INVESTIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG BLACK BOYS IN

PREDOMINANTLY WHITE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Damian Patton

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Dissertation approved:

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Major Professor

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For the College

DEDICATION

 This is dedicated to my sister, Alisa Ducksworth. Although you are in heaven, you were that driving force to help me through those late nights. I never worked during our Thursday time. I always took a break for an hour on Thursdays, and I spent that time talking to you. I did it, sis! Thank you for helping me through this journey. I love you!

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INVESTIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG BLACK BOYS IN

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by

Damian Patton

Doctor of Education, 2022 and Higher Educational Leadership

Dr. Jo Beth Jimerson, Associate Professor

To better understand the challenges Black boys face, one needs to understand the obstacles they face. The purpose of this study was to focus on the lived experiences of Black boys in predominantly White elementary schools (PWES). My desire in conducting the study was to better understand young Black boys' experiences in a PWES and then use this knowledge to help school leaders and educators provide better educational experiences for other young Black boys.

This qualitative analysis detailed the narratives and interviews of three families with Black sons who attend a PWES. The study offered an opportunity for them to share how young Black boys and their parents describe the benefits and challenges of being in a PWES, how young Black boys describe the school's culture, and how practices of teachers and administrators affect the experiences of young Black boys in a PWES.

Throughout this study I learned that parents have not been able to find that environment for their sons so, they constantly battle between academics and social well-being. The results of implementing "counter-spaces" and making these spaces available to assist with affirming Black boys' racial identity, creating targeted professional development plans for the staff focused on racial identity and race consciousness, also creating mentor support programs focused on engaging the staff, the Black boys, and their parents in meaningful conversations around race will make the Black boys feel valued. Also, an intentional recruitment plan to hire and retain diverse teacher candidates will benefit the school and the district.

Keywords: Black boys, predominantly White elementary schools (PWES), social identity, schools' culture, Black educators

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Duncan, 2013, para. 1). I have found that my own personal experiences in the school system as a Black boy, a parent, and a teacher have piqued my interest in the opportunities provided to young Black boys in public education.

Growing up in Southern Mississippi, my experiences as a young Black boy have been the source of my particular interest in educational inequities within the public school system. I am a Black male who attended a predominantly White elementary school during the 1970s and 1980s in deep south Mississippi. I have a son who attended a predominantly White elementary school in the 21st century in the state of Texas. Back then in Mississippi, elementary education consisted of first grade through sixth grade, with first through third grade being early elementary and fourth through sixth as upper elementary. Elementary school in Texas consisted of kindergarten through fourth grade. My experiences as a young Black boy attending a predominantly White elementary school have been the source of my particular interest in educational inequities within the public school system.

Black boys in predominantly White elementary schools struggle with discipline concerns, social identity, and achievement issues (Noguera et al., 2016). The U.S. Department of Education's (2014) Office for Civil Rights performed an all-inclusive study to observe the civil rights data of every public school across the United States. The findings revealed "troubling racial disparities" mainly around the area of discipline (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 1). The Office for Civil Rights noted Black boys were unequally impacted by suspensions and discipline policies in schools. In Southern Mississippi, Black boys in particular were not given the same educational opportunities as White students and were often labeled as troublemakers.

When I was living in the situation, I did not realize the racial inequities or biases going on. DuBois (1903) questions, "How does it feel to be the problem?" (p. 7), especially when you are unaware that you are the problem.

"Never utter a word, put your head down and just do your work, never challenge authority, and you will not have a problem." This is the speech I was given on a daily basis by my teachers and my parents. My parents knew that as a Black boy attending a predominantly White school I would face stereotyping from my White teachers and peers. Black boys were often viewed as troublemakers, seen as the problem, labeled as *not caring* or *lazy*, and as a threat to classroom traditionalism. My parents were also critical of me and often did not listen to my side of the story because if the "White" teacher said I did something, then I must have done it. It was not long before I learned the rules of the game. "Never utter a word" was taught because Black boys' declarative and loud tone of voice came across to a White female teacher as disruptive and threating. "Put your head down and just do your work" meant that any fondness for active learning may be interpreted as disruptive. "Never challenge authority" was taught because questioning authority was viewed as insubordinate and disrespectful.

Although many of these are teacher-perceived disruptions, Black boys received severe consequences for these minor infractions. Black boys often ended up in one of three places: the principal's office for discipline reasons; the counselor's office for anger issues; or at home because of suspension. Suspensions for Black boys date back to the 1970s and have been on the rise since (Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015; Losen et al., 2015). I was taught; mostly through implicit messages (although at times some messages were explicit) that White was always right and that I would never fit in the ingroup. Today, Black boys still consistently face implicit and explicit

messages as a reminder that they were a part of the outgroup and their racial group is not respected in predominantly White schools (Arrington et al, 2003; Steele et al., 2018).

Elementary school was about survival of the fittest. The person with the strongest personality was the person with the biggest social following (although that social following was still limited to that person's racial group). It did not matter how popular you were; you were still limited (segregated) to your social group (e.g., Steele et al., 2018). During this age group, we were often segregated, or placed in social groups most often by the adults (parents, teachers, etc.), and sometimes by peers. Students were told by parents and teachers who they could or could not play with at school and to even further divide the students the classrooms were often segregated by race. For example, Black parents would tell us to stay away from White children because they would only get us in more trouble. Today, research shows children have acquired implicit racial bias by age 5 usually from adults and sometimes from peers and that implicit bias might be more responsive to change among older children (Gonzalez et al., 2017). The perception was that White students were the dominant student group and they came to school with their heads held high and their shoulders back, looking down on Black students as if we were dirty. Black students often turned to each other to discuss racial encounters that they experience within the school setting. Research shows that Black students prefer to speak with others that look like them to discuss racial issues (Tatum, 2007).

I was one of those boys until a third-grade teacher by the name of Sister Morgan took me under her wings. Sister Morgan completely changed my vision of school as well as my outlook on life. To this day I can still visualize Sister Morgan. Sister Morgan was a young White energetic nun, teaching in a Catholic school. In spite of her soft voice, warm smile, and calming demeanor, Sister Morgan was a no-nonsense kind of teacher. She set high expectations for

everyone in her class and held us to that standard regardless of race. She sought to make learning fun and she incorporated some aspects of all the students' cultures because even back then she understood what it would take to motivate her students. She poured all that she had into educating her students, spending individual time with each of us. Her dedication, determination, and love for her students was clearly evident, making every student feel as if we were her favorite. Sister Morgan focused on me beginning in third grade on through sixth grade to ensure that I remained on track and that I never lost focus on what school was about. She was the first teacher to show interest in me and taught me that the color of my skin did not define who I was as a student.

Throughout my first through 12th grade schooling I had two Black teachers. My first experience with a Black teacher was in sixth grade. After years of feeling like a failure, to say that I was excited about sixth grade is putting it lightly. Sixth grade was not only the beginning of class changes, where you had different teachers for different subject content, but for Black kids it was the grade that a Black teacher taught in. She was the only teacher who lived in the same neighborhood as the few Black students who attended the school and she was friends with our parents. The excitement quickly wore off as I recall her classroom being rather loud, and it was not just the students being loud but the teacher was also loud. The teacher often degraded students with an "in your face" approach and at times cracked more jokes than the students. I often remained silent in this classroom out of fear that the teacher would degrade me. Research suggests that Black teachers serve as role models for Black boys and that they are more likely to teach Black boys to serve as role models for their White peers, in an effort to influence their perceptions of Black boys (Allen & White-Smith 2018). Such research suggests that Black boys will attempt to share their culture and show that the negative stereotypes are not true. There were

only a few Black students that attended the school and all of us were in her class. That was not the experience with this Black teacher. Instead some of her actions highlighted the negative stereotypes. Harris-Tigg (2005) argued Black educators not only failed to stand by the cultural values of the Black children, but they seemed to "ignore what African children bring to the classroom situation, and they deny the oppressive, dominant, hegemonic institutional and societal operatives from which many of the stereotypes disseminate" (p. 94). Khalifa (2015) argued Black on Black abuse was prevalent in the educational system, noting that "Black administrators also contribute to the reproduction of racism and marginalizing school practice on Black students" (p. 268).

Middle school introduced even more segregation as the focus shifted to fitting in to a certain social group. Three elementary schools combined to make up the middle school. Because of the combining of schools, there were a few more (not many) Black students in the school. I can recall us forming a tight group and the majority of the time the races, and even genders, were segregated within the school. The courtyard of the school had the appearance of a racial and gender four square. In one corner were Black boys, in another corner White boys; the opposite corner was Black girls, and the final corner White girls. If a Black student interacted with the group of students from the opposite race that individual was often called a "sell-out" and was often labeled as wanting to be "White" or was told to their face that they were "acting White."

In the classroom, the majority of Black students were often placed in the same classroom. There may have been only one or two Black student(s) in a classroom with majority White students. The majority White classroom was often called the "advanced" class and the majority Black classroom was often called the "slow" class, even by the Black students that were in the majority White classroom. The Black students in the majority Black classroom would often refer

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to the Black students in the majority White classrooms as "Uncle Toms" or labeled them as wanting to be White. My experience in middle school were not isolated, as Khalifa (2015) noted, you either stuck with your racial social ingroup or you had no group, because most likely the outgroup would not fully accept you as a part their group.

High school came with other challenges when dealing with race. For the majority of Black boys, academics were not stressed by our teachers because if one Black boy was not paying attention, the teacher grouped us together and formed the impression that "we" did not care. Black boys took on the attitude that if the teacher does not care, why should they? High school brought about sports and Black boys typically leaned towards sports because it was a way of fitting in with any social group and gave us the feeling of being accepted. Everyone liked the star athlete and as the star athlete we could hang out and fit into either "Black" or "White" racial or gender social groups (e.g., Cuffe et al., 2017). The majority of the teachers never bothered the Black athletes, not even for discipline purposes. However, it was back to reality and segregated classrooms when it came to academics. The classroom was awkward, especially when it came to discussions in History class. I remember learning everything about the "Founding Fathers" but nothing about Black history, except for the yearly Martin Luther King, Jr. lesson in February. Here again, my experience all these years ago are still reflected in schools as Cuffe et al. (2017) found.

Black boys at my school were done a disservice by teachers. Our teachers never taught us to think of ourselves as people of color and I know now the reason was for the fear that it would lead to very touchy conversations about racism. On the other hand, no one discussed future college plans with Black boys unless sports recruiters showed up at the head coach's door inquiring about you. There was no faster way to get the head coach out of his office and for him

to show an interest in a Black boy than the day the recruiter showed up. For example, a recruiter showed up interested in me playing football for their university. Coach left his office in the field house and drove over to the main campus and found me in the hallway. He pushed me into an empty classroom and demanded that I sign up to take the ACT immediately. Coach was never interested in Black boys' academics until it benefited him and the school. Again, my experience reflected broader research findings that suggests Black boys matter not because they are accepted but instead, because of what they do well, such as athletics (Carey, 2019). In my personal story, Coach was not the only educator uninterested in Black boys' academics.

My path towards education was untraditional. I served 4 years in the U.S. Army, which awarded me the opportunity to experience something outside of Mississippi. In meeting people from all over the world and discussing our backgrounds, I quickly began to realize that I was not the problem: the problem was the educational system. I realized that educators taught from their personal experiences, which is no fault of theirs because it is more of a pedagogy problem (Gay, 2010). Paris (2012) argued that school systems should include elements of ongoing in-service training for the school staff by incorporating a culturally sustaining pedagogy with one that addresses the culture of the community. After leaving the military, I took the alternative route to get in education and my goal was to work with minority students.

As I look back over my personal life as a student in elementary and in my professional career as an elementary teacher, I realize that this study symbolizes who I am and who I was in that environment. I have served in education for 16 years. I taught in a smaller district on the outskirts of Dallas, for two years, where 98% of the students looked like me. The students were classified as poor and often categorized as slow learners or behavior problems, reflective of research indicating educators label Black children (e.g. Marsh & Noguera, 2018). This injustice

was not only done by White teachers or Black teachers but it was also done by administrators through willful blindness (Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015).

Black parents in that environment were unaware of the social injustices in the education system. Black parents in that environment did not see the value of education, and they often referred to the school as "Them people's school." A common phrase was, "Don't go in there acting a fool in them people's school." A majority of the challenges I experienced were often with other educators, having to deal with the prejudgments that they placed on Black boys. Black teachers and administrators were just as guilty as White educators when stereotyping Black boys (Khalifa, 2015). In my experience as an elementary teacher, I often observed other Black educators stereotyping Black students. I often heard Black teachers stating, "Black boys are lazy," "they do not want to learn," and that "they were going to end up dead or in prison." I preferred to work with the students everyone had counted out; however, I struggled to work with the adults. I left the district the following year, and was hired by a school district where the kids were considered "well off." Ninety-five percent of the students in the district were White and, at my particular school, 98% were classified as middle-class White. This is the district that my own kids attended school and because of that I remained in that district for 7 years.

While teaching fourth grade in this predominantly White school, I began to see the Black boys having the most difficulties. I was very naïve and I bought into the educational ideologies that said Black boys who were not successful were that way by choice; they did not want to learn or they simply lacked interest in school (Rist, 2002; Sleeter, 2017). My perspective of Black boys at that time was reflective of trends in research mainly because of my childhood schooling experiences as well as the educational agendas and school climates that I navigated through as a teacher. Black boys in the school wore labels like "slow learners" and "discipline problems."

Sociologist Rist (1972) argued labels given to students in kindergarten set them on a course that would most likely affect the rest of their lives. Nothing had changed since my own experiences as a student in the education system. Black boys were still targeted for discipline infractions and special education services at higher rates than their White peers (e.g., Anyon et al., 2018; Gregory & Fergus, 2017) and as a teacher there was nothing that I could do about it on a large scale.

When it came time to choose a school for my kids, the quality of the school was a huge factor in our decision. At that time "quality" meant a majority White school in a nice middle-class neighborhood often referred to as a "good neighborhood" (Dow, 2016; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017). My experiences align with Rhodes and Warkentien's (2017) argument, "the ideal educational arrangement for nearly all parents is to live in a neighborhood that guarantees access to neighborhood schools that meets their expectations, something we call the 'package deal'" (p. 169S). While the diversity of the faculty played a major part in the decision, I was quite skeptical of my kids having a Black teacher because of the negative experience that I had with a Black teacher. I was a Black male stereotyping my very own race but these were the only experiences I had as a student.

Looking back at my lived experiences in elementary school and thinking of my kids in elementary school, this thought startles me. As I reflect on discussing with my kids how they should behave in school, I realize the expectation of "good behavior" was doing exactly what the teacher told them to do, causing me to quickly realize that I was a part of the educational ideology plaguing young Black boys (Khalifa, 2015). We often joked in the family that Damian Jr., who is the only boy out of our kids, was the worst one in school. I am ashamed of myself now, thinking back, that I played a part in the experiences of not just Black boys but, also my

own son. I had several discussions with him on how as a young Black male he had to carry himself differently, what DuBois (1903) describes as double consciousness, and how he had to speak a certain way to fit in because he is not like the rest of the kids in the classroom (Khalifa, 2015). I often told him that he was the face of the race in his school, being that he attended a predominantly White school and that teachers would form a judgement about all Black boys based off of his actions. The topic of our conversations frequently referenced being a Black boy in a majority White school, where people are expecting him to mess up, so he better not let me down. His mother and I were both teachers and strong supporters of education. We both knew what it was like to fight for an education because of our experiences in Southern Mississippi.

I can remember the first time that Damian Jr. got in trouble. He attempted to hide his folder from me as to not disappoint me. Because of my upbringing and being taught by my parents that the teacher was always right caused me to support the teacher and the school. Reflecting back, I often took the teachers' side, leading me to believe that it had a negative impact on my son. Damian's teacher had a laundry list of things that Damian could not do right when it came to behavior. He was never mean or aggressive to other kids nor towards her but it seemed as if he was constantly getting in trouble for things that a typical student would not get in trouble for. When we discussed school, Damian often referred to school as "frustrating" and often times "not fun" or "boring." I can remember him coming home crying one day and saying, "I just can't be good!" At this point I realized Damian was not the problem and that maybe it was the teachers' perception or the school's culture standards that were problematic.

For my son and the numerous Black boys I have mentored, I know they have the talents, skills, and the ability to achieve at high levels once given the opportunity. I am now on a mission to better understand the challenges young Black boys face, the nuances of their lived

experiences, and what factors may be constraining their success in predominantly White schools. Research suggest that Black boys become resilient and develop racial microaggression avoidance strategies to help them navigate the environment of the education system by the time they are in high school (Hotchkins, 2016; Ungar, 2005). However, in elementary school they are at the mercy of the school, the teachers that serve them, and the peers they interact with. Throughout my career as an educator I have had the privilege to work with Black boys in elementary schools and I know that Black boys in elementary have a voice. We often seek to speak with other educators about the experiences of Black boys in education but never to the students, especially the students in elementary grades. Understanding the lived experiences of young Black boys early in their educational career will permit educators to implement effective strategies earlier for these students.

Statement of the Problem

Unequal practices in education causes Black boys to continue to struggle in schools throughout the United States (Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; Pitre, 2014). These unequal practices lead to a substantial achievement gap; or the synonymous term, *opportunity gap* to best represent inequalities (Gorski, 2017; Pitre, 2014). Black boys lack the same opportunities that their White peers have because elementary schools fail to draw on the knowledge that Black boys already possess (Love, 2015). Current educational practices place Black boys with the teacher who is known for tough classroom management instead of placing them with a teacher based on their academic needs like their White peers are placed (Thomas & Warren, 2017). Teacher effectiveness is important and classrooms must be equipped with effective teachers who are well-prepared, able to build effective relationships, and have a genuine desire to educate all students (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Unfortunately, learning environments are not conducive to

accommodate the young Black male scholar. If schools are not providing "pedagogical and curricular interventions and innovations that would move teaching and learning away from the deficit approaches", students may not be provided opportunities to be successful (Boyd et al., 2007; Paris, 2012).

Studies show Black boys are continually placed in schools where culture is ignored or those that pretend the cultural differences do not exist, thus ignoring culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP, Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Schools often lose opportunities when it comes to establishing a culturally congruent curriculum to better engage Black boys, thus causing them to remain behind their peers when it comes to academic performance mainly due to racial inequality (Epps, 1995; Irvine, 2003; O'Connor, 1999). Research argues that schools could better recognize Black boys' culture by affirming hip-hop as the culture of urban youth and the background context in which they learn (Love, 2015). Love (2015) expressed that "education programs must help future teachers recognize, affirm, and embrace Hip-Hop-Based Education, so that teachers can use young urban youth's cultural tools and artifacts to build specific curriculum materials and instructional strategies for young urban learners" (p. 126).

Black boys continue to struggle in schools regardless of their socioeconomic status and this is mainly because of America's continuous favoritism of the "dominant" White race, creating racial inequalities in the educational system (Marable, 2015). Even where they do have similar opportunities in terms of materials, facilities, and teacher quality, they still face opportunity gaps. Black boys often struggle with identity development feeling that they have to change or mask who they are in order to fit into the school system, particularly in predominantly White schools (Hansra Matrenec, 2011).

To better understand the challenges Black boys face, one needs to understand the obstacles they face and the assets that Black boys bring to the table that may be currently unrecognized or disregarded. Exploring young Black boys' lived experiences in predominantly White schools is critical, because society must understand why young Black boys are unsuccessful academically and why they often feel alienated from school. Schools are supposed to be student-centered and able to individualize instruction to allow all students to benefit from instruction; however, schools and school personnel seem resistant to making changes that would fit the needs of Black boys (P. Carter et al., 2017). Schools are supposed to focus on the social emotional needs of all students; however, they are failing Black boys in this area (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). In order to know what motivates young Black males and ensure they feel that they receive a quality education leading to continual learning, it is important to examine their lived experiences. Understanding the lived experiences of Black male students in predominantly White schools will help identify which factors are contributing to their failure, as well as determining if these factors are consistent across the population or specific to the student.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Our past educational system failed Black boys, our present educational system is failing Black boys, and if we continue to do the same thing over and over, our future educational system will fail Black boys. Researchers consistently say that we need to address the failures of Black boys in education (Battle, 2017; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Warren, Douglas, & Howard, 2016). Black boys are failing regardless of their economic status and regardless of the school's demographics (Dowd, 2016; Ogbu, 1994). Black boys face several barriers when it comes to education. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on Black boys from middle-income families. Few studies have examined the schooling experiences of secondary Black boys in

predominantly White schools (Carey, 2019; Hotchkins, 2016; MacLeod, 2009), virtually no studies examine the lived experiences of Black boys in PWES. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to focus on the lived experiences of Black boys in predominantly White elementary schools (PWES). This study is guided by the following questions:

Q1.   How do young Black boys and their parents describe the benefits and challenges of being in a predominantly White school?

Q2.   How do young Black boys describe the school's culture at a predominantly White school?

Q3.   How do practices of teachers and administrators affect the experiences of young Black boys in predominantly White schools?

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Definition of Terms

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Before turning to a review of the literature, it is important to define some terms as they have been used in the literature, and as I used them in this study.

Black vs. African American

Research suggests both terms, "Black" and "African American" have negative aspects (Hall et al., 2015; Smith, 1992) by suggesting the stereotype for the label of Black contained more negative content than the stereotype for the label African Americans. Research also suggests the label African American is generally used to identify socioeconomic status and not that of race (Hall et al., 2015). Political agendas were tied to the term "African American" identifying the term with a culture instead of race (Smith, 1992), a culture to which many Black Americans have no ties (Butler, 1990). The term Black connoted strength and power (Smith, 1992), generally covering a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The focus of this study is understand the racial experiences that Black boys experience in school and to not focus

on the political label. In an effort to cover a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as to get to the heart of the racial experiences, I will use the term Black.

Chapter Summary

Young Black boys begin experiencing failure when they first enter the doors of the school (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Bryan, 2017). Bryan (2017) argues the culture of the school, the social interactions, and the teaching practices are some of the hurdles that Black boys are not prepared to handle and "White teachers already perceive disciplinary problems among Black children, they should be aware of practices in K-12 schools which may dehumanize Black boys and encourage White (and other children) to do likewise" (p. 330). The majority of Black boys are not ready for this transformation and on top of that they are expected to perform on high-stakes standardized tests. Relationship struggles often occur between Black boys and their teachers and often times between their peers (Bryan, 2017; Thomas & Warren, 2017). Schools refuse to adapt what they are doing to benefit minorities (Yeager et al., 2017). Schools often recognize the achievement gap but fail to address the lack of opportunities provided to Black boys by outdated teaching practices and school cultures that are geared toward White students (Yeager et al., 2017).

Research is needed to determine factors that may be contributing to the so-called achievement gap when it comes to Black boys. Some researchers believe that social or cultural differences are responsible for the lack of achievement, although some Black boys do well in school (Khalifa et al., 2016; Noguera, 2003). It is important to hear from this group of students, focusing this study on investigating the lived experiences of third through fifth grade Black boys to determine which factors attribute to their problems in school. Policymakers can begin to understand that standardized assessments are only good for measuring the achievement gap but

do nothing to measure the opportunity gap which is the cause of the achievement gap (Zhao, 2016). Educators can begin to understand and develop instructional strategies to minimize the academic challenges. Schools can use the results of this study to determine if specific preventions/interventions can be developed to assist Black boys with social problems that they will encounter in schools. Schools and parents need to understand the importance of why Black boys struggle in this environment and the importance of meaningful social interactions during elementary school in order to make progress to improve academic outcomes in middle and high school. Breaking the negative connotation that Black boys are failures could result in more Black boys becoming successful adults.

In the chapters that follow, I outline major aspects of the research on Black boys and significant factors linked to their educational experiences. The literature review is an examination of concepts such as navigating race in education, racial identity, acting White, racial socialization, race consciousness, teacher expectations, school climate, and color blindness. Then, I lay out the rationale for discussion of different approaches to help nurture racial identity of Black boys in PWES, and employ a CRP lens to recognize those matters in the educational literature most relevant to this study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. . . . To the real question, "How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word." (DuBois, 1903, p. 7)

This chapter begins with reviewing the pertinent literature on the importance of race in education. In this section, I review the historical context on navigating race in education, race consciousness from a Black boys' perspective, teacher quality, and the school's climate to give insight into the experiences that Black boys face in predominantly White schools. A historical context on race and culture is used to show how the inequalities in the educational system and race have been used to determine various aspects of one's abilities or lack thereof. I then describe the theoretical lens I use to approach the study.

Navigating Race and Education

Slavery prohibited, "African Americans from learning to read or write, and once slavery was abolished, African Americans were not only subjected to inferior schools and materials but they also faced the cultural deficit of the school environment" (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paige & Witty, 2010). Dating back to the civil rights movement, educators have struggled to even the playing fields for Black boys though these boys are often viewed as hopeless and underachieving (Knight, 2015).

The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling was supposed to bring about change and grant African American parents their hopes of giving their children the opportunity to an equal education (Blanchett et al., 2005). However, research suggests the 1954 Supreme Court ruling had the opposite effect for Black communities and Black students (Noguera et al., 2016; Tillman,

2004), and that White dominance is still as pervasive in the education system "today as it was prior to *Brown v. Board of Education"* (Bell, 2006). Researchers argue that displacement of Black educators after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision created a social injustice threatening the economic, social, and cultural structure of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children (Khalifa, 2015; Tillman, 2004). Firing of Black school leaders and teachers, who previously staffed Black schools under segregation, created a devastating impact on social justice practices causing them to later identify with normative and culturally dominant practices (Khalifa, 2015).

Researchers argue that education in America is commonly used as a tool of oppression to teach Black boys that their culture is inferior to that of the dominant White culture (Duhaney, 2010; Hooks, 2001). Researchers Clark and Clark (1950) concluded that Black boys are taught that White is *good* and Black is *bad*. In 1947, Clark and Clark conducted a study on Black children to determine their racial preference. The test, known as the "doll test," showed that Black children consistently chose White dolls when asked to select the one they liked best. The results demonstrated to the world that young children are capable of identifying racial difference and that racial segregation was damaging to the inner self of Black boys (Clark & Clark, 1950).

Black boys continue to lag behind their White classmates due to the existing *opportunity gap* (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paige & Witty, 2010; Pitre, 2014). In a meaningless effort to improve student achievement for Black boys and close the opportunity gap, policy makers required states to use statewide assessments to hold schools accountable (Klein et al., 2000). Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that an "all-out focus on the 'Achievement Gap' moves us toward short-term solutions that are unlikely to address the long-term underlying problem" (p. 4) and that attention to racial discrimination and inequitable distribution of resources are needed. T. C.

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Howard (2010) explains that the areas that are often overlooked when analyzing student performance is the importance of race and culture in the schooling experience. Race and culture play a huge role in the teaching and learning process and in order to close educational outcomes, racial and cultural disparities must be addressed (T. C. Howard, 2010).

Racial Identity

Racial identity in the case of Black Americans has been defined as a "common racial heritage that includes shared physical attributes as well as shared racial experiences, including social, economic, and political experiences" (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 103). Racial identity is how young children understand race based on physical appearances, predominantly skin color, as these are the features most salient to children (Rowley et al., 2008). DeCuir-Gunby (2009) argues Black boys often negotiate multiple identities from birth through adulthood, with the period of adolescence being the most critical.

Byrd (2012) outlines three components that are significant for children developing a racial identity: awareness, identification, and attitudes. Byrd defines "awareness" as being able to distinguish racial differences in accordance with accepted norms, "identification, or self-labeling" as naming one's own race correctly, and "attitudes" as beliefs of characteristics of different racial groups (p. 4). School is often the first place Black boys acquire awareness, identification, and identity attitudes (Byrd, 2012; Smith & Hope, 2020). Research suggests children have the ability to identify their race right around school age; however, at that age they still lack a complete understanding of their racial identity (Priest et al., 2016). Racial identity attitudes consist of multiple dimensions, to include ingroup and outgroup preference which in turn affects peer relationships (Byrd, 2012; Geerlings et al., 2019).

A critical component to racial identity is peer relationships (Neblett et al., 2009). These relationships cause children to often associate with students of their same racial background, which makes it difficult for Black children in predominantly White schools. Black boys in predominantly White schools are often navigating through racism and identity struggles, making it hard to have peer relationships (D. J. Carter, 2007). D. J. Carter (2007) writes, "White peers, even when they are not the perpetrators of racism, are also unprepared to respond in supportive ways" (p. 542). Black boys often search for and acquire what is known as "counter-spaces" to affirm their racial identity (D. J. Carter, 2007; Jackson & Hui, 2017). "Counter-spaces" serve as areas where Black students can cluster outside of the learning environment to vent their frustrations or to acknowledge their identity (D. J. Carter, 2007; Jackson & Hui, 2017). Even in these counter-spaces, peer relationships can have some negative consequences. Peer relationships can have both positive and negative implications with a negative implication of being given the label of "acting White," which is a label most often given by another Black peer (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009).

Living in a culture in which being Black is often perceived as being academically disengaged and intellectually inferior by the larger society, Black boys find it difficult defining themselves racially as well as academically (D. J. Carter, 2007). "Segregation leads to blockages in the communication and interaction between the two racial groups. Such blockages tend to increase mutual suspicion, distrust, and hostility" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, as cited in Martin, 1998, p. 145). Dickerson (2004) argues that although White people are often identified as the major perpetrators in promoting White dominance, Black people can be complacent in maintaining these beliefs "by vying for White approval, rather than for their own autonomy and

giving in to nihilism and immorality in the face of the endless struggle to surmount inequality" (pp. 52–53).

Brown v. Board of Education was supposed to change the quality of education for Black boys by putting an end to racial segregation (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). Research shows that even today across entire metropolitan areas, unequal access to educational opportunities still persists for Black families even as they attempt to move into the suburbs (Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017). Following the 1954 Supreme Court decision, nearly half of the Black educators in some states lost their jobs in the name of desegregation (Goings et al., 2019; Khalifa, 2015), and "in the Southern states, the overall number was reduced by as much as 90%" (Khalifa, 2015, p. 263). The percentage since the 1960s has continued to decline, with Blacks now accounting for only 8% of the teachers' workforce (Goings et al., 2019). Khalifa (2015) argues,

> Those that retained employment were also often surprised to learn that they were, purportedly, no longer qualified to lead schools with (Black and White) children, and were thus demoted or given inconsequential, menial jobs in their districts. Considering that in 1950, half of all African-American professionals were educators (Cole, 1986), this dealt a heavy blow to the Black community. (p. 263)

Goings et al. (2019) argued

> post Brown, the purposeful closing of all-Black schools, which were never attended by White students, unseated Black teachers and administrators. Consequently, these actions undid the structures that kept Black students academically and emotionally safe, thereby rendering Brown ineffective. Ultimately, Brown was responsible for the decline of Black educators. (p. 269)

Trask-Tate et al. (2014) argued communities were already separated with White and Black people living separate and parallel lives, causing racial lines to never cross, which keeps segregation alive. For some students, the only way these lines crossed was in a public-school setting but now with *schools of choice* these lines will never cross. Sikkink and Emerson (2008) refers to *schools of choice* as just another way to introduce racial segregation, a way for Whites to avoid racial minorities in public schools. Alexander (2012) argued the last two decades have influenced a "New Jim Crow" in which legalized segregation has been replaced with a penal system associated with unjust incarceration outcomes, especially for Black boys. While it is difficult to discriminate against a person for race, it is easy to remove a person's civil rights if they are a felon, which takes away several resources for that person (Alexander, 2012). Researchers have highlighted how current school segregation in Texas is, "reminiscent of former Jim Crow laws in that Black boys are exposed to the most challenging school contexts and they have the least amount of institutional supports" (Trask-Tate et al., 2014).

"Acting White"

Black boys dealing with social identity problems will often struggle with internal self-identity conflict, making it more appealing to *act White* in certain social environments. Tyson et al. (2005) defined the term "acting White" as "Black boys who use language or ways of speaking; displaying attitudes, behaviors, or preferences; or engaging in activities considered to be White cultural norms" (p. 583). Research shows that the burden of acting White is not widespread in predominantly Black neighborhoods but is prevalent in predominantly White neighborhoods with a small Black population (Tyson et al., 2005). Many Black students are still segregated in some way or another in public schools today, thus leaving Black boys with the perception that they must act White in order to fit in (McWhorter, 2014; Trask-Tate et al., 2014).

For example, in a predominantly White school, White students are given "unearned rewards and privileges and Black boys are not" (Bryan, 2018). Black boys in this environment quickly realize they must act White to receive the same rewards and privileges.

Parents of young Black boys also contribute to this by unconsciously teaching their Black sons to "act White" in certain environments (Dow, 2016). Dow (2016) provides an example of a parent that wanted to give her son access to better resources and schools. The parent translated that to mean living in primarily White neighborhoods and attending predominantly White schools. The parent explained that she hoped to transform her son from "that Black kid" to "the kid next door" (Dow, 2016, p. 178). Current school behavior and cultural expectations are established around the dominant White culture and Black boys are expected to operate within these expectations regardless of their cultural backgrounds; if they do not, they are seen as trouble makers or low achievers (Andrews, 2009; McWhorter, 2014).

Racial Socialization

Racial socialization is defined as the transmission of values, beliefs, and information about ethnicity and race from adults to children (Hughes et al., 2006). For example, Black parents begin communicating with their children at a very early age about the possible obstacles and barriers they will face throughout life because of the color of their skin. Black parents have a strong belief that they must instill their culture in their children, so they use racial socialization to teach their children Black culture, and to prepare them for potential experiences with racism (Hughes et al., 2006). According to Hughes et al., research identifies two common racial socialization goals, which are (a) ensuring that youth maintain a positive view of their own racial group and (b) helping children cope with racism and discrimination (i.e., preparation for bias).

Black parents are often aware of the racial discrimination taking place in the schools today because of their own experiences in school and because they are knowledgeable of racial disparities in educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes (Posey-Maddox, 2017). These parents prepare their children by transmitting messages of cultural pride which involves the sharing of ethnic and cultural traditions (Dow, 2016; Hughes et al. 2006). They also prepare them through messages that they either proactively discuss or through reactive conversations from experiences of bias and discrimination (Hughes et al. 2006; Thornton et al., 1990; Wang & Huguley, 2012).

Spencer (2006) argued these racial socialization mechanisms acknowledged that race was and still is a social construct associated with a hierarchy of institutional racism. Black parents' messages to their children reflect pride and Black culture as it is a direct correlation to self-esteem (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). Constantine and Blackmon (2002) argued that Black boys' sense of self can be complex in predominantly White schools, leading to low self-esteem and causing them to question their personal value because of implicit and explicit messages provided by others. Research suggests school culture and behavior norms are typically anchored to the dominate White culture which is usually in direct contrast to behavior and cultural norms of the Black community (Andrews, 2009; Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016).

Researchers argue that parents play an important role as socializers for their children especially as their children enter adolescence, due to the increased exposure of influences and the child's own awareness of and exposure to discrimination (Dow, 2016; Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2016). Research has shown that the effect of slavery and segregation has an impact on Black people's identities continuing through today and because of that legacy, some Black boys

tend to put up self-imposed barriers due to feeling inferior to their White peers (Bristol, &

Goings, 2019; Paige & Witty, 2010).

Race Consciousness

Race consciousness is defined as "a critical understanding of the asymmetrical power

relationships that exist between Blacks and Whites in America" (D. J. Carter, 2005, p. 102). In a

letter to his sister, Baldwin (1971) wrote,

> We know that we, the Blacks, and not only we, the Blacks, have been, and are, the
>
> victims of a system whose only fuel is greed, whose only god is profit. We know that the
>
> fruits of this system have been ignorance, despair, and death, and we know that the
>
> system is doomed because the world can no longer afford it - if, indeed, it ever could
>
> have. The enormous revolution in Black consciousness which has occurred in your
>
> generation, my dear sister, means the beginning or the end of America. Some of us, white
>
> and Black, know how great a price has already been paid to bring into existence a new
>
> consciousness, a new people, an unprecedented nation. If we know, and do nothing, we
>
> are worse than the murderers hired in our name. (Baldwin, 1971, paras. 14-15)

Research suggests that Black boys will only be successful if they realize that racism exists (Love,

2016a), and understand that race is a barrier to their success and then use these to construct their

achievement ideology (D. J. Carter, 2005; Tatum, 2017). D. J. Carter (2005) argued Black boys

must understand the historical and current impact that racism has in perpetuating social

inequality in America, especially for them.

To further explain race consciousness, W. E. B. DuBois (1903) highlighted the term

double consciousness. DuBois was one of the first sociologists to discuss the racial identity of

African Americans, citing his principal tenet that all Black people experienced a "double

consciousness" (Whaley, 2016, p. 107) arguing that being both Black and American created an ongoing internal conflict within Black Americans. Du Bois (1903) explained:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. . . . (p. 9)

Khalifa (2015) argued that by Black people mentioning and legitimizing White insights, the Black person is confirming the White "power structure and its treatment of Black boys. When a teacher suggests that White stereotypes and perceptions should be relevant to Black students, the teacher is in fact revealing their own positioning toward a type of Black behavior of which he or she does not approve" (Khalifa, 2015; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019). Khalifa (2015) goes on even further to argue that Black teachers are just as guilty when it comes to stereotyping Black boys. This argument shows the double consciousness of the Black teacher for he is giving credit to the "negative stereotypes assigned to Black students, and that he distinguished himself from these stereotypical Black Others" (Khalifa, 2015). To further show the twoness identified by DuBois (1903), Khalifa (2015) argued that typically it is Black principals who become the oppressor of Black boys when they follow suit of the "dominant oppressive school system" which "devalues the social and cultural capital of Black students", while confirming the social and cultural capital of traditional White students. Khalifa (2015) wrote, "Despite being Black, the principals reinforced White supremacist notions of good or bad student behavior, and ultimately reproduced exclusionary practices toward Black students" (p. 275).

Teacher Expectations

Teacher expectations for Black boys is often lower than those for their White classmates (Ferguson, 2003; Khalifa, 2011). This difference in expectations is generally due to teachers stereotyping the Black boys' culture. Khalifa (2011) further explained a teacher can have a grave effect on a student's ability, because of the teachers' preconceived belief that cultural characteristics of Black boys will impact their academic ability. If a teacher has negative thoughts about Black boys' abilities, "the teacher's interactions with and attitudes toward the child will negatively impact the Black boys' performance in the classroom. Black boys will typically feel invalidated and left out when the instructional practices of the teacher reflect only the values, and beliefs of the dominate race" (Ferguson, 2003; Khalifa, 2011) causing the Black boys to become disengaged from the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2009) contended,

> Students who fail to look, talk, or act as the teacher does are in danger of being placed in the lowest tracks. Students' ability to rise above these levels is compromised because they have less attention. Thus, they continue a cycle of poor school performance that was initiated by a teacher's biases and predispositions toward them. (p. 64)

Teachers' stereotyping of Black boys is one of the main reasons that Black boys still feel inferior to White students, which causes them to question their intellectual worth (Wasserberg, 2017). Often times there is a cultural mismatch, or unconscious bias or unintentional racism held by some White teachers. According to Picower (2009), *whiteness* is operationalized within the educational system resulting in White teachers holding Black boys responsible for the inequalities they face in school upholding the beliefs of these teachers that Black boys are lazy. Educational systems and most educators operate to maintain the idea of whiteness rather than challenging it (Picower, 2009). These educators believe that the Black boys must fit in the

system and not the educators adjusting to the Black boys. King (1991) says these educators operate under what she identifies as "dysconscious racism" (p. 135). Dysconscious racism is defined as one having "an uncritical habit of the mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (King, 1991, p. 135). G. R. Howard (2006) describes these teachers as "Fundamentalist White educators [who] demonstrate a mono-cultural and Eurocentric approach to teaching. Their curriculum content and pedagogy reflect an inherent commitment to Western Supremacy" (p. 101). These teachers fail to realize that the racial biases they have about Black boys often influence their pedagogical practices, which in turn has a negative impact on the Black boys' learning. The vast majority of these teachers do not recognize that racism is a form of oppression that Black boys often experience in everyday life (Picower, 2009).

Curricular Signals

Schools fail to teach Black boys about who they are (Carey, 2019), because even when teaching race-related content, there is evidence that teacher educators tend to focus on the emotional needs of White students rather than Black boys (Matias, 2016). Bryan (2018) argues that curriculum is a factor causing Black boys to develop and internalize unhealthy racial identities in schools. These racial identities are shattered even more through the curricular decisions and classroom practices during "Black History Month" (Doharty, 2019) noting these practices often have a White supremacist root, which continues to marginalize and have racist consequences for Black boys. Ladson-Billings (1998) argued that Black boys have to endure, "curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script" (p. 18). Teachers uphold White supremacist thinking and practices in classrooms through textbooks (King, 2005), contending that part of the "White supremacist agenda is to dehumanize

Black people in and through school textbooks by highlighting sociocultural deficits about them instead of inequitable systems that negatively shape Black boys' lives" (Bryan, 2017, p. 335). Research suggests that even school leaders are not prepared to lead and implement instructional practices to address the discourse around diversity in the curriculum (Khalifa et al. 2016).

School Culture

Spirit on a school campus creates a feeling of unity and togetherness among staff and students all working towards a common goal of building a successful campus culture. Schools must ensure that Black boys are connected to the classroom, the teacher, and their peers (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007). Research suggests the school's culture and climate influences students' performance and it plays a role in their behavior and attitudes (Ramsey et al., 2016). Regardless of the campus culture, Black boys are expected to check their cultures at the door and learn according to the norms of White students, or run the risk of being labeled as oppositional, assertive, disrespectful, or as a behavior problem (Picower, 2009). Black boys are usually oblivious of White cultural rules within the school setting and they often do not behave by the *school norms* (Schofield, 2001).

Schofield (2001) argued that attitudes toward Black boys are more negative than attitudes towards their White classmates. Black boys typically do not fit into the prescribed system of the school, and no matter what they do they are typically not viewed in the positive light or have the attributes that *schools value* in students. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued, "the educational systems do not value the knowledge and interpersonal skills that are brought into the classroom by Black boys" (p. 161). In order to change the school's climate, Khalifa et al. (2016) argued that school leaders are the ones who should create a welcoming school environment for all students regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. These leaders should set high expectations,

address educational needs of minoritized students, and then ensure that students and teachers meet those expectations.

Microaggressions

Although explicit, blatant incidents of racism still exist in our society, young Black boys are experiencing covert or subtle racism that often goes unnoticed in the form of racial microaggressions that quietly demean and belittle them. Pierce et al. (1978) defined microaggressions as:

> . . . subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are "put downs" of Blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms used against Blacks often are innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major ingredient in Black-White interactions. (p. 66)

Black boys in predominantly White schools can experience both verbal and non-verbal microaggressions on a daily basis from peers and school staff (Allen, 2013). An example of a non-verbal microaggression is Black boys labeled by White teachers and administrators as deviant for issues like talking in class or how they dress. Some examples of verbal microaggressions may include statements such as a teacher making a comment that the Black boy must have cheated on the test because he received a high score, or a teacher asking a Black boy does he live with his mom and dad and if so, is it his real dad or stepdad. Verbal microaggressions often aim to degrade Black boys and verbal exchanges between students happen quite often. For example, a White student telling a Black student, "you were accepted to this school because you are Black," or "you're different from the others" are forms of microaggressions (Allen, 2013). Racial microaggressions may be unconscious and the wrongdoer may not be aware of the demeaning message received by the Black individual.

However, research shows that even subtle microaggressions can harm students psychologically causing them to have bad experiences in the school setting (Allen, 2013). Black boys who experience racial microaggressions may struggle with isolation and become frustrated because of the negative racial environment.

In recent categorization of racial microaggressions, Sue (2010) identified three categories: (1) microassaults, (2) microinsults, and (3) microinvalidations. Black boys could experience all three of these in a predominantly White school setting. Sue (2010) writes, microassaults are more blatant, "are conscious, deliberate, and either subtle or explicit racial behaviors that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, verbalizations, or behaviors" (p. 28). An example could be a White student bringing a confederate flag purse to school. Microinsults are "subtler but still include the interpersonal and environmental messages that convey stereotypes and biases toward marginalized groups" (p. 35). An example is placing Black boys in Special Education or assuming that they will be a behavior problem because of their race. Microinvalidations are "interpersonal and environmental messages that negate, nullify, or undermine the experiences, feelings, and realities of marginalized groups" (p. 37). An example could be telling Black boys that racism does not or never existed and that they should get over it.

Microaggressions are mentally damaging to Black boys and often cause them to not perform well in certain school settings (Sue, 2010). In an attempt to minimize this impact Black parents often forewarn their Black sons of subtle racial comments or acts that they may encounter, such as being stereotyped of having bad behavior or for being lazy and not wanting to learn (Allen, 2013).

Black parents may also experience microaggressions in the educational setting (Posey-Maddox, 2017). For example, these microaggressions may come in the form of parental involvement and teachers verbalizing that "these" parents are not involved in their students' education, or teachers believing that Black parents are aggressive, have bad attitudes, or assuming they are single parents, and cannot or will not attend conference or PTA meetings.

Color Blindness

Researchers define color blindness as a belief that race should never be taken into account because people should not form impressions or make decisions on the basis of race (Apfelbaum et al., 2012). "The logic underlying the belief that color blindness can prevent prejudice and discrimination is straightforward: If people or institutions do not even notice race, then they cannot act in a racially biased manner" (Apfelbaum et al., 2012, p. 205). This definition implies that when it comes to making curriculum decisions or decisions that impact the culture of the school, schools should ignore Black boys' culture and the things that define them. The problem with this approach is the fact that a person's race is the first thing noticed upon meeting them (Strauss, 2016). Researchers argue that people judge another person by their race in one-seventh of a second and that racial differences are noted as early as six months of age (Apfelbaum et al., 2012; Strauss, 2016).

Annamma et al. (2014) writes that race plays a significant role in educational outcomes, citing that racism impacts student achievement, discipline, and special education placement, to name just a few. Wells (2014) argued that education policy and reform are structured to advance color-blindness, noting:

The two central educational reforms of the last few decades—the
standards/accountability movement and free-market school choice policies—have both

been framed as outcome-based solutions to the racial achievement gap without directly

addressing any societal or educational issues related to race. (p. 1)

Wells acknowledged that policies required school districts to report test scores by racial

categories making this the "most popular 'colorblind' approach to addressing racial disparities in

education: Ignore stark racial inequality when implementing policies and then bemoan vivid

racial inequalities in educational outcomes" (p. 1).

Researchers argue that school administrators play a significant role in maintaining

practices that reproduce racial oppression in schools by taking a willful blindness approach to the

racial inequities (Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015), meaning that educators have the power to erase the

lived experiences of Black boys by taking the "race does not matter" approach or ignoring what

Black boys have been through and ultimately ignoring their social identity. Schools that take the

color blindness approach fail to recognize Black boys' racial identity and the real social identity

issues they face within the school (Annamma et al., 2017). Teachers, perhaps unintentionally,

worsen existing racial inequities by supporting social norms through their own beliefs and

thoughts about Black boys, and forming the belief that Black boys should change to fit within the

system instead of the teachers making adjustments to meet the needs of the students they serve

(Ghosh, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

I approach this study through a lens of the social identity theory and CRP. I first discuss

social identity theory to understand how and why Black boys form ingroups in predominantly

White schools. Next, I move to an analysis of the role of CRP in addressing the needs of Black

boys. The particular frameworks were chosen for study because they both offer useful

perspectives on race, culture, teaching, and learning, which are central to the purpose of this

study, which is to investigate the lived experiences of young Black boys in predominantly White schools.

Social Identity Theory

Introduced in the early 1970s by Tajfel, social identity theory explains that part of a person's concept of self comes from the groups to which that person belongs (Tajfel et al., 1971). Tajfel's original research explained social identity theory in which participants were allocated into two groups, an ingroup and an outgroup, on the basis of meaningless and arbitrary criteria (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Initially participants were categorized and allocated into groups on the basis of the flip of a coin (Tajfel et al., 1971). Studies guided by social identity theory explore how people search for positive social identity and, once groups are formed, how they function within a group or several groups (Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003). According to this theory, individuals do not just have a personal selfhood, but they have multiple identities associated with their affiliated group and each person is a part of many different ingroups. The individual and situation determine which ingroup is the most dominant at any given time. Research suggests that an individual will lean towards the group that gives them the most self-concept in that particular setting (Hogg et al., 2017).

Categorization, comparison, and identification are criteria used to form a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Researchers identify self-categorization as a pertinent component to the formation of one's identity, citing that categorization depends upon a named and classified world (Hogg et al., 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Categorization happens when individuals organize themselves and others into distinct social categories based upon apparent or concrete categorical differences (Hogg et al., 2017). For example, noting that someone is Black or a male categorizes that individual by race and gender. Social identity theory holds that the more an individual sees

themselves as a part of a group and the more they connect with that group, the more similarities they begin to form.

Research argues that one strengthens their social identity through different learning experiences (Hogg et al., 2017). This means if a student identifies himself as a Black boy, he will most likely behave within the norms of that group (Hogg et al., 2017). When an individual does not identify themselves as part of a particular group that is known as the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Research shows that the forming of ingroups and outgroups causes negative feelings and interactions toward the members of the opposite group (Hogg et al., 2017). Discrimination comes in the form of an overly strong ingroup identity causing the group to feel hatred towards outgroups. For example, a White person who feels strongly about their race may have negative feelings towards other races due to their affiliation with the White race and their need to feel superior to other races. Hogg et al. (2017) suggested stereotypical depictions and beliefs about other ethnicities, greatly raises racial biases and negative feelings toward ethnic outgroups. These negative feelings are passed down from generation to generation with children often having the same racial biases as their parents (Wang & Huguley, 2012). Ingroup individuals will process knowledge from experiences they have with peers and use that knowledge for the social needs of the group (Wang & Huguley, 2012). Tajfel and Turner (1986) suggested this process makes ingroup boundaries salient and therefore results in construction of a social identity.

Social identity theory is concerned with the social and psychological reasons people form a social identity (Shinnar, 2008). The premise of the theory is that people need to feel a sense of belonging so they consistently search to be part of groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Black boys search for these groups in PWES schools and once they identify their group, they begin a journey

in which they either succeed or fail. The outcome is based on the Black boys' abilities to see the importance of school and academic success as essential to one's social identity. Research has shown the dominant factor in selecting a group is likely to be to one's race, making it essential for Black boys to have teachers, mentors, and peers in their lives that centralize school success (Allen, 2015). People gravitate toward others they think are like them in search fulfilling their social identity; however, just being a part of a group is not enough to form an identity. Social identify theory suggested Black boys would benefit in an environment where they feel valued, which in turn raises their self-esteem helping them form an identity. People want to belong to groups that boost their self-esteem so they become members of a unique combination of social categories over the course of their personal being (Shinnar, 2008). Social identity theory would suggest the need for PWES to work to help create and nurture both racial identity groups for these boys and help them find other ingroups or categories where they could be more comfortable crossing racial lines.

Black Boys' Experiences of School Through Social Identity Theory Lens

> Walk into any racially mixed high school cafeteria at lunch time and you will instantly notice that in the sea of adolescent faces, there is an identifiable group of Black students sitting together. Conversely, it could be pointed out that there are many groups of White students sitting together as well, though people rarely comment about that. The question on the tip of everyone's tongue is "Why are the Black kids sitting together?" (Beverly Tatum, 1997, p. 52)

Headlines and news stories are constantly describing the educational experiences of Black boys in school detailing their continued underachievement and the abounding problems they face while attending schools (Dumas, 2016; T. C. Howard, 2013). For example, a Black

teen was suspended and told he would not be allowed to walk at graduation for not cutting his dreadlocks. A Black fourth-grader was suspended for two days and required to spend 15 days at an alternative school for bringing black pepper to school. Also, a Black 6-year-old was handcuffed, arrested, led out of school, and booked in the police station for aggression toward a teacher. What the storylines never cover is the fractured self and social identities of these Black boys which is usually caused by the school setting (Andrews, 2009). History tells us that the intent of laws of desegregation was to bring racial groups together socially while offering a better quality education for Black boys (Houlette et al., 2004). Researchers argue while you can bring the two groups together socially, you cannot eliminate the social preferences of students, nor can you eliminate the racial stereotypes that are taught and formed by students (Houlette et al., 2004; Liberman et al., 2017). T. C. Howard (2013) points to social barriers in attempting to explain why Black boys do not fare well in and beyond school. T. C. Howard suggested Black boys need an environment where their knowledge and beliefs can contribute to the growth of their own individualities. Tatum (1997) argued that Black boys sitting together in a cafeteria is seen as a problem, although they are only participating in social categorization norms.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) defined social identity as "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (p. 16). Therefore, working from Tajfel and Turner's (1986) definition of social identity, Black boys' identities may be generally defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his or her knowledge of membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Therefore, social identity for Black boys refers to the characteristics of their self-image that derive from perception that they are in the social group—African American. For Black boys this plays a crucial role in

the development of their identity because they are beginning to develop a sense of who they are and becoming more conscious of how their social identities relate to the ways they are viewed and treated by others (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Hogg et al., 2004). As Black boys discover that their social group is often poorly represented in the school setting, they become skeptical of their White peers (Darder, 2012; Dumas & Nelson, 2016). As Black boys begin to consider the implications of their racial group membership as well as the opportunities and limitations of their social group, they quickly realize they are faced with living in a society in which the color of their skin is the difference which often translates into an increased consciousness of self-identity and the social group to which they belong (Welch & Nesson, 2016). Ladson-Billings (2011) observed,

> When we look at the 'hate' aspect of this dichotomy, we see African American males as 'problems' that our society must find ways to eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root cause of most problems in schools and society. We seem to hate their dress, their language, and their effect. We hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. We seem convinced that if they wouldn't act so . . . 'Black,' they would not be problems. While the society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots – music, basketball, football, track – we seem less comfortable with them than in places like the National Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club. (p. 9)

In this passage, Ladson-Billings (2011) observed the manner in which society accepts Black boys for what they stereotype as their strength while turning their back on them for what they identify as their weakness. For Black boys belonging to a group to which White society has attached negative stereotypes, it becomes difficult and may lead to negative self-identity. Tajfel

and Turner (1986) outlined possible reactions to negative social identity. First, the Black boys may attempt individual mobility, meaning they may attempt to move to what society views as a higher status group or they may attempt to just distance themselves from the ingroup they are placed in. This option is usually very difficult to accomplish and rarely happens because of racial boundaries and social groups are usually formed based off of race. A second strategy for Black boys in the low status ingroup is to work to change the results of the social comparison by changing the evaluations associated with social groups. For example, Black boys will use this strategy to form their social identity by changing the evaluation and using sports instead of academics to compare the two groups placing themselves in a higher social category. At a very young age Black boys begin to form their self-identity through social identity experiences and through observations of their environment (Tatum, 1997).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Former President Barack Obama said, "The single most important factor in determining [student] achievement is not the color of their skin or where they come from. It's not who their parents are or how much money they have. It's who their teacher is" (Winters, 2012 p. viii). In this quote, former President Obama suggested teachers have the power to make a difference in Black boys' lives depending on the teacher's belief, attitude, and expectations of the child. However, Black boys continue to be discriminated against by their teachers, their peers, and even by parents of the opposite race (Banerjee et al., 2018; Hotchkins, 2016; Love, 2016b). As Black boys enter the education system, they soon realize that race matters when it comes to their teachers and peers (Hotchkins, 2016). For a young Black boy experiencing this blatant racism, he is often left with his "spirit murdered" (Love, 2013). She describes "spirit murdering within a school context as the "denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because

of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism" (Love, 2013, p. 293). Love (2016a) argued that school officials ""spirit murder" (Love, 2013) the souls of Black children every day through systemic, institutionalized, anti-Black, state-sanctioned violence" (p. 22). It is difficult for the student to imagine this being done by his teacher, the person he looks to for approval and affirmations.

Research shows that Black boys disproportionally receive greater disciplinary consequences when compared to their White peers, and are punished harsher despite the behavior being the same (Hotchkins, 2016; Monroe, 2005). Monroe (2005) explains that teachers' perceptions and expectations of Black boys are the key factors that influence their decisions when it comes to discipline. Teachers are in constant dialogue with Black boys whether it be verbal or non-verbal and this language is a "tool of engagement in any student–teacher interaction" (Thomas & Warren, 2017). Thomas and Warren (2017) argue that it is not just what teachers say, but it is how they say it, and their intentions for saying it that matters in order to produce promising academic and social outcomes for students. "Black boys may often feel invalidated and left out when the instructional practices of the teacher reflect only the beliefs, and values of their White counterparts" (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

In his book titled *Dear White People*, Simien (2014) made an attempt to clear up the negative stereotypes that Black boys often face, noting Black boys will typically live up to these stereotypical characteristics. Simien (2014) suggested Black boys often learn about themselves through these stereotypes. Most White people also learn about Black people through the same stereotypes (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Simien, 2014). Research suggests White teachers disproportionately target Black boys for behavior reasons causing the White teachers to negatively influence White children's perception of Black boys (Goyer et al., 2019).

In an effort to end the inequities in school and assist Black boys with affirming their cultural identity, Ladson-Billings (1995) defined a theoretical model which she termed culturally relevant pedagogy. She intended for the framework to focus on acknowledging "cultural difference as an asset to instruction, rather than a liability" (p. 160). She identified three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy: "(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order" (p. 160).

Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching as teaching "to and through [students'] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments" (p. 26). Culturally responsive pedagogy is premised on "close interactions among ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement" (Gay, 2010, p. 27). She explained, "Students of color come to school having already mastered many cultural skills and ways of knowing. To the extent that teaching builds on these capabilities, academic success will result" (p. 213). She identifies five dimensions of teacher praxis:

1. culture and difference are natural attributes of humanity, and, therefore, should be normative features of teaching and learning;

2. since attitudes and beliefs about ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity shape instructional behaviors, they need to be more positive and constructive to produce better teaching and learning for culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse students;

3. some resistance to culturally responsive teaching should be expected, understood, and resisted;

4. the underlying values and beliefs of culturally responsive teaching such as equality, justice, and diversity are compatible with the democratic ideals of the United States; and

5. the viability and validity of culturally responsive teaching increase when connections between it and other routine responsibilities and functions of teaching are made explicit. (Gay, 2013, p. 67)

Culturally responsive pedagogy combines both *culturally responsive teaching*, of Gay (2010, 2013), and *culturally relevant pedagogy* of Ladson-Billings' (1995, 2009, 2014) in an effort to reduce the *opportunity gap* for Black boys by helping teacher candidates conceptualize and translate theory into practice (Warren, 2018). Research suggested the importance that "teacher candidates learn to develop habits or tendencies to behave in ways that appropriately and accurately respond to the needs of diverse youth" (Warren, 2018).

Culturally responsive pedagogy could prepare teachers who are highly qualified to implement practices and deliver instruction that is representative of the cultural backgrounds of the Black boys in their classroom. Simien (2014) suggest that, "culturally relevant teachers establish relationships with their students and families, get to know their students inside and outside of the classroom," and do not believe in the stereotypes. These teachers are critical of the system to ensure that their students get what they need to address their social identity. "Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 140). These educators do not demand that the students change to fit the system, instead culturally relevant teachers adjust to fit the students' needs.

Chapter Summary

The review of the literature supports that there are efforts being made by schools to support Black boys by adjusting teacher expectations to fit the needs of these students. Some of this research is grounded in deficit thinking and speaks to what Black boys lack in the educational system. Racial interpretation differences are as prominent today as ever. The racial socialization, consciousness, macroaggressions, and even teacher expectations have deep-seated perceptions separating Whites from Blacks. Research must address negative stereotypes towards Black boys in the educational setting. Research has shown that the majority of Whites and Blacks do not attempt to understand the cultural identity of the other race. Chapter Three focuses on methodology and outlines the research design of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived experiences of young Black boys in predominantly White schools. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

Q1. How do young Black boys and their parents describe the benefits and challenges of being in a predominantly White school?

Q2. How do young Black boys describe the school's culture at a predominantly White school?

Q3. How do practices of teachers and administrators affect the experiences of young Black boys in predominantly White schools?

In this chapter, I described the research design and the processes used in this study.

Research Design

"Qualitative research seeks to provide its readers with a comprehensive perspective and/or explanation of situations, events, or experiences" (Creswell & Maietta, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). The focus of this study was to capture how Black boys perceived their school and to illuminate the lived experiences of these boys while exploring the benefits and challenges they faced in a predominantly White school. I utilized a qualitative approach, to provide readers with an inclusive perspective and explanation of situations, understanding, and voice (Tierney & Clemens 2011). I wanted to give the participants an opportunity to share their experiences without interruption or false interpretation, so I utilized a case study approach to capture data through narrative inquiry and interviews. Harrison et al. (2017) argued "case studies investigate people, events, or phenomena in a given system, situation, or setting." So, I used this

approach to explore Black boys' experiences, their parents' experiences, and the school's environment in general.

Researcher Positionality

The color of my skin does not define me, in fact, that is the one thing about me that I cannot change, yet it is the one thing that I am often judged by. I am an elementary school educator, having served students in the role of teacher, campus level administrator, and central office administrator. I am a Black male who attended a predominantly White elementary school during the 1970s and 1980s in deep south Mississippi. I also have a Black son who attended a predominantly White elementary school in the 21st century in the state of Texas. As an educator, I have consistently witnessed the educational inequities within the public school system. My experiences, my son's experiences, along with the experiences of countless other Black boys' in predominantly White elementary schools, serve as my source of interest in this study. As a teacher, my ability to influence the entire elementary school was limited but I made it my goal to start with one class at time. During my time in the classroom, I understood the needs of my students, the need they had to feel valued, the need they had to feel respected, and the need they had to feel they belonged. I saw myself in so many of them; I gave them what I longed for as a Black boy attending a predominantly White elementary school in Mississippi. Understanding the need to change the culture at the campus level, I moved into administration. As a principal, I was slowly able to change the culture of the campus when it came to Black boys. I set out to coach and train teachers on the importance of understanding equality and equity in their classrooms. This required teachers to adjust their mindset, their pedagogy, instructional practices, and their classroom environment as it related to Black boys. Although sometimes unintentional, schools and school personnel seem resistant to making changes that would fit the needs of Black boys (P.

Carter et al., 2017). I was not blind to the fact that I may not have been able to change the teachers' perceptions of Black boys once they closed the door of their classroom. Looking back, I was spending my time talking to the teachers instead of listening to the Black boys. How do you impart change without listening to the ones you set out to help? Driven by my passion to change the schooling experiences for young Black boys, I emerged as a researcher. Utilizing my experience as a Black boy, coupled with my desire to help school leaders and educators better serve young Black boys, my body of research offers unique perspectives from parents and Black boys that can be used to start the change process. With my background in elementary education and my lived experiences as a Black male, not only do I believe that my positionality offers more credibility to the study, I also believe that I offer space for Black boys to feel they can tell their stories freely.

Setting

The study was conducted at an elementary school in a suburban school district in the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas. The school was selected because the student body represented the objective of the study. The elementary campus selected serves approximately 490 students in Grades K–5. The student body makeup consisted of 9% Black, 25% Hispanic, and 56% White. The teaching staff at the school consisted of majority White females, with a demographic breakdown consisting of 93% White, 1% Black, and 6% Hispanic.

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of elementary students who identify as Black/African American boys. Parent(s) of the identified Black/African American boys also participated in the study. Initial contact with the participants was made through email sent out by the school's principal. The final pool of participants were randomly selected from among all

potential participants who meet the requirements and expressed interest to take part in the study. An invitation to participate was sent to all parents of Black boys in grades 2, 3, 4, and 5, along with a letter of introduction (both delivered electronically), was distributed detailing the parameters of the study, an explanation of confidentiality, and how the information would be collected.

Students

The student participants (see Table 1) included three young Black boys that attended the selected predominantly White elementary school during the Grades 2–5. Participants attended 2 of the previous 4 years in this educational setting. Participants were selected according to the following criteria: (a) they identified as Black/African American in third, fourth, and fifth grade, (b) they are male, and (c) they attend a predominantly White elementary school. Each of the student participants identified by a number (S1–S3). Table 1 provides the description of the three students who participated in the narratives and interviews.

Table 1

Student Group Participants

Name	Age	Grades Attended
S1Gamer	11	2, 3, 4, 5
S2 Satchel	8	1, 2, 3
S3 Batman	10	1, 2, 3, 4

Parents

Parent participants included a parent who has a Black son who attended a predominantly White elementary school. One or both of each participating student's parents may participate, though both were invited to participate, meaning that between three and ten parents may have

ultimately opted to participate. Participants were recruited as families. I sent the study

information sheet, invitation, and letter of introduction home to parents, then among all families

who indicated an interest, I selected three students (and their parents) at random. Participants

understood that their involvement in the study was primarily to gain parental insight on their

son's experiences as well as their experience and perception of the school. Each of the parent

participants were identified by a number (P1–P4). Table 2 provides the description of the four

parents that participated in the narratives and interviews.

Table 2

Parent Group Participants

Name	Student	Ethnicity	Gender	Attend a Predominately White School
P1 Regina	Gamer	Black	Female	Yes
P2 Mrs. Paige	Satchel	Black	Female	Yes
P3 Mr. Paige	Satchel	Black	Male	Yes
P4 Tiffany	Batman	Black	Female	Yes

Data Collection

Narratives

Empowering the students and parents to use narratives for this study permitted the

participants to convey their stories in a freely. Prior to the first interview, parent and student

participants were asked to write or record a narrative telling the story of what it was like for them

"as the parent of a Black son in a predominantly White elementary school" or "as a Black boy in

a mostly White school." Allowing the participants to write or record their narratives ahead of

time gave voice to their stories and ensured that their experiences were not lost throughout the

translation. The recordings and/or written stories were collected prior to the interviews. The remainder of this chapter contains descriptions of these processes.

Interviews

To gather perspectives and experiences, parents and students also participated in an interview. Merriam (2009) argued that "interviews are one of the most common forms of data collection in qualitative research and are extremely beneficial when conducting case studies." Interviews were conducted virtually with the parents of the student participants and recorded with an audio recorder. The audio recordings were transcribed following the interviews by a professional transcription company. Virtual interview methods were more attractive than in-person interviews due to features including convenience, efficiency, and flexibility (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Interview questions were open-ended, and each participant was given the opportunity to explain any issues or topics that arose during the interview questioning. The interviews gave me insight of the participant's feelings, experiences, and perceptions of the school. I conducted final family interviews after I completed some early analysis to see if my takeaways were on the right track in retelling their stories. I obtained written consent from all participants prior to the narratives and virtual interviews.

Figure 1

Data Collection Process
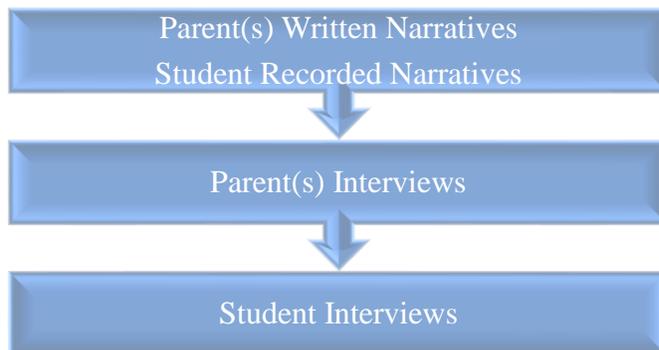
Data Analysis

The data analysis for the study took place in stages. The first stage began after the written and recorded narratives. Data collected from the individual narratives were coded throughout the data collection process. I provided the participants with my interpretations of their narratives using the process of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) asking, "Did I understand this in the same way you meant it?" and to verify that I was on the right track. None of the participants requested any changes. "Member checking is the process of continuous, informal testing of information by solidifying reactions of respondents to the investigator's reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77).

I utilized the software program Dedoose (2018), to organize the information that I acquired during this study. I used Dedoose as a method to assist with coding and to help me with organizing data and establishing themes (Creswell, 2013). I used the analysis from the audiotaped and professionally transcribed narratives for generating themes (Merriam, 2009). The established themes helped guide me to develop further questions for the virtual interviews.

Stage 2 was the virtual interviews. Yin (2014) argued that evidence from interviews are vital to case studies. Virtual interviews were recorded and each session transcribed by Dedoose qualitative coding software. The data was then coded and decoded conferring to repetitious themes related with perceptions and experiences. The use of multiple data sources helped establish reliability through the triangulation of data, it also aide in articulating my positionality and strengthening trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). Table 3 contains samples of the final codes.

In the coding program, Dedoose, I was able to analyze and code data from the individual student interviews and parent interviews. In using the analysis, reading through my data multiple times I was able to use open coding to begin creating color groups to lump my data under.

50

Table 3

Samples of Final Codes

Code	# of Times Used	Examples
Black Teachers	96	. . . attend the programs and there a few Black kids on the stage but no Black teachers in the building . . . it's not right
Environment	96	. . .determination to provide Satchel with the best learning environment and the opportunity to be successful is unwavering.
Different	88	I had to explain . . . that he couldn't question or challenge his teachers because coming from him it would be looked at differently
Social	82	The social piece is one thing that rips at my heart sometimes. It is the one thing which causes me to go back and forth on my decision.
Challenge	80	We all face challenges within our life. She knows that there only a few Black boys that attend the school. She continued saying that when deciding, we first analyze the pros and the cons or the benefits and the challenges.
Taught	78	We are taught to "code switch," which is just not right. I was taught in order to fit in a White environment, you had to speak and act a certain way.
Friends	73	He doesn't play with the same friends he once played with when he was younger. They seem to have grown apart. They are not the friends that come to his birthday parties, nor does he attend theirs.
Feel	58	I know how Black kids are treated in school. Let me put it like this, the same rules don't apply for us that applies for them.
Culture	42	. . . must change the culture of school and a major step in doing so would be adding some Black teachers to the staff.
Stereotype	28	Stereotyping happens in schools every day by peers as well as by adults creating an intimidating situation for young Black boys.

This assisted me with identifying general patterns to sort and inspect the data more precisely. The data was coded from both the student and parent individual interviews. I then color-coded patterns that emerged in the interviews and the software identified the commonly occurring patterns. I completed a cross case analysis by utilizing the data across interviews, focusing my attention on the similarities which led to establishing the themes.

Timeline

The timeline for the data collection and analysis for the study is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis

Duration	Focus	Method
April	Obtain IRB Approval	
	Begin Recruitment process	
June	Begin first narrative interviews	Narratives
	Analyze narratives to develop questions for interviews	Coding
September	Begin virtual interviews	Virtual interviews
	Transcribe interviews	Auto recordings
	Follow up family interviews	Coding
	Review transcriptions with a peer	
December–January	Analyze interviews	

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived experiences of young Black boys in predominantly White schools. Schools provide experiences that mold Black boys' future and educators must be aware of how these experiences impact young Black boys. The presentation of

data follows in Chapter Four, with the focus on presenting the experiences of young Black boys in predominantly White elementary schools.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to focus on the lived experiences of Black boys in predominantly White elementary schools (PWES). This qualitative case study utilized student and parent narratives, as well as student and parent interviews to answer the following questions:

Q1. How do young Black boys and their parents describe the benefits and challenges of being in a predominantly White school?

Q2. How do young Black boys describe the school's culture at a predominantly White school?

Q3. How do practices of teachers and administrators affect the experiences of young Black boys in predominantly White schools?

The assumption was that knowing of the lived experiences of young black boys in predominately White elementary schools, the ability to provide educational experiences for young Black boys would be increased. I first start out the discussion in this chapter focusing on the narratives and interviews of the Black boys and their families, being sure to capture their voices as much as possible. The latter part of the chapter provides a summary of the emergent themes recognized in the narratives and interviews.

Although this opportunity was via zoom, I had the pleasure to interview three amazing young Black boys and their families. Unique in their own ways, the Black boys shared their experiences and how they navigated their way in a PWES. The three boys here range in age from eight to twelve. Their parents were also part of the study however only one dad participated in the interview. The boys and their families' identities are protected in the study through the use of pseudonyms which I assigned. I assigned the boys a pseudonym to match their interest and I randomly assigned their parent(s) a pseudonym.

Stories and Experiences

Gamer's Story

Gamer is a 12-year-old boy who enjoys movies and playing games with his family. He also enjoys going to entertainment venues like Dave and Busters and Top Golf, but most of all he enjoys playing video games. Gamer's family consisted of a single mom and a three-year-old brother. Regina, Gamer's mother, let me know that Gamer's father was not in his life. Gamer appeared as a confident young man that took on the role of "man of the house." Regina, his mother, described in her narrative that Gamer often feels that he must take on this role and sometimes it causes some frustrating moments. Gamer's often described by others as funny and somewhat hyper but with periods of sadness; while his mom describes him as a loving kid who cares for others. In class, Gamer is described by his teachers as hard-working but sometimes off task.

Preparation for the PWES

Regina discussed the need to ensure that Gamer was prepared for the environment. She discussed some measures she took to help prepare Gamer for the predominantly white school he was entering. She describes how she had to prepare Gamer in a manner similar to how she prepares him for the world that is outside of the four walls of their home. Regina shared that she made sure to have "the talk" with him about racial biases and how he needed to be intentional about controlling his emotions. In addition to being on guard because you are a Black male in a predominantly white school, Regina believes it is also important ensure that Gamer is mentally prepared with the skills and resources to navigate his environment. She believes this to be a benefit and a challenge. Regina believes that "if Gamer can navigate this environment, he will be

able to navigate any environment . . . how best to help him has always been a priority." Regina stated:

> I remember one time, I had to explain to Gamer (in the fourth grade) that he couldn't question or challenge his teachers because coming from him it would be looked at differently even if his question or concern was valid and even if his tone of voice was gentle.

Regina contributes Gamer's challenges in this environment to his occasional struggles with anger issues, depression, and anxiety. Highlighting that being back at school after being virtual for a year and a half impacts his depression and anxiety. However, she discusses how she goes above and beyond to make sure that Gamer is respectful and kind to everyone that he meets, while also standing up for himself when he's mistreated. She views this as a real challenge because he should not have to navigate this added pressure at such a young age. She understands that the system is not fair for Black boys as she has told Gamer on several occasions to pick and choose his battles wisely. Regina has also told Gamer many times that he cannot do the same things that his White classmates do because his consequences will be very different from theirs. "It's about teaching him to advocate for himself in a respectful manner so that his needs get met."

Perceived Challenges in the PWES

Regardless of the time you spend preparing Black boys for the PWES they attend, they are certain to encounter some challenges. While many factors contribute to the challenges that young Black boys feel at school, Gamer and Regina describe some key incidents that interfere with the relationships between peers as well as the adults in the building.

Peer Relationships

Gamer mentioned that sometimes he feels sad when going to school. He describes his school as terrible! Gamer shared most of the kids are jerks, racists, or just cannot get over themselves. He said White kids will only talk and play with other White kids and "now they make it a point to talk about Trump." Gamer said,

> They write "Trump 2020" on their folders and even on the white board when the teacher is not looking. Not that it makes a difference if the teachers are looking or not because the teacher never erased it, it was still on the board the next day when we came to class.

Black people know what it means when they start talking about Trump. It's racist! Gamer said: "I kind of stay to myself at school. I mean, I play with a couple of people at school but we don't hang out or nothing. At recess a couple of us play basketball or football, that's about it."

Regina said she understands that stereotyping happens in schools everyday by peers as well as by adults creating an intimidating situation for young Black boys entering this environment. She hates that Gamer has to navigate this at such a young age. Nevertheless, she feels this environment offers him the best opportunity for a successful future. Gamer feels that because a lot of the kids in his school do not look like him nor have the same background as him, he is often the subject of racial profiling by his peers and teachers. He describes his first interactions at the school, saying, "a lot of White kids were coming up to me saying things like, 'when I saw you, I thought you were going to be a jerk or something' but once they got to know me they love me." Gamer says he hates when people group all Black people together. "All Black people are not alike, just like all White people are not alike."

Adult Relationships

Gamer's relationships with adults in the school were sometimes as problematic as the relationships with peers. Gamer's often viewed by his teachers as "getting off task" and not being motivated to work. Gamer's teachers added another layer of pressure to him, telling him that because of his ADHD it is hard for him to focus especially when he doesn't take his medicine. Gamer describes how the teacher ask him every day, before he can enter the classroom, if he took his medicine before coming to school- "she said, I can always tell when you don't have your medicine." Gamer said he spends a great deal of time "trying to focus, trying his best to just do his work, and trying not to bother anyone. Even sometimes that is not enough."

One particular incident illustrates how devastating of an impact stereotyping can have on an individual. This incident has had a lasting effect on both Gamer and Regina. Once, Gamer was sent to the office, only to experience stereotyping from the school principal. Gamer shared,

> See, Mrs. [says teacher name] sent me to the office one day because I was disrupting the class and interrupting my classmates' learning. Mrs. [says principal name] starting questioning me, asking me who lives in my house. She asked if I had a mom and a dad at home or did I live in my grandmother's house. She never asked me why was I in the office she just gave me one day of ISS (In School Suspension) and told me to behave in class. I told my mom all about it. She was mad! We went to the office the next day and I went to class and didn't have to go to ISS.

After Gamer left the interview room, his mom Regina, wanted to talk about the office incident that Gamer discussed during his interview. Regina said, "that's the one day I think I was seeing red." She was furious that adults would treat a child like that. Regina shared that Gamer's

dad does not live in the home but that had nothing to do with the reason he was sent to the office. She felt if an adult had an educational reason they needed that information, that adult should have come to her. She understood the reason was solely stereotypical. On top of that, she felt the principal automatically assumed he was guilty by never asking him what he had done wrong, instead "she simply assigned him a consequence." Regina said: "This incident has me upset all over again and the fact that he remembers all of the details makes it more upsetting. Because it tells me he was truly impacted by that experience." Regina was clearly upset as she recalled the incident.

Gamer recalls an incident of a teacher, Ms. [says the teachers name], not liking him. Gamer's recollection of this teacher is of her consistently sending him to the office or calling his mom for every little thing. Gamer said,

> That's just how the White people are at my school. If I was an adult and had kids of my own I would pick another school for them to attend. I mean this school is cool and I like it here sometimes but I wish all the people [would] like me.

Gamer actually enjoys going to ISS if it means skipping this particular teacher's class. Regina did express her frustration with this one particular teacher. She said, "Some teachers just shouldn't be in the classroom, and this is the first of his teachers that I have felt that way about." Regina points out that this is the one teacher that has low expectations for Black boys in general. Regina said,

> I say in general because I talk to the other parents both past and present about their experience in her classroom and they all have the same thing to say. In a parent-teacher conference, the teacher told me that it appears my son is not excited about learning.

Instead of changing her approach or her teaching method, she looks for ways to blame him.

Regina made it a point to say that this was a specific teacher incident and not the doing of the entire school. In fact, she noted for the most part, she has a pretty good relationship with Gamer's past teachers. Regina's shaky relationship with this one particular teacher also stems from the experience Gamer has with the teacher. This just so happens to be the same teacher he was talking about that he believes does not like him. However, Regina pledged that she will continue to work with the teacher to ensure Gamer's success.

Despite this one teacher, Regina feels Gamer is in an environment where he feels comfortable for the most part. She knows there are classmates that get under his skin occasionally, but she feels the staff and administration have been really supportive. She does often worry about him having to learn how to navigate life as a Black male because she believes that in itself is a major challenge, but even more so in an environment where people do not look like him and consider his skin color a threat. Regina continued by saying she and Gamer consistently adjust to ensure he is not viewed as being aggressive or as a threat.

Regina discussed that Gamer is dealing with some personal issues and because of those issues he intentionally has a very close relationship with the assistant principal and school counselor. Regina illustrated how the staff at the schools goes above and beyond for Gamer. She explained Gamer gets anxious and depressed sometimes but the counseling and administrative staff at the school are really good about making sure that he has what he needs. The teachers give him permission to go see the counselor anytime he needs to so that he does not get too overwhelmed.

Regina felt she needed to make sure the staff at the school knew she was well educated, and she has a good career. She believed that this would make them respect her more as well as treat Gamer better. Regina said she was not sure if it was anything that she mentioned previously, that effects how they are treated or if everyone is just genuinely kindhearted, but either way, she did not want to take any chances.

Despite some of the incidents noted, Regina said she felt she and Gamer actually received a great deal of care, love, and attention from the school. She explained in more detail,

Gamer struggles as a result of his father being absent. He has some anger issues, depression, and anxiety that he is learning how to cope with. Being on guard because you're an African-American male in a predominantly White school doesn't make coping any easier. But ensuring that he is mentally prepared and has skills and resources to best help him has always been a priority and I feel the school works with me to ensure this happens. Hence the close relationship with the assistant principal and school counselor.

Culture

Participants described the culture as challenging because of the lack of Black heritage within the curriculum, which was observed through homework and other assignments.

Regina's view on how the school supported his cultural identity development was described simply as the school honoring Black history every year. Despite what the school is doing, Regina attempts to fill in the gaps, by teaching him Black history and encouraging him to research information for himself instead of just taking another person's word for it. Regina's interview revealed that neither the assignments nor homework build upon Gamer's cultural background. While she believes that his teachers relate his learning experience to the life of a fifth grader, she believes the school falls short in specifically relating learning experiences to his

life as a young man of color. Regina points out that minorities are left out more often than not, noting that most literature that is read or assigned is not culturally affirming. Regina said,

> The school could do things differently by incorporating a wider variety of literature would be a good start. Incorporating books with main characters that look like them while also teaching American History in its entirety would have a major impact on my son's life and learning experience.

The Black boys and their parents perceived their culture was not represented anywhere at the school.

Despite Gamer having an overall "good" experience in school, he genuinely does not like school. In fact, Gamer described his school as terrible because he is not treated fairly by the teachers. He feels that no one likes him, which causes him to display this hurt in the form of anger. Regina perceives his anger issues, depression, and anxiety stem from the absence of his father in the home. In addition to the teachers not liking him, Gamer is concerned that he is often racially profiled by his peers and teachers.

Satchel's Story

At the time we met, Satchel was an 8-year-old well-mannered third grader who reported that he enjoys science experiments and playing baseball. Satchel also recognized that his strength is his intellect. Satchel showed up for his interview wearing a dark blue polo shirt with his hair well groomed. He appeared to be a quiet little boy, coming off shy and nervous during the introduction phase of the interview. However, as we began to discuss sports, he began to warm up and you could see the spark in his eyes as his personality started to come to life.

The Family's Story

The Paige family is originally from Kansas and only relocated to Texas after Mr. Paige's job moved them here. The family makeup consists of two kids, Satchel and Lala with Satchel being the oldest. They found moving to Texas bittersweet in that it provided a better opportunity for the family financially but at the same time they felt it separated them from their extended family support system. They discussed how they knew nothing about Texas; where to live, the best place to raise a family, let alone what the school systems were like. However, they made the best of it because, "as a family it's about spending quality time together." They enjoy doing things such as; movie nights, cooking together, electronics, and of course sporting activities on nights and weekends.

Growing up Mrs. Paige attended a predominantly White private school and Mr. Paige attended a predominantly White suburban public school. "This was our experience so being creatures of habit, naturally we sought out the same experience for our kids," said Mrs. Paige [Mr. Paige nods in agreement]. Once moving to Texas, they started asking around what areas had the better the schools. They recall taking road trips to visit the different areas that were suggested and after visiting those areas they looked at the demographics of the schools. They decided to build their home in this growing suburban district because after several discussions they felt it was a better option than the urban districts and the other suburban districts when it came to the learning environment.

Preparation for the PWES

Mr. and Mrs. Paige's determination to provide Satchel with the best learning environment and the opportunity to be successful is unwavering. Mrs. Paige said they looked at the demographics at a neighboring district and was like, "oh no, it's not enough [Black people], we

need the percentage to be just a little bit higher than that." They felt the current district was a perfect fit, "the demographics are kind of like what they were when I was in school," said Mrs. Paige. They said they knew Satchel was not going to see or interact with, "a whole lot of Black kids" at school but they felt he would see enough to socialize with.

Mr. Paige chimes in saying,

as parents who grew up attending this same type of school, we knew we would have to prepare Satchel for school. We let him know that he is different than the majority of the other students and that his behavior was extremely important. He had to act differently, be better, and always apply himself. At the top of our list was his behavior. We drill in him that he must be respectful and listen to teachers.

Mrs. Paige says, "a big thing for us is respecting adults. If an adult is disrespecting you, let us know and we will handle it." Mrs. Paige continued, "before moving to his current school, Satchel had a Black kindergarten teacher which we feel gave him a loving beginning." At his current school, Mrs. Paige became involved in the school to let them know that he comes from a family that cares and is supportive of the school. Her thoughts, "work with the school and not against the school." She felt that by doing this, she would know what was going on.

Mrs. Paige said,

Satchel is a different child at school. I would notice kids in his personal space and him not standing up for himself. Satchel was identified as gifted and talented and as we know, there are not many Black boys in the gifted and talented program. So, this further segregated him from other Black boys, so he tends to have friends that do not look like him. We consistently train him to look out for things that are not appropriate.

Life at School

Satchel enjoys school and even describes his school as "amazing" reporting that his teachers liked him. Satchel stated he "feels proud to be one of the only few Black boys attending the school." As the interview unfolded, Satchel talked about his day and how he feels confident to see all of his friends and teachers. Satchel said he feels that because he is "nice and kind" to others they treat him nicely. "I treat others the way I want to be treated," he said.

For Satchel, being good entails ensuring he is nice, kind, and sweet to everyone he encounters at school. Throughout his interview, he consistently described himself as nice or kind and believes his classmates would also describe him the same way. He was beginning to say that his parents would also describe him as kind but hesitated and said his parents would probably describe him as kind and smart. Satchel was excited to discuss how he was "great at learning" reporting that his favorite subject is math. He feels because he is "great at learning" he is often viewed by his teachers as helpful, "because he helps people when they need help."

Although Satchel feels his school is amazing, he would be extremely excited if another Black boy was to join his class, because "it's adding people that look like me." Satchel expressed, not only does it add people to the class that looks like him but it would also give him someone to play with at recess. He would advise him to "be nice and stay cool." While showing him around to the other nice people in the classroom.

Satchel consistently used the word "nice" to describe himself. "I feel like I have to be nice in school so others will like me," he said. He enjoys helping others when they need help or picking them up when they are sad. Satchel said, "A good student is nice, kind, helpful, and smart."

A challenge for Satchel is he often feels different when he is at school. Lowering his head Satchel said, "it feels like you are the only one, it feels like there is no one to talk to sometimes, I feel like there's not a lot of people that look like me."

Satchel's experience on the playground at school is quite different. He said he usually plays with two friends from another class because some kids treat others differently when they are out on the playground. He plays with P [says the friend's name] and B [says the friend's name]. Satchel's parents report that P is mixed, half Mexican and half Asian, and B is White. Satchel said, "They are pretty much the only two friends I play with at school." They typically do not play together outside of school, because Satchel has baseball practice or he is inside doing his homework.

Satchel understands that all of the students are treated the same at his school "as long as they are good." He remembered the one time he observed a student being treated differently. Satchel said, "one time a teacher was yelling at this other kid, and he started crying. She was yelling at him because he wouldn't stay in his seat and do his work. She made him go to the office." Satchel couldn't wrap his brain around why "the little Brown boy" was treated differently, "because other people were out of their desk too but she only picked on him, and the teacher only yells at [says the students name]." Satchel feels sad for this little boy when he cries. Here Satchel cuts to the root of his understanding, believing the teacher never treats him differently because he sits at his desk and does his work.

Life Outside of School

At home Satchel feels he does not have to be nice all the time. Satchel stated, "playing at home and with friends outside of school is different because they see each other the same and

don't judge each other by the color of their skin." Mr. Paige said he figured that he would meet

more friends like him in the neighborhood but that has not been the case. Mr. Paige explained,

> the majority of Satchel friends are outside of the school, even outside of the
>
> neighborhood. He plays on a baseball team and they call themselves the baseball bros.
>
> They have been playing together for some years so they pretty much do a lot of stuff
>
> together, like birthday parties and stuff. D [says the friend's name] is his best friend and
>
> he is Black. His other good friend is K [says the friend's name] who is mixed, half White
>
> and half Black.

Mr. Paige explained Satchel's friends outside of school are Black because that is their

environment, and that is who they take him around. Mr. Paige said, even though his friends

outside of school are Black, Satchel still interacts with them in the same manner as he does with

the White kids at school. Mr. Paige said, "For example, D picks on him and Satchel does

nothing. Even D's parents say that all Satchel needs to do is stand up to him one time." On the

baseball field is where you will see Satchel's personality come to life. Mr. Paige said, "He is

aggressive and he takes no prisoners."

Lack of Representation

> When visiting Satchel's school, Mr. Paige said,
>
> Honestly when I go there and get a chance to see all of the teachers, and this have been a
>
> concern of mine, you have all of these Black boys in this school and all of the teachers
>
> are White women.

He said when you attend the programs and there a few Black kids on the stage but no Black

teachers in the building, "it's not right. These boys need to see that, and personally I don't like it,

they have to do a better job of representation."

Mr. Paige becomes even more emotional when telling his personal story of growing up, being the first Black family in the neighborhood and never having another Black kid in his class. He remembers that one day, in the fourth grade, G.G. moved into his neighborhood and they instantly bonded. Mr. Paige stated, "I had someone that looked like me so we instantly clicked and we are still friends to this day and I would like that for my son." From an educational aspect, Mr. Paige was not expecting the teachers to become Satchel's friends or his mentor, but he felt a Black teacher would be someone he could look up to and go to. He goes on to say, "besides, Black teachers could educate the White teachers on how to treat and respond to Black boys." Mr. and Mrs. Paige believe that the one Black teacher Satchel had in kindergarten, had a nurturing and loving personality towards him and that contributes to the student he is today. Mr. Paige adds he thinks it is important for Black boys to see Black male teachers within the school.

Mrs. Paige said, "having worked at Satchel's last school and now currently serving as the PTA president at his current school, doesn't make you blind to what it is." She said, "I was like you need to get some Black males (teachers) in here." Mrs. Paige stressed that at his previous school, there were a few more Black students than at his current school. She felt like the principal tried to get at least a couple of Black teachers in the building, even though they were all females. She said, still the overwhelming majority of the teaching staff were White females. Mrs. Paige said, she is a firm believer that White female teachers do not know how to handle the young Black male nor do they want to. She stated that while working at Satchel's last school, she had teachers coming up to her, "I hate to say it, White teachers coming to me asking, why does he listen to you and why does he talk to you and they just wild out on me?" She told them, "maybe because I look like their mom but it was really because of the way I handled them and the things I said to them." Mrs. Paige said she built a relationship with them and they just related

to her better. "This is something that the White teachers don't know how to do," she said. Currently, she believes his teachers treat him good because they know she is involved.

Mrs. Paige's relationship with the principal is a little stronger than some of the other parents at the campus. As the PTA president, she has the principal's ear and she has relayed the lack of diversity concerns that some of the Black parents have with the school. There is currently one Black teacher in the entire school. Mrs. Paige communicated with the principal that when people look at the staff picture, all they see are blond hair, blue-eyed people. To Mrs. Paige's surprise, the principal blamed the staffing on the district, stating, "the staff members are overflow from other schools within the district." Mrs. Paige viewed her reaction of blaming the district as just another excuse, "as parents, we don't really care about any of those excuses. Besides, that excuse only tells us that she didn't advocate for her students," said Mrs. Paige.

Mr. Paige goes on to say we must change the culture of school and a major step in doing so would be adding some Black teachers to the staff. He said, Satchel had a Black teacher in kindergarten at his old school and they loved her and she was instrumental in helping Satchel gain his love for learning. Mr. Paige believes she was very nurturing, and she took the time to get to know Satchel and his needs—"she went further than the color of his skin." Mr. Paige stated,

> The school has to do a better job adding diversity to the teaching staff. By adding more
>
> diverse teachers, eventually the some of those cultural things will start to come out. I
>
> mean, with some of their input within the school, will start to change how our Black boys
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> are viewed. And, maybe even change what you see when you enter the school. I think the
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> White teachers could learn a lot from Black teachers. Not that Black teachers are better,
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> but just that you know, they know how to treat Black boys, they know black culture, they
>
> know how to not make Black parents feel insulted. I just think the school would benefit a

lot from adding Black teachers to the staff. There is more to Black history than just

Martin Luther King, and now President Obama. Culture can be celebrated more than one

month out of the year.

Mr. and Mrs. Paige discussed the lack of culture within the school. They said none of his

assignments or homework has anything to do with Black culture. They feel the school could do

more to address the cultural needs of the Black boys in the school. Mr. Paige said,

> Look for cultural speakers to come in and speak with the teachers. Display different
>
> cultural figures throughout the school. During school announcements, add in some fun
>
> facts and figures to introduce. I think all kids would benefit from this. And don't just
>
> share Black entertainers or athletes, there are so many more Black people out there that
>
> have done some great things for society.

Mr. Paige added that some of things could be addressed by not only adding some diversity to the

staff, but having discussions about different cultures.

Navigating Racism at PWES

Mrs. Paige's recollection of visiting the school, is that the staff is just "not nice" or open

towards her. She discussed how they do not speak, "the staff don't say 'hey, how are you doing'

or anything like that, unless they know me as the PTA president." Mrs. Paige says, she

understands that it is hard being a teacher in today's world but if teachers would take the time to

get to know the family that they are working with, she believes it would make for a better

environment. She said, "when the staff don't know who I am they treat me different than they

treat a White person that walks in the door."

For Satchel, he has a way of making people love him. He is very kind, nice, well-

mannered, and respectful. He does that on his own. He makes people like him. So, when they

look at him, he is the model they may use to judge another Black boy if he was to enter the classroom. Which in Mrs. Paige's opinion is stereotyping. Mrs. Paige said, "all Black boys' upbringing is different, everyone's parenting style is different, there is so much more that plays into it other than just the color of their skin." She said teacher relationships play a vital role in it, yet she believes teachers only consider the color of the student's skin. Mrs. Paige believes teacher favoritism and bias often get in the way on these relationships. Mrs. Paige said,

> For example, we have a friend, she is a single mother raising a Black boy and she strongly believes that her Black son is being discriminated against. She told us that they are constantly out to get him and they even viewed him as a monster. She asked if we felt that way and I say no because Satchel doesn't really get in trouble. He doesn't talk back and he doesn't argue with adults. That is just not Satchel's personality, he doesn't have a strong personality like that and he doesn't come off like that, as they would say aggressive. She is also a member of the PTA and is involved, but she feels her son is treated different.

Mr. Paige chimed in stating,

> In his defense, once you get labeled or have that one encounter then you are basically done as a Black boy. I'm saying, as a Black boy if you speak up against something you feel is not right or fair, you are labeled as a trouble maker or as aggressive. You see, if Satchel didn't feel something was fair or right, he wouldn't necessarily speak up. Because, that wouldn't be nice or that may not be kind. But the kid she is talking about is going to speak up and he is going to question, he will question authority. [frowns] Which I don't see why teachers are viewed as authority. But I have told both of them, it is okay to question authority, you just have to do it in the right way, especially as Black boys.

Satchel has the need to be nice, he wants everyone to like him. This sometimes scares me especially in the environment that he is in. I don't want him to be a pushover to other kids or to be mistreated by other adults because they know he will not say anything. For example, I was at the school and witnessed some boy, let's just say a boy that doesn't look like him, playing in Satchel's hair and Satchel is doing nothing but sitting there laughing. I'm sitting there like what the . . ., you know what is happening! Satchel was looking at me like I know I shouldn't, but he never said anything.

Mr. Paige goes on to say that he had to have a talk with Satchel about his body and his personal space, but even more so about speaking up when he does not like something. He said it scares him with Satchel feeling like he has to be nice, with him wanting to be liked, and feeling that he has to act a certain way in order to not fit a certain stereotype. Mr. Paige said that he tries to teach Satchel to speak up for himself if he does not like something. "I mean, you don't have to fight and all that stuff, but you should speak up if you are mistreated or don't like something," said Mr. Paige. He said he explains to Satchel that people who mistreat you are not your friend. Mr. Paige said, "we teach him that people will mistreat him based on the color of his skin and that sometimes you have to speak up for yourself, you can't just be a pushover."

Balancing Benefits and Challenges of Attending the PWES

Mrs. Paige believes the learning environment created within the school is huge benefit to Satchel. She said the school has everything from, "state of the art computer lab, one-to-one device, I mean everything you could possibly ask for to prepare Satchel for the future." Not to mention the growth, she said she feels they feed his need to know more. "His teachers intrigue him to want to know more. They take his learning outside of the classroom by creating projects to deepen his learning," said Mrs. Paige. She said so much so that if Satchel is not playing

baseball he is usually working on school projects. Mr. Paige said sometimes that concerns him because he worries if the other Black boys he plays with outside of school will see him as a nerd. But realizes at the end of the day it is about setting Satchel up in the right environment to prepare him better for college and the world we live in.

While the benefit of the learning environment is great, Mrs. Paige identifies a couple of challenges for Satchel in this environment. Satchel was recently diagnosed with dysgraphia, identified by his sloppy hand writing and with his struggles of sometimes getting his thoughts from his brain to his paper. She said their first fear was the school was only trying to label him. However, they went along with the testing because they wanted to give him the tools to set him up for success. Mrs. Paige said,

> Satchel is on a 504 right now but he is not getting serviced right now. So, our frustration is, you [the school] say this is what he needs to be successful and you [the school] have labeled him, but now you are doing nothing about it.

She questions if it was truly just about adding a label to him.

Mr. Paige added more often than not he worries about Satchel's environment because he was that Black boy. He said, he was smart, he was the only one in his class and he always felt like there was a spotlight on him, even simply walking home from school. Mr. Paige said,

> I felt like teachers shined a spotlight on me, being surprised that I was well read and I was good in math. I felt like I was the model for other Black boys and I don't want that for Satchel. That is a heavy weight to carry as a kid. I don't want other Black boys to ostracize him.

Mr. Paige said recently they were discussing being in the right or wrong place and that for some reason Ahmaud Arbery came up. Mr. Paige explains how he was in tears discussing

this because as a father of a Black son, you worry about your son in that environment. Mr. Paige discussed a memory from his past recalling a White kid stole something from shop class and the White teacher blamed him in front of the whole class. He said remembers telling the teacher that he does not steal and the teacher saying, "you were the last one with it. . . ." He recalls his dad "having his back" by going to the school and insisting the teacher apologize to him in front of the class. He said, "I tell that story to say, that I will make sure to protect Satchel from those types of stereotypes." Mr. Paige reiterated that, yes, the environment worries him every day and even more now-a-days.

Overall, if Satchel was a grownup and had the opportunity to pick this school or another school for his child, he would pick this one. He said, "I think they would love it because the teaching staff is good." Through Satchel's experiences thus far, he has been characterized to believe that as long as he is kind and nice, everyone will like him. Satchel craves social relationships at school, reporting that he would love to have another Black boy join his class. Only to teach him how to fit in the same environment that is shaping his character. Outside of school Satchel interacts with more kids that look like him. However, Mr. and Mrs. Paige reported his interactions are usually the same and because of that it often leads to him being taken advantage of. While Mr. and Mrs. Paige sometimes view this environment as problematic, they feel it is the best environment for Satchel's overall success. They believe they must do more on their part when it comes to cultural identity to make him well rounded.

Batman's Story

Batman is an intelligent 10-year-old boy who enjoys spending most of his time reading DC comics, playing basketball, and playing video games. He has been at his current school since first grade and he is currently in fourth grade. He realized he was in a predominantly White

school. Batman recalls that first and second grade was completely different than third and fourth grade.

Perceived Benefits of the PWES

Batman said the number one thing he dislikes about his school now is his teachers tend to treat him different. He said oftentimes he can be doing the same thing as the White kids in the classroom and the teacher will call his name and say, "settle down." Batman went on to describe his perception of the situation at school, and, during the conversation, turned to engage his mother in the dialogue:

Batman: When I was younger I use to argue with them letting them know that I wasn't the only one talking. But now, you know, now I just don't say nothing because you know all they ever do is say, "You want to go to the office?" Plus, my mom always says, "Boy, just keep your mouth shut." My mom don't play and if I get in trouble at school, you know, I get in trouble at home. She may take my game for a week or two. [he pauses, then continues]

Batman: Mom can I ask you a question in front of [the researcher]?

Tiffany: What's your question?

Batman: I'm not going to be in trouble for asking?

Tiffany: No, what is your question?

Batman: Why don't you ever listen to me when I try to tell you what happen at school?

Tiffany: I always listen to you. You just chose to not follow directions. Which is why you were always getting in trouble in school. But now you have grown out of that and that's why you don't get in as much trouble anymore.

Batman: You never listen to my side. You would just say, "The teachers are not lying on you.

    Now close your mouth and go to your room." And you would say, "I know they are not

    lying because you are talking back now."

Tiffany: We can discuss this later. Let Mr. P finish with his questions.

Mr. P: It's okay if you want to finish this discussion.

Tiffany: No, go ahead. Batman gets off task at times.

    Batman seemed frustrated at what just transpired and the lack of closure related to his

question. As he begins to share his thoughts again, he started with, "See she doesn't listen or

believe me, but what is your next question?" I reminded him that he was telling me about his

teachers and the peers in his classroom. Batman said, "They just treat me different." It seemed as

if he was shutting down because of the conversation that he and mom just had. I asked mom if it

was okay for him to take a break while I spoke to her and she agreed. Once Batman was out of

the room, Tiffany apologized for his actions and said that he will be fine in a minute. Tiffany

shared that she is supportive of him. "We just want him to go to a good school and get good

grades so that he can go to a good college and excel. We know the school will come with

challenges, but every school will come with challenges."

    As Batman stepped out of the room, Tiffany began her interview what just transpired,

their rationale in choosing the current school for Batman. Tiffany said:

    Batman is just a different child. I know this school offers him the best opportunity for

    learning. His dad and I know that we must prepare him for his future. He may not see that

    yet but we know that this school is the best place for him. We make the sacrifices now to

    prepare him for high school and college. We all know that unless you attend an HBCU,

    the majority of universities are predominantly White, at least the major ones are. So, if

you are going to be successful in this United States you are going to have to be able to survive in a predominantly White environment. When I go to work every day, I am in that type of environment. My husband's work environment is the exact same. I am sure, your environment is the exact same. You are attending TCU, how many Black kids do you see on that campus? I imagine, not that many. All of that to say, we know what is best for his future.

Although Tiffany does not believe the school is doing everything in its power to create an environment where Batman would feel comfortable. She feels a shift is coming because of all the of the unrest in the world on the disparities or treatment of Black boys across this country. It is now becoming more of a focus. I wish it was a focus early on. However, she quickly changed her tune as she thought about his work coming home and classroom discussions. Tiffany stated:

I don't see that it is a focus in school. It is maybe wishful thinking on my part. Come to think of it, as we sat and discussed the George Floyd case, I asked Batman if they had talked about the case at school and he said no. I guess, I could only wish that the teachers would discuss the unrest that is going on in the world or just simply ask our Black boys how are they doing.

Tiffany's decision for having Batman attend this school leaned more so on the advantages the school offered their son. She continued by saying the school provided social benefits as well, stating that, "because he is able to interact with other social classes, and very different minorities in his present environment. So again, moving on to college and his future job he will be prepared to work with a variety of people."

Balancing Challenges and Benefits of Attending the PWES

Batman shared that he and another boy are the only Black boys in the class. He explained that when he was in first grade it was

> really no big deal because everybody played with everybody. However, in fourth grade race is a big deal. Even the teachers say stuff that make you feel some type of way. Just the other day, I heard a teacher ask a Black girl if that was all her hair. The girl didn't get mad, she just told the teacher that her hair was braided into it.

He couldn't understand why a teacher would even ask her that. He stated, "The teachers were only concerned if he did his work or not. They don't care how I feel or nothing like that." He went on to say that there are four fourth grade classrooms in the school and about two or three Black boys in each class. Though he does not see the other Black boys during class, he does get to play basketball with them at recess. He pondered that if he was a grownup with kids of his own, if he would select this school for his child. Leaning more to selecting a different school, Batman said:

> I mean this is a good school and I know it will help me but sometimes I just don't like to always feel like I am in trouble. At this school, I always feel like everyone looks at me. I wouldn't want my child to feel like that. I would let them come in third grade. Ms. [Thoughtful] is a nice teacher. She still checks on me, and ask me how am I doing. She is the only one.

Tiffany shares, "we all face challenges within our life." She knows there are only a few Black boys that attend the school. She continued saying, "when deciding, we first analyzed the pros and the cons or the benefits and the challenges." Tiffany said, "I believe that the benefits far outweigh the challenges. It's not like I fear he will grow up not knowing he is Black." Tiffany

believes it is not the school's job to teach culture. "It is the parent's responsibility to teach their kids who they are and to teach them about their culture. Batman will know who he is because I take the time to introduce him to his culture." She said, it is the school's job to prepare him for his future by ensuring that he is well equipped for each educational level. Tiffany realizes that the world is "racially charged" right now but states his future environment is not changing anytime soon. She says, "the same kids that he is attending school with right now, are the same kids he will enter the workforce with. If he adapts to the environment now, he will be seen as less of a threat later."

Navigating Racism at PWES

While Tiffany understands that Black boys are sometimes not treated fairly in this environment, she would not say they are treated as a threat. Tiffany continued by stating,

I wouldn't say as a threat, more of rude and disrespectful. It is often a difference of opinion. Batman likes to tell his side of the story and often times he doesn't stop until he has said what he has to say. So, oftentimes teachers take that as being rude and disrespectful. He knows, I will defend him to the end of earth. However, I have told him over and over, that he can't do the same thing as those little White boys in his class. I know that may sound racist on my part, but I know how Black kids are treated in school. Let me put it like this, the same rules don't apply for us that applies for them.

Tiffany says that by no means is she naive. She understands that more often than not Batman is seen as rebellious, rude, and disrespectful, and knows his White classmates are not viewed the same. Tiffany continues,

I make every attempt to prepare him at home for the things he will encounter at school. I hate the world we live in! Race is the root of all evil and it is unfortunate that even our

kids today are suffering from the same mistakes and hatred from years and years ago.

Now this is where I must defend him and let the teachers know that I am watching. He

doesn't know, but there have been several times I have challenged his teachers and

administrators on issues I believed were unfair.

In addition to unfair treatment by adults, Tiffany describes how the lack of friends Batman has

rips at her heart. Tiffany stated,

The social piece is one thing that rips at my heart sometimes. It is the one thing which

causes me to go back and forth on my decision. As he is getting older, it becomes more of

a struggle because I see he doesn't play with the same friends he once played with when

he was younger. They seem to have grown apart. They are not the friends that come to

his birthday parties, nor does he attend theirs. I mean, he is invited to their parties, but we

know it is school policy for the teacher to give every kid in the class an invitation. So, we

never take him because they never come to his party. This is so hard.

Navigating racism as the mother of a Black boy, worries Tiffany about the environment

in and outside of schools. She often worries that he would be judged by the color of his skin, his

height, and his demeanor unfairly. She worries he can make one wrong turn and his life could be

forever impacted. She worries they may not have fully prepared him for all that he may

experience in life but she hopes they are laying the foundation for his success. She said, "we

constantly tell him, never be afraid of who he is and to never change who he is for anyone."

Tiffany continues stating:

We often times try to change who we are to match the environment that we are in. You

know, we are taught to "code switch," which is just not right. I was taught in order to fit

in a White environment, you had to speak and act a certain way. You had to be seen as

not Black. So, we teach him to accept that he is Black and that he will be viewed as Black

regardless of the environment. We feel, especially as a Black male he will be judge as

soon as he walks in the door. We teach him to not look at his Blackness as a negative

thing. So, don't change who you are for anybody.

Overall, Batman enjoys some aspects of school but given the opportunity he would attend a

different school. A school where he would feel valued, respected, and loved. Batman wants to be

listened too and treated fairly. He is craving social attention while trying to navigate his racial

identity. Tiffany only wants what is best for Batman. She feels that the decision to place him in

his current learning environment is the best decision for his future. While she understands that

this environment comes with challenges, she recognizes that these challenges are minimal in the

broad scope of things. Tiffany believes that she has the means to support Batman in the areas that

the school is lacking.

Cross-Case Analysis: Emergent Themes from Narratives and Interviews

Cross-case analysis provided the opportunity to understand the challenges Black boys

face in a predominantly White elementary school. As the data from the narratives and interviews

were coded and analyzed, the following themes emerged: (a) Parents desires for a positive school

environment; (b) Parents search for balance of the proclaimed benefits as they weight the

challenges of being at a predominantly white school. Proclaimed benefits of it offering the best

learning environment and it increased the chances of their sons attending college. The Black

boys did not perceive any benefits of attending a predominantly White school; however, the

challenges for Black boys included lack of peer relationships, and often feeling the need to be

nice, and feeling different; (c) Awareness of differential treatment including not treated fairly by

their teachers, and overall feeling that they just have to act different; (d) Navigating racism

through social isolation; and (e) Lack of Black educators in the school fell in the area of culture and was viewed as a problem. White teachers lack the experience of working with Black families. The Black boys and their parents perceived their culture was not represented anywhere at the school. Culture was viewed as how students and parents were treated when they entered the building and what types of things were on the walls throughout the school. Culture was also viewed as the lack of Black heritage within the curriculum, which was observed through homework and other assignments.

Examining the narratives and interviews, it quickly became apparent that the students and the parents had likes and dislikes about school. The parents welcomed the opportunity to speak about why they selected the school for their sons, as well as how they prepared and continue to prepare their sons for the experience. The boys openly shared their experiences and gave their honest opinions about the school. Cross-case analysis of the data collected from the narratives and interviews revealed, the following themes:

- Parent Desires for School Environment

- Balancing Benefits and Challenges of Attending the PWES

- Awareness of Differential Treatment

- Social Isolation

- Lack of Representation

Parent Desires for School Environment

As the parents shared their thoughts on why they selected a predominantly White school for their sons to attend, some common themes formed around "the environment." Parents shared that this environment gives their sons an opportunity to flourish. For example, Batman's mother asserted,

This environment gives my son the opportunity to compete academically with the best across the country. Elementary is the foundation and you must have a strong foundation to be successful. You must have a rich vocabulary for doors to open for you.

In digging deeper to find out how parents defined the kind of schooling environment they desired for their children, it became apparent that parents conceptualized a positive school environment as newer facility with the latest and greatest resources. Parents also lumped teacher quality, expectations, and climate under the general term "environment." Parents referenced the constant battle they fight on a daily basis to ensure their sons get the best education possible. As Mrs. Paige described it, "I spend a great deal of time volunteering at the school so I can monitor the teacher expectations for him as well as look out for any racial bias toward him." The parents also selected the elementary with the idea in mind as to which high school their sons would attend. Mrs. Paige shared that since Satchel loved science, she even viewed the high school to see what different pathways they offered. Tiffany summed it all up stating,

The learning environment is the most important thing for us. We sought out the best schools for our son and that happened to be in a predominantly White area. I wanted to make sure he had every advantage in life and it started with his education.

Balancing Benefits and Challenges of Attending the PWES

The benefits far outweighed the challenges from the perspective of the parents in this study. However, when describing their sons' experiences, the parents seemed to describe and detail more challenges than benefits. Despite describing numerous challenges, parents in the study simply seemed to put more weight on the benefits—benefits they felt strongly about. Drawing on the comments and stories from the boys in the study, the challenges of navigating a PWES seem daunting.

The Black boys described challenges as the feeling of not having someone they can talk

to and not having very many friends. The Black boys described the hidden racial lines within the

school, pointing to incidents on the playground where they were not allowed to play with certain

groups. One Black boy described an incident on the playground when he attempted to play with

a group outside of his racial class, recalling how he remembered being told, "Why are you over

here? Shouldn't you be playing basketball with them [pointing to a small group of other Black

boys]?" At the end of the day, the boys' experiences/challenges are often not valued or heard.

Parents may not be fully considering their sons' challenges because they want to believe they are

doing the right thing for their child. Through the years, as the boys spend more time in this

environment, you can begin to see them slowly change who they are in order to fit in.

Awareness of Differential Treatment

The older Black boys described the unfair discipline experiences they often encounter.

For example, Batman said,

> the Black boys are always sent to the office or to another teacher's classroom for every
>
> little thing. Most of the times the White kids are acting worse than the Black kids, but the
>
> Black kids get in trouble and the White kids don't.

A common theme the parents shared was their level of involvement within the school. The

parents believe they have to constantly monitor within the school and be attentive to whether

negative stereotypes are taking place. Parents felt they also needed to monitor because of the

unfair discipline practices Black boys usually succumb to within this environment.

Social Isolation

While parents agreed the environment provided the necessary need for their sons

academically, they struggled with the realization that the environment was not providing for their

sons socially. Adding to the parents' laundry list of challenges of being at a predominantly White school were challenges that ranged from low teacher expectations to negative stereotypes, to lack of Black teachers, to unfair discipline practices, and to the lack of cultural exposure.

Parents defined low teacher expectations as teachers' beliefs that Black boys are not smart enough to do the work; in turn, these teachers make little to no effort to ensure academic success. Regina said, "some of the teachers don't look at the Black boys and see their academic potential, instead they focus on his behavior." In this vein, Regina struggled with her decision on a daily basis:

> What decision is the best decision with the current reality we presently live in? As the
> mom of a Black son I want Gamer to have the best education possible but I struggle with
> what should I compromise, his social well-being or his academic success?

Parents discussed the fear they have when it comes to the social well-being of their sons. The parents listened as their sons felt they always had to be nice in this particular environment. Satchel, the youngest of the Black boys who participated in the study, repeatedly stated he had to be nice and kind so people would like him. It is almost as if he constantly witnessed what happens to Black boys if they are viewed as not nice and kind. When asked if he felt that he needed to be nice and kind at home, Satchel chuckled and said "no." Because Satchel is viewed as nice and kind, he is perceived as the model for Black boys. Mrs. Paige described an encounter with his teacher, who told her, "Satchel is the standard for all the boys in my class. He is a sweet, loving, and respectful kid." Mrs. Paige continued, "Never once did [the teacher] acknowledge any of his academic strengths, even though he is GT (gifted and talented)." Mrs. Paige explained she knew the teacher was talking about the behavioral standard for the Black boys in her classroom. Satchel's parents struggled with the fact that Satchel is perceived as the model for all

Black boys simply because he is nice and kind. Mr. Paige fears the longer Satchel stays within the predominantly White school environment, he will be ostracized by other Black boys outside this environment.

The Black boys who participated in this study shared this common theme in feeling they had to act a certain way (act White) at school and act different (act Black) around other friends outside of school. Gamer described the feeling of having to "pretend" when he is at school. Batman and Gamer are a little older than Satchel and their comments suggested they have received messages and feedback from their PWES environment such that they have internalized this "lesson" that they need to function with this double consciousness. Gamer is beginning to struggle with the fact that he always has to be a certain way at school. Gamer has some strong emotions toward the environment and struggles with the different standards that he often witnesses. Regina agrees with some of his frustration stating,

> I sometime worry about his sense of self, because I want him to be proud of who he is. I want him to speak confidence but often times I don't see that especially in that environment. When we are out with other friends, I see his strong personality shining through.

Lack of Representation

The parents all noted the school's lack of Black teachers and recognized that in fact, the majority of the teachers resembled each other as well as the administrators. The parents however did say they believe the teachers are doing a great job teaching all students academically. However, they recognized the importance of their Black sons seeing and interacting with Black teachers for their social growth. They all believed this was an important discrepancy to make and they believed the lack of Black teachers at the schools was something that needed to be corrected

by administration. Mrs. Paige summed it up, stating, "Administration should hire more staff that little Black and Brown boys can see themselves reflected in—someone they can talk to and help them navigate the environment."

Summary of Findings

While parents of young Black boys describe the benefits of the predominantly White schools their sons attend, the young Black boys described the challenges they face while attending the PWES. One would assume that parents are very aware of the day-to-day challenges their sons face in school but in fact they may not be fully considering their sons' challenges because they want to believe they are doing the right thing for him. Parents also believe they could address most of these challenges at home, by preparing their sons for the obstacles they would face in school.

Three Black families shared their experiences at a predominantly White elementary school. Their stories revealed several common themes from their experiences. The following summary addresses the research questions that informed this study.

Q1. How do young Black boys and their parents describe the benefits and challenges of being in a predominantly White school?

The Black boys did not identify many benefits of attending a PWES. Overall, the Black boys perceived it as a physically safe environment. As noted within-case analyses, the Black boys perceived several challenges while attending the PWES to include often feeling the need to be nice, feeling as though they are different, some instances of microaggressions, and the overall feeling that they just have to act different.

Parents voiced their perspective on the benefits of being at a predominantly White school. Parents declared that PWES offered the best learning environment for their Black son and it

increased the chances of their sons attending college. As mentioned previously, parents placed several descriptors under the term environment, to include newer facilities with the latest and greatest resources, teacher quality, teacher expectations, and climate.

Parents perceived challenges included fear their sons would be ostracized by other Black boys outside of school, the negative stereotypes and microaggressions they may face, lack of Black culture within the school, and unfair discipline practices. Even with the laundry list of challenges the parents felt the benefits outweighed them. To counter some of the challenges, the parents felt they could overcome them by being overly involved at the school to ensure their son was treated fairly. Parents also believed they could address some of the challenges at home, by preparing their sons for the obstacles they would face in school.

Q2. How do young Black boys describe the school's culture at a predominantly White school?

Culture was viewed as how students and parents were treated when they entered the building and what types of things were on the walls throughout the school. Culture was also viewed as the lack of Black heritage within the curriculum, which was observed through homework and other assignments. The Black boys and their parents perceived their culture was not represented anywhere at the school to include the lack of Black teachers.

Q3. How do practices of teachers and administrators affect the experiences of young Black boys in predominantly White schools?

Both parents and students discussed the lack of Black teachers at the school. Parents discussed the lack of Black educators in the school as a problem because they believe White teachers lack the experience of working with their sons and Black families holistically. Parents were concerned with White teachers having low expectations for their sons. They were also

concerned with racial profiling by teachers and administrators when it comes to academically labeling, unfair discipline practices, unfair treatment by their teachers, and negative stereotypes of assumptions about Black boys. Another concerned voiced by the parents was the lack of focus on Black culture within the curriculum to include class discussions, homework, and assignments.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to focus on the lived experiences of Black boys in predominantly White elementary schools (PWES). My desire in conducting the study was to understand young Black boys' experiences in a PWES and then use this knowledge to help school leaders and educators provide better educational experiences for other young Black boys.

This qualitative analysis detailed the narratives and interviews of three families with Black sons who attend a PWES. The study offered an opportunity for them to share how young Black boys and their parents describe the benefits and challenges of being in a PWES, how young Black boys describe the school's culture, and how practices of teachers and administrators affect the experiences of young Black boys in a PWES. Data were collected through narratives and interviews from three Black boys and their parents.

Discussion

Black parents are constantly grappling with the decision of what is the best school choice for their Black sons (Posey-Maddox et al., 2021). In this chapter, I examine parents' desires for the school environment, and how Black parents balance the benefits and the challenges of attending a predominantly White elementary school. In addition, this chapter covers the awareness of differential treatment, navigating racism at a PWES, and the lack of representation at a PWES. Lastly, I discuss implications for practice, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Parent Desires for School Environment

In today's times, Black parents' must navigate several factors before deciding on a "good" school for their son (Posey-Maddox et al., 2021). The learning environment is one of those factors that Black parents examine when deciding on a school. As parents weigh the

different options of what school to send their son to, the learning environment comes out as the top factor. Findings revealed, parents linked high teacher expectations as the desired school environment for their son. Parents shared that this environment gives their sons an opportunity to flourish. For example, Tiffany asserted,

> This environment gives my son the opportunity to compete academically with the best across the country. Elementary is the foundation and you must have a strong foundation to be successful. You must have a rich vocabulary for doors to open for you.

Contradictory to how the parents seek high teacher expectation in this environment; research reveals that teacher expectations for Black boys is often lower than those for their White classmates (Ferguson, 2003; Khalifa, 2011). Instead of teachers having high expectations for Black boys, more often than not they have unrealized racial biases that often influence their pedagogical practices. Picower (2009) stated the vast majority of these teachers do not recognize that racism is a form of oppression that Black boys often experience in everyday life.

Mr. and Mrs. Paige shared most of the conversations they had with Satchel's teacher centered more around his behavior and not his academics. The teacher even referred to him as the model student because he was well mannered which in the parent's eyes, said he fit within the system norms.

Balancing Benefits and Challenges of Attending the PWES

Black boys often fall into "vying for White approval, rather than their own autonomy" (Dickerson, 2004, p. 52). Parents discussed how they must prepare their son for the environment, teaching them to be nice, kind, and respectful. Findings revealed Black boys feel they have to always be nice in this environment, feeling the need to check their cultures at the door and learn according to the norms of White students (Picower, 2009), or run the risk of being labeled as

oppositional, disrespectful, or as a behavior problem. This creates a learning environment that is not advantageous to developing racial identity. Black parents attempt to assist by using racial socialization to teach their son how to navigate in this environment and to communicate about the possible obstacles and barriers they will face in this environment because of the color of their skin (Hughes et al., 2006).

Racial identity in the case of Black Americans has been defined as a "common racial heritage that includes shared racial experiences" (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 103). Although not as obvious to these young Black boys, findings revealed, they are experiencing racial identity challenges in the form of awareness, identification, and attitudes in the PWES. Byrd (2012) defines "awareness" as being able to distinguish racial differences in accordance with accepted norms, "identification, or self-labeling" as naming one's own race correctly, and "attitudes" as beliefs of characteristics of different racial groups (p. 4). The boys are not completely aware of the racial difference because they currently lack the racial experiences with their own race, which also causes them to fall short on identification, and attitudes.

Black parents feel the need to teach their Black sons to be "good" in this environment. Dow (2016) provided an example of a parent that wanted to give her son access to better resources and schools. The parent explained that she hoped to transform her son from "that Black kid" to "the kid next door" (p. 178). As a result of these findings, schools must create a culturally welcoming environment for all students.

Schools must be intentional to affirm Black boys' cultural identity through culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Recognizing cultural differences is a huge step in this environment, but it must be done in order to impact instructional change. Utilize instructional practices that reflect beliefs and values—so, teach by using not only what Black

boys believe in but by using things they value. Ladson-Billings (2009) shared about Black boys, schools can begin to focus on cultural difference as a benefit to instruction, rather than a burden. In order to do so, teachers, and administrators are going to have to start listening to these students (why not).

Awareness of Differential Treatment

W. E. B. DuBois (1903) highlighted the term double consciousness. Citing his principal tenet that all Black people experienced a "double consciousness" (Whaley, 2016, p. 107) arguing that being both Black and American created an ongoing internal conflict within Black Americans. DuBois (1903) explained:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (p. 9)

Findings revealed Black boys believe they must act a certain way at school as opposed to at home or with their other friends outside of school. In order for Black boys to be successful in this environment they must have a sense of who they are and not feel they must please another person to eliminate negative stereotypes. Evidence from the interviews also revealed the parents of the Black boys are involved in creating this double consciousness for their sons. For example, Tiffany stated:

> I have told him over and over, that he can't do the same thing as those little White boys in his class. I know that may sound racist on my part, but I know how Black kids are treated in school. Let me put it like this, the same rules don't apply for us that applies for them.

Regina said she chose academic success for Gamer, but struggled if it was the right decision for him socially. Gamer was identified with some behavior struggles that were, according to his mother, linked to the absence of his father. I question, could Gamer's behavioral struggles be caused by his environment, and his feeling that he has to change who he is in order to fit in [double consciousness], and the lack of social support? Although, the young Black boys did not specifically say they had to change who they were, they described this overwhelming feeling of having to be nice. With each Black boy sharing the need to change who he is to fit into a certain environment, it is important to point out that this environment comes at a cost. Parents even shared the belief that their sons must be able to alter who they are to navigate their environment. Regina shared,

> I worry all of the time. He is having to learn how to navigate life as a Black male and that in itself is a major challenge, but even more so in an environment where people don't look like him and consider his skin color a threat. Because of this I try to teach him to behave appropriately at school.

Social Isolation

Many Black students are still segregated in some way or another in schools today, thus leaving Black boys with the perception that they must act a certain way in order to fit in (McWhorter, 2014; Trask-Tate et al., 2014). Findings revealed, Black boys had an overwhelming feeling they had to be good in this environment. Although they were not able to communicate a definition for good, researchers Clark and Clark (1950) concluded from a very early age Black boys are taught that White is *good,* and Black is *bad*. Consistently, the Black boys repeatedly stated they had to be nice and kind so people would like them. Parents are doing the best they can to weigh the benefits and challenges when it comes to sending their sons to a PWES. Parents

stated, if given the opportunity, more often than not, they would send their sons to a PWES because of their beliefs that their sons would be afforded the best opportunity for a better future. If the focus was solely on academics, this statement would be mostly true. However, research suggests this benefit comes with a cost, which can be the social well-being of the Black boys (C. Smith & Ulus, 2020). Research states, current school behavior and cultural expectations are established around the dominant White culture and Black boys are expected to operate within these expectations regardless of their cultural backgrounds; if they do not, they are seen as troublemakers or low achievers (Andrews, 2009; McWhorter, 2014).

Black boys dealing with social identity problems will often struggle with internal self-identity conflict, making it more appealing to *act White* in certain social environments. Tyson et al. (2005) defined the term "acting White" as "Black boys who use language or ways of speaking; displaying attitudes, behaviors, or preferences; or engaging in activities considered to be White cultural norms" (p. 583). The Black boys did not articulate the words "act White," they shared the feeling of having to act a certain way at school and act different around other friends outside of school. Gamer described the feeling of having to "pretend" when he is at school.

Lack of Representation

Findings revealed Black boys have problematic relationships with peers which could lead to racial identity problems. Neblett et al. (2009) stated peer relationships often of the same racial background, are crucial to young Black boys' racial identity. D. J. Carter (2007) argued it is often hard for Black boys at PWES to establish peer relationships as they are often navigating through racism and identity struggles. To help affirm Black boys in this environment, schools must establish "counter-spaces" to serve as areas where Black students can cluster outside of the

learning environment to vent their frustrations or to acknowledge their identity (D. J. Carter, 2007; Jackson & Hui, 2017).

Schools must ensure that Black boys are connected to the classroom, the teacher, and their peers (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007). Researchers argue that school administrators play a significant role in maintaining practices that reproduce racial oppression in schools by taking a willful blindness approach to the racial inequities (Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015),

In order to change the narrative for young Black boys in PWES, schools must understand the role school culture plays in the daily experience for these young Black boys. Schools must ensure Black boys are connected to the classroom, the teacher, and their peers (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007). Findings revealed parents have a desire to connect with the school; however, they do not feel welcomed when they are at the school. Parents revealed teachers sometime do not speak to them when they are in the building. Teachers can help build capacity in this area by working to establish a relationship with all parents. Schools can build capacity in this area by implementing race conscious initiatives, and intentional hiring practices.

Implications

Black Boys Need Positive Identity Development

In the PWES, Black boys begin to alter who they are beginning at an early age, in order to fit in the environment. Data from the present study as well as others show it is essential to ensure Black boys have an awareness of who they are, and school is often the first place this awareness occurs (Byrd, 2012; Smith & Hope, 2020). The Black boys discussed the lack of peers that look like them at the school which leaves them feeling like there is no one available for them to play with. In this current setting it is difficult for the Black boys to form peer relationships from the lack of available ingroups, which will ultimately have an impact on their racial identity

(Byrd, 2012; Geerlings et al., 2019). Understanding racial identity is essential to the young Black boys' success especially in this environment. To counter this potential harm, schools must:

- be intentional when it comes to creating "counter-spaces" and making these spaces available to assist with affirming Black boys' racial identity (D. J. Carter, 2007; Jackson & Hui, 2017).

- create a targeted professional development (PD) plan for the staff focused on racial identity and race consciousness.

- create mentor support programs focused on engaging the staff, the Black boys and their parents in meaningful conversations around race.

The PD plan must go above and beyond just sharing ideas and resources, but make sure the plan is implemented and evaluated. The professional development plan should be developed collaboratively by strategically forming a diverse committee to include parents, school personnel, and community members. The committee's goals would be to create the following: a PD mission, develop goals to address Black boys' needs, evidence-based strategies to accomplish the goals, determine who is providing the PD, and a timeline for each strategy. An evaluation plan to evaluate the plan's effectiveness should also be included. Schools should bring in culturally relevant mentors to not only mentor the boys but to mentor the educators within the district, starting with central office. The mentors could provide feedback to ensure implementation of the PD plan. Schools should provide parents with a support group and establish affinity spaces for groups to meet and engage in meaningful conversations around race consciousness and other racial issues. It is not enough for the Black boys to know who they are but it is important for the administrators, teachers, and peers to know who the students are. Social identity theory suggests the need for PWES to work to help create and nurture both racial

identity groups for these boys and help them find other ingroups or categories where they could be more comfortable crossing racial lines. Schools could do so by providing extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs (i.e., fishing, photography, gardening, robotics, gaming, etc.) centered around their students' interests. Having these activities led by teachers based on their interests could also open doors to build and develop relationships that allow the teachers to get to know and better understand Black boys and allow the Black boys to see and interact with their teachers in an environment that they may not perceive as threatening.

Teachers and Administrators Must Change

Teachers, perhaps unintentionally, worsen existing racial inequities by emphasizing social norms through their own beliefs about Black boys, and forming the belief Black boys should change to fit within the system instead of the teachers adjusting to meet the needs of the Black boys (Ghosh, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016). Teachers must change how they look for resources to support the curriculum. I understand the state of Texas, Texas Education Agency, governs what public schools must teach as their standards, but they do not govern what resources a school or teacher must use to teach those standards. An effort to change the entire Texas standards is a huge undertaking. However, an initial impact could be made by selecting culturally relevant curriculum resources to supplement the standards. Findings reveal parents yearn for their sons to be exposed to Black curriculum content at school. Regina shared,

> Incorporating a wider variety of literature would be a good start. Incorporating books
> with main characters that look like them while also teaching American History in its
> entirety would have a major impact on my son's life and learning experience.

School leaders need to lead this change in the school by preparing teachers to implement instructional practices within the classroom to address the discourse around diversity in the

curriculum (Khalifa et al. 2016). Schools must do more than the current Black History month project. Findings show schools should provide teachers with professional development specifically centered around "culturally responsive teaching" (Gay, 2010). Providing teachers with focused professional development will allow them to not only learn more about the students they serving but will also teach them how to advocate for the young Black boys. Schools must show they are committed to these students' overall well-being. Schools should implement culturally relevant programs on a regular basis. For example, they could have Black visiting authors come. Mr. and Mrs. Paige stated,

> The school could do more to address the cultural needs of the students. Look for cultural speakers to come in and speak with the teachers. Display different cultural figures throughout the school. During school announcements, add in some fun facts and figures to introduce. I think all kids would benefit from this. And don't just share Black entertainers or athletes, there are so many more Black people out there that have done some great things for society.

School districts are currently facing political challenges in the area of critical race theory (CRT). Given that we are not seeing majority of the districts totally give to rampant book challenges—many of which are predicated on the "evils of CRT," but which really just seem to target books about and by authors of color and books that feature nonwhite characters and their perspectives. If districts begin to backoff from culturally responsive materials and pedagogy, schools will find it difficult to meet the needs of Gamer, Batman, and Satchel. School leaders need to provide professional development, community resources, and parent support in the area of culturally relevant teacher created materials. School leaders and teachers should be proactive in learning from parents, as parents play an important role as socializers for their children, due to the

increased exposure of influences and the child's own awareness of and exposure to discrimination (Dow, 2016; Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2016). School leaders have to take a more active role in creating a welcoming school environment for all students regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Khalifa et al., 2016). Be intentional about hiring practices. Black educators, bring cultural background knowledge to the school and can make an impact on the teaching staff. No one can take away effective teaching practices. Culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2010) teaches "to and through [students'] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments" (p. 26). Educators impact change even if it's one student, one classroom, one school, or one district at a time- change will come. Majority of educators will continue to do what's best for every child, regardless of the political noise in the background. Lastly, utilize culturally relevant teaching, "to teach students to question the structural inequalities, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 140).

Recruitment

Findings support the need for the district and schools to diversify their teaching staff. This effort starts with school administrators being intentional when it comes to hiring and retaining diverse teacher candidates. Parents and students expressed the need and importance of having access to Black teachers. Gamer's mom shared:

> I wish that Gamer had a chance to have more African-American teachers. I feel like representation matters and being able to have teachers, mentors and role models on campus that look like him could be beneficial.

This effort cannot stop with the hiring process, in fact even more effort should be placed on training and retention processes. Retaining teachers that have been trained to utilize culturally

relevant teaching practices is critical. The teachers should know they are valued and their expertise should be utilized. Black teachers' presence on allows Black boys and their parents feel welcomed and teacher is also a resource for the other teaching staff. Black teachers are needed within the school to advocate for these young Black boys and help them navigate the system. The younger Black boys are too young to recognize the injustices that are happening around them until it is too late and by then anger is starting to settle in. The Black boys also unconsciously begin to establish coping skills to fit within the environment. A Black teacher on campus allows Black boys and their parents to feel more comfortable and creates an environment of trust. It also opens the lines of communication for Black boys to express their needs.

Limitations

As the study progressed, racial tensions heated up, fueled by several high-profile murder cases and controversial topics within the media. A recruitment limitation was created from racial wars in the streets of several major cities to the political argument over CRT. This limitation made it difficult to recruit participants for the study. It was not because the Black boys or their parents did not want to participate but because the districts and the schools did not want to send out the information to the Black families out of fear the study would cause further tensions to spark within the school or district. In this context, I was turned down by several districts I approached to even distribute informational materials on this study. For example, one district informed me the district had recently completed a survey of its stakeholders and they know they have several items to address. They told me because of the survey results, they hired a Diversity and Inclusion Director to assist the district with ensuring they meet the needs of all their students. They said this person would be doing some surveys throughout the district to learn more about what their families needed, and they just did not want to cause more confusion

within the district. I understood this to mean, they felt my study would cause additional racial tension. This was a reminder to me that the districts are not willing to change their systems. Because how can educators meet the needs of Black students without talking to Black students and their families to know what their needs are? This brings me to another limitation, me, as that Black boy.

Another limitation to the study is myself, as I have a personal relationship to the study being that my son and I attended a predominately White elementary school. Hence, researcher bias had to be maintained so the findings and conclusions of the study would be trustworthy. However, my story and who I am benefits the study in a major way. Because of who I am, I was afforded access to these families in a way a White researcher may not have been able to establish.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is great opportunity for future research to continue capturing the lived experiences of young Black boys in PWES. The study led to more questions around the Black boys struggles in this environment. In light of the findings, I found it challenging to get the young boys to open up fully to discuss their experience. Although the older boys opened up a little more than the younger student, a focus group of like aged boys would help the boys open up the discussion by feeding off of one another.

Future research could look at young Black boys attending private independent schools. While the narratives and interviews provided detailed information, the use of parent and student focus groups would be value added when it comes to data collection.

Conclusion

Since *Brown v. Board of Education*, Blacks parents have sought out an equitable education for their Black boys. An environment that will educate them academically and take care of them socially. Throughout this study one learned that parents have not been able to find that environment for their sons so, they constantly battle between academics and social well-being. Parents believe they can provide for their sons' social well-being within the home so, they typically lean toward enrolling their sons in PWESs as they feel the academics are more important for their future. Through this study one learned that Black boys have the ability to navigate through the education system by establishing coping skills. However, it is important that educational leaders begin to focus on the needs of the Black boys and not the needs of the system. It is the system that must change and not the Black boys.

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