blacks and even some relatives who asked questions such as “Why you act so white? Can you dance?” For those Blacks who asked such questions, the assumption was that because of the way I spoke, either I was trying to act White and/or I couldn’t dance. As an aside, concerning the way I spoke, I will never forget the one time I used the word “ain’t” in front my dad. He quickly reprimanded me and warned me to speak the English language *properly*. In fact, so important was proper speech to my father, that I vividly remember him giving my sister and me one of the earlier editions of Funk & Lewis’s book, *30 Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary* back in the 1980s. While at the time I thought my father was going a bit overboard in his insistence upon my speaking the

English language properly, as I grew older, more and more I appreciated his instruction, especially in the vein of language as cultural capital.

These experiences in many ways have shaped who I am as a person and my viewpoint of the world. For example, while some in my community make the argument, that I don't know what it means to "struggle," on the contrary I could make the argument that they have no idea about the complexities, challenges, as well as emotional and psychological stresses associated with straddling two worlds—one White and the other a unique aspect of Black. That being said, instead of trying to determine who has struggled the most, I feel that it is safe to say my experience has been a "different" kind of struggle.

These experiences have also paved the way into my research interests as an educator concerned with issues of social justice, in that the limited available scholarly research still notes an achievement gap between economically privileged African Americans and their White counterparts. In their research, Howard & Reynolds (2008) found, "when social class is held constant, an analysis of school achievement data still reveals a disturbing picture for African American students. For example, African American students attending more affluent, middle-class schools still lag behind their White peers" (p. 81). The researchers go on to say reasons for these "disparities remain unclear" (Howard & Reynolds, 2008, p. 81).

I can relate to this finding because that was my experience. Despite my parents' educational background and great involvement in my life, I struggled academically—particularly when I attended the predominantly White schools. In many respects, my struggle had less to do with a lack of help or resources and more to do with struggles in social adjustment and connectivity to my school environment, teachers, and peers. It is

because of these encounters that I am concerned about the school experiences of others like me—privileged African Americans educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban K-12 schools. What follows is a formalized research statement of purpose.

### **PURPOSE STATEMENT**

By focusing on two critical components—race and class—the purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to examine the K-12 school experiences of middle to upper income African Americans who were educated in public and private suburban schools. Intergenerational in scope, the study compares and contrasts the school experiences of Generations Y and Z.

Having a narrative design, the study is also phenomenological in nature as the school experiences at predominantly White and integrated suburban K-12 schools are the phenomenon understood through the race (African American) and class (stable middle and upper income) of the study participants. In essence, this phenomenon has been investigated and understood through the stories or “narratives” of study participants.

By utilizing individual interviews and one focus group, this study concentrated on participant school memories to understand and characterize their K-12 experiences through the lenses of race and class. By discovering commonalities in experience, it is believed that light can be shed on how these shared experiences have served to shape participant ideologies on race and class. In addition, as it relates to pedagogical practices for Black students, it is important to note that “understanding more about *within-group differences in communities of color* [emphasis added] is important as institutions endeavor to successfully retain and serve a diverse complex student body” (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 509). Thus, it is believed that study findings can serve to better inform

educator practice for those working with middle and upper income African American students attending predominantly White and integrated suburban K-12 schools.

The specific research questions used to guide this study included the following:

1. How do study participants describe their K-12 school experiences as it relates to their perceptions of race and class issues?
2. How do study participants describe ways in which their school experiences have influenced their worldview on race and class?
3. How do study participants conceptualize or understand privilege as it relates to their economic class of being middle or upper income?
4. How do study participants describe ways in which their school experiences have shaped their perspectives as a privileged class within a racially oppressed and culturally marginalized group?

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: SOCIAL LOCATION & TRUST**

The theoretical frames of social location and trust were utilized to help ground this dissertation. Grant & Sleeter (1986) posit that all people are simultaneously members of, or are “socially located” (Watkins & Aber, 2009) in three key groups or categories—race, class, and gender. These concurrent memberships impact one’s perceptions, actions, and experiences (Watkins & Aber, 2009; Grant & Sleeter, 1986). As an illustration of one’s social location, a person can be African American (race), upper income (class), and male (gender). While this person would be considered a member of a culturally oppressed and marginalized group, their status as male and upper income, simultaneously makes them members of a privileged and often oppressive group toward others. As such, this

person's perception would differ greatly from a poor, African American male or female or even an upper income White male.

As it relates to the body of research, the tendency to overgeneralize the school experiences of low-income African American students to the broader cultural group ignores the factor of social location, and has thereby left a gap in the research on the school experiences of African Americans. Grant & Sleeter (1986) contend, "A failure to consider the integration of race, social class, and gender leads at times to an oversimplification or inaccurate understanding of what occurs in schools and therefore to inappropriate or simplistic prescriptions for educational equity" (p. 197). Watkins & Aber (2009) assert, "Inattention to the ways in which race, class, and gender interact overlooks the high correlation among them and disregards the reality that students occupy multiple social locations" (p. 396). They go on to say, "Given that social location influences one's perceptions, experiences, and opportunities, attention to how race, class, and gender are intertwined may enhance our understanding of students' school experiences" (p. 396).

In addition to drawing upon social location, this study looked to the theoretical frame of trust to understand participants' overall confidence in the educational processes they experienced as it related to their success in life. In Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky (2009), they note that "trust" is a strong predictor of student academic achievement. In their study, using a stratified random sample of public elementary schools across the state of Michigan, they focused on "the relations among trust in schools, academic achievement, and several school contextual conditions often cited as explanations for low academic performance" (p. 293)—conditions such as school size, racial/ethnic composition, as well as the socioeconomic status of the school. As it relates to elementary schools, the Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky (2009) study results found a positive

relationship between trust levels and student academic achievement. The researchers contend, “Trust is a potent feature of informal social structure that serves to mitigate risk, enhance efficiency, and thereby support learning in schools” (p. 295). Citing Cunningham & Gresso (1993), Beard & Brown (2008) assert,

Trust is the foundation of school effectiveness [and] it is within trusting relationships that collaboration and problem-solving can yield creative solutions. If the achievement gap is the largest problem facing the educational system, then creative solutions will come through meaningful collaboration. (p. 473)

Sebring & Bryk (as cited in Beard & Brown, 2008) argue, “In schools that are improving, where trusting and cooperative adult efforts are strong, students report that they feel safe, sense that teachers care about them, and experience greater academic challenge” (p. 473).

In contrast to the importance of trust as it pertains to student success, it is important to draw attention to the deleterious affects of distrust. Beard & Brown (2008) argue,

Distrust... causes people to feel uncomfortable and ill at ease, provoking them to expend energy on assessing the actions and potential actions of others (Fuller, 1996). Because learning is typically a cooperative process, and distrust makes cooperation virtually impossible, distrust negatively impacts the learning process. When distrust prevails, people minimize their vulnerability to one another, and the result is disengagement from the educational process (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). (p. 473)

Taken together, the theoretical frameworks of social location and trust were utilized to guide this study which sought to investigate and understand the school experiences of Gen Y and Z, middle to upper income African Americans, educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban K-12 schools.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY & DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION**

In this chapter, the need for more research to be conducted on the K-12 school experiences of middle and upper income African American students attending predominantly White and integrated suburban schools was addressed. Upon review of current demographic information pertaining to annual household income levels, U.S. Census results reveal that the majority of Blacks are not impoverished. Notwithstanding, though there are more Blacks who are middle-class than there are poor, much of scholarly research centers on the school experiences of low-income Blacks attending inner city and suburban schools. Subsequently, research on middle and upper income Black students is very limited. As the theoretical frames of social location and trust were implemented to guide the research, to address what appears to be a thin area in the body of literature centering on the K-12 academic experiences of African Americans, this dissertation took an in-depth look—that is intergenerational in scope—at the educational experiences of middle and upper income Blacks educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools.

Chapter two presents a literature review on some of the few studies that concentrate on the school experiences of middle and upper income African American students. Chapter three elaborates on the study's phenomenological and narrative design and describes the overall methodology for the dissertation.

Chapter four reveals study findings. Finally, chapter five provides a summary and discussion of key findings through emergent themes and discusses study limitations as well as implications for teaching and learning. The chapter also addresses other areas for related future research on the school experiences of middle and upper income African American students attending predominantly White and integrated suburban K-12 schools.

## CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature is organized around four central questions pertinent to the school experiences of Generation Y and Z African Americans, educated in predominantly White or integrated suburban schools, who have come from middle and upper income backgrounds: (1) How do study participants describe their K-12 school experiences as it relates to their perceptions of race and class issues?; (2) How do study participants describe ways in which their school experiences have influenced their worldview on race and class?; (3) How do study participants conceptualize or understand privilege as it relates to their economic class of being middle or upper income?; and (4) How do study participants describe ways in which their school experiences have shaped their perspectives as a privileged class within a racially oppressed and culturally marginalized group? These four questions guided me in my review of qualitative studies that centered on the school experiences of middle and upper income Black students educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools.

In terms of the flow of the chapter, section one, “Identity Construction” presents studies that center on issues of identity development for Black students who are educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools. Section two, “School Climate & the Prevalence of Same Race Peer Networks” presents research that discusses issues surrounding school climate within the context of race and common coping strategies implemented by African American students educated in racially and culturally unfavorable school environments.

Section three, “A Matter of Trust,” presents studies that center on African American viewpoints on being able to trust schools that are predominantly White or integrated with nurturing and developing their academic achievement.

The social location of gender did not receive as concentrated a focus as race and class in this dissertation. However section four, “A Look at Gender,” does present an overview on matters of gender in relation to school experiences. This section is necessary because both males and females participated in this study as I sought to understand the “collective” experience of the group under examination. Finally, the chapter closes with a summary.

In identifying the studies for this review, I combined the descriptors of African American students, Black students, Black male students, Black female students, schooling, school experiences, academic achievement, identity, adjustment, middle-class, upper middle-class, upper class, wealthy, rich, privilege, predominantly White schools, integrated schools, Generation Y, Generation Z, Millennials, suburban schools, private schools, race, racism, school belonging, academic achievement, social location, and class, to search four databases: EBSCOhost, ERIC, JSTOR and PsycINFO. Further, I did a computer search for demographic information on Generations Y and Z.

This chapter provides analysis on qualitative research studies pertaining to the school experiences of middle and upper income African Americans who had K-12 experiences in suburban schools that were predominantly White or integrated.

In terms of other selection criteria, only peer-reviewed articles centering on the school experiences of middle and upper income African Americans educated in predominantly White and integrated schools, were reviewed. In the following section, I

present a discussion on African American student identity construction in predominantly White and integrated school contexts.

## **IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

Fine, Burns, Payne & Torre (as cited in Huidor & Cooper, 2010) assert, “schools are intimate places where youths construct identities, build a sense of self, read how society views them, develop the capacity to sustain relations and forge the skills to initiate change” (pp. 143-144). As it relates to identity construction in schools, Carter (2007) examined the ways in which African American high-achievers attending a predominantly White, upper-middle class public high school (Independence High) negotiated their racial identity. In the study, participants were considered high-achievers if they were enrolled in at least one honors or AP class, participated in an extracurricular activity, and met at least one other criteria (i.e., a qualifying GPA, were on the honor roll, or through teacher recommendation).

Carter (2007) overwhelmingly found that participants felt that African Americans and their culture were not affirmed or valued—especially in the classroom. As such, in efforts to support one another, affirm their racial identity, and have a general sense of community, and belongingness, Black students at Independence High used a *counter-space* (i.e., a location) within the school environment to gather in formal and informal “same-race peer networks” (p. 542) between classes and during lunchtime. Carter (2007) writes:

Researchers have found that often in predominantly White learning environments, the classroom domain—a domain where students spend much of their school time—does very little to foster a positive

representation of Blackness or Black identity (Carter, 2005; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Therefore, the creation of an identity-affirming counter-space is a positive coping strategy for some students as a response to experiencing what they perceive as racism in the school environment. (p. 543)

As it relates to belongingness—“feeling a part of and supported by the school community” (Holland, 2012, p. 103), it is important to interject that Booker (2006) notes, “Sociocultural perspectives of the educational process posit that students need a sense of community or connection to others in order to maximize student learning, motivation, and engagement” (p. 1). As in Carter (2007), same-race peer networks or counter-spaces have the ability to provide community as well as serve as social and academic identity-affirming mechanisms that are useful “as a resistance strategy to buffer experiences with racism and other forms of discrimination” (Carter, 2007, p. 543) in school environments.

Carter (2007) also references Datnow & Cooper (1997), who speak to the benefits of same-race peer networks for African American students. Datnow & Cooper (1997) explored the formal and informal peer networks constructed by African American students enrolled in predominantly White private elite schools through the Baltimore Educational Scholarship Trust (BEST). Having interviewed a total of 42 students, the researchers found that most participants felt that their formal (e.g., official Black student organizations) and informal (e.g., specific locations on the school grounds) peer networks were vital to help lessen feelings of isolation, and were pivotal to their overall survival in a predominately White school environment. “Peer networks functioned in important ways to simultaneously foster school success and provide mental space for them [Black

students] to reaffirm their racial identities” (Datnow & Cooper, 1997, p. 62). It is important to note that while the African American students in the Datnow & Cooper (1997) study stressed the importance of same-race peer networks, they also spoke of the importance of building friendships with White students as well—expressing that having associations with Whites was beneficial later on in life.

Having its roots in legal scholarship (Ladson-Billings, 2009), Critical Race Theory (CRT) proposes that racism is ordinary and not aberrant in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT assumes that race is socially constructed, pervades all facets of social life, and that “race-based ideology is threaded throughout society” (Ortiz & Jani, 2010, p. 176). DeCuir-Gunby (2007) emphasized that race and class are significant to identity development and for those students who are African American, being educated at predominantly White schools, “race and class serve as sources of distinctiveness” (p. 31). Thus, through the lens of CRT, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) explored the school experiences of six high-achieving African American students (three girls and three boys) attending Wells Academy, an elite, predominantly White, private school. By focusing on race and class, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) investigated the “multifaceted nature of African American student identity” (p. 27) and examined the role of the private school context on the development of Black identity.

Concerning ways to build positive racial identity for African Americans attending predominantly White private schools, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) contends that a “stronger community partnership is needed among African American students, [families], and [schools]” (p. 33). As it relates to community partnership amongst Black students, DeCuir-Gunby contends that such students should “engage in exploration of their sense

of identity” (p. 33) by participating in activities related to cultural issues. “Engaging in such behavior will help empower African Americans to make a change within the school context, particularly challenging racial and class norms” (p. 33).

As it relates to families and identity, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) asserts that the family is connected to the broader African American community and “serves as the primary source of racial socialization and identity” (p. 33). Therefore, to “challenge the homogeneity” (p. 33) of majority White schools and foster a positive African American identity in such contexts, DeCuir-Gunby proffers the essentiality of Black parent presence and involvement. As an aside, I believe that active parental involvement is important period—regardless of school setting. DeCuir-Gunby charges that it is vital for the families of Black students in such school environments to be active participants in their child’s schooling in addition to extracurricular activities.

Finally, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) points to the imperativeness of schools acknowledging and supporting race and class effects in the learning environment. Accordingly she posits that school support and recognition of race and class influences can come about in a number of ways. For example, “schools should select appropriate instructional approaches, design relevant curricula, and create social contexts that are conducive to learning for all racial and class groups” (p. 33). Further, DeCuir-Gunby points to the necessity of hiring more African American faculty as they can “serve as models and mentors for African American students as they attempt to negotiate their sense of identity within the school context” (p. 34).

Although DeCuir-Gunby spoke in the setting of independent schools, her charge to schools toward being more proactive in fostering a learning environment beneficial for all racial and class groups is applicable in both public and private school environments.

### **Distinctions in Identity**

As it relates to secondary distinctions in identity, it is important to point out two common characterizations of Black students in predominantly White schools: (1) notions of “acting White”; and (2) “Outsiders within.”

#### ***Notions of Acting White***

Within the context of this literature review, it was not found in any of the studies that African American high achievement in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools was evidence of “acting White.” In fact, in Datnow & Cooper (1997) high academic competence was a marker of elevated social standing in African American same race peer networks. In their study, Datnow & Cooper shared a statement of one student participant who offered their thoughts on academic achievements link to popularity. The student stated, “if you’re not smart, you’re not cool” (p. 64).

Cookson & Hodges-Persell (1991) also point to academic achievement as a marker of positive Black identity. They contend, “traditionally, African Americans have viewed education as an avenue of upward mobility” (p. 221). Noting that education is a practical means to success, Cookson & Hodges-Persell assert, “for African Americans the route to the American dream [begins] at the school house door” (p. 222).

These two studies demonstrate that one cultural marker of African American identity is linked to high academic achievement—and is not an example of the “burden of

acting White” such as put forth by Fordham & Ogbu (1986) (as cited in Cookson & Hodges-Persell, 1991).

***Outsiders Within: “Double Marginalization”***

Cookson & Hodges-Persell (1991) also examine aspects of the Black experience in independent, predominantly White, elite college-preparatory boarding schools. In their article, in which they speak to the isolation often felt by African American students in such contexts, they discuss Collins (1986) idea of “outsiders within” (p. 220).

Specifically the researchers explain:

Attendance at an elite prep school [often] distances African American students from their parents and friends, blocking them from fully participating in the lives and lifestyles of their parents and peers. Yet, because they are African Americans, it is unlikely that they will be fully accepted by upper-class families or into upper-class culture. They are [outsiders within]. (p. 220)

African American students situated in predominantly White schools are in a sense “caught between two cultures” (Cookson & Hodges-Persell, 1991, p. 220) and are viewed as being “doubly marginalized” (p. 220). This double marginalization can lead to emotional and psychological distress as well as uncertainty in the identity of the Black student enrolled in this type of school environment (Cookson & Hodges-Persell, 1991). As it relates to not belonging in either world, Cookson & Hodges-Persell assert, “They [African American students in such schools] are in peril of not belonging in either their home or school communities and [are left] vulnerable to a sense of ‘racelessness’” (p. 114).

McNamara, Horvat & Antonio (1999) discuss the outsider status of Black students in predominantly White private schools. In their study they document how race and class “shape the organizational habitus of a predominantly White, elite private school for girls and how that habitus interacts with and ultimately shapes the dispositions of African American students” (McNamara, Horvat & Antonio, 1999, p. 318). The researchers proffer that this outsider status is founded on race and class distinctions within the school environment. Elaborating on this outsider status and one’s identity, McNamara, Horvat & Antonio explain, “through their [Black students] interaction with the school organizational habitus, [students] learn or relearn their status as different, lesser, and Other (hooks, 1990) as African Americans in a White world” (p. 319).

While this section covered identity construction of African American students educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools, the next section discusses the climate of such academic settings and expands earlier dialogue on same-race peer networks in these environments.

### **SCHOOL CLIMATE & THE PREVALENCE OF SAME RACE PEER NETWORKS**

A number of studies have documented the effects of school climate on student outcomes, inclusive of academic achievement (Mattison & Aber, 2007; Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997). Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie (1997) define school climate as “the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influence children’s cognitive, social, and psychological development” (p. 322). These interactions concern interfaces between home and school, between teachers and students, as well as student-to-student communication (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997). As put forth by Moos (as cited in Watkins & Aber, 2009), school climate is characterized as

“the social atmosphere of a learning environment in which students have different experiences, depending on the protocols set up by the teachers and administrators” (p. 396). Watkins & Aber (2009) contend, “from this perspective, perceived school climate reflects the influence of social, physical, organizational, and psychological aspects of the school on the learning environment” (p. 396) and that there is variation with regard to these perceptions across groups in terms of race, class, and gender (Watkins & Aber, 2009).

Looking at perceptions of school climate in the context of race, *school racial climate* is typified as insights on “race relations, racial fairness, racial treatment, and experiences of racism in the school” (Watkins & Aber, 2009, p. 396). Watkins & Aber (2009) contend, “research suggests that students from different racial backgrounds do not experience the campus environment in the same ways” (p. 397). Specifically they note that racial minorities, as well as low-income students, may have negative school climate perceptions directly related to their social location (Watkins & Aber, 2009). For example, they point, “African American students at predominantly White institutions often report feelings of marginalization, experiences of isolation and hostility, and perceptions of unfair treatment by staff and other students” (Watkins & Aber, 2009, p. 397). In contrast, the researchers note that not only do Whites report less racial conflict, they often describe such school settings as having respect for diversity (Watkins & Aber, 2009).

In their paper presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Florida Educational Research Association, Bacon, Schwartz, & Rothfarb (1991) presented the results of a study they conducted in which they examined survey responses related to perceptions on school racial climate. Administered to 2,882 students and 377 teachers and administrators

in a large Florida school district, the Racial Climate Survey assessed the following areas: (1) perceptions of personal interactions; (2) perceptions of administrators' and teachers' respect and fairness for students of different races; and (3) perceptions of students' social interactions (Watkins & Aber, 2009). Not surprisingly, a key finding of the study was that both African American staff and students had less favorable views of fair treatment toward students of color (Watkins & Aber, 2009).

Although Watkins & Aber (2009) largely spoke of issues of marginalization experienced by African American college students attending predominantly White colleges and universities, a recurrent theme throughout much of the studies analyzed for this review of the literature, was that participant feelings of isolation, marginalization and perceptions of unfair treatment were overwhelming in the K-12 contexts as well (Simmons, 2012; Carter, 2007; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; McNamara Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Datnow & Cooper, 1996; Cookson & Hodges-Persell, 1991). Interestingly, a common strategy used by African American students in predominantly White K-12 schools as a way to survive in what is often perceived of as a racially and culturally hostile environment are formal and informal same race peer networks (Carter, 2007; Datnow & Cooper, 1996).

While DeCuir-Gunby, Martin & Cooper (2012) explain how young African Americans define and perceive of their racial identity within the context of a private elite, predominantly White school, the study also speaks to the importance of peer networks for Black students in such academic environments. These peer networks are not only crucial for developing and maintaining a positive sense of self but also as a means for bonding, and coping in a racially hostile environment.

At the microsystem, peers provide additional support in helping students utilize their racial identity to promote racial solidarity in acts such as developing peer networks. Peers also supported each other at the mesosystem level because students interacted with the school environment as a coping resource to handle racial slights by majority students and teachers. The students best demonstrated this when they discussed how the majority of the African American students at Wells sat together in the cafeteria during lunchtime [at the Black table]...For the students that preferred to sit with other African American students, the cafeteria served as a refuge. Lunchtime was one of the few times of the day in which they could socialize with other students that looked like them. The Black table took on the role of a source of cohesion, allowing the African American students to [have] time to bond. (DeCuir-Gunby, Martin & Cooper, 2012, pp. 124-125)

Kuriloff & Reichert (2003) conducted a study, which looked at the school experiences of students in an elite private boy's school (The Haverford School or THS). In the study, the researchers contend that they were "interested in finding out how different groups of boys managed at one elite school where the dominant cultural capital continues to define the core of the school's practices and where students are expected to have and hone the habitus of the ruling class" (p. 753). In the study, the researchers reference the formal peer network (the Black Student Association or BSA) that African American students at THS formed to help guard against the onslaught of racial isolation, invisibility, stereotyping and prejudice experienced by the young Black men at the school.

Kuriloff & Reichert put forth, “creating the BSA forced the school community to recognize them [the Black students] and gave them a foundation for voicing their collective concerns” (p. 764).

These informal and formal same race peer networks discussed in the studies above serve as places of solace, community, and safety in school climates that are often psychologically and emotionally hostile toward African American student identity. The next section of this review discusses matters of trust and African American school experiences in predominantly White and integrated school environments.

### **A MATTER OF TRUST**

A recurring theme as it relates to the benefits of attending predominantly White or integrated suburban schools are that such schools often provide superior academic educational experiences. For example, Huidor & Cooper (2010) investigated the experiences of 20 students of color (African-American and Latino) who for integration purposes were voluntarily bused from their inner city neighborhoods to attend a predominantly White suburban high school. Referencing Orfield (2000), Huidor & Cooper (2010) explain, “integrated schools represent favorable academic opportunities for students of color because predominantly White schools are embedded with college-bound values that increase the success rates of navigating the educational pipeline” (p. 156).

As it relates to “college-bound values” in DeCuir-Gunby (2007), for those African Americans enrolled in the elite private school of Wells Academy, the school’s reputation of providing a rigorous curriculum, was worth the challenges experienced by many of the school’s Black students, as it was pointed that putting down the Wells’ name went a long

way in regards to getting into college. Going further, in the McNamara Horvat & Antonio (1999) study on the academic experiences of Black girls in an elite private girls school, the researchers relayed the sentiments of the African American school chef mentioned in the study who stated, “It’s a straight shot to college from here” (p. 337).

Although the strong academic rigor and curriculum provided for in many predominantly White and integrated suburban school contexts has been a motivator for many upwardly mobile African American families as it relates to sending their children to such schools, another challenge that many Black students encounter who attend such learning environments is whether or not these types of schools can be trusted to nurture them academically, maximize their abilities and talents as well as foster their achievement (Beard & Brown, 2008). For example, Beard & Brown (2008) look at this issue of trust in schools by specifically examining the viewpoints of suburban middle and upper income African American mothers whose children attended predominantly White schools. While all of the participants spoke positively of the academic benefits of having their children attend such schools, they all echoed the same sentiments in not being able to trust the predominantly White faculty and administration to adequately meet the learning needs of their kids.

Specifically, the researchers note, “While all of the mothers trust that their local public schools provide an excellent education overall, they are ‘worried’ about the experiences and actual education their children receive” (Beard & Brown, 2008, p. 477). For example many of the mothers felt that teachers had low expectations of their children and thus did not challenge them; that those whose children were in AP classes were often overlooked when it came to class participation; and that their children were more likely to

be targeted in terms of disciplinary actions. One mother even mentioned that when her son was failing a class the teacher was not very helpful in assisting the mother in helping her son to get his grades up.

Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon (2007) examined associations of peer-related dynamics with academic achievement. Specifically the researchers noted, “we were interested in gaining an understanding of students’ school experiences, their educational aspirations and expectations, their perceptions of race and opportunity, and the beliefs about peer dynamics that impacted [their] school achievement” (Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007, p. 664). In particular, the researchers had a keen interest in the ways that peers might have discouraged students from educational engagement.

In general, it was found in the study that African American students did not discourage or provide negative feedback toward other high achieving Black students. Aside from occasional light joking, they encouraged and admired those students who were doing well. In fact, the lower achieving Black students encouraged each other to do better. However, interestingly and somewhat a reflection of the findings in Beard & Brown (2008), the discouragement came from their White counterparts. “Many high-performing Black students reported experiencing negative feedback from White peers and teachers in honors and advanced placement (AP) classes” (Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007, p. 656). These findings almost mirror the reasons behind the lack of trust that the African American mothers in Beard & Brown’s (2008) study experienced concerning their children and the treatment they received from White faculty and administrators.

Similar to sentiments expressed by mothers in Beard & Brown (2008) revolving around their concern about the actual education received by their children in predominantly White educational environments, Diamond (2006), draws upon a case study conducted in an integrated suburban school (Lakeside High), wherein the researcher examined the “racialized educational terrain” (p. 495) as an explanation of the persistent achievement gap between Blacks and Whites—even when coming from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Diamond (2006) asserts, “The racialized educational terrain focuses on the ways that multiple disadvantages accumulate within the racialized terrain specific to education” (p. 496). Within this educational terrain, are three ways in which African Americans are disadvantaged, which sustains a gap in achievement. Specifically, as it relates to this terrain and the issue of trusting schools to meet the academic needs of its African American students are two areas of concern: (1) Institutionally speaking, Blacks are “positioned [tracked] systematically in the least advantaged locations for learning inside schools” (p. 496); and (2) ideologically speaking, Black students often have “their intellectual capacity questioned and their cultural styles devalued” (p. 496).

As it relates to tracking in the study, Diamond (2006) notes that while Lakeside is a wonderful example of an academically successful integrated school—what he touts as a “picture of racial integration” (p. 498)—he found some patterns inside the school demonstrating significant gaps in student achievement, stratified across racial lines. For example, the researcher points that African American students attending the school are rarely found or placed in honors and advanced placement (AP) courses. Outlining the school’s four levels of instruction (levels 1 and 2, honors, and AP courses), Diamond puts

forth that only 10% of the Black students ever take AP classes—despite the fact that they represent 40% of the total student population. In contrast, Whites who comprise 48% of the student population at Lakeside, represent 82% of students in AP classes by the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Diamond explains that most of the African American students at Lakeside high are concentrated in levels 1 and 2 of the schools instructional levels.

These differences in track placement are very important. Oakes (1985, 1994) notes that students in lower educational tracks are typically taught by less qualified teachers using instructional materials and strategies that are less challenging and engaging, and therefore, ultimately, learn less. By being overrepresented in these tracks, Black students are systematically placed in school contexts least conducive to educational achievement.

(Diamond, 2006, p. 501)

Detrimental to the academic success of Black students, Chubbuck (2004) also asserts that students of color are often “over-represented” in lower classes and “under-represented” in higher classes. She contends:

Placement in secondary tracking programs is determined, in large part, through structures that privilege White norms, such as biased testing and evaluations based on the academic performance of students of color who may have experienced years of differential expectations, pedagogy, and curriculum. Once placements occur, White students, in over-representative proportions, continue their trajectory of accelerated academic success because of the higher levels of curriculum, instruction, and expectation usually found in higher tracks. At the same time, students

of color, in over-representative proportions, experience a trajectory of lowered academic success because of differential curriculum, instruction, and expectation in lower tracks. (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 305 citing Braddock, 1995; and Collins, 1988)

As it relates to the intellectual competence of Blacks being questioned, Diamond (2006) points to what he refers to as symbolic meanings linked to race. These symbolic meanings refer to beliefs about the intellectual inferiority of African Americans held by certain teachers, which subsequently cause these educators to have lowered expectations about the academic capabilities of Black students in comparison to their White counterparts (Diamond, 2006).

This lowering of expectations of African American students was also discussed in Harmon (2002). Harmon (2002) focused on the experiences of gifted African American elementary students who were bused into a predominantly White middle-class school, who after a period of time returned to their predominantly Black neighborhood school. The purpose of the study was to investigate desegregation and subsequent dismantling integration efforts.

In Harmon's (2002) study, six gifted African American 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from an inner-city, socioeconomically deprived school were bused to a predominantly White school of middle to upper income students. In the study, the students elaborated on their experiences of being bused to and from their neighborhood to the White school, and described how they felt attending a predominantly White school versus their neighborhood school—which was predominantly African American and low-income. Harmon (2002) notes that all of the students characterized their experience at the White

school as painful due to their daily confrontation with prejudice and lack of support from teachers. Harmon (2002) states:

Each student explained how they believed [ineffective] teachers lacked an understanding and appreciation of African American culture and behavior resulting in low academic expectations. Students insisted that these teachers did not believe that they were capable of learning or of being gifted and talented. Consequently, these students believed that they were placed in lower ability groups and given less challenging work compared to White students in their classroom. (pp. 73-74)

Interestingly, once desegregation efforts were ended, by choice, all participants returned to their neighborhood school, despite the fact that they all were “qualified for highly academic magnet programs designed for high achieving gifted students” (Harmon, 2002, p. 72). When asked why they refused to attend such schools, participants cited “the kind of teachers, the lack of an inclusive curriculum, and teaching methods” (Harmon, 2002, p. 72) as primary reasons for not going.

DeCuir-Gunby (2007), McNamara Horvat & Antonio (1999), Beard & Brown (2008), Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon (2007), Diamond (2006), and Harmon (2002) are just a few examples of school experiences related to whether or not African American students and families are able to trust predominantly White and integrated suburban schools in being conscientious in nurturing and fostering their academic achievement.

## **A LOOK AT GENDER**

Although gender is an aspect of one’s social location, as noted previously, it did not receive as heavy a focus in this dissertation because I sought to understand

*collectively* the school experiences of middle and upper income African American males and females educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban school environments. Even so, it is important to note that gender does play a role in student school experiences. For example, Corbett, Hill, & St. Rose (as cited in Watkins & Aber, 2009) contend that female students report positive school experiences more often than males, while males are more likely to report feelings of alienation in schools (Watkins & Aber, 2009). In light of these findings, Watkins & Aber (2009) make note of the fact that African American males have higher grade retention rates, are overrepresented in special education classes, have more encounters with school disciplinary actions, and have higher school drop-out rates in comparison to Black female students.

While it is well documented that Black males encounter more exaggerated disciplinary actions than any other group of students (Kirwin Institute, 2014; Watkins & Aber, 2009; Monroe, 2006), there is divergent research that suggests in comparison to Black females (within K-12 settings that are predominantly White), Black males report more positive feelings about the school environment. For example, Holland (2012) investigated a predominantly White high school that participated in a desegregation program in which “mostly working-and lower-middle-class” (p. 106) African American and Latino students were bussed-in. Examining the integration process for these minority students, Holland (2012) highlighted gender differences relevant to social experiences. In her study she argues:

Boys are more socially integrated than the girls due to two interacting processes:

(1) At the interpersonal level, suburban White youth value the status

characteristics attributed to African American and Latino males, which facilitates

integration according to Blau's (1960) theory of social integration, and (2) at the organizational level, the organizational practices of the school facilitate participation for the boys in extracurricular activities, which lead to interracial contact under ideal conditions (Allport, 1954), while blocking the girls from such participation...these two processes occur simultaneously on different levels of interaction, creating a cycle whereby the school provides opportunities for minority boys to make friends with Whites and participate in athletics, which gives them status and positive social experiences, which makes them more likely to make more friends. In contrast, the school provides little opportunity outside of class time for minority girls to interact and make friends with White students, which makes them little known at the school, which leads to negative social experiences, which makes them less likely to make friends. (pp. 101-102)

Holland's (2012) study revealed stark contrasts in school experiences between male and female participants. Specifically, "While the females felt that the atmosphere at school was uncomfortable and burdening [due to racism and academic pressure], the males felt free and accepted by friends" (p. 109). This is not to say that the male participants did not experience racism, discrimination, or negative stereotyping. Having said that, Holland (2012) points out that although Black males situated in predominantly White high schools may still encounter stereotypes that portray them as violent as well as aggressive, she advises:

African American males have higher social status than females for a number of reasons that are dependent on the school's context. For instance, young African American males are typically stereotyped as athletic, which may help them gain

status in schools that value sports, and participating in sports typically brings more status to boys than to girls (Eder and Parker, 1987). In addition, minority girls may be less likely to join high-status girls' sports, such as cheerleading, because they are so strongly associated with White girls (Bettis and Adams, 2003). Many White suburban males are also increasingly listening to rap and hip-hop music and becoming fascinated with images that this music represents (see Rodriguez 2006). This may allow African American males in majority White context to gain status. In contrast, African American females do not have the same kinds of cultural signals to trade on for status. (p. 103)

In a similar study to Holland (2012), Ispa-Landa (2013) investigated school experiences centering on gender performance in African American adolescents (males and females) who participated in a "voluntary urban-to-suburban racial integration program" (p. 219) entitled "Diversify." According to Ispa-Landa (2013), the "Diversify program buses Black students from poor and working-class, majority-minority neighborhoods to a participating network of affluent, majority-White suburban schools" (p. 219). Concerning study findings, Ispa-Landa (2013) notes:

I found that Black boys in the Diversify program reported being popular and included in suburban social and dating networks, while the Black girls reported the opposite (Ispa-Landa, 2011). Upon investigation, I discovered that although the boys in Diversify were popular, they were also perceived as incapable of academic "success." This called into doubt their ability to reap the economic rewards associated with masculine dominance in adult social circles. Thus, the Diversify boys' role in the suburbs supported masculine ideals and also did not

threaten White dominance. In contrast, the Diversify girls were unpopular and excluded from suburban social and dating networks. The suburban students and the Diversify boys explained that the Diversify girls were unpopular and sexually undesirable because they were coded as “ghetto” and “loud.” Thus, Diversify boys and suburban classmates criticized the Diversify girls’ “loudness” according to discourse about feminine norms. They also used this discourse to rationalize the Diversify girls’ social isolation. From their standpoint, the Diversify girls claimed their “loud” reputation came from their direct style of handling interpersonal conflict and racially insensitive remarks. (p. 219)

Although neither the Holland (2012) or Ispa-Landa (2013) study investigated African American students coming from similar socioeconomic backgrounds to their more affluent White counterparts, the studies do provide a window into the K-12 experiences of Black students situated in predominantly White school settings, across gender lines.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter reviewed studies that elaborated on the school experiences of African American students (lower, middle, and upper income) educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools. Overall the review found that there is little disagreement within the body of research concerning the challenges associated with being African American (regardless of gender or class) in a predominantly White or integrated suburban school. Nevertheless, as suggested by many researchers regarding the benefits of informal and formal same race peer networks (Carter, 2007, DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Datnow & Cooper, 1996), as well as through collaboration between students,

schools, and families (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007), Black students can be successful and have positive school experiences in such school climates. The following chapter, details specific methods I utilized to carry out this study.

## CHAPTER 3

# METHODS

### RESEARCH DESIGN

*“The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives”*

*- (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)*

In terms of research design, this dissertation is largely phenomenological with narrative features. While phenomenology characterizes what I sought to understand, narrative gives place to the expression of the phenomenon that was under investigation.

Creswell (2006) describes phenomenology as research that expresses the sense or meaning of lived experiences of a phenomenon or perception of several individuals. Referencing van Manen (1997), Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl (2003) assert “one goal of phenomenology is evocation which serves to bring experience ‘vividly into presence’” (p. 875). Creswell (2006) goes further by explaining,

Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon...The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (a “grasp of the very nature of the thing,” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). To this end, qualitative researchers identify a phenomenon (an “object” of human experience; van Manen, 1990, p. 163). This human experience may be phenomena such as insomnia, being left out, anger, grief, or undergoing coronary artery bypass surgery (Moustakas, 1994). The inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite

description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals. This description consists of “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). (pp. 57-58)

In the case of this dissertation, the phenomenon was the K-12 school experiences of socioeconomically stable middle and/or upper income, Gen Y and Z African American males and females attending predominantly White or integrated K-12 suburban schools.

Concerning the narrative nature of this dissertation, by presenting participant short school history accounts or stories, the phenomenon is revealed and understood.

To address reasons why participant narratives were selected as the method in which to present the phenomenon under investigation, I looked to Carter (1993), who explains, “At one level, *story* [emphasis added] is a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs” (p. 6). Going further, Carter (1993) puts forth:

We come to understand sorrow or love or joy or indecision in particularly rich ways through the characters and incidents we become familiar with in novels or plays. This richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions. It can only be demonstrated or evoked through story. (p. 6)

In concert with Carter (1993), Polkinghorne (1995) contends “stories are particularly suited as the linguistic form in which human experience as lived can be expressed” (p. 7). Contending that human action is the “subject-matter of stories” (p. 7), Polkinghorne (1995) explains,

A storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of

human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts. In this context, story refers not only to fictional accounts but also to narratives describing “ideal” life events such as biographies, autobiographies, histories, case studies, and reports of *remembered episodes* [emphasis added] that have occurred. (p. 7)

Metaphorically *marrying* the two qualitative inquiry methods of phenomenology and narrative, I looked to Connelly & Clandinin (1990) who contend:

It is equally correct to say “inquiry into narrative” as it is “narrative inquiry.” By this we mean that *narrative is both phenomenon and method* [emphasis added]. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon “story” and the inquiry “narrative.” Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience.

(p. 2)

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) contend that the study of narrative is an investigation of the ways in which people experience the world. Again, in the case of this dissertation, the experience of being a Gen Y or Z African American male or female, who has had their K-12 education in predominantly White or integrated suburban schools, and who have come from stable middle or upper income

backgrounds, was the phenomenon under study. Accordingly, the narrative features of this study allowed participants to share the phenomenon through their stories.

### **RESEARCHER'S ROLE**

Patton (1990) (as cited in Golafshani, 2003) explains that in qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument” (p. 600) or the one responsible for data collection and analysis. Going further, as it relates to qualitative research, Maykut & Morehouse (1994) (as cited in Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) put forth,

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand. (p. 55)

As a researcher who is an “insider” (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55) I share a similar socioeconomic status, cultural background, as well as K-12 school experience to those who were under study. I am also a first wave Millennial in that I was born between the birth years of 1977 to 1983. Thus, I realize my positionality has the ability to enhance understanding of the academic experiences of middle and upper income African American Gen Y'ers educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools. Despite my insider status, I recognize “holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group” (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60) just as non-membership does not signify overall difference (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In consideration of my member status, I looked to Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009) who

point, “the complete membership role gives researchers a certain amount of legitimacy and/or stigma” (p. 58). As it relates to *legitimacy* they contend,

The benefit to being a member of the group one is studying is acceptance. One’s membership automatically provides a level of trust and openness in your participants that would likely not have been present otherwise. One has a starting point (the commonality) that affords access into groups that might otherwise be closed to “outsiders.” Participants might be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness; it is as if they feel, “You are one of us and it is us versus them (those on the outside who don’t understand)”. (p. 58)

Relevant to *stigma*, Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009) explain “stigma refers to the view of outsiders, who might see this role as creating a heightened level of researcher subjectivity that might be detrimental to data analysis and even collection” (p. 58).

Expounding further upon drawbacks related to researchers as insiders, they further state,

Although this shared status can be very beneficial as it affords access, entry, and a common ground from which to begin the research, it has the potential to impede the research process as it progresses. It is possible that the participant will make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully. It is also possible that the researcher’s perceptions might be clouded by his or her personal experience and that as a member of the group he or she will have difficulty separating it from that of the participants. This might result in an interview

that is shaped and guided by the core aspects of the researcher's experience and not the participant's. Furthermore, its undue influence might affect the analysis, leading to an emphasis on shared factors between the researcher and the participants and a de-emphasis on factors that are discrepant, or vice versa. (p. 58)

In contemplating the pros and cons of insider status, I was aware of my ability to bring intimate knowledge and commonality in experience with those I sought to study. I was also cognizant of the fact that with my position, there was a potential for bias.

Concerning this issue of researcher bias, Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009) argue, "Being an insider might raise questions of undue influence of the researcher's perspective, but being an outsider does not create immunity to the influence of personal perspective" (p. 59). Going further, Rose (1985) (as cited in Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) asserts,

There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing. (p. 55)

Denzin (2012) contends, "Objective reality can never be captured" (p. 82). He continues, "We only know a thing through its representations" (p. 82). Despite the risk of bias, I realize that "Being a member of the group under investigation does not unduly influence the [research] process in a negative way" (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59). In effect, critical to the role of the researcher, "is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience" (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59).

Toward openness, acuity, and authenticity in the research process, Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009) point to the necessity of the researcher taking the position of the “space between” (p. 61).

As qualitative researchers we are not separate from the study, with limited contact with our participants. Instead, we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. The stories of participants are immediate and real to us; individual voices are not lost in a pool of numbers. We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant “researcher” role [as in quantitative research].

Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact is the space between. The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords. (p. 61)

In addition to understanding that as a researcher I had to occupy the space between insider and outsider, for the purposes of minimizing bias and adding quality as well as credibility to my inquiry, I utilized methodological triangulation or mixed-methods research (Zauszniewski 2012, Casey & Murphy 2009). Denzin (2012) argues, “triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation but an alternative to validation” (p. 82) in that it adds “rigor, breadth complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (p. 82). While methodological triangulation is described in the literature as using “two or more

research methods in a single study” (Casey & Murphy, 2009, p. 41), I specifically used within-method triangulation. In other words I used more than one data collection procedure from the same qualitative study design (individual interviews as well as a focus group)—later detailed in this chapter.

In addition to within-in method triangulation I also incorporated member-checking and utilized peer-debriefing. Creswell (2009) points that qualitative researchers can locate a peer “who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (p. 192).

Now that I have positioned my role as researcher, what follows is detail on study participants and how I went about recruiting them.

## **RECRUITMENT**

Specifically, I sought six subjects to participate in my study. Through multiple purposive sampling I was able identify potential subjects. Widely used in qualitative research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), Palinkas et al (2013) puts forth that purposeful sampling “involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (p. 2). Patton (1990) explains that purposeful sampling, “selects information-rich cases for in-depth study” (p. 182). Multiple purposive sampling, “involves using two or more [sampling strategies] when selecting units or cases for a research study” (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 83).

Specifically, to identify and recruit my participants I used a combination of three different purposive sampling techniques (e.g., criterion, homogenous, snowball)—all of which can be used to “narrow the range of variation and focus on similarities” (Palinkas et al, 2013, p. 2).

For my study I sought out six participants who met very specific criteria: (1) they had to have grown up in a stable middle or upper income household in Riverside or Orange counties in the state of California; (2) they had to be African American (male or female); (3) they had to have attended predominantly White or integrated suburban high schools; (4) they had to have been raised in a two-parent household; (5) parents of the participant had to have been their biological, adoptive parent, or step-parent who raised them; (6) one or both of their parents had to have minimally been college-educated; and (7) they had to be members of Generations Y or Z. As it relates to generational membership, three participants had to be members of Generation Y—stemming from the “first wave” (those born between 1977 and 1983) and “core group” (those born between 1983 and 1989) of their generational cohort. In addition, three participants had to be members of Generation Z—“first wave only” (specifically those who were 18 or 19 at the time of the study) of their generational cohort. Participants who met all of these criteria were considered homogenous. Patton (1990) notes that picking a small homogenous sample serves the purpose of describing a “particular subgroup in-depth” (p. 173). The literature also points that homogenous sampling is good for focus groups (Palinkas et al 2013, Patton 1990).

Within my own peer networks at a church I attended in Riverside, CA I knew of individuals who I thought might have fit my criteria. As such, after acquiring their phone numbers I placed a “qualifying” call to each. Once it was determined they fit my criteria, I asked if they would be willing to participate in my study (*see* Appendix B for “Gen Y Telephone Recruitment Script”). Once they agreed to participate, we set dates for the actual interviews.

As I was only able to identify Gen Y participants from my own peer networks, snowball or “chain” sampling was utilized to pinpoint the Gen Z participants. Noted as “an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases” (Patton, 1990, p. 176), I utilized snowball sampling in that I asked those within my peer network who they knew that might fit my criterion for Gen Z participants. If they didn’t know anyone specifically, I asked if they knew someone else whom they thought did know Gen Z’ers who fit my criterion. Patton (1990) notes, “By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases” (p. 176). Taking this approach, I was able to acquire Gen Z participants who fit my criterion. Specifically, I sent emails to persons who were recommended to me by Gen Y participants who may have known possible Gen Z’ers who fit my criterion (see Appendix B for “Email Referral Script). Once these referrals identified potential subjects, they contacted them on my behalf to find out if it would be all right for me to give them a call. Once they were given the “OK” by the potential subjects, I then placed a phone call to them (see Appendix B for “Gen Z Telephone Recruitment Script”), qualified them during the call, and then asked if they would be willing to participate. Like Gen Y’ers once they agreed, interview dates were scheduled.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

### ***A Brief on Background of Study Participant’s Parents***

Lacy (2007) contends that sociologists argue, “middle-class Blacks and Whites do not experience their middle-class status in the same way” (p. 22). She notes that this is in large part due to the fact that scholars have studied lower middle-class African Americans who live within or near the same communities in which poor Blacks dwell—

communities that are typically plagued by “high unemployment, drugs, teenage pregnancy, high rates of poverty, [high rates of crime], inferior shopping districts, low-performing school districts, poor municipal services, and White flight” (p. 22).

In terms of why she believes scholars generally make the claim that middle-class Blacks and Whites have different experiences as it relates to their social location of being middle-class, Lacy (2007) argues,

The Black middle-class has not been properly defined in the sociological literature. This misspecification not only conceals growing heterogeneity within the group, it leads researchers to draw erroneous conclusions about the group—findings that are derived from data on individuals who would be more accurately characterized as Black working class. In practice, the Black lower-middle class and the Black middle class have been unevenly studied. As a result, the two groups are often confounded in the sociological literature. (p. 22)

Relevant to properly characterizing a group, as discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, Lacy (2007) defined two distinct middle-class African American groups (a fragile lower-middle class and a stable middle class). While the fragile Black lower-middle class “falls behind the White middle-class on key measures of middle-class status” (Lacy, 2007, p. 2), the stable African American middle class virtually mirrors its White counterpart in terms of income, occupation, education, and residential accommodations.

As these facts relate to the school experiences of middle and upper income African Americans educated in predominantly White or integrated suburban schools, for reasons that remain unclear, Howard & Reynolds (2008) note, “when social class is held

constant, an analysis of school achievement data still reveals a disturbing picture for African American students in that they still lag behind their White counterparts [coming from similar backgrounds]” (p. 81). In the case of African American students who attend more affluent, middle class schools, Howard & Reynolds (2008) found that an achievement gap persisted between Black and White students. This finding is not only disturbing, it is of great importance to me because I sought to understand the school experiences of stable middle and upper income Gen Y and Z Blacks who were educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools—schools that by-and-large are considered affluent or middle class.

Because of the ambiguity of the achievement gap that persists between Blacks and Whites (even when socioeconomic status, education, occupation, and residence are practically indistinguishable), to better understand the school experiences of the Black sub-cultural group under study, and to peel away at root causes of disparities in academic achievement, a qualifier of being selected for this study was that parents of study participants had to have been members of this stable middle-class as defined by Lacy (2007) or be upper income. For example, at least one parent of each participant had to minimally have a bachelor’s degree. It is important to interject that as it relates to parent level of education, research documents a link between student achievement and their parents’ highest level of education. In fact, Hodgkinson (1993) (as cited in Hahs-Vaughn, 2004) posits, “Parents’ education has been noted as one of the very best predictors of students’ educational achievement” (p. 486). In addition, the parents of study participants must have raised them in desirable neighborhoods. For the purposes of this study, *desirable neighborhoods* are defined as communities not plagued by the problems often

associated with low-income neighborhoods (i.e., high crime, drugs, underperforming schools).

Concerning family structure, study participant's parents had to have been married to one another. Research results are mixed concerning family structure as it relates to two-parent vs. single-parent headed households and its affect on student academic achievement. While a number of studies contend that family structure (for various reasons, such as income and resources) does have an impact on student achievement—particularly an ill-effect for those growing up in single-mother headed homes—(Hampden-Thompson, 2009; Sand fur, McLanahan, & Wojtkiewicz, 1992; McLanahan, 1985), others say family structure “alone” has little to no affect as one must consider other factors typically associated with family structure—dynamics such as income, persistent poverty, or even whether or not a family is blended (Gennetian, 2005). Still others point that these ill-effects typically hold sway only for the “general population” (Heiss, 1996, p. 247) and that the results are more mixed as it relates to African Americans. Concerning family structure specifically among African Americans, Heiss (1996) contends:

The effects of family structure may vary markedly depending on the context, and data from White families or the general population may not be generalizable to African Americans. In fact, the empirical record for African Americans does not permit a firm conclusion, since it is relatively small and contradictory. Theoretically, it is quite possible that an African American child from a father-mother family has no great advantage over one whose father is absent—given the societal disadvantages that many

Black children face regardless of their situation. And, perhaps many single mothers rise to the challenge and provide a good environment for their children. (p. 247)

While I acknowledge that factors associated with family composition as it relates to student outcomes are complex and not always conclusive, it is my contention that family structure does have the ability to have an impact on student academic achievement and overall school experiences. One example to support this position is a study conducted by Sun & Li (2011), in which the researchers did a comparative analysis of varying family structures and the impact on children's academic performances in math and reading over time. Specifically, the researchers found achievement outcomes were more favorable for those coming from "non-disrupted two-biological-parent and non-disrupted stepparent households" (p. 541) as opposed to those students coming from "non-disrupted single-parent, disrupted two-biological-parent, and disrupted alternative families with multiple transitions" (p. 541).

Conscious of what research has to say about the impact of family structures on the academic achievement of students, just as control was made for participant parent income levels, control was also made for the type of family structure in which participants were raised. Specifically, participants had to have been raised in households in which their parents were married to one another. Further, taking any form, participants married parents could have been their biological parents, non-disrupted stepparents, or adoptive parents.

### ***Generation Z***

Participants from Generation Z ” (those born in or around 1995 through 2014) were students at the time of this study and are being referred to as “student participants.” Specifically, three (3) student participants (two males and one female) were selected who were considered “first wave” (Smola & Sutton, 2002, p. 364)—those born within the first five to seven years of a generational cohort (Smola & Sutton, 2002). First wave Gen Z’ers (those who were age 19 at the time of this study) were chosen because they had the longest experience as members of this generational cohort. Further, they were chosen because Generation Y has influenced many of their attitudes and values. It is important to note that “second” wave Gen Z’ers were not selected for this study because they were too young. They would have been born during the birth years of roughly 2000 to 2005—making them between the ages of 9 and 14.

In addition, another selection criterion was that student participants must have been high school seniors enrolled in regular, honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses or college students in good academic standing. Special Education students or those suffering from serious behavioral issues were not considered for this study. In the case of this dissertation, all student participants were college students, attending four-year institutions of higher learning.

As emphasis was not placed on participant gender, subjects were not selected based on whether or not they were male or female. They were selected given they met key study qualifications (e.g., came from stable middle to upper income families, attended predominantly White or integrated suburban K-12 schools, were reared in a two-parent household, etc.).

### ***Generation Y***

Generation Y or Millennial study participants were selected from two sub-sets—“first wave” of their generational cohort (those born between 1977 and 1983) because they came of age or were in the midst of young adulthood at the millennium; and “core group” (Smola & Sutton, 2002, p. 364), those born between 1983 and 1989.

Similar to Gen Z’ers, first wave Millennials were chosen because they were there from the genesis of this demographic group and had more experiences within this generational cohort. In addition, first wave Gen Y’ers were not only the first to be born into and shaped by the defining characteristics of Generation Y, they were also heavily influenced by the attitudes and values of Generation X. This is because the “last wave” (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66) of Gen X saw its birth cutoff year in 1976.

Concerning core group Millennials, participants were selected from this “critical developmental stage” (Smola & Sutton, 2002, p. 364), because all of the defining or uniquely Gen Y characteristics and values, are principally all they have ever known. Stated another way, due to their relative distance from Generation X, the attitudes and values of Gen X’ers do not weigh as heavily on core group Millennials’ worldview in comparison to Gen X’s influence on first wave Millennials.

Just as with Gen Z’ers, Millennial participants were not selected based on gender. Instead, three (3) Gen Y’ers (all females) and three (3) Gen Z’ers (two males and one female) were selected based on the criteria specified above for participation in the study. Further, Millennial participants minimally had to have a bachelor’s degree.

## SETTING

In terms of the setting (as previously outlined) participants had to have been raised in Riverside or Orange counties in the state of California. These counties were selected because of their relatively small African American populations, as well as annual median household incomes that fall within the stable middle-class typical salary range as described by Lacy (2007).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), of the 2,268,783 persons living in Riverside County, African Americans made up only 7% of the share of the population as of 2011, while non-Hispanic Whites comprised 39.1%. In this same county, the annual median household income from 2007-2011 was \$58,365 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In addition, only 14.2% of the total population was living at or below the poverty line for the same years.

It is important to note that in contrast to racial demographics for Riverside County in 2011, according to Census 2000 (as cited in [censuscope.org](http://censuscope.org), n. d.), it was found that 1990 census data for Riverside County showed that 64.43% of the total population of 1,170,413 were non-Hispanic Whites and 5.12% were African American. By the 2000 census, while the total population increased to 1,545,387, the population of non-Hispanic Whites had decreased to 51.04% and had increased for African Americans to 5.98% (“Population by Race,” [censuscope.org](http://censuscope.org), n. d.).

Of Orange County’s 3,090,132 residents, while non-Hispanic Whites made up 43.5% of the total population, Blacks made up only 2.1% in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Additionally, for the years 2007-2011, the annual median household income for

this county was \$75, 762 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). For those living at or below the poverty line, 10.9% made up this demographic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

As it relates to the 1990 census data for Orange County, Census 2000 (as cited in censuscope.org, n. d.) notes that of the 2,410,556 total population in 1990, 64.49% were non-Hispanic Whites and 1.62% were Black. By 2000, while the population for Orange County increased to 2,846,289, numbers for non-Hispanic Whites had decreased to 51.26% and had decreased for Blacks to 1.5% (“Population by Race,” censuscope.org, n. d.).

Concerning recent data on other ethnic populations within the two counties, the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) notes that Latinos made up 46.1% of the total population in Riverside County in 2011, and 34.1% in Orange County. Asians comprised 18.4% of the population in Orange County, and 6.5% in Riverside County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Due to key demographic markers which demonstrated relatively small percentages of African American representation in the total population for both counties during the 1990s (years when Gen Y’ers were in junior high and high school) and 2000s (up to the present day), and because Whites maintain large (and in some cases majority) numbers, it was my assertion that I would be able to find participants who met my criteria.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Over the course of 13 sessions, data were collected through a series of three semi-structured interviews modeled after Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series—an in-depth, phenomenological interviewing method in which the researcher conducts three separate interviews with each study participant (Seidman, 2006). Concerning why I chose to enlist Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series as a basis for my method for data collection,

Seidman (2006) demonstrates:

People's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience (Patton, 1989). Interviewers who propose to explore their topic by arranging a one-shot meeting with an "interviewee" whom they have never met tread on thin contextual ice...Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982) designed the series of three interviews that characterizes this approach and allows the interviewers and participant to plumb the experience and to place it in context. (p. 17)

In this study, each subject participated in two rounds of individual interviews. For the third round (a focus group), only five out of the six subjects participated as one of the Gen Z'ers (a male) had a schedule conflict. The rationale for why I varied the third interview, making it a focus group instead, is offered later in this chapter.

All individual interviews as well as the focus group were conducted via a conference line. Utilizing the conference call service through Virtual PBX, I gave each participant a phone number to call in for the individual interviews as well as for the focus group session. Through this service I was able to have all sessions recorded as well.

Using a "standard protocol of open-ended questions designed to engage participants in a discussion" (Irizarry, 2007, p. 89) within 45 to 60-minute timeframes, participants were asked to narrate and "reconstruct" (Seidman, 2006, p. 17) particular "remembered [school] episodes" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7) as well as a range of "constitutive events in their past" (Seidman, 2006, p. 17)—day-to-day events that

essentially established or characterized their K-12 school experiences. The remembered school episodes and the range of constitutive past events, are considered as participant retellings of their K-12 school experiences. Throughout this chapter, these retellings are also referred to as short school stories, school histories, or “storied vignettes” (Polkinghorne, 1995). The idea of school histories is based on what Creswell (2006) and Seidman (2006) define as a “life history”—essentially a portrayal of a person’s entire life. While this study did not seek to understand the entire lives of participants, it did endeavor to retrieve narrative snapshots into their K-12 (namely middle school and high school) experience or history—hence “school histories.”

While I will expound later in this chapter on the significance of specific remembered school episodes, it is necessary at this juncture to discuss the relevance of constitutive events, as these events essentially characterize the day-to-day school happenings experienced by study participants. To better frame constitutive events, I put forth what I conceptualize as “cumulative effects,” or a series of events or actions that take place in the school environment that have an effect “greater than the sum of their individual effects” (Spencer, 1999, p. 181). As it relates to day-to-day school-related events or experiences, I sought to understand racial microaggressions experienced by participants while in school. Heinfeld (2011) describes microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (p. 141). Within the context of this study, the “greater effects” of racial microaggressions were the overall outcomes relevant to participant academic performance and social adjustment while attending predominantly

White or integrated suburban schools; the ways in which these experiences influenced participant worldviews on race and class in America; and finally how these effects helped to shape subjects perspectives in terms of being a privileged class within a racially oppressed and culturally marginalized group.

To better situate what is meant by “cumulative effects” I looked to cumulative risk research, which considers risk factors and their deleterious effects over time in child behavior outcomes (Appleyard et al., 2005). The cumulative risk hypothesis suggests, “the most detrimental effects on the child are caused when risk factors accumulate” (van der Molen et al., 2012, p. 728). In relation to this dissertation, while I did not aim to make sense of child behavior outcomes, I did seek to understand participant corollaries overtime relevant to their K-12 school experiences, and how the outcomes of those experiences shaped their ideologies and worldview on race and class, all while being culturally marginalized and socioeconomically privileged. In short, by analyzing constitutive events, it was felt that these insights could help toward understanding the effects (good and bad) overtime on participant adjustment in their K-12 environment, as well as their views on matters of race, class, and privilege.

### ***Interview I***

The goal of the first interview was to essentially have the participants “narrate a range of constitutive events in their past” (Seidman, 2006, p. 17) thereby revealing the cumulative effects associated with their school experiences at predominantly White or integrated suburban schools. Seidman (2006) notes that in the first interview, the researcher’s “task is to put the participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time”

(p. 17). Specifically, for interview one, 18 open-ended questions were asked (*see* Appendix C), during approximately a 45-minute block of time.

### ***Interview II***

For the second interview I was looking for detailed, specific school episodes. Seidman (2006) explains that the researcher's task during the second interview is to "ask for stories about their experience in school as a way of eliciting details" (p. 18). During this interview, 11 questions (*see* Appendix C) over a 45-minute period of time were asked.

To distinguish the importance of detailing specific school episodes aside from day-to-day school happenings, it is important to expound upon the "remembered [school] episodes" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7) mentioned earlier in this chapter. To better conceptualize remembered episodes, I turned to Carter's (1994) research on well-remembered events, defined as "an incident or episode that a student observes in a school situation and considers, for his or her own reasons, especially salient or memorable" (p. 236).

Having its basis in the study of teachers' knowledge, a principle of well-remembered events suggests that knowledge is classified into descriptive frames, which serve to provide illustrative mechanisms for conceiving various incidents (Carter, 1994). Another premise of well-remembered events is that school experiences are often complex social events. In the context of school practitioners, teaching in schools are multifaceted public proceedings. However, it is through these actions or events that pedagogical expertise or knowledge is gained. Even so, although the method of well-remembered events is rooted in the study of practitioner knowledge, it is useful for understanding

student experience as well because the very act of schooling is a multifarious and intricate social event—especially for those students straddling two worlds (one of privilege and the other of peril). Further, these composite events shape student knowledge and their overall worldview.

Understanding these complexities has real implications for teaching and learning. As such, by analyzing singular school events such as encounters with teachers, school administrators, or peers, “interpretations of [those] events,” (Carter, 1994, p. 236) can become implicit—thereby leading to a greater understanding of the “how’s and why’s” of participant school histories. It is my contention that these insights can serve to better inform educator practice—particularly with this sub-cultural group under study.

### ***Interview III***

As previously mentioned, methods for data collection for this study were *modeled* after Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series, *not exactly replicated*. Having said that, instead of conducting a third *individual interview* with each subject as Seidman (2006) recommends, I decided to carry out the third round (or the “13<sup>th</sup> session”) with all subjects at one time in the form of a focus group (again, one Gen Z’er was unable to participate). Lasting approximately 60 minutes, six questions were asked (*see Appendix C*).

There were two main reasons why I chose to do a focus group. The first reason was to gain more clarification on participant views on race and class in America at a societal level. Kitzinger (1995) notes that “focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method” (p. 299) and that this approach “capitalizes on communication

between research participants in order to generate data” (p. 299). Kitzinger (1995) further explains:

This [focus group methodology] means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each others' experiences and points of view. The method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way...[further] group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview. Group discussion is particularly appropriate when the interviewer has a series of open ended questions and wishes to encourage research participants to explore the issues of importance to them, in their own vocabulary, generating their own questions and pursuing their own priorities...Group work also helps researchers tap into the many different forms of communication that people use in day to day interaction, including jokes, anecdotes, teasing, and arguing. Gaining access to such variety of communication is useful because people's knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions. Everyday forms of communication may tell us as much, if not more, about what people know or experience. In this sense focus groups reach the parts that other methods cannot reach, revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by

more conventional data collection techniques... Tapping into such interpersonal communication is also important because this can highlight sub-cultural values or group norms. Through analyzing the operation of humor, consensus, and dissent and examining different types of narrative used within the group, the researcher can identify shared and common knowledge. This makes focus groups a data collection technique particularly sensitive to cultural variables—which is why it is so often used in cross-cultural research and work with ethnic minorities. (pp. 299-300)

The second reason why I chose to do a focus group was because I wanted to bring together the generations—Gen Y and Gen Z—to have a candid conversation on matters of race and class relevant to their K-12 school experiences. Dupree (2009) notes that each generation has a distinct set of attitudes, behaviors, values, habits, and motivational buttons, and even communication styles. As such, with this type of generational diversity I was curious as to what new dynamics (e.g., school stories, perspectives, participant interactions) relevant to the study would possibly arise as the two generations interacted with one another.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The overall goal of this dissertation was to “elicit and describe those aspects of the phenomenon that [were] common to all” (Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003, p. 874) to better understand the school experiences of an understudied group (i.e., middle and upper income Black students educated in majority White and integrated suburban K-12 schools) as a step toward better informing

educator practice with this sub-cultural group. In order to meet this objective, I looked to Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl (2013) who contend, “To accomplish this goal, the investigator must make sense of each individual account and then compare across those accounts to identify themes that are common to all respondents’ accounts” (p. 874). Hence within-case and across-case analyses were conducted to identify emergent themes or generalizations to make meaning of findings (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). Following analytic procedures as identified by Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl (2003), I extracted excerpts from participant stories to probe and understand the data.

After collecting all of my data and having the 13 interviews transcribed verbatim, I immersed myself in the data by reviewing the transcripts line-by-line repeatedly and then analyzed them “in conjunction with field notes” (Irizarry, 2007, p. 89) from all of the individual interviews as well as the focus group. Next, I revisited each participant’s account to “identify significant statements” (Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003, p. 874). In other words, I extracted sentences and phrases that were in direct relation to participant K-12 school experiences. Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl (2003) refer to this exercise as *decontextualization*. Essentially, “data are decontextualized because they are separated from the individual cases in which they originated” (p. 872). Through decontextualization I was able to “describe aspects of the phenomenon as experienced by each individual respondent” (Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003, p. 874). Once significant statements “within all cases” were identified, they were coded and sorted into “possible” themes. It is important to interject that I did conduct

member-checking to ensure that each participant's account of their school experiences were adequately and accurately captured.

To find commonalities “across-cases,” next I compared participant significant statements with each other. By looking across cases, I was able to identify participant experiences that were common to all. At that point, “solid” categories or participant themes of experience began to emerge. In addition, “I reconnected each significant statement to its original context and validated the categories” (Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003, p. 874). This was done to ensure or “account for everything that was significant from the original accounts without introducing ideas not represented in those original accounts” (Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003, p. 874). Finally, once solid categories of experience were identified, previously coded individual significant statements were re-sorted into those themes. Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl (2003) refer to this strategy as *recontextualization*. The researchers note,

Data are recontextualized as they are reintegrated into themes that combine units of like meaning taken from the accounts of multiple research respondents. These recontextualized data create a reduced data set drawn from across all cases. The researcher uses the reduced data set to explore theoretical or process relationships among these clusters of meaning. (p. 872)

Referenced in Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl (2003), these within-case and across-case analytic procedures are strategies taken from Colaizzi (1978) that Kavanaugh (1997) utilized in her phenomenological study on the essential

structure of perinatal loss. The following tabled information outlining these strategies was taken from Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl (2003):

Strategy	Analytic Focus	Product
Analytic immersion in all interviews (e.g., review of interview transcripts)	Within all cases	Sense of lived experience of the phenomenon
Immersion in each interview	Within each case	Identification of significant statements—phrases, sentences, paragraphs related to the experience
Comparisons of significant statements	Across cases	Identify or code categories of statements common to all participants
Reconnection of significant statements to interviews	Within and across all cases	Ascertain fidelity to original accounts—for validation purposes
Intuiting or critical reflection	Within and across all cases	Identification of themes
Free writing to make intuited themes explicit	Within and across all cases	Answer question, “What would [participants] want the world to know about their experience
Organize categories of significant statements by themes and sub-themes	Set of significant statements which are summarized and organized into the thematic categories	Themes form the essential structure, which is the fundamental framework of the phenomenon
Return analysis or summaries [i.e., composite descriptions] of themes to participants for evaluation	Essential structure, summaries of themes	Evocation and intensification, achieved through participant narratives (e.g., statements or stories) categorized across themes

Table 1: Adapted from *Within-case and across-case approaches to qualitative data analysis*, pp. 874-875, by Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003.

Through the analytical strategies outlined above, I formed an overall “composite description” (Creswell, 2006, p. 58) that served to characterize the phenomenon under study. Through the composite description formed from excerpts taken from participant school storied vignettes, school experiences were better understood.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In summary, this chapter detailed the dissertation design, described my role as the researcher, detailed information regarding recruitment strategies, study participants,

setting, data analysis and collection. What follows in chapter four is a report of study findings.

## CHAPTER 4

# RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter shares participant retellings or well-remembered events centering on their academic experiences in junior high and high school. More specifically, structured in the form of storied-vignettes or “narrative snapshots” of the lives of the six participants, study findings are revealed.

In terms of chapter flow, Section One (e.g., “Gen Y Storied Vignettes”) presents snapshots that capture moments in time during the junior high and high school years of Gen Y’ers. Similar to Section One, Section Two (e.g., “Gen Z Storied Vignettes”) provides insight into the junior high and high school years of Generation Z. Following Section Two, Section Three presents an overview of what took place during the focus group.

It is important to note that while chapter five specifically discusses themes or categories of experience, at certain points in this chapter throughout each individual snapshot as well as the focus group, I provide reflections on the literature as it relates to some of the significant statements made by each subject regarding their own personal K-12 experiences. While these statements do not necessarily represent themes of experience, they are salient because they provide examples of challenges experienced by Black Americans that can be found in the body of research. Finally, the chapter concludes with a recap of the chapter.

### **GEN Y STORIED VIGNETTES**

Born between the period of 1977 to 1994, and on track to becoming the most educated generation in the history of the United States (Pew Research Center, 2010),

Generation Y (a.k.a. “Millennials”) is hailed as the largest generation of youth in U.S. history (ARC, 2011; Saatchi & Saatchi, 1999). As a generation comprised of three distinct birth waves (first, second, and third waves), an estimated 78 million individuals make up its membership. Davis-Welch (2013), referencing Saatchi & Saatchi (1999) and Pew Research Center (2010), points that the defining character trait of Gen Y is its extreme need to always be connected—as evidenced by their explosive use of mediums such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, emails, as well as other social media platforms. What follows are the narratives of the three female Gen Y participants (first and second wave of their generational cohorts)—all of whom are in their early to mid-thirties.

### **Narrative Snapshot: Karen**

*“It’s kinda like you’ve reached this level and you’re privileged to have reached this level. You better not squander this.”*

- Karen

Now living on the east coast, Karen Livingston (pseudonym) is a 36-year old (“first wave” Millennial) physician assistant who grew up in Riverside County, CA. Largely attending predominantly White private K-12 Christian schools, Karen shared that she attended public school all of three months during her entire K-12 experience, while in junior high school.

Raised in an upper income, two-parent household by her biological parents, both of whom have advanced degrees, Karen acknowledges that being classed as an upper income Black has brought her privileges not readily available to low income Blacks. Specifically when asked whether or not she felt being classed as an upper income African

American has brought her special privileges that are unavailable to low income Blacks, she stated:

Most definitely. For one, people look at you differently because they know the class you're in. So, people respond to you differently because they expect something different. Also, with being in that class [upper income] there were things that my parents were aware of because they were in that class. So, it's kind of like you can pass things on to your children that you're aware of. It opens up doors that an underprivileged, or a person that's in a lower income might not necessarily have. Now, it doesn't mean that they don't have it. But, it might be a little bit harder because they don't have somebody in their life that has the middle or upper class income that can show them that this is possible.

When asked to describe some of those privileges Karen explained:

Ok...so like one big one for me is that my father has a Ph.D. in counseling and guidance. So, when it came time for me to get ready to go to college and deciding on what I wanted to do, he was very informed how to help make these decisions...I also never thought that there was nothing I couldn't do, coz I was in a place where middle and upper class people were very visible to me. It was like right there. I could reach it. It was just one step up. It's very possible; it's not so far away. So, it didn't seem like this monstrous leap.

Still on the topic of "privilege," during the second interview, Karen explained:

When it came to my community, there was no part of my community that I didn't see. There were councilwomen who were Black. There were doctors and lawyers and people who were movers and shakers in our community that were doing things. So, it was all possible and my parents would tell me, "the sky is the limit, there's nothing you can't do." And, when I saw all this, I believed them. Now, did I believe that I could become President one day? No. But, that wasn't even a thought. Like that wasn't even something I wanted to do. But, I believed that all my dreams could come true...like everything that I wanted. So, the question for me is, "how might my dreams have been different if I came from an even higher class than what I was raised in?"

While growing up as an upper income Black had its perks, for Karen it was not without challenges relevant to race that so many African Americans have encountered throughout America's school systems. Specifically, when asked whether or not there was ever a time in which she felt unjustly treated due to her race, Karen recalled:

A teacher thought that I cheated coz I made a perfect score on her test. In her mind there was no way that I could have gotten that perfect score. It actually wasn't a test, but a take home assignment. And, I think it kind of was like an "honor" thing. Like, you couldn't open your book or something. Fortunately, I had been doing my classwork in another teacher's office who could vouch for me that I wasn't cheating. But, to me, it shouldn't have come down to that. Thus the need to prove yourself. She [the teacher] didn't believe that I could have gotten this grade. Well, I did!

When asked to expound more upon her perceived need to prove herself, Karen (who is very much a high achiever) explained:

For one, it was more about I have to get good grades...and, I didn't want the professor to think that I was less than anybody else. So, I made sure that I got those good grades—even though my counterparts might not have been making such good grades...as a Black student you had to prove yourself more to staff than other students who were not Black. You had to prove your capabilities that you were as good as, or better.

Karen's need to prove herself is not an uncommon experience among Black high achievers. For example, in their study, which examines the academic experience of a group of high-achieving African American college students, Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) explain, "Black high-achievers are still judged based on prevalent social stereotypes regarding the academic abilities of blacks" (p. 510). Referencing a study by Fries-Britt & Turner (2000), Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) noted that within that study, successful Blacks, "felt that they repeatedly engaged in a 'proving process' to establish themselves as worthy and academically able both in and outside of the classroom" (p. 512).

Stemming from questions concerning why she felt the need to prove herself (particularly within the class in which she was accused of cheating), Karen expounded that it was due to a number of comments (i.e., microaggressions) made by this teacher throughout the school year. In fact, Karen explicated that to her as well as other blacks in her class, "there was this unspoken air or under-lying assumption that Black people weren't as smart as other students, so I really worked hard in her class, in particular, just to prove her wrong."

Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000) explain, “racial microaggressions take various forms, including both verbal and nonverbal assumptions and lowered expectations for African American students (p. 65). In their article, which speaks to microaggressions and presents a framework (i.e., MEES or Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress) for examining “the stress associated with occupying minority racial/ethnic status on predominantly White campuses” (Solórzano et al, 2002, p. 16), an environment which the researchers argue as being racially hostile for minorities, Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll (2002) point to the fact that some African American students, “feel they must overachieve to show the White folks that African Americans are smart and can excel in this hostile environment” (p. 27). The researchers go on to say, “This also gets restated in students trying to ‘prove others wrong’” (Solórzano et al, 2002, p. 27).

Inquiring into how she handled this situation, Karen was asked to share how she dealt with her teacher, the negative stereotype of African Americans being low achievers, along with her personal need to prove herself:

I expected them. So, my parents told me, “Basically, it’s going to be harder for you. You have to do better, you have to show better.” Because this was preached to me as a child, “you have to be the best, you’re gonna have these bumps in the road, you’re gonna have people think that you can’t do this,” I was prepared for it. [So] it wasn’t a shock to me.

As it relates to the pressure of doing better than other students who are not Black, Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) also cite Bonner (2001), a study that documents the academic experiences of gifted Black male college students. Specifically, Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) highlight, “a high-achieving Black male attending a PWI (Predominantly White

Institution) who was interviewed by Bonner reported feeling pressure to be ‘ten times as smart as everyone else,’ and that he constantly had to prove his capabilities” (p. 512).

Continuing in the interview, when asked to describe an instance in which she felt singled out or unaccepted due to her race by her peers, Karen referenced the infamous OJ Simpson trial:

I say most of the time I felt accepted [but] there was the occasion when I was in high school, the OJ Simpson trial was going on. So, during that occasion is when I felt more of the un-acceptance or division. And, it wasn’t just between Blacks and Whites. It was between Blacks and everyone else. This was very much a cultural issue, and if you were for him, it was like, “oh, it’s because you’re Black.”

Aside from backlash stemming from the OJ Simpson trial and the incident with her teacher, Karen was unable to recall any other specific instances in which she felt personal racial injustice or cultural stereotyping. However, she did have this to say:

I think a big part of it was that I had fellow classmates who went through stuff that was different than what I dealt with. Um, I think a big part of me not having to deal with all of that [other racial issues] was because my father was well-known on the campus. So, I wasn’t just another Black student. I was Dr. Livingston’s daughter. So, I think that helped out a lot when I didn’t have to deal with all this other stuff that I saw other [Black] kids having to deal with. I think it made a big difference. I mean, I did have some [problems] but it wasn’t as bad as it could have been.

Although Karen felt that there were benefits to being “Dr. Livingston’s daughter,” she didn’t sense that her social class had anything to do with it. In fact, when asked if she thought that her social class had an impact on how she was treated while in junior high and high school, she indicated, “the majority of the students were in my social economic class or slightly above...so, we were all pretty much equal.” Thus, in her opinion, the reputation of her father had the greatest impact on how she was treated in school.

At the close of the individual interviews with Karen, when asked what has the greatest impact (social class or cultural background) on how one interacts and is accepted in society, she stated:

Ok, so I believe they both have significance. The sad part I see is that because I am a middle class African American, then I’m more accepted than if I was a lower class that popped up into the middle class because it’s just a little bit easier for me to blend in because that’s how I grew up. So, I can play the role or the game a little bit more because of the situations I was in. I can be in an all White area with upper class people and be ok—you know assimilate. Or, I can be in an all Asian or all Black, or all Hispanic [environment] and not have a problem blending in with those groups. Where, somebody coming into that situation might have a more difficult time because that wasn’t how they were raised. It might be more of an adjustment. But, other than that, not really so much. And, the thing is that I almost kind of feel like as a Black person in this class, we’re expected so much more of than our White counterparts. It’s kinda like you’ve reached this level and you’re privileged to have reached this level.

You better not squander this. Where my White counterparts are like, “this is just normal, this is where we’re supposed to be.” So, it’s kind of like you have that feeling, “I have to give back, I have to help those behind me.

### ***Snapshot Summary (Karen)***

To sum up Karen’s K-12 experiences, she felt they were positive overall. When asked if she felt that the education she received was good, she indicated that it was “sufficient.” She also advised that because of the type of school she attended, she felt that it better prepared her to interact and thrive in a culturally diverse society.

With the exception of the time-period when the OJ Simpson verdict came out, Karen felt acceptance by her peers for the most part. While she did indicate that there were some issues surrounding race at her school, she did feel that to a certain degree her school was culturally sensitive to her needs as an African American because they did allow for a Black Student Association.

While she did not feel that her social class had any bearing on how she was treated at her school—more so who she was connected to impacted her treatment—at a societal level, she did feel that the upper-income upbringing she received afforded her with privileges (financial and social) that otherwise would not have been as easily accessible had she been raised in a low-income household.

In contrast, she did feel that her race had an impact on how she was treated—both at school and in society in general. For example, similar to that which is already documented in the literature, as a Black student she felt pressured to constantly prove herself academically in resistance toward the common stereotype

of Blacks being academically inept. Having said that, Karen did acknowledge that to a certain degree she felt shielded from other racial slights and injustices at her school (which other Black students dealt with) because of the reputation of her father.

### **Narrative Snapshot: Adrienne**

*“Um, I’m not like “the other Black girl.” So, I think that that’s good for me because for career-wise, it can just only help elevate me to certain places—which is not so horrible, but it’s just the reality, you know?”*

- Adrienne

A “first wave” Gen Y’er who recently graduated with her master’s degree in Arts Administration, 36-year old Adrienne Jones (pseudonym) grew up in Orange County, but now lives in the Midwest. During her entire K-12 years, Adrienne attended predominantly White public schools.

Adrienne was raised in a two-parent household by her biological mother and step-father. Growing up middle class, Adrienne agrees that her socioeconomic status brought with it privileges not readily available to low income Blacks. She explains:

There are certain life experiences through my upbringing that has allowed me, I guess, to understand, or be more relatable in certain situations with other ethnic groups. I think that may be an advantage. Also, I guess from an educational perspective, since I went to public school, I didn’t have to go necessarily to a private school to get the type of education I received. Whereas if I were in an inner city community, I may have had to go to a private school to get the type of education I got. So, I feel like that’s an advantage as well...I guess probably even just some of the things [my] school offered in terms of extracurricular activities. Field-trips and things

like that, I think probably were of a caliber that wouldn't necessarily be available to lower socioeconomic classes. Um, I also think that an advantage is not having the concerns of survival that maybe those that live in inner city areas would be concerned with—like outside of school and having to deal with that on top of whatever else is going on in their school environment. So, I feel like that's an advantage that I had—that I didn't have to worry. [Also] I guess just being able to have certain things just because of my parents economic status that maybe, you know, for example relatives that I know who didn't come from that same upbringing, couldn't get. So, I was able to recognize that early on as I grew up. You know, I was receiving things that others didn't get...or, when they came to my house, how they were so in awe of what I did have.

When asked to describe the community in which she was raised, Adrienne explained that there were very few Blacks. "I mean I grew up in Orange County and I think that that's like 1% Black," she said. Despite so few Blacks, Adrienne felt very comfortable growing up and attending the schools she went to:

I definitely felt comfortable. I mean it just became, you know, that's just what my world was growing up. And, I feel that it's helped me learn as an adult how to deal with all different kinds of people from all different socioeconomic backgrounds. I feel like I have an advantage because I had that upbringing to be able to interact with people of all different ethnicities and races.

Although Adrienne was comfortable in her environment and felt that it gave her an advantage that helped her to work easily and interact with a diversity of people, she admits that there were challenges:

I do think [however] there were some challenges. Just small things. But, looking back, obviously I didn't quite understand them at the time. [Such as] questions about my hair. I remember one kid asking me, "Why don't you wash your hair everyday?" I would get questions about my hair all the time. Obviously they were asking questions because they didn't understand. But, that was hard for me to get over because people kinda picked at that. Anyway, I don't know how the subject came up, but I remember coming home and telling my mom and her teaching me how to answer those questions. And you know, just being able to speak up for myself and explain that that's just how my type of hair works made a difference. And then, it just became kind of normal to me to be asked these types of questions as I got older through school. Um, but to me, I think my parents had to work. They really did more to make sure that I was familiar and knew my roots, my Black roots. I mean we would go to Los Angeles to the museums. And, my mom and dad would teach me about history and things like that.

During the interviews, Adrienne admitted that she had never encountered blatant racism while attending junior high and high school. When asked if there was ever a time in which she felt unjustly treated due to her race while in school she shared:

I honestly never really felt like I experienced that [racism] real directly where I had to have a talk with my parents about being Black and stuff to that degree. I would say that probably my brothers experienced that. But, I mean that's a whole [other] thing with being a Black male. I think in certain things, that as a Black woman, I can identify with what happens with a Black male. So, when I think of that, I think about things that maybe I didn't see as a racial thing [at the time]. But, looking back now as an adult, I realize that's possibly what it was.

Even though blatant racism was never something Adrienne encountered, she did speak at length about race and identity. Specifically when characterizing her peer-to-peer interactions in junior high and high school, she had this to say:

My peer-to-peer interactions were good. I mean, I had friends and my parents worked hard to help me identify with who I was—you know, racially. So, I didn't go off and not interact with other Black children in my school or other minorities—like some of the other Blacks I did see at my school. For example, I remember one girl in particular (I'm sure she's a representation of others) that tried to like not identify with being Black. What I mean by that is, she made out as though it wasn't something that really existed. I mean, looking back, she acted and carried herself in such a way that was removed from anything within her Black culture at all. There were [also] people that did the opposite and went way on the other end of it. Like they tried to over-compensate to show that they were Black. So, you know for me, finding that balance was really important. I think in that

environment you had to work harder at finding your ethnic identity. And, not only in the Black race, but like being a Black woman. And, I even saw some of my Mexican American friends dealing with the same identity thing.

As a credit to Adrienne's parents in helping her to develop a positive identity as a Black girl in a predominantly White school system, it is important to note the critical formative role that African American parents play in the racial socialization of their children (Neblett Jr. et al., 2009; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Racial socialization can be conceptualized as implicit and explicit, verbal and non-verbal race-centered messages (i.e., values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors) that are transmitted namely by parents (as well as other authoritative figures) to youth on the significance of race (Neblett Jr. et al., 2009; Lesane-Brown, 2006). These messages serve to "help African American youth to develop a positive racial identity, particularly in the face of racial bias and adversity" (Neblett Jr. et al., 2009, p. 189). Further, racial socialization provides insight for younger generations on "intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity" (Lesane-Brown, 2006, p. 400).

A critical component of racial socialization is racial identity. Referencing Sellers et al. (1998) Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), Neblett Jr. et al. (2009) point out that according to the MMRI, "racial identity is that part of individuals' self-concepts that is related to their membership with a race" (p. 190). Delving deeper into racial identity and the MMRI, Neblett Jr. et al. (2009) share:

The MMRI proposes four dimensions of racial identity in African Americans: the *salience* of identity...the *centrality* of the identity; the

*regard* in which the person holds the group associated with the identity; and the *ideology* associated with the identity. The first two dimensions address the significance of race in the individual's self-definition while the second two dimensions address the qualitative meaning that the individual ascribes to being Black. (p. 190)

During the interview, much of Adrienne's comments touched on issues surrounding identity; and while she did have a positive racial identity it did not shield her from dealing with stereotypes about what it means to identify as being Black:

My friends that were White, they would have a lot of stereotypes that they saw on television and assumed that I would identify with them, or would make jokes about them. Being young, I didn't realize, "oh wow, that's kinda really rude. They shouldn't be saying that to me." But, because you're young, you're not really realizing what's going on. So, I can think of circumstances like that.

During the second interview, Adrienne was asked to describe an experience where she felt singled out due to her cultural background. Again, with reference to racial identity, Adrienne explained:

This is a little general, but because I was "the Black girl," then I understood "the Black talk." So, I would be singled out in that regard. I was so naïve about it, you know? I didn't think about it because that's just kind of the way it was, you know? And, I don't even think that those that would reference me that way [as "the Black girl"] even realized the magnitude of what they were doing. There was a little bit of ignorance to

that too. Again, I never really dealt with someone being very derogatory or blatantly racist toward me. But, from a social standpoint, I definitely feel like that's how it was a lot of times. It was, I was the Black girl and so that meant that I would understand certain things in pop culture at the time that was classified as "Black." Whatever was going on in the popular culture at the time that was signified as Black, I was the person they would look to.

Still on the topic of identity and being stereotyped, Adrienne continued to discuss perceptions of what it meant to be Black from the lens of the media and popular culture:

Um, you know the images that were seen on television about what being Black was, for those in the community (particularly the White children), they would stereotype or structure conversations with me that way— certain people, not all of them. So, I would feel like that's definitely stereotyping. But, I myself somehow was struggling with the idea (more so in high school) of trying to be what I thought was more Black. So, I then kind of depicted some of that [pop culture images] in my identity. So, I felt I was stereotyped that way. Especially during that time when shows like "In Living Color" or the big show "Martin" was out. A lot of those character images were very, you know, "finger snappin', head jerkin'," You know what I'm saying. So, that would be emulated and that stereotype would kind of trickle into interactions with certain people at school.

Interestingly over the course of the interviews when asked to discuss experiences relevant to feelings of acceptance and non-acceptance, Adrienne made mention of a few

issues she had with other African Americans at the schools she attended. For example, she expressed the hurt and rejection she felt from Black males:

I had a lot of like good girlfriends who were not Black that would date the Black men at my school. But, the Black men at my school didn't pay any attention to me. I mean it sounds so silly (laughing) now. But, it really bothered me that I wasn't looked at. Like, "Oh, we're learning about courtship with people in high school and the guys that I was attracted to happened to be of my same race, didn't pay any attention to me. That was something that did bother me.

Adrienne's feelings of rejection by African American males are not an isolated case. With prevailing standards of beauty still largely being based on White American ideals, interfacing with Black men who routinely date and/or marry outside of their race is still a sore spot for many Black women. In her Huffingtonpost.com article, "Black Women, Interracial Dating and Marriage: What's Love Got to Do With It?" Dr. Tiya Miles, Chair in the Department of Afro-American and African Studies at the University of Michigan, offers her viewpoint on why so many African American women may feel rejected or devalued. Articulating the less than desirable stereotypic depictions (i.e., loud, argumentative, too strong, unfeminine, ghetto) of Black women, Dr. Miles argues that Black women can never measure up to the "narrowly defined beauty ideals based on Euro-American aesthetics that are so firmly entrenched in this culture" (p. 4). In the article, Dr. Miles herself admits, "Try as I might to suppress the reaction, I experience Black men's choice of White women as a personal rejection of the group in which I am a

part, of African American women as a whole, who have always been devalued in this society.”

Being careful to note that many people experience genuine, loving relationships across color lines, Dr. Miles (who is an African American woman married to a Native American man) puts forth:

In a perfect world, love would be blind. Individuals would choose each other for kindness, intelligence, perseverance, courage, and a host of other mysterious reasons that make attraction so magical. Race and the characteristics that have come to represent it -- like skin color, eye color, and hair texture -- would not be factors in matters of the heart. This is the way things would be if our love lives actually mirrored recent scientific findings, which tell us the human family is so genetically close that we share more than 99 percent of our DNA. Genetically speaking, there are no racial categories; race is merely skin deep. Dating and marrying across racial lines should therefore be natural, common and acceptable. But this is not a perfect world. This is the United States, where a deep-seated notion of racial difference has been the rationalization for oppression, the rallying cry for discrimination against people who are not white. Within this racialized landscape in which whiteness has reigned supreme, the line between white and black has been the starkest marker of racial difference, with the white side of the line representing all that is positive, and the black side of the line representing all that is negative. Whiteness has been a privileged and prized identity in the U.S.; our national culture has made

it this way. So when black men select white women and de-select black women, they are doing so in a context of charged racial meanings (p. 5).

Adrienne, who herself has dated outside her race, did not expound upon why it bothered her that the Black men at her school did not express romantic interest in her. Having said that, Dr. Miles' assertions on Black women attitudes and reactions toward Black men dating outside their race can only offer a speculative reason as to why Adrienne may have felt the way she did.

Still on the topic of issues she encountered with other African Americans as it related to issues of acceptance and non-acceptance, Adrienne mentioned:

I am a light skin Black woman, or girl. And, at the time I had a friend who was a darker skinned girl who came from a similar upbringing as me—and there were jealousy issues. We met in junior high and were friends until I switched high schools. She, you know, kinda fit the stereotype of like the aggressive, angry Black girl at the school in a way. I mean people didn't want to like confront her too much, but they wanted her to like them. You know, they wanted to be friends with her, but then they didn't want her to be their enemy either. [Anyway] One time I didn't like let her just talk down to me or something. I mean, I stood up to her and she kinda bad mouthed me for a minute. We made up later, but our friendship was never the same.

Socioeconomically speaking, Adrienne advised that her friend came from a similar background as herself. In fact, from the outside looking in, Adrienne indicated

that her friend seemed to have the “white picket fence” lifestyle. So, she believed that her friend’s jealousy issues stemmed from colorism.

Monroe (2013) defines colorism as “a system of prejudice that is generally mediated by skin tone, although the construct may also encompass characteristics such as hair texture, hair color, nose shape, eye color, lip width, body type, and vocal expression” (p. 10). Typically favoring light complexioned individuals and disenfranchising darker-skinned people (without regard to socioeconomic status), colorism has long been an “elephant in the room” in the African American community. Noting that colorism can be both “uni- or multidirectional,” Monroe (2013) makes a distinction between interracial and intraracial colorism. Essentially, interracial colorism refers to skin tone distinctions made from racial group to another racial group. Intraracial colorism, which is often seen in the African American community, occurs when “a member of one racial group makes a distinction based upon skin color between members of her own race” (Monroe, 2013, p. 10 citing Jones, 2000).

As it relates to intraracial colorism, Monroe (2013) posits that skin tone variations “may tap deep-seated feelings and rankle interpersonal relationships among Black females” (p. 11). To explain where these deep-seated feelings stem from, Monroe (2013) offers both a historical and contemporary perspective. Historically speaking she asserts:

The interplay of skin color and race has governed African American positionality throughout the nation’s labor, legal, educational, and civic histories. Indeed, roots of colorism were seeded during the colonial period as skin tone became entwined with a prejudicial hierarchy that was stimulated by White racism. Thus from the slave era through legal

segregation, the historical record chronicles relative advantages for light-complected Blacks as compared to dark-complected Blacks (Monroe, 2013, p. 11)

From a contemporary stance, Monroe (2013) puts forth:

In mainstream society, people with dark pigmentation tend to encounter exclusion and particularly harsh treatment if they are “more African looking”...Likewise, the social sciences and humanities are replete with examples of how dark-skinned women are excluded from depictions of beauty, attractiveness, and femininity in mainstream society and heterosexual relationships (Bond & Cash, 1992; Ross, 1997). For instance, M. Hunter (2008) notes the value of light skin on the marriage market particularly among women, a theme poignantly reverberated in other studies (e.g., Hill, 2002b) as well as popular media (e.g., Spike Lee’s (1991) *Jungle Fever*) (p. 13).

Although the friendship Adrianna shared with the young lady who was jealous of her was forever changed, Adrianna shared:

With the power of Facebook, she basically told me that she was jealous of me and thought that I had more (laughing). I don’t know how the conversation came up, but she did admit that to me as adults. You know, I just think that even within the school, where we’re like 1% of the population, there was that difference in race, among the race and dealing with social issues.

As the interview continued, Adrienne expressed that she did feel her race had an impact on how she was treated in school:

I definitely think my race had a lot to do with how I was treated. I mean it's not something I could hide. You look at me and you see. So, for me it would be silly to think that that didn't have any influence. I mean you're taught about race by your family. So, my peers know I'm different and they're gonna ask questions based on whatever they believe my race is about—which I dealt with a lot. So, I definitely think that it did impact me on some levels for sure.

Adrienne was also asked whether or not she felt the schools she attended were culturally responsive:

No, I don't think that...if we're talking about the type of curriculum that might be encompassed in the school. You know...what's the phrase they use now (laughing)—culturally responsive (emphasis added) teaching? I mean, I don't really think that existed when I was growing up. I mean we were taught about the same people in history all the time. And even still, they may have gotten a little bit deeper, but still there's so much more that can be taught. And, it really should be just a matter of American history and not it just being in the month of February [Black History Month]. It should be integrated into the actual curriculum. So, for example social studies, I don't think that I learned about who I was and what my race did other than we were slaves, Martin Luther King Jr. or something like that, and Rosa Parks—you know? And that was it (laughing).

As Adrienne referenced “culturally responsive teaching,” it is important to provide an explanation of what that is. Ware (2006) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as “an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 447). Even though Adrienne did not have many positives to say regarding the cultural responsive pedagogical practices of her teachers nor the curriculum she was exposed to, she did have this to say about her interactions with her instructors:

I do remember in junior high, having a Black teacher. She was a math teacher. And, being in junior high, you’re already dealing with like learning to be a teenager and dealing with all of the social changes that happens at that age. So, it was great for me socially and emotionally to have a Black teacher, and that she could teach the students in my class. Like, it was very uplifting for me. So, that was a positive thing.

Taking into consideration the positives Adrienne experienced with having a Black teacher, this lends support for increased efforts in teacher recruitment for diversity. For example, a benefit in recruiting for diversity is the impact that teachers of color have on student achievement. In the “Assessment of Diversity in America’s Teaching Force: A Call to Action,” the National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force (henceforth referred to as “the Collaborative”) details several reasons why teachers of color are a critical component to the academic achievement of students of color. One major example noted by the Collaborative is that teachers of color have the ability to close the achievement gap of students because studies have shown that students of color have a tendency to perform better academically, personally, and socially when being

taught by teachers from their own ethnic groups. The Collaborative was careful to note that this finding does not negate the fact that culturally competent teachers (regardless of race) can achieve similar gains with students from varying ethnic groups.

Adrienne continued by stating:

As far as the rest of my teachers, there was nothing that really stood out where I may have felt that they didn't have my best interest at heart. With the majority of my teachers, I just had to work hard and do what I needed to do to get good grades—just like anyone else. So, for the most part my interactions with my teachers were positive.

In reflecting on how she felt overall (academically and socially) attending the type of schools she went to, Adrienne shared:

I feel like the pros kind of outweigh the cons—but the cons do have meaning. I mean it was positive overall that I was Black when I was going to school there. And honestly, I don't really think that I would have it any other way because I feel that it's just made me more of a well-rounded person. And I know that sounds really cliché, but I just think that I'm able to identify with things on a social level with middle class people of all races. Maybe that's why they feel so comfortable around me, if that makes any sense (laughing). Um, I'm not like “the other Black girl.” So, I think that that's good for me because for career-wise, it can just only help elevate me to certain places—which is not so horrible, but it's just the reality, you know?

When Adrienne said that she was not like “the other Black girl,” she was asked to clarify what she meant by that:

What I mean is like the other girl who’s grown up in more of a school that has a higher percentage of African American and other minorities. Um, more of a culturally diverse school that might not be as highly ranked of a district. She might not be able to articulate herself the same way, but she can be just as smart. But, you know, certain people would not feel comfortable with her as they would me because I talk more like them... whatever that really is supposed to mean. But, that’s what I mean by that. But, then you know I have a friend who grew up in a predominantly Black school and she’s able to fit in with everyone too. So, I think a lot of that relates to your household too and what your parents are doing.

At the close of the interviews, Adrienne was asked whether or not she felt her experiences had an impact on how she views race and class in America. In her response she stated:

Yes, I do. I feel like I have more of an open view about race because of living in California. Again, for the most part, I never really felt blatantly discriminated against. Now that I’ve been placed in different parts of the United States, it’s made me think a little differently about how race is viewed in other areas, and how if I had grown up there, it could have influenced how I think about it. Growing up in the far west, and then moving far east, where things are a little bit more diverse, I think has a lot

to do with the why I feel the way I do. But, then coming here to the Midwest, I can see why people here have such narrow-minded views about what they think about other races.

### ***Snapshot Summary (Adrienne)***

To recap, Adrienne had a positive K-12 experience overall as a Black student attending predominantly White schools. Never having encountered blatant racism, in her words, “the pros kind of outweigh the cons.” For example, Adrienne attributes her attending the schools she went to as equipping her with the social skills to easily identify with and interact with people of all races. Further, from a frame of “trust,” Adrienne placed a lot of confidence in the type of education she received—noting that she probably wouldn’t have had access to such a great education in an inner-city environment unless she had attended a private school in the same locale. Further, for the most part her interactions with teachers and peers were positive.

There was, however, a period when Adrienne struggled to negotiate or find her cultural identity in the predominantly White environment in which she received her education. Noting that her race did impact how she was treated in school, at times she faced stereotyping as well as other racial microaggressions by her White peers. In addition, she encountered colorism with a fellow Black student, and even admitted to feeling resentment toward some of the Black males at her school because they seemed to show no interest in her, preferring instead to date non-Black girls. Further, she didn’t feel that her schools were culturally responsive to her needs as an African American.

From the perspective of the social location of class, Adrienne admits that her middle class status did afford her privileges—at both a societal and school level—that she did not feel was as easily accessible to those Blacks in a lower social class. Finally, Adrienne did feel that her K-12 experiences influenced her views on race and class in America in that because of the environment in which she was raised and attended school, it gave her more of an open view about race.

### **Narrative Snapshot: Jocelyn**

*“I liked a guy and I told him and he told me he couldn’t bring home a nigger. I felt like that was unjust.”*

- *Jocelyn*

“Second wave” Gen Y’er, Jocelyn Murphy (pseudonym), is a 31-year old psychologist who grew up in Orange County, CA. Attending predominantly White private schools during her entire K-12 years, Jocelyn was raised in an upper income, two-parent household by her biological parents—both of whom have advanced degrees.

Noting that “Money allows you more mobility, allowing you the ability to bridge certain gaps,” Jocelyn feels that being classed as an upper income Black has brought her special privileges that are unavailable to low income Blacks. As it relates to “cultural capital” (Sullivan, 2001), in her description of some of these privileges Jocelyn explains:

I think you get in-group inclusion with White people. Basically because you grew up with them and they know you, you have an opportunity to see things and hear things from the majority that a lot of other people never get a chance to hear and see—which makes you more mobile in society when you get older because society is basically White. So, if you practice

being around White people and understanding them, then you get a chance to be a little bit more successful.

Sullivan (2001) explains that according to Bourdieu (1979), “cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society” (p. 893). To Jocelyn, she sees the value or “capital” in having been schooled in primarily White settings as it's been helpful toward success and upward mobility. However, being in this type of setting has not come without its challenges. For example, when asked was there ever a time in which she felt unjustly treated due to her race, Jocelyn shared two experiences that remain paramount in her mind:

I liked a guy and I told him and he told me he couldn't bring home a nigger. I felt like that was unjust. It really pissed me off and I told him my brother would kill him (laughing). I didn't have a brother by the way. I don't have a brother. I made one up so we could kill him (laughing). In all seriousness though, it was just surprising to me that people even used words like that.

Jocelyn was asked if prior to being called the N-word by the young man, if she had any inkling of his racial views. She emphatically responded, “No, not at all. It was very surprising!”

In addition to being called a racially derogatory name by one of her peers, Jocelyn also indicated that she experienced racial profiling by a high school administrator:

I actually had an issue with my administrators. They were a little inappropriate and rude, and I really didn't interact that much. I didn't hangout after class, didn't ask a lot of questions. I didn't know any of

them personally. But, one day the high school principal took me to the office and accused me of being in a gang. Like, he made my parents come in and I think that was probably directly because I was Black. There weren't any gang problems on campus but there was a fight on campus between some random guy who didn't go to the school with another guy who did go to the school. And so, I guess because that happened, they assumed that all the Black kids were in a gang.

Jocelyn indicated that she wasn't the only Black kid taken to the office that day for being a "gang banger." She continued:

There was actually quite a big race issue at my school. So, they like had to fire the principal. In fact, one of the lunch ladies had recorded some conversations that the teachers had been having about race, so there was some racial stuff going on at my school.

Attending a private Christian high school, Jocelyn admits that generally speaking she felt unaccepted by her teachers:

I kinda felt like they felt like I was an underachiever. And I wasn't necessarily an underachiever and I wasn't a straight "A" student either. But, I never got like D's or F's or anything like that. Um, so yeah, they would always want to have conferences with my mom because I wasn't turning things in and I talked too much in class. I felt like I didn't have a lot of positive interaction with my teachers. It was always because something was going wrong.

Research shows that the teacher's role is the most significant of all school factors in terms of student academic achievement (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). With that being said, Higgins & Moule (2009) remind us "care is critical for effective learning to occur in any environment" (p. 133). Moreover, "caring is seen to exist in a greater quantity in the high achievement of African American children" (Higgins & Moule, 2009, p. 134). Further, taking into consideration a study by Rey et al. (2007)—wherein researchers explored teacher and student perceptions of their relationships with an aim to predict the classroom experiences and adjustment of students—findings suggested "that children who perceived a caring, emotionally supportive and meaningful relationship with their teacher also behave better in class, are more interested in school, feel more connected to school and are more involved in school-related activities" (Rey et al., 2007, p. 357). Taken together, the lack of relationship and lack of a sense of genuine care by her instructors, may have contributed to why Jocelyn felt unaccepted by her teachers.

Relevant to social exchanges, although her interfaces with teachers and administrators weren't the best—and aside from being called the "N" word from a peer—most of Lisa's peer-to-peer interactions were positive. She explained:

In junior high, I got invited to all the slumber parties and sleepovers. So just the socialization and being a part of people's lives was fine. I didn't always get invited to the most popular people's parties, but it really wasn't like that. There really wasn't like a popular vs. not popular. It was just that people kinda had their own groups. So there really wasn't too much [social] hierarchy. [Concerning] high school, well, I will say I hung out with kids whose parents made significantly less money than my parents,

and they were kind of like the misfits. Not like really strange, but we just weren't like the low down kids, but we weren't really high up. So, I'll say that. And, money was a big deal at my school too. But, for some reason, I ended up being with kids that didn't have a lot of money.

As Jocelyn was raised in an upper income home, with her mentioning money being "a big deal" at her school, finding out whether or not she felt her social class had an impact on how she was treated while attending school was of great interest. She recalls:

Um, I would say for high school no because I felt like it was more about who you knew. You know, did you know these teachers? Did you grow up with these students? And, I didn't. So, I wasn't a member of that in-group. So, I felt like that had a greater impact than my social class. I felt like a lot of kids there really didn't have lots and lots of money anyway. There were a few. But, yeah, not in high school. And in junior high, kind of everyone had the same stuff.

It is important to note that Jocelyn attended the same school as Karen, although during different academic years. Interestingly, they both felt that social class did not play a role in how they were treated at school. Further, just as Jocelyn indicated that it was "more about who you knew," Karen mentioned the benefits of being "Dr. Livingston's daughter."

During the second interview, we had a conversation about stereotypes and Jocelyn was asked if there was ever a time when she felt singled out due to her race. She responded:

(laughing) Um, yes...every February. Yeah, at Black History Month I was always the Black kid in the room that everyone would look at weirdly.

Yeah, everyone would look at me and wonder if my family were slaves...[Kids] would ask me if I could play basketball or if I could sing or if I would play on the [basketball] team. So, I never played basketball in junior high because I felt like they all expected me to.

Taken altogether, when asked if overall she felt that her K-12 experience (both academically and socially) was positive, Jocelyn had this to say:

I learned the basics...I learned what I needed to get through college. It could have been more specialized, but it was alright. High school was ok. Elementary and junior high was good. Socially, it could have been better. But, because I lived so far from my high school, I didn't get to hang out and see people as much...taken together, I would say these experiences have been positive because they taught me you know who I am and sometimes I think you learn best when you kind of have to struggle a little bit. Um, it wasn't a horrible struggle. But, yeah, I think ultimately I'm not too damaged from it (laughing).

To close the interview, Jocelyn was asked to share whether or not her experiences had an impact on how she views race and class in America. She shared:

I'm not sure if these experiences in particular have impacted it. But, I think that my life and things that I've read and understood about race and class have impacted my view on race and class. I mean, these experiences helped solidify it because I feel like it's difficult to get past economic class.

And I think a lot of people who've never been on the other side have a more difficult time passing over that hurdle and kind of getting inclusion into that world...into that club. So, I think that just being exposed to it, I'm able to be like a member of the Talented Tenth.

It's important to interject and provide an explanation of the so-called "Talented Tenth." Coined by Reverend Henry Lyman Morehouse—a White Northerner for whom the historically Black college (HBC), Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA was named after—and popularized by civil rights leader, sociologist, and scholar, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois in his work, *The Negro Problem (1903)*, the Talented Tenth is a concept that emphasizes the need for higher education to develop a leadership class among the most talented ten percent of African Americans. This ideology was an outcry against what Morehouse, DuBois, as well as other Black intellectuals felt was an "overemphasis on industrial training that would confine Blacks permanently to the ranks of second-class citizenship" ("Talented Tenth," 2014). In his own words, DuBois (1903) asserts:

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races ("The Talented Tenth" [excerpts], 1903).

After finishing her comment on the Talented Tenth, Jocelyn closed by stating, "I have the ability to translate between the language of my culture and the language of

America—which I think is something hard to learn...that language [and] I was raised speaking both.”

### ***Snapshot Summary (Jocelyn)***

Jocelyn’s experiences as an upper income Black attending predominantly White schools were peppered with some real lows. For example, she encountered blatant racism by being called the N-word, dealt with stereotypes from peers and experienced racial profiling by her school principal.

Relevant to the theoretical frame of trust, as noted in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Beard & Brown (2008) argue that in school environments where “trusting and cooperative adult efforts are strong, students report that they feel safe, sense that teachers care about them, and experience greater academic challenge” (p. 473). Taking into consideration what Beard & Brown (2008) have to say, Jocelyn did not experience trust in her school environment, as generally speaking she felt unaccepted by her teachers. Specifically, Jocelyn noted that generally her teachers saw her as an underachiever and frequently requested to have conferences with her mother. Further, as it relates to her overall confidence in the education she received, Jocelyn felt that she received the basics—enough to get her through college.

Going back to trust and achievement, Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky (2009) argue that trust is a strong predictor of student academic achievement. That being said, although Jocelyn did not have a strong sense of trust in her schools—and even though her teachers did not see her as a high achiever—this did not stop her from going on to earn her Ph.D. years later.

In relation to socioeconomic class, Jocelyn indicated that money was a big deal at her school (and her parents had money). However, she didn't feel it impacted how she was treated at school because more important than social class, was who you knew. In high school, although Jocelyn came from an upper-income background, she hung out with peers who didn't have a lot of money, and who were not well-connected.

From a societal level, Jocelyn did feel that her social class brought her privileges not readily available to low-income Blacks. For example, she felt that her socioeconomic status did afford her in-group inclusion with White people, which was good for upward mobility. Because she grew up around them, she indicated that she heard and saw things that other people in lower social classes never had the opportunity to encounter.

Taken together, Jocelyn felt good overall about her K-12 experiences because (in her words), "sometimes I think you learn best when you kind of have to struggle a little bit."

## **GEN Z STORIED VIGNETTES**

Comprised of approximately two billion people worldwide, there is general agreement that the birth years of Generation Z span from roughly 1995 to the present (Kingston, 2014; Schroer, 2012). Touted as "Digital Natives" (Fudin, 2012), they are the most technologically savvy generation to date. Defining characteristics of this generation include the following: They are globally and socially conscious; they are all about sharing; they are more humble and less rebellious than Millennials; and they embrace diversity (Kingston, 2014; Everett-Haynes, 2013). As members of the "first wave" of

their generational cohort, what follows are narratives of three Gen Z study participants (two males and one female)—all of whom are age 19.

### **Narrative Snapshot: Terrence**

*“There’s good and bad in every ethnicity—and I think that’s something people always need to remember.”*

- Terrence

Possessing a very happy-go-lucky persona, 19-year old Terrence Young (pseudonym) grew up in Riverside County, CA and is a sophomore majoring in English. Growing up middle class, Terrence was raised in a two-parent household by both of his biological parents. In terms of his parents’ educational background, Terrence stated that his mother has a college degree and is currently working on an advanced degree.

Throughout his K-12 years, Terrence attended both public and private schools and felt that not only were his school experiences good overall, but they were “positive in every way imaginable.” Attending schools in Riverside County, his junior high school was a predominantly White private Christian school, and his high school was public and ethnically diverse.

When asked about his comfort level as an African American attending his junior high and high school, Terrence shared:

My junior high was comfortable. That school was a K-12 school and I started attending during my 4<sup>th</sup> grade year. So, going to junior high school once I started 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I already had two to three years in that system. So, yes I was comfortable. I had some experience going there, knew the people and knew the staff. I was comfortable with the community, despite

me—I guess—being a minority. [Concerning high school] I was comfortable [too]. It was just a different feel because going into high school...that was the first time I was going to public school in my life. So, it was definitely something new. And, since I was the first born, I was the first of my family going to public school out of me, my brother, and my sister. So, I was the first one being exposed to that environment and it was definitely different. The people were night and day [from private school]. But, after getting kind of used to it, within the first month or so, I definitely was comfortable and had a great four years there.

Within the context of race and class, Terrence was asked to discuss his peer-to-peer interactions while in junior high and high school. He stated:

When I was in junior high school, interaction with my friends, who were probably middle and upper class, was pretty good. And, I want to stress that back then, at that age, I don't even think everybody truly knew what that meant as far as race and class. Everybody would genuinely just like you or dislike you because of your character, who you are, and things of that nature—not necessarily from the color of your skin. At least I don't think kids were really thinking about that. But, I always had a pretty good interaction with everybody I came across. It was always fair. People always liked you or disliked you—again, just for who you are. And I was a pretty likable guy, so everybody who I came in contact with back then really liked me and was fond of me—and that goes for parents as well.

A self-proclaimed “social butterfly,” regarding his social interactions in high school Terrence advised:

I wouldn't say it [high school] was divided, but everybody did kind of cling to their own—their own people. But, I would go throughout the day and interact with everybody. I was a social butterfly. I always tried to talk to a lot of people and not just cling necessarily to my own. I would try and talk to everybody, including White people and stuff. Based off class interaction with people and things of that nature, I did feel that that was different because the majority of my people, or the Blacks who went to my school, my family was doing better than the majority of the people that went there. There were not many Black people who were in the middle or higher class families. Most of them were actually just living with one parent—with their mother for the most part. So, that actually was different because growing up—especially being in the private school system—a high percentage of kids do have two parents in the household. And, they are middle and high class. So, those were always the people I was exposed to growing up. And as a kid, I always thought that was just the norm. I thought everybody had a two-parent household. Everybody was making pretty good money and living pretty comfortably. It wasn't until I got to high school, where I realized that that actually wasn't the case for everybody. I was actually pretty shocked and kind of felt a little bad for a lot of people that I knew who didn't have a father in the household. That was shocking to me.

Since the Moynihan Report of 1965, a poignant analysis on African American families by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*), “the percentage of Black children being raised in single-parent homes has grown from 20% to nearly 70%, according to data from the American Community Survey” (Toldson, 2013, p. 1). The report notes that the issue of generations to come would be that of the decline of the Black family—and it’s somewhat eerie as to how close the report has come to actual Black family outcomes. For example, centering on the Black family, the 2014 documentary “72 Percent” by Director Jeremy Batchelor, analyzes “beyond catastrophic statistics through a discussion of the effect of welfare policies, social norms and celebrity examples on the decline of the Black family,” (Dickerson, 2014, p. 1). More specifically, “the film takes a hard look at the single mother phenomena within the African American community” (Dickerson, 2014, p. 1)—a community in which roughly 72% of all Black children are born to unwed mothers.

Terrence continued:

I was never really exposed to that and really didn’t know that was a thing. I thought that [two-parent households] was just the norm. Everybody had two parents in the household. But you know a lot of people were just living in single parent households and low income. That was the first time I had ever seen people get free lunch. I didn’t even know what that was. But, it was just based on your social status and how much money you made. I guess if you weren’t making that much money, you could have free lunch. And, I wasn’t eligible for that, so I didn’t even know what that meant or how they got it. I didn’t get it. So, it was a bit of a culture shock.

Not because of the people I was exposed to, but just their living situations compared to mine. That did shock me.

Transitioning from a predominantly White school to an ethnically diverse public high school seemed to be very eye-opening to Terrence—especially in terms of class distinctions. During the second interview, he was asked to share his perspective on what it meant to be privileged. He said:

I think being privileged is being brought up in a good environment... a good upbringing. To have positive influences to actually being supported financially and emotionally in every sense of the word. I think I was fortunate enough to be brought up in a pretty good environment and under good care. And I think that's really what it means to be privileged. And I was kind of brought up in a similar type of fashion. Almost the same way I described it.

After providing his stance on privilege, Terrence was asked if he felt that being classed as a middle income African American had brought him special privileges unavailable to low income Blacks. In his response, Terrence stated:

Honestly, I don't really think that is the case. I don't think that I was significantly privileged more than I guess lower income households and families. I believe that the people who I've been associated with throughout my life may not have had the same upbringing [as myself] but I feel still had the same opportunity to succeed as I did growing up. And, again, that wasn't really the case in my middle school because I was not really around that many Black people. But, even when I got to high school,

I felt that even if not everybody was making the same amount of money as my family, they were still pretty smart, educated and well off people. They weren't that far from me. So, I think they still had every chance to succeed and do well—and I know some of them really did do well. So, I don't think I was really more privileged than anyone else. [Having] experienced both private school and public school, I really didn't feel that I was more privileged than anyone else.

When asked to describe some of the privileges he personally enjoyed, Terrence indicated that he always had food on the table, his parents were really supportive and he “almost got everything he wanted.” He stated:

I wouldn't say that I was spoiled. I mean I did have to work for a lot of what I received. But, I guess for example, in forms of gifts, if I needed money to go out, or throughout the week, I had it. If I needed a ride somewhere, I got it. I guess, you know, some people really weren't fortunate to have those kinds of opportunities, but I guess that was what it meant to be privileged. So, I just viewed the support system as the true meaning of really being privileged.

Because of the way in which Terrence answered the question, he was again asked if his middle class status afforded him privileges that were unavailable to low income Blacks. With hesitance he acknowledged:

Maybe to a certain degree. But, I guess I just feel the people who I was around, I guess the low income families, weren't, um...they were struggling but they were not too incredibly far off from where I was. I

guess I really wasn't exposed to like the really lowest of the low. Even the people who weren't as privileged as me, they still had a support system. They still had a caring mother that would you know go out of their way to really make sure they had what they needed. They still had friends and family members who would help them along the way. And, even for example, they had free lunch at my high school. So, they were able to accommodate the people who were exactly as privileged as me. So, again, I don't feel like I had any significant advantage over anyone else. I was just maybe a tiny bit more well-off than I guess they were. But, it really wasn't that big of a gap between us.

In considering privilege from strictly a *socioeconomic* stance, based on Terrence's response, it was evident that he was unaware of what research has revealed concerning the economic divide between single-parent and two-parent households. No doubt, there are many examples of successful, well-adjusted individuals who have grown up in or are being raised in single-parent households. However, there is a large body of research which demonstrates that children raised in single-parent households in comparison to two-parent households are more likely to "experience childhood poverty, act up in class, become teenage parents and drop out of school" (DeParle, 2012, p. 2).

In his New York Times article, "Two Classes Divided by 'I Do,'" DeParle (2012) asserts:

Estimates vary widely, but scholars have said that changes in marriage patterns—as opposed to changes in individual earnings—may account for as much as 40% of the growth in certain measures of inequality. Long a

nation of economic extremes, the United States is also becoming a society of family haves and family have-nots, with marriage and its rewards evermore confined to the fortunate classes” (p. 2).

Quoting Dr. Andrew Cherlin, Professor of Sociology & Public Policy at Johns Hopkins University, DeParle (2012) stated, “it’s the privileged Americans who are marrying and marrying helps them stay privileged” (p. 3). Without going into detail about power structures of privilege and the social benefits of marriage, economically speaking, a privilege of marriage is that typically there are two individuals contributing two incomes—whereas, if one is single (in general) the economic burden rests on the individual solely. Based on a number of Terrence’s comments relevant to *socioeconomic* privilege he appeared to be unaware of the gravity of his privilege in comparison to those who did not have both “supportive” parents in the household—who both were making “pretty good money.”

After the talk on privilege, the conversation shifted to a discussion on Terrence’s experience with racial injustice in a K-12 school setting. He recalled:

So, I think this was in middle school. I was a part of the basketball team. I think we probably had a big heavy population of Black people. It wasn’t enough to where we could say we made up half of the population, but, I think for a very small school, there were a lot of us. And, a lot of us boys played on the basketball team. [But] there was a particular game where we played a predominantly White team and we won the game. We won by over 50 some odd points. It was a blowout! And, I think we didn’t have a lot of players. So, for some reason, a lot of the people who started the

game were still in at the end of the game—when it was far out of reach. So, the coach from the opposing team (I think the very next day) called our principal at our school and made a complaint. He claimed that we were showing off and being bad sports—and I guess still playing hard even when the game was far out of reach. A lot of us who really played were African American. So, I think he was definitely trying to take a jab at us. So, the very next day our principal pulled specifically all the Black people on the team out of class and harassed us for no apparent reason. She made a false claim. She thought we were showing off and still playing hard when the game was out of reach—when that really wasn't true. We were really trying not to run up the score, but we genuinely couldn't help it. I mean we were scoring with ease. But, I felt it was a little unfair to just call us, the Black students out, because there were White people on the team [also]. But, they didn't get called out of the class...she came down on us and she wasn't even there. She was just going off of what she heard and didn't really give us a chance to tell her what had happened. So, that was one thing that really stuck out in my mind that was unfair. We were kind of profiled. We were the bad guys...for winning a game! Playing a game (which everybody can play), playing hard (which we were encouraged to do). But, they just came after us [the Black students], profiled us, and really kind of gave us a bad name. Again, the other team was predominantly White—I don't even think they had any other ethnicity on their team. And, our White players were not called out. So, it's not like she

called the whole team out and voiced her concerns. She only called the Black people out—and that's what I had a problem with because we weren't the only ones playing. We told the coach and he was kind of on our side and said that wasn't fair that they profiled us and came at us in a negative way. She [the principal] shouldn't have done that.

Continuing with the interview, Terrence was asked whether or not his class position had an impact on how he was treated with regard to the basketball incident as well as other school experiences. He explained:

I honestly don't think it really made much of a difference for me. It wasn't really my money that categorized me as middle class. It was my parents. So, I guess I really didn't have that mindset that I was above or below anyone else. I didn't view it as an advantage. To be honest, even when I was at the White school—to where maybe it could have meant something—I was too young to really understand that.

Terrence was then asked if he felt that his social class made his interactions with peers and teachers of other racial backgrounds favorable.

I think I can probably say yes to that because if it wasn't for my social class, and if it wasn't for my parents making the money they were able to make, I probably wouldn't have been able to go to my private middle school. And I wouldn't have been able to be surrounded by people outside my race. And, I am thankful that I was because I was able to interact with people who weren't necessarily like me. So, I had to adjust because I was a minority—and you know, they [other races] are a lot different than I am.

I believe all races, all ethnicities, are kind of different in a way—especially White and Blacks. We kind of can be night and day. So, I learned from a young age how to interact with them, how to socialize with them, how to talk to them, treat them, behave around them—their likes, dislikes, and everything of that nature. So, I believe it did serve a purpose for me socially and I was able to take what I learned from being in that atmosphere and use it wherever I went. So, when I went to high school and I was around a lot of different ethnicities, I was able to just take that background of trying to relate to everybody and apply it there. It definitely helped me in the long run.

Terrence also shared another experience in which he felt unjustly treated or singled out due to his cultural background.

Now, this was back in high school. I was kind of talking to a girl who was not of my race. She was Mexican and she was in one of my classes. We talked for awhile and kind of liked each other. It got to a point to where we were kind of interested in becoming a couple. The problem was she came from a background where her parents were traditional and very racist. Let's just put it out there! They didn't believe in dating outside your race and she was hesitant to even go about us trying to talk or whatever because of what her parents might think, or whatever they might say. She didn't really want to deal with that and go through the heat she was going to get from her parents. So, that ended up going nowhere.

There has been a significant increase in the number of interracial couples within the U.S. (Field, Kumuna, & Straus, 2013). According to 2010 U.S. Census Bureau Data (2012), households comprised of interracial, opposite sex married couples, grew by 28% over the decade—up from 7% in 2000 to 10% in 2010. Further, the report showed that a greater percentage of opposite sex unmarried partners were interethnic than married couples—18% in comparison to the 10% who were actually married (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012).

In their study, “Attitudes toward Interracial Relationships among College Students: Race, Class, Gender, and Perceptions of Parental Views,” Field, Kumuna, & Straus (2013) investigate attitudes of college students, centering on interethnic relationships in efforts to gauge race relations in modern America. Although the researchers acknowledge increased approval of interracial relationships, in their study, which used a sample of college students (N=1173) from five universities, it was found that “overall, Black students disapproved of interracial dating more commonly than White” (p. 741). Study findings also indicated greater approval for Asian/White relationships in comparison to Black/White relationships (Field, Kumuna, & Straus, 2013).

Elejande-Ruiz (2012) notes, “while Americans’ support for interracial marriage has become nearly universal—and mixed marriages are twice as common as they were 30 years ago—dating across ethnic lines still carries some apprehension” (p. 1). As such, amidst “post-racial America” rhetoric, generally speaking, most continue to “pursue relationships in their own ethnic circles” (Elejande-Ruiz, 2012, p. 2).

Still on the topic of the rejection he felt from someone who he wanted to date that was outside his race, Terrence continued:

That probably was the first time it really came to my attention that dating outside your race could be a problem, and that it could be looked down upon to some people. It was kind of a shock because again I had gone to a middle school with a bunch of White people. And back in middle school, they liked each other and talked to each other outside their race. So, I was exposed to that and kind of didn't think anything of it rather than it was normal. [But] her parents were not going to accept that. So, we just stopped talking because we knew it wasn't going anywhere. So, I guess you can say, because of my race that [relationship] didn't happen. So, I guess I was singled out and here's another story of how my color really wasn't in my favor.

Switching gears, the conversation lightened up when it came to the subject of “stereotypes.” Laughing, Terrence gave a lengthy explanation of his views on stereotyping and being stereotyped:

I guess all throughout my life I have been stereotyped. But, I don't think anyone in any way negatively stereotyped me in a way where I really took it offensively. So, when I have been stereotyped, it was always kind of in a light manner—in a joking way. So, as far as me handling it, it was always from laughter because it was funny. As I look back on it, you know, a lot of the stereotypes are true (laughing). So, it's funny because it's dead on! [For example] people have just assumed that because I'm Black, I'm

athletic. I can of course run, jump...you know what everyone says...you know sing, dance...everything (laughing), you know? [But] we Blacks are athletic. We can play a lot of sports. We are good rappers and a lot of us do go into rapping. Even food stereotypes! Of course if you're Black you like chicken, watermelon, grape juice. I mean Black people really do like chicken—(laughing) well, I do! I mean, the reason I laugh is because it's gotten to a point where even Black people kinda stereotype each other...in a joking way...because we do like to just make things light. So, I mean there is some truth behind it [the stereotypes]. So, even if White people say it, I guess depending on who it is, and how well you know that person, it could be taken as a joke—and nothing more. But, as far as a negative stereotype to where I may have taken it offensively, um, I really can't think of one off the top of my head—especially in high school. People really weren't that bold to just throw that out there. If they had stereotypes or anything negative to say, they probably kept it to themselves. And I'm sure they have. That's human nature. I think everybody stereotypes everyone. Whether they stereotype their own kind or other ethnicities, everybody does it—whether it's an accident, or on purpose because that's just how it's been for such a long time. I don't think it's ever going to change.

Taken together, Terrence was asked how being stereotyped, as well as racially profiled (as in the basketball incident), influenced his views on race and class in the United States. Concerning stereotyping, Terrence again stressed that it was always done

in a joking manner. Thus, he did not take it seriously. Further, with homage to his parents, Terrence advised that what shaped his views the most was the great upbringing he received. “I was raised and taught by some pretty knowledgeable people...I was brought up well,” he said.

With regard to the basketball incident, Terrence stated:

I’m very aware that racism still exists to this day. It may be slowly fading away, which is good. But, I do know that it is out there. But, this situation was just shocking. The fact that she did that...I’ve never seen anybody pull someone out to talk about a game they won and be [reprimanded] for playing too hard. So, I really don’t think that it had much of a racial impact on me. Nor did it make me view White people as really racist. That was just one individual that did that. Not everyone still thinks like that and still views us like that. So, again, that was just one situation. I’ve met good White people; I’ve met bad White people. There’s good Black people and bad Black people. There’s good and bad in every ethnicity—and I think that’s something people always need to remember.

To close the interview, Terence (who was unable to participate in the focus group) offered his perspective on the “future” of racism and classism in America. He notes:

Racism is out there. But, I do feel it’s fading away—more and more each day. So, that’s definitely a good sign. I feel there will come a point when racism is far in our past. I think just as the world expands and there are more mixed couples and interracial dating, sooner or later (no specific date), at some point racism will probably be eliminated. I just feel we are

now entering a new era. We are coming to a time where that [racism] is just eventually not going to be an issue. Hopefully my prediction is right. Now, class...I think that's a different issue. I feel that classism will probably still be around because that just comes down to the individual. What I mean by that is people are divided between low, middle, and wealthy incomes—you know that's their salary, which is mostly based off what they are doing for a career. And, again, that's drawing back to the individual because you as an individual have to want the best for yourself, your family, and so forth. [So] I think if everybody has the incentive to work hard and rise up to the top, then classism might be eliminated. But, not everybody has that motivation to strive for the best. So, there will always be underachievers and there will always be the people that rise to the top and make a lot of money. So, there will always be classism. There will always be people making little to no money, people making a lot of money, and people in the middle.

### ***Snapshot Summary (Terrence)***

For the most part, Terrence seemed to have the ideal K-12 experience. Although there were a few bumps in the road such as the racial profiling incident and the sting of rejection (based on his race) in regards to a romantic interest, overall his experiences were very positive.

While he did experience being stereotyped, he didn't take any offense to it as he felt a lot of the stereotypes were true, he received them in a joking manner and felt that "everybody does it [stereotypes]."

In large part, Terrence's view of what privilege meant was in the context of a support system. This support was inclusive of being brought up in a good environment that embodied having positive influences, as well as financial and emotional support. In light of this, Terrence did feel he was brought up in this type of environment, yet he was hesitant to say that he was more privileged than those who didn't have a similar upbringing. For example, while he grew up in a two-parent household with supportive parents (who made good money), he didn't really see that as a privilege over and above growing up in a single-parent household with a supportive mother. Noting that the prevalence of students coming from single-parent households was much greater at his high school than what he saw at his private middle school, Terrence indicated that this was shocking to him as he thought two-parent households were the norm. Further, the fact that his parents made enough income to where he didn't need to have free or reduced price lunch was not necessarily viewed as a privilege because in his mind, at least the low-income students still could get lunch. In sum, with regard to his privileged status in comparison to low-income students, he didn't feel that he had an advantage necessarily over others. He felt that the same opportunities for success were available to them as well.

Lastly, Terrence did feel that his social class made his interactions with peers and teachers of other racial backgrounds favorable because it allowed him to interact with them on a regular basis. The skill of being able to relate with people from multiple ethnic backgrounds was viewed by Terrence as a great social skill that he learned from the schools he went to, and which can be used wherever he goes.

## **Narrative Snapshot: Lisa**

*“Sometimes, even when I was around my Black peers, I would feel different because I may have been (or like me and another Black girl may have been) the only two in honors.”*

- Lisa

An athlete and scholar, Lisa Jacobs (pseudonym) is a 19-year old pre-med student attending college on the East Coast. Growing up in Riverside County, CA, she was raised in an upper income, two-parent household by her biological parents, one of whom has an advanced degree.

“Ninety percent of the time I did feel comfortable,” explained Lisa when asked to talk about her comfort level as an African American student attending her predominantly Asian and White private Christian school. Concerning her comfort level growing up in her predominantly White neighborhood, in which there were not many children, Lisa explained:

Most of the time, it was just me and my brother. So, we didn’t really interact with a lot of people in the community. So, I feel like it didn’t affect me that much.

Having played organized sports and being an honors student in both junior high and high school, when asked to characterize her peer-to-peer interactions as it related to race and class, Lisa noted:

It was interesting. We learned a lot about each other’s different cultures through like the different food we ate. So, a lot of time my friends would bring lunch from home. So, it wasn’t negative. It was more like a learning experience. We kind of taught each other about our different cultures.

Still on the topic of race and class, Lisa spoke positively of her interactions with her instructors as well. Specifically she advised that they were very nice, were always willing to talk to her, and be of help. Further, she indicated that she didn't notice any difference in the way she was treated by them in comparison to the other students in her classes.

During the interview, Lisa was asked to share experiences in which she felt either accepted or unaccepted by her peers while attending junior high and high school. She responded:

Um, I guess like in junior high, I was in some honors classes. So, at first people were just like, "Oh!" You know...they were surprised that I was so smart. But, once I got into honors in high school, it was fine, coz they were already used to it.

Lisa advised that the shock and reactions to her presence in honors courses did not emanate from her teachers, but rather her peers. In fact, throughout the interviews, she continued to make small references to peer reactions on her being an honors student. For example, when asked if she felt that her race had an impact on the way in which she was treated in school, Lisa stated:

Um, I would say not a huge deal...but definitely a little bit. Just because there were so few minorities [aside from Asians] who went to the school. I mean I wouldn't say we were treated a whole lot different, but it was definitely noticed. You know, you might have been the only Black kid in honors. I think there were only a few—like seven—in my entire [honors]

classes. So, we would always stick together. Like, it was noticeable that there were only seven of us.

Still on the topic of being an honors student, and given the literature on high-achieving African American students, Lisa was asked to share more on her comfort level in the honors classes.

There were definitely times where I felt I had to work harder than everyone else. But, then you know, that's just going to happen in life. So, I didn't really take it like negatively...like, I understood that I may have to work harder than a lot of people.

Lisa's response begged the question of whether or not she felt that her gender or race played a role in her perspective of having to work harder. She advised:

Definitely not because of my gender. There were definitely a lot more females than males in my honors classes and most times the females did better than some of the males. [But] maybe a little bit because of my race. But that probably was minimal.

Although during the first interview Lisa attributed the minimal struggles in her honors classes to her race, the second interview would reveal even more about her experiences as a high-achieving African American student in a predominantly Asian and White K-12 private Christian school. For example, when asked to describe an experience wherein she felt stereotyped, Lisa said:

I would say there were more stereotypes with academics. I guess they [White and Asian students] just assumed that we [Black students] weren't that smart. I noticed a lot of my [non-Black] friends would be like

surprised if one of us did really well on the test...or if we actually did better than them. They would make comments like, “Oh, I can’t believe like you’re in this class” or “You’re the only Black person here”...just like small stuff.

These comments, which Lisa considered as “small stuff,” were actually racial microaggressions, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Contending that most interracial exchanges or interactions are apt to microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007), Sue et al. (2007) point that, “perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities” (p. 271). Continuing, Lisa was careful to give her peers the benefit of the doubt with regard to their statements about the presence of Black students in the honors classes. Specifically she said:

I don’t know if that [their comments] is just because maybe some of us hadn’t done better before in the past or you know they just assumed that we were incapable of putting in the work and actually getting good grades. Um, but I felt that that was the biggest thing for me and for some of my Black friends. Like, even if it wasn’t directed toward me, I had people say some things to my other friends in different classes. Like I said [before], when I was in honors classes, a lot of people were surprised—especially if I did well.

Doubts aside, Lisa largely felt that her non-Black peers doubted her as well as other African American honors students' academic prowess because of commonly held negative stereotypes on the academic capabilities of Blacks as a whole—of which existing literature on high-achieving African American students would support (Strayhorn, 2009; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Griffin & Allen, 2006). For example, Griffin & Allen (2006), in their multi-site case study which investigates the academic experiences of high-achieving Black students at two Southern California high schools, the researchers found that not only were there few Black students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, but those who were in the classes, “encountered stereotypes about their intellectual abilities” (p. 490).

In his quantitative study, Strayhorn (2009) sought to do two things: “explore the extent to which high-achieving Black collegians feel the need to prove themselves academically despite their demonstrated intellectual acuity” (p. 376) and “measure the relationship between their ‘burden of proof’ and their academic achievement in college” (p. 376). Results revealed that approximately 88% of African American high-achievement students feel pressure to prove their intellect.

Aside from dealing with stereotypes from her White and Asian peers concerning her intellectual acuity, Lisa opened up about negative reactions she received from her Black peers.

Sometimes, even when I was around my Black peers, I would feel different because I may have been (or like me and another Black girl may have been) the only two in honors. So, a lot of times we would get made fun of because we were like smarter. Or, they would kind of make little

jokes or remarks about us being able to be in honors. So, that was kinda hard because they're supposed to be your friend and like you'd wanna lift everyone up. But, in a way, I kinda felt like I wasn't. And, so, I wouldn't want to talk about my being in honors or maybe being smart around them because I wouldn't feel as comfortable because I felt like they would either make fun of me or say something about it.

Taking into consideration what Lisa spoke of regarding her African American peers, there is popular research—reductionist and deficit-oriented in nature—that attempts to explain instances of lower achieving Black students apparent disdain with high achievement. This research is largely rooted in the theoretical assertion of “acting White” (Fryer, 2006; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). “According to the acting White hypothesis, African American students who do well in school or engage in pro-social behaviors are negatively sanctioned by their same-race peers for acting White” (Wildhagen, 2011, p. 445). Presented by Fordham & Ogbu (1986) and popularized by national media, the acting White theory, or suggestion that African Americans do not value education “itself contributes to cultural stereotyping in its failure to acknowledge the role of solidly entrenched social stereotyping in the school adjustment and coping requirements of African Americans” (Spencer et al., 2001, p. 22).

Beyond the acting White assumption, there is a growing body of research that would counter the idea that Blacks perceive high achievement as acting White. Rather, this research demonstrates that high-achievement is actually linked to or a marker of, racial and ethnic pride (Toldson & Owens, 2010; Carter-Andrews, 2009; Wakefield & Hudley, 2007; Spencer et al., 2001; Cookson & Hodges-Persell, 1991). Interestingly, as it

relates to the spectrum of high achievement, Toldson (2013) notes that in his own research (*Breaking Barriers 2: Plotting the Path Away from Juvenile Detention & Toward Academic Success for School-Age African American Males*):

I have noticed a “nerd bend” among *all* [emphasis added] races, whereby high—but not the highest—achievers receive the most social rewards. For instance, the lowest achievers get bullied the most, and bullying continues to decrease as grades increase. However, when grades go from good to great, bullying starts to increase again slightly. Thus, *the highest achievers get bullied more than high achievers* (emphasis added), but significantly less than the lowest achievers (p. 1)

Lisa did not share her opinion on why she felt some of her Black peers made fun of her high achievement. That said, considering what exists in the current body of research as it pertains to African American high achievement and high achievement in general, one can only guess what the reasons were behind negative comments made by her Black peers.

Moving forward in the interview, when asked to explain how she handled the stereotypes and less than uplifting comments by peers about her being an honors student, Lisa said:

So, maybe like my junior high year it was a little bit tough. But, by the time I got to high school, like my freshmen or sophomore year, I had already been in honors with some of these same kids. So, everyone knew, because it was a K-12 school. So, we had all been in school for a long time. So, a lot of times it wasn't like a big deal because everyone already knew.

I felt too that I was able to grow as an individual and was able to accept and love myself. And, in the end, it didn't really matter what other people thought.

After spending quite a bit of time on stereotypes, the discussion moved on to social class and privilege. Specifically Lisa was asked whether or not she felt her upper income status had an impact on how she was treated in school. She responded:

I would say yes and no. I just feel like sometimes, on certain occasions, they [other students] would be like "Oh well, it's because your dad's a doctor." Like, they just assumed I had so much money, or that I could basically do whatever, just because of my dad. Even though that wasn't the case. So, they like assumed a lot...as a kid, I did come from an upper middle class social status, but I never really talked about my income. So, I tried to have relationships based on other stuff—like me as a person—not how much my parents made. So, I tried to keep that [money] out as much as possible because I didn't want to feel like, or be judged, or people assume, because I have so much, that I should have something. Or, if I do have something, you know, not be made fun of because I like do have money. So, I try to keep that out as much as possible.

As it pertains to "having money," Lisa was asked if she felt that being classed as an upper income African American had brought her special privileges that were unavailable to lower income Blacks.

Definitely yes! Just because while I feel like money shouldn't be based on it, I do feel the more money you have, the more options or more stuff

you're able to do. So, even if it's something like taking specific vacations, and maybe being able to buy a newer version of a car—even getting a car—or being able to get like newer gadgets, computers, or iPhones or whatever. So, mostly like materialistic stuff that people of lower incomes would want, but they necessarily can't have because they can't afford it. So, I feel that being upper middle class they can say, “Yeah, you know you're more privileged, or you have opportunities to get stuff than people with less money.” But, I feel like maybe people of upper incomes take it for granted because they do get it.

Speaking of taking things for granted, as it pertains to the privileged African American, upper class society, in which she was raised, Lisa noted:

My dad's an orthopedic surgeon. So, when I came to college and told my roommate, who is also Black, she was like, “Wow, I never heard of like an African American being an orthopedic surgeon.” For me, I was like that's normal! Like my uncle is in internal medicine. You know, like there are so many around you who are African American who do this [who are medical doctors]. But, I kind of took it for granted because that's what I was used to. Whereas out in the world, that's not something that people see everyday—like a whole bunch of Black doctors.

As Lisa reflected on her overall K-12 experience, she felt that it was very positive, with just a few struggles along the way. In closing the interview, when asked if she felt the experiences she had impacted her views on race and class in America, she explained:

I try to take everyone for who they are and not categorize all people in a certain way, or stereotype a whole entire race or culture based on my few experiences because there are always outliers. I can't assume everyone is nice and then meet a few mean people and then categorize everyone as mean. So, I try to take everyone at face value or however they present themselves or how they treat me and again not categorize a whole group.

### ***Snapshot Summary (Lisa)***

Overall, Lisa had a positive K-12 experience. She had good interactions with her teachers and felt that they genuinely supported her. Further, for the most part she got along well with her peers as well.

She did encounter racial microaggressions from her non-Black peers, as periodically she would encounter insulting comments related to her being in honors courses. Interestingly, sometimes she also received negative commentary from her Black peers regarding her being an honors student.

Lastly, concerning how social class impacted her treatment in school to a degree she felt that some students had certain assumptions about her because of her upper-income status. Because of this, Lisa was intentional about keeping conversations relating to how much money she had to a bear minimum. She stated that she didn't want to be judged by her money, but rather by whom she was as a person.

## **Narrative Snapshot: Travis**

*“There were really no hiccups. It’s almost like if there were to be any problems, they were not really well known...racism, it’s almost nonexistent in the community where I went to school”*

- Travis

Travis Smith (pseudonym) is a 19-year old freshman, who attends State University (pseudonym) in Southern California. Growing up in Riverside County, CA Travis explained that where he grew up “was a good situation because not only does it make you feel like everyone’s like that [culturally acceptant], but it kind of makes you forget that prejudice and racism are still out there.” A graphic design and marketing major completing his first year in college, he was raised in a middle-class, two-parent household by his biological parents, both of whom have bachelor’s degrees.

When asked to describe the student body of his junior high and high school, Travis discussed his high school, as “it’s most in my memory,” he explained. He recalled that while the student body, faculty, and administrators were majority White, there was a good mixture amongst the minorities who attended his school. With regard to his neighborhood, he indicated that it was very middle class, primarily White, but still contained a good mixture of other cultures. Travis also noted that most of the kids in his neighborhood had two parents who participated in their lives.

Within the context of race and class, Travis was asked to describe his interactions with peers, teachers and administrators. He indicated that all of his interactions were fine and that while most of his teachers were White females, the majority of the people he hung around were African American.

In terms of his comfort level as an African American attending a predominantly White high school, Travis shared:

I felt comfortable. There was nothing to make me feel uncomfortable. It's kind of like the mixture of cultures and races (even though it wasn't extremely mixed)—more like the college that I am going to now—even though it was like that [extremely mixed], there was still never a situation where I felt uncomfortable—especially due to my race. It was perfectly fine.

When asked if he felt that his race or class had an impact on how he was treated in high school, Travis said:

I feel that my race did not have an impact. Or, at least I wasn't able to notice. It was something that I didn't think of to the point where I would notice if it did, unless it got really bad or was extremely obvious...I didn't feel like my social class had too much of an impact because I was in the middle class during high school—which most of the kids were.

Although during the first interview Travis expressed that his race and class had no bearing on how he was treated while in high school, the second interview would reveal something else. To open, Travis was asked to explain how he understood what it meant to be privileged. He explained:

I would consider privilege to be something that your parents worked for and you get to like reap the benefits from as a child. Or as someone living under them, you like get the benefits of material things, experiences, and other stuff that requires money. [Also] a good household, because it's not

always money that makes you privileged but also your parents in the way they raise you.

When asked if he felt his middle class status brought him special privileges that are unavailable to low-income Blacks, Travis stated:

That's a good question because I don't know. When you're younger, you just kind of don't pay attention as much. You know? I hadn't paid that much attention to all these things. You probably don't until you get older—until you really realize what everything meant. So, in terms of me feeling more privileged than lower income African American students, I feel like a lot of it I'd compare now, in college. For example, I would feel privileged above low income African Americans because I am able to live on campus here. So, most people that couldn't get enough grant money or loan money to be able to do something like this wouldn't be able to have these experiences. So, in that case I would feel privileged compared to a lower income African American.

Going back to his experiences in high school, Travis reiterated that he couldn't see a big difference between his middle class status and low income students with regard to privilege. However, he did mention that being able to buy new clothes every year was a “big deal” in high school—something he considered to be a privilege.

Up until this point in interviewing Travis, his K-12 experience seemed almost ideal. However, when asked if there was ever a time in which he felt unjustly treated due to his race while in high school, there apparently was a “hiccup.” Specifically he said:

I can actually think of one story. I was a freshman in high school and was in the hospital for two weeks following the first week of school. I had hurt my back that weekend and going into my second week, I was gone for two weeks. So, I missed a whole bunch of school. When I came back I was trying to get my grades back together because it was like really overwhelming because I was like, “man, I’ve never been here before, I’ve only been here for a week, my teachers don’t remember me” (laughing) so I was trying to get my grades back together—especially from the independent study I was doing while at home recovering. Anyway, one of the rules that year was that we couldn’t have iPhone and iPod headphones. But, me and some friends, we figured out a way to put speakers in our jacket...it was kinda cool. So, I remember I put earphone speakers in my jacket, and I wasn’t using them. But, one of my teachers saw my jacket and was quick to tell the disciplinary principal. [So] when I got to the principal’s office, I felt profiled because he pulled out my file, saw my grades, and quickly judged me. He was willing to suspend me right there for my actions.

Describing the vice principal as an ex-military, Caucasian male, Travis continued:

It was extreme, very extreme! He wanted to suspend me, which I don’t believe was the normal punishment for speakers. The principal explained that because the speakers were in my jacket, it was so much worse. But, I didn’t have a phone or iPod to play music out of these speakers. So, they couldn’t be used. I put the speakers in the jacket simply to see if it could

work. It was kind of like I brought the jacket only to show my friend. But, trying to explain the story, he wasn't trying to believe that. So, yeah, he was trying to suspend me and then he asked if my parents knew about this. And, I told him yes. So, he tested that by calling my mom. She did know about the jacket. It wasn't a big deal...so I didn't expect this to happen. So, yeah, he tried to suspend me over such a small thing...I felt extremely profiled and I think it had to do with my race.

When asked how his parents responded to the situation. Travis specified:

My mom was extremely angry because of the way he called her and was surprised when my story checked out. He was so surprised. You could hear it through the tone of his voice while on the phone. She got mad about that coz she was like, "Why don't you believe my son? He has no reason to lie"...you know, stuff like that. But, you can always expect mothers to be very protective. So, when it came down to my father hearing about the story he was very upset because he was like, "Why threaten suspension, if that's not even close to the punishment for the crime?" So, then we talked to a few other faculty members...I think we [also] talked to the [main] principal as well about the punishment. So, we got my punishment all the way down to a Saturday school—which is more of a normal punishment for what I did. But, it was pretty crazy...pretty extreme. And that's why my parents were so upset.

As noted by Rudd (2014), research has demonstrated time, and time again, that African American students (in particular Black males), are disciplined more often, and

receive more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than White students” (p. 1). Arguing that school discipline is “one of the most troubling aspects” (Monroe, 2006, p. 102) of African American male education, Monroe (2006)—in concert with the Rudd (2014)—points, “Black students are disciplined at rates that far exceed their statistical representation, particularly on measures of suspension and expulsion, in almost all major school systems” (p. 102).

Noting that the discipline gap can be corroborated qualitatively and quantitatively, Monroe (2006) puts forth, “a small, yet compelling body of research further reveals that teachers are most likely to discipline Black boys, even when students of other races participate in identical behaviors” (p. 103).

Rudd (2014) is in agreement with Monroe (2006), positing that African American male students do not display inappropriate behavior in the classroom any more than White students. In fact, Rudd (2014) highlights in the 2014 Kirwan Institute brief a study by Skiba (2000) contending:

Although discriminant analysis suggests that disproportionate rates of office referral and suspension for boys are due to increased rates of misbehavior, no support was found for the hypothesis that African American students act out more than other students. Rather, African American students appear to be referred to the office for less serious and more subjective reasons. Coupled with extensive and highly consistent prior data, these results argue that disproportionate representation of African American office referrals, suspension, and expulsion is evidence

of a pervasive and systematic bias that may well be inherent in the use of exclusionary discipline (p. 2).

Gathered from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014), the following bullet points are from the Data Snapshot on School Discipline:

- Black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment, but 42% of preschool children suspended once, and 48% of preschool children suspended more than once (p. 7).
- Black students represent 16% of the student population, but 32-42% of students suspended or expelled. In comparison, White students also represent a similar range of between 31-40% of students suspended or expelled, but they are 51% of the student population (p.2).
- Black boys and girls have higher suspension rates than any of their peers (p. 3).
- While boys receive more than two out of three suspensions, Black girls are suspended at higher rates (12%) than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys (p. 1).

No doubt, the above-stated statistics are staggering and can be generalized across the board for African Americans—regardless of socioeconomic status. In fact, in Travis' case, he admits that his middle class status did not shield or help him in this encounter with the disciplinary principal. Having said that, he credits the proactivity of his parents as the reason behind his reduced punishment. He explains:

It really doesn't matter where you are in the social class if that happens to you. If your parents are upset enough to call the school and share some

words with them, I think that [reduced punishment] would be able to happen to anyone.

Aside from his parent's response, Travis was asked to explain how he personally handled the situation he faced with his disciplinary principal.

I handled it really well because I didn't let him speak to me like he could just control the outcome of what was going to happen. I was very direct and made eye contact with him, speaking to him in a tone of, "Do not disrespect me right now." I felt like I took control, like especially at such a young age. I was only 14, and I think I handled it very well. I felt offended. So, while I was angry, I didn't want to show my anger and start yelling, coz, you know, that would have probably provoked the stereotype of me being an angry Black male. Like, "here he goes, he's about to get in trouble, he's gonna start whilin' out." So yeah, I think I handled it very well—almost professionally if you want to call it that.

As posited by Blake (2010), "many White Americans don't like angry Black men."

In his June 2010 article on CNN.com, John Blake posted an article in response to the Gulf Coast oil crisis titled, "Even discussing 'angry black man' stereotype provokes anger." The article was a critique of reader response to CNN's article "Why Obama doesn't dare become the 'angry Black man'"—an article which provided commentary on critic complaints of President Obama supposedly not showing enough anger as a reaction to the oil disaster. Blake—who interviewed University of Nevada (Las Vegas) Director of Afro-American Studies Program, Dr. Rainier Spencer—explained:

Spencer said the angry black man stereotype has its origins in slavery. During slavery, White men feared Black men like Nat Turner, who resisted slavery. They were the Black men who led slave insurrections and were sold further south. They were called Bucks. There's the image of the minstrel, the happy, silly Negro who is fun to watch and laugh at. But, the other one—the buck—is the one you have to be careful about, Spencer said. The angry black man stereotype persisted after the end of slavery, Spencer said. Black militants in the civil rights movement, today's Black male rap artists—all are equated with some variation of the angry Black man, Spencer said (Blake, 2010, p. 2).

The angry black male stereotype persists within the broader American social psyche. Knowledgeable of this stereotype, Travis made the conscious decision to keep his cool when being threatened by the school disciplinary principal so as to not make an already intense situation worse; and he felt good about how he handled himself.

After discussing his run-in with his high school disciplinary principal, a lengthy conversation centering on stereotypes ensued. Initially, when asked to describe an experience (good or bad) wherein he felt stereotyped, Travis indicated that he hadn't experienced being stereotyped. However, after some thought he replied:

Well, maybe back in 2008 and 2009 when jerking was really popular. That was the dance everyone was doing. Um, it was kind of like an assumption that all Black people could do it. So, jerking was really popular my freshman year of high school and all of my White friends (if I can say it like that) would expect every Black person to be able to do it. And, it was to the point that they would just like ask you to do it in some random way.

It was just like they wanted to see you—like it was something amazing. But, I guess that’s one of the stereotypes—that Black people can dance. And they [White friends] all (every last one of them) would expect you to. After talking about the stereotype of *all* Black people having the ability to dance, Travis shared another stereotype that was sports related. He explained:

Like a lot of people think I’m really good at basketball when I go to the rec center (laughing). But, it’s like, “I’m sorry to disappoint, I’m not that good...I can play, I can dribble, I can shoot, but I’m not a star” (laughing). I remember one time being at the rec center with one of my friends and we were just shooting around, taking some half-court shots, and actually making them. And then, my friend asked to play 2 on 2 (laughing) with a White and Asian guy and they were like, “I don’t know, we just saw you guys making those ‘crazy shots’ (laughing).” So, they kind of assumed that we were better than we were...when really, we were just getting lucky (laughing). So, it was funny.

Still on the topic of stereotyping, Travis did share his perspective on African American girls at his high school. He advised:

I kinda have an example with Black girls in high school. Um, the word of the year to describe Black girls in high school who were loud and obnoxious and you know would put individuals [a type of braiding style] in their hair and stuff—they would all hang out together—and so the word of the year was “ratchet.” That’s how you would describe them. So, everyone would use that word in a negative way to describe their behavior

and stuff like by the way that they looked and dressed. They were loud and they would clap at you and stuff like that (laughing). And it was funny because not everybody [every Black girl] acted like that, but enough did—especially at my high school. It was weird because there weren't that many Black people—especially Black girls. But, enough did act like that and I was kind of like, "Why are you guys doing this to yourselves? Like, you don't need to act like that. You're not in a ghetto environment (laughing). I mean this isn't L.A.'s school district. This isn't L.A. unified. There's no need for you to be out here acting crazy and making everybody [other Blacks] look bad." I feel like, especially when it comes to Black girls and Black guys doing that type of behavior, they do it to themselves and it's kinda of like you're making it worse for everybody when you do that.

Continuing on with his opinion of the behaviors exhibited by some African American girls, Travis said:

In a way I'm kind of disappointed when I see like Black girls act like that—especially in big groups. Coz I'm like "Man! You're making all these other people assume the worst of everybody [other Blacks]." It kind of made me mad because of the high school I attended. I was like, "You're acting like you are straight from Crenshaw or something" (laughing). Not to stereotype L.A., but that's what all these White people are thinking right now. It's like you're embarrassing, and you almost just want to tell them to stop. "Stop wearing pajamas to school. Stop yelling in the

cafeteria when the lunch lady does something wrong. Stop, you know, back talking to the teacher all loudly and standing up and storming out the classroom!” All that just looks bad.

Listening to Travis share his experiences with being stereotyped as well as hearing him stereotype L.A. Unified, people coming from certain areas of Los Angeles (i.e., the Crenshaw District), as well as a subset of African American girls was all very interesting. Even more remarkable was his apparent concern about what White people and other ethnicities thought about Blacks. This was evident by comments made such as: “Not to stereotype L.A., but that’s what all these White people are thinking right now”; “Man! You’re making all these other people assume the worst of everybody”; “There’s no need for you to be out here acting crazy and making everybody [other Blacks] look bad”; and “It’s kind of like you’re making it worse for everybody [other Blacks] when you do that.”

This *burden of representation*, or feeling that the actions and behaviors of individual Blacks can reflect upon Blacks *in general* is quite pervasive within the African American community. Although not explicitly stated, it appeared that Travis was no exception when faced with “embarrassed to be Black moments”—that is times when he personally felt discomfited as an African American due to the actions and/or behaviors of other Blacks.

This ideology to represent the race has roots in what is termed *racial uplift ideology*, “the belief that educated, elite Blacks have a duty and responsibility for the welfare of the majority of African Americans” (Gaines, 2010, p. 3). Gaines (2010) notes that historians describe racial uplift ideology as a “response by prominent middle class

Black leaders, spokespersons, and activists to the crisis marked by the assault on the civil and political rights of African Americans primarily in the U.S. South from roughly the 1880s to 1914” (p. 1). Gaines (2010) goes on to say that shortly after slavery was abolished and post Reconstruction:

White Southern politicians and elite opinion leaders defended White supremacy and proclaimed the moral, mental, and physical depravity and inferiority of Blacks from the press, pulpit, and university. The consensus was that Blacks were unfit for citizenship and that plantation slavery, or the neo-slavery of menial labor and share-cropping, was the natural state of Black people. Guided by Southern apologists for lynching (the execution of persons without benefit of trial by mobs), many Whites, regardless of income or education, viewed the aspirations of Black men and women through the warped lens of crude racial and sexual stereotypes that accused all Blacks of criminality and immorality. Given the prevalence of such damning representations of Blacks, African American leaders and public spokespersons, a growing, but small percentage of the entire African American population, were under constant pressure to defend the image and honor of Black men and women (p. 2).

Gaines (2010) goes on to suggest that to counter anti-Black stereotypes and to uplift the race, Black leaders emphasized class differences within the race. The so-called Black elite (e.g., educated, Black leaders and spokespersons) drew attention to their social status to “reform the character and manage the behavior of the Black masses” (p. 2)—thereby attacking negative portrayals of the broader African American community.

Although well-intended, the drawback to this approach of uplifting the race “ushered in a politics of internal class division that often seemed to internalize dominant notions of Black cultural depravity and backwardness even as they sought to oppose racism” (p. 2).

With regard to “class division,” Gaines (2010) draws attention to another complex aspect with racial uplift ideology. He contends:

By affirming their respectability through the moralistic rhetoric of uplifting the race, and advocating the moral guidance of the Black masses, African American middle-class leaders and spokespersons were marginalizing the idea of uplift in its more democratic and inclusive sense of collective social advancement and demands for equal rights. Many Black spokespersons sought to resolve this tension between individual and group status *by insisting that individual achievements benefitted the entire race* [emphasis added]. However, many African American men and women interpreted the rhetoric of uplift as a call to public service (pp. 2-3).

Embedded deeply within the psyche of many Black males and females, racial uplift ideology “remains an influential framework among African Americans for understanding the challenges they continue to face” (Gaines, 2010, p. 3). Further, “the persistence of racial stereotypes and prejudice fuels the perception among many Blacks that racists attitudes must be countered by positive images and exemplary behavior by Blacks” (Gaines, 2010, p. 3).

It is possible that Travis’ strong rebuke against some of the African American females at his high school, as well as his stereotype of L.A. Unified School District students and those coming from the Crenshaw District, is rooted (unbeknownst to him) in

racial uplift ideology. However, given the complexities of this topic no definitive conclusion can be made.

At the close of the interview, Travis shared his perspective on how his experiences influenced his views on race and class in America. He said:

These specific experiences I don't think they had a big effect about how I feel about race and class in America. I think more of like my education and conversations I would have with my history and government teacher kind of really gave me a big understanding of race and class in America coz that's something we used to touch on during my lunch period when I would just spend time talking to him. We would have real conversations and stuff like that. But these specific experiences—especially the one with the vice principal—it kinda made me feel like when it comes to getting in trouble as an African American male, they automatically assume the worst and are willing to punish you heavily for no apparent reasons. So, I think that does have a reflection on at least race in America. It's still there, even down to the high school setting. So, I can't even imagine if I were to get into this adult world now and some punishment that my parents could not get me out of, no matter how many times they tried. That would be terrible. And then, the stereotypes...I think the stereotypes are still there. It's kinda like it's just something that's always going to be there (negatively or positively). So, stuff like that is still there. Um, but it's never been too negative. It's never been like, "Oh yeah, you're Black so you don't know

who your dad is” or “You’re Black so you’re not going to get into college” (laughing). It’s never been crazy like that.

### ***Snapshot Summary (Travis)***

Just as with the other participants, Travis had a positive K-12 experience overall. Aside from the incident with the disciplinary principal when he faced suspension for having earphones on campus, Travis’ interactions with faculty and administrators were positive.

Travis also indicated that he got along well with peers. However, these positive interactions did not shield him from being stereotyped—although, he didn’t take the stereotypes to heart because they were funny to him.

Despite the stereotypes and the run-in with the disciplinary principal, Travis didn’t feel that his race had an impact on how he was treated in school—or in his words, he “wasn’t really able to notice it.” Similarly, he didn’t feel that his social class had too much of an impact of how he was treated in high school because most of the kids at his school were middle class also. Having said that, he did admit to seeing the benefits of his middle class status particularly in college.

Lastly, Travis credited conversations he had with his history and government teacher as having an impact on his views of race and class in America, rather than the other K-12 experiences he shared over the course of the interviews.

### **THE FOCUS GROUP**

During the Focus Group, only five out of the six study subjects were able to participate, as one of the males (Terrence, a Gen Z’er) was unavailable. Further, of the five who did participate, one subject (Jocelyn, a Gen Y’er) was only able to participate

for the last half of the interview. To begin, the opening question—which asked participants if they felt that issues surrounding race and class were still prevalent in the U.S.—was first directed toward Generation Z. Lisa opened:

I would definitely say yes. I feel like now it's more undercover and [that] maybe people tend to keep their opinions to themselves. I guess an example that just recently happened would be with Donald Sterling. So, definitely, it's still prevalent and still out there...regardless of whether we have a Black President or not.

It's important to interject that Donald Sterling, former owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, was forced to sell his team, pay a \$2.5 million fine, and was banned from the NBA for life (Curry, 2014) after audio recordings of racists remarks he made were leaked to the celebrity news website, TMZ, in April of 2014. These audiotapes were secretly recorded and released by V. Stiviano, Sterling's alleged mistress.

After Lisa finished her remarks, Travis chimed in:

Yea, I feel racism is dying down in the sense of how relevant it is and well known—especially here in Southern California. I know it's different in other parts of the country, but I feel like its dying down and will eventually become not prevalent. I feel like it will eventually be part of our culture to just be accepting—especially with the thing of Donald Sterling that's like big in the media right now and everybody's against him right now. It shows where America is leading right now.

While the two Gen Z'ers had differing views on the prevalence of racism in modern America, there was general agreement between the two with regard to classism.

Lisa indicated that she felt that there is “a little bit of a caste system in our society.” In Travis’ purview, “as long as this country is capitalistic, we are going to have classism...there’s going to be a difference in the way people in different social classes are treated and respected.”

After Gen Z’ers had finished their responses, the same question was posed to Generation Y. Anxious to weigh in on the question, Adrienne remarked:

I was so hoping to answer that question because I live in the [Midwest] and I feel that racism is extremely prevalent in our society right now. So, it’s very interesting to hear Travis say that it is dying down in California. So, just to let you know, depending on where you are, it’s a totally different situation than being from California and then like moving to Middle America. It’s quite a difference and it’s really hard to describe until you’re placed into a situation. In terms of class, I definitely agree that as long as this is a capitalistic society, we will continue to have social class being very much still a part of our culture as a whole.

Once Adrienne finished her statement, Karen said:

Okay, what I would say is that I think it’s the same across the country. I don’t think it’s a big difference. I just think the way that people express themselves is different across the country. So, in California I think there is just as much racism as there may be in Mississippi. But, the issue in California is that people are quiet and silent about it. They are undercover racists—whereas in Mississippi it’s okay to be blatant about it. It’s right there in your face. I don’t think we’re anywhere near post-racial at all

when it comes to President Obama. As far as class, class is always going to be here as long as we are a society where people make different amounts of money. That's not going to change.

The next question, first directed to Gen Y'ers, asked participants to discuss ways (if any) in which their schools perpetuated inequities associated with race and class.

Karen opened with:

Ok, so in high school the principal called Whoopi Goldberg an ape by the way that she looked. And that was in the 90s. And, it wasn't like it was undercover, it was very much there, and it wasn't said in a small incident. It was said in a general assembly.

Taken aback by Karen's comments, Adrienne responded by saying:

That's pretty profound! I don't think I have an example that significant...well, I guess an example in some way is [that] we weren't allowed to have a Black student union at my school. We had to have...I think it was called "ethnic" student union. I don't know. To me it didn't really make any sense because there were others (if I remember correctly). I think there was some type of Asian student union or something to that nature. But, I just remember feeling like why weren't we [Blacks] allowed to have one? We had to kinda just become one conglomerate, you know, the Hispanics and the Blacks together—pretty much.

After Gen Y'ers had finished providing their feedback, Gen Z was posed with the same question. Travis shared:

Like the only thing I can really talk about is the BSU example. We weren't allowed to call it the Black Student Union after my sophomore year in high school, but it was still "Brothers and Sisters United" to keep the acronym BSU. So, I mean other than that, the only other thing that I can really touch on is classism. And, when it came down to class, it was just ticket prices. They would sell tickets for every event and the ticket prices sometimes would be too much for people who were in lower classes. And there was nothing they could really do about it.

Lisa then responded:

I don't think I can really think of anything besides maybe what the other two said...we didn't really have a Black student alliance. We had a group called "multicultural club." It wasn't specific to Black people—anyone of any type of culture was able to be part of that club. So, it kind of made sense as to why it was called "multicultural" and not just "Black"—even though mostly African Americans were part of that club.

With the exception of Karen, Travis, Adrienne, and Lisa did not say their schools *necessarily* perpetuated inequities—they just spoke of the type of cultural clubs (or lack thereof) that were on their campuses. Interestingly, during each of the individual interviews when participants were asked if they felt that their schools were "culturally sensitive" to their needs as an African American, Karen and Terrence were the only two to indicate that they felt that their schools were culturally sensitive to their needs. Both advised that their campuses allowed Black student unions. Further, Terrence indicated that even the curriculum was culturally sensitive as in history courses the contributions of

Blacks and Latinos were recognized. Travis, Lisa, Adrienne, and Jocelyn, on the other hand, all indicated that the curriculum they received was not culturally sensitive to their needs as African Americans. Further, while all indicated that their schools offered some acknowledgment of activities relevant to cultural pride, none felt that their schools were really culturally responsive to their needs as an African American.

Half-way through the interview, Jocelyn joined the conversation just in time for the question which asked if they felt that social class influences the way African Americans are treated in school. First to speak was Adrienne:

My first thought went straight to the Black male with that one because they already are in such a struggle, like in general. There's already a stigmatism placed on you regardless, that even if you don't fit the stereotype—trying to go against that [stereotype] is so hard—you know? So, like even if we are privileged or in a higher class or middle class, we're kind of placed in the same group [low income]...and I think it's really prevalent with the Black male.

The only Black male participant in the group interview, Travis spoke next:

[To clarify] so on top of us being Black, our social class influences how we are treated in the school system? As a male I feel it's an unfair assumption that a Black male would be at a lower social class than he may be. I feel like that's the only thing I can really talk about [as] sometimes I've been assumed to be at a lower social class (from my faculty and my peers) simply for being who I am [a Black male].

Having much to say on this topic, the next participant to respond was Jocelyn:

I think social class impacts the way everybody is treated. [And] I agree with the last gentlemen [Travis] who spoke in that there is this assumption based on skin color they [non-Blacks] think because you're Black, you are poor. I don't know if I gave you the example of a woman I was working with who is older, [but] she was saying that she grew up in a home with dirt floors and she looked at me and said, "I know you understand me, right?" (laughing) Yeah, so she looked at me and felt I grew up in a home with dirt floors because I was the only Black person in the room. She was a White lady, and I know it's dramatic (laughing) but I think that having and knowing that that assumption was there, I think impacted me in a way when I was younger. Especially like I felt I would have to go over the top in saying things to help people realize I was like them financially—which might have been totally obnoxious and horrible, but I felt like it was the only way that I could cope with the fact that people assumed that my parents were divorced or people assumed that I was lower SES, even though I wasn't. And, I think also, it added one more level of stress to my day—it was kind of like one more thing I had to prove out of this constant needing to prove myself for everything. Like, I am smart, I have as much money as you—we're all the same. Just because I am Black does not mean I am poor and ignorant.

Chiming in, Adrienne said, "That's a lot to carry. You got over that right, Jocelyn? Laughing, Jocelyn responded:

Yes. You know, you get to the point where you start to believe that all Black people are all poor too. It's like you are not Black, and people tell you all the time, "Oh, you're not Black"—because you speak a certain way [standard American English]. Or, "You're not Black" because you live in a certain neighborhood. So, I went through a definite, "I'll show you just how Black I am" phase.

The last participant to answer this question was Lisa. She said:

I would just say, I definitely agree with the other young lady and how she said with money, you're always going to have social class—regardless. And as an African American, yes you are automatically [assumed] to be on the lower end of social class.

The next question asked participants what did they feel was more of a problem in the United States—racism, classism, or both. Both Jocelyn and Lisa felt that classism was more of a problem. However, Jocelyn was of the opinion that racism *somewhat* stemmed from classism. She explained:

There have been a few studies that have come out talking about how America's actually split by class and not race—and that people who felt that Black people don't have access to certain things, it's more so that poor people don't have access to certain things. And I think there's this intertwining where people associate poverty with being a minority. So, people start to make assumptions that lead in my mind to racism. But, I think it [racism] kind of stems from classism.

On the contrary to the viewpoints of Lisa and Jocelyn, Karen felt that racism was more of a problem. She argued:

To me, racism is worse than classism. Classism is always going to be there. It doesn't matter how we do, because we all make different amounts of money. So, there's always gonna be class. But, racism is basically looking at a specific race and putting them in a class because of their race.

In processing the sentiments of Karen and Jocelyn, it is important to share and excerpt from Powell & Menendian's (2006) article, *Race vis-à-vis Class in the U.S.*?—one of several articles found in the book “America's Growing Inequality: The Impact of Poverty and Race.” They write:

Race and class inequalities are inextricably linked...Class identity and class consciousness itself has been thoroughly shaped and limited by our racialized arrangements...Race is so intimately intertwined with our class understandings that a politics of class will ultimately be split asunder by the subterranean use of race. Today, the race issue undergirds messages on taxes, government spending, poverty, immigration, crime, rights, values and even urban development. The racial mythology of the welfare state has become so entrenched in party politics that it constrains the policy choices for progressive change that would benefit all Americans, whatever their color or class. Race was critical to the development of arrangements that prevent class solidarity and of a political movement hostile to helping citizens in need. (Gutiérrez, 2014, p. 23)

While Travis maintained that classism was a more relevant issue, Adrienne felt that both classism and racism were equally a problem. The next question asked participants to share their views on how social class influences the way in which African Americans interact with one another. Jumping right in, Jocelyn opened:

Well, there is this Black concept of the Talented Tenth—the upper class African Americans, [those] who are of a higher socioeconomic status. And that creates, whether for better or worst (for whatever reason), this upper end mentality—which a lot of people on the upper-class end of the African American spectrum feel. It's this [mentality] coming from the lower class that says, “they’re excluding us, they are pushing us out.” And so it causes a rift where it’s this “me vs. you...you make us look bad.” You know, high SES speaking to low SES...and it creates an animosity, where it’s like, “Well, if you could just get yourself together, then people wouldn’t look at me crazy because of you.” So, you know, it creates this animosity that for some reason you have to force each other to be [a certain way] to both be Black, because “blackness” is one thing—instead of “whiteness.” White people can be all different...you know, all kinds of different. There are poor people, there are rich people, and there are middle class White people. But, for Black people, you’re instantly all assumed to be exactly the same, and so it creates a lot of animosity I think.

As Jocelyn made reference to “whiteness,” it is important to take a moment to discuss key aspects of this social construction. Chubbuck (2004) notes that whiteness is directly linked to institutionalized powers and privileges enjoyed by White people. She

also comments “whiteness is seen as one more constructed racial category, yet distinct as the one category with relatively exclusive access to privilege” (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 303). As it pertains to privilege, Leonardo (2004) defines white racial privilege as “the notion that white subjects accrue advantages by virtue of being constructed as Whites” (p. 137). A key aspect of whiteness and white privilege is that those who receive these advantages are often unaware of it (Marx, 2004).

In relation to White naivety of their privilege, McIntosh (1988), details several privileges that White people enjoy without even realizing it. For example, as a White woman she notes, “I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group...I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race...I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race” (pg. 7). What’s more, whiteness is normalized. Thompson (2001) argues:

Toni Morrison has used the following metaphor to describe the invisibility of whiteness: it is like the fishbowl that contains both fish and water.

Whiteness, in other words, provides the very context for meaning-making.

It supplies the norms and categories against which all groups are measured.

But the categories of whiteness are invisible as *constraint* because we keep focusing on what is inside them — the water and the fish, rather than the fish bowl itself.

All whiteness theories problematize the normalization and naturalization of whiteness. Rejecting the notion of white values as a generic or colorblind norm, they point to how the very status of whiteness as a norm

is a privilege. When, for example, whiteness is the norm in the U.S. high school curriculum, the history of whites in America counts as “just plain old American history,” whereas the history of non-white groups (and white women) is a special case of or even a departure from American history. Hence, there is no expectation that all Americans should know that history. (p. 1)

Going back to Jocelyn’s comments, undergirding her views was a type of pressure that so many African Americans feel—that pressure to represent the race. As it relates to representing the race, Travis spoke up, indicating:

Yea for me, if I were to answer the question, I really feel like it [social class] does affect how Black people interact with each other—especially when it is low class to high class, or even middle class to low class or middle class to high class...anytime someone feels that they are higher class than someone else and they are both Black, they are going to have that same type of “I’m ashamed to see you do what you’re doing because you’re reflecting on me and you’re representative of me.” We do represent our race—especially when you walk into some situation or some area where you are the only one there. If you’re the only Black guy or Black girl in the room, you are going to represent your race or at least a good percentage of us because if you ever do anything good or bad that will feed into a part of people’s preconceived notions. So, I feel like that’s part of what we represent, and it gets built into schemas on how we react to certain situations or what we do in other situations. So, if we do anything

wrong, it's going to be reflected as bad toward all Black people. If we do anything right, it's going to be a small reflection of good. And, I feel like it's always going to be a small reflection of good because in human nature, the bad will always outweigh the good things when looking at another person or another race you already have a bad preconceived notion about. I feel like we're going to have to do so many tremendously great things to get the bad things outweighed. And I feel that's unfair.

In her 2012 Huffington Post Article, "No Pressure: You're Just Representing Your Entire Race and Gender," Storyteller, Angela Gray, argues:

Being Black...you always have to be better, work harder, not be too threatening, be on good behavior (to an extent) and are representatives of your race...[and] being a Black woman...well shiiiiittt, you know how that goes. All of the above, besides combating "angry Black woman syndrome" and dealing with more reasons for people to doubt you...no pressure, right? (p. 2).

Gray (2012) points to the weight she carries as a Black woman, arguing that her "words, actions, and interactions are frequently perceived on behalf" (p. 3) of both her race and gender. In her 2012 Madamnoire.com article, "I'm Every (Black) Woman: Do You Feel Pressure to Always Represent for the Sistas?" Brande Victorian offers her perspective on feeling the pressure to represent the race. She shares:

It is an umbrella over us from which we cannot escape. Even when we don't want to rep for everybody who looks like us (at least to outsiders anyway) we find ourselves in the unfortunate seat of doing so and with

that come repercussions we don't realize or want to be responsible for (p. 1).

Shortly after Travis' comments, the conversation shifted to the media's portrayal of African Americans. Specifically Jocelyn stated:

I always wonder like what happened to media images in the middle of the 90s...everything like (excuse me), went to shit! (laughing). You know? Like we used to have "The Cosby Show," "A Different World," "Family Matters," "Fresh Prince of Bel Air"...we had so many positive Black role models that people could get a chance to see and you know, like identify with. But then it all just disappeared and became "Basketball Wives," and I have no idea what happened!

Lisa then chimed in:

Yeah, it's because of the media that it makes it even harder. They are portraying us one way [negatively]. And, like Travis said, to overcome that negative we have to do a lot. But, like when you're constantly always seeing negative, like you know "Love & Hip Hop of Atlanta," and all this other crap [other TV shows], it just makes it harder to get out of that mentality and the class that people put us in.

As it relates to media portrayals of African Americans, Punyanunt-Carter (2008) notes that such depictions contribute to public perceptions of Blacks. Citing Dates (1990), Punyanunt-Carter (2008) contends that "Black images on television may cause viewers to conceive, alter, or even reinforce their beliefs and opinions about Blacks" (p. 241)—regardless of the viewers age. Specifically as it relates to off-putting images—citing the

work of several researchers (Mastro & Tropp, 2004; Ford, 1997; Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996; Bryant & Zillmann, 1994; Dates, 1990)—Punyanunt-Carter (2008) contends, “negative exposure to African American portrayals in the media significantly influences the evaluations of African Americans *in general* [emphasis added]” (p. 242). Given mass media’s power to shape public opinion, the challenge is that while there has been a steady increase in the amount of Black images on television, quality or positive portrayals of African Americans has not increased (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008)—an observation that both Jocelyn and Lisa can attest to. In repeating Jocelyn’s words on the state of African American images on television, “everything like (excuse me) went to shit!”

To close the interview, subjects were asked if they had any questions for each other. Aside from questions regarding where each participant was from, nothing else was asked.

### ***Focus Group Summary***

Much of participant responses to questions during the focus group mirrored what was stated during the individual interviews. For example, the topic of needing to prove oneself and represent the race came up again. The topic of their school’s cultural sensitivity to Blacks in the K-12 environment also resurfaced. With the exception of Jocelyn (who had not yet joined the interview during this topic), Travis and Lisa mentioned cultural clubs on their campus—but they didn’t necessarily feel that their schools were culturally sensitive to their needs as African Americans, nor did they indicate that their schools perpetuated inequities. Karen on the other hand, who mentioned that there was a Black Student Association on her campus (which

she saw as a positive), did point out ways in which there were still inequitable practices perpetuated at her school and so did Adrienne.

The focus group also reiterated that while everyone was not able to see how their social class impacted their K-12 experiences, at a macro or societal level there was general agreement that their being situated as middle and upper-income did positively impact how they got along in life. Concerning the impact of race, three out of the five participants (Jocelyn, Travis, and Lisa) felt that social class was a bigger issue. Although Jocelyn and Lisa still saw the prevalence of racism in America, Travis felt that racism was becoming less and less prevalent and that classism would remain constant due to capitalism. In contrast, Karen felt that race was a bigger issue than class, while Adrienne felt that both were equal problems in America.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter revealed study findings via participant narratives on their K-12 school experiences. Throughout the chapter, areas of commonality in experience—commiserate with the current body of research on the school experiences of Black students—were also discussed. By and large, while it was found that participant school experiences were not without challenges centering on race and class, subjects felt that their K-12 schooling was positive overall. Further, looking across generational lines, while it is clear that participants did not view the climate of America as being “post-racial,” their K-12 encounters were demonstrative of improvement in Black student experiences at majority White and integrated suburban schools. Particularly, improvements *over-time* were readily apparent as Gen Z’ers seemed to have a more positive perspective on their school experiences in comparison to Gen Y’ers.

In relation to gender, commiserate with other studies on Black student experiences in predominantly White suburban schools (Ispa-Landa, 2013; Holland, 2012), male subjects seemed to have the most positive experiences overall. This was despite the fact that both experienced what would seem to be unusually harsh punishments for minor misbehaviors (i.e., the earphone and basketball game incidents)—also in concert with other studies on Black males in K-12 settings (Monroe, 2006; Watkins & Aber, 2009). Improvements aside, prevailing negative stereotypes of African Americans continue to impede progress in Black K-12 school experiences. What follows in the last chapter is a discussion on specific themes that arose from the study as well as recommendations for educators working with middle and upper income African American students situated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools.

CHAPTER 5  
**DISCUSSION**

Chapter four discussed findings overall and provided reflections on the literature related to study participants' individual experiences (i.e., colorism, interracial relationships, pressures to prove oneself) mirroring research found within the broader body of knowledge on Black students. In contrast, chapter five presents a discussion on themes or participant categories of experience. In terms of what constituted a theme, any experience encountered by three or more subjects was considered a theme or category. By utilizing within-case and across-case analyses procedures (Ayers, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003), participant retellings have been organized into the following categories central to the phenomenon under study and have been coded accordingly:

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Positive K-12 Experience Overall	Code: AFFIRMATIVE STATEMENTS (OVERALL) Code: COMFORT LEVEL Code: TEACHER INTERACTIONS Code: PEER INTERACTIONS
Experiences Relevant to Race	Code: STEREOTYPING Code: MICROAGGRESSIONS Code: PROFILING Code: AFFIRMATIVE STATEMENTS (RACE) Code: SCHOOL CULTURAL SENSITIVITY
Perspectives on Class	Code: TREATMENT IN SCHOOL Code: INTER-CULTURAL RELATIONS Code: SPECIAL PRIVILEGES Code: PRIVILEGE CONCEPTUALIZED
Influence of K-12 Experiences on Worldview	Code: RACE/CLASS WORLDVIEW

Table 2: Categories & Codes

Concerning the flow of the chapter, Section One details each of the participant categories of experience. Section Two discusses implications. Finally, Section Three converses on limitations and recommendations for further study.

## CATEGORIES OF EXPERIENCE

### Category: Positive K-12 Experience Overall

#### *Code: Affirmative Statements (Overall)*

When asked to share how they felt overall about their K-12 encounters, all participants expressed that their experiences were positive.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	I think it was a positive experience. I think it prepared me for what the world was. It wasn't um, one class vs. the other. The world that I work in now is predominantly White, and maybe 10 – 20% of minorities (Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians). So, what I saw in school [ethnically speaking] is what I am currently in. That's my community now.	...it was positive overall...And, honestly I don't really think that I would have it any other way because I feel that it's just made me more of well-rounded person. And I know that sounds really cliché, but I just think that I am able to identify with things on a social level with middle class people of all races. Maybe that's why they feel so comfortable around me...	I learned the basics...I learned what I needed to get through college. It could have been more specialized, but it was all right. High school was ok. Elementary and junior high was good. Socially it could have been better. But, because I lived so far from my high school, I didn't get to hang out and see people as much...taken together, I would say these experiences have been positive because they taught me you know who I am and sometimes I think you learn best when you kind of have to struggle a little bit.
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	I had a positive experience in every way imaginable...I really felt that I was able to communicate and talk and relate with almost every ethnicity. Which I feel is very important...I mean you can't just rely on reaching out to your own or a specific ethnicity. I feel you have to be able to relate and communicate with everybody...	I would definitely say that it was positive overall. I feel the friends I've made, the activities and stuff that we were able to have. I don't feel personally like there was any discrimination towards me that I felt in school. I also feel because I was in honors classes I was able to keep up and you know do basically everything that anyone else was doing.	Yes, overall, it was positive...It [attending this school] made me able to speak to anybody from any race or any culture very comfortably. I feel like high school and my social abilities and the way I was in high school allowed me to have that strength that I have right now.

Table 3: Affirmative Statements (Overall)

*Code: Comfort Level*

Everyone encountered some challenges germane to race or class as an African American student in their K-12 schools. However, overall everyone indicated that they felt comfortable going to the schools they attended.

<b>Generation Y</b>	<b>Karen</b>	<b>Adrienne</b>	<b>Jocelyn</b>
	Um, I did felt comfortable because that's how my entire education was.	I definitely felt comfortable. I mean it just became, you know, that's just what my world was growing up. And I feel that it's helped me learn as an adult how to deal with all different kinds of people from all socioeconomic backgrounds.	Um, hmm, I will say I did [feel comfortable]. But, I think a piece of it was also because I wasn't totally aware. I didn't realize how horrible a lot of the things people were saying were. I was a little oblivious.
<b>Generation Z</b>	<b>Terrence</b>	<b>Lisa</b>	<b>Travis</b>
	My junior high was comfortable...[high school] I definitely was comfortable and had a great four years.	Ninety percent of the time, yes, I did feel comfortable. Just coz everyone was like really accepting and like there wasn't a big racial barrier.	I felt comfortable. There was nothing to make me feel uncomfortable.

Table 4: Comfort Level

***Code: Teacher Interactions***

With the exception of Jocelyn, everyone indicated that they had positive interactions with most of their teachers. Further, while Karen did characterize her teacher interactions positively overall, she also discussed her challenges with the teacher who accused her of cheating as well as feeling pressure to prove herself academically because she was Black.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	Uh, in junior high school it was good. [In high school] basically as a Black student you had to prove yourself more to the staff than as another student. You had to prove your capabilities that you were as good as or better than.	...there was nothing that really stood out where they didn't have my best interest. Like if I just think of the majority of my teachers, you know, I just had to work hard and do what I needed to do to get good grades like anyone else.	I felt like I didn't have a lot of positive interaction with my teachers. It was always because something was going wrong.
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	I never really had any problems with teachers. They were social enough where I could talk with them. I always tried to talk to them and I've had good relationships with teachers who I still have to this day.	They were always willing to talk to me. They were nice...I didn't feel any different from any of the other students.	When I reached out to speak to any type of staff members or teachers and stuff like that, I think that I was well accepted and respected...

Table 5: Teacher Interactions

***Code: Peer Interactions***

For the most part, everyone spoke positively of his or her peer interactions. However, when asking Jocelyn about her peer-to-peer connections (particularly in high school) she spoke more in terms of who she hung out with versus whether or not her interactions were positive or negative.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	I interacted well with [my] peers...I would say most of the time I felt accepted.	My peer-to-peer interactions were good. I mean I had friends.	In junior high, I got invited to all the slumber parties and sleepovers. So, just the socialization and being a part of people's lives was fine...High school, well, I will say I hung out with kids whose parents made significantly less money than my parents, and they were kind of like the misfits.
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	...I always had a pretty good interaction with everybody I came across...and I was a pretty likable guy...	...everyone was like really accepting...I would definitely say that it wasn't anything negative where I felt like, you know, out of place...	I interacted [well] with pretty much everyone...[I felt accepted] by my peers...my presence was valuable.

Table 6: Peer Interactions

## Category: Experiences Relevant to Race

### *Code: Stereotyping*

While all participants expressed that they encountered being stereotyped, some took it more seriously or offensively than others. Specifically, each male subject took no offense to the stereotypes they personally encountered.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	There was this unspoken air or under-lying assumption that all Black people weren't as smart as other students, so I really worked hard in her class, in particular, just to prove her wrong.	You know, the images that were seen on television about what being Black was for those in the community (particularly the White children), they would stereotype or structure conversations that way— certain people, not all of them.	[Kids] would ask me if I could play basketball or if I could sing or if I would play on the [basketball] team. So, I never played basketball in junior high because I felt like they all expected me to.
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	I guess all throughout my life I have been stereotyped. But, I don't think anyone in any way negatively stereotyped me in a way where I really took it offensively...[For example] people have just assumed that because I'm Black, I'm athletic...	I would say there were more stereotypes with academics. I guess they [White and Asian students] just assumed that we [Black students] weren't that smart.	It was kind of like an assumption that all Black people could do it [Dance]...the stereotypes are still there. It's kinda like it's just something that's always going to be there (negatively or positively)...um, but it's never been too negative. It's never been like, "Oh yeah, you're Black so you don't know your dad."

Table 7: Stereotyping

**Code: Microaggressions**

With the exception of Travis and Terrence all participants shared experiences that were evidence of encountering racial microaggressions.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	Karen felt the need to prove herself and her academic abilities often in the class in which her teacher accused her of cheating. She explained that her teacher made a number of comments that made her want to prove herself.	I would get questions about my hair all the time. Obviously they were asking questions because they didn't understand. But, that was hard for me to get over because they kinda picked at that.	...kids were racist and they said racist things...if they said those things to me now as an adult, I probably would have been offended. But, as a kid, I was just like, "You're an idiot!"
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	No Comment	They would make comments like, "Oh, I can't believe like you're in this class" or "You're the only Black person here"... <i>just like small stuff</i> (emphasis added)	No comment

Table 8: Microaggressions

**Code: Profiling**

An even split, half of the participants (Jocelyn, Terrence, and Travis) indicated that they experienced racial profiling.

<b>Generation Y</b>	<b>Karen</b>	<b>Adrienne</b>	<b>Jocelyn</b>
	No comment	No comment	One day the high school principal took me to the office and accused me of being in a gang. Like he made my parents come in, and I think that was probably directly because I was Black.
<b>Generation Z</b>	<b>Terrence</b>	<b>Lisa</b>	<b>Travis</b>
	<p><i>("Basketball Incident")</i></p> <p>I felt it was a little unfair to just call us, the Black students out, because there were White people on the team [also]...She just came down on us and she wasn't even there. So that was one thing that really stuck out in my mind that was unfair. We were kind of profiled.</p>	No comment	<p><i>("Headphone Incident")</i></p> <p>One of my teachers saw my jacket and was quick to tell the disciplinary principal. [So] when I got to the principal's office, I felt profiled because he pulled out my file, saw my grades, and quickly judged me. He was willing to suspend me right there for my actions.</p>

Table 9: Profiling

**Code: Affirmative Statements (Race)**

All Gen Z'ers indicated that their cultural background had *little impact* or were doubtful that race influenced how they were treated in school. In particular, Travis admitted that if race did effect how he was treated, he was unable to notice. This was despite the fact that he encountered racial profiling by a school administrator. In contrast, all Gen Y'ers explicitly stated that their race influenced ways in which they were regarded at school.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	Of course, of course, very much so.	Definitely, I think my race had a lot to do with how I was treated because, I mean it's not something that I could not—you know, you look at me and you see. So for me, it would be silly to think that it didn't have an influence.	I think it could have...I think maybe a small impact—especially in high school.
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	I don't think it had much of an impact for junior high, simply because of [our] age...race really wasn't something big at my high school. So, I guess it wasn't really that big of an issue.	I would say not a huge deal, but definitely a little bit, just coz there were so few like minorities [Blacks] who went to the school. So, I wouldn't say we were treated a whole lot different, but it was definitely noticed.	I feel that my race did not have an impact or at least I wasn't able to notice the impact my race had while attending high school.

Table 10: Affirmative Statements (Race)

**Code: School Cultural Sensitivity**

Most participants did not feel that their schools were culturally sensitive to their needs as African Americans. However, it is important to note that for those who indicated this, it did not lessen their perspective of having a positive overall K-12 experience at the schools they attended. Only Karen and Terrence acknowledged that their high schools were culturally sensitive to their needs as Black Americans. Specifically, Karen indicated that they were *somewhat* responsive. Further, although Travis did not express that he felt

his school was culturally sensitive to his needs as a Black student, he did mention that his campus had a club for African American students as well as clubs for other ethnic minorities. As it relates to changes over time, while both Karen and Jocelyn went to the same high school—during different academic years as Jocelyn is a “second wave” Gen Y’er—Jocelyn did not feel that their high school was culturally sensitive at all.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	<p>Culturally sensitive? Our high school allowed us to have a Black Student Association. So we were able to have that. [So], I would say somewhat culturally sensitive</p>	<p>No, I don't think that...if we're talking about the type of curriculum that might be encompassed in the school.</p>	<p>Absolutely not... because I just think they didn't know that they had to be...you know, they thought it was ok to just talk about slavery for a day during February...Um, I think they thought they actually were very culturally sound...but to me, it was just the ignorance of the educators who weren't forced to work on that.</p>
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	<p>In junior high I believe that instead of really taking the time to make sure they addressed my specific needs, like taking the time to address February as Black History Month, I don't think they went that far and really celebrating that, nor did they really give special recognition to Latinos and Latinas, and Cinco De Mayo and things of that nature. I think they went out of their way to really make reference to Jesus Christ simply because it was a Christian school...Now high school it was recognized, and there actually were clubs there. I was a member of the Black Student Union for the last two years of high school...they did address Black History Month, and history courses, and they did address things for Latinos...</p>	<p>Um, I would say a little bit, but not as much as they could have. But, I guess if think about it they weren't really culturally sensitive to really any of the other students either. I think they were really just like solely about the academics...there was one club started by students. But it was called, I think multicultural something, and it like happened to be mostly Black students that were in the club. But, it was welcome to everyone.</p>	<p>Hmm...the only thing that brought up the subject of being culturally sensitive to my needs was when they would say more African Americans scored higher on stuff like the ACT instead of the SAT...but, after saying all of that, I did score much better on the SAT than the ACT. I did not like the ACT at all...now in terms of the curriculum, I wouldn't say so. I feel like it was just standard. I don't feel the curriculum was culturally sensitive in any way...there was a black student union. The [clubs] were offered for not only African Americans, but also like Mexicans, and Muslims, and all different types of cultures had their own clubs that they could be a part of at my school.</p>

Table 11: School Cultural Sensitivity

## Category: Perspectives on Class

### *Code: Treatment in School*

Subjects were asked if they felt that their social class had an impact on how they were treated in school. Evenly split, Lisa, Terrence (both Gen Z'ers), and Adrienne (Gen Y'er) all felt that their social class impacted how they were treated in school. Whereas, Travis (Gen Z'er), Karen, and Jocelyn (Gen Y'ers) did not feel that their social class influenced how they were regarded in the school environment.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	I don't think so because the majority of the kids were in my class socioeconomic-wise. Most of the students were in my class or slightly above when it came to finances. So, we were pretty much equal.	I would say it did because most of the people were of like a certain class. So, that had a lot to do with your interactions with certain peers about what privileges they may have had that you didn't have. [So] you kinda needed to keep up with that, you know.	I would say for high school, no, because I felt like there it was more about who you knew...and in junior high, kind of everyone had the same stuff.
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	...it could have. I think it might have had somewhat of an impact...it might have on my parents because we were paying tuition [in junior high]...it was pretty expensive. So, I guess in parents' mind, they kind of see, "ok, you can afford to go here, you probably aren't some guy who just came from the street; you obviously have some kind of money." And you know that probably resonated in some parent's head. So it probably did have some kind of impact, but none that I was really aware of at the time.	I would say yes and no. I just feel like sometimes on certain occasions [people] would be like, "Oh well, because you know, your dad's a doctor,"...	Because I was in the middle class during high school, which most of the students were—at least their parents were—I didn't feel like it had too much of an impact.

Table 12: Treatment in School

***Code: Inter-Cultural Relations***

Within the K-12 setting, most subjects indicated that their social class made inter-cultural interactions favorable. The only participant who did not feel this way was Lisa.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrianne	Jocelyn
	I think it has. I think I interacted with a level of people because of the class that I was in, because of the amount of different races that I was around.	Oh definitely. I think that my interactions with other ethnic groups have been favorable because of my ability to just adapt. It's kind of natural for me to just adapt to the situation I'm in. So, I feel like because I am able to talk with them [other cultures] on their level, that I am able to have more of a comfortable rapport with those individuals in various situations.	Well, I think in more of an abstract way because I think that being from a higher class teaches you different skills when it comes to talking to people. Um, so I think I've always just been more direct...um I think it [social class] made me more assertive with people. I think it had to do with the way my parents raised me, which was really because of our economic class.  I think you get in-group inclusion with White people. Basically because you grew up with them and they know you, you have an opportunity to see things and hear things from the majority that a lot of other people never get a chance to hear and see—which makes you more mobile in society...
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	I think I can probably say yes to that because if it wasn't for my social class, and if it wasn't for my parents making the money they were able to make, I probably wouldn't have been able to go to my private middle school. And I wouldn't have been able to be surrounded by people outside my race. And I'm thankful that I was because I was able to interact with people who weren't necessarily like me.	I am going to say no...I never did really talk about my income. So, I tried to have relationships based on other stuff—like me as a person—not how much money my parents made.	Uh, yeah actually. I feel like it has. I feel like because I was exposed to a whole bunch of different races has allowed me to speak to other people the way I do right now...to speak to everybody equally and feel the same way about everybody.

Table 13: Inter-Cultural Relations

*Code: Special Privileges*

Each participant was asked if they felt that they received any special privileges due to their socioeconomic status that was unavailable to low-income Blacks. All of the female participants answered this question within the context of society overall as well as the K-12 environment. At a societal level, each female subject emphatically indicated that they received special privileges based on their socioeconomic class. For example, while both Karen and Jocelyn did not feel they received any special treatment or class privileges in school—this was because most of the people at their school were in the same class as they were—they did feel that at a societal level, their economic class afforded them with privileges not necessarily available to low-income Blacks. Both Adrienne and Lisa also saw that their class provided them special privileges not readily available to those Blacks in lower classes. In contrast, the male participants (Terrence and Travis) only responded to this question within the framework of their K-12 setting. From this context, neither of them really felt that they had any significant advantages over and above low-income Black students who attended their schools.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	<p>Most definitely. For one, people look at you differently because they know the class you're in.</p>	<p>There are certain life experiences through my upbringing that has allowed me, I guess, to understand, or be more relatable in certain situations with other ethnic groups. I think that may be an advantage.</p>	<p>Yes, because money allows you more mobility. It allows you the ability to bridge certain gaps.</p>
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	<p>Maybe to a certain degree...I don't feel like I had any significant advantage over anyone else. I was just maybe a tiny bit more well off than I guess they were.</p>	<p>Definitely yes! Just because while I feel money shouldn't be based on it, I do feel the more money you have, the more options or more stuff you're able to do. So even if it's something like taking specific vacations, or maybe being able to buy a newer version of a car—even getting a car, I feel that being upper middle class, they can say “yeah, you know, you are more privileged, or you have more opportunities to get stuff than people of lower middle or lower income.</p>	<p>Compared to lower income African American's I haven't felt too privileged over them. I know when you're younger, you just don't pay attention as much you know? I hadn't paid that much attention to all these things.</p>

Table 14: Special Privileges

***Code: Privilege Conceptualized***

When asked to describe how they conceptualized what it meant to be privileged, everyone expressed their view of privilege within the context of material wealth as well as parental or family influence and upbringing.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	<p>It's a difficult question, because privilege is all based on what class you're in. Like, I don't necessarily say I was privileged but again I was afforded more luxuries than others. So, in some form I'm privileged, but I guess I take my privilege for granted...It's a hard question for me to answer, cuz people would say that I'm privileged, but then I might say someone else is privileged that has more than what I had. It's all based on things like having more than what you say normal life is [or] to have opportunities that others don't...above and beyond the norm. There were things that my parents were aware of because they were in that class. So, it's kind of like you can pass things onto your children that you're aware of.</p>	<p>I guess just being able to have certain things just because of my parents economic status that may be you know for example relatives that I know didn't come from that same upbringing couldn't get. So, I was able to recognize that earlier on as I grew up that I was receiving things that others didn't get. Or, when they came to my house, how they were so in awe of what I did have.</p>	<p>I guess I look at it from the perspective of socioeconomic status...looking at high education, higher income, being from a family that allows you access to different types of people...different types of experiences.</p>
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	<p>I think being privileged is being brought up in a good environment, a good upbringing. To have positive influences to actually being supported financially and emotionally in every sense of the word. I think I was fortunate enough to be brought up in a pretty good environment and under good care. And I think that's really what it means to be privileged.</p>	<p>Um, for me personally, I would say to be privileged is not getting everything you want, but I would say it's not understanding the struggle, if that makes sense. So, you may not have everything, but your parents make sure that whatever need, you have—regardless of whether they could provide it to you or not.</p>	<p>I would consider privilege to be something your parents worked for and you get to like reap the benefits of as a child or someone living under them, where you can like get the benefits of material things, experiences, and other stuff that will require money...and a good household because it's not always money that would make you privileged, but also your parents in the way that they raise you, is one way to be privileged. So, that's what I would consider privileged.</p>

Table 15: Privilege Conceptualized

## Category: Influence of K-12 Experiences on Worldview

### Code: Race/Class Worldview

When participants were asked if they felt that their K-12 experiences shared during the interviews influenced their views on race and class in America, there was a clear generational divide in that all Gen Z'ers felt that these experiences did not have an impact on how they viewed race and class in America. However, Gen Y'ers took a more holistic view affirming that these K-12 experiences did have meaning and helped to contribute toward their overall view of race and class in the United States.

Generation Y	Karen	Adrienne	Jocelyn
	<p>Ok, so very much so. Um, it's frustrating to me when I hear people say, "Black people are lazy, Black people have all these opportunities and they do nothing with it." Because the reality is, I know that if I grew up in a family in a lower income, I wouldn't be the person I am today. So, because of who my parents were and what they exposed me to, allows me to have those opportunities...if you haven't seen anybody in your family go to college and let's say your family's all living on welfare and they seem to be doing ok. And that's what everyone in your neighborhood or surroundings are doing. Why would you think that there's anything else? It's not attainable to you.</p>	<p>Yes...I do. I guess the reason I hesitate is because I am an individual who has lived in California, and now I currently live in the Midwest. I feel like a lot of things that I have identified with, or see now, is how I view race in America. So, I feel like I have more of an open view about race because of living in California for the most part...how I view race is more open minded, if that makes any sense. Now that I've kind of been placed in different parts of the United States that has made me think a little differently about how you know race is viewed in other areas and how that, if I lived there, could have influenced how I think about it.</p>	<p>I'm not sure if these experiences in particular have impacted it, but I just think that my life and things that I've read and understand about race and class has impacted my view on race and class. I mean, these things helped solidify it because I feel like it's difficult to get past economic class. And, I think a lot of people who've never been on the other side have a more difficult time passing over that hurdle and kind of getting inclusion into that world...into that club.</p>
Generation Z	Terrence	Lisa	Travis
	<p>It [experiences] wasn't where I got my truth about my race...I mean I have been raised and taught by some pretty knowledgeable people...</p>	<p>No. I try to take everyone for who they are and try not to categorize all people in a certain way. So, I try not to somewhat categorize or stereotype for a whole race or culture based on my few experiences because there are always outliers.</p>	<p>These specific experiences I don't think they had a big effect on how I feel about race and class in America. I think more of like my education and the conversations I would have with my history teacher/government teacher kind of really gave me a big understanding or at least an older understanding of race and class in America...</p>

Table 16: Race/Class Worldview

## IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation sought to gain more understanding about the K-12 school experiences of middle and upper income African American students situated in predominantly White and integrated suburban school systems. Commiserate with well-documented research on Black students, findings from this dissertation matched much of what is known about the K-12 school experiences of African Americans as a whole. However, there were additional insights gained from this study, which can deepen understanding on middle and upper income Black student experiences.

### *Race*

Concerning the role of race in school experiences, generational differences in perspective were quite striking in that matters of race seemed to be less of an issue with Gen Z'ers than with Gen Y'ers. In fact, evenly split across generational lines, while Generation Y felt that their race did impact how they were regarded in school, Generation Z felt that their race had very little, to no bearing whatsoever on how they were treated in school. Interestingly, although all Gen Y'ers felt that race impacted their academic experiences, Karen and Adrienne (both first wave Gen Y'ers) felt that race significantly impacted their experiences, while Jocelyn (the second wave Gen Y'er) felt that race only somewhat influenced her K-12 encounters.

At a surface level, these generational (and in a way “cohort”) variations demonstrate improved treatment overtime of Black students situated in predominantly White and integrated suburban K-12 schools. However, when delving deeper, I do wonder why all Gen Z'ers and even Jocelyn (the second wave Gen Y'er) felt that race had little to no impact whatsoever on their K-12 experiences—despite the fact that each

dealt with challenges relevant to their social location of race; and most did not feel that their schools were sensitive to their needs as African Americans. I would argue that this generational difference in perspective on race is a microcosm of societal attitudinal changes stratified across generations. While it is true that Generation Y is extremely racially tolerant (Pew Research Center, 2010; ARC, 2011), Generation Z is considered even more tolerant of racial diversity (Kingston, 2014). These attitudinal differences in generation may offer an explanation as to why Gen Z study participants felt that their race did not impact how they were treated in school; as well as why Jocelyn felt that the influence of race in her K-12 experiences were minor.

Study findings also demonstrate that aside from Jocelyn, participants had positive interactions with their teachers, felt genuinely supported by them and were treated with fairness. However, with the exception of Karen—who for the most part had positive interfaces with her teachers, yet still encountered being stereotyped by one of them—findings suggest that the biggest perpetrators of racial stereotyping were students and not educators. This stirs up the question of what are best practices for reducing racial stereotyping and microaggressive behaviors exhibited by students in K-12 environments? As a means for combating stereotypes, Dixon & Rosenbaum (2004) point to Gordon Allport's (1954) Contact Theory for reducing prejudice, which "suggests that contact between majority and minority group members may help to disconfirm negative stereotypes of a minority group" (p. 258). From their study which, tested "contact, cultural, and group threat theories to learn how contact in different interactive settings affects Whites' stereotypes of Blacks and Hispanics" (p. 257) the researchers argue that under ideal situations "contact helps to disconfirm stereotypes" (p. 276). As Dixon &

Rosenbaum (2004) point to contact “under the right conditions” (p. 257), contact *alone* is not enough to reduce stereotyping incidents and racial microaggressions.

Berryman-Fink (2006) investigated “the role of contact with diverse groups on prejudice levels of 284 college students” (p. 511). Study results found a “reduction of general and specific prejudice was significantly associated with contact that occurs between equals, and contact that is interpersonal, cooperative, rewarding, and positively sanctioned by students’ institutions and social networks” (Berryman-Fink, 2006, p. 511). In essence, inter-cultural contact must be meaningful in order to reduce instances of stereotyping and microaggressions. Although Berryman-Fink (2006) was speaking within the context of a college setting, I believe the researcher’s sentiments can rightly be applied in the K-12 environment as well, in that schools “must couple institutional support for diversity with opportunities for different students to interact in cooperative tasks and to form meaningful and rewarding relationships with each other” (Berryman-Fink, 2006, p. 516). Berryman-Fink (2006) goes on to say that by “creating opportunities for meaningful contact across student differences, we can contribute to the creation of a welcoming climate for diversity” (p. 516). With that in mind, cross-cultural meaningful contact has implications for teachers as well as school site practice. For example, within individual classrooms, in terms of group projects, teachers can be intentional about forming groups with students from different cultural backgrounds (Berryman-Fink, 2006). As students work together on a project, there is potential for reducing negative stereotypes. Pointing to the role of the school site itself, Berryman-Fink (2006) also suggests that schools “can provide incentives for specific ethnic minority student organizations to sponsor collaborative activities with other ethnic organizations” (p. 516).

For example, in terms of school-wide fundraisers, different cultural student organizations may consider partnering together to raise funds. It is a responsibility of schools and practitioners to be intentional in creating meaningful inter-cultural contact among students because “providing opportunities for sustained relationships among diverse types of students is necessary for [their] educational development” (Berryman-Fink, 2006, p. 516)—especially in an increasingly globalized society.

### *Class*

In relation to social class and school experiences, there was again an even split. However this time, it was not across generational lines. Specifically, Gen Z’ers Lisa and Terrence, as well as Gen Y’er Adrienne felt that their social class somewhat impacted how they were treated in school. Although neither spoke in terms of social class having great significance on how they adjusted in school, each pointed to examples that were indicative of having a higher social status in comparison to lower income students. In contrast, Travis (Gen Z’er) and Gen Y’ers Karen and Jocelyn did not feel that their social class influenced how they were treated in school in large part due to the fact that most of the students at their schools came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Interestingly, in addition to their school environments, all of the female participants commented on their socioeconomic status from a societal view as well, and felt that due to their class standing they did receive additional privileges. In contrast, the males only spoke on how class personally affected them within their K-12 environments.

As it relates to cross-cultural interfaces, most felt that their social class made those interactions favorable. Interestingly, significant to both race and class, a major perspective shared by all study participants was that the ethnic demography of the

schools in which they attended, was instrumental in helping them to acquire cross-cultural social skills. According to Antonio (2006) student inter-cultural interaction or “socializing across race” (p. 611) develops cultural awareness, social self-confidence as well as leadership skills. For the subjects who participated in my study, cross-cultural socialization skills were considered vital to overall success in life.

With regard to their understanding of privilege, subjects equated this construct with material wealth and upbringing. In fact, none of them described privilege beyond socioeconomics or family background. This view of privilege stands in striking contrast to White privilege, which largely speaks to the normalization of whiteness and institutionalized powers that benefit White people. Although none of the participants spoke on institutionalized powers or privileges that White people receive, I did find it interesting that Jocelyn felt that her upper income background afforded her “in-group inclusion with White people.”

### ***Gender***

Although gender is a component of social location, this facet of experience was not closely examined in this dissertation as I only sought to understand the collective experience of the group under study (both males and females). Nevertheless, there were some aspects of gender that raised a few questions concerning participant K-12 school experiences. For example, in relation to social class, I question why all of the female participants commented on their socioeconomic status from both a societal level and K-12 framework, while the males only spoke on how class personally affected them within their K-12 environments.

Another observation I made was that the males seemed to be the most enthusiastic about their school experiences out of all study participants. I base this observation on significant statements made by both males. For instance, when asked how he felt overall about his school experiences, Terrence shared, “I had a positive experience in every way imaginable...” Travis noted, “There were really no hiccups. It’s almost like if there were to be any problems, they were not really known...” Despite some of the exaggerated disciplinary actions both male subjects received while attending their schools—which is reflective of that which is documented in the body of research on Black male students (Watkins & Aber, 2009; Monroe, 2006)—each participant expressed great zeal about their K-12 encounters overall. In contrast, while it is true that each female subject also felt positive overall about their K-12 experiences, their level of enthusiasm was not expressed to the same degree as the males. In response to this cursory observation, there is research, which suggests in comparison to Black females (within K-12 settings that are predominantly White), Black males report more positive feelings about the school environment. Now there are several reasons that may attribute to this phenomenon. For example, as already shared in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Holland (2012) argues:

African American males have higher social status than females for a number of reasons that are dependent on the school’s context. For instance, young African American males are typically stereotyped as athletic, which may help them gain status in schools that value sports, and participating in sports typically brings more status to boys than to girls (Eder and Parker, 1987). In addition, minority girls may be less likely to join high-status girls’ sports, such as cheerleading, because they are so strongly associated with White girls (Bettis and Adams, 2003).

Many White suburban males are also increasingly listening to rap and hip-hop music and becoming fascinated with images that this music represents (see Rodriguez 2006). This may allow African American males in majority White context to gain status. In contrast, African American females do not have the same kinds of cultural signals to trade on for status. (p. 103)

Interestingly, as a side-note on stereotypes, both male subjects (neither of whom took offense) made comments about being stereotyped as being good at sports due to being African American. For example, Terrence shared, “People have just assumed that because I’m Black, I’m athletic.” Laughing, Travis explained, “Like a lot of people think I’m really good at basketball when I go to the rec center. But, it’s like, I’m sorry to disappoint, I’m not that good...I can play, I can dribble, I can shoot, but I’m not a star.”

Again, as emphasis was not placed on gender, these observations central to gender are superficial. As such more in-depth investigation is required to better understand how gender impacted the K-12 experiences of the group under study in this dissertation.

### ***Trust***

As pointed in Chapter One with regard to the theoretical frame of trust, “in schools that are improving, where trusting and cooperative adult efforts are strong, students report that they feel safe, sense that teachers care about them, and experience greater academic challenge” (Beard & Brown, 2008, p. 473). Within that context as described by Beard & Brown (2008), most study participants had a strong sense of trust relevant to their K-12 schooling. For example, as it relates to teacher care, all Gen Z’ers felt that their teachers genuinely cared about them. Lisa shared, “I can’t think of one point where I felt unaccepted by my teachers. They were all pretty fair and accepting.”

Travis advised, “I actually built a few great relationships with a few of my teachers (my senior year) who I still talk to today.” Terrence noted, “I am lucky enough to say I always felt good about my peers and the faculty at my school...my faculty and peers for the most part respected me and enjoyed my presence and I enjoyed theirs.” As it relates to academic challenge, Adrienne (Gen Y'er) shared:

...from an educational perspective, since I went to public school, I didn't have to go necessarily to a private school to get the type of education I received. Whereas if I were in an inner city community, I may have had to go to a private school to get the type of education I got.

Although they did feel positive overall, Gen Y'ers Jocelyn and Karen did not express the same degree of confidence in their K-12 school environment as the other four participants. For example, specifically centering on teacher interactions, both spoke of negative encounters with teachers. While Jocelyn shared that she didn't have a lot of positive teacher interfaces, Karen spoke of the great need to always prove herself. Beard & Brown (2008) note that a by-product of student distrust in schools “is disengagement from the educational process” (p. 473). In Karen's case, disengagement did not occur as she worked hard to overcome negative teacher perspectives. “I didn't want the professor to think that I was less than anybody else. So, I made sure I got those good grades,” Karen said. In contrast, it would appear that to some degree Jocelyn experienced disengagement as she pointed that her teachers always wanted to have conferences with her mother because she talked too much in class and failed to turn in a number of assignments. As previously noted in Chapter Four, “children who perceived a caring, emotionally supportive and meaningful relationship with their teacher also behave better

in class, are more interested in school, feel more connected to school and are more involved in school-related activities” (Rey et al., 2007, p. 357). Jocelyn did not view her teachers in a positive way as she notes, “I felt like I didn’t have a lot of positive interaction with my teachers. It was always because something was wrong.”

As an aside, I found it interesting that both Karen and Jocelyn went to the same high school (although at different times) and exhibited the least amount of confidence in their K-12 environments out of all six participants. I wonder if the teacher challenges shared by these two subjects are indicative of other Black student teacher interactions at this same school.

### **LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Although the social location of gender was identified in this dissertation, it was not central to the overall analysis. For the purposes of this dissertation I was more interested in themes related to the school experiences of stable middle to upper income African American students in general—not necessarily particular to whether one was male or female.

In addition to not conducting a concentrated analysis on gender differences germane to the school experiences of participants, I realize that my sample size for inquiry was fairly small. For example, I only examined the educational experiences of six (6) participants. Thus, I envision this dissertation as only Phase I in my investigation to better understand this sub-cultural group’s school experiences. Having said that, to build upon this study, I imagine opportunities for studying additional participants, as well as soliciting insights from parents and teachers, and closely examining experiences pertinent to gender. In addition, just as insight was gained in terms of differences in generational

placement (which I would argue is also a component of one's social location), I feel that it would be of interest to conduct a focus group, which brings together African Americans from multiple socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., poor, middle, and upper income), attending the same types of schools described in this dissertation.

Understanding these class differences within the same ethnic group, who attend predominantly White and integrated suburban school systems, may provide additional knowledge helpful toward improving educational outcomes for Black students as a whole.

Finally, while this study focused on African Americans, I recommend that similar research be conducted on other culturally marginalized groups within American K-12 school systems.

**APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA – HUMAN SUBJECTS  
PROTECTION PROGRAM APPROVAL LETTER**



Human Subjects  
Protection Program

1618 E. Helen St.  
P.O. Box 245137  
Tucson, AZ 85724-5137  
Tel: (520) 626-6721  
<http://ocr.arizona.edu/hsp>

<b>Date:</b>	March 26, 2014
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Jermara C Davis
<b>Protocol Number:</b>	1403260698
<b>Protocol Title:</b>	Race & Class: An Intergenerational Study of "Privileged" African Americans Educated in Predominantly White and Integrated Suburban Schools
<b>Level of Review:</b>	Exempt
<b>Determination:</b>	Approved

This submission meets the criteria for exemption under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

- The University of Arizona maintains a Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (FWA #00004218).
- All research procedures should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the Investigator Manual.
- Exempt projects do not have a continuing review requirement.
- Amendments to exempt projects that change the nature of the project should be submitted to the Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) for a new determination. See the Investigator Manual, 'Appendix C Exemptions,' for more information on changes that affect the determination of exemption. Please contact the HSPP to consult on whether the proposed changes need further review.
- All documents referenced in this submission have been reviewed and approved. Documents are filed with the HSPP Office. If subjects will be consented the approved consent(s) are attached to the approval notification from the HSPP Office.

Your proposal is in compliance with Federalwide Assurance 00004218. This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Investigators Manual and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that affect the protocol. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the IRB.

This project has been reviewed and approved by an IRB Chair or designee.

## APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

### Telephone Recruitment Script (Generation Y)

**PLEASE NOTE:** The following script is for potential Gen Y participants whom the researcher already knows fit the study criteria.

Hi \_\_\_\_\_ this is JerMara. How are you?

The reason for my call is because I need your help (pause). I am conducting my dissertation research which is relevant to race and class in America and I am looking for participants whom I can interview for my study. Specifically, I will be investigating the K-12 school experiences of middle and upper income African Americans educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools. The aim of the study is to better understand what it means to be economically privileged while being a member of a historically racially oppressed and culturally marginalized group.

Now \_\_\_\_\_, you grew up in a middle class/upper income African American family, right? You went to predominantly White and integrated suburban schools, right? You grew up in a two-parent household, right? And, at least one of your parents is college educated, right? Ok, that's why I'm calling you.

Now, my study is for eight weeks, beginning in January 2014, and ending in February. Over the eight weeks, I will conduct three interviews (two individual and one group) in which I am seeking your participation.

So, \_\_\_\_\_, can you help me by being a participant? (pause) Great and thanks so much! I'll be in touch with you within the next week to discuss exact dates and locations for the interviews.

Thanks again \_\_\_\_\_. Take care!

### Email Referral Script

**PLEASE NOTE:** The following referral script is for personal contacts of the researcher who work closely with Gen Z'ers. The researcher will use this script to reach out to contacts, as a means to try and find potential participants for Gen Z.

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

This is JerMara. How are you? I am emailing you because I am looking for people to participate in a research study that I am getting ready to launch. Specifically the study will be investigating the K-12 school experiences of middle and upper income African Americans who have been educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools.

\_\_\_\_\_, I am specifically looking for participants who meet the following criteria:

- 18 or 19 years of age
- African American
- Middle-class or upper income
- Come from a two-parent household, in which one or both parents are college-educated  
**NOTE:** the parents of the potential participant must be their biological or adoptive parent, or step-parent that raised them. Further, the parents must be middle-class or above.
- Attended suburban high schools in either Orange or Riverside counties in the state of California

Now \_\_\_\_\_, do you know of anyone who fits the above description? Or do you know someone, who may know someone else who fits this criteria? Do you think you can help me out by putting me in touch with them? Thanks so much for your time and I hope to hear back from you soon!

Warm regards,

JerMara

### Telephone Recruitment Script (Generation Z)

**PLEASE NOTE:** The following script is for potential Gen-Z participants who have been referred to the researcher.

Hi \_\_\_\_\_ this JerMara Welch, and I am a friend of \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ gave me your number and indicated that you were fine with me giving you a call (pause). How are you? Is now a good time for you to talk? (pause) Great!

<name of person>, the reason for my call is because I am conducting my dissertation research which is relevant to race and class in America and I am looking for participants whom I can interview for my study. Specifically, I will be investigating the K-12 school experiences of middle and upper income African Americans educated in predominantly White and integrated suburban schools. The aim of the study is to better understand what it means to be economically privileged while being a member of a historically racially oppressed and culturally marginalized group.

Now \_\_\_\_\_ , do you come from a middle class/upper income African American family? (pause) Have you attended predominantly White and integrated suburban K-12 schools? (pause) Have you grown up in a two-parent household? Does one or both of your parents have at least a bachelor's degree? Did you or do you go to high school in either Riverside or Orange County? Ok, this is why I'm calling you!

Now, my study is for eight weeks, beginning in January 2014, and ending in February. Over the eight weeks, I will conduct three interviews (two individual and one group) in which I am seeking your participation.

So, \_\_\_\_\_ , would you be willing to participate in the study? Great and thanks so much! I'll be in touch with you within the next week to discuss exact dates and locations for the interviews.

Thanks again \_\_\_\_\_. Take care!

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Interview I

1. Please describe the racial and cultural make-up of the student body at your junior high and high school.
2. Please describe the racial and cultural make-up of the faculty, staff, and administration at your junior high and high school.
3. Did you or do you live in the same community in which your junior high or high school are located?
4. How would you describe the community in which you attended junior high or high school?
5. How would you describe the community or neighborhood in which you lived when you were in junior high and high school?
6. What was it like to live in this community as an African American?
7. Did you feel comfortable as an African American at your junior high and high school? Why or why not?
8. Can you describe a normal day for you while attending your junior high or high school?
9. Within the context of race and class, how would you characterize your peer-to-peer interactions while attending junior high and high school?
10. Within the context of race and class, how would you describe your interactions with your teachers and administrators while attending your junior high and high school?
11. What experiences made you feel accepted or unaccepted by your peers while attending junior high and high school?
12. What experiences made you feel accepted or unaccepted by your teachers?
13. Do you feel that your race had an impact on how you were treated while attending junior high and high school? If so, please explain in what way.
14. Do you feel that your social class had an impact on how you were treated while attending junior and high school? Why or why not?
15. How do you feel about the education you received overall while attending your junior high and high school?
16. How do you feel overall about your social interactions while attending junior high and high school?
17. Overall, do you feel that the K-12 schools you attended were culturally sensitive to your needs as an African American? Why or why not?
18. Within the context of race and class, overall do you feel that your K-12 school experiences have been positive? Why or why not?

## Interview II

1. How do you understand or conceptualize what it means to be privileged?
2. Do you feel that being classed as a middle or upper income Black has brought you special privileges that are unavailable to low-income Blacks? Why or why not?
3. Can you describe some of these privileges?
4. While attending junior high or high school, was there ever a time in which you felt unjustly treated due to your race? If so, can you please describe this experience?
5. During this experience, did you feel that your social class helped you? Why or why not?
6. Overall, do you feel that your social class has made your interactions with peers and teachers of other racial backgrounds favorable? Why or why not?
7. Can you describe an experience where you felt singled out because of your cultural background?
8. Can you describe an experience where you felt stereotyped by your peers?
9. Can you describe an experience where you felt stereotyped by your teachers or school administration?
10. How did you handle these experiences?
11. Do you feel that these experiences have had an impact on how you view race and class in America? Why or why not? And, how so?

## Interview III

- **Interviewer: “I’d like to ask a question, but let’s start with Generation Z (ask question 1). To Gen Y, I pose the same question (ask question 1)”:**
  1. With the ushering in of our first Black President, the media has alluded to the idea of America being post-racial. Do you feel that issues surrounding race and class are still prevalent in the United States? Why or why not?
- **Interviewer: “To Gen Z, please share (ask question 2). Likewise, for Gen-Y, please share (ask question 2)”:**
  2. In your own personal experiences, what are some ways in which (if any) your school(s) perpetuated inequities as it related to race and class?
- **Interviewer: “Gen Z’ers (ask question 3). Members of Generation Y (ask question 3)”:**
  3. Do you feel that your school experiences have shaped or influenced your viewpoint on race and class in America? If so, please explain in what way.
- **Interviewer: “To everyone, whoever would like to answer first (ask questions 4 and 5)”:**

4. Do you feel that social class influences the way African Americans are treated in schools? Why or why not?
5. Which do you feel is more of a problem currently in America, racism, classism, or both? Why do you feel the way you do?
6. Do you have any questions for each other?

**NOTES:**

- By addressing each individual generation for questions 1-3, I am ensuring the sharing of perspectives across generations. Further, I am first posing questions 1-3 to Generation Z because I am trying to guard against their answers being influenced by the answers of the older generation (Gen Y).
- By having a focus group with both generations, I see this as an opportunity to see how (if any) perspectives on race and class differ by generation. It is also an opportunity to see how different generations influence the perspectives of other generations relevant to race and class.

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