Post-oppositional culture theory: Counter narratives of African American preservice teachers

Sonya Victoria Scott

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POST-OPPOSITIONAL CULTURE THEORY: COUNTER
NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
PRESERVICE TEACHERS

A Dissertation
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership

by
Sonya Victoria Scott
March 2013
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March 2013

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3-7-13 Date
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ABSTRACT

Racially correlated disparities prevalent in standardized test scores, high school dropout rates and college eligibility remain one of the most pervasive educational dilemmas facing public schools across the nation (Wiggan, 2007; Arlin Mickelson, 2003). In each instance, African Americans are identified as significantly underperforming when compared to the average performance of White students. Despite the robust body of literature on African American underachievement, educational reform efforts continuously fail to achieve results in closing the achievement gap and improve educational outcomes for African American students. In addition, the plausible explanations of African American academic underperformance are grounded in cultural deficit views and ignore the dysconscious racism that continues to function in educational practices. Utilizing a critical race theory framework, this study contributes knowledge learned through a phenomenological analysis of twelve African American preservice teachers in-depth interviews to expand understandings of the role of racial identity in schooling that translate into gaps in academic achievement and persistence. The findings of this study provide a counter narrative to the notion that African Americans resist schooling. As such, voices of participants' can be utilized to implement social changes in educational policies and practices towards closing the achievement gap and creating pathways to recruit more African Americans to the field of education. To further support these findings, it is recommended that future studies consider conducting a comparative analysis
of other fields in which African Americans are underrepresented to determine similar constructs of schooling experiences and viable career choices.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my gratitude and honor to God. For it is through His favor that I had the courage and strength to pursue this dream. It has been an amazing journey with a multitude of blessings along the way that have only inspired me to continue to serve Him by helping others to achieve their highest potential through education.

Second, I would like to acknowledge my phenomenal committee. Thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Louie F. Rodriguez for your patience and giving of your time to meet with me. Your theoretical knowledge and expertise in qualitative methodologies was instrumental to my research and development into a scholar. You have been an inspiration to pursue higher education and seek out publication opportunities. Dr. Thelma Moore-Steward, you truly have been an excellent mentor. Thank you for continuously supporting and encouraging me. Your love and friendship have been my motivation to persist. I have enjoyed our conversations and many laughs along the way. My sincerest gratitude to Dr. Mary Texiera, thank you for introducing me to Stereotype Threat and always providing insightful feedback. From our first meeting in Dr. Rodriguez course, you have been an inspiration to me. I appreciate your service as a committee member.

I would like to acknowledge my family for their support and understanding over the past few years. I wasn't always available to do many family outings and
always had work to do. I made many sacrifices to achieve this goal and knowing you understood and supported me, made it all worthwhile.

I would like to also acknowledge the members of Cohort 4 – Aja, Carly, Christy, Greg, Edwin and Audrey. You all have made a lasting impression on me and changed my views in many ways. I am honored to have shared this journey with each of you. C4 is the BOMB!!

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the many individuals that were unaware of the role they played in making a contribution to my research. To the CSUSB faculty members – Dr. Pat Arlin, Dr. John Winslade, Dr. Donna Schnorr, Dr. Debbie Stine, Dr. David Stine, and Dr. Enrique Murrillo, thank you for either reading my work, providing feedback or giving me an idea during a conversation that was beneficial to my research. Thank you to the twelve individuals that volunteered to participate in my study, I appreciate your openness and honesty in sharing your story with me. Thank you to my wonderful colleagues and administrators at Etiwanda School District for expressing interest in my research and supporting my endeavors. Thank you to my many supporters – friends and extended family members for cheering me on and keeping me motivated and focused. Thank you! Thank you!
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of my father Willie Hollins, for he is the reason for my educational career. I would also like to dedicate this work to my children and grandchildren in hopes that they too, will pursue their dreams and aspire to make a positive impact in the world.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Real Crisis in Education

Across the nation, high school dropout rates, low-test scores and the shortage of qualified credentialed teachers have become characteristics of public schools that are failing and have received much media attention. The deterioration of the traditional model of public education is further spotlighted by the growth of charter schools. Charter schools are regarded as providing a higher quality of education in comparison to public schools as depicted in the 2010 documentary, “Waiting for Superman”.

Serving as an exhaustive review of the crisis in public education, the theme of “Waiting for Superman” suggested that the plight of public education has become so disheartening, that parents are willing to participate in a “lottery” for charter school entry. The film portrayed many families residing in urban communities that actively sought enrollment in a charter school in the hopes of obtaining a good education and promising future for their child. This notion begs the question of what defines a “good education.”

On a national level, the federal implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) defines a “good education” as high student performance scores on standardized tests. Public schools across the country are required to adopt a standards based curriculum to ensure a standard instruction is provided.
to all students. Student academic achievement is then measured through the use of standardized assessments as indicators of a "good education". Although the initial intentions of NCLB were to ensure all students receive a "good education," it denies the real crisis of inequality in education (Zhao, 2009).

As public schools are required to conform to a standardized curriculum, most low performing schools in urban areas focus on the main subject areas of Language Arts and Math that will be annually assessed. The standard curriculum provides consistency in instruction and outlines what students are expected to learn as determined by the standard of the dominant culture. Thus, what is considered standard and what knowledge and skills are needed for success is based upon normalized White standards (Williams & Lands, 2006). The standardized curriculum ignores student diversity and lessens the possibility of exposure to a culturally relevant curriculum. Thus, students of color are deprived of opportunities to develop strengths and talents in other subject areas (Zhao, 2009).

Research has shown that culturally relevant pedagogies recognize the diverse background of marginalized ethnic groups and provides a way for minority students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding in school (Ladson-Billing, 1995). However, acknowledging diversity and the cultural backgrounds of the U.S. minority student population was not a goal of the NCLB. Instead, NCLB was intended to establish certain criteria’s to address the gaps in
academic achievement but not the hegemonic practices that initially created the disparities.

The accountability measures of NCLB further pronounced the gaps in academic achievement between ethnic groups placing responsibilities on schools and teachers. As a result, educators have used assessment results not as a means to improve instruction but inadvertently further limit educational opportunities for minority students through tracking and placement in lower level classes, which inadequately prepare students for college. Williams & Land (2006) contend that the school reform effort of NCLB ensures that the children left behind are students of color.

Ultimately, the achievement gap confirms the failure of public education to deliver a quality education for minority students. Yet, the federal accountability measures of NCLB mandates have a neutral foundation based upon color-blind ideologies, which perpetuates institutionalized racism. This color-blind ideology ignores the social and cultural contexts in which minority students depend and fails to see the economic and educational disparities that are prevalent at all levels of schooling (Williams & Lands, 2006).

The disparities in educational opportunities and access to quality instructional resources are systemic problems that reduce the academic success for many students, particularly students of lower socioeconomic status. Thus, failing schools are most likely to exist in urban areas in which the student populations are predominantly ethnic minorities, specifically African Americans.
and Latinos. Rodríguez (2008) posits that students attending schools in urban areas are most vulnerable to experience dilapidated school facilities, insufficient access to resources and low expectations by unqualified teachers. These explicit differences in educational opportunities neglect the needs of marginalized students. NCLB places emphasis on high stakes testing without consideration of the realities that exist within schools that limits minority student potential.

NCLB’s aim to improve public education has cultivated many new problems and constructs a much deeper crisis. The belief that public education is failing to provide students with basic skills and knowledge has led to an “increasing distrust of educators, disregard of students’ individual interests, destruction of local autonomy and capacity for innovation, and disrespect for human values” (Zhao, 2009, p. 6). Students are not failing to perform nor dropping out of school due to a lack of intellectual abilities. The structural determinants of schooling mechanisms reproduce social inequalities in various forms (Fernandes, 1988). The dehumanizing effects of a system rooted in dominant ideologies that remain discriminatory in nature are internalized by minority students. Despite federal reform efforts, the crisis in education teeters on the educational policies and practices that continue to serve the mainstream and are resistant towards diversity. (Hilliard, 2001; Zhao, 2009).
Dominant Ideologies and African American Social Status

During the early stages of America's development, the influx of immigrants threatened the superiority of the dominant group. Immigrant populations including enslaved Africans brought forth differing religious and cultural values that were considered indigenous and required deculturalization. Deculturalization stripped away evidences of heritage cultures, customs, values and traditions. Immigrants were forced to abandon their heritage and subjected to a deculturalization process in which schools provided. Schools were a viable means of transferring the ideological views to members within the society. Schooling served as political and ideological management to ensure survival of the dominant ideologies and social order (Spring, 2007; Watkins, 2001).

Through deculturalization, the immigrant culture and heritage languages were replaced by English and Anglo-American cultural values. For most immigrants, particularly enslaved Africans as involuntary and subordinate immigrants, deculturalization reflected the social and racial ideologies of the dominant group. Enslaved Africans were characterized as a deficit culture, inferior to the dominant culture. Deculturalization became essential to the suppression and dependency of enslaved Africans upon the slave owner. Deculturalization and slave management methodologies were widely practiced giving rise to physical and psychological control over enslaved Africans. The psychological impact of assimilation on enslaved Africans made them vulnerable to cultural domination (Spring, 2007; Mitchell, 2008).
Bartolome (2007) posits the assimilationist ideology of deculturalization reinforced the belief that subordinate groups, including enslaved Africans, must be taught to conform to the norms of the dominant culture. As a sanctioned practice of cultural assimilation, deculturalization manifested into discriminatory cultural and social norms further asserting the belief of enslaved Africans as inferior (Bartolome, 2007; Ogbu 2003). The historical aspect of this form of internal colonization of minority groups in America perpetuates the master narrative of the dominant group which remains relevant today, specifically within the school setting (Carter-Andrews, 2009).

The dominant social narrative depicts harmful racial ideologies and deficit based views of non-white minority groups that legitimize the dominant social order. It operates as a form of dysconscious racism (King, 1993) that justifies the socioeconomic advantages of the cultural elite. The social and economic hierarchy assumes the social order is fair and based upon individual merit. Further, they believe that disadvantaged cultural groups are accountable for their own disadvantages despite the social barriers and inequities that inhibit socioeconomic mobility. A review of the literature indicates that racial disparities in academic achievement goes beyond simple ethnic differences but are historicized hegemonic ideologies that have become the standard propensity within education.
Dominant Ideologies in Education

Historically, the United States has a tradition of racist ideologies and discriminatory practices that inhibit the social mobility of certain ethnic groups. Because schools serve as a social equalizer, Williams and Land (2006, p. 581) contend that racism can be observed in the “development, implementation, interpretation, and implications of various educational policies”. The support of these policies and practices are harmful to minority student populations, which continue to reproduce the existing social order.

The dominant ideologies of U.S. society informed educational practices throughout the history of our nation. “The pervasiveness of dominant ideologies as perpetuated in schools were unseen and perceived as being natural. Thus, unconscious acceptance is perceived as legitimate and normal” (Bartolome, 2008, p.14). It is within this framework of thought that supports hegemonic beliefs that justify the existing social order. The early histories of American schooling frequently disclose the political, social, and economic interest of the dominant culture.

Critical scholars have found the societal forms of overt oppression and imposed restrictions were also, recurring themes in the educational history of minority groups. Particularly, African Americans have been the recipients of multifarious forms of oppression in and outside of schooling. From being enslaved to Jim Crow laws, from segregation to desegregation, from affirmative action to the gaps in academic achievement, the social status of African
Americans has had an enduring effect on educational issues for African Americans. Given the social and racial differences, White teachers were predisposed to view African American students through a deficit lens. The societal inequities formed a dysconscious racism revealed in the teaching methodologies of White teachers thus justifying White hegemony (Bartolome, 2004; King 1991).

**Shortage of African American Teachers**

Prior to the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, African American students were taught primarily by African American teachers in segregated schools which, despite their separate and unequal status, ironically provided “liberatory spaces” to culturally affirm students (Frederick & View, 2011, p. 572). African American teachers used subversive strategies to instill cultural consciousness and self-reliance in African American students. African American teachers were role models and took on the role of surrogate parents, counselors and disciplinarians providing a unique schooling experience for African American students (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Frederick & View, 2011).

During this time period, African American teachers held themselves accountable for the academic achievement of students as part of their fictive kinship or collective identity and a means of racial uplift suggesting that success
for one meant success for all. Thus, education was valued within the African American community for "individual enrichment and social progress" (King, 1993, p. 117).

Desegregation eventually removed the caring support system provided by African American teachers to African American students. The absence of African American teachers required African American students to conform to traditional structures of an educational system designed to meet the needs of mainstream culture. Questions regarding the cognitive abilities of African American students gave rise to systematic victimization of African American students by White teachers. Problems of low self-esteem and decreased aspirations emerged as African American students were stigmatized and tracked into special education classes (Hudson and Holmes, 1994). Thus, the intangible (psychological and social) factors within schools became complicated and damaging for students of color resulting in racially correlated disparities in academic excellence.

Racially Correlated Disparities

One of the most pervasive educational dilemmas facing public schools across the nation are the racially correlated disparities prevalent in standardized test scores, high school dropout rates and college eligibility (Wiggan, 2007; Mickelson, 2003). In each instance, minority student academic performance is compared to the average academic performance of White students as a benchmark of academic achievement. The racial comparison of ethnic groups'
performance reveals gaps in academic achievement and persistence, which generally identifies African Americans as the most significant underperforming group. African American students are disproportionately identified as lagging behind White students.

Educational data also suggest that White students outperform African American students in all aspects of education, from preschool to higher education, with the exception of the high school dropout rate. The dropout rate for African American students is often double that of White students. In 2010, the dropout rate for African American students residing in San Bernardino County, the largest county within the U.S. was 28.1% and 16.2% for White students. The high school completion rate for African American students was 6.8% compared to 35.5% of White students (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). These disparities are not only present in empirical data from K-12 educational settings but are also present in higher education. Table 1 illustrates these disparities.

In California, the college eligibility rate for African American high school graduates was 26.8% compared to 40.5% for White students. The college completion rate was 40% for White students and only 9.2% for African American students. Of the students enrolled in college, only 11% of African American students were Education majors compared to 36% of Whites (National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). These startling statistics in an era of school accountability suggest that the empirical data and plausible explanations of
contributing factors to the gap have continuously failed to remedy the achievement gap across ethnic groups.

Table 1. San Bernardino County Academic Persistence Rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dropout within 1st year</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout within 4 years</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Graduates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates UC/CSU eligible</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Time College</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Completion</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Majors</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Summary

The crisis in education lies in the historical establishment of the American educational system that has failed to be responsive to minority students, particularly African Americans. America's history of structural inequality within high minority schools has excluded students of color from the social, political and
economic opportunities that education should provide. These inequalities are demonstrated in the racially correlated disparities in academic achievement, academic persistence and career opportunities for minority students (Brayboy, Castagno & Maughan, 2007). The focus of this study is to examine the underrepresentation of academically persistent African Americans that overcome institutional mechanisms that inadequately prepare them for college and limit their opportunities to make choices about their futures.

Statement of the Problem

The racially correlated disparity in education has a significant impact on life outcomes and fosters racial division inside and outside of the school setting. The racially correlated disparities are historically rooted from African Americans being socially characterized as a “stigmatized and devalued group” (Chavous, Hilkene-Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood and Zimmerman, 2003). Thus, it is not surprising that the gap in academic achievement and persistence between African American and White students has remained constant for over 50 years.

The lack of academic achievements and persistence of African Americans maintain the status quo of the dominant group. It is a century-old tradition that proposes that educational equity remains unfinished business in African American education. The national imperative to address the problems reveals that the underperformance of African American students is ultimately a deterrent
towards progress in a competitive democratic society (Dilworth, 1989). Even more concerning is the lack of African American representation in the teaching force as role models for African American students.

African American students' underperformance reduces the likelihood of African Americans pursuing higher education and entering the teaching profession. Although, the teaching force has traditionally been White female, the percentage of African American teachers has become an absent resource. Dilworth (1989) contends that the declining number of African American teachers has been even more surprising given the increase in minority student populations. Thus, the need for more African American teachers is not to support the notion that only African American teachers can teach African American students but to provide all students with a variety of perspectives and role models that only a diverse teaching force can provide.

Purpose of the Study

This proposed study seeks to contribute knowledge learned through an examination of African American preservice teachers' narratives about identity and schooling and its connection with gaps in academic achievement and persistence. This study also seeks to counter the social narrative that African Americans resist schooling by examining African American postbaccalaureate college students that have developed a passion for learning as demonstrated in their persistence and motivations to enter the teaching profession.
Working within the theoretical frameworks of Oppositional Culture Theory, Stereotype Threat and Critical Race Theory, this study argues for social change in educational practices in order to close the achievement gap and creating pathways to recruit more African Americans to the field of education.

Research Questions

To exam African American preservice teachers' academic persistence and career aspirations in education, the research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do African American preservice teachers describe their experiences within the K-12 school system?
2. In what ways do African American preservice teachers define and describe their motivation to pursue careers in education?
3. What role, if any, does race play into their decision to become an educator?
4. In what ways do African American preservice teachers define and describe their persistence to pursue higher levels of education?

Assumptions

This study presumes that the social historical elements of institutionalized racism are still applicable to African American student achievement today. This study also presumes that the schools are resistant and oppositional towards
minority student populations as demonstrated in educational policies and practices. It is also considered that an understanding of motivational factors of high achieving African Americans would improve the academic achievement of African American students and eradicate the gaps in achievement. In addition, it was presumed that this study would help create pathways for more minorities to pursue careers in education.

Limitations

This study was limited to the examination of the literature on John Ogbu’s Oppositional Culture Theory and Claude Steele’s Stereotype Threat thesis. It was further limited to the examination of narratives of African American postbaccalaureate college students actively pursuing a teaching credential with no prior experience of teaching. The generalizability of African American preservice teachers’ motivation, academic persistence, and career aspirations that emerge from the data collection was limited by the interview questions and the participants’ willingness to share their story.

Delimitations

A limitation presented in this study was that the research was limited by the research questions that guided this study. The research questions primarily centered on the schooling experiences, motivations, academic persistence and career aspirations of African American college students. This study was further
limited by the sample population and the research design. Using a qualitative narrative analysis design, the data was collected through interviews with African American college credential students to counter the oppositional culture theory of African Americans resistance towards education.

Definition of Terms

**African American**
African American is defined as black people residing in the United States that are considered descendants of African slaves.

**Academic Persistence**
Academic Persistence is defined as students that have continued their education after high school and have obtained a Bachelor’s degree or higher.

**Dysconscious Racism** (King, 1991)
A form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges.

**Microaggressions** (Solórzano, 2001)
Subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously.

**Preservice Teachers**
Preservice teacher is defined as teachers that are enrolled in teacher credentialing courses but have not yet begun teaching in a full time capacity.
Stereotype Threat in the Air (Steele, 1997)

A situational threat of being negatively stereotyped which can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The gap between African American and White students academic performance is well known. It is common knowledge that African American students are more likely to drop out of school earlier than White students. There is very little debate over the fact that African American students underperform when compared to White students in all academic areas even when sharing similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Ogbu, 1991). However, what are questionable are the probable explanations for the differences in academic achievement between African American and White students (Mickelson & Velasco, 2006).

The literature is inundated with research providing diverse perspectives and explanations for the gaps in school performance between African American and White students (Oates, 2009,Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002). The most prominent explanations are those that seem to inadvertently support the dominant ideologies suggesting social and cultural deficits of African Americans. One such perspective suggests adverse cultural predispositions towards schooling among African Americans and is known as the Oppositional Culture thesis (Ogbu, 1991; 1992a).
The Oppositional Culture thesis evolved out of the influential work on the educational attainment of adolescent minority groups by the late cultural anthropologist, John Ogbu (1938-2003). Much of his work focused on African American high school students and the influences of cultural frames of reference on education, including cultural inversion and oppositional behaviors. Based upon the resistance model (Willis, 1977), Ogbu's research evolved into the Oppositional Culture hypothesis. Within the field of education, the popularity of the Oppositional Culture hypothesis strengthened the deficit views of African Americans in and outside of schooling. The perception of African American students as academically disengaged and being negatively predisposed to schooling and achievement has resonated in the public mind (Tyson, 2002). The cultural explanation of African American low student performance coincides with the prevailing public imagery of African Americans as intellectually inferior to White people.

Ogbu's explanation for the achievement gap merely increased negative perceptions of African American students, which in turn formed an institutional oppositional culture frame of reference towards minority groups in education. These negative perceptions are systemic and subject minority groups, particularly African Americans, to “diminishing stereotypes and low expectations” (Steele, 2003, p. 110). Examining the role stereotypes play in schools provides an understanding of the schooling experiences that African Americans encounter
which has an influence on academic persistence and career aspirations in education (Steele, 1997).

Ogbu’s research on African Americans’ community and cultural factors has influenced scholars and educators perceptions of African American's attitudes towards schooling. The belief that African American culture resists schooling and education is not valued in the African American community makes Black students vulnerable to devaluation in academia (Inzlicht & King, 2010; Tyson, 2002). Despite the fact that all Black people are not African American, structural ideologies held by teachers coupled with the deficit views of Black people have proven to impair academic performance. These structural ideologies have evolved into a form of “dysconscious racism” within the school environment (King, 1991, p.133) in which the continuity of policies and practices are not questioned by practitioners and stakeholders.

Dysconscious racism serves as an impaired ideological foundation that ignores issues of race and accepts dominant white privileges as being natural. The structural forces and culturally sanctioned assumptions and beliefs about non-white groups and racial inequalities are not questioned (King, 1991). The perception of African Americans possessing anti-school and anti-achievement cultural beliefs does not question the social historical predicament of African Americans nor the history of education for African Americans as a factor. Instead, the repeated theme of African American students being culturally
opposed to education implicitly implies education and achievement are natural cultural beliefs and values of White people.

Within the school environment, dysconsciousness functions as power based upon the historical predisposition of hegemonic ideologies. The literature indicates that racial disparities in academic achievement goes beyond simple ethnic differences but are historicized hegemonic ideologies that have become the standard within education (King, 1991). For example, high stakes testing, academic tracking, disciplinary practices, and teacher perceptions of minority students are contemporary forms of racism and hegemonic ideologies embedded in educational policies. Schools’ academic tracking policies often “resemble the economic and racial disparities” rooted in U.S. Society and limits minority student access to “educational advancement opportunities” (Williams & Land, 2006, p. 581). Thus, not only are minority groups, particularly African American students victimized by these forms of institutionalized racism but anti-achievement attitudes among African Americans are over generalized and supports facets of the Stereotype Threat hypothesis (Aronson, Fried, and Good, 2002; Davis, Aronson & Salina, 2006; Harper, 2007; Osborne & Walker, 2006; Steele, 1997; Tyson, 2002). African American students’ underperformance is not solely attributed to their knowledge and skill level but related to an “unfair disadvantage” (Kellow & Jones, 2008, p. 116) compared to White students by the stereotype threat in the air (Steele, 1997).
The notion of a stereotype "threat in the air" suggests that, "African Americans must contend with negative stereotypes about their abilities" within the school setting (Steele, 1997, p.613). The prevalence of negative stereotypes of African Americans stem from a history of racial inequalities and hegemonic beliefs. Thus, Critical Race Theory is a framework in which racial discourse in education can be examined and serve as a means of challenging hegemonic ideologies which support deficit notions of minority groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The literature review presented in this study examines the dominant social narrative of African Americans resistance towards schooling presented in the Oppositional Culture framework and ties it to the critical literature on the Stereotype Threat Hypothesis. To add to the current literature, this research applies tenets of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework in challenging the Oppositional Culture Hypothesis. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, Ogbu's explanation for African Americans low performance lacks relevance since it does not question the social barriers or structural factors that limit opportunities for African Americans. Nor does Ogbu's theory give credence to high achieving African Americans who have been able to navigate through the school system that was not designed to meet their needs. Furthermore, Ogbu's theory does not account for high achieving African American students that value education as demonstrated in their academic persistence and interest in careers in education.
Oppositional Culture Theory

The oppositional culture theory explanation for racial gaps in academic achievement is one of the most noted bodies of research contributing to an understanding of African American students lower academic performance compared to White students (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Akom, 2003; Carter-Andrews, 2009; Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007; Downey, 2008; Foley, 2005; Fisher, 2005; Gibson, 2005; Griffin, 2002; Harris, 2011, 2008, 2006; Harris & Robinson, 2007; Lundy, 2003; Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 2003, 1992, 1991; Solomon, 1992; Whaley & Noel, 2011; Wiggins, 2007; and Wilson, 2003;). Specifically the popularity of the oppositional culture thesis grew, as it seemed to provide a provocative theoretical explanation that accounted for cultural differences in academic achievement between African American and White students (Harris, 2011; Downey, 2008). The Oppositional Culture framework posits that African Americans have “developed a cultural norm of underachievement in response to inequitable educational opportunities and discriminatory social policies” and practices within the United States (Harris, 2011, p.53; Ogbu, 1998). This cultural explanation became increasingly more attractive as scholars continuously failed to explain differences in academic performance between African American and White students based upon similar socioeconomic status (Downey, 2008).

Based upon African Americans social positioning within American society, studies have suggested that socioeconomic factors contribute to African
American student underperformance (Ogbu, 1978; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). African American families generally have less access to resources and are most frequently concentrated within lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Many African American students reside in single parent homes under poor conditions and tend to be more transient between schools and communities due to rental living (Downey, 2008). Conversely, when socioeconomic status is not a variable and both African American and White students are of similar socioeconomic status, African American students still perform lower than Whites (Ogbu, 1991). The rationale for why gaps continue to exist baffles educators and scholars. However, Ogbu's research examining the gaps between middle class African American and White students' performance in Shaker Heights provided some empirical data suggesting cultural differences surpass socioeconomic status (Ogbu, 1991).

Ogbu's cultural explanation seemed to substantiate the existence of variables that have a greater impact on academic achievement than socioeconomic status. As Lundy (2003) asserts, the structural argument of the oppositional framework relies on the cultural deprivation model drawn from the culture of poverty theory. The culture of poverty theory posits that the systemic burden of poverty perpetuates a cycle of poverty from generation to generation (Lewis, 1966). Thus, Ogbu maintains the academic underperformance of "African Americans is a functional adaptation to the lower structural position they will occupy in adult life, which does not compel them to seek higher educational
qualifications" (Lundy, 2003, p. 453). However, the oppositional culture theory shifted emphasis from the influences of socioeconomic status to deficient motivations and values that impede academic performance leading to student disengagement.

Ogbu’s (2003) interest in the academic disengagement of minority student populations led to an examination of disparities between middle class African American and White students residing in an affluent Ohio community. He found that even when controlling for socioeconomic status, African Americans still trailed behind their White counterparts. Ogbu suggests that a cultural framework would provide an alternative explanation for the academic disparities that extend beyond socioeconomic status between African American and White students.

Specifically, Ogbu’s (2003) study examined the academic performance of middle class African American students residing in the affluent Shaker Heights community of a Cleveland suburb. African American students demonstrated high academic achievement and generally performed higher than other African American students attending schools across the nation. Despite the African American student’s superior performance compared to other African Americans, their performance was still less than their White counterparts at Shaker Heights. Ogbu’s explanation for the differences in academic performance between the Shaker Height’s African American and White students was attributed to "community forces" (Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007).
Community Forces

Ogbu contends that "community forces" are the beliefs and attitudes within African American culture that leads to students' academic underperformance and disengagement in school (Ogbu, 2003). The general mistrust of the school system by African American parents and students, for example, was considered the kind of disruptive attitudes that inhibit student performance. Ogbu concluded that the Shaker Heights' African American families did not value education in the same manner as White families residing within the community (Ogbu, 2003, Comeaux & Jayakumar, 2007). His analysis of the role of the African American family and culture as the underlying reason for the lower performance of Shaker Heights African American student population is entrenched in his earlier work on understanding the differences in minority groups' school adjustment and academic performance within the context of the cultural and community forces.

According to Ogbu (1992, p. 288) the "complex and interlocking forces" that generally influence students' academic performance differs for minority students. Minority students must contend with forces that derive from their own communities and encompass every aspect of their lives. It is these varying frames of reference, which characterize ethnic minorities' culture and language. The frames of reference are the cultural models, which define minority groups' understandings of their world and guide their interpretations of events in their world. It is also the acquiescence or lack thereof, towards relationships with the dominant culture and social institutions created by the dominant group.
Collectively, the reference frames become elements of the community forces that affect the strategies minority groups use to navigate the structural factors present in schools (Ogbu, 1995, 1992).

**Cultural Differences**

Educational strategies are continuously influenced by community forces and define the ways in which minority groups interact and respond to schooling (Ogbu, 1992). Minority groups’ responses to social systems, such as schools are often determined by their history of oppression and racial discrimination by the dominant group. Solomon (1992) asserts the oppression of minority groups such as Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans by the dominant culture for extended lengths of time throughout history have made schooling an arena of conflict. School learning is culturally discontinuous as minority students are expected to learn the dominant culture and standard curriculum taught in school which differs from their own culture (Ogbu, 1982). Despite similar experiences of social and structural forms of racism and discrimination, the ways in which minority groups respond to school is different (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu, 1995). Evidence of this has been found in comparative research studies (Ogbu, 1991) on minority status and education that suggest significant variability between minority groups. For examples, Koreans migrated as involuntary immigrants (colonial subjects) in Japan and underperform compared to the dominant group. In the United States, Koreans migrate as voluntary immigrants and perform just as well as other Asian
American students (Ogbu, 1991). Ogbu notes the variability in responses relates to the minority groups status as a voluntary or involuntary immigrant, which is informed by significant cultural differences. These differences, according to Ogbu, include behavior, language, artifacts, and ideals (Ogbu, 1995).

Although Ogbu contends that cultural differences affect minority response to schooling, he later purports that cultural differences have little impact on some groups (Ogbu, 1992; 1991). Ogbu argues that as different cultures continuously interact in society and within schools, the differences become less pronounced. Members of subordinate cultures acquire an understanding of cultural differences and begin to behave in culturally appropriate ways when interacting with other groups. Individual members of minority groups are able to cross cultural boundaries and successfully assimilate into mainstream society. However, African Americans have not been able to fully assimilate as the dominant culture continues to discriminate against individuals based upon race.

The ability of minority group members from different cultures to cross cultural boundaries is dependent upon their cultural frames of reference. Ogbu noted:

It is easiest for people with similar cultural frames of reference to cross cultural boundaries (e.g., mainstream white middle class people from Los Angeles and San Francisco); next are populations with different but not oppositional cultural frames of reference (e.g., French and Americans; immigrant minorities in the U.S.); finally, crossing cultural boundaries is
most problematic for populations with oppositional cultural frames of reference (e.g., colonized people involved in messianic movements; involuntary minorities) (Ogbu, 1995, p.197).

Thus, Ogbu (1995) argues various cultural frames of reference of minority groups as immigrants and nonimmigrant's determines their ability to obtain upward social mobility. However, both immigrants and nonimmigrants have an awareness that their own minority culture and language are not accepted by mainstream culture and this necessitates crossing cultural boundaries. Furthermore, in American society, both immigrants and nonimmigrants are expected to adapt to the cultural frames of reference of the dominant group in school and the workplace.

Understanding cultural differences and cultural frames of reference provides an explanation of why some minority groups perform well in school and others do not (Ogbu, 1992, 1995; Solomon 1992). It appears the most academically successful minorities differ from the less academically successful minorities by the community forces that guide them (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). Based upon this notion, African Americans’ minority status as an involuntary minority is key to understanding how community forces channel motivation in academic achievement and persistence.

**Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities**

According to Ogbo (1992, p.290), the explanation for why some minority groups perform well in school while others do not is largely due to the community
factors that appear to be relevant to the "group’s histories and self perceptions vis-à-vis the dominant group". The minority groups that appear to be most successful in school are immigrants from other countries, while the less successful minorities are often those that are considered indigenous or involuntary immigrants (Ogbu, 1991).

To explain the variability in academic performance between minority groups, Ogbu (1992) contends classifying minorities into specific groups provides an understanding of how history and self-perception shape community forces. Thus, he classifies minority groups into three types:

(1) Autonomous minorities - Minority populations that are culturally or linguistically distinct but are not politically, socially or economically subordinate to major degrees such as Jews and Mormons.

(2) Voluntary minorities - Immigrant populations that have migrated to the United States from other countries in seek of greater opportunities including political and economic freedoms. Despite subordination by the dominant group, their positive expectations for a better life influence their perceptions of America and schooling.

(3) Involuntary minorities - Minority groups that did not choose to come to America and endured a forced assimilation into society because of slavery, conquest or colonization (Ogbu, 1992, 1991).

From a cultural-ecological perspective, Ogbu’s classification of minorities into specific categories explains the disproportionate high rates of school failure of
subordinate minorities in the context of historical and cultural forces (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

According to Ogbu, subordinate minorities such as involuntary immigrants do not assimilate into American society with the expectation of a better future, which is characteristic of most immigrant populations. Ogbu (1991) argues that involuntary minorities such as African Americans often "resent the loss of their former freedoms and interpret social, political, and economic barriers against them as undeserved oppression" (p.437). Involuntary minorities experience more persistent forms of discrimination and often develop counterproductive schooling behaviors (Harris & Robinson, 2007). African American students' low academic performance is an adaptive response to a history of limited social and economic opportunities as slave descendants (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). As a result, involuntary minorities' cultural models lead to skepticism about social mobility through the use of mainstream strategies and increase their distrust of schooling as a viable means for overcoming oppression (Ogbu, 1992).

In contrast, Akom (2003) states voluntary minorities have a more optimistic view towards assimilation into society. Their cultural frames of reference allow them to accept mainstream strategies for social mobility. Hardships are viewed as temporary obstacles that can be overcome through education and hard work. For many voluntary immigrants, education is often viewed as a primary means for achieving opportunities that led them to come to the United States (Harris & Robinson, 2007). Their cultural models encourage
students to not only perform like their White counterparts but also to academically surpass White students. Thus, voluntary minorities do not adopt counterproductive schooling behaviors and are less likely to be critical of unfair treatment and institutional discrimination by the dominant group (Ogbu, 1992).

Ogbu (1992) purports that the differing elements of the community forces and cultural models of minority groups work in combination with societal factors, which produce educational strategies that either enhance or discourage academic achievement. Ogbu theorized that involuntary minorities understand their opportunities are constrained and develop an oppositional culture towards schooling (Diamond et al., 2007). This oppositional culture, according to Ogbu, stems from generational transference of family oral histories of social injustice that carries emotional attachments and discourages adopting attitudes and behaviors that enhance academic success.

In the case of African Americans, Ogbu contends that the community forces entrenched in the Black experience in America contributes to the failure of African American students. Parents pass on adverse social beliefs that society will not reward Black students' academic achievements in the same manner as White students. Although this is a coping strategy to prepare African American children to handle racism and discrimination, it illustrates how the struggle for equality continues to resonate within the African American community.

Institutionalized racism and discrimination has been so pervasive in American society, that even academic persistence and educational aspirations do not
guarantee greater life outcomes for African Americans. Many believe that simply following the rules of behavior for achievement and success have little significance in terms of upward mobility. In the end, African Americans' culturally sanctioned attitudes appear to be anti-academic success oriented, according to Ogbu.

Collective Identity

Ogbru's theory of African Americans' oppositional collective identity is based upon their distinctive history of enslavement, oppression and discrimination in the United States (Fisher, 2005). Ogbru (2003) described African Americans' collective identity as the product of a prolonged history of oppression and racial victimization experiences pre and post slavery as involuntary minorities. African Americans forced migration to America is a distinctive characteristic of the African American experience which forged collectivism and established fictive kinships within the African American community (Chatters, Taylor, Jayakody, 1994; Fordham, 1988).

Historically, many negative traits and characteristics have been projected onto African Americans as not being "socially, culturally, and biologically" acceptable (Ogbru, 2007, p.439). As victims of ongoing social exploitation, African Americans have employed a variety of strategies to develop, protect, and maintain their collective racial identity in response to their social position. Ogbru (2007) contends that as folk theories of American society emerged within the African American community, various patterns of social beliefs, understandings,
and behaviors developed amongst African Americans reflecting a sense of collectivism. Thus, the historical effects of African Americans daily lives formed a culture that merged "indigenous cultures of the past with the cruel reality of life in segregated America" (Hecht, Collier & Ribeau, 1993).

According to Thomas & Columbus (2009) a person's identity and the development of identity is established by culture. However, an individual's identity development is often trumped by racial identity with regard to influence and significance. Harper & Tuckman (2006) also stated that African Americans frame an identity that goes beyond physical characteristics and includes the historical experiences of an oppressed and stigmatized people. The formation of a collective racial identity thus entails the perception of commonality amongst members based upon a racial heritage. This collective identity for African Americans acted as a shield to racism enabling African Americans to develop a psychological resiliency to prejudices and discrimination (Thomas, Howard, Caldwell, Faison & Jackson, 2009).

Through a collective cultural development, a racial identity was cultivated that gave African Americans a sense of pride and self worth as members of a larger ethnic group. Ogbu (2004) states that African Americans communicate their collective identity with cultural symbols and emblems reflective of their collective experiences. Hence, the attempts to develop an appropriate name – Negro, Black or African American, characterizes Africans struggles as an marginalized people and illustrates a sense of togetherness and collective racial
identity that becomes an essential component of racial socialization for African American families (Ogbu, 2007). A collective identity system served as different functions for African Americans including maintaining their self worth in response to White denigration (Ogbu, 1991).

According to Ogbru’s (2007) premise of a collective identity, the African American collective identity system is quite unique. The distinct features of African American’s collective identity system are the ways in which the collective problems historically faced by all Black people evolved into collective solutions. These collective solutions had a positive impact on African American coping strategies such as the “Black Folk” theories of making it and the racial socialization process involved in child rearing practices within the African American family. However, the collective solutions also forged adverse outcomes producing disillusionment, ambivalence, and lack of academic effort (Ogbu, 2007).

As Ogbru (1991) illustrates in Figure 1, the involuntary incorporation of African Americans in U.S. society has lead to subsequent exploitation revealed in symbolic, relational, and instrumental dispositions. Ogbru argues

For generations, after emancipation, whites exploited blacks both instrumentally (e.g., economic exploitation through a job ceiling) ad expressively or symbolically (e.g., through cultural denigration). The instrumental exploitation was accomplished in several ways, but in the
context of formal education, economic exploitation has been primary (Ogbu, 1991, p.438).

Ogbu contends the “job ceiling and related barriers gave rise to Black Folk theories about making it that seem to discourage serious attitudes and effort toward schoolwork” (p.446). The opportunities for future employment and social mobility through education and schooling credentials have created disillusionment within the African American community. Education has not been a viable means for success for African Americans as it has been for White people. As a result, Ogbu contends African Americans dissatisfaction with schooling developed an oppositional group identity and cultural frames of reference that distrust White people and hegemonic social institutions leading to African American academic underperformance.

As Ogbu points out, elements of oppositional group identity towards schooling may include increased absenteeism, disruptive classroom behaviors, and high dropout rates for African American students. These are reoccurring themes throughout much of Ogbu’s research on African American academic underperformance. As Ogbu further illustrates in Figure 1, the “collective problems faced by Blacks historically” has lead to “collective solutions Blacks worked out to their collective problems” resulting in a lack of serious academic attitudes and effort (Ogbu, 1991, p.445). However, little attention is given to African Americans students that pursue academic success in response to
Figure 1. Minority Coping Responses and Schooling

generations of historical racial oppression and seek to careers in education to change the dominant social narrative of African American underachievement.

**Fictive Kinships and Schooling**

Following many years of comparative studies on disparities in academic performance of minority students, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) published a study identifying significant factors that play a role in minority student performance. Specifically, the findings of their study suggested that a collective identity or fictive kinship were contributing factors to academic achievement within the African American community. It is the dominant cultural system that facilitates African American students' sense of self and group belonging through shared experiences.

Within anthropological studies, fictive kinship is defined as the relationships and social ties between individuals unrelated by birth that provide informal social support networks. For African Americans, the formation of fictive kinships was the result of shared experiences of collective mistreatment. Fictive kinships that were developed during slavery provided the familial qualities that were stripped away as relatives were separated and sold as human commodities (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994). African American fictive kinships became a dynamic psychological process that served as a means to mitigate the impact of slavery and social inequality (Fordham, 1985).

Similarly, Carson (2009) claimed that the commonality of African American heritage is shared amongst individuals and is a source of inter-connectedness of
the African American community offering safety and security. The extended family unit as well as individuals outside the immediate family such as members of the church played an important role within the socialization and psychoeducational development of African American children. The fictive kinship bond was strong and enabled African Americans to cope with societal conditions and promoted resiliency. Throughout history, fictive kinships have remained a part of the African American community, which also suggest that African Americans view themselves as “an enduring people with clearly identifiable attitudes, behaviors and a stock of symbols that together with their meanings, concerning their experience as a people constitute their collective identity” (Fordham, 1985).

Despite the support system found within fictive kinship amongst African Americans, the research indicates that fictive kinships have two unique components of collectivism. First, the collective identity is a cultural symbol (sisterhood and brotherhood) that has specific membership criteria, which is learned and transmitted from African American parents to children during racial socialization. Possessing African features such as black skin or being of African descent does not mean automatic membership into the fictive kinship. Membership is determined by an individual’s behaviors and attitudes (“blackness”), and can also, be denied due to a lack of loyalty to the group, (“whiteness”) (Fordham, 2008; Harris & Marsh, 2010).
Another aspect of fictive kinship is the inversion of negative stereotypes of African Americans into positive attributes. Thus, an individual’s membership within the fictive kinship is for the advancement of the group. It is a sense of connection to and responsibility for the groups’ uplift as a counter-narrative to mainstream culture (Fordham, 1985; Carson, 2009; Brown, 2008).

The complexity of the criteria for fictive kinships remains relevant to understanding the collective identity and enculturation process of African American children’s identity development. Fordham (1988) alleges, that “the collective ethos of the fictive kinship system is challenged by the individual ethos of the dominant culture” (p.57). Thus, African American children encounter discourse between their individual identity and racial identity upon entering schools. For example, Ogbu (2007) contends that African Americans’ “interpret their culture and language as symbols of identity” (p.449). The use of Standard English used in school differs from the nonstandard English dialect or African American Vernacular English spoken in the home (Perry & Delprit, 1998). The view of African American students’ language as inadequate presents a discord between the child’s individual identity, racial identity, and their school identity. This discourse continues to be problematic at all levels of schooling resulting in academic disengagement.

**Cultural Inversion**

According to Ogbu, minority groups, particularly involuntary minorities, develop a social identity that is in opposition to the dominant group. African
Americans collective racial identity allowed Blacks to protect their identity and self worth in response to the ways in which Whites have treated them in social, political, economic, and psychological domains (Ogbu, 1987). Minorities develop an oppositional social identity valuing behaviors and language that are opposite of Whiteness.

Ogbu (1987; 1992) contends that this form of opposition is related to cultural inversion, which is defined as:

Cultural inversion is the tendency for involuntary minorities to regard certain forms of behavior, events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for them because these are characteristic of White Americans. At the same time, the minorities value other forms of behavior, events, symbols and meanings, often the opposite as more appropriate for themselves (Ogbu, 1992, p.8).

Cultural inversion is the result of two opposing cultural frames of reference coexisting within the same domain. Although, cultural inversion may take on different forms, Ogbu (1991a) explains that for African Americans, it functions as a form of passive resistance towards White culture. It is symbolized in the style of dress, body language and communication styles that African American’s use as cultural frames of reference in relation to their group identity, yet are oppositional to White culture. The cultural frames of reference persist and are communicated from generation to generation as cultural values. Ogbu believes
this serves a solution to confronting collective problems of racism and discrimination for African Americans that continue to persist in society (Ogbu, 1995).

**Acting White**

In the context of oppositional collective identity, Ogbu (1991) asserts that African Americans attribute academic success to White culture. Performing well in school, being in advanced placement classes, and speaking Standard American English are characteristics of White cultural norms (Tyson, Darity Jr., & Castellino, 2005). According to the theory, academic achievement is not valued in the African American community as it is in White communities, thus the notion of "acting white" is part of a larger oppositional culture constructed by the socio-historical predicaments of African Americans (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

The basis of the "Acting White Hypothesis" is that academically high achieving African American students are negatively sanctioned by their African American peers and accused of acting White. African American students fail to demonstrate academic abilities to avoid alienation from the collective racial identity (Neal – Barnett, Stadulis, Singer, Murray & Demmings, 2009). The choice between the collective group identity and academic achievement produces a "burden of acting White" for African American students (Tyson et al., 2005; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

The "burden of acting White" was introduced in Fordham's (1985) ethnographic case study examining how academically successful students...
attending a predominantly African American high school located in Washington, D.C, cope with inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance of academic achievement. High achieving African American students attending Capital High were interviewed to understand their schooling experiences and the inherent conflict between being Black and the relationship with the school system. The fear of “acting white” emerged as a reoccurring theme to describe the out-group and in-group factors that contribute and impair academic success. African American students must concurrently embrace and reject behaviors defined as characteristic attitudes, values, and style of dress of White people. As a result, African American students were accused of trying to be White and not truly Black.

Fordham’s ethnographic study was extended further with the collaborative analysis, which explored the tension and its effects on African American student’s academic efforts and outcomes (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The efforts for African American students to achieve success and retain support from the Black community were an area of conflict. At issue for African American students was how to meet teacher’s expectations for high academic performance without peer rejection for acting white. The burden of acting white became increasingly difficult for African American students as they faced pressure to perform academically yet continuously encountered doubts about their abilities from teachers. Despite the external and internal group factors’ impact on academic
efforts, the findings of this study suggest that African American students adopt specific strategies to avoid the effects.

Yet, additional studies assessing the acting white hypothesis have found little evidence that the burden of acting white was a valid explanation for why African American students underperform in comparison to their White counterparts. Tyson et al. (2005) found that high achieving African Americans avoided academic challenges out of fear of not doing well rather than fear of being ridiculed by African American peers. African American students were less concerned about the perception of high academic achievement being antithetical to their cultural authenticity. Their findings also suggest that racialized ridiculing of academically performing African American students was a rare occurrence. The accusations of acting white had little impact on African American students' motivations to achieve academic success.

The coping strategies that African Americans have used to combat racial discrimination remain symbols of historically rooted oppression. Although the Oppositional Culture Framework seems to acknowledge the historical conditions African Americans encountered as an explication for academic underperformance, this framework continues to place blame on African Americans rather than acknowledging the larger scope of African Americans realities within a hegemonic society. The lack of academic achievement as a result of African Americans' disillusionment of the job ceiling fails to recognize the social barriers that limit social mobility for African Americans. Furthermore, the
notion that African Americans devalue education and must "act white" in order to achieve success further illustrates how the dominant social narrative has created a psychological condition in which African Americans also buy into the notion of inferiority. Revealing one's "Blackness" and possessing cultural features, including language or physical features subjects one to the stereotype threat and undermines African American's knowledge, skill level, and abilities in social settings.

Stereotype Threat

Social Stigmas and Stereotypes

In the United States, the social perceptions of African Americans are historically rooted. As descendants of slaves, African Americans' distinctive social position has defined black people as a highly stigmatized group (Chavous, Hilkene-Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood & Zimmerman, 2003). Although not all Black people are African American nor are all Black people descendants of African slaves, society categorizes people of dark pigmentation or black physical features under the same generalizations. Often, just having darker skin tones has negative connotations and subjects individuals to various forms of racism, discrimination and derogatory stereotypes within the public domain.

Due to the unique history of oppression and powerlessness for African Americans in the United States, being African American carries a sinister
stereotype (Operario & Fiske, 1998) that represents the persistence of racial disparities in the American society (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998). Thus, “African Americans live life confronting adverse stereotypes that affect their existence.” The negative stereotypes determine the saliency of African Americans physical and psychological presence in social contexts particularly schooling (Green, 2008, p.39).

With the current emphasis on closing the achievement gap, educational data inadvertently supports the notion of academic inferiority by comparing and measuring African American student test performance to White students. The comparisons of ethnic minority groups' performance to White student performance supports the mainstream narrative suggesting that White student performance is the standard to which all other groups must perform. Academic performance and success is thus defined as a cultural trait, which is a broadly white, and characteristic of White middle class behaviors (Carter-Andrews, 2009).

In schools, the negative social imagery of African Americans as being culturally and intellectually inferior to Whites has contributed to environmental cues. Through the lens of diminishing stereotypes, African American students are subjected to lower academic performance expectations and are highly vulnerable to devaluation in academia (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). The effects of negative stereotypes and social stigmas on academic performance have been
theorized by Steele and Aronson (1995) as a condition described as "stereotype threat."

**Stereotype Threat Hypothesis**

The theoretical focus of the stereotype threat hypothesis is to provide an explanation of how social stereotypes of a group has an influence on the academic performance and intellectual ability of individual group members. The stereotype threat hypothesis focuses on situational threats presented in schools that derive from the broader dissemination of negative stereotypes of a group (Steele & Arson, 1995). In particular, the stereotype threat research has focused on exploring the effects of stereotypes as a partial explanation for the underperformance of African American students (Steele, 1997).

The phenomenon of the stereotype threat hypothesis exists primarily within social settings when pervasive negative stereotypes are pertinent and the targets of the stereotypes must contend with the threat of being judged according to the larger group's stereotype (Wout, Shih, Jackson & Sellers, 2009). As described by Steele (2003), Stereotype Threat is "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm the stereotype" (p.111). Within the context of schooling, academically performing African American students are negatively stereotyped based upon the prominent views of African Americans rather than their own personal merit. This poses a threat, which induces a psychological
state and motivates African American students to concentrate efforts to disprove the stereotype of the group (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Ho & Sidanius, 2009).

The effects of the stereotype threat does not address the internalization of negative images as it has been found that African American students do not have to believe the stereotype to have an effect on their academic performance or behavior (Good, Aronson, & Harder, 2000). Rather, the social prevalence of the negative stereotypes is threatening enough to have disruptive effects on Black students own psyche and academic performance. The stereotypes remain persistent as the typecast may be applicable to some members of the group. Kellow & Jones (2008) also argue that the media attention brought on by accountability measures perpetuate negative stereotypes about African American students’ abilities to perform academically.

The viability of situational threats within the context of schooling determines the stereotypical ways in which African American students are treated and judged. As Black students are confronted with disparaging and negative social stereotypes of the collective group (Steele and Aronson, 1995; Steele, 2003), the media’s portrayal of stereotypical images of African Americans further perpetuates how White people perceive all Black People (Ford, 1997). The common perceptions of African Americans as being “loud”, “hostile attitudes,” “violent” and “poor” are not only common in the mainstream but reflected within the school setting. Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) posit that Black
people are rarely associated with academics and high levels of academic talent are generally associated with other minority groups such as Asians. Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) argue that the expectations of academic abilities for African American students are low, thus the terminology of “gifted Black” is an oxymoron. One factor that has proven to impair African American student performance is the “stereotype threat” hypothesis. African American students pursuing higher education are subjected to stereotypical generalizations in various forms throughout schooling. The student’s awareness of these commonly held stereotypes depress African American student performance and behavior. The suspicion of their intellectual abilities provokes the stereotype threat in African American students that aspire to perform (Davis, Aronson & Salinas, 2006). An increasingly robust body of literature on African American underachievement suggests that various social psychological factors, from the stereotype threat hypothesis, contribute to African American academic underperformance in school (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Osborne & Walker, 2006; Davis, Aronson & Salinas, 2006; Harper, 2007).

**Stereotype Threat and Test Performance**

The Stereotype Threat hypothesis posits that negative stereotypes of marginalized groups causes members of the group to experience aversive consequences. Within the context of schooling, Steele and Aronson (1995, p.797) contend that African American students are faced with the “threat of confirming or being judged by a negative societal stereotype – a suspicion –
about their group's intellectual ability.” African American students often feel that their intellectual ability and performance trail in school (McGee & Martin, 2011; Steele, 1997). The persistence of this threat within schools causes African American students to have increased anxiety to “define or redefine the self-concept” within the context of academic performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797).

To examine the effects of the stereotype hypothesis, Steele and Aronson (1995) conducted a series of experiments eliciting stereotype threat conditions to examine the role that social psychological predicaments can play in the cognitive test performance of African Americans students. In each experiment, Black and White college students were given items from the verbal Graduate Record Examination (GRE). It was then hypothesized that the pressure imposed by the relevance of a negative stereotype of one’s group would impair the intellectual performance of Black participants on the test. The results indicated that during a test, stereotype threats undermine Black student performance by increasing cognitive interference about one’s ethnic group (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

According to Steele and Aronson (1995), the effect of the stereotype threat is mediated by an individual’s apprehension of validating the negative stereotype of their ethnic group. Black students often feel threatened by intellectual tests simply based upon racial stereotypes. Negative racial stereotypes of Black people coupled with participants own self-doubts associated with intellectual abilities arouse a psychological state inhibiting test performance.
The results of the study revealed that Black students showed significantly higher cognitive activation of stereotypes about Blacks, concerns about their ability and a greater tendency to avoid racially stereotypic preferences. Black student participants also demonstrated a greater tendency to make advanced excuses for their performance as well as a greater reluctance to have their racial identity linked to their performance. Black student participants were motivated to disassociate themselves from the stereotype.

The Generalizability of Stereotype Threat

Although the stereotype threat hypothesis has been generally associated with African American student test performance, Steele (2003) posits the impairing effects of stereotype threat were generalizable to other domains. The generalizability of the theory has been tested in other studies. Spencer, Steele & Quinn (1999) conducted an experiment measuring the effects of stereotype threat on female math students’ abilities when given a difficult math test. It was found that the “mere relevance of the negative stereotype” towards females in the context of math abilities was enough to undermine female participants’ test performance (Steele, 2003, p.118).

Rydell, Rydell & Boucher (2010) also conducted a study to examine whether stereotype threat undercuts female students ability to learn mathematical concepts, principles, and operations necessary to excel in math. The finding of this study not only indicates that a stereotype threat contributes to impairments on performance but also harms to acquisition of skills necessary for
successful performance. Stereotype threat was found to reduce learning by inhibiting the execution of previously learned skills and reduced working memory leading to poor performance.

In a study designed to obtain an understanding of Black honor students experiences and responses to overt racism in college, Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) found that students encountered systematic stereotypes on a continuous basis. Black students reported feeling pressured to prove their academic abilities to White peers and disprove the negative stereotypes associated with being Black. The findings of this study indicate the ways in which African American high achievers are confined to stereotypes of Black people as a collective group and assumptions about their abilities. The student's resistance towards dispelling the negative stereotypes of African Americans often diverted attention away from academics.

Due to the limited research on the effects of stereotype threat on K-12 students, Kellow & Jones (2008) conducted a study examining the extent in which African American high school students experience stereotype threat with high stakes testing. It was hypothesized that inducing stereotype threat in a testing situation would result in higher levels on a stereotype threat specific scale for African American students. The results suggest that African American students have an unfair advantage compared to White students when their knowledge and academic skills are measured using high stakes testing.
The findings of the studies suggest that stereotype threat has implications for African Americans and other groups. Since all people are subjected to stereotypes, it is not difficult to understand how individuals are threatened by the stereotype threat or disrupted by the stereotype. As Osborne and Walker (2006, p. 573) purport, minority students must contend with “multiple challenges to retention” as the “most dedicated minority students are also the most likely to fall victim to the effects of stereotype threat”. The psychological and physical withdrawal from school in response to the stereotype threat only supports the premise of Oppositional Culture Thesis. This study argues the importance of examining factors that may encourage minority students, particularly African American students to remain academically persistent to combat stereotype threats. Through the experiences of African American teacher candidates, this study seeks to identify ways in which African American students can utilize their collective identity as a strength in response to stereotype threats. Thus, the aim of this study is to fill the gaps in the literature by understanding how the stereotype threat hypotheses is relevant to the academic persistence and aspirations of African American preservice teachers.

Critical Race Theory

The Movement

During the mid-1970's legal activists and scholars began to focus interest on the lost momentum of the Civil Rights Movement by examining social
structures and the constructs of social domination and subordination. Legal scholars of color such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado recognized the need for new theories to combat the subtler forms of racism that dominated the social, political, and legal arenas. Studying and transforming the myriad ways in which social institutions support and perpetuate hegemonic ideologies and practices led to the Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement (Munoz, 2009).

The Critical Race Theory movement draws from and extends Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and Radical Feminism movements to redress historical wrongs. Specifically, critical race theorists applied radical feminism’s insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles that perpetuate patterns of patriarchy and domination. Drawing from the CLS movement, critical race theory adopted the idea of legal indeterminacy, which suggests that every legal rule can be opposed by a counter rule in the process of legal reasoning (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). The influences of both movements coupled with conventional civil rights thought broadened legal scholarship theories addressing issues of race, racial inequalities and how race functions in society (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano & Lynn, 2004).

The basis of Critical Race Theory also grew out of legal scholars frustration with the “failure of Critical Legal Studies to adequately address the effects of race and racism” within the United States judicial system (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). Their scholarship maintained that Critical Legal Studies did
not account for the lived experiences of minority groups oppressed by institutionalized racism and restricted strategies for social transformation (Yosso et al., 2004). Although Critical Legal Studies challenged the meritocracy of the U.S. justice system, it did not address the hegemonic system of White privilege on the meritocratic system.

Critical Race Theory provided an analytical framework to bring forth social change and the implementation of social justice while addressing the effects of race, racism, and power. Critical Race Theory recognized the limits of social justice struggles that silence the experiences of minority groups (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Yosso et al., 2004). As a law movement, Critical Race Theory was an emerging and powerful analytical framework that branched away from its legal roots and influenced other disciplines, particularly educational research (Munoz, 2009).

The activist dimensions of critical race theory had a significant influence on educational research as it served as a means to understanding and transforming educational inequalities. Educational scholars have applied tenets of Critical Race Theory to investigate the inequities that exist in education by examining the school policies and practices that are both directly and indirectly racist and discriminatory towards minority groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). Critical Race Theory allows educators to explore the role of race in education in a more in-depth way compared to other social ethic approaches to learning (Howard, 2008).
Tenets of Critical Race Theory and Education

According to Solórzano & Yosso (2001), critical race theory challenges the dominant discourse on racism by examining how educational theory and institutional practices are used to subordinate minority groups. With race as the central theme of analysis, Critical Race Theory broadly theorizes about institutional and social practices that asserts the “normative standards of whiteness which result in the ignoring of and subjugation of,” ethnic minorities in post Civil Rights American culture (Jay, 2009, p.673). As a means of informing theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy, the following tenets have been extracted from Critical Race Theory:

1. Racism is a fundamental characteristic to American society.
2. Challenge to dominant ideologies
3. Focus on storytelling as methodology
4. Commitment to social justice

(Berry, 2009; Kohli, 2009; Munoz, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005)

The application of Critical Race Theory in this study provides a theoretical lens to challenge the cultural deficit theories of African American underachievement. This study proposes that the tenets of Critical Race Theory provide guidance in unpacking the structural mechanisms in education that impact African American student’ academic achievement and persistence.
Racism in American Society

A basic premise of Critical Race Theory is the notion that racism is endemic in American society. It is the primary basis of defining and explaining how U.S. society functions and the underlying essence of how racism plays a role in our everyday lives (Giles & Hughes, 2009). In a social context, it includes the political and social structures that maintain and reproduce the dominant social order. The reproduction of the domination and subordination relationships present in social structures is preserved in the classifications of statuses, social roles, and hierarchical rules, which correspond to issues of race and gender (Fernandes, 1988). The mere “permanence of racism suggests that racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). These institutionalized forms of racism have continuously impacted the lives of African Americans throughout history (Awokoya & Clark, 2008).

Sears (1998) asserts that racism is central to attitudes towards law, order, and social welfare that are not explicitly in racial terms yet are rooted in underlying racial prejudices towards African Americans. Characterized as second-class citizens, African Americans have been denied the pursuit of the American dream in all spheres of life – education, socially, economically, and politically (Sears & Henry, 2003). These forms of racism have evolved from historical forms of overt racism (Jim Crow laws) to more symbolic forms of racism (structural), which are still contemporary resentments towards African Americans.
According to Sears & Henry (2003), the sources of symbolic racism are rooted in (a) early socialization experiences, which passed on conventional attitudes towards African Americans. These attitudes evolved into a (b) “blend: of primitive anti-Black affects with traditional values that have little to do with Blacks. This leads to the acceptance of beliefs supporting the (c) themes of the symbolic racism belief system. In turn, is the most powerful proximal predictor of opposition to Black and to contemporary racial policies. Simultaneously, other socialization experiences generate a more general political conservatism that has independent effects on the same political dependent variables. Figure 2 illustrates the symbolic racism model (p. 103).

Figure 2. Symbolic Racism Model.

Symbolic racism sustains the status quo and is reflective of White hegemony and dominant ideologies of how society should be in more abstract terms. Compared to old-fashioned racism, symbolic racism is more widely accepted socially and politically. This explains why most Americans support principles for equality for ethnic minority groups yet not willing to support programs designed to implement these principles (Sears & Henry, 2005). It is the dominant views that African Americans are pushing too hard for equality and making unfair and illegitimate demands when racial discrimination are a thing of the past. Symbolic racism reflects a threatened sense of White privilege and group consciousness of power.

Various forms of symbolic racism remain prominent in education and schooling as indicated in a study describing the racial and cultural climate of an elite predominantly White independent school. Researchers DeCuir & Dixson (2004) found that African American students perceive symbolic racism as a commonality within the school environment. The pervasiveness of racism within the school led African American students to feel culturally alienated and physically isolated. The social structures of the school silenced African American students to the extent that their cultural pride must conform to the “acceptable” standards imposed by the school policies.

According to DeCuir & Dixson (2004), the African American students described schooling experiences that demonstrated how school policies and practices regulating student dress and behaviors. For example, African
American students were not permitted to wear pro-African attire such as dashikis on days in which students were not required to wear school uniforms. Nor were graduating students allowed to wear African head wraps during graduation ceremonies. The school's policies regulated and reinforced "whiteness as property" (Harris, 1993) and discouraged the acceptance of ethnic diversity in discussions of African American leaders and traditional African attire that were viewed as unacceptable and controversial by school administration.

According to Harris (1993), implicit or explicit recognition of white privilege produced by white supremacy reinforces property interest in whiteness that reproduces subordination of other minority groups. In this way, whiteness is considered a property and functions on three levels: right of possession, right of use and right of disposition.

In DeCuir & Dixson's (2004) study, it was found that the function of Whiteness as property was experienced by African American students in the ways in which the school was not receptive to African American culture. The African American student's narratives demonstrated how the right to possession, use, enjoyment, and disposition has exclusively benefited Whites as evident in the school policies and practices that regulated and reinforced Whiteness as property. This research illustrated the salience of racism in education.

Solórzano & Yosso (2001) contend that Critical Race scholars acknowledge the contradictory ways in which schools operate. The social structure of schools as described in DeCuir & Dixson's (2004) research,
oppressed and marginalized African American students while co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower. The African American student's narratives transcend the school context and demonstrated the pervasiveness of racism and how schooling affects students of color.

**Challenge to Dominant Ideologies**

The early histories of American schooling frequently disclose the political, social, and economic interest of the dominant culture. Critical scholars have found the societal forms of overt oppression and imposed restrictions were also recurring themes in the educational history of minority groups. The current structure of public education cannot be examined through a critical race lens without identifying the historical genesis of modern school practices that are grounded in hegemonic ideologies.

From a Critical Race perspective, the United States has a tradition of racist ideologies and discriminatory practices that inhibit the social mobility of certain ethnic groups. Specifically, African Americans have been the recipients of multifarious forms of oppression that have been socially reproduced through schooling pre and post Brown. The dominant ideologies of U.S. society have informed educational practices reproducing the existing social order. Given the social and racial differences, White teachers are often predisposed to view Black students through a deficit lens. In many cases, the societal inequities formed a dysconscious racism revealed in the teaching methodologies of White teachers thus justifying White hegemony (Bartolome, 2004; King 1991).
Prior to the Brown decision, African American students were taught primarily by African American teachers in segregated schools, which provided "liberatory spaces" to culturally affirm students. African American teachers used subversive strategies to instill cultural consciousness and self-reliance in African American students (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Frederick & View, 2011). African American teachers held themselves accountable for the academic achievement of students as part of their fictive kinship or collective identity and a means of racial uplift suggesting that success for one meant success for all. Thus, education was valued within the African American community for "individual enrichment and social progress" (King, 1993, p. 117). African American teachers had the ability to reach African American students academically which is absent in the classroom today. African American teachers had the same historical culture and background as African American students, enabling them to share strategies for success based upon their own struggles and experiences. The loss of African American teachers was an unforeseen consequence of desegregation and continues to have a damaging affect on African American students (Hudson & Holmes, 1994).

Desegregation eventually removed the caring support system provided by African American teachers to African American students. The absence of African American teachers required African American students to conform to traditional structures of an educational system designed to meet the needs of the culture of power. Questions regarding the cognitive abilities of African American students
gave rise to systematic victimization of African American students by White teachers. Problems of low self-esteem and decreased aspirations emerged as African American students were stigmatized and tracked into special education classes (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). Thus, the intangible (psychological and social) factors within schools became complicated and damaging for students of color resulting in racial disparities in academic excellence.

In addition to examining the historical ideologies of the dominant group, it is essential to also review the literature on minority group response and development in spite of inequitable social and economic conditions. Historically, all nonwhite minority groups are recipients of racially motivated discrimination; however, African Americans ancestors were predominantly subjected to the most extreme forms of exploitation in American history (Webster, 1992).

The particular ways in which African Americans survive the constraints of oppression has had distinct implications on the racial socialization process that commonly occurs within the family structure. The unique social position of African Americans as slave descendants requires African American parents to prepare their children to function and cope with racism and discrimination as part of their existence. African American families communicate implicit knowledge about race including norms, behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes that enable African American children to view themselves as members of the group. African American children develop a collective racial identity that supports awareness of African Americans position relative to the social hierarchy. The
racial awareness of being a stigmatized group becomes important in developing self-competencies and provides coping strategies to handle societal barriers. (Hughes, 2003; O'Brien Caughey, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002).

**Storytelling as Methodology**

Critical Race Theorists have emphasized an appreciation for storytelling and advocate the acknowledgement of how experiential knowledge gives silenced voices power (Knaus, 2009; Howard, 2008). Building upon the everyday lived experiences of oppressed people gives insight into how society is structured and how these structures impact their lives. Thus, Critical Race Theory recognizes the legitimacy of experiential knowledge of marginalized people as a means of analyzing issues of racial subordination (Yosso & Solórzano, 2001). The power of storytelling enables a deeper understanding of how issues of race and racism remain prevalent in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical Race Theory in education seeks to transform subtle and overt forms of racism to transform society. It enables the lived experiences through the use of storytelling, narratives, and family histories to understand the realities that students bring into the classroom. In schools, African American students are often silenced, yet their personal experiences and knowledge can bring forth new ways of thinking that can shape the curriculum (Yosso & Solórzano, 2001). Storytelling methodologies in education provide a cure to silenced voices and reveals similar discriminatory experiences that occur in schools. The silenced
voices shed light on the tangible realities of racism for students of color that challenge the dominant narratives that argue that race and racism are not an issue in schools (Jay, 2009).

As cited by Flynn, Kamp & Perez (2009) Berger, Berger & Kellem (1974) coined these individual experiences as “pluralisation of lifeworlds” (p. 141). The pluralisations of lifeworlds are the ways in which students have a plurality of experiences derived from daily life experiences. The plurality of African Americans experiences are attributed to the community, churches, barbershops, and hair salons and communal gatherings that shape students’ understandings of the world. It is this knowledge that is not found in books and educational settings that form African American students’ identity, which enables educational researchers to develop an understanding of muted voices and viewpoints (Howard, 2008)

African American stories about their experiences are a powerful means of challenging and changing the dominant mindset. Storytelling challenges common beliefs about realities and builds consensus. An individual’s experiential knowledge and sharing of life experiences helps to contribute to their psychological well-being and thus a healthy identity.

Social Justice Commitment

As noted by Yosso (2005) Critical Race Theory is committed to social justice by means of a transformative retort to oppression. In racial oppression, the dominant group maintains power and control through suppressing of the
other ethnic group’s mobility. For African Americans, this form of oppression has endured since slavery and this suppression continues to play a role in the educational, judicial, and political settings within our society. Using a Critical Race Theory lens to analyze the forms of oppression in our educational system can address not only the racial oppression but also gender oppression as seen in the disenfranchisement of African American male students.

The influences of historically rooted social and racial ideologies reflected in education provide insight into how minority groups develop psychological competencies to navigate through school. For instance, Steele (1997) argues that the structural and cultural threats in school have a psychological impact on African American students that identify with school. African American students who possess an academic identification are often high academic achievers at risk of confirming negative stereotypes of their racial group and experiencing emotional distress and peer pressure. Thus, sociocultural responses to discrimination of some minority groups produces racial distancing behaviors resulting in the students distancing themselves from their racial group to maintain their academic identification or academic group (withdrawal from school) to maintain their racial identity. Understanding the racial distancing behaviors characterized in the theoretical frameworks of Oppositional Culture and Stereotype Threat is important towards addressing the problem of African American academic underperformance. This study examines both the Oppositional Culture Framework and the Stereotype Threat Hypothesis through
the lens of Critical Race Theory to explain how more aggressive steps towards ending racism are needed to close the achievement gap for African Americans.

Conceptual Framework

A significant amount of research exists on African American underperformance yet the empirical evidence appears to vary depending upon the outcome. The most prominent explanations for the achievement gap between African Americans and White students suggest a cultural disconnect with education and schooling. School achievement is often viewed as problematic as it is suggested that education is not socially conceptualized as occurring within the context of being African American as defined in the Oppositional Cultural Theory framework (Oyserman, Gant & Ager, 1995; Ogbu 1991).

However, much of Ogbu’s research occurred in a period following desegregation and the civil rights movement of the 1960’s. African Americans struggle for equality were still relevant and fresh in the minds of the generations that experienced the struggle. In the case of Ogbu’s Shaker Heights ethnographic study, African American students were only one to two generations from family members who directly experienced the struggle. Their stories and oral family traditions may have suggested an oppositional culture that was relevant to that time. However, over the last three decades, the influences on African American identity, and the growth of African American culture has altered
The oppositional culture frames of reference in various ways within the African American community. Thus, this study proposes that a post-oppositional framework is needed to explain the shifts in African American cultural frames of reference towards education and schooling.

The Oppositional Culture Theory suggests that African American cultural forces are contributing factors to student underperformance. Emphasis is not placed upon the role of dominant ideologies presented in school that have an impact on educational outcomes for minority students. Maybe it is the cultural frame of reference found in schooling that is oppositional and resistant towards students of color. The conceptual framework of this study explores the ways in which the cross-cultural framework of Oppositional Culture Theory provides an understanding of how marginalized groups orient themselves towards education but also applies this same framework to examining how schooling fails to orient itself towards minority groups.

This conceptual framework of this study also explores whether the phenomenon of stereotype threat could partially explain the academic persistence gaps between White and African Americans. This study examines the extent to which African American teacher credentialing students experience stereotype threat while attending school and continuing their education to obtain a teaching credential. Although the effects of stereotype threat on test performance have been well documented and the generalizability of stereotype threat has been applied to other domains, studies specifically measuring the
effects of stereotype threat on the academic persistence and career aspirations of teachers has not been done. Little is known about whether stereotype threat is a factor in the academic persistence of African American college students pursuing careers in education. This study seeks to fill in the gaps in literature that does not address this area.

Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, this study seeks to examine how hegemonic ideologies and practices within schooling have a greater impact on African American student underperformance. The cultural frames of reference of schooling maintain a resistance towards minority groups. Thus, Oppositional Culture Theory appears to be less useful in explaining the underachievement of African American students but more suitable in explaining how the characteristics of schooling environments operate to produce particular student outcomes for minority groups.

Figure 3 represents the conceptual framework of this study. The arrows represent the relationships between the concepts written in each box. For example, line (a) represents how tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) are applied to this research by examining the historical and systemic elements of racism that exists within schools. The dominant ideologies and hegemonic practices of schools can be linked to the development of (b) Oppositional Cultural Frames of reference (c) stereotype threat conditions and (d) academic outcomes for African American students. It serves to reason that African American students would develop an opposition towards schooling when faced with
stereotype threat conditions as indicated in line (g). However, this premise is twofold as tenets of Critical Race Theory can provide an examination of how the culture of schooling is oppositional towards African American student achievement. Lines (e) and (f) demonstrates the relationships between Oppositional Culture of schools (dominant ideologies) and stereotype threat conditions (hegemonic practices) impact African American academic performance.

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework.
(Figure 3 is a conceptual model and not a path diagram for analysis).
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As presented in the review of the literature, the empirical research on African American underachievement appears to vary. The most cited research studies suggest cultural factors as a plausible explanation for variations in academic achievement between African American and White students (Harris, 2011; Harris & Robinson, 2007). The gap in academic achievement between African American and White students continues to reflect racial disparities in overall student learning, performance, and persistence. The school systems’ failure to effectively address the racial disparities in achievement lessens the likelihood of African American students’ pursuit of higher education and potential interest in educational careers, particularly the teaching profession (Dilworth, 1989).

Absent from the literature are qualitative studies that explore tenets of the Oppositional Culture Theory (Ogbu, 2003) beyond cultural factors (Harris, 2011). With this in mind, this study used a phenomenological analysis approach as well as critical race methodologies to question the social narrative of African American resistance towards education. This study explores the academic persistence and motivational factors of African American postbaccalaureate college students in pursuit of higher education and careers in education.
By examining African American post-baccalaureate college students' schooling experiences, racial identity, motivation and career aspirations, the realities of African Americans schooling experiences can convey new understandings, which differ from other racial groups (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). The voices of participants serve as counter-narratives, illuminating the racial marginalization and totalization of African American students and the dysconscious racism that continue to function within the school system (Knaus, 2009). This study seeks to generate new pathways to improve educational outcomes for African American students by investigating the narratives of preservice teachers.

This chapter describes the research design for this in-depth examination of African American postbaccalaureate college student's reconstruction of their schooling experiences, motivation, racial identity, and career aspirations. The research questions guiding this study, the site selection, participant criteria, sampling techniques, data collection, and data analysis are also presented. Elements of the California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) Institutional Review Board (IRB) process for this study and methods for addressing validity and reliability are also included in this chapter.

Research Questions

The researcher seeks to dispel the social narrative of African Americans resistance and devaluation of education as a viable explanation for the academic
achievement gap. Thus, the primary aim of this study is social change in educational practices towards closing the achievement gap and creating pathways to encourage more African Americans to remain academically persistent and seek higher education. The secondary aim is to recruit more African Americans to the field of education by drawing from the lived experiences of African American preservice teachers enrolled in teacher credentialing programs. There were four guiding research questions:

1. How do African American preservice teachers describe their experiences within the K-12 school system?
2. In what ways do African American preservice teachers define and describe their motivation to pursue careers in education?
3. What role, if any, does race play into their decision to become an educator?
4. In what ways do African American preservice teachers define and describe their persistence to pursue higher levels of education?

Research Design

Corbin & Strauss (2008) suggest that a qualitative research design allows the researcher to “get at the inner experiences of participants” and “determine how meanings are formed through and in culture” (p.12). Thus, it is through qualitative inquiry that the inner experiences of African American preservice teachers’ motivations, their persistence in navigating through the school system,
and career aspirations can be explored in depth. Specifically, the researcher used a phenomenological inquiry approach as a means of defining and describing the essence of the participants schooling experiences that influenced their perceptions of higher education and the teaching profession (Graham & Erwin, 2011).

As suggested by Iwamoto, Creswell, and Caldwell (2007), a key component of a phenomenological inquiry is capturing the essence of the lived experiences of participants. This qualitative approach is most suitable for a study of how participants experience and perceive schooling given how power and the depth of race and racism functions in schools. Phenomenology allows the collection of data through in-depth interviews as a means of describing "what" participants experienced and "how" they experienced it (Creswell, 2007, p. 58).

Phenomenologists use narrative data derived from in-depth interviews to make sense of participants lived experiences leading to an understanding of the ways in which socially constructed events and personal accounts intersect (Glesne, 2011). This approach is best to capture the core of what constitutes the fundamental nature of participants lived experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007) may have a specific contextual focus guided by a theoretical lens. Thus, this study uses a Critical Race Theory framework, which supports the "voice of color thesis." The "unique voice of color" supports the premise that people of color have the ability to communicate life circumstances that their White counterparts are unlikely to know or experience.
(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). The voice of African American preservice teachers illuminates their critical consciousness to interpret their own experiences and aim to find meaning in their situations and transforms their social realities (Gomez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011).

A phenomenological approach enables the participant’s “voices to be heard” and “exposes taken for granted assumptions” that are commonly associated with African Americans (Lester, 1999, p.3). This form of narrative inquiry supports “counter-storytelling” which allows the power of participants’ stories to come to a deeper understanding of the role of race in the academic persistence and career aspirations of African Americans.

Sampling Strategies

Purposeful sampling strategies allow the researcher to select specific participants that can inform an understanding of the phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2007). As this study seeks to understand the schooling experiences contributing to the academic persistence of African American postbaccalaureate students, the research used purposeful sampling strategies to establish the participant criteria and determine site selection (Glesne, 2011).

The Inland Empire served as a prime location for participant recruitment as African Americans account for less than 11% of education majors and only 5% of K-12 teachers. The limited number of African Americans within this region suggests a unique population. Thus, participants were recruited using
snowballing (word of mouth) techniques. Snowball sampling served as a practical approach towards recruiting participants as it allowed the researcher to use current participants in playing an active role in this study. Following each interview, participants were encouraged to take a recruitment flyer (Appendix A) to give to other African American graduate students that they knew who met participant criteria. Recruitment materials include recruitment flyers, email, and social networking sample posts (Appendix A).

Additional snowball sampling strategies used in this study included email contact by the researcher to colleagues, acquaintances, and university faculty to obtain referrals and recruit potential participants. Online social networking resources such as Facebook and Craigslist were also used to recruit participants. Online postings similar to the recruitment flyer were made on social networking sites weekly over a 30-week timeframe. Responses to online tools included individuals (n= 9) that did not meet the participant criteria. These prospective participants were experienced teachers and not presently enrolled in teacher education programs. These individuals were excluded as participants for this study.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of twelve self-identified African American college students enrolled in teacher education programs within the Inland Empire Region of Southern California. All twelve African American
Preservice teachers participating in this study were enrolled in teacher education courses offered at six of the seven public and private universities within this region.

Each participant had previously graduated from a 4-year university and possessed a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree. All participants were continuing their education to obtain appropriate credentialing for a position in education, including Multiple Subject Credential, Single Subject Credential, Special Education Credential, Pupil Personnel Services Credential, and Speech-Language Pathology Service Credential. Participants included nine female and three male preservice teachers, ranging in ages from 25 to 46 years old. Table 2 provides a snapshot of the participant demographics characteristics obtained from the demographic survey (Appendix B) each participant completed.

Participant Profiles

Participant 1. Participant 1 grew up in Philadelphia in a two parent household. She attended a semi-elite private school during K-12 and skipped 10th grade. She has a Bachelor degree in Behavioral Science and Masters Degree in Education Administration. She is currently completing a second Masters degree in Counseling and Guidance as well as a obtaining a Pupil Personnel Services credential at a public university.
### Table 2. Participant Demographics.

<table>
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<th>Age</th>
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<th>Type of College</th>
<th>Type of Credential Program</th>
<th>Desired Grade Level to Teach</th>
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<td>Special Education</td>
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<td>State</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Multiple Subject</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Multiple Subject</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Pupil Personnel</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 was raised by a single mother on the west side of Chicago. She attended an all Black elementary school in Chicago for grades K-8 which promoted an Afro-Centric curriculum. Later, Participant 2 attended a multicultural high school and then went on to attend a private Liberal Arts college in Iowa. Participant 2 described herself as being determined and focused throughout her schooling. She is currently seeking a single subject credential with emphasis on Social Science and interested in teaching high school.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 lived and attended schools in Las Vegas with her mother until 8th grade. She then moved to Los Angeles area to live with her father who was also an educator. She earned a Bachelor's degree at public university in the Inland Empire. She has a Masters degree in education and is
currently pursuing an Education Specialist credential at a private university. She desires to teach special education at the elementary school level.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 lived in a two parent family household with two older siblings. Her family moved from eastern border of Los Angeles County to the Inland Empire region. She attended schools in a medium income level neighborhood in which Participant 4 describes as having “more resources.” She attended community college prior to transferring to a local university in the Inland Empire. She has a Bachelors Degree in Liberal Studies and completing a multiple subject credential. She is particularly interested in becoming an elementary school teacher and work in areas of high need.

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 resided in a single parent home in an impoverished area in Los Angeles. She then moved from this Los Angeles to the Inland Empire where she completed her middle school and high school education. Participant 5 attended community college then transferred to a state university prior to completing a Bachelor's degree at a private university. She is currently seeking an Educational Specialist credential in hopes of becoming a middle school Special Education teacher.

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 grew up in a two parent home. His parents were immigrants from Nigeria and settled in the Los Angeles area in the 1970's. His family relocated to the Inland Empire where he attended public schools. After graduating from high school, Participant 6 attended a 4-year state university as an engineer major. However, his career interest varied as he shifted from
engineering to sociology to law and then to law enforcement until he discovered that he enjoyed working with children. He began to substitute teach and then entered into a teaching credentialing program. He currently has a Bachelor's Degree and recently completed a Master's Degree in Education.

Participant 7. Participant 7 grew up in a home with immigrant parents who inspired him to always do well. His family resided within the Inland Empire region where he attended a private Christian school during his elementary years. He later attended local public schools in high school prior to attending community college. He later transferred to a four-year university where he earned a Bachelor's degree. He is currently seeking an Education Specialist credential and would like to work in a middle school setting.

Participant 8. Participant 8 attended private schools in Los Angeles County. Upon graduating from high school, she was accepted into a four-year university in Orange County. However, due to financial challenges, she left the university to return home. Participant 8 attended community college and worked for several years before deciding to return to college. She enrolled at a private Christian university in the Inland Empire where she obtained a Bachelor's degree and began to seek an Education Specialist credential. She is currently seeking a special education position at the elementary school level.

Participant 9. Participant 9 was born in New York and raised in a single parent home in Queens. He characterizes his neighborhood and schooling experiences as "rough" and stated that he almost dropped out of school. His
family relocated to California where he finished high school earning his diploma and went into the military. Following approximately five years in the military, he went to community college to obtain an Associate's degree. He later attended a private university in the Inland Empire earning a Bachelor's degree and pursuing a Communication Disorder credential.

Participant 10. Participant 10 was raised in a family of educators. She has always lived and attended school within the Inland Empire. Participant 10 participated in the Gifted and Talented (GATE) program during elementary and middle school. In high school, she took advanced prep classes, and decided to participate in sports. For college, Participant 10 attended community college for two and a half years and then transferred to a state university. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies and is currently seeking a multiple subject credential.

Participant 11. Participant 11 grew up in Minnesota and was an honor roll student while attending a Math and Science magnet school for grades K – 6. She describes herself as being actively involved in everything throughout high school including being the senior class president and participating in sports. Following high school, Participant 11 attended a university in South Dakota in which she was a star athlete. She later graduated with a Bachelors degree and earned a Master's degree. Participant 11 is currently working towards a second Master's degree and credential in Communication Disorders to become an elementary or middle school Speech and Language Pathologist.
Participant 12. Participant 12 lived in Texas until her family moved to the Inland Empire region of California. She attended middle school and high school within the Inland Empire. Participant 12 earned an Associate's degree at a local community college prior transferring to a four-year university to complete a Bachelor's degree. She is enrolled in the Pupil Personnel Services program at a state university to become a school counselor.

Data Collection

The nature of qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to take an active role in co-constructing information with multiple data collection methods. The various data collection strategies used in this study allowed for triangulation as a means of enhancing the validity and trustworthiness of findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glesne, 2011). This study utilized semi-structured interviews, researcher field notes, and member checking as the primary sources of data collection and forms of data triangulation.

Interviews

According to Seidman (2006), qualitative interviewing enables the researcher to engage in in-depth examinations of participants lived experiences. Face to face, participant interviews served as a primary source of data collection to seek answers to the research questions guiding this study. Specifically, pre-established questions guided the interactions between the researcher and the

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participants. In depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted over a period of 7 months. The semi-structured interview protocol is included in Appendix C.

The researcher met with participants volunteering to participate in this study at a mutually agreed upon date, time and location. All interviews were held at times that did not conflict with the participants' graduate program schedules. The researcher established a rapport with participants by engaging in small talk about how their day was going and the weather. After a rapport was established with participants, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and each participant was asked to sign an IRB informed consent form and complete a demographic survey prior to the interview. Participants were then asked a series of open-ended questions and probing questions to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes up to 90 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded by the researcher and transcribed verbatim for accuracy by an independent transcriber.

A second interview was held with three of the participants. The second interview permitted the researcher to probe further into the participants' responses from the first interview. Specifically, participants were asked to elaborate further on their schooling experiences and racial identity. The second interviews ranged from 15 to 25 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded by the researcher and transcribed verbatim for accuracy by the researcher.
Field Notes

Participants were informed of the researchers’ purpose in writing prior to the interview being conducted. During each face-to-face interview, the researcher took descriptive field notes to provide a portrait of the participants’ physical appearance, dress, mannerisms, and style of talking and acting. Analytic field notes were also taken to capture and reflect on particular interactions among participants (Glesne, 2011). The researcher noted unique phrases or statements made by participants during the interview.

Immediately following each interview, the researcher wrote reflective field notes. The reflective field notes allowed the researcher to become more aware of her positionality in relationship to the research and analysis. The reflective field notes also provided points of clarification, and reflections of ethical dilemmas and conflicts (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998).

Member Checking

Member checking strategies were used to allow the researcher to check, refine and generate new interpretations of the data by conducting follow up interviews with participants. As stated, a second interview was held with three participants in this study. This allowed the participants’ to have a participatory role in the data analysis to ensure the essence of the participant’s meanings was articulated accurately in describing their academic persistence and motivations to pursue a career in education (Bryant & Charmz, 2010).
"In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Thus, to ensure the accuracy of the transcript data collected and profile interpretations of participants, the researcher engaged all twelve participants in member checking. Each participant was asked to review the preliminary analyses, which included significant quotes obtained from the transcripts and emerging themes.

Data Analysis

Creswell's (2007) phenomenological analytic approach was used in this study. Using this analytic approach, participant interview transcripts, field notes and researcher's reflective notes were read several times. This method of phenomenological reduction allowed the researcher to focus on the participants voices and set aside her own personal experiences as an academically persistent African American in education (p.159).

After this process, the researcher moved through the following steps; (1) identifying and delineating significant statements related to participants lived experiences with the phenomenon, (2) grouping significant statements into units of meaning (3) clustering meaning units to generate common themes of participants, (4) developing textural and structural descriptions of participants experiences and (5) extracting themes to make a composite description of the phenomenon (Graham & Erwin, 2011; Creswell, 2007).
To complete the first step, the interview transcripts and field note data were uploaded into ATLAS
ti, a qualitative data analysis software program that provided a systematic approach to data analysis. With this qualitative software, the researcher was able to do a highly organized, case-by-case and cross case analysis of participant experiences with the phenomenon, which enabled conceptualization of various levels of abstractions (Creswell, 2007).

Table 3. Selected Examples of Significant Statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statement</th>
<th>Formulated Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The brown paper bag rules are alive and well in my world.</td>
<td>Skin color matters. Lighter skin complexions are socially accepted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know that I've always felt like a minority.</td>
<td>Minorities have an inferior social status that warrants different treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You got to work that much harder than everybody else to get ahead.</td>
<td>Social mobility is not based solely on meritocracy for African Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will have to say the teachers in elementary school who let us know that it was okay to be black.</td>
<td>Being black is nothing to be ashamed of.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still black. I went to sleep as black and woke up black.</td>
<td>There is no relief from racial perceptions and stereotypes of African Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can't be mediocre. Because of our color, you have to do more than the average person. You just can't do with the bare minimum, it doesn't work.</td>
<td>Being African American places limits on opportunities for advancement thus one must work harder to be considered average.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So I already know. I know when I walk in the room, I know when I walk in an interview; I already know. I already know.</td>
<td>Understandings that one's qualifications and creditability will be questioned because of one's race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also, just being reminded that I'm black. What I can't do, what I can do, how far I can go and how far I'm not allowed to go; I'm reminded every day.</td>
<td>Frustrations of being judged by one's race and not being viewed as a person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the second step of data analysis, significant phrases, and sentences related to participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon were identified in the transcripts. From the interview transcripts, 202 significant
statements were extracted. Table 3 illustrates how “meaning units” were formed from participants' statements. This step permitted the research to facilitate the horizontalization of the data. The formulated meanings were then clustered into meaning units to generate 5 common themes of participants. Table 4 contains two examples of themed clusters (Creswell, 2007).

Table 4. Example of Two Theme Clusters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Clusters and Associated Formulated Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fictive Kinship (Collective Identity)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They thought that I thought I was better than them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My black people that I had connections with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He was black, but he was not black if that makes any sense, Uncle Tom-ish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I kind of chose my friends to be not black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honestly we feel like we're all just the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I'm with my social group, the majority of them are black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exposure to diversity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had a really good mixture of kids in our school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had a diverse team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends weren't my same color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from different ethnic backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine were more white American experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher grouped the significant statements into larger meaning units generating common themes for categorizing participants' experiences. Textural descriptions were devised to highlight “what” the participants in this
study experienced with the phenomenon. Structural descriptions were also developed to enable the researcher to “reflect on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced” (Creswell, 2007, p.159). The final step of devising the composite description established the essence of the phenomenon and “represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study”.

Although deductive and inductive data analysis techniques were employed, the grounded theory approach took precedence allowing a focus on the context in which factors contributing to African American credentialing students’ academic persistence, and career aspirations became evident (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

To ensure this study was conducted with ethical regard to human participants, the researcher adhered to the CSUSB IRB process that included the use of informed consent forms and participant confidentiality. The IRB informed consent form (Appendix D) included statements that this study was voluntary and participants had right to withdrawal from participation at any time. The IRB consent form also included an explanation of how participant confidentiality will be maintained including the use of pseudonyms. The CSUSB IRB approval letter and consent forms can be found in Appendix E.
Positionality of the Researcher

The researcher's influence on the data analyses, Corbin & Strauss (2008) contends is an important factor in the research process as the researcher co-constructs the data collection with participants. With the social construct of race at the core of this study and both the researcher and participants being African American, it is essential for the researcher to engage in reflexivity and recognize the "relevance of self" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.33) in the data collection and interpretation. As this study focused on the emic (Creswell, 2007) perspectives of African American preservice teachers, the emic perspective of the researcher is also relevant. As such, the researcher developed a positionality statement to elucidate any biases in accurately interpreting and validating the experiences of African American preservice teachers within the context of the phenomenon of this study (Tillman, 2002). To explain the researcher's positionality, this next section is presented in first person.

This focus of this study is of interest to me for two reasons. To begin, I am the younger of two children, raised in a two parent middle class family residing in Compton, California. I attended parochial schools until the tenth grade and then attended a public school for the final two years of high school. Throughout my youth, there was always a strong emphasis on education from both my family and teachers. As I reflect on my school experiences, majority of my teachers were people of color, particularly African American. Now, as a mother, I realized that my children have quite a different schooling experience. Majority of their
teachers are White and the have had very few teachers of color. As an educator and being the only teacher of color at my school, I became interested in examining the limited presence of African American teachers.

Secondly, my own personal experiences of navigating through school and pursuit of a career in education as an African American, provides an improved lens into the phenomenon examined in this study. Throughout my college experiences, I encountered various situations in which I was the only African American student enrolled in various courses. As I took advanced courses in education and pursued higher levels such as obtaining a Masters Degree and then entering a Doctoral program, the limited presence of other African Americans became even more apparent. This was quite concerning to me, as an educator, a mother and an African American. Thus, I have maintained an interest towards understanding the limited presence of African Americans in higher education and education careers.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to dispel the dominant social narrative of African Americans' devaluation of education by providing a counter-narrative presented in the voices of African American post-baccalaureate students enrolled in credentialing programs leading to careers in education. The data analysis of the participants' interviews revealed significant constructs for African American preservice teachers. Thus, five themes emerging from the data analysis are presented in this chapter.

Specifically, the data analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the ways in which African American preservice teachers' experienced concentrated forms of stereotype threat in the air (Steele, 2010) in higher education settings, which were of great importance to their personal goals and career aspirations. The frequent encounters with racial microaggressions reflected the intricate ways that dysconscious racism continues to thrive within educational environments, more specifically in teacher education. These experiences manifested into a second theme, grappling with the stereotype threat, which participants critically and actively processed their awareness of their race as an inevitable aspect of their lives through social interactions with others. As a third theme, the
participants’ strong sense of racial identity came into view along with the subtheme of collectivism as participants spoke of fictive kinships.

The final two themes speak directly to the participants’ most influential schooling experiences and motivations to be academically persistent. A topic that was repeatedly expressed throughout the data was that most of the participants’ families moved from the inner city to a suburban area during their K-12 schooling. Participants spoke of how their relocation to a new area increased their exposure to diversity and had an impact on their achievement as the academic rigor and their level of preparedness differed. Thus, exposure to diversity and achievement emerged as a fourth theme in this study. For the fifth theme, participants described the influences of significant role models in and outside of school as motivational factors in their interest in teaching.

Theme 1: Stereotype Threat in the Air

“A Fly in the Ointment”

Based upon the data collected, the most intriguing experiential theme emerging from the participants’ voices related to the role of their racial identity in their academic persistence and interest in educational careers was the phenomena of a “stereotype threat in air” (Steele, 1997). Participants described the extra pressure brought on by negative stereotypes that they had to deal with for no other reason than that they were black. All twelve participants shared many unique experiences of stereotype threat in the air throughout their
schooling. Each participant encountered various situations in which negative stereotypical views of African Americans were present and lingered over them as a threat. The participants' voices revealed how they feel the presence of such stereotype threats (Steele, 2010, p. 9).

To illustrate just how deeply the presence of stereotype threat is felt, Participant 1, a Pupil Personnel Services credential student stated, “the brown paper bag rules are alive, and well in my world” (personal communication, April, 2012). Her comment refers to notion that an African American is considered less threatening and more socially acceptable, if one’s skin tone is lighter than a brown paper bag (Hill, 2002; Hunter, 1998). Participant 12, also a Pupil Personnel Services credential student expressed an awareness of how her skin complexion is met with resistance:

Being a black American okay, just to me, being black is [pause] I feel like there’s a place. You know your place, dominant versus non-dominant. No matter how much I strive, it’s always met with resistance. No matter how much I obtain, it’s never good enough. I associate these things because of my skin color, because of the wall that’s around me just because of my skin color. I’m reminded that I’m black. I can’t forget that I’m black. (Participant 12, September, 2012).

Both Participant 1 and Participant 12's statements reveal insights of how their skin hues have been forms of exclusion due to the stereotype perceptions of African Americans, particularly those of a darker skin tone. Their experiences suggest that skin tone plays a role in how others perceive their abilities.

As the researcher inquired into participants’ interest and motivations to teach, Participant 5, an Education Specialist teaching candidate stated, “I think I
will be able to understand and be able to help and have a little bit more love instead of a judgmental type of attitude towards the kids” (personal communication, June 2012). Her initial response prompted the researcher to seek clarification on what she meant by “judgmental attitudes towards the kids.”

Participant 5 elaborated by sharing her personal experience:

I mean the teachers in the education realm. They read all types of documents with all these studies saying that African-American kids score less than white kids. You have teachers that play off of that. Even if they’re not doing it purposefully, but even in their subconscious. I just got lost in the crowd. I didn’t have a teacher that really believed in me. I’m sure that a lot of my high school teachers or even junior high teachers would be surprised that I’m in a credential program now (Participant 5, personal communication, June, 2012).

Participant 5’s words reflect her sense of not being viewed as an individual and feeling reduced to the stereotyped assumptions of African Americans (Aronson, 2008). This assertion of Participant 5’s feelings of exclusion is further supported as she went on to say:

...the way I felt, like I just kind of disappeared to my teacher. The way that no extra time was set to help when they knew that I didn’t understand, even with my counselors. It could have been because I was a “black girl” to where I just disappeared, and it was like, whatever. Being a “black girl” and going through that or feeling that way [shaking her head no], at least, it was like, I would like to be a teacher because of that so that I don’t do those things (Participant 5, personal communication, June, 2012).

Echoing Participant 5’s feelings of being the “black girl,” Participant 8 shares her experience of being the only African American in most of her coursework while pursuing a Special Education credential at a private Christian University. She shared:
In class, in general, people don't understand [what it is like to be black] because they don't walk in your shoes. They think they live in this utopia where color doesn't matter anymore, but it does. No matter where I go or what I do, again, I'm going to be that "black girl" over there. That's the deciding factor of who people perceive me as, and how I relate to anybody else. I'm always going to be that "black girl" over there whether I have dyed blonde hair or blue contacts in my eyes, I'm still going to be that "black girl" over there (Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2012).

The saliency of being totalized by the racial stereotype of being a "black girl" is expressed in Participant 8's words and reflects her feelings of being confined to her racial background (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Being that "black girl" carries certain assumptions and inferences of racial and academic inferiority. For both Participant 5 and Participant 8, being the "black girl" implies that they lack potential or the capacity to contribute anything significant as the inherent characteristics of their skin color takes precedence. Thus, being that "black girl" ultimately predicts how faculty and peers will respond and interact with them as well as hinders their level of engagement.

Similarly, Participant 4 shared an example of how cohort peers perceived and interacted with her, the only African American Special Education preservice teacher in her cohort at a State University:

I think now, it's very interesting because we've been with the same people especially for two quarters now, or most of the same people. People kind of put it on me [stereotypes] or over address it [her blackness]. Some people will try to talk a certain way or move their body or head a certain way and I'm like "why are you acting that way?" They feel like "oh, I'm identifying with you, right?" I'm like "not really, you just look stupid. Why are you doing that?" I feel like more people just kind of bring it out and try to over expose it [blackness]. I'm like why? I know I'm black but -- (Participant 4, personal communication, May, 2012).
Participant 5, Participant 8, and Participant 4 described experiences in which they felt the stereotype threat in the air. The stereotype threat of being the "black girl" and what being a "black girl" means was cued by their awareness that a negative group stereotype could be an applicable characterization of themselves (Steele, 1997). Whether they believe the stereotype or not, their blackness carries negative connotations and assumptions that define whom others perceive them to be. The negative connotations associated with being that "black girl" derive, in part, from the disparaging stereotypes of African American women portrayed in mainstream media (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Kretsedemas, 2010).

In recent years, the media’s depiction of African American women has become noticeably a more aggressive stereotype, similar to the destructive stereotype portrayal of African American men (Kretsedemas, 2010). This form of derogatory representation of black people has a profound influence on Whites’ perceptions of African Americans. For instance, as one of very few African American undergraduates at a predominantly White, private Liberal Arts university in Iowa, Participant 2 shared, “I was dealing with white students who had never encountered black people except for on television (Participant 2, personal communication, May, 2012). What they saw on television or what they had been told, they believed it.” Thus, negative characterizations of blacks in mainstream media are perceived to be true depictions of African Americans’ and their culture (Ford, 1997).
The damaging portrayals of African Americans become further pronounced in films with a predominantly African American cast (Ford, 1997). For instance, Tyler Perry's (2005) movie, "Diary of an Mad Black Woman," which consisted of an all black cast, has become the controlling imagery (Griffin, 2012) of African American women as possessing loud tones, antagonistic attitudes, and hostile demeanors. This negative perception of African American women has become commonly referred to as "angry black woman" and specifically referenced by half the female participants of this study.

While describing schooling experiences, African American female participants revealed how the "threat in the air" (Steele, 1997) of being an "angry black women" affected their decision-making while in school. Participant 11, a teaching candidate focusing on Communication Disorders at a State University, explained how the threat in the air affected her during her undergraduate studies:

I don't ever want to be combative. I can stand up for myself and disagree with someone, but I don't want them to perceive me in that negative connotation as far as "oh look, there's that black woman. There's that black angry woman syndrome again." I don't want to be that angry black woman. I think, I'm always conscience of how I'm reacting to a situation because I never know when I'm going to be their only encounter with a black person (Participant 11, personal communication, September, 2012).

Participant 11 continued on to explain how she fell under the watchful eye being an athlete, however the stereotype threat in the air of being perceived to be an "angry black woman" was more restricting:

I feel like I couldn't be...[Participant 11] to a certain degree because I always feel like all eyes were always on me because I went to a predominantly white college and because I was a star athlete there. The eyes were already on me. I did slip up a couple of times. I always feel
like I had to be on top of it (Participant 11, personal communication, September, 2012).

When the researcher asked to elaborate further on what she meant by “slip up,” Participant 11 stated:

They [stereotypes] would come out and they’d [white people] be like, “oh there’s that angry black woman, there she is. I knew it was in there somewhere.” I can’t just react to something. It has to be this over the top stereotype that they play into. It just can’t be that “oh, I had a bad day and I got upset.” It couldn’t be just that someone wronged me so I want to express that. It has to be the over the top stereotype. I feel like I could never be... [Participant 11] because I’m always like okay ... [Participant 11] just kind of take, this for now, it’s not that serious. It’s going to blow too far out of proportion and it’s going to get too serious (Participant 11, personal communication, September, 2012).

Participant 11’s story illustrates how the disparaging views of African American women limited her ability to openly express her feelings or react to unfair treatment due to fears that her responses to discriminatory treatment would be taken out of context. The perception of her being an “angry black woman” will take precedence over the marginalization and various microaggressions functioning in academia. Likewise, Participant 8 expressed similar concerns of being an “angry black woman”:

For example, you can say something and somebody will say to a black person, “you’ve been aggressive” whereas to a white person, [saying the same comments] “you’re asserting yourself.” They’re [white people] not letting people dictate to them what they should and should not do. When it’s a black person and you say it, you’re angry. “Why are you talking like that?” [White person’s response to a black persons comment]. You would say it the exact same way somebody else said it, but because you’re black, you’re perceived as being an “angry black woman” or an “angry black man.” You have to watch what you say and how you say it (Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2012).
Not only does Participant 8 reveal the prevalence of negative perceptions of black women, her comments also suggest elements of white privilege. For example, Participant 8’s statement, “They’re [white people] not letting people dictate to them what they should and should not do” (Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2012), suggest the “benefits of whiteness as property” (Harris, 1993, p. 1758). Whites are not subjected to monitoring their behaviors, speech, or attitudes in comparison to African Americans. As Harris (1993) contends, the benefits of whiteness are based upon relations of power and privilege in which white dominance is maintained through Black subordination.

Participant 12, a Pupil Personnel Services credentialing student attending a State University, also articulated her frustrations of faculty mistreatment towards her in response to her absence from class:

Then, because of the night one and night two, I fell back. I have to be reserved because I don’t want to come across as an “angry black woman” who has a problem with this white woman. I feel oppressed. Now let’s just say it that way, because if you can’t say what you think or feel because you’re afraid of repercussions, isn’t that what oppression means? Well, then yes, I feel oppressed (Participant 12, personal communication, September, 2012).

Within the academic domain, Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) contend that being “judged on prevalent social stereotypes” drives African Americans to “actively resist the stereotypes with their behaviors both in and outside the classroom” (p. 510). The vivid examples shared by Participant 11, Participant 8 and Participant 12 illustrate how the stereotype threat of being perceived as an “angry black
woman" was internalized and regulated their behaviors to avoid confirming this negative perception.

While pursuing a Single Subject credential at a predominantly White Christian University, Participant 2 shared how she worried about tripping the stereotypical perception:

I had to make sure that I didn’t fall into the stereotypes that other people thought about us [Black people]. I also had to still be myself. My voice carries you know in areas, black people are loud....It was just making sure that I represent myself to white people in a good way (Participant 2, personal communication, May, 2012).

The threat of the stereotype has a direct influence on social interactions and behaviors as reflected in Participant 2's words. She expressed an awareness of inherent characteristics that allude to insinuations of racial inferiority as well as deep apprehensions of possibly confirming unfavorable views of African Americans (Aronson, Fried & Good, 2002; Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). The desire to counter negative stereotypes, Green (2008) contends is an ongoing dilemma in the lives of African Americans.

In comparison to the experiences of the African American female participants, the three African American males in this study also expressed stereotypical views brought forth by media representation of African American males. As previously, mentioned, African American males are stereotyped in mainstream media by negative social images. Most often, African American males are only portrayed as athletic scholarship recipients within the college environment. Scholastic abilities are seldom recognized as talents and skills
associated with African American males (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Participant 6 shared his experience with this stereotype threat in the air by describing how his presence as an African American male in higher education always attracts attention. Participant 6 shared:

I would definitely say the fact that we’re [black men] always getting that attention because we’re not supposed to necessarily be there and it’s not a natural fit. You’re always mindful of that everywhere. You have to be super observant of how people come across; the questions people ask you, how people want to discredit you, disqualify you. Like for example my favorite is – “oh, you went to college? What sport did you play?” So they say that because they want to disqualify me in terms of you probably were for sports. “No, I’m all academics.” A lot of the times I don’t even like to mention that I’m African because I don’t want them to even discredit me there and say, “oh, well you’re African, you’re different.” I want them to look at me and say, “okay he’s black and every sense of the word. We can’t disqualify him but yet he’s here and he’s operating at a certain level.” There’s that challenge that you have every day. People are trying to disqualify you, discredit you, and they think that you can’t cut it or you’re here because of affirmative action or something of that nature (Participant 6, personal communication, June, 2012).

Participant 6 captures the feeling of many academically high achieving African American males that must contend with negative and restrictive identity contingencies because of a physical characteristic (Steele, 2010). For example, Participant 6’s reluctance to express that he is actually Nigerian American demonstrates the powerful effects that totalizing distinctions have on individuals and how individuals internalize these experiences. Steele (2010) refers to this stereotype threat as a “subset of identity contingencies” that shapes how an individual functions and informs them of their particular identity (p. 71). When identity contingencies are threatening as determined by pervasive negative stereotypes of a group, individuals become more “aware of being a particular
Participant 7, also of Nigerian descent, expresses identity contingencies as he describes his racial identity:

Yeah, I do identify as African-American. I probably consider myself Nigerian-American because I like to represent that, I am proud of my Nigerian heritage; I'm not ashamed of it. At the same time, I am aware [negative stereotypes] and I want to put out there that I [do] not necessarily see myself - [just an African American] like I'm a hybrid of the two (Participant 7, personal communication, August, 2012).

Although Participant 7 initially states an African American identity, his words reveal identity contingencies due to possible judgments or stereotypes within a social context. He speaks of being proud of his Nigerian heritage and not ashamed of it, implying that being actually from Africa carries certain stigmas. Participant 7's awareness of such cues further suggest that within social settings, how others treat him is contingent upon one of which of his social identities - African American male, Nigerian male, or Nigerian American male, he chooses to divulge to others (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittman & Crosby, 2008).

Identity contingencies are based upon given characteristics. Participant 6 captures the complexities that negative stereotypes of African American males bear on their academic abilities as well as how deeply these stereotypes are felt (Steele, 1997).

When it's not part of what it seems to be a Black man, education is not part of it,... people aren't going to do it. Men aren't going to do it and unfortunately, to be educated and to be Black and masculine are oxymoron's. It's very difficult where in other groups, it enhances your masculinity. Yes, you're academically sound, you're educated, you're professional; you're even more of a man. Black men were one of the few groups where it's just like people look at you funny. If you're educated, then how masculine are you? (Participant 6, personal communication, June, 2012).
In contrast, Participant 9 expressed concerns regarding race and gender while enrolled in a credentialing program in which males and African Americans are generally unrepresented. He described the subtle behaviors and attitudes towards him that he felt when interacting with his cohort mates and faculty who were all White and female:

Some of the females I spoke to were a little more accepting of course, but most of them weren’t. They would have their little study groups and I would ask them a question about some material and they would give me short answers; they wouldn’t try to explain. I think that they felt they had to compete with me because I was a man and they thought that I was a shoe in to get into the master’s program, but obviously, I wasn’t. I remember there was this one professor who I had the first quarter I was there, after I had her, I would see her in the hallway because she’s part-time and she would parade down and walk past me. Just little things like that (Participant 9, personal communication, September, 2012).

Participant 9 expressed that it was more than just gender differences. He described the anguish he felt being constantly judged and discriminated against which ultimately affected his performance and goals to continue:

This wasn’t my cup of tea. That’s why I told myself, that was one of my worst decisions I made in my life going to that school because of how I felt.... It made me feel a little [withdrawn], I wasn’t as motivated. As a matter of fact, I didn’t even want to go back there my [graduating] year because it was one of those things where I have to deal with this for ten more months or nine more months (Participant 9, personal communication, September, 2012).

When Participant 9 was asked to elaborate on these experiences, Participant 9 recalled an incident in which the professors comfort level with his White cohort peers revealed the racial biases that he felt were directed towards him;

I think what happened was [recalling the incident]... It was a group project that I was dealing with two other students and we needed the manual that was in her [professor] room. I asked for it and she told me that she
couldn’t give it to me right now because she’s going to a meeting. Can you come back later on? [the professor asked] I live in [local city 30 minutes away]...and my class is over so she expected me to come back up there with traffic, gas, and all that stuff. I guess she didn’t understand that [when he responded no] so she snatched the book out of my hand, went to the office, and proceeded to say that comment to [about] me. In little subtle ways, but it was aimed towards me....The way she said it was she was talking to one of the other students in my group and she said, “Yeah it looks like there’s a fly in the ointment in your group.” (Participant 9, personal communication, September, 2012).

In a similar study of African American undergraduate students experience with racism and stereotypes on campus, Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) found that university faculty were the “main perpetrators of stereotypical thinking towards African American students” (p.642). Faculty would openly express racial biases and racist beliefs in the lecture rooms. The negative stereotypical views held by college faculty reveal the low expectations and lack of support in African American students’ academic abilities.

For Participant 9, a professor’s indirect and coded language not only revealed disparate treatment, but the “fly in the ointment” analogy also reveals racialized undertones. Ultimately, these experiences obviously have a direct impact on the educational experience of African American students, and in this case, Black males (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012).

Theme 2: Grappling

“You Have to Play the Hand You’re Dealt”

As the construct of the “stereotype threat in the air” emerged as a reoccurring theme in the participants’ voices as discussed in Theme 1, inquiry
was focused on participant's persistence and motivation to continue in the face of such threats. Participants revealed coping strategies employed to combat marginalization and discrimination. This section highlights the ways in which their experiences revealed more than just coping strategies but the notion of "grappling" with stereotype threats in the air in various situations emerged as a second theme.

According to Sizer & Sizer (2011) grappling is a balancing act between "meaning" and "meaning –making." Grappling calls for an individual to "do what one has never done before and thus learns more about what one wants to do" (p.132). It raises questions of morals and values that are not explicitly stated. For example, when participants were asked how they handle situations in which microaggressions occurred, Participant 9 stated:

Yeah, they always say not to play the race card, but you play the hand that you’re dealt. Right. You play the hand that you’re dealt. If people are constantly demonstrating certain behaviors towards you and you feel like that [discriminated against] then it’s obvious that you know [they have biases]. I just... [handled] the mature way instead of confronting her [professor] ....(Participant 9, personal communication, September, 2012).

Participant 9's reflection on microaggressions demonstrates the deeper consideration that he must give to unfair and discriminatory treatment. As he stated, “that's just one of those things that you kind of learn after awhile” (Participant 9, personal communication, September, 2012).

For Participant 9, each microaggression acts a "distant mirror" in which the meaning of his immediate experience is "viewed against a sweep of human and environmental experiences, past and present" (Sizer, 1999, p. 187). Participant
9’s words reveal his desires not to believe that his professor harbors racial biases as he grapples with the meaning of the situation. However, his past experiences play a role in making meaning of the situation as he is left with no other choice but to confirm his suspicions’ of the professors racial biases towards him. In comparison, Participant 6 provides insight into how he grapples with the racial stereotypes he encounters regularly while on campus. Participant 6 shared:

Sometimes if you feed into that [stereotypes] you could go crazy. All I could do is honestly just, be myself and say we’re not all like that. You do have brothers who are trying to be productive. It’s difficult and sometimes you have to pick your battles and if it’s one of those [situations] no, I can’t win when some of the stereotypes that they believe are greater than what I can do (Participant 6, personal communication, June, 2012).

Participant 3 shared an experience in which she addressed a negative stereotype with peers in her teacher education class:

…I heard one of the students say – he’s white – and his last name is Jenkins. He’s like “oh, it’s just that my last name [is a black name] – because he was being really loud in class. “What does that mean? That you’re saying that because you have a black last name that you have to be loud or that black people in general are loud? You do realize that’s a stereotype, right? That’s really racist.” He said, “no, it’s just what it is” (Participant 3, personal communication, May, 2012).

Participant 3 continued,

I felt that I had to explain to them that that’s not how everyone is. There are people that act like that but there are, people who are raised not to act like that. Just because you’re black doesn’t mean that this is how – you can assume that they’re all going to be this way (Participant 3, personal communication, May, 2012).

The participants’ responses depicts the ways in which African American college students must actively process real life experiences to define the meaning of
such experiences and respond in more productive ways to offset the damaging effects of these experiences. This form of grappling enables African Americans to understand social situations and react in more transformative ways to change negative perceptions even when they feel that “going off” would be a justified response. To expand on this point, Participant 7 shares his words of wisdom that he tells other Black men in response to these situations:

I would say this to black men all the time. Think about how horrible it would be to be around black men if we got so angry with what we have to deal with all the time. We learn how to deal with it in different ways because who would want to be around this angry and mad [black man] all the time so you just have to learn how to leave it where it is and pick and choose your battles (Participant 7, personal communication, August, 2012).

Participant 7’s words of wisdom to other Black men indicate the challenge grappling with stereotype threat in social situations poses on individuals. The personal instinct to defend and protect ones image by responding to the stereotypes becomes complicated resulting in confirming and reinforcing the negative stereotypes. The fears of supporting negative stereotypes of African Americans in the eyes of others (Schmader, 2010; Shapiro, 2011) are expressed in Participant 4’s comments:

Sometimes I try to address each situation as, is it going to make my ethnicity as a whole, better or worse? If, it’s going to make us look worse, if I try to go at an issue or whatever and they’ll be like, “of course you’re going to say that,” than I might not say that just because I don’t want us to look bad. There’s enough of us who already do that; I don’t need to add to that (Participant 4, personal communication, May, 2012).

Although Participant 4 expresses a desire to counter the negative stereotypes, she actually gives credibility to the stereotype by confirming that African
Americans are behaving poorly. Similarly, Participant 5 articulated this dilemma by stating:

That's what it means to be African-American that you have to juggle what the world thinks about you with who you really are and trying to even set yourself apart. Sometimes when you're trying to set yourself apart, we get stuck in putting our own race down, a lot of times (Participant 5, personal communication, June, 2012).

The essence of how African Americans' must grapple with stereotype threats in the air is captured in both Participant 4 and Participant 5' statements as their beliefs about their racial identity, in the face of stereotype threats, are grounded within their collective identity.

With regards to collectivism, some participants expressed how they often relied on fictive kinships as a means of support. Participant 2 described how she was able to cope during her undergraduate studies and found support in talking to family and other African American peers:

I’ve been able to talk with other black students about it [encounters with racism] and my family. I’ll call home and talk to them. Then, we [Participant 2 and other Black female students] started our own organization. There was already one there, but it was more centered around the black males on campus. The black males on campus were more assimilated into the school culture because they were athletes but the black females were not. So, we started a group that kind of catered to our needs, where we could go and talk about different things. It gave us a sense of power on campus (Participant 2, personal communication, May, 2012).

Participant 6 echoed Participant 2's comments by seeking support from others as a coping strategy. He stated, “Obviously, you can’t blow up. For me, I'm lucky enough that I have a support group of friends where we can just share our feelings and kind of vent that way.” Likewise, Participant 7 also expressed that
he found comfort amongst other African Americans rather than seek out services provided at through the university. Participant 7 shared:

I really do believe that it's more of a comfort level because you're more comfortable around your own. It's like that's what it is, your comfort zone. When you're with people that you feel like you can identify with, you're more prone to attach yourself to them rather than sometimes delving out and going to do something completely different and opposite of what your comfort zone is (Participant 7, personal communication, August, 2012).

Theme 3: Racial Identity

"I'm Black, Dog Gone It"

When African American preservice teachers were asked to define their racial identity, to some degree, all twelve participants stated that they were "African American," either "Black American" or "Black." As Participant 12 states, "my racial identity is that I'm black." Likewise, Participant 5 responded, "I would say that I'm African-American." However, the researcher sought to uncover exactly what it means to be "Black" or "African American and probed further into participants' responses. In doing so, participants such as Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 9 passionately defined their racial identity. Participant 1, of caramel brown skin complexion, stated:

I'm black! I'm black, and I don't go for all that other stuff. I'm black, dog gone it! That's it! I'm not white. The other stuff that I'm mixed with is so way far back, I can't even get a check or anything else for it so I'm just black, that's it! (Participant 1, personal communication, April, 2012). As Participant 1 expresses a sense of pride in being "just black" and not acknowledging any other racial ethnicities in how she defines her racial identity.
Participant 2, of dark brown skin complexion, also alludes to the same sense of pride by stating:

... I've always been proud to be black. I've never said that I was mixed with anything else. I have family members that say, "oh our great, great, grandma was Native American." No, I'm black! I'm not claiming anything else. When the census comes, I mark the box 'black'. I've always been proud of it. I've always seen beauty in it, and I never let anyone take and break down my self esteem because I'm dark skinned. I've been called everything. I always thought that it was something that I should be proud of and I knew that other people were jealous of because they didn't have it. I could see that whatever we did that was positive or that other people couldn't do, people tried to take it away from us. So I've always been comfortable being who I was (Participant 2, personal communication, May, 2012).

Participant 9, also of light skin complexion, said:

Some people say, "You look like you're mixed." That may be the case, but I identify with black people, that's just who I am. That's what I've always been. It's funny because a lot of black people today don't like their identity. You have a lot of fiction talking about "I'm half this and half that". I'm just fully black. It's funny because they can't do a math problem, but they know what the half is (Participant 9, personal communication, September, 2012).

Overwhelmingly, participants revealed a strong sense of individual racial identity but fictive kinship (collective identity) emerged as a subtheme of their racial identity. Carson (2009) contends that one's racial identity functions as both an individual and a group identity based upon a "common racial heritage" (p.328).

To illustrate, African Americans' sense of connection with one another,

Participant 2 provided the following description as she attempted to explain the core features of her racial identity to a friend:

I was telling him [her friend], it's the soul that black people have that connects us. We can be anywhere on this earth. But we can be English, we can be American, we can be over in Africa or Brazil, but it's the soul
that connects us no matter what. It's almost like music. If you hear a drum beat, it's the sensation that goes through like no matter where we are, no matter what we go through, we connect. I try to explain to him like, have you ever seen a black person getting ready to get into a fight with somebody else and you know there were no black people around, but then you look up and there's like 20 black people that come out of nowhere. They're like, "you okay?" Where did you all come from? I'm like there's a spirit that connects us. A lot of people say that we're not unified because we don't walk around holding hands and marching anymore like we used to but we're unified; it's a unified spirit. That would be something that is distinct with black people, other people might not be able to see it, but we feel it (Participant 2, personal communication, May, 2012).

The interconnectivity and unified spirit that Participant 2 refers to in the above statement provides an example of the kinship like relationships between unrelated African Americans, which serves as an informal social support network (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu; 1986). The source of the interconnectedness amongst African Americans is based upon the commonality of a shared oppressive historical heritage (Carson, 2009). This sense of a collective identity offers safety and security as illustrated in Participant 2's description of a black person in a conflict and seemingly, out of nowhere other black people come to one's aid. However, Fordham & Ogbu (1986) contend that membership in the fictive kinship system is not solely based upon physical characteristics. Membership can be denied based upon one's behaviors as well as one may choose not to seek membership despite their black features. To expand upon this notice, Participant 4, Participant 8 and Participant 10 share examples of being excluded from fictive kinship relationships by choice or by other group members while in school.
Following the family’s move from the inner city to the suburbs, Participant 4 recalls an early school experience as she shared the following story:

I remember there was only one other black girl and she was in the other preschool class. When we went outside to play together, I remember seeing her and saying that I wanted to play with her because she looks like me, we’re the same. She didn’t want to play with me. That’s kind of my first experience of realizing that I was black and then having a negative [feeling] about being black as well (Participant 4, personal communication, May, 2012).

Participant 4 continued to describe other experiences during both middle school and high school years:

When I was going through junior high, especially I never really fit in with the black kids. I’m assuming because it’s the way I talk, the way I dress. My whole mentality was completely different then a lot of the black kids at my school. I never fit in with them. I always had a fire or passion to represent black people and be like a little baby Black Panther or something, but I never fit in. I never was like good [black] enough. I remember in high school I had a friend that was white, but she talked the right way and she dressed the right way. She said the right things and did the right things and black people accepted her, but they didn’t accept me (Participant 4, personal communication, May, 2012).

Participant 4’s story provides a glimpse into the ways in which African Americans can be excluded from the fictive kinship within the school setting based upon how other members perceive them. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) refer to the exclusion from the fictive kinship in school settings as the “burden of acting white.” Within the school setting, African Americans are often excluded from the collective membership for demonstrating behaviors that are commonly associated with whites such as high academic performance. As example, Participant 5 expressed how she copes with the burden of acting white in the following statement:
...a lot of us African Americans feel what we have to do to succeed is to leave our culture behind. I don't believe that. To succeed you stop doing everything that you think is black and then you take on everything that you think is white and you don't have to do that and so you get white wash, sell out, from the other blacks because you believe in your mind to succeed you have to get rid of the whole culture when there's dirty in every culture (Participant 5, personal communication, June, 2012).

Likewise, Participant 1 shared her encounters with the burden of acting white while she attended community college. She explained:

... if you wanted to get the master's degree, maybe even a bachelor's degree, that you were basically selling out and the few black people who were not teachers there were sell outs. It was okay to be a teacher, but I had one that was a counselor, one that was the department chair, and the lead forensics in the speech department, and all that and they were sellouts. I was like, "oh, I'm about to be a sellout" (Participant 1, personal communication, April, 2012).

In contrast to Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 1 experiences, Participant 8 shares her experience during her undergraduate studies in which she sought out fictive kinship relationships however made the decision not to continue membership in the collective group. She shared:

I found myself initially drawn to the African American Student Union and getting into that. I felt that it was something that I had to do for my identity. That didn't define me because honestly, I felt like some of the stuff that they were doing was ridiculous. I quickly left that and did my own thing. I actually did more activities with white people than I did with black people. I just found that some of their ideas [black students] and how they thought was ridiculous. I don't know; it's kind of, like you have to be smart. You have to stay on your toes. With black people, you can't be all about your color all the time because that doesn't matter with people. You have to prove yourself in other ways. You have to show that you can assimilate. When you join groups that make you dissimilate, than you run into problems because you get labeled (Participant 8, personal communication, September, 2012).
Participant 10 also alludes to the same conclusion of not seeking to be included in the collective group in response to unconstructive interactions with African American peers. Participant 10 shared:

We are far and few between. I do think that I don’t quite fit in with the majority, if that makes sense – of black people. I just feel like, I didn’t go to that school that was mostly black to have those characteristics or traits and then playing sports you have a different attitude about people and you’re working together as a team. We had a diverse team [basketball team] and I don’t know. I would say it’s affected me positively. I’ve been able to keep myself on track as much as possible. I do feel isolated or lonely. I do feel those feelings sometimes because even like right now, I’m the only black person in Phase 1 [credentialing program]. It gets kind of lonesome at times (Participant 10, personal communication, September, 2012).

When the researcher probed deeper into why she expressed feelings of be lonesome, yet she does not seek out relationships with African American peers, Participant 10 responded:

Lonesome because like even though I have friends that aren’t black, I still crave that ethnic relationship, that foundation where you don’t have to explain yourself when you’re talking about certain things or certain things are assumed. I know you have sister locks [referring to the researcher’s hair]. I’m not going to sit here and go “oh, how did you do your hair?” and things like that? I’m not going to ask you certain questions or give you a whole history lesson. Those are the things you kind of get tired of (Participant 10, personal communication, September, 2012).

Participant 10 continued to explain how she responds to questions about her blackness by White peers as well as how she feels when African American peers question her identity.

I feel like they [white people] genuinely want to know and I’m not offended. I’m not really at all offended. I get more irritated with black people asking me what I’m mixed with. As if I’m holding onto two different cultures when
I’m really only holding onto being black. I feel like that might be one of the reasons why I don’t go towards black people as much as I want to because I feel like you still put this – because I’m light or whatever it is; my outer appearance or whatever I’m not as black as I’m supposed to be or whatever. That would always irritate me being asked if I was mixed or whatever. I felt like if I was, is that good or bad? What makes it good and what makes it bad? I just didn’t agree with that question. When other cultures ask, I feel like it’s okay because you genuinely want to know. You don’t know and I don’t mind telling you because I like teaching. I’m open to that. When black people ask I do feel like you’re being ignorant because I do feel like everybody in the United States is mixed right about now. What is your real question? (Participant 10, personal communication, September 2012).

The participant’s statements discussed in this section reveal the complex ways in which African American racial identity functions in social settings, particularly educational environments. Both the preservice teachers’ individual perceptions of their race identity as well as perceptions of the collective group racial identity were contributing factors in their academic persistence and career aspirations.

Theme 4: Exposure to Diversity

“I’ve Been to Many Places and Seen Different Things”

Expressed by many of the participants in this study was their exposure to diversity during their schooling. Most participants referred to the exposure to other ethnic groups because of their families’ relocation to another geographic area or the participant’s leaving their communities to attend college in another state. Seven of the twelve preservice teachers shared that their families moved during their elementary and middle school years from the inner cities of Los Angeles, New York and Texas to a suburban area within the Inland Empire. Four
participants temporarily left their inner city communities to attend college immediately following their graduation from high school. One participant only resided in the Inland Empire all her life yet traveled each summer with her family. Overwhelmingly, all participants spoke of different school experiences in which interacting with different ethnic groups contributed to their school engagement and achievement.

In describing what stood out the most during her schooling experiences, Participant 5 shared that being raised by a single mother, she moved quite a bit. Participant 5 stated, "For me, I came from all black, to all Mexican, to all white so I had a lot of knowledge of being in those different exposures" (Participant 5, personal communication, June 2012). Her experiences of relocating to different communities brought forth new understandings as she expressed the following:

I think just the different cultures for me. I was blessed when I was in elementary school. I went to school with all blacks; even my principal was a black woman. It was a higher percentage of blacks than it was Hispanics and whites back then in L.A. Then we moved to [city name] and I went to school with mostly Hispanics from Mexico. Then we moved to [city name] and I went to school with mostly whites (Participant 5, personal communication, June 2012).

As Participant 5 explained her transitions to different areas and the exposure to different ethnic groups, she also shared how the academic rigor was slightly different in each school setting. Participant 5 said:

The quality [of education] from elementary to [predominantly Hispanic city] was about the same but in high school, it was more difficult. More work, testing and the testing that could attest to the year and the standards then, and just being in high school. You definitely had to do your homework and study to get good grades in high school. You had to do more and it
seemed like the quality was higher in [predominantly White city] (Participant 5, personal communication, June 2012).

In contrast to Participant 5’s experiences with diverse groups, Participant 2 shared that she had a great deal of exposure to other ethnic groups yet had very limited interactions with White students. Growing up on the Westside of Chicago, Participant 2 shared, “in high school there were blacks, Latinos, we had one Asian student, and the white students there were Polish. We did not have white American students.” However, Participant 2 described how the academic expectations changed upon leaving her community to attend a predominantly White college in another state:

Well, for undergrad they had a rigorous program. It was one course at a time. For three and a half weeks, we took one class and then that was it. It was a semester’s worth of work packed into those three and a half weeks. In the beginning, I couldn’t hack it. I started to figure out that they kind of did me wrong in high school because they didn’t prepare us for this. I saw that my white counterparts had been prepared. They knew more. All the black students at school knew less. It wasn’t that we weren’t smart, we were being taught two different things. It took me to my senior year where I really figured that out. I knew when I went to grad school that I had to put more effort into it. I had to catch up to the white students in my grad school classes because they were a couple of steps ahead of me. I had to not only get the information in class, but I had to go read more and know more in order to compete with them (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012)

Participant 7 also talked about how he experienced feelings of being unprepared in terms of academic performance being in a new environment as he transitioned from a private Christian school to a predominantly White public school.

Participant 7 shared:

It just felt like it was more rigorous and they were looking for high school graduates who were actually going to college. That kind of threw me out
for a loop. I knew that they said the junior years are a lot more rigorous, but at the same time when I look back at the differences in schools, there was a big difference. Here, I was in one environment where I felt like I was prospering and then I transferred to the more rigorous and successful environment and then I noticed that I was struggling. Maybe in a sense there were certain things or skills or habits that I developed that worked best in that environment but didn’t work best in the other environment (Participant 7, personal communication, August 2012).

Another participant, Participant 9 shared his experience of living within a diverse population in New York and then moving to California during his youth:

...I mean it’s basically a melting pot [New York]. You have West Indians, African Americans [Africans] or traditional African Americans [Blacks born in America] and Hispanic, some Asian (Participant 9, personal communication, September 2012).

Participant 9 continued on to explain that limited number of Whites in Queens at that time, as well as how had to adapt to being in a diverse community that was vastly different than where he had grown up. Participant 9 explained:

I remember, when I was in first grade there was this kid and I have to take that back a little bit, I did run into one white kid when I was growing up and he was kind of like the endangered species, so to speak or a lack of a better term. He used to get picked on a lot over the course. He looks different from the norm. That’s funny because when I moved out here to California in 1996, that was the first time that I ever seen a white person before. I never saw white people until I moved out to California. For me it was, the way I was brought up, I moved out here when I was 13. I moved to California when I was 13 and I lived in [city name] which had a great diverse population. I had to take all that stuff that was – all that yo, yo, yo, slang talking and adapt to how California was. I started watching that old show with Kevin James and the wife, how she got that accent and all that stuff.... Me, I’ve been to so many places that it doesn’t matter to me. I’ve been to many places and seen different things. I’m constantly learning (Participant 9, personal communication, September 2012).

During the interview with the researcher, Participant 9 shared that after completing his high school, he enlisted into the military. Being in the military
provided an array of experiences in which he was further exposed to diverse groups and learned how to interact with others.

In describing what stood out the most during his schooling experiences, Participant 6 shared his exposure to diversity as an undergraduate:

I think the most compelling part was the diversity. [State university in the Inland Empire] is one of the most diverse schools nationwide. Yeah, African student programs, fraternities. During my time period there, frats [fraternities] were there, sororities were there, and then you got this sort of "okay, I'm also interacting with different foreign students," students from different ethnic backgrounds. You're dealing with Asians and Caucasians and so, I got everything. It allowed me to understand how to work with and try to understand the people that I'm going to be working with in my professional life (Participant 6, personal communication, June 2012).

It is apparent that most participants' exposure to diversity because of a family relocation set the tone for rising to a new standard. Being exposed to other cultures served as a means of introducing participants to the cultural capital and expectations of mainstream society. Thus, in order to continue to aspire to reach their personal, family, and career goals, participants had to meet new expectations that they were not previously exposed to. Although this is not to say that the inner city communities lack the capacity to produce highly successful African Americans, the participants' stories revealed that they lacked the capacity to excel and compete at the same level as White counterparts.
Theme 5: Role Models

"She Let Something Loose"

To investigate motivational factors contributing to the participants' academic persistence, the researcher did not have to look very far. All twelve participants openly spoke of individuals that had an influence on their academic achievement, persistence, and career aspirations during their K-12 experience. Eight of the participants attended public schools that the participants characterized as being inner city schools. Three female participants attended private schools, which they characterized as being a semi-elite charter school, magnet school, and a parochial school. One male participant shared that he attended a private school prior to attending an urban public school. Despite the urban setting, participants spoke highly of individuals, primarily teachers that had an influence on their learning.

Participant 3 expressed her desires to teach began an early age, which resulted in her participation in a Future Teachers of America Club as a high school elective. She contributes her motivations to teach as being influenced by a high school teacher that kept her engaged in learning:

...I had a high school teacher, Mr. [Teacher], he [a] was history [teacher], and he was pretty awesome. He always played music to help us remember the songs and stuff. We had a game called History Bucks and I think at one point I earned enough History Bucks where I actually bought my final so I didn't have to take it my junior year. It was pretty great! He was the advisor for Future Teachers of America club that I was in (Participant 3, personal communication, May 2012).
Participant 7 also shared how his elementary school teacher ignited his interest in learning:

That was my fourth and sixth grade teacher... [Mr. Teacher]. One thing that I liked about him was that he made learning fun. He was a very jubilant individual. Class wasn't boring, and I actually grasp things and his whole demeanor, like I didn't get that with a lot of other teachers. They were more cut and dry. With him, I felt more captivated to learn which is originally why — ... Elementary was one of those track schools — [Mr. Teacher] was the reason why I switched tracks, to go to sixth grade with him (Participant 7, personal communication, August 2012).

For, Participant 7, the teacher student rapport encouraged him to try harder as he shared that he was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, which made learning more difficult for him. While reflecting on his own schooling experiences as a student with a disability, Participant 7 stated his motivations toward becoming a special education teacher:

When you're growing up as a kid and looking for a role model, you're looking for somebody that you can identify with, somebody that looks like you and probably has similar life experiences and could relate to your life experiences. Yes, I feel that I can be more relatable [to special education students] (Participant 7, personal communication, August 2012).

In terms of having role models that one can identify with, many participants referred to the experience of having an African American teacher during their education. When the researcher asked what stands out the most in the participants' K-12 experience, Participant 12 stated, “K through fourth [grade levels], I was in Texas and I had black teachers. African American teachers and African American students across the board. Then fifth through twelfth, I only had one African American teacher.” However, after her family moved to
California, Participant 12 felt a loss of support in school as she described, "I moved here. That's the first big difference. It was a culture shock on a lot of levels" (Participant 12, personal communication, September 2012).

Similar to Participant 12's experience of having African American teachers, Participant 10, Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 5 also provided vivid stories of how African American teachers had an impact on their education. When the researcher asked the same question of what stands out the most in the participants' K-12 experience, Participant 2 responded, "I will have to say the teachers in elementary school who let us know that it was okay to be black" (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).

Growing up in a Black community on the Westside of Chicago, Participant 2 recalls the influence of having African American teachers:

I had a lot of teachers who were pro black, who grew up in the 60's, and they were vocal in civil rights discussions. They had a lot of pull in the community and they were a part of the community because they lived here. They saw our community transition from being a great place to a bad place. They taught us that it's good to be black. This is your history, be proud of it and pass it down (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).

Participant 2 continued to describe how African American teachers encouraged her to be persistent along with the expectation to attend college:

My black teachers in elementary school showed me more than what was just in the book. They taught me that there are more things to learn. The more that you know, the more proud you are. With them telling me that and my mom encouraging me that I will go off to college. I will make a way, some kind of way; you will go [to college] (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).
This notion of African American teachers providing an education beyond the curriculum is derived from Black teachers' perceptions that it is their role to educate African American students on the realities of life (Maylor, 2009). Similarly, Solomon (1997) asserts African American teachers act as social change agents by providing African American students with a teaching style and classroom disciplinary structure that is similar to their family and home structures.

In comparison to Participant 2's experience of African American teachers providing knowledge and a curriculum that extended beyond the text, Participant 1 also shared similar teaching styles of her African American teachers:

They knew what we needed in order to make it out here. They knew what our parents and great grandparents and grandparents and some of our parents knew what we needed in order to make it. They weren't caring about a book (Participant 1, personal communication, April 2012).

This perspective supports King's (1993) viewpoint that suggest the teaching pedagogy of African American teachers “affirms the importance of education and the relationship of education to the academic, political, social, and economic success and advancement of African Americans” (p.117). As Participant 1 continued to reflect on the African American teachers that she had in school, she shared:

Yeah, I had an African-American teacher in kindergarten and I did not see another African-American teacher until I went to public school. I had a female African-American gym teacher, Ms. [Teacher], and I don’t know whether it’s innate or whether it was because of her that I love it, love it, love it; P.E. was my favorite class. Then when I went to ninth grade, I had other African-American teachers and they taught the highest curriculum they could teach. You have to teach to your students and I was in all the top classes... (Participant 1, personal communication, April 2012).
Participant 5 also shared how an African American teacher made her feel in comparison to her schooling experiences with other teachers:

Mrs. [Teacher], I will never forget her. She was a teacher that was interested in me. I could tell that she loved me. She thought I would go far and do well. She was an African American woman. I didn’t get that feeling from my other teachers. I was kind of lost in the crowd. There wasn’t extra time spent with me, only my teacher Mrs. [Teacher] did (Participant 5, personal communication, June 2012).

Participant 5 continued on to share how having an African American teacher in the class inspired her to teach:

It helped me and it was better for me when I saw an African-American teacher in the classroom, especially being a woman. Her presence helped me and it was like an example to me saying you can do this. This can be you. I think kids need to see that more [African American teachers] (Participant 5, personal communication, June 2012).

Following Participant 5’s K-12 experience, she described another experience of being influenced by an African American Sociology professor during her undergraduate studies at a state university:

Yeah, at [state university], I call her my mentor. Her last name is [professor]. I took her class and it changed my life. When I took her class, it was a boost for me. It helped to go out and change the world, and change the perspective that people have of blacks from taking her class. Before, I used to kind of, keep quiet and I had thoughts in my head and it’s like everyone’s going to be mad. They don’t believe that, and I would keep quiet but I always thought a certain way.... (Participant 5, personal communication, June 2012).

Participant 5 revealed that she was reluctant to openly express her thoughts and views as she felt that others would not agree. However, she felt a sense of empowerment as she continued to say:

And I just never really -- [spoke up] now I’m very vocal about, like the black kind, all because of her. I always felt that way but all because of her class
Exposure to African American teachers throughout the participant’s education allowed participants’ to consider careers in education (Smith, Mack & Akyea, 2004). Participant 6 shared a memory in which he recalled seeing African American male teachers on campus although he never had an African American male teacher. Participant 6 expressed how he felt just seeing African American male teachers at school informed him that education is a viable career option, he stated:

...the fact that there were other male teachers there and for me it was like okay, so it’s not this idea that teaching is all for women. That kind of had an impact on me. That was something that I had in the back of my mind (Participant 6, personal communication, June 2012).

In addition to participant’s characterizing teachers as significant role models, many participants spoke of the influences of various family members. When the researcher inquired about significant role models, most participants raised in a single parent home referred to either their mother or father. Other parents referred to their parents or the extended family unit. For example, Participant 2’s response to the researcher’s inquiry was as follows:

Yeah, they were my role models [African American teachers], and then my mother and my grandparents. My grandparents moved from down south and they actually made it and bought a home and took care of seven kids and became middle class Americans. My mom was a single parent but she brought me up and she worked hard. She went to school herself and I just saw that I didn’t have to be out there selling drugs. I didn’t do anything negative (Participant 2, personal communication, May 2012).
Like Participant 2, Participant 12 also responded that her role models were members of her extended family. Participant 12 stated:

My grandmother; my mom's mom. Because she was my caretaker prior to moving to California. In a lot of black people homes – three generations live together –... She was a big part of my life. In other words, my grandmother has third grade education. My mother has college units and then I have my bachelor's degree. Over the generations, it has ascended. From my family. It's important to me not only to achieve for myself, but for them too (Participant 12, personal communication, September 2012).

Participant 10 provides a unique experience of having a strong family heritage in which oral histories of their family's persistence and achievements were shared. Being raised in a family of high achievers as well as African American educators, Participant 10 shared that she has several role models:

Teaching actually goes way back in our family. I guess my great, great, grandmother was a runaway slave, and she had a school in her house for the kids. Obviously back then, you couldn't go to school first of all. Even when they did build schools for blacks, they would be four and five walking miles away or ten and twenty miles away, so she held one in her house on her farm. Her daughter did the same and then her daughter who is my grandmother went to USC at 17 and graduated from USC at 21. She's my in-house role model because I don't know anybody who can top that. Yeah, I have a lot of educators in my family. My grandmother, she's a retired teacher from LA Unified. My aunt, she's a teacher for special ed in Victorville. I have a couple more teachers, but I won't go on (Participant 10, personal communication, September 2012).

When the researcher inquired about any role models outside of school, Participant 6 referred to his extended Nigerian family unit and attributed his motivation to excel. Participant 6 went on to explain:

Well, growing up and I guess this is where the Nigerian side kicks in, my uncles and family friends they all had the same background so I was always around educated, well to do, black men and women. That was just always around me and even the older siblings and the older cousins, them
going through it and getting on me for grades not being there, so I was just immersed in it (Participant 6, personal communication, June 2012).

Participant 6’s perspective supports Ogbu’s (1992) explanation for voluntary minority success in school in comparison to involuntary minorities. With the status of voluntary minorities to the United States, Participant 6’s Nigerian family has high expectations for a better life, which influences their perceptions of education and schooling. As Participant 6’s statements reveal he is immersed in culture in which the community forces are contributing factors to his academic achievements.

Summary

The themes emerging from the participants’ personal stories provided a glimpse into the origin of their high academic achievements and drive to seek careers in education. As the data revealed significant recurring themes emerged that, reflect issues of race and racism as being constant constructs in African American academic experiences. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the positive and negative constructs related to participants’ racial identity and academic persistence. The participant’s experiences serve as conscious factors in defining participants’ academic persistence and how participants’ grappled with these factors. Participants revealed the psychological anguish that they must contend with on a daily basis as being totalized by their physical characteristics. However, their voices revealed a critical consciousness toward transforming this reality (Gomez et al, 2011).
Figure 4 illustrates the positive constructs related to the academic persistence of African American preservice teachers as revealed from the emerging themes of the data analysis. The arrows represent the pathway from education to a career in education. Beginning during the participants' K-12 experiences, the influences derived from their racial identity, interactions with role models and exposure to diversity lead to positive outcomes such as higher education and education careers.

The emerging themes of "stereotype threat in the air" and "grappling with the stereotype threat" are viewed as negative constructs as these constructs can hinder academic persistence and interest in educational careers. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship of negative constructs related to the academic persistence of African American preservice teachers.
Similar to Figure 4, the arrows represent the pathway from education towards an education career. Following the participants' K-12 experiences, participants enrolled in college in which their experiences in higher education vastly differed. Their racial identity remained at the center of their school experiences. Their higher education experiences revealed the saliency of institutionalized racism and discrimination. However, the participants' racial identity plays a duo role in their higher education experiences. For example, arrow (a) represents how the participants' racial identity (physical characteristics of blackness) resulted in numerous encounters with (b) stereotype threats in the air. As participants encountered numerous microaggressions present in the stereotype threats, their responses (c) lead to "grappling". Participants were able to grapple with the stereotype threats in the air because of their strong sense of racial identity as revealed in their interview transcripts. Although the participants' negative higher education experiences presented a hindrance in their academic persistence and career aspirations, these experiences served as motivation to (d) counter these experiences for other students by becoming a teacher.

In this sense, this study indicates that a significant relationship exists between a high sense of racial identity and academic persistence. Accordingly, in answering the research question, regarding the relationship between participants' racial identity and their career aspirations, African American preservice teachers have a strong sense of racial identity are likely to seek teaching careers as a means of becoming positive role models for students. This
supports evidence found in other empirical research that highlights race and academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2003).

Figure 5. Negative Constructs of Schooling Experiences.

While these findings are not generalizable to a wider population of African American teacher credential candidates, it does provide an in depth examination of what is occurring within the Inland Empire (a region about one hour east of Los Angeles). Thus, the findings of this study can provide insight on how African Americans perceive their schooling experiences and how these experiences affect their academic persistence. More research should be concerned with changing the perceptions and practices of college professors towards African American preservice teachers.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This phenomenological study was designed to explore the academic persistence and career aspirations of African American postbaccalaureate students. As such, Critical Race Theory (CRT) methodologies were used to elicit the voices of twelve African American preservice teachers through semi-structured interviews. As the transcripts of the twelve interviews and field notes were analyzed, five themes emerged as significant constructs. These themes, as presented in Chapter 4 were: (1) stereotype threat in the air, (2) grappling with stereotype threats, (3) racial identity, (4) exposure to diversity and (5) role models. To illustrate the essence and relevance of the African American preservice teachers lived experiences as revealed in this emerging themes, this chapter will provide a summary of the study findings, implications, and conclusions.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section begins by presenting the interpretation of the emerging themes related to the research questions. The second section discusses the conceptual framework of this study as applied to the findings. The third section provides the implications of the findings on teacher education programs, university faculty, and African American
students. Lastly, the chapter presents a general conclusion of this study’s findings for dissemination and future research.

Summary of Research Questions

Research Question 1

How do African American preservice teachers describe their experience within the K-12 school system?

As participants described their K-12 experiences, the data analysis revealed that all participants expressed their exposure to diversity as a prominent factor in their schooling experience. As noted in Chapter 4, the participants either moved from a lower income urban community to a middle class suburban area with their families or left their communities to attend a predominantly white college in another state. In each instance, the participants’ relocation served as a pivotal point in their educational experiences as participants expressed differences in teacher expectations, academic rigor, and cultural experiences.

Research Question 2

In what ways do African American preservice teachers define and describe their motivation to pursue careers in education?

According to the data analysis related to research question 2, African American preservice teachers described their motivation to pursue education careers as being influenced by role models. Role models were identified as teachers and family members who were instrumental in the participants’
academic achievements. Four participants described the influences of family members that have obtained college degrees or close relatives that were also educators. Eight participants identified a particular teacher as a role model during their schooling experiences that had an impact on their decision to teach. In both cases, participants described their role models as individuals that believed in their potential and encouraged them to do their best.

Further analysis of the data related to role models revealed that participants described their teacher role models as caring and more supportive in comparison to their other teachers throughout their schooling experiences. For example, participants identified a particular teacher during their schooling experiences that had a lasting impact on their lives. The analysis also reveals that four teacher role models were identified as being African American females, two African American males a white female and a white male. These educators were depicted as teachers that developed a strong rapport with students and created engaging classroom learning experiences that challenged the participants. These findings are supported by prior research that found a correlation between teaching practices and African American students school success (Wiggan, 2007). This engaging teaching style increased the participants' academic efforts, which supports Duncan-Andrade (2007) assertion that the depth of the teacher student relationships increases student effort and achievement. As a result, participants felt empowered to achieve and remain academically persistent.
Although participants' identified teacher role models that had an impact on their academic persistence and achievement, the "humanizing element of education" (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 635) was not a common experience throughout their schooling. Participants' described an array of schooling experiences that were marred by teachers that held to a disengaging pedagogy. Thus, those few teachers that saw participants as individuals, recognized their cultural capital (Bartolome, 1994) and created a humanizing learning experience stood out as role models and were instrumental in the participants school success (Wiggan, 2012). As previously stated, most participants identified teacher role models that were African American, which also suggests that participants saw themselves and their own potential in their teacher role models. The effect of these experiences essentially defined the participants' motivations and interest in teaching.

Research Question 3

What role, if any, does race play into their decision to become an educator?

The data analysis associated with research question 3 was two-fold. First, the data revealed that participants did not feel that race played a direct role in their decision to teach. Four participants explicitly stated that they did not see any connection between their racial identity and their decision to pursue a career in education. This is probably related to the limited presence of African Americans teachers. However, issues of race emerged throughout all
participants K-12 and college experiences, which placed their race as a continuous influence in their education.

Participants shared various experiences in educational settings in which they encountered negative incidents centered on their race. Participants described these negative experiences as numerous encounters with stereotype threats and microaggressions that placed their physical racial characteristics ahead of their academic skills and abilities. As such, participants aspired towards teaching careers to transform these negative experiences of racism within the school setting for other students of color.

This analysis suggests that the participants' racial identity does play an unintended role in their decision to enter the teaching profession. Even though participants did not explicitly say, "I want to teach because I am black," their racialized experiences lead them towards teaching. Most participants sought teaching careers for intrinsic reasons. Their cultural understandings of race, experiences as a student of color, and their awareness of social inequalities in school provided them with positive perceptions of their abilities to influence other students of color by teaching (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). Participants did not associate being African American with teaching however being African American and enduring countless forms of racism, encouraged them to pursue teaching careers.

Second, the data analysis revealed the ancillary role of the participants' race in their decision to become educators. As a cultural feature, participants felt
that their race identity was irrelevant to their career goals. However, their social experiences in various school settings related to their physical characteristics or "blackness" did inform their passions to pursue a career in which they could impact the lives of marginalized youth. In particular, participants referenced their negative schooling experiences of being invisible to teachers yet their "blackness" was highly visible. In addition, African American male participants of this study expressed their race as preceding their academic abilities. This speaks to the stereotype views of Black men in America as being lazy, uneducated criminals.

Specifically, the participants schooling experiences with stereotype threat and being subjected to endure counterproductive incidents within the learning environment made participants' attuned to racial cues. As several participants stated during face-to-face interviews, no matter what they do, they are still only seen as black and being black entails discriminatory treatment in and outside of schooling. Thus, participants had a desire towards becoming role models similar to their teacher role models and inspire students of color to overcome the social barriers and continue their education.

Research Question 4

In what ways, do African American preservice teachers define and describe their persistence to pursue higher levels of education?

The data related to research question 4 revealed the participants ability to grapple with stereotype threats in the air defined their persistence to pursue
higher education. One possible explanation for the participant’s ability to handle discriminatory experiences is the racial socialization practices of African American families. O’Brien et al. (2002) contend the parental practices of African Americans provides a cultural socialization which increases African American children’s awareness of racism and discrimination. The messages conveyed within the racial socialization process communicate a racial awareness that is essential to the development of self-competencies and provides coping strategies to handle social barriers such as stereotypes, racism, and discrimination. Thus, a well-developed racial identity correlates to higher academic achievement (Howard, 2008) as indicated in the voices of participants in this study.

Another possible explanation for the participant’s academic persistence is their collective racial identity. African American’s collective identity is based upon the shared oppressive experiences related to a lower social status (Ogbu, 2004). As such, participants have an awareness of their social positioning within the dominant society enabling them to endure the frequency of racial microaggressions in and outside of schooling. The participants’ voices revealed the depth of their understanding of how racism functions within society and its effects on them as individuals. Their experiences with discriminatory practices in educational environments were the result of hegemonic ideologies that discriminates against African Americans as a collective group rather than the individual. Participants were “attuned to cues that signal social identity
contingencies – judgments, stereotypes, opportunities, restrictions and treatments that are tied" to their collective identity (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies & Dittman, 2008, p.615). It is this consciousness that enabled participants to continue to demonstrate their academic abilities and remain academically persistent in spite of the prevalence of social barriers in education.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study applies tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a means of examining the historic and systemic elements of racism that continue to shape schooling practices (Yosso, 2005) and hinders students of color academic success. As dominant ideologies and hegemonic practices in schools can be linked to the development of oppositional cultural frames of reference, stereotype threat conditions, and academic outcomes for African American students, this study argues the ongoing significance of race in education, particularly in higher education settings.

Guided by this framework the lived experiences revealed in participants’ voices draws attention to the persistence of hegemonic practices in education. The notion of education as the great equalizer becomes nothing more than a fallacy as equal opportunities afforded to all come at a price for African Americans. The psychological effects of ongoing racial discrimination and consequences of chronic stereotype threat is the cost African Americans must bear. Thus, the voices of African American preservice teachers provides a
counter narrative to the equal education myth as their schooling experiences reveal the discriminatory practices and structural mechanisms in academia that impact African American achievement and school success.

In addition, the strength of participants’ voices provides a counternarrative to the notion of an African American cultural resistance to education and purports an understanding of how educational settings are resistant towards diversity. As such, CRT provides a powerful lens for examining the ways in which the culture of schooling and traditional practices are grounded in dominant ideologies that are oppositional towards African American student achievement. A conceptual framework analysis of the emerging themes points out the ways in which African American preservice teachers orient themselves towards education.

**Racism as a Fundamental Characteristic of American Society**

The central principle of CRT is the notion that racism is an integral part of American society and explains the essence of how racism plays a role in our everyday lives (Giles & Hughes, 2009). When applied to education, CRT explains how the range of various mechanisms of racism is manifested within educational systems, particularly in school practices. In this study, the voices of African American preservice teachers revealed the oppressive and dehumanizing conditions throughout their schooling yet more prevalent during their higher education experiences.

Participants’ frequent encounters with racial microaggressions and stereotype threats in the air in higher education settings suggest the prevalence of racist
views towards African Americans. As a participant, Participant 9 shared the
professor openly referred to him as "a fly in the ointment" in the presence of other
white students. This racial microaggression in a teacher education program
suggests several points:

(1) Racial microaggressions were embedded in the culture of higher
    education.
(2) University faculty is allowed to make racist and derogatory remarks about
    students of color without any ramifications, disciplinary or personal
    consciousness.
(3) Abuse of power and privilege of faculty.
(4) Messages of low expectations, inferiority, and rejection are communicated
    to students of color.
(5) Whiteness as the norm is further communicated to white students.
(6) Messages are communicated to White students that it is appropriate to
    openly speak about their racial bias towards students of color in a public
    forum.
(7) People of color are not welcomed in education.

The faculty’s microaggressions towards African American students is supported
by the work of Johnson-Ahorlu (2012) which contends the “lack of support given
to African American students by faculty is blatant and cruel" causing African
American students to feel less encouraged about their academic endeavors.
This has significant implications for basic academic support, quality of education and opportunities to fulfill personal goals and career aspirations.

**Challenging Dominant Ideologies**

The CRT framework argues that the structure of schooling is built upon hegemonic ideologies, thus the premise of educational equality and a schooling system built upon objectivity, meritocracy and racial neutrality is a camouflage for the hidden agenda that continues to operate in schools (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). The self-interest of the dominant group is supported in the curriculum, teaching pedagogies, and school policies that operate throughout the school system. Deficit views of students of color, particularly African Americans remain the most prevalent forms of racism in education (Yosso, 2005). CRT challenges the dominant ideologies and deficit thinking towards students of color.

CRT argues that hegemonic ideologies are embedded in our social structures, such as schools and become the routines and standard practices which social institutions rely on to maintain white self interest. The themes emerging from this study challenges the hegemonic practices of schools and seeks to transform the schooling experiences for African American students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). The historical elements of unequal education for African Americans remain relevant as the participant's voices exposed multiple layers of resistance towards African Americans in academia. Collectively the
themes of this study demonstrate the need for our education system to address the needs of African American students, which is ignored by the saliency of the dominant ideologies.

**Centrality of Experiential Knowledge**

All twelve participants of this study were considered high achievers as each participant demonstrated academic success by earning a bachelor's degree and persistence by continuing their education for career opportunities. As such, each participants' voice represents the importance of examining their schooling experiences as a means of understanding the essence of their academic success and how these experiences relate to their desires to teach.

Through the lens of CRT, the power of the participants' voice epitomizes the significance of centering marginalized groups schooling experiences towards creating new knowledge. The participants of this study ranged in ages, phenotype, and geographic upbringing, yet their lived experiences as a African American pursuing higher education and seeking educational careers revealed a common thread amongst all participants. Race remains a significant factor within the larger society and continues to play a role in education for African Americans. The examination of African American preservice teachers academic persistence and motivations to enter the teaching profession can be utilized towards the development of new teaching pedagogies that respond to the issues of race in education and support African Americans academic persistence towards the eradication of the achievement gap.

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Commitment to Social Justice

Acknowledging the lived experiences of African American preservice teachers serves as a CRT approach towards a commitment to social justice in education. As such, social justice in education proposes that all students are entitled to equal social rights and opportunities. The findings of this study suggest that African American postbaccalaureate students experienced inequitable schooling experiences throughout their education. Thus, their voices offer a transformative response to racial oppression in education (Yosso, 2005).

Based upon the themes emerging from this study, it is argued that the concept of desegregation has yet to resolve the effects of separate but equal ideologies. For over 50 years, schools may have presented the physical appearance of desegregation however, the structural elements of integration have yet to be addressed as evident in the dismissive teaching pedagogies that fail to engage people of color and encourage school success. The voices of African American preservice teachers illuminate this phenomenon and calls for corrective actions in education to ensure equal opportunities for all students.

Implications

As this study explores the academic persistence and educational career aspirations of African Americans through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the findings presented highlight the salient experiences with academic and social marginalization of African Americans throughout the educational pipeline. The
voices of African American preservice teachers reveal the multitude of negative experiences encountered within educational settings. In particular, the most negative schooling experiences occurred in higher education in which participants vividly recalled frequent microaggressions. These experiences demonstrate the presence of various forms of institutionalized racism and discrimination as schools have a dysconscious oppositional culture towards diversity. Thus, the participants lived experiences provide insight into the varied causes of low African American academic persistence, interest in educational careers and serves as a means of transforming stereotypical perceptions of African Americans. The findings of this study have practical implications for teacher education programs, university faculty, and African Americans as revealed in the participant’s voices.

Teacher Education Programs

First and foremost, K-12 schools are facing a progressively more diverse student population thus, preservice teachers must develop approaches to pedagogy that are fitting for an increasingly diverse student population. Many teacher education programs concentrate on preparing preservice teachers to provide equitable learning experiences for all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, teacher education programs often fall short in putting their own aims into practice, and being living models of social justice in preservice teacher education.
The limited presence of a diverse preservice teaching population leaves teacher education programs ill prepared to address the educational experiences of preservice teachers of color in navigating through a credentialing program towards becoming effective teachers. In this way, not only are preservice teachers of color, particularly African American males, pursuing a career in a White female dominated field, they are also determinedly persisting against a hegemonic educational system that has historically devalued people of color. Thus, when academically persistent African Americans are visible in teacher education programs, they encounter stereotypical views by faculty that is in opposition to the program purpose of developing culturally sensitive teachers.

Understanding the specific socio-historical context of African Americans, schooling experiences can be used by university administration and faculty to make teacher education program decisions that encompass knowledge learned from those experiences. Affirming African American preservice teachers' experience creates a cultural awareness that have the potential to allow teacher education programs to be inclusive and transformative spaces for marginalized students (Bartolome, 2004). The structure of teacher preparation should promote the development of preservice teachers' understandings of providing instruction that mediates the causes of social inequities and academic disparities in our educational system.

Teacher preparation should structure the program curriculum and courses to promote prospective teacher's awareness of hegemonic and counter-
hegemonic ideologies in education that affect people of color at all levels of schooling (Bartolome, 2004). Hence, the need for a multicultural pedagogy that includes an exploration of White privilege is imperative in teacher preparation. Teacher education programs must be ground zero in modeling such critical pedagogy that recognizes the voice of color and the social context of their experiences in order to foster and achieve social justice. Such social justice frameworks call for teacher education programs to take action by deliberately recruiting African American teaching candidates. Universities must establish initiatives to engage and support African Americans, particularly males in successfully moving through credentialing programs and into the role of practitioner.

University Faculty

University faculty should engage in reflection that places race within a cultural context towards a means of understanding experiences that are often misunderstood and ignored. Milner (2003) refers to “the notion of race in cultural contexts” as the “endemic and ingrained perceptions and realities that exist in education as a consequence of one’s skin color” including values and beliefs, socioeconomic status, gender roles and academic knowledge (p.173). Such reflective thinking challenge internalized biases and develops a more reflective teaching pedagogy than the traditional hegemonic model. Faculty must have an awareness of how they impact practice and disallow stereotypical views and deficit thinking models to be the nature of their work. Academic leaders such as
department chairs, provosts, and university presidents need to more explicitly monitor the experiences of students and implement safeguards that support, retain, and empower African American students as they move through the academy.

As teacher education programs seek to recruit more people of color, it is imperative that faculty engage in race reflective practices that address the dual nature of schooling. Comprehending schooling inequalities and providing liberating spaces in which preservice teachers of color lived experiences can be validated; new knowledge can emerge that informs practice. Faculty should see the presence of preservice teachers of color as a means of understanding the factors contributing to their academic persistence and interest in educational careers. An appreciation of diversity can link theory into practice ultimately leading to the eradication of the racially correlated disparities in education.

African Americans

African American preservice teachers must feel empowered to share their voices and should seek out spaces in which their voices can be validated. Their lived experience differ significantly concerning race and gender in comparison to most preservice teaching candidates. Their experiences can inform teaching practices to enhance the schooling experiences of African American male youth beginning in primary grades. The voices of African American male preservice teachers provide insight into the factors that support their career aspirations in education. Thus, validation of these experiences can foster critical
consciousness that not only leads to social transformation but also addresses the
difficult and complex situations present in education for African Americans
(Gomez et al., 2011).

State and Federal Policies and Initiatives

The findings of this study also bring forth significant educational concerns
for students of color that should be addressed at state and national levels to
ensure equal access to opportunities for marginalized groups. The following are
recommendations for state and federal legislation:

1. Credentialing requirements – The federal legislation implementation of No
Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) requires all teachers to meet the criteria of
“highly qualified” as measured by subject matter competency. At a state
level, California requires all teachers to have a Crosscultural, Language,
and Academic Development (CLAD) certificate authorizing instruction to
English language learners. Similar, Cultural Competence credentialing
authorizations should be required to ensure teachers not only have an
awareness and understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds but have
the praxis to meet the academic needs of diverse student populations
(Yang & Montgomery, 2011).

2. Recruitment – National teacher campaigns to aggressively recruit
teachers of color, particularly African American males are needed.
Recruitment campaigns should include incentive programs to encourage
African American males to pursue education careers. Incentives such as
(a) free college tuition for African American males with a commitment to teach for 3 years (b) guaranteed employment upon completion of teaching credential and (c) additional stipend incentives after 5 years of service.

3. Education Service Learning Programs – federal initiatives should support the implementation of education service learning programs (Chambers & Lavery, 2012) to provide African American students with practical learning opportunities within the classroom environment as a means of attracting African American teachers to the profession.

4. Begin Early – a focus on African American student success, particularly African American males should begin early in schools to ensure positive educational outcomes. For example, mentoring programs to support and encourage African American student school success throughout their schooling.

Conclusion

While the aim of this phenomenological study was to create new pathways towards the teaching profession, the need for social change within the larger society must be addressed. As the findings of this study dispel the dominant social narrative that African Americans resist schooling, it was revealed that our educational systems continues to function under hegemonic ideologies that hinder African American academic success and educational outcomes.
The stereotypical views of African Americans in society have perpetuated negative views of African Americans in academia. If the educational practices of school create humanizing learning environments by recognizing the cultural capital of students of color as an asset, greater educational outcomes can be achieved. As such, the cultural knowledge of students of color can be deemed valuable to the dominant society (Yosso, 2005) as more students of color can be afforded opportunities that benefit society as a whole. Thus, to counter these stereotypes of African Americans in society, educational practices must begin to acknowledge the cultural wealth of African American students lived experiences.

In conclusion, the findings of this study can inform research related to teacher education recruitment of African American, particularly African American males. Specifically, the need for a diverse teaching population is imperative to ensure student exposure to diverse perspectives (King, 1993) including the social construction of gender roles (Smith, Mack & Akyea, 2004). As this research centers on educational conditions within the Inland Empire region of Southern California, the implications of the findings should be considered nationally.
Participants Needed

Seeking participants to take part in a study on the role of racial identity on the academic persistence and career aspirations of African American students enrolled in teacher credentialing programs located within the Inland Empire.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: (1) complete a demographic survey (2) participate in a face to face interview with the researcher. Your participation would involve one interview session, conducted in approximately 90 minutes and possible a second interview at a later date. In appreciation for your time, you will receive a $15 Starbucks gift card.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Sonya V. Scott, M.ED.
Doctoral Student
CSUSB Educational Leadership
at (909) 436-8740 or
Email: sonyascott2@gmail.com
Participants Needed For Research on African American Identity, Academic Persistence and Career Aspirations in Education

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of the role of racial identity on the academic persistence and career aspirations of African American students enrolled in teacher credentialing programs located within the Inland Empire.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: (1) complete a demographic survey (2) participate in a face to face interview with the researcher.

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APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY*

1. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

2. Age: ______

3. Race/Ethnicity: __________________________________________

4. Highest level of education earned:
________________________________________

5. Are you currently employed as a full time teacher? _____ yes _____ no

6. What type of credentialing program are you enrolled in? (Check all that apply)
   _____ Multiple Subject  _____ Single Subject
   Subject Area:
   _____ Special Education
   _____ Other __________________________________________

7. At what level would you like to teach? (Check only one)
   _____ Early Childhood Education
   _____ Kindergarten
   _____ Elementary Grades (1st – 5th)
   _____ Middle School (6th – 8th)
   _____ High School (9th – 12th)
   _____ Other __________________________________________

*Researcher developed survey
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol

First Interview - Interview Questions

Part 1: Background Questions
1. So, tell me a little about your educational history? (probes—elementary, where?; middle school, where? High school, where?; college, where?)
2. What stands out for you in your K-12 experience?
3. Any significant role models, in or out of school? If so, tell me about them.
4. How would you describe yourself as a student now? How about when you were younger?
5. How would you characterize the quality of your education growing up? How about in college?

Part 2: Motivation
1. What has been your motivation to continue/further your education? Explain.
2. Why teaching?
3. What were your initial reason(s) for entering the teaching profession?
4. What are your career aspirations in education? (What do you feel that you will contribute to students by teaching?)
5. What career path in education do you foresee for yourself? (probes - classroom teacher? administration? district administration? higher education?)

Part 3: Racial Identity
1. How do you define or explain your racial identity? (How do you view yourself racially?)
2. What are some of the core features of your racial identity?
3. How have your racial attitudes or beliefs affected decisions or choices that you have made in school? in college?
4. Do you see a connection between your racial identity and your career choice?
5. What role do you feel your racial identity will play in your career aspirations? (with students?, colleagues? administrators?)

Part 4: General Views towards Education
1. Are you aware of the achievement gap in education? What do you know about it?
2. What are some thoughts, comments or concerns that you would like to make about the racial achievement gap in education?
3. Is there anything else I haven't asked that you would like to share about your racial identity, education or schooling experiences?
4. Did you have any questions for me?
Second Interview - Interview Questions
1. Since our first interview, are there any other schooling experiences that you would like to share?
2. Since our first interview, did you have any other thoughts or feelings about your racial identity that you would like to share?
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
The purpose of this study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to examine the role of racial identity in the academic persistence and career aspirations of African American preservice teachers. This study is being conducted by Sonya V. Scott under the supervision of Dr. Louie F. Rodriguez, Professor of Educational Leadership and Curriculum, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study in which you are being asked to participate seeks to contribute knowledge learned through examination of African American preservice teacher's personal narratives of race and schooling to expand understandings of the role of racial identity in schooling that translates into gaps in academic achievement and persistence. This study also seeks to dispel the social narrative that African Americans resist schooling by examining African American student's that have developed a passion for learning as demonstrated in their persistence and motivations to enter the teaching profession.

DESCRIPTION: Data collection consists of a demographic survey, face to face interviews with the researcher and field notes. You will be asked to complete a 7 question demographic survey and participate in face to face interviews with the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded and consist of a questions related to the literature on racial identity, academic achievement and career choice. The researcher may also write notes in a journal during the interview as part of the data collection.

DURATION: The demographic survey will take no more than 5 minutes to complete. Each face to face interview with the researcher will be approximately 90 minutes in length.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is voluntary. It is not expected that you will experience any discomfort while filling out the demographic survey or participating in the interview. You may cease participation at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants have a right to privacy and all information identifying participants will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of participants. The confidentiality of the participant's information will be maintained by storing...
demographic information, interview transcripts, audio recordings and researcher’s field notes in a locked filing cabinet or password protected computer for a period of 3 years. All data collected will be destroyed 3 years after the study has been completed.

AUDIO: I understand that the face to face interviews will be audio recorded. Initials______

BENEFITS: The benefits of participating in this study will include:
(1) Opportunity to share a personal narrative that can contribute to the field of education.
(2) Provides a voice and sense of empowerment.
(3) Self acknowledgement and sense of purpose in social change.

INCENTIVES: $15 Starbucks gift card at the conclusion of the face to face interview.

RISKS: The possible risks of participating in this study may include:
(1) Participants' personal reflections associated with schooling that may have been uncomfortable experiences.
(2) Some of the interview questions might evoke mild to moderate negative feelings related to schooling and factors contributing to participants’ ability to navigate through the school system.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about the research and research participant’s rights, you may contact Professor Louie F. Rodriguez, lrodrig@csusb.edu or call (909) 537-5643. You may also contact Sonya V. Scott, scots3j2@coyote.csusb.edu or call (909)436-8740.

RESULTS: The results of this study will be available by December 2013. The results will be presented during a public defense and a bound copy of the dissertation will be available in the CSUSB PfaU Library.

CONSENT: I understand that I am participating in a research study and the research has been explained to me so that I understand my role as a participant of the study. I understand that I may stop participating at any time without any consequences for doing so.

Thank you for your assistance.

Signature ___________________________ Date ____________
As part of this research project, we will be making a audio recording of you during your participation in the experiment. Please indicate what uses of this audio recording you are willing to consent to by initialing below. You are free to initial any number of spaces from zero to all of the spaces, and your response will in no way affect your participation. We will only use audio recording in ways that you agree to. In any use of this audio recording, your name would not be identified. If you do not initial any of the spaces below, the audio recording will be destroyed.

Please indicate the type of informed consent
☐Audio Recording

(AS APPLICABLE)

☐ The audio recording can be studied by the researcher for use in the research project.
   Please initial: ___

☐ The audio recording can be shown/played to subjects in other experiments.
   Please initial: ___

☐ The audio recording can be used for scholarly publications.
   Please initial: ___

☐ The audio recording can be shown/played at research meetings.
   Please initial: ___

☐ The audio recording can be shown/played in classrooms to students.
   Please initial: ___

☐ The audio recording can be shown/played in public presentations to non-scientific groups.
   Please initial: ___

☐ The audio recording can be used on television and radio.
   Please initial: ___

I have read the above description and give my consent for the use of the audio recording as indicated above.

The extra copy of this consent form is for your records.

SIGNATURE ____________________ DATE ____________________

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APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER
April 10, 2012

Mrs. Sonya Scott
c/o Prof. Louise Rodriguez
Department of Education
California State University
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mrs. Scott:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Post-Occupational Cultural Theory: Narratives of African American Preservice Teachers" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The attached informed consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. Your application is approved for one year from 04/10/2012 through 04/09/2013. One month prior to the approval end date you need to file for a renewal if you have not completed your research. See additional requirements (Items 1 – 4) of your approval below.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

1) Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are made in your research protocol/protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research.
2) If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,
3) To renew your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,
4) When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Coordinator/Compliance Analyst.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefits. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, IRB Compliance Coordinator. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgie@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,
Sharon Ward, Ph.D.
Sharon Ward, Ph.D., Chair
Institutional Review Board

SWing

cc: Prof. Louise Rodriguez, Department of Education
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PARTICIPATION: Your participation is voluntary. It is not expected that you will experience any discomfort while filling out the demographic survey or participating in the interview. You may cease participation at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants have a right to privacy and all information identifying participants will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of participants. The confidentiality of the participant's information will be maintained by storing

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demographic information, interview transcripts, audio recordings and researcher's field notes in a locked filing cabinet or password protected computer for a period of 3 years. All data collected will be destroyed 3 years after the study has been completed.

**AUDIO:** I understand that the face to face interviews will be audio recorded. **Initials**

**BENEFITS:** The benefits of participating in this study will include:
(1) Opportunity to share a personal narrative that can contribute to the field of education.
(2) Provides a voice and sense of empowerment.
(3) Self-acknowledgement and sense of purpose in social change.

**INCENTIVES:** $15 Starbucks gift card at the conclusion of the face to face interview.

**RISKS:** The possible risks of participating in this study may include:
(1) Participants' personal reflections associated with schooling that may have been uncomfortable experiences.
(2) Some of the interview questions might evoke mild to moderate negative feelings related to schooling and factors contributing to participants' ability to navigate through the school system.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about the research and research participant's rights, you may contact Professor Louie F. Rodriguez, lrodrig@csusb.edu or call (909) 537-5643. You may also contact Sonya V. Scott, scots302@coyote.csusb.edu or call (909) 436-8740.

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**CONSENT:** I understand that I am participating in a research study and the research has been explained to me so that I understand my role as a participant of the study. I understand that I may stop participating at any time without any consequences for doing so.

Thank you for your assistance.

Signature __________________________ Date ____________

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  Please initial: ______

- The audio recording can be shown/played in public presentations to nonscientific groups.
  Please initial: ______

- The audio recording can be used on television and radio.
  Please initial: ______

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SIGNATURE ___________________________ DATE ___________________________
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doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.94.4.615


