

Shaping the Black Male Identity

WHITE NOISE/BLACK BOYS:
SHAPING THE BLACK MALE IDENTITY

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WHITE NOISE/BLACK BOYS: SHAPING THE BLACK MALE IDENTITY

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Doane University, 2018

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and analyze the Black male identity as shaped by the context of white noise at predominately white schools in the U.S. Midwest. The two overarching research questions asked (1) how socially constructed identities of race and gender impact Black boys within the educational system and (2) who Black boys think they are relative to who others say they are. Data were collected through interviews and artifacts. Interviews were conducted among six Black boys who were attending or had recently graduated from a white school environment as of the fall of 2017. Participants' ages ranged from 13-22 years. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the phenomenological procedures of coding, and clustering of themes. Four themes emerged relative to the study's focus on *cultural conditioning, Black identity, and desired perceptions*: his-story untold, love being Black, wanting to be able to express their Blackness, and wanting to be seen as human. Untold Black his-story exemplifies cultural conditioning. Relative to their racial identity, Black boys love being Black, and want to be able to express that Blackness. Relative to their desired perception, Black boys want to be perceived as human first. *White noise* strongly motivates the social construct of race which infiltrates our education system. Recommendations for future studies include interviewing Black parents, and white teachers. Recommendations for educational systems include recruiting Black male teachers and administrators, providing district-level training in cultural awareness and

courageous conversations about race, implementing programs for Black boys, and highlighting the accomplishments of Africans and African Americans other than slavery and the civil rights movement in curricula.

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My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble Psalm 46:1

Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witness are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty. Psalm 27:12

For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. Psalms 61:3

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DEDICATION

To My Husband

BRYAN MCKINLEY

“Do everything in love” 1 Corinthians 16:14

This dissertation is dedicated to my Black Nubian King, my husband, Bryan McKinley.

A God loving, God fearing, a follower of Christ, a believer, faithful, wonderful, magnificent, patient, forgiving, understanding, helpful, kind, humorous, serious, strong, confident, intelligent, generous, passionate, a man with integrity and moral values. Without you, your love and your strength, this dissertation would have taken another year to complete. ☺

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the United States of America and continuing to the present day, the Black male identity has been under attack and demeaned by a white male power structure seeking to justify an inhumane system. The human nature of Black males and their contributions as citizens are questioned and at times excluded in a country whose constitution states, “We the People.” Americoon, Baboon, Boy, Thug, Nigger, Lazy, Shiftless, Dangerous, and Uneducated, are just a few words used to describe the Black male and his relevance to society (see The Racial Slur Database, n.d.). Because Black men are boys before they are men, young Black boys in the United States are also described and labeled as defiant, unmotivated, aggressive, intimidating, oversexed, and hostile (Smith, 2013). The ongoing use of these degrading and dehumanizing words and tones start to blur into a continuous hissing and sometimes subconscious sound, a sound we as Black Americans have come to know as *white noise*.

For this study, I refer to the term *white noise* as the direct or indirect means by which white society effectively covers up, distorts or prevents truth in its entirety from being seen or heard (Carnes, 2014). The metaphor *white noise* pertains to the phenomenon of noise that may interfere with, influence or impact the lives of Black people. Examples of *white noise* include, but are not limited to, the negative images, perceptions, stereotypes, under-achievement, and the misrepresentation that impacts the Black male and his identity. The words *thug*, *nigger*, and *dangerous*, along with tones from anti-Black sources, have created a false perception of Black males, distorted his self-identity and have plagued his lived experience (Topos Partnership, 2011).

The Black male's quest is to live out the words of Rodney King (1992), *Can we all get along?* The truth is that Black males live and operate in a racist society (Tatum, 1992). Prejudice, discrimination and oppression is ever present in their daily lives, including school. Black boys internalize negative stereotypes that the dominant white culture holds about them and absorb many white cultural beliefs and values. Blacks may seek to assimilate, to be accepted by whites, and to distance themselves from other Blacks (Tatum, 1992).

The questions for Black boys then become, "Who am I?" "How do I, as a Black male feel about my race?" "What word(s) or label would I use to identify myself?" These questions and others have drawn me, a Black woman, to the topic of *white noise*/Black boys: shaping the Black male identity. In the 21st century, the theme of Black male identity arises in the masking context of *white noise*, a context that is difficult to remove.

From the slave patrols to the hands of the white nationalist Ku Klux Klan, to the laws of Jim Crow, to mass-incarceration, elimination, domination, to today's miseducation; I see the lives of young Black boys still endangered and becoming extinct.

In his 1992 work, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, legal scholar Derrick Bell described a fictitious story about a group of Space Traders who had arrived in the United States. These Space Traders came equipped with natural resources, special environmental cleaning chemicals, money, gold, and other commodities that were desperately needed for a financially and natural resource-strapped United States. The traders were willing to provide these items to the U.S. government in exchange for all of its African American citizens, who would be taken to an unknown location (Bell, 1993).

As Derrick Bell (1993) inferred, *what are African Americans in the United States worth?* Twenty-five years later, this question is still relevant. For this study, I ask you as the reader to consider how the question of worth speaks to the Black male. By means of this study, I present this question to education practitioners, researchers, and scholars but with a little twist. I ask you to focus the question on a group of students whose value and worth seem to be called into question every day in schools across the United States--- Black boys. The current state of education for Black males in PreK-12 schools reveals that these students' underachievement and disenfranchisement in schools and society seem to be reaching a pandemic and life-threatening proportions (Howard, 2008). So, it is imperative that we (educators, researchers, and scholars) focus our work on Black male students. We can no longer keep silent, that's if we really care!

One of the disturbing realities about the plight, a dangerous, difficult, or otherwise unfortunate situation, of Black boys in PreK-12 schools has been the relative silence from the educational community at large, and the educational research community in particular. While an increasing number of African American scholars have addressed this issue (Brown & Davis, 2000; Foster & Peele, 1999, Garibaldi, 1992; Fashola, 2003; Hopkins, 1997; Noguera, 2001; Polite, 1993; Polite & Davis, 1999), it would appear as though others have accepted this widespread failure as business as usual, thus echoing an old phrase from Marvin Gaye's famed song, *Save the Children*, in which he asks the poignant question about the fate of our children, "Who really cares?" (Howard, 2008, p. 956).

Silence: The Hidden History of ‘Black’ to America

There was a time when African men understood their roles, and their identification was nurtured and validated by strong cultural and family values, and affirmation from their social construct. The "rite of passage" (a ceremony that marks the transition from one phase of life to another) came after years of mentoring by African men with whom they could identify. Stories of ancestry were passed down from generation to generation. But then things abruptly changed, African people were brought to America by whites, where they were sold, enslaved, separated from their families, stripped of their identities, culture, and language. Africans were mentally, physically, emotionally tortured, raped, and abused. Stories regarding the truth about who Africans in the United States were -- and where they came from -- was and has been hidden from the Black male for years.

The tradition of storytelling has always been a part of African culture (Tuwe, 2016). Using voices and listening has historically been essential to human and cultural survival. When taken from Africa, the enslaved ancestors of today’s Black Americans used their voices to cry out to their homeland. When slave owners stripped them of their language and culture and brutally beat Black boys, men, girls and women, their voices cried out for freedom, and when Black people were not included in the foundational documents of these United States, they used their voices to say “I am a Man” (Hartsell, 2006, title) and “Ain’t I a Woman” (Truth, 1861, title).

U.S. history standards would do well to account for the reality that “Black history is bigger than slavery” (Albu, 2015, title). Current grade 5-12 history standards limit African Americans content to slavery, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement,

effectively treating the Black experience as a separate entity. What goes unrecognized in the US curriculum is the reality of who they descended from. Black students descend from moors who contributed to ancient European civilization (Van Sertima, 1992); from African kings such as King Mansa Musa (see Figure 1) who was named “the richest man of all times” (Goodwin, 1957, p. 109); from warriors such as Shaka Zulu (Ritter, 1985); from rebellious slaves such as Nat Turner (see Figure 2), who fought back against the system that oppressed Blacks (see Vox, 2017); from scientists and mathematicians such as Benjamin Banneker (Haber, 1992); and from surgeons (see Finch, 2004). Many great slave rebellions took place in the United States (Gates, Jr., 2013). “Driven by prophetic visions and joined by a host of followers — but with no clear goals — on August 22, 1831, [Nat Turner along with] about 70 armed slaves and free Blacks, set off to slaughter the white neighbors who enslaved them” (Gates, Jr., 2013, “Nat Turner’s Rebellion,” 1831, para. 1).



Figure 1. King Mansa Musa of Mali (reproduced from Ezebuirio, n.d.)

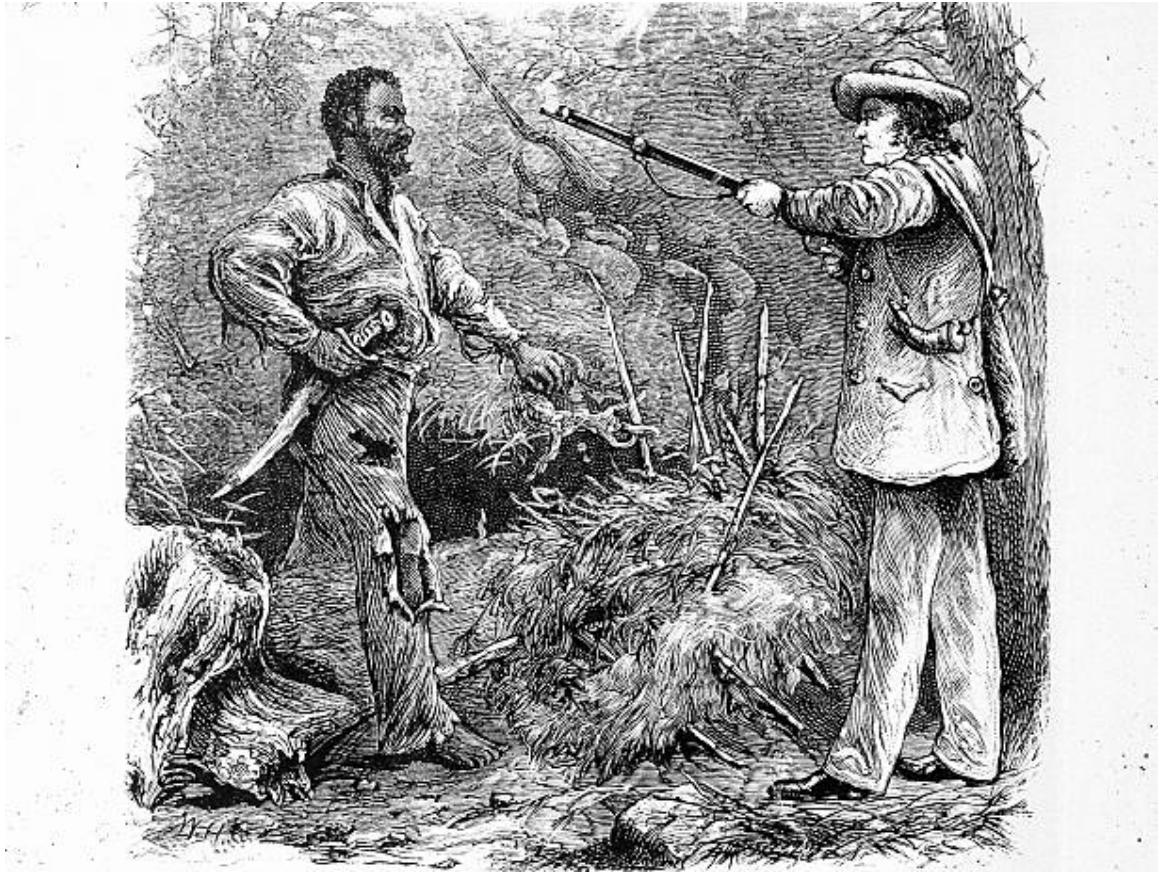


Figure 2. Nat Turner as “Slave leader” (Reproduced from MPI/Getty Images, n.d.)

Statement of the Problem

White Privilege

Henze, Lucas, and Scott (1998) said that:

when teachers and facilitators attempt to raise issues of racism, power, and white privilege overtly, it is like trying to dance with a monster; it is awkward and frightening, and no one is quite sure how, or even why, to do it (p. 189).

This study is my attempt to not dance with the monster, but to expose the monster for what it is and the impact it has on Black boys in education. Racism, power, and privilege

are all embedded in social structures, in institutions, and in society as a whole. This study will discuss how privilege and racism impact the lives of the Black boy participants’.

“White privilege [is] an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 1). McIntosh (1988) provided this definition as a white woman, at a time when she was coming to see her whiteness relative to her contextual place and space. “I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive” (McIntosh, 1998, p. 8).

Peggy went on to say, “...perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them...they are not people of color; they do not see ‘whiteness’ as a racial identity” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 5). I find it interesting that Black, brown and red are considered colors, but white is not. White is the norm; other colors, i.e. races, are abnormal. “White [people] are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that . . . [working] to benefit others . . . allow[s] ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’” (pp. 1-2). Peggy listed 16 conditions that she thought attached somewhat to skin-color privilege. I have chosen six from McIntosh’ (1988) list that I believe relate closely to my study:

1. “I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time” (p. 2).
2. “I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the newspaper and see people of my race widely represented, positively” (p. 2).

3. “When I am told about our national heritage or about ‘civilization,’ I am shown that people of my color made it what it is” (p. 2).
4. “I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race” (p. 2).
5. “I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them” (p. 2).
6. “I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race” (p. 2).

Now imagine if you were a Black boy sitting in a class being taught by a white teacher who relates to the attributes expressed in the six points above. If you cannot imagine sitting in a class as a Black boy being taught by a white teacher with these attributes, you probably have white privilege. Therefore, we cannot overlook the fact that some white teachers are busy dancing with the monster to the music of *white noise*, the Black boy sits in a classroom watching with no sense of his true identity. So, let’s turn off the music, stop all the dancing, and just have a real conversation!

Internalized Racism

Everybody knows that racism exists and that people are racist. So when it comes out, they are not that surprised . . .because of the legacy of racism, schooling is problematic for African American students, particularly those students attending predominantly white schools. For such students, feeling culturally alienated, being physically isolated, and remaining silenced are common experiences (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 26).

Educational environments where a mentality of white superiority consciously or subconsciously permeates policies, literature, and behavior of students and faculty, may directly or indirectly relegate Black boys to a mindset of inferiority and frustration due to lack of a true identity.

Furthermore, “the development of all children is racialized, although the process of racialization differs for minority versus majority children” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 60).

With the cultural framework of America, the systemic structure is characterized by white male patriarchy that allows for Black males to have the ability to negotiate the way in which they have been socialized and institutionalized to think, act, and behave because they are men. However, the reality of race and the lack of diversity in the purest sense, impedes upon this effort and cripples the Black male's ability to truly transition into manhood. He is left to constantly struggle and fight for an identity, for power, for respect, and for an understanding of who he is versus what he is projected as: a nigger (Nedhari, 2009, p.1).

Nedhari's (2009) quotation relates to this study by acknowledging that the social construct of race was originated by white males, and by revealing how negative and false perceptions of someone looking on can have a damaging effect on how [Black] individuals perceive themselves and how they treat each other. These perceptions are known as stereotypes.

Stereotypes and Negative Social Imagery

“Social imagery has been part of the United States landscape since the country's inception” (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012, p. 85). Social imagery [is] the manner in

which perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs [regarding] certain groups shapes people's understanding of those groups. [These beliefs] become an integral part of a population's thinking when it is institutionalized for a sustained period of time (Howard et al., 2012). For the Black male, negative social imagery has [especially] influenced his school experience. Stereotypes are developed from these negative social imageries. Stereotypes such as being lazy, incapable of reaching high academic standards, to being seen as overly aggressive in the classroom. Then, as the saying goes, what you see is what you get, or what a person sees is what they get.

The question before us is not simply about how we use statistics but a deeper concern with how our discourse about young Black males needs to change. We can start by presenting larger, more complex stories about the lives they lead—not out of political correctness but in a sincere effort to achieve authenticity (Knight, 2014, para. 16).

A wide range of studies and analyses point to persistent and destructive biases regarding the public image of Black males and ongoing forces that perpetuate the creation of these images (Topos Partnership, 2011). If the dominant society constantly sees negative images of Black boys and hear negative lyrics about Black boys, they will internalize and believe those messages. Hence, it is not surprising that “all of the most important quality of life indicators suggests that Black males are in deep trouble” (Noguera, 2008, p. 17).

Black Male Identity

As “sites of socialization, ... schools are places where children learn ... how to interact with others” (Noguera, 2008, p. 28). Schools are also “sites for gender role

socialization, and in most societies, ...for instruction about values and norms” (p. 29).

Furthermore, “schools are also places where [many children] learn about the meaning of race” (p. 29). Much of African American racial identity is developed in the context of “beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, including the notion that ‘white is right’ and ‘Black is wrong’” (Tatum, 1997, p. 93).

“Black students are seldom exposed to scholarly work related to the Black experience and must construct their young adult racial identities from the raw and flawed racial stereotypes perpetuated in the media and popular culture” (Adams, 2005, p. 285). Developing a robust, confident, and well-rounded identity can be motivating for Black boys. Such an identity may act as a buffer in some racially intolerant environments. However, in some white suburban neighborhoods and schools, where Black boys may have only token representation, the interface of identity with the racial context of school is different (Stevenson, 1994). It is safer for a Black boy to assimilate, to blend in or, act white in a predominately white school setting. This study allowed Black boys the opportunity to talk about their plight with the persistent and destructive biases regarding the public image of Black males and its influence on their identity and their educational experience.

Deficiencies in the Literature: Who Am I?

Three areas that “have not been significantly researched for children of color [include] normative development in context, intergroup relations, and attitudes and *identity* development” (Dowd, 2016, p. 60). Identities, we know, are shaped throughout our lives based on our experiences and environment. In Erikson’s (1959) theory of psychosocial development, the fifth of eight stages is one of the most important and is

particularly relevant to this study. This stage involves identity versus role confusion and occurs during adolescence, around ages 12-18. In this stage the adolescent re-examines their identity and is faced with the question, “Who am I?” (Erikson, 1968, p. 314). Few publications have represented the lived educational experience of Black boys in a predominately white environment, or represented how the experiences influence, impact, or shape their identities. “One of the glaring absences of much of the research associated with African American males is that it has not included first-hand, detailed accounts from African American males about the roles that they believe power, race, and racism play in their educational experiences” (Howard, 2008, p. 967).

Allowing Black male participants, the freedom to share their lived experiences in a predominately white school will add to the existing literature on how the role of power, privilege, race, and racism impacts their lives. This study will also address deficiencies in understanding Black boys’ identity. The consensus across existing studies is that future research must give credence to the power and insight that comes from Black boys naming, describing, and analyzing their own realities (e.g., Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Dowd, 2016).

I respectfully acknowledge that the United States of America includes many people who may identify in ways other than Black or white (see Wu, 2003). Indeed, many people may not know which color they identify with because their histories are mixed. Furthermore, the vast number of people who have arrived in the United States over the past several hundred years, have contributed to extremely complex cultural and racial identities (Schwede, Blumberg, & Chan, 2005). However, this study focuses on Black faces.

Audience and Significance of the Problem: Who Really Cares and Why?

Broadly speaking, the U.S. PreK-12 educational system is the intended audience for this study. More specific audiences include superintendents, administrators, teachers, staff members, school-board members, and parents of Black students.

In an interview, Dr. Bettina Love, a professor of education at the University of Georgia said:

I don't think there's any such thing as a crisis in Black education. There is an educational justice crisis. Schools are just mirrors of our society, and when communities of color are deliberately gutted of their public services, jobs, housing, and health care, these human beings who are the most vulnerable in society become trapped by economic and racial isolation. We have a series of failing and interdependent systems: Educational justice is connected to economic justice, racial justice, environmental justice, religious justice, queer justice, citizenship justice, and disability justice (Ray, 2017, para. 7).

This phenomenological study is important because,

despite recent gains from a number of students in U.S. schools, African American males continue to underachieve on most academic indices. Despite various interventions that have attempted to transform the perennial disenfranchisement, their school failure has persisted. Conversely, their failure in schools frequently results in poor quality of life options (Howard, 2008, p. 954).

The significance of this phenomenological study was both immediate and long-term. The immediate significance involved providing a platform where six young Black males, ages 13 to 22, could present their stories through interview conversations. I

wanted these stories to be heard and valued in a way that would touch the hearts and souls of those who play a significant role in their lives. My ultimate goal for the young Black boys involved in this study was to ensure that they understand that their voices matter and by speaking up, other Black boys will have the courage to reflect, examine and question their current experience in their scholastic environment in hopes for a better future. My hope is that this study begins to erase the stigma of what it means to be a Black boy in a white school environment.

Reading this study's stories of Black boys will enable educators to more deeply understand the current reality and past history of (some) Black males as they have been and are being treated in the U.S. school system. Furthermore, the boys' stories will shed light on ways in which school policies consciously or unconsciously promote racism. The stories will also provide educators with a cornerstone for dialogue through which authentic information about the lived experiences of Black boys may arise. Such dialogue will serve to build knowledge, understanding, and empathy among stakeholders in the education field. Over the longer term, I wanted and will always want the study to enforce how imperative it is that the predominantly white U.S. K-12 educational system be willing to hear the voices of Black boys so that those boys will feel like they are part of that system and hence of society at large.

Purpose of the Study: Black Boys' Lives Matter

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and analyze the Black male identity as shaped by the context of white noise at predominately white schools in the U.S. Midwest. Through the use of unstructured face-to-face interviews, I

gathered detailed information from Black male students. I also asked the participants to provide artifacts that expressed their encounter with *white noise*.

The specific focus of this study was to describe the essential structures of Black boys' lived experiences in the context of *white noise*. The *white noise* that occurs in the context of Black boys' educational experiences and their beliefs about how it has influenced their identities, emotional, social and cognitive development.

This study's stories of Black boys' reveal gaps in the portrayal of U.S. history within the educational system. The willingness of teachers, staff, administrators, parents and community members, to listen to these boys' stories will assist in acknowledging these truths. The boys' stories may increase the confidence of educators, administrators, and staff in addressing issues of *white noise* as pertains to educating Black boys. Their stories may also assist school districts in preparing effective strategies to counteract and hopefully eventually eradicate the influences of *white noise*.

Definition of Terms

Bias, as a verb, involves "feel[ing] or show[ing] inclination or prejudice for or against someone or something" ("Bias," 2018, Verb section).

For purposes of this study, *cultural conditioning* is "the social process [by] which [European American] authority figures such as ... professors, politicians, religious leaders, peers, and the media define [the] cultural values, beliefs, ethical systems, and ultimately the way" Black Americans perceive themselves in the world (Morgan, 2016, para. 1). Joe Madison, The Black Eagle (host of the Urban View on Sirius XM Radio), has often said, "In America, we are culturally conditioned to believe white is superior,

Black is inferior, and the manifestation of cultural conditioning, is that Black people are undervalued, underestimated and marginalized.”

Discrimination involves unequally treating “members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion and other categories” (“Discrimination,” n.d.).

Identity is “the fact of being whom or what a person or thing is.” (“Identity,” 2018).

Internalized Racism is:

the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power (“Internalized racism,” n.d.).

Oppression is:

the systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that saturate most aspects of life in our society (“Oppression,” n.d.).

Perception is “the ability to see, hear or become aware of something through the senses” (“Perception,” 2018).

Prejudice is:

a pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics (“Prejudice,” n.d.).

Race is:

a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups. (“Race,” n.d.).

Racial and ethnic identity consist of:

an individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe him or herself based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization and personal experience (“Racial and ethnic identity,” n.d.).

Racism is:

a complex system of beliefs and behaviors, grounded in a presumed superiority of the white race. These beliefs and behaviors are conscious and unconscious; personal and institutional; and result in the oppression of people of color and benefit the dominant group, whites. A simpler definition is racial prejudice + power = racism (“Racism,” n.d.).

A *rite of passage* is “a ceremony [that] marks the transition from one phase of life to another” (“What is a rite of passage? Why is it Important?” n.d.).

A *social construct* is “a social mechanism, phenomenon, or category created and developed by society; a perception of an individual, group, or idea that is ‘constructed’ through cultural or social practice.” (“Social construct,” n.d.).

The “*Other*” is “a group or member of a group that is perceived as different, foreign, [or] strange” (“Other,” 2018).

The term *White Noise* is a neologism or slang term that refers to “meaningless commotion, or chatter that masks or obliterates underlying information” (“White noise (slang),” 2017). More specifically, *white noise* relates to U.S. policy and politics (“White noise,” n.d.). For this study, I refer to *white noise* as the direct or indirect methods used to effectively cover up, distort, or prevent truth from being seen or heard in its entirety (Tretceter & Bucholtz, 2001; Carnes, 2014; Matias, Kara, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, & Galindo, 2014).

White Privilege refers to the “unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it” (“White privilege,” n.d.).

Significance of the Study: Silenced Voices

The identities of Black boys such as Emmett Till, 14 Trayvon Martin, 17, Tamir Rice, 12 and Michael Brown, 18, may have embodied some the same *white noise*. To completely understand the lives and lived experiences of Black boys, it is important for educators [readers] to more fully understand the power *white noise* can have in the lives

and educational experiences of these young people. Let us view the lives, images and the deaths of Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice and Michael Brown, and the essential structures of *white noise* and how it impacts their lives.

Emmett was visiting relatives in Money, Mississippi one summer in 1955 (“Emmett Till Project,” 2015). He and some friends/relatives went to a store. Later that evening, two white men came to the house where Emmett was staying. They kidnapped, tortured and murdered him. Emmett was hung, shot in the head, beaten and thrown into the Tallahatchie River with a 70-pound cotton gin fan covered in barbed wire around his neck. Three days later, his body floated to the surface. Emmett Till's brutal death came as a result of him allegedly *whistling at a white woman*. This allegation that eventually led to Emmett's murder is a result of the strong influence of cultural conditioning and *white noise*.

On February 26, 2012, in Sanford, FL, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, “a self-appointed neighborhood watch volunteer” (Susman, 2013). Martin was unarmed. He was walking home carrying a bag of skittles, a cell phone, an iced tea, and wearing a hoodie. The night of the shooting, Zimmerman told a 9-1-1 dispatcher, “This guy looks like he is up to no good. He looks Black,” (Wemple, 2013, para 4). The shooting of Trayvon Martin is another poignant example of *white noise*.

In 2014, while playing with a toy gun in a park, Tamir Rice was shot and killed by a police officer (Lee, 2014). In this example of *white noise*, the officer assumed Tamir was 20 rather than only 12 years old. At as young as 10 years of age, Black boys may be viewed with less childhood innocence than their white peers. Instead, they are likely to be mistaken as older, to be perceived as guilty, and to face police violence if accused of a

crime (Goff, Jackson, Allison, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomaso, 2014). His murder is a result of the strong influence of cultural conditioning and *white noise*.

Michael Brown was also shot and killed by a police officer in 2014 (Swaine, 2014). The officer said that he feared for his life; “He looked like a demon” (Wax-Thibodeaux, 2014, para. 1). Michael Brown’s dead body laid in the middle of the street for four hours before allowing his mother to see his body. Dehumanized, treated worse than an animal, and why?

Hostile, violent, dangerous, and aggressive are all threatening words associated with people who have Black skin, specifically the murdered Black boys and Black boys in general (Noguera, 2008). Did the color of their skin play a significant role in their deaths? Did race and gender play a significant role in how they were treated? What fears, misconceptions, preconceived beliefs, in other words, *white noise*, came into play and tragically caused the deaths of these young Black boys and silenced their voices forever?

The deaths of Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice, are examples of Black boys’ lived experiences within the presence of *white noise* (perceptions of Black boys) and how *white noise* played a role in bringing a devastating end to their lives. Fortunately, the *white noise* that plays a role in the lived experiences of the Black boys' involved in my research does not end the same as the boys referred to above. Unfortunately, their lived experiences so far have not been as positive as their white counterparts in the same school. “One of the larger questions arising from Martin's death" (and the death of the other Black boys, I assert), “is how educators can explore

their own race and gender perceptions to confront the daily classroom injustice toward young Black males” (Love, 2014, p. 293).



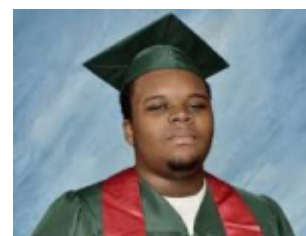
Emmett Till¹



Trayvon
Martin²



Tamir Rice³



Michael Brown⁴

Figure 3. Black boys murdered between 1955 and 2014

The murder of Black boys has always been, and still is, an epidemic (see Noguera, 2009). What if we were able to hear the voices, the stories, and the lived experiences of murdered Black boys? What would they say? What would their stories tell us? Perhaps they would say how they were proud of their race, proud to be a young Black man. Or maybe they would talk about what it was like being a Black boy, how difficult it was in school, always being seen as a threat, portrayed as a thug, a wanna-be, an *americoon*, a *nigger*...the *white noise* that was a constant in every aspect of their existence.

The Black male: an endangered species,

The Black male: the face at the bottom of the well,

The Black Male: silenced voices,

¹ Reproduced from Nodjimbade (2015) via the Bettmann/Corbis collection.

² Reproduced from “Trayvon Martin in a hoodie,” photo released by the Martin Family (Lewis, 2014)

³ Reproduced from Hanna (2017)

⁴ Graduation photo (Reproduced from van Woerkom, 2014)

The Black Male: who am I?

The Black male is an energetic, powerful, fearless, educated, and talented young man...but who really cares?

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter two of the dissertation presents the literature and research on factors related to *white noise* and its influence on the Black boys' identity, his emotional, social and cognitive development while attending a predominantly white school.

In literature and film, Black males have been depicted as villains, con men, and feeble-minded buffoons (Noguera, 2008). But society also fears Black males for many of their attributes that threaten the social order of society. According to Noguera (2008), society has characterized Black males as “too aggressive, too loud, too violent, too dumb, too hard to control, too streetwise” (p. 310).

Likewise, “in schools, Black children are often perceived as dangerous, aggressive, or threatening [by their teachers], even as young as preschool” (Mayfield, 2017, p. 9).

“These racialized images have been internalized by people in our society, including educational professionals and by young Black students themselves” (p. 9).

A review of the literature revealed the following topics relevant to Black boys: (1) negative perceptions and imagery, and (2) structural racism in the U.S. education system (Topos Partnership, 2011). “Because of racism, Blacks have been excluded historically from being full participants in many White-oriented U.S. communities that have developed in the education system” (Sedlecek, 1987, p. 542). These perceptions and structural racism, exemplify *white noise*.

What is White Noise? A Conceptual Framework

White noise is a type of noise that is produced by combining sounds of all different frequencies together. If you took all of the imaginable tones that a human can hear and combined them together, you would have *white noise*. For this dissertation, I

have used Wikipedia's urban/slang definition for *white noise* as "an expression/neologism to describe a meaningless commotion or chatter that masks or obliterates underlying information" ("White noise (slang)," 2017). Because *white noise* contains all frequencies, it is frequently used to mask other sounds (truth, other perspectives). For this study, *white noise* is the direct or indirect methods used to adequately cover up, distort or prevent truth in its entirety from being seen or heard.

Imagine that you, as a reader of this dissertation, are in a hotel and voices from the room next-door are leaking into your room. You might turn on a fan to drown out the voices. The fan produces a reasonable approximation of *white noise*. Why does that work? Why does *white noise* drown out voices?

Using the example above, think of the hotel as a society whose laws and societal systems are rooted in the perspectives of a single source. The voices next door represents factual truths and other perspectives; your room represents your current physical, economic, social environment, and perspectives; the fan represents tools like media, education, and religion, etc., that are used to create *white noise*.

When perspectives other than the current dominant attitude start to enter into one's consciousness (which goes against the prevailing viewpoint) and changes the way one views the dominant perspective, the dominant perspective will use tools and avenues, although subtle, that drown out opposing perspectives. It is not only what is being said but also the constant application of *white noise*, over generations, into the minds of an entire society that blankets truths and makes those who don't agree with the dominant perspective feel marginalized and devalued.

Each of the four murdered Black boys provides an example of *white noise*.

Society's perception of the Black male as deviant, not only allows these murders to take place but also in many ways validates and supports carrying out such acts. Before the Black male is killed, his image is first dehumanized (see Goff et al., 2014).

Who controls *white noise* and determines whether and when to use it and for what purpose? Since the inception of the United States, powerful, rich white males have continually developed and controlled the narrative of hierarchy in society, mainly for economic control. "This archetypal oppression of Black Americans is responsible for a substantial portion of the initial white wealth on which the American economy and government were built" (Feagin, 2006, p. 57). When that narrative has been challenged, white males have systemically pumped *white noise* into the American environment so that factual truths and/or other perspectives cannot be heard.

Critical Race Theory

From a philosophical perspective, I used critical race theory (CRT) as a framework. According to Parker and Lynn (2002),

CRT has three main goals: (a) to present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and in society; (b) to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct; and (c) to draw important relationships between race and other axes of domination (p. 10)

A CRT approach to U.S. education involves committing "to develop schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of communities of color in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). CRT challenges traditional historical practices of predominately white school systems as they

relate to the centrality of whiteness (as influenced by cultural mismatch and culturally-responsive classroom management) and to the challenge of dominant ideology (as influenced by teacher and institutional bias, authentic caring, and race-based intervention; see Figure 4 as adapted from Payne, 2012). Within qualitative studies, CRT enables examining historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggles of social institutions/schools (Morrow & Brown, 1994).

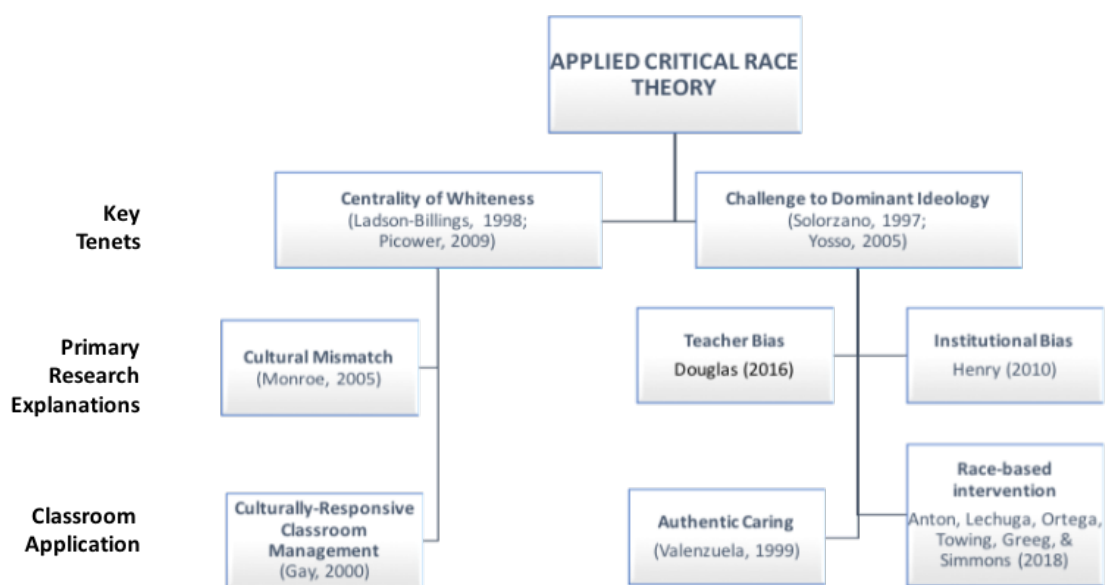


Figure 4. Literature map of applied critical race theory (adapted from Payne, 2012)

The remainder of this literature review will consider the following topics as they relate to *white noise* (perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of teachers, staff, and students) and its impact on Black boys' identities while attending a predominantly white school.

U.S. Perceptions of Black Boys

Imagine a man you know well—a father, brother, uncle, cousin, or friend.

Whoever comes to mind, imagine that individual at birth, as a baby. What are the expectations, hopes, and dreams that you have at that moment of his coming into

being? How do you think he will grow and develop? What would be the expected challenges and the arc of development? Because he is a baby boy, does that make a difference? Now, take note of whom you visualized by race. Imagine, if you have not done so already, that the baby boy you are thinking of is African American, a Black baby boy. Does race by itself, or in combination with gender, affect your expectations, your sense of the life course, and what is possible? Is it the first day of this child's life? What will happen by the time he begins kindergarten? What will happen by the end of high school (Dowd, 2013, p. 45).

If your perceptions have shifted, those shifts affect Black men and boys.

Stereotypes and Prejudices about Black Boys

To further understand the plight of Black males in a predominately white school one might examine the work of Noguera (2008) to gain insight into the Black male school experience. Prejudgment [and stereotypes] of African American boys has led to the disproportionate number of out of school suspension, placement in special education, and in alternatives schools.

By the time African American boys reach the fourth-grade teachers cease viewing them as *cute and adorable* children. They are now perceived as that stereotypical African American male: The would be criminal, the over sexed-great athlete, and academically unsuccessful (Moss-Dobson, 2011, para. 3).

Researchers from the Yale Child Study Center found that the unconscious prejudices and stereotypes that inform our attitudes and interactions with others affect how teachers treat Black male students as young as four years old. These perceptions of the Black man, have been manifested throughout history and in the media.

Media Portrayals of Black Boys

The media plays a prominent role in creating meaning, shaping our values, defining who we are, and establishing norms. These values are powerful because they generally come from places of *power*, but also because we *internalize* them and take them for granted; they seem natural and the way things should be, and in turn, shape the way we see and understand the people, objects, practices, and institutions in our lives (The Critical Media Project, 2017, “identity and the media,” para. 2).

“Media could be [either] a site of change [or] a site that perpetuates ideologies and norms. The media uses representations—images, words, and characters or personae—to convey ideas and values. Media representation, therefore, is not neutral or objective” (The Critical Media Project, 2017, “identity and the media,” para. 1).

Black boys are not immune to the influence of the media portrayals, which they consume along with other Americans. In forming images of themselves and their peers, Black boys draw on far more experience than others. The overall presentation of Black boys in America is distorted, exaggerating some dimensions while omitting others (Topos Partnership, 2011, p. 23).

“The remnants of these constructions and others continue to have contemporary influences, particularly when it comes to their schooling experiences in the U.S.” (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012, p. 86).

A recent documentary fittingly portrayed James Baldwin’s exploration of the lives of three of his civil rights movement contemporaries and close personal friends: Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X (see Baldwin/Raoul, 2017). Baldwin

examined institutions of racism and the ways those American institutions have been upheld throughout the years by people in power, even by Hollywood, through stereotypes and erasure (the removal of prior history or feedback).

For Black boys to be successful in school and life, the power structure that controls the education system and the mass media must be attacked. Attacked by the voices, stories, the lived experiences of our young Black male students. This study examined some of the concerns about the manner in which the media may have influenced the way Black boys/males are frequently viewed, and how Black boys see themselves in schools.

Educators as a Channel for White Noise: Who Really Cares?

The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us (Audre Lorde, 1984, p. 123).

Lorde's (1984) words ground this study in an examination of the racism and racial profiling that broadly takes place in the United States public school system. One of the aims of this study was "to unpack the images of Black males in U.S. culture that make it possible for too many teachers to see some of their Black male students as threatening, arrogant, disdainful of authority, and uncontrollable except by force or removal" (Love, 2014, p. 293).

"One of the larger questions arising from Martin's death" and those of Emmett, Tamir, and Michael, "is how educators can explore their own race and gender perceptions to confront daily classroom injustices toward young Black males" (Love, 2014, p. 293). Love (2014) went on to powerfully summarize this historical context as follows:

To ‘*See Trayvon Martin*’ is to acknowledge one's power and privilege, and reconcile these social constructions to the plight of one's students of color. If educators do not take action to problematize, examine, confront, and challenge their own inscribed dispositions to create social change, they determine that their role in schools is to criminalize Black bodies. So long as educators continue to enforce policies that demonize innocent children, they thus allow for the murder of thousands of Trayvon Martins in classrooms every day (p. 304).

“Too often, teachers make judgments concerning Black male students having nothing to do with their intellectual ability and everything to do with stereotypes, assumptions, and fear” (Love, 2014, p. 294). Educational research “enables progress to be made and has increased the understanding of different cultures” (Boykin, 1972).

Let me share a real-life setting in which educators misappropriated their misperceptions of young Black boys, misperceptions which served as *white noise*. An elementary school paraprofessional whom I knew, told the story of overhearing one teacher say to another, “You have a class of thugs... can we just say, orange jumpsuits and penitentiary?” Laughter followed. According to the paraprofessional, the Black male student had been placed in a closet when he misbehaved. However, when a white student choked and punched another white student just for looking at him, the white male student only had to sit in the principal's office for the rest of the day. Both boys had attended the same school, but their consequences were different. The Black student was locked away in a closet, while the white student sat in the office. This is just one example of how U.S. educators have internalized racialized images that serve as *white noise*, which in turn poses a burden on Black boys (see Mayfield, 2017).

Black Boys' Identity

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” 14 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, [a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades[b] will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:13-20; New International Version (NIV))

Jesus first asked the disciples "who do men say that I am?" Then he asked them "who do you say that I am" (Matthew 16:15, NIV). Peter stated, "you are the son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16, NIV). Jesus told Peter "you could only know this because the Holy Spirit revealed it to you" (Matthew 16:17, NIV).

Notice the progression of Jesus's questioning. Why did Jesus start by asking the disciples “who do men say I am as opposed to who do you think I am?” Possibly He wanted them to know that if you aren’t sure within yourself of who He is, you will be susceptible to whatever the world tells you. Now contrast that with the identity of Black boys of African descent and how “Europeans robbed them of their spirituality and cultural identities” (Smedley, 1999, p. 695). Throughout their lives, Black individuals have been confronted with the question: Who are you? For some of our Black boys, this will be a difficult question to answer.

“Identity is a socially and historically constructed concept” (The Critical Media Project, 2017, introduction). Black and white people alike internalize constructed identity. We learn about our own identity and the identity of others through interactions with family, peers, organizations, institutions, media and other connections in everyday life (The Critical Media Project, 2017, introduction).

As students, Black boys’ education, Black students are constantly left in the hands of white teachers. In 2014, more than 50% of U.S. public school students were students of color, but more than 80% of the teaching force was white (Hrabowski & Sanders, 2015). When it comes to seeing themselves in a positive light, Black boys' identities are in the hands of their white teachers, white schools, and in the hands of the media.

Key facets of identity include gender, social class, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity (The Critical Media Project, 2017, introduction). These facets play significant roles in determining how we “understand and experience the world, as well as shaping the types of opportunities and challenges they face” (The Critical Media Project, 2017, “key concepts,” para. 2). The Black male in particular encounters many identity-related challenges than white males, including discrimination and oppression which they experience throughout their developmental years.

When I speak of discrimination and oppression, the term *nigger* comes to mind. I wonder how many of our Black boys know where the word *nigger* came from and how many know who created it and for what reason? *Nigger* was/is a term used by white men to keep the Black man down...to keep him in his place...to strip him of all his pride, strength, and his identity. Today, unfortunately, many Black boys use the word *nigger* almost daily as a term of endearment. I know from personal experience that Black

boys/men say such phrases as, What's up *nigga*! *Nigga* please! But do they [Black boys] know that their ancestors fought and died not to be called by the name *nigger*?

On May 31, 2017, Basketball superstar LeBron James' Brentwood home was vandalized with racist graffiti (ESPN, 2017, introduction). The word *nigger* was painted on his front gate. LeBron James said in an interview with ESPN,

No matter how much money you have, no matter how famous you are, no matter how many people admire you, being Black in America is tough. We got a long way to go as a society and for us as African Americans until we feel equal in America (Joseph, USA Today, 2017, para. 2).

Some Black boys don't even know where they belong as indicated by James Baldwin's statement that, "It comes as a great shock to discover the country which is your birthplace, and to which you owe your life and your identity, has not in its whole system of reality evolved any place for you" (Baldwin/Raoul, 2017, p. 23).

This study references these negative images, portrayals, influences and biases that shape the Black male identity, as *white noise*.

The reactionary behaviors and coping mechanisms that manifest from this cultural group may appear incomprehensible to one who is not challenged with an anomalous form of self-awareness defined by a conflicting identity that forces the Black male to view himself through the lens of the dominant culture that does not perceive and does not allow him to function as equal" (Nedhari, 2009, 2nd paragraph).

It is critical that the voices, the stories of Black boys become more recognizable and commonplace and that their realities with *white noise* become more attainable for all, especially those in the education field.

Influence of White Noise on Black Children

The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) Supreme Court judgment, declaring “the segregation of public schools on the basis of race unconstitutional,” sparked growing recognition that race discrimination can have far-reaching consequences for the psychological well-being and adjustment of students who are stigmatized” (<http://tmcsh.org/brown-v-board-of-education/>).

Central to the court decision was the contribution of social science research—in particular, that of Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark during the 1940’s (“Brown at 60: The doll test,” n.d.) A series of studies among African American children who ranged from three to seven years old and attended segregated versus integrated schools, found that children of color internalized prevailing negative societal stereotypes and attitudes toward African Americans by as early as four years old. “A majority of the children preferred the white doll and assigned positive characteristics to it. The Clarks concluded that ‘prejudice, discrimination, and segregation’ created a feeling of inferiority among African-American children and damaged their self-esteem” (“Brown at 60: The doll test,” n.d., para. 2). In a particularly memorable episode while Dr. Clark was conducting experiments in rural Arkansas, he asked a Black child which doll was most like him. The child responded by smiling and pointing to the brown doll: “That’s a nigger. I’m a nigger.” Dr. Clark described this experience as disturbing (“Brown at 60: The doll test,” n.d., para. 5).

Influence of White Noise on Black Boys' Schooling: An Endangered Species

According to critical race theorist Richard Delgado (1995), “we cannot identify with or love anyone who is too different from us” (p. 55). Delgado (1995) described the phenomenon of being *beyond love* as the “condition of those who are marginalized to the extent that they are excluded from society’s economy and networks of care and expelled from useful participation in social life” (p. 55). As Delgado went on to say, “not only are certain social groups excluded from institutions and marginalized within society, ... no one really cares about their plight” (p. 49).

This *beyond love* phenomenon is not essentially a problem with Black boys but rather that some educators view Black boys as them, those, or the other (Duncan, 2002, p. 133). Duncan’s (2002) point here was that many studies tacitly construct Black males as a strange population and contributes to the widespread perception that their plight in schools is unremarkable. Duncan went on to say, “the dominant storyline suggests that Black boys are ‘too different’ from other students, and oppositionally so” (p. 133).

Summary of the Literature

Black boys are seen as demons, threat to others, too different, thugs, endangered species, an *americoon*, and as a *nigger*! Before Black boys are killed, their image is dehumanized. Emmett Till, murdered why? For disrespecting a white woman. Trayvon Martin, murdered why? For being an ass hole by wearing a hoodie in a white neighborhood. Tamir Rice, murdered why? For looking older than he was and playing with a toy gun in the park. Michael Brown, murdered why? For looking like a demon. *White Noise/Black Boys*, what will their rite of passage ceremony look like for these Black male participants? Will it be a celebration of accomplishments, overcoming the

obstacles or will it be a ceremony of death? The question remains, who really cares anyway?

This literature review has painted a picture of the distorted ways in which Black boys learn to view themselves within the US educational system. It is critical for educators to recognize these distortions so they can consciously become aware of their contribution to *white noise* and of how their approach to teaching influences Black boys.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and analyze the Black male identity as shaped by the context of white noise at predominately white schools in the Midwest. The two overarching research questions that I asked were: (1) how socially-constructed identities of race and gender impact Black boys within the educational system and (2) who Black boys think they are relative to who others say they are. The specific focus of this phenomenological study was to describe the essential structures that impact Black boys' education experiences, and how *white noise* can drastically impact the Black male identity and his emotional, social and cognitive development (see Finlay, 2012).

Qualitative research is a way of telling a story from the perspectives of the participants and of providing a complex, detailed understanding of an issue (Creswell, 2013, p. 259). Qualitative research is primarily exploratory and aids understanding underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations (Creswell, 2012, p. 4). Qualitative inquiry allowed me to interact with study participants on a personal level, in a comfortable, natural, and non-threatening manner.

Relative to other forms of qualitative inquiry, phenomenological studies in particular seek to describe the essence of participants' lived experience with a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological studies also provide a rich description of experiences and are appropriate when an understanding of unique populations of students is needed (Bean, 1990). For this study, a phenomenological approach enabled understanding Black boys' lived experience with white noise while attending

predominately white schools. This study examined the attitudes and beliefs associated with the phenomenon of Black male identity as shaped by white noise, in the context of an educational experience at a predominately white school.

The Researcher's Role

I am a Black woman who currently works in a predominantly white school system in the Midwest. My racial experiences encountered include growing up in a predominantly Black/poor neighborhood, attending an all-Black elementary school until the third grade, moving to an all-white middle-class community, attending a diverse elementary, middle and high school. After graduating from high school, I attended a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in Texas. In 1985, upon receiving our Bachelor's Degrees, my husband and I moved to Arkansas where I taught in a predominantly Black school district. The majority of the teachers, staff, and students were people of color.

Five years later, my husband and I moved to Nebraska. It was the middle of winter when we arrived. Relocating from the South, this was indeed an eye-opening experience for me. I remember it like it was only yesterday...snow covered the ground and it was very, very cold. After about a month or so, I was hired to teach physical education, coach track and field and gymnastics at a middle school. The majority of students were Black and Hispanic. However, the staff was predominately white. Three years later, I moved to a high school in the same school district where the majority of the students were Black. After five years, I became an administrator in a predominately white school in a white school district and, at the time of this study, had been employed there

for over 17 years. A plethora of multicultural experiences have shaped me into a well-rounded person and prepared me to take on this study.

At the time of this study, I served as a middle school assistant principal in the state of Nebraska. I approached this study as a Black female whose administrative lived experiences have been in a predominately white education system. Until a year before this study, I was the only Black female administrator in the district. At the time of this study, there were two Black female administrators. The other was hired as the principal of the district's level three behavior school. When I initially arrived in the district in 2000, there were four Black male administrators. However, and unfortunately, the district is now down to one. He is an assistant principal at one of the high schools. As for the other Black male administrators, two retired, and one left the area to serve as Director of Elementary Principals in a nearby school district.

Not only is there a shortage of Black administrators, but there is also a shortage of Black teachers, specifically Black male teachers in the district in which I served at the time of the study. As one of an insufficient population of Black educators in the district, it was difficult for me to find my place, to find my voice and to gain acceptance and respect from colleagues and the staff. An example of this attempt to find acceptance occurred one year when a staff member met with the building principal. She informed him that she did not want me as her evaluating administrator, and he honored her request or demand. I too have suffered from the *white noise*.

My journey has been rough, but still I rise. I've been called a racist, and it has been said that I was antisocial, quick-to-anger, hard to talk to, and other stereotypical names or phrases for Black females. Also, I believe wearing my hair in its natural state

has led to not being invited to participate in my district's yearly college/teacher recruiting fairs. Before wearing my hair in its natural state, I was always invited. So, I asked myself the question, why? Is it because my natural hair (formerly afro style and now dreadlocks) are not considered professional in the society in which I work? I wonder. Who determined what was acceptable professional decorum for women?

Biases Foreseen

My culturally-influenced predispositions come from growing up in a world that was vibrant with a variety of cultural experiences. Yes, I bring my biases to this study – biases that may serve as either assets and potential interference. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the phenomenological researcher “usually explores his or her own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions” (p. 27). To pursue this phenomenological study, I identified my own biases and pushed forward while keeping my focus on the study and attempting to limit my own subjective thoughts. To do so, I removed myself from TV, music, social media and news.

My biases involve recollections of my lived experiences with *white noise* as a Black woman who works as an administrator in a predominately white Midwest school system. As a Black female educator/administrator working in a predominantly white district, I can relate to the stories of Black boys—to their struggles, their isolation, and their voices being silenced. I too have been viewed as “the other.” I believe that if I, a Black female administrator in a predominately white district, have experienced *white noise* (as I described in The Researcher's Role), young Black male students have

experienced it as well. What are some of their struggles? What racial issues are they encountering on a daily basis in school? How do they navigate through the *white noise*?

Throughout this dissertation journey, I've tried to balance my role as a wife, an administrator and researcher. As an administrator in a predominately white district, my personal experiences with *white noise* has been a challenge. However, over the years my faith, my prayers and the strength of my husband has been my saving grace. I have been able to set aside my biases. I am aware of my predispositions as I add integrity to all aspects of the study. Now that I have acknowledged my predispositions, I have a sense of balance as a researcher. My participants deserve to have their stories and their perspectives shared, from an unbiased set of lenses.

Finally, I gathered and analyzed information that coincides with the purpose of this phenomenological study. The experiences of the Black boys in this study were much different than mine. All but one had grown up in a Great Plain state and attended predominately white schools throughout their educational careers. As a Black female administrator, my ability to relate to the experience of Black male participants at predominately white schools facilitated my analysis of their interviews.

Participant Recruitment

My reasons for recruiting study participants, related both to convenience and purposefulness. Convenience sampling was relevant because my employment as an administrator in a predominately white public school system in the Midwest provided direct access to most of the student participants and personal connections with the others. Purposeful sampling served my desire to discover, understand, and gain insight from participants from whom I could learn the most (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2007)

recommended three to 15 participants for a phenomenological study. I invited ten, of whom six chose to participate (see Table 1).

Table 1. Potential participant contact information

Pseudonym / Description	Age at Contact	Personally Knew	Source of Contact Information	How Contacted	Whether Participated in Study
Gregg Duncan	22	Yes (knew of & vice versa)	Recommended via friend's FB blast	Emailed directly	Yes
Church contact	20	Yes	Personal knowledge	Emailed directly	No
In jail	19+	Yes	Former student	Called mother	No
On his way to college	18	Yes	Former summer track athlete from program my husband & I ran for 24 years	Emailed mother	No
Heightman	15	Yes	Siblings in Former Track Program; family former members of church	Called & emailed parents	Yes
Calvin Johnson	15	Yes	Guardian attended church	Emailed guardian	Yes
Anthony	14	Yes	School district database; had close personal relationship with sisters	Emailed guardian	Yes
Carlos	13	Yes	School district database; former building student	Emailed parent	Yes
Arthur	13	Yes	School district database; current building student	Called & emailed parents	Yes
Family issue	~13	No	Recommended by a coworker	Called & emailed father	No

I initially invited eight male participants, whom I directly or indirectly knew identified as only Black in race, who were between the ages of 12 and 21, and who were attending or had recently attended a predominately white school in a Great Plains state. One former colleague recommended an additional potential participant who met the same criteria and whom I also invited. On my behalf, another former colleague distributed an invitation -- via Facebook's Messenger and including my contact information -- to selected males of color whom she knew had recently graduated from a particular predominantly white Great Plains school. From that Facebook invitation, a 22-year old young man who identified as only Black and had graduated from a predominantly white K-12 school district contacted me.

For the three of ten potential participants who were over the age of majority, I emailed two directly and called the mother of the third. For the seven of ten potential participants who were under the age of majority (i.e. 19 years in the state in which the boys had most recently completed a K-12 academic year), I called parents or guardians and then followed with information via email.

The email invitation (see Appendix B) informed invitees that, if they chose to participate, the interviews would be held face-to-face and audio recorded. I asked guardians, parents, and/or participants (depending they were of the age of majority), whether they would allow a videographer to record the interview. The videographer was a friend and well known entrepreneur in the Great Plains. All six participants emailed me their consent forms, and the answers to the pre-interview questions. All participants, and their parents or guardians, agreed to be video recorded.

The invitation also included the four pre-interview questions which all participants answered prior to the interview. Additionally, the invitation asked each participant to bring an artifact that described his lived experiences while attending a white school in the Midwest.

Data Collection Plan

Semi-structured and in-depth face-to-face interviews, served as the primary method for gathering data. “Qualitative interviews enable generating a plethora of useful information” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 17). Qualitative interviews enable the researcher to explore the lived experiences of its participants and gather a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Open-ended interviews enabled me to learn about the Black male participants’ experiences by listening to their stories, told in their own voices.

I scheduled each face-to-face interview to accommodate the participants’ schedules and, for those under the age of majority, their parents’ or guardians’ schedules. Each interview took place in a quiet and private setting (see Researcher Journal in Appendix G). The interviews took place either in my school office or at the videographer's studio in the nearby downtown metro area.

To conduct the semi-structured, in-depth interviews, I developed a protocol of approximately 50 open-ended questions, including a few probing questions for clarification/elaboration (see Appendix F). I directed interview questions toward participants’ experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about their identity in the white educational contexts. Given that I had already received signed informed consent forms prior to the interviews, I turned on my i-Phone for audio-recording and the videographer turned on the video-recorders at the beginning of each interview session. I

also observed and took paper-and-pencil notes of participants' body language and my sense of their emotions during the interviews. I similarly noted artifacts that I had invited participants to bring to the interview. Each interview lasted up to 60 minutes.

To gain their first impressions, I immediately asked each boy to choose a crayon color to represent himself and then asked his reason for making that selection. I then asked a couple background warm-up questions and went on to inform participants why I had selected them relative to the purpose of the study. I then proceeded to ask a number of specific interview questions. Part-way through those questions, I elicited one-word or one-phrase associations that came to mind for participants when I mentioned ten or so words (including the term *white noise*) and the names of the four murdered boys. I then asked several more interview questions. I followed this protocol more closely for earlier interviews. For later interviews, I re-sequenced, combined, condensed, and/or eliminated questions that had been answered previously.

Data Analysis

I uploaded the audio recordings files and emailed them to the Rev.com, an on-line transcription website that converts audiovisual recordings to text. I received the completed transcripts through email as Word documents. I then read each transcript carefully, and sent a copy to each participant for verification. While reading each transcript in its entirety, I made notes in the margins or highlighted significant statements and keywords. I used a similar process for the artifacts.

I also used NVivo (2016), to organize collected data and supportive background videos. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software designed to help the researcher work with small or large volumes of data that require deep levels of analysis

for. NVivo enabled easily organizing participants' interviews and artifacts, as well as subsequently assigning codes to those documents. Coding is the process of organizing data by bracketing chunks of text or image segments and writing a word or phrase that represents a category.

Once the coding process was completed, I then constructed individual textural descriptions for each participant (see Moustakas, 1994, regarding textural and structural descriptions). Then I created a composite of experiences with *white noise* for the group of participants. I derived a synthesis of meaning of *white noise* and its impact on Black male participants. Four themes emerged from the interviews and artifacts. Consistent with qualitative phenomenological studies, I attempted to reduce participants' individual experiences to a description of essential structures (Moustakas, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

Applicable to any study, I maintained the dignity, respect, and ethical considerations of the research participants. Before recruiting participants, I obtained approval from Doane University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study in a way that retained the legal rights outlined in the Informed Consent form (see Appendices A and E). After obtaining this permission to invite participants between the ages of 12 and 21, I subsequently revised the IRB application to include ages 12 through 23, although participants were ultimately between the ages of 13 and 22. The consent form explained the purpose of the study and that there was minimal to no perceived risk or direct benefit to their participation in this study.

Prior to arranging each interview, I emailed parents (or emailed participants, for those ages 19 or over) with an informed consent script, an informed consent form, and an

interview information sheet (see Appendices B, C, and D). Each participant (and their parents, for participants under the age of 19) read, signed, and returned a consent form. Study participants participated voluntarily and without coercion or reward. I told them before and at the time of the interview that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time and that they could also ask questions at any point during the interview. They knew that, if they decided to withdraw, their information would not be used for the study.

To ensure confidentiality for within this dissertation document, I have identified each participant by a pseudonym that he chose. I will store the data, transcripts, and audio recordings for the study on a locked and password-protected electronic device. The video recordings are on a thumb drive in a secured and locked file cabinet. I will retain both for seven years after the completion of the study.

Verification Strategies

As with many qualitative studies, I endeavored to show transparency more than to formulate a more linear form of validity (see Morrow, 2005). My efforts in this regard included:

- *I provided each study participant with a copy of the transcript* and asked them to review what Rev.com had transcribed. I offered to read the transcript out loud to each participant and gave them an opportunity to reply with indication of whether they agreed or disagreed with the transcription. Five of the six participants sent an email or called confirming that the transcripts needed no revisions. Once participants confirmed their agreement, I anonymized the transcripts.
- *Soliciting formal and informal debriefings, methodological reviews, and peer reviews.* A fellow educator served as a peer reviewer by reading the stories of

chapter 4 findings and chapter 5 discussion. A methodological mentor also read all chapters and conducted a debriefing of written findings and key study components relative to my oral expression of those. My husband also served as an informal debriefer in the sense that he listened to my various conversations along the way. He also provided the graphic images of generic Black boys' faces for this dissertation document. All of these individuals were knowledgeable of the purposes for which they reviewed the study. These various peer reviewers and debriefers were able to review the data and enhance the credibility of the findings.

- Providing detailed excerpts from each participant's interview to serve as individual *textural descriptions* followed by thematic and other analysis across interviews related to white noise and the other being *structural design* of how the white noise was experienced (see Saldaña, 2016) regarding textural and structural analysis). Providing an abstract logo for each participant as synthetic triangulation of their interview and artifact.
- Maintaining a detailed *researcher journal* regarding the data collected, coded, and categorized as documentation (see Researcher Journal in Appendix G).

Summary of Methodology

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach. The central research questions were: (1) how do socially constructed identities of race and gender impact Black boys, especially within the educational system and (2) who Black boys think they are relative to who others say they are. Study participants were Black boys, ages 13 through 22, who were attending or had recently attended a predominantly White school in the Midwest and who were selected through convenience and purposeful sampling.

Unstructured face-to-face interviews were conducted among study participants. Data also included artifacts. Ethical considerations were addressed by means of an informed consent form and through the use of pseudonyms for boys' names.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This findings chapter represents the focal point of this phenomenological study. Previous chapters have laid the groundwork. They explained the purpose behind the study, the questions explored, and a description and stories of the participants and how it fits within the overall body of study related to the subject *white noise* under construction. In this chapter, the results of the data analysis are presented. I collected and processed the data in response to the purpose statement and two overarching research questions. The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the essence of participants' lived experience with a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this particular phenomenological study was to describe and analyze the Black male identity as shaped by the context of white noise at predominately white schools in the Midwest. The research questions asked (1) how socially-constructed identities of race and gender impact Black boys within the educational system and (2) who Black boys think they are relative to who others say they are.

The boys in this study shared their stories and experiences about the phenomenon of being Black while attending a predominantly white school. They were as young as 13 and mature as 22. They came in assorted colors of yellow, sepia, burnt sienna and brown. Table 2 provides demographic and other interview information. The crayon color is the one each boy chose to best represent himself.

They were bold, they were brilliant, they were Black. Meet the unforgettable six Nubian Kings – The Talented Six.

Table 2. Demographic and interview descriptions

Pseudonym	Age	Current Grade	Crayon Color	Years Attended White School	Self-Description
Gregg Duncan	22	2017 college graduate	Burnt Sienna	K-12 + 4 years of college	Ambitious
Carlos	13	7th grade	Brown	K-7	Outspoken
Heightman	15	9th grade	Yellow	K-9 (private school)	Understanding
Arthur	13	7th grade	Sepia	K-7	Human Being
Calvin Johnson	15	8th grade	Burnt Sienna	8th grade	Respectful Kid
Anthony	14	8th grade	Yellow	K-8	Bright

Narrating the Individual Interviews

I now narrate the individual stories of the six Black boys. For each boy, I start with their answers to the word association game in which I asked participants to say the first word that comes to their mind when I say a word. During the activity, I named four Black males who had been killed over the years. From there, I present the boys' answers to the questions: who are you? How do you see yourself? Then proceed with their answers to the remaining interview questions.

Gregg Duncan

Our first traveler is Gregg Duncan, a strong-willed and laid-back young man. Here is his story.

Emmett Till-Wronged; Trayvon Martin-Child; Tamir Rice-Kid; Michael Brown-Innocent.

I'm 22, Burnt Sienna. Hilarious, witty, kind, compassionate, ambitious, college graduate. I'm Gregg Duncan.

When asked why he chose the color Burnt Sienna to best represent him, Gregg Duncan described the color as "Warm, kind of like a light brown." He went on to say that he was "one of the lighter brown skinned ones in [his] family," which he said are "mostly . . . pretty dark complexions."

I had previously asked Gregg Duncan by email, who he is and how he sees himself, he said:

A lot of my makeup is due to my upbringing . . . My parents instilled many values in me from a very early age. I was taught to act a certain way because I would always be representing the Duncan family. They didn't emphasize Black culture, or what makes you Black. It was mainly values, especially growing up in a Christian home. So, my Christian faith has a lot to do with the way I act and how I carry myself. Growing up in a Christian home with Christian values has kept me level-headed and mindful of what is transpiring in the world.

Returning to our face-to-face interview, I asked Gregg Duncan to share his lived experiences as a Black male attending a white school, which he had done his entire life. Gregg Duncan stated:

I mean as far as my personal experiences, I didn't have too many instances where there was prejudice or anything like that. He continued by elaborately stating "I think a lot of that has to do with the Air Force Base and there being so many different kinds of people that have come in all around the world. There was some diversity as far as schools but I . . . didn't have too many instances where I was like, "Aw man, I'm Black so I can't do that."

Gregg Duncan characterized his lived experience as "mostly good" and concluded by saying that white people have made "a lot of . . . subtle or ignorant comments" to or about him, which he thought all Black people encounter.

As the interview continued, I asked Gregg Duncan whether he saw himself anywhere in the educational system—in the classroom, curriculum, academics, sports/clubs or discipline. He said:

I think [the teachers] preconceived notions about how we're supposed to be [have influenced] what they've [expected to] experience in the classroom. And then when they meet me, and they're like, "That's definitely not what I was expecting to hear." Like "Wow!" They . . . weren't expecting me to be as insightful or open [as I am to] a wide range of what I was saying.

When I wanted to know his perspective on how the education system portrayed Black boys, Gregg Duncan responded that the educational system and professors don't expect Black boys to do well or to "be interested in what's going on because

[educators] believe, '[Black boys] probably just interested in their sports, [and] their recreational activities'."

Turning to Gregg Duncan's relationships with teachers and with members of his peer group, Gregg Duncan said, "I never really had a teacher growing up that I didn't care for." About his relationship with his peer group, he said that, although he "had Black friends, [he] predominantly [had] white friends growing up." With those friends, he "never really had . . . in-depth conversations about race."

I asked Gregg Duncan how many Black male teachers he had had during his school years. After quick reflection, Gregg Duncan replied "Whoa, now that's a good question." He laughed and went on to say, "Man, I don't think it was until . . . 8th grade where I had this Black female teacher, and then it wasn't really until I got to [university] . . . [that] I had two black professors . . . of African descent." This is an example of *institutional bias* (refer to Figure 4).

I then asked Gregg Duncan whether he thought his teachers had necessary knowledge of Black boys. He said that they had "only experienced a certain type of Black male, and [that] they'd . . . had stereotype[s]." He clarified by saying that teachers did have experience with Black males but that as far as their understanding was concerned, their perceptions mostly stemmed from ignorance. He then said that "ignorance can lead to a lot of things but [that] sometimes ignorance is just ignorance." This is an example of *cultural mismatch* (refer to Figure 4).

I went on to ask Gregg Duncan how he defined identity. He responded with these words, "Be who you are" and "Don't let anyone ever tell you, 'Aw man, that's weird' or ask 'Why do you act like that?'" To encourage deeper response, I asked Gregg Duncan what history had taught him about Black identity. He stated that the schools he had grown up in didn't teach Black history. When he "took American History after 1865 [during his] first semester of college, [he] learned more . . . about race and racism [in] America" than he had in his "entire high school [and] elementary school career." "When it came to Black identity and Black issues" his elementary and high school career had "skipped over a lot and . . . definitely . . . glossed over [the omissions] to make them not seem as bad." His frustration was evident when he rhetorically asked, "Why didn't they tell us about this?" Gregg Duncan pointed out the importance of not skipping over "that large section of our history" for purposes of empathy and understanding. Gregg Duncan was that he was mostly shocked and intrigued as well. This is an example of *culturally responsive classroom management* (refer to Figure 4).

I straight-forwardly asked Gregg Duncan, "Are you proud to be a Black male?" He quickly and confidently replied, "Oh yes, absolutely. I love everything about being Black. Especially when I get to educate others about what I believe it means to be Black."

When I asked how Gregg Duncan thought society had portrayed the Black male throughout history, he responded that “the Black males [have] been portrayed as a *one-trick pony*.”

I then asked Gregg Duncan to give me his perspective on how the media portrays Black boys. He replied “Definitely not great . . . definitely not in the best light,” especially not interactions of Black men [with] police officers.

When I asked if he had ever been called Nigger by a white person, Gregg Duncan responded with an emphatic, “Yes!”

As the interview neared an end, I asked Gregg Duncan if there was anything else he would like to share related to shaping of the Black male identity. Gregg Duncan added that what I was doing with my study was “really important . . . because a lot of times . . . stories about Black males in the education system [come from] the south or the west [but that] the Midwest . . . gets overlooked in a lot of different scenarios.” Gregg Duncan especially pointed out the importance of my study relative to the predominantly-white Midwest. He said that, “Just sharing the experiences of Black males growing up in the education system, especially in the Midwest . . . [is] really important.”

For his artifact, Gregg Duncan performed an excerpt from a song called *You in the Sixth* by “the one [and only], Mr. Drake.” The excerpt Gregg Duncan rapped was, “I used to get teased for being Black, and now I’m here, and I’m not Black enough. Cause I’m not acting tough or making up stories about where I’m actually from.” Gregg Duncan went on to say that the excerpt “really resonated with [him] because [he had] gotten push back--opposition from white people and Black people . . . White people [think] ‘Oh man, you don’t act Black.’” When Gregg Duncan “get[s] that line” from white people, he wonders “How’s a Black person supposed to act?” At the same time, Black people, even Gregg Duncan’s family members, say, “Well, you don’t really act Black,” at which point Gregg Duncan wonders, “Okay guys, which one is it?” Gregg Duncan said he loves hearing the accusation because it offers him a chance to say, “oooh, . . . let me talk about that.” Gregg Duncan ended by saying that the *You in the Sixth* lyric “really related to how [he] felt growing up.”



Figure 5. *Tug-of-War*: My representation of Gregg Duncan⁵

⁵ Compiled from Lenten regulations (cross) and google.user.content (tug-of-war)

From “burnt sienna” to “brown,” let’s take a look at the perspective of a thirteen-year-old boy on what it means to be Black in America.

Carlos is the next traveler on life's road to equality. Although only thirteen years old, he is quite aware of who is as a black boy and how black boys are perceived in America. He has an interesting story to tell and this is how it goes.

Carlos

Emmett Till-Whistling; Trayvon Martin-George Zimmerman; Tamir Rice-Police. Actually, I'd say young African American. Yep, mm-hmm The police is connected too; Michael Brown-Uh, police.

I’m 13, Brown. Made by God, family and environment. I'm a young African American growing up in a predominantly white school whose been harder on because of my race... I think, a seventh grader. I’m Carlos.

In response to the questions I asked Carlos by email, he replied that he was “a young African American growing up in a predominantly white school” where teachers were “harder on [him] because of [his] race.” He went on to say that, “God made me who I am and my family and the environment.”

According to what Carlos wrote, he wanted his teachers to know that, “Black, white, Asian, yellow, green, we’re all the same. It's not the color on your skin that makes you do the things you do, it's the person within you.”

Later, during my face to face interview with Carlos, I asked him to share his “lived experience” as a Black male in a predominately white school environment. Carlos replied:

Different, you know? I feel like once I hit elementary, I felt like once teachers heard something, that [they immediately assumed] I did something (while snapping his fingers). [They think,] “He's always gonna be like that, he can't change, that's just who he is, and we gotta keep our eye out for him.”

Carlos went on to say, “But I feel like as I'm going up, my teachers warn the other teachers about me.” Carlos concluded his statement with, “It's hard to change the way somebody looks at you after past stuff.” This is an example of *teacher bias* (refer to Figure 4).

I then posed the question to Carlos of whether, as a Black boy, he saw himself anywhere in the educational system, such as in the classroom, the curriculum, academics, in sports or clubs, and in discipline. His response was “I think there only are three classes [sessions] where we talked about Blacks.”

I inquired about his perspective on how the education system portrayed Black boys. Carlos responded that teachers basically taught “we were slaves, and that, Africans sold Africans . . . I’d be that person in class to [ask], ‘But what about them [Nat Turner, etc.]?’” But teachers would say, “Yeah, but that’s not what we’re talking about.” Carlos’ explanation of teachers’ responses was “I think some of it is because they don’t want to talk about it, and, partially because they don’t know about it.”

I asked Carlos about his relationships with teachers. Carlos replied:

Ms. Riley, at my school is an African American teacher, she’s always preaching about African Americans, about our history, saying that we [Black boys] got it good, because back then things were different, you [Black people] weren’t allowed to do things, they weren’t allowed to do things that we... do now.

Speaking about his peer group, Carlos replied that, “I try to have my own Black group... I kind of have like my clique, which has been all, mainly Black people.” He spoke in more detailed about his peer group by saying:

but the Black people that I’m with, they don’t... like understand where they’re from that much. So it’s kind of like different, you know? Like, [Black friends] don’t know about their past history ... like, they grew up in a white school, so they’re not white, but that’s ... their mindset’s the same. I try to have conversation with them, but none of them take me seriously, though.

I asked Carlos a question about the number of Black male teachers he had during his school years, He flat out said “Actually, I had none. No Black males.”

I asked Carlos if he thought his teachers had the necessary knowledge about Black boys. His response was “I think they know... stuff that a lot of people know, like that we [Black people] used to be slaves. Not a lot, but most people [white teachers] know that we used to be slaves.” Carlos went on to say “I think white people, what they have on us is like a stereotype. It’s like all Blacks are like this type, you know? But I think it’s just a whole big stereotype that they have on us.” This is an example of *cultural mismatch* (refer to Figure 4).

Reflecting back on previous conversations I have had with Carlos, I asked Carlos to share any experience he had had relating to speaking out in class. He replied “That happened too many times. I could name, like, two, three times.” He shared this story, “So, one [time] that happened at my school was when this one teacher, was yelling at these [white] girls in the back of the class. . . He’s yelling at them, ‘You guys never listen, you guys wonder why I give you this much homework,’ or whatever. And [the teacher] ended his whole statement with, ‘And you guys wonder why Black people get beat and killed by the police’” Carlos said that he was furious. He went on to say that,

I was getting on [the teacher] for that. I was like, “You don't know ..., like it all happens for a reason, and it's not all fair.” And I was just mad, like, I was cussing at him, too. So I just walked out of class and went to the office.

This is an example of the *centrality of whiteness* (refer to Figure 4).

When I asked Carlos to define identity, he responded with these words “The way that you look at yourself, the way other people look at you. It's all just one big identity.”

Next, I asked Carlos to talk about how the stories he has heard or read, may have influenced his perception of the Black identity. Carlos replied:

That growing up back in the day, 1900, or from when they brought us out of [Africa], to now, it's hard for us, like, living in this world. And Black people didn't just get freedom just because some white ... guy was like, ‘oh yeah, let's just give them freedom.’ No, we earned it.

Reflecting upon his previous statements, Carlos stated, “To this day ... they say we're free, but it doesn't feel like we are, feels like there's still something, like holding us down, you know?”

I asked the straight forward question, “Are you proud to be a Black male?” Carlos said “Yeah, I'm proud to be Black. Because, like, I got a whole bunch of history. I'd still be proud to be Black, because it's who I am, and I wouldn't wanna be anything else other than that. We got like a whole story to us.”

I wanted Carlos to explain, from his perspective, how he thought society has portrayed the Black male throughout history. Carlos brought up a conversation that he and I had prior to my invitation to participate in the interview. He said:

Like, that one picture that you showed me, it was from the 1700s, when we were brought over with chains, and then it was the 1800s, we were being lynched. And then 2000, we get bullets” (see Figure 6 and Figure 7).

He continued to describe the picture “Yeah, and that one face that was like a face...around their dead body. Like, those pictures basically show how ... they changed the way that they're killing us [Black boys]. But it's still happening.” He went on to say “Just because we're [Black boys] not being hanged, we're still being put down, and, killed six feet under.



Figure 6. First image Carlos mentioned: The Black male: Methods of death⁶



Figure 7. Second image Carlos mentioned: White Chalked Bodies/Black Face⁷

I asked Carlos to give me his perspective on how the media portrays Black boys, He replied “Well, the news, I'd say negative, from what I see. But I mean, there's probably still positive stuff that they [media] don't mention. Like, the media just wants people to think that we're [Black boys] all that type of way.”

After listening to his perspective on the media, I asked Carlos if he thought police treated white and Black people differently. His response was that:

I've seen videos of white guys pointing guns at a cop, and they don't even shoot them. [Cops just] say, 'I'ma give you five seconds, just don't do that.' And the cop just tackles [a white guy]. But if it's a Black, like, Michael Brown, was that his name, Michael Brown? Yeah, when they

⁶ Retrieved from www.thepictaram.club

⁷ “Wake Up” retrieved from PB Large on Apple Music

shot him in the middle of the street. They didn't have to it was uncalled for.

In a related line of questioning, I ask Carlos if he knew who created the “N” word and what it meant. He struggled to remember and said “The word nigger means, itself, not intelligent, I know it means unintelligent. Finally, he said, ‘Ignorant, yeah, that's the word.’” When I followed up with the question, “Have you ever been called Nigger by a white person?” he responded “Yes, I have.”

My final interview question to Carlos was what would be the one thing he would change about America, as it relates to Black males, if he had the power to do so. He clearly stated “Just the way that we're looked at.”

Carlos's creativity was on full display when he wrote and rapped his own profound rap lyrics as his Artifact:

Imagine a Dalmatian wit very few Black spots. That look at u different cuz u white, they not. Always lying putting you down, you wanna fit in so become the class clown. Hav u ever been picked on because of ur skin, and walked around the school wit very little Black friends. Well here's the story of me, a kid who knows background, whose picked himself up then been knocked back down. Ever since elementary, it felt lik a penitentiary, here to tell my testamentary. About my documentary all I felt was pain, I never liked being one of the only Blacks, something needed to change. They'd always accuse me of stealing, sayin stuff lik, Ima grow up killin. Teachers look at me differently because of my color, buh I bet if I was white, they'd treat me lik the others. they always talk to me lik I'm slow. Always sayin sentence lik how slow you gonna go. So I start to not listen lik, I'm the same as the others. Lik the kid next to me, and his sister and brother. Always bring up parts of my pass that's irrelevant. if u talk to me, talk to me with intelligence.” He completed his interview stating “I was basically saying, like, I was looked at differently in school, all the teachers would kind of talk to me like I didn't understand what they were saying. And, like, basically [that's] how school was growing up.



Figure 8. *Rebel*: My representation of Carlos⁸

⁸ Retrieved from Challenge Clip Art (Hanslodge.com)

What have you, as the readers of this dissertation, seen through the eyes of Carlos? Even at thirteen, he has had a critical story to tell. Is his story an anomaly? From Brown to Yellow, let's see what life is like from the eyes of the next fellow. His name is Heightman and this is his story. Some might consider Heightman a bit quirky. Others may see him as somewhat intriguing and funny and others may see him as just the typical fifteen-year-old kid. What do you think?

Heightman

Emmett Till-Killed; Trayvon Martin-Killed; Tamir Rice-I don't know who that is; Michael Brown-Killed, yeah with all this [laughs]

I'm 15, Yellow. I'm me, person with own frequency and vibrations, ninth grade. I'm Heightman.

In response to my email question "Who are you?" Heightman's response was "I am me, a person with their own frequency and vibrations. I see myself by the way I treat others and how I want to be treated."

I then ask "What makes you who you are?" He replied "experiences, parents, grandparents, influences of adults & teachers, closest friends."

My final email question to Heightman gave him the opportunity to tell his teacher(s) what he wanted them to know about him. Heightman's response was "I want my teachers to know about me then he stated, "Honestly I have no idea."

When I sat down with Heightman to conduct our face to face interview, I asked him to share his lived experiences as a Black male attending a white school his from kindergarten to the present. He replied "that I had to find my place in the classroom," especially when he was younger.

I proceeded to question him about whether as a Black boy, he saw himself anywhere in the educational system. Concerning whether Heightman saw himself in the curriculum, he said "Oh, yeah. For sure."

When I asked how, he responded that, "Man, that's a hard question."

When I asked about sports and clubs, Heightman said that, "In sports, it's always . . . can you score? Can you defend? Can you that? It's nothing color-wise. It's really just, are you a team player?"

When I asked him how he thought the education system portrayed Black boys, Heightman said “I don’t believe it portrays us as a Black man in any way.” This is an example of *cultural mismatch* (refer to Figure 4).

Next, I asked Heightman about the number of Black male teachers he had over the years, his response was simply “I believe zero, actually.”

Considering Heightman never had a Black male teacher, I asked Heightman if he thought his teachers had the necessary knowledge about Black boys. His response was, “Probably not, especially in middle school.” He expounded by saying that, he:

switched schools, because I wasn't really understanding the teachers. I wasn't on the same page with them. I was also a little more, I had more energy than they did, so it was always a struggle for them, I guess.

When I asked him to explain the struggle, he said it was “more of a discipline thing. I was a little more hyper and energetic in class than being focused on the classwork. It wasn't being rude or anything. I was just being, you know, talkative.” This is an example of *teacher bias* (refer to Figure 4).

I asked if he thought Black boys were viewed differently in a predominantly white school setting, and he replied “Mostly in sports, I'd say. Just depending on what you're doing. People don't expect that I'm playing golf . . . or doing robotics.” This is an example of *the challenge to dominant ideology* (refer to Figure 4).

At this point in the interview, I asked Heightman to define identity. His response was “My family name.”

Continuing the probing questions, I ask Heightman “Are you proud to be a Black male?” He replied:

Absolutely. I mean, I'm proud to be Black because, especially going to a white school, ... there aren't as many African Americans that I can talk to. So, you know, being proud of being this color and being different is pretty special, and I take pride in that. So, that's one reason I like being Black.

I asked him to describe Black male and his place in society. In response to each of my probes about historical and contemporary perspectives, Heightman responded that the role of Black males was to “Put food on the table.”

I then asked Heightman to give me his perspective on how the media portrays Black boys, he replied: “A lot of it's basketball.”

I asked Heightman did he think police treat white and Black people differently. His response was:

Yes. I mean, even in the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, they were making fun of how police treat African Americans, how you should act, poking fun at it.

And that was forever ago, so you know ... It's still happening, which is pretty amazing to think about.

Making a sharp turn in the questioning, I ask him “Do you know who created the ‘N’ word and what it means?” he replied, “I do not. But I do know what it means.” He went on to explain that “It's just a way to put someone down. I guess now it has a different meaning, especially now rappers are just throwing it around like it's candy, and it's not.” I followed up with the question “Have you ever been called Nigger by a white person?” Heightman responded with an emphatic “Yes!”

Finally, I asked Heightman, if there were one thing he could change about America, relative to Black males, what it would be. Not surprisingly, he said, “I'd have to think about that.”

To describe his artifact, Heightman said, “My artifact is ... some sport, like soccer, soccer ball or basketball or football.” He then elaborated by saying,

Just because when I was growing up, sports were a huge thing for me. Not only because you could show your skill and it wouldn't matter what race you are or anything, because you're gonna play if you're good, so it's like that sort of thing.

He ended with a rather enlightening statement “And it also brought me closer to friends. We could all agree on something, have fun, when we're just hanging around, playing around.



Figure 9. *Free Spirited*: My representation of Heightman⁹

I can imagine Heightman saying, “I wish the world could see that I just want to be me. I’m Heightman, human like you, I think.” Yellow is bright, so let’s see what Sepia is like. His name is Arthur.

Arthur is full of confidence and appreciation of the talent he possesses. He is very comfortable with just about everyone he encountered on his journey and sees himself as no different than anyone else. Let's' take a closer look at Arthur's story.

⁹ “About Myself Girl” (Retrieved from Children-learningreading.info)

Arthur

Emmett Till-I don't know who that is; Trayvon Martin-Teenager; Tamir Rice-I don't know who that is; Michael Brown-school graduate.

I'm 13 Sepia. Blessed with intelligence, and athletic talent, seventh grade. I'm Arthur.

When asked to select a crayon color that best represents him, Arthur selected the color Sepia. "Because as being Black, I feel appreciative of it."

In response to my email question of who he was and how he saw himself, Arthur stated "I am Arthur, and I see myself as being blessed with intelligence and athletic talent."

In response to what Arthur would like his teacher(s) to know about him, he wrote, "I like to help out younger kids and be a role model for them."

As we started our face to face interview, I asked Arthur to share his lived experiences as a Black male who had been attending a white school his entire life, Arthur stated:

I would talk about how I was always in the [white] system, and I've never been exposed to a predominantly Black school, so I would talk about how when [teachers] would talk about segregation and how I would feel about it, and my feelings when I realized how I was in a predominantly white school in my younger ages and how you're surrounded by people that are white, so you're mostly gonna talk to people that are white, being taught by people that are white, and then there's not gonna be that many Black people in the school you may be able to talk to. I feel like I may have different feelings as some of the other [white] kids in the class.

This is an example of the *centrality of whiteness* (refer to Figure 4).

As with the other participants, I asked Arthur, as a Black boy, whether he see himself anywhere in the educational system: in the classroom, the curriculum, in academics, in sports or clubs, and in discipline, he gave this response:

I feel that I'm the same as everyone else and I can use my voice and I can talk to other teachers without a problem, without a difference from any white male, or any white female. Or any Black female. And I feel like the teachers in the curriculum did a good job. They treat all teachers- they treat all students the same.

I inquired about his perspective on how the education system portrayed Black boys. He replied:

From my experience, . . . I feel like they have done a good job with [portraying Black males]. They treat everyone the same. Like they don't

treat white males or white females differently than they would treat any Black female or Black male.

I asked Arthur to talk about his relationship with his teachers and who was a part of his peer group. His response was:

I feel like I have like really good relationship with all my teachers. Since I live in a predominantly white school, I have mostly white friends, but I still do have, am friends with Black people in the school. Pretty much most of them, . . . all of them. So I'm pretty much friends with everyone, no matter the color.

I asked Arthur if he had any Black male teachers over the years, His reply, the same as Carlos and Heightman, was an emphatic “No!”

I asked if he thought Black boys were viewed differently in school, Arthur replied, “No, I don't think that they're viewed differently than anyone else.” He went on to explain that, “Because I feel like, . . .if one student that was white asked a question, then [the teachers] for example would explain to the whole class, so everyone gets it.” Arthur also went on to say that, if he were confused, the teachers would answer his question and help him out. In other words, Arthur inferred that, in his experience, teachers help everyone, and that the color of the person who asked a question did not influence the explanation a teacher gave.

I asked Arthur if he thought his teachers had the necessary knowledge about Black boys understood him “inside and out.” After giving the question some thought, his response was:

I don't think [teachers] might fully understand, because [the] majority [of] all my teachers are white. They probably attended white schools. If they went to a predominately white school, they [saw] many kids that are white and not a lot of kids that are Black. So they might not have had the experience of what we [Black boys] have had.

Shifting gears a little in the line of questioning, I asked Arthur if he had ever been asked to speak on behalf of all Black people. His quick response was “No!” but responded with this personal insight, “Sometimes I feel uncomfortable, like when we're talking about segregation and how white people and Black people didn't always get along. I don't know but like I feel a little bit uncomfortable.”

In his introduction, Arthur identified himself as “I am Arthur and I see myself as being.” At this point in the interview, I asked him to define identity. Arthur's response was, “It's like who you are. Like who you are portrayed as.”

I ask Arthur to talk about how the stories he has heard or read, may have influenced his perception of the Black identity. Arthur talked about one book he remembered reading in elementary school, “called Bud not Buddy. It took place in during segregation.”

In trying to understand to what degree these stories that Arthur has read or heard about the Black identity effects his view of himself, I asked, “Are you proud to be a Black male?” Arthur confidently replied “Yes, I’m proud.” He went on to say “And I feel like I’m lucky to be surrounded by . . . great influences like Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X and many more.”

I ask Arthur to talk about his views on how society has portrayed the Black male throughout history. His response was:

What I remember, the Black man [and his] place in society, . . . they used to be slaves. And, they did some great things. Which many people don't know . . . My mom told me that some of the white inventors, they got some of their ideas from Black people. And also, some of them . . . inventors . . . made great things. And then some of them, inspired people, and then they released the slaves by helping them run away. For example, Harriet Tubman. And today I feel like we're all in the same place.”

In his attempt to make sense of it all, he said,
even though there's still racism in this country, I feel like we're in the same place as some white males and females, because of some of the people who stood up for segregation, and fought for our rights so that we could vote and not everything would be fair for everybody in the United States.

I asked Arthur how he thought the media portrayed Black boys. He began by saying, “I know that sometimes people would say that Black males, in . . . bad neighborhoods . . . would do shootings and stuff like that, but that's not fully true.” He explained that “it could happen with anyone, and just 'cause Black males do it, it doesn't make a difference. Like, any color of skin, just 'cause you are portrayed as a Black male, it doesn't make you different from anyone else. We're all human beings, and it doesn't really matter. Just 'cause you do something negative, doesn't mean someone else that has a different skin color can do the same exact thing, 'cause no one's perfect.”

Next, I asked Arthur if he thought police treated white and Black people differently. He replied “I feel that most police do, but at the same time I feel like some of the police don't treat Black people the same as they would treat white people.”

At one point in the interview, we played a word association game, these were a few of his responses: Black?--Brown. Black boys?—“Nothing's really coming to my head.” Bold? —“Nothing's really coming to my head.”

I asked Arthur if he knew who created the “N” word and its meaning, he responded “Yes, I know who created it. It was actually white people that created it, and that's what they call Black people as an insult.” Then I asked him “have you ever been called Nigger by a white person. Arthur said, “Yes!”

My final interview question for Arthur was, “what would be the one thing you would change about America, as it relates to Black males, if you had the power to do so?” Similar to Carlos, Arthur said, “How people think of us.” He also stated, “Or, I feel like, if I could change anything it would be racism.” He proceeded to explain that:

Because Martin Luther King did a really good job with it. But, as sad as it is, there's still racism around, like the KKK is still around, which was around since the early, well late 1800's, I'm pretty sure it was. And I wish that, like it could put a complete stop to it. Even though it's like gone down significantly over the years.

For Arthur's artifact, he presented a picture, about which he said:

I have a picture from my birthday party. At a hotel, and it shows that, as you see, there's only one Black friend that I had there. And the rest of them were all white. This was my thirteenth birthday.

This is his interesting analysis,

That's saying to me that, of all the people I invited to my party, I had my good friends, [and] they're mostly white, and one of my really good friends are Black. Even though I have more Black friends, but of my really good friends, only one of them was Black.

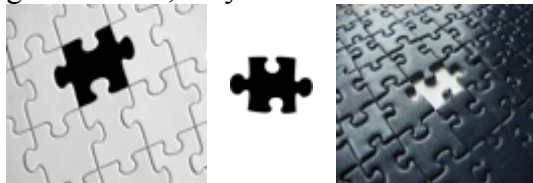


Figure 10. *Puzzled*: My representation of Arthur¹⁰

Is a Sepia crayon in a box full of White crayons, a crayon or a Sepia crayon? Does it matter? Should it matter? Arthur says I'm a human being. Let's hear from a “Burnt Sienna.” Meet Calvin Johnson.

Calvin Johnson's experience is a little different than the other five participants. He was raised in a predominately Black environment for several years then transplanted into a predominately white environment during his pre-teen years. His story is just as interesting.

¹⁰ Compiled from Pixabay (via Creative Commons license) and from Radically Christian

Calvin Johnson

Emmett Till-Emmitt Smith; Trayvon Martin-Black guy killed. That was the ... that Black guy; Tamir Rice-Black woman; Michael Brown-I don't know him.

I'm 15 Burnt Sienna. Well-rounded young man. Very disciplined household, eighth grade. I'm Calvin Johnson.

In response to my email question, "Who are you and how do you see yourself?" Calvin Johnson responded, "Calvin Johnson. Well-rounded young man. Very disciplined household."

I asked if he felt he was able to use his voice in school and to explain, Calvin Johnson simple responded with "yes, definitely." Calvin Johnson provided no explanation. He may not have fully understood the question.

In the same email, I asked Calvin Johnson what he would like his teacher(s) to know about him, his response was, "I am very respectful, because I listen while they're talking."

When I sat down with Calvin Johnson to conduct our face to face interview, I asked him to share his lived experiences as a Black male currently attending a white school [compared to growing up in a predominant Black, compared to where you are today]. Calvin Johnson replied "It was kinda no different. I mean, I still have my friends there, I wasn't treated differently, I just got switched to a different type of area."

As a Black boy in a predominately white school environment, I asked Calvin whether he could see or view himself as a Black male anywhere in the educational system; in the classroom, the curriculum, in academics, in sports/clubs and discipline, Calvin Johnson thought for a moment then said "How do I view myself? Just a normal guy, an average guy."

I inquired about his perspective on how the education system portrayed Black boys, he replied:

there's a lot of information that's not being told, but it's basically the same things, you know, what we've been learning for years. It's nothing new. There's nothing new being presented for African American history. You know, MLK... the same basic things...from my school years."

I asked Calvin Johnson to talk about his relationship with his teachers and who was a part of his peer group, his response was "I connected to a lot of my buddies that I played [sports] with in eighth grade, and I connected to my teachers, we bonded very well. I'm always good with teachers."

I asked Calvin Johnson if he had had any Black male teachers over the years [at predominantly Black school], he replied “About eight, eight or nine.” Then I asked whether Calvin had had a Black male teacher since he started attending a predominantly white school. Just like Carlos and Heightman, he gave an emphatic “Nah!”

I asked if he thought Black boys were viewed differently in school, Calvin Johnson replied, “Probably ... they probably watch us a little bit more than the white students. Just because of the reputation we [Black boys] supposedly have.” This is an example of *teacher bias* and of *institutional bias* (refer to Figure 4).

I asked Calvin Johnson if he thought his teachers had the necessary knowledge about Black boys he politely said, “Yes, ma'am” then gave this explanation, “We watched a few movies during my eighth-grade school-year about slavery, and the first Black army to help the Civil War. I forget their number, but we watched a movie about that.” He added “We touch on a lot of Black, I mean, African American subjects during school.”

I asked Calvin Johnson if there was a time when he spoke out in class where biases, behavior, relationship and fairness came in to play. He responded “No, I've never had a bias teacher towards anyone.”

I presented Calvin Johnson another question about biases, behavior and fairness. I asked him if he could recall any type of behavioral situation where he felt people were treated unfairly based on race. Calvin Johnson replied, “Nah.”

When I asked Calvin Johnson to define identity, his response was “the way you view yourself, or the way others view you.” I asked Calvin Johnson what stories he has read, heard or been taught about Black identity, have taught him. Calvin responded “Just the history and what [Black people] had to go through during those times.”

I asked Calvin Johnson the direct question “Are you proud to be a Black male?” He politely and clearly responded, “yes, ma'am. I mean, I don't see any difference in color. I treat everyone the same as they treat me.” This is an example of *the challenge to dominant ideology* (refer to Figure 4).

I asked Calvin Johnson what he thought about his race and to explain or give examples. His response was “What do I think of my race, um, beautiful. I don't see any difference in, you know, race, color.”

I asked him to describe the Black male and his place in society from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Calvin Johnson replied “Well, they [Black people] were formerly used as slaves to build up United States of America.” And presently, Calvin Johnson said Black males are “just hard working . . . people . . . trying to provide for their families.”

I asked Calvin Johnson to give me his perspective on how the media portrays Black boys. He said “kind of like, thugs, bad people, when they're not.”

I asked Calvin Johnson if he thought the police treat white and Black people differently. He said “Absolutely, because, like, recent things that's been happening to a lot of [Black people], getting shot down.”

Making a sharp turn in the questioning, I asked Calvin Johnson if he knew who created the “N” word and what that word meant. He replied “Slave owners. It's [Nigger] like a negative word to knock African Americans down.” I followed up with the question “Have you ever been called Nigger by a white person?” Calvin Johnson said “Nah!”

Finally, I asked Calvin Johnson if he could change one thing about America, as relates to Black males, what that change would be. Similar to Carlos and Arthur, Calvin Johnson replied “Just the way they view us, you know. Looking at us as equal as they look at everyone else.” This is an example of *the challenge to dominant ideology* (refer to Figure 4).

For Calvin Johnson's artifact, he shared a poster board with pictures. He explained “These are images of my school years, especially, in eighth grade and into ninth.” There were multiple photos of Calvin Johnson's football team, and individual pictures. Many after game victory photos with fellow teammates. A picture of his report card/academic achievements. His poster board also included photos from church events and a photo of his Black History collage project from his eight grade year.



Figure 11. *Shielded*: My representation of Calvin Johnson¹¹

¹¹ “*Knight Warrior Armed*” (Retrieved from Pixabay.com via Creative Commons)

Are you starting to see a common theme, I am a color but first a human being? I love who I am whether it's brown, yellow, sepia or burnt sienna, it's everything about me that makes me a winner. I wonder what Anthony has to say.

If you are looking for someone who is different and doesn't mind being different, then look no further, check out Anthony's story.

Anthony

Emmett Till-Leader; Trayvon Martin-Powerful; Tamir Rice-Amazing; Michael Brown-I don't know who that is.

I'm 14 Yellow. Strong individual, bright person, different from everybody, everything else, eighth grade. I'm Anthony.

In response to questions I asked Anthony by email, he replied "Hello I am Anthony. I see myself as a strong individual." He went on to say "What makes me who I am are my interests, like building robots and mathematics and science."

I asked him if he thought he had a voice in the school environment. His response was "yes, I do think I can use my voice sometimes in school. If it is something that is extremely important to me I will speak my mind."

In the same email, I asked Anthony what he would like his teacher(s) to know about him, his response was:

I would like my teachers to know that I like details of facts. And I enjoy discussion and being able to speak what's on mind when it's on topic. I would also love teachers to know that I'm a very outgoing and energetic person and enjoy working with other people, with my same mind set.

I asked Anthony during our face to face interview, to share his lived experiences as a Black male attending a white school his entire life, he replied "I feel like it is fair share equal-in most cases. See, some people would like to disagree, but I would say its equal [whites & Blacks being equal]. . . in most times."

As with the other participants, I asked Anthony, as a Black boy, whether he saw himself anywhere in the educational system: in the classroom, the curriculum, in academics, in sports or clubs and in discipline, Anthony replied:

I see myself equal [to white students], in some ways, not everything is so equal, but at school, sitting in a classroom, I feel like I can talk to the teacher without being, "Okay, he's Black." Something, some racism going on, I don't feel that when I'm in the classroom. I feel like I'm doing really

well in my academics. Sports or clubs... I pretty much do both, but I would say it's equal... where I have been... it's equal-ish, but I feel like it's still equal here [for] Black people.

When I asked how he thought the education system portrayed Black boys, Anthony said:

I feel like in like history classes, of all my years so far, we haven't really talked anything on the time period where there's just racism, slavery, stuff like that. When it just really wasn't talked [about], it was just like a gray area that we never really went over. Which was like a really big time, but [teachers] never just wanted to go over it, which is like, "Wow."

He summed it up by saying that teachers will "talk about it, but they won't go into details."

I asked about his relationships with teachers and who was part of his peer group Anthony said "I feel like I have a really good relationship with my teachers. Yeah, I'm trying to make friends who are more supportive and do things more like or with me. Yeah, stuff like that."

I asked Anthony a question about the number of Black male teachers he had had during his school years. Anthony's response was similar to the answers of Carlos, Heightman and Calvin Johnson. He replied with an emphatic "Zero!" This is an example of *cultural mismatch* (refer to Figure 4).

I asked Anthony if he thought Black boys were viewed differently in school, he replied:

Middle school, I would say, yes. Like in middle school, we're based off of two grades, there's not that many people there, I feel like on my team, there's at least three total Black people. There's not that many [Black] people that I can discuss with like-all this stuff [Black issues/concerns].

I asked Anthony to define identity, he referred to "who you are and how the community, or people around you see you as."

I asked Anthony what stories he had read, heard, or been taught about Black identity, had taught him about Black identity. His response was:

It teaches me past stuff... long, long, long time ago, being able to, know that stuff has happened in past time. People were telling me that, it just ... I can understand at my age of what has happened in the past, and how it has changed all today.

I asked Anthony the direct question "Are you proud to be a Black male?" He replied "Yes, because I feel like it is empowering, to myself, knowing that I'm different than everybody, than most people that go to my school and being different. I like that, so yeah."

I asked Anthony to describe the Black male and his place in society from both a historical and contemporary perspective. In describing the Black male, he said, "Very low." He went on to say, "there were segregation and slavery -- and going all the way back then, and how they put Black people lower, and like 'whites only,' this and this and this." Continuing with his assessment, he said:

I think it has changed a lot for the [better]. And now today, a Black man can walk down the street, like say downtown -- and, I wouldn't say wouldn't, but [would have] less of a risk of being targeted, or-fingers pointed at, or negative words being thrown at him. In the past, it's like you wouldn't see a Black country artist. Well, that's what the stereotypes would say.

Anthony concluded his response by saying, "And it comes to me like anybody can do anything, so just because I'm Black, doesn't mean I can't do something that one of my friends is doing, or what somebody that is white is doing."

I asked Anthony to give me his perspective on how the media portrays Black boys. He said, "I feel like, with music, I really haven't seen a Black country artist. But I see a whole bunch of Black rappers and negative music and bad things, that kind of-music." Anthony went on to say, "And I feel like it's just stereotypes that Black people are gonna be rappers and not country artists, or something like that."

I asked Anthony if he thought police treat white and Black people differently? He responded:

Yes, depending on the officer. I know some officers that'll treat people fair. And then there are some, where they're just like, "No, you're doing wrong just because you are Black." And just that kind of feeling that they give off, you know?

I asked Anthony if he knew who created the "N" word and what it meant, he replied "No!" I asked him if he knew what the "N" word meant, he replied "Nah!"

I asked Anthony at what age he noticed people were similar or different from him. His response was:

I say about 12ish or 13. My sister Tavi, she's really talked about that type of stuff, and put my head in what is actually happening. It really helped . . . she put it in ways that I could understand at my younger age.

Finally, I asked Anthony if there was one thing he could change about America, as it relates to Black males, what it would be. Anthony simply stated "Crime!"

For Anthony's artifact, he submitted a newspaper article and an explanation that identifies the potential of Black Boys when given the opportunity, and a hope for their future. This is what Anthony had to say:

I have my -- it's a article in the newspaper. It was in the City Paper and, it was when seventh, going into eighth grade, I got to go to space

camp. And I feel like ... it [gave] really good benefits to me, because I feel like, without going, I would probably be something totally different, because space camp actually gave me the whole mindset of, "Wow, space is really cool." And that's why I want to be an astrophysicist. And that's why I have such high hopes. And I feel like with space camp, my parents have been like, "He can do stuff, actually," so like it pushes them like, "Yeah, let's do it some more." And like I feel like, without going, my life would be totally different."

To clarify, I asked, "so just experiencing space camp and being there, you as a Black male, your opportunity, your options are open to anything and everything?" "Yes. I can do it, yes."



Figure 12. *Sheltered*: My representation for Anthony¹²

The wonderful thing about a box of crayons is that there are so many colors. Each has its own beauty and still are crayons. Each crayon compliments, highlights and accents the other and they still are crayons. One no better than the other and when given the chance, will add their own beauty to the total picture. Each equal in value and beauty and yet still a crayon.

Summarizing Findings

During the interview, each of the six boys confirmed their racial identity as "proud to be Black." Five participants had been raised entirely in the Midwest and the other had been raised in the South until his eighth-grade year in 2016. Similarly, five had

¹² "52 images for shelter clip art." (2017). Retrieved from

<http://www.clipartpanda.com>

attended predominantly white schools for their entire educational career and the other had started attending a predominantly white school in his eighth-grade year during 2016.

Each of the interviews started with a game in which participant boys associated words with the names of four murdered boys. Table 3 provides those words. All six participants stated words that initially seemed to indicate they knew about the 2012 death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, although I later suspected that Anthony may not have known any of the murdered boys. Four explicitly said they had not heard about the 2014 death of 12-year-old Tamir Rice.

Table 3. Words participant boys associated with murdered boys

	Gregg Duncan (22)	Carlos (13)	Heightman (15)	Arthur (13)	Calvin Johnson (15)	Anthony (14)	# Not Heard of
Emmett Till (1955, age 14*)	Wronged	Whistling	Killed	I don't Know him	Emmitt Smith	Leader	3
Trayvon Martin (2012, age 17)	Child	George Zimmerman	Killed	Teenager	Black guy killed	Powerful	0
Tamir Rice (2014, age 12)	Kid	Young African American	I don't know him	I don't know him	Black woman	Amazing	4
Michael Brown (2014, age 18)	Innocent	Police	Killed	School Graduate	I don't know him	I don't know him	2

*Year & Age of death

Five out of six Black boys believed that their teachers did not have the necessary knowledge about Black boys. Two of the six said “especially at the middle school level.” All six participants believe that their teachers’ knowledge is coming from skewed history,

ignorance and stereotypes. One participant talked about teachers having preconceived notions about how Blacks are “supposed to be.” Another participant saw himself through the eyes of his teacher when he stated, “I feel like I can talk to the teacher without thinking, Okay, he's Black.” Is this a case of “Color Blind/Culture Blind?” It’s okay to see color.

Five of the six participants had never had a Black male teacher. Five out of six participants believe that Black boys are stereotyped more and treated differently than white students in school.

Four out of five participants reported that they had been called the “N” word by a white person. Two of six participants said they knew who created the N word—specifically, “white people/slave owners.” Five of six said they knew what the “N” word means—specifically, “ignorance” and “a negative word to knock African Americans down.”

Due to lack of diversity in their schools, three participants reported having some racial issues as Black males at school. One indicated that he had not had major racial issues, “in most cases.” Based on this participant’s other answers, his issues seem to have been more internal, not having a lot of Black people around to with whom to discuss racial issues. Two participants specifically identified having majority white friends or friends that either participated in the same group, club or sport. One participant described his attempt to associate with the other Black males, but acknowledged they were not on the same level or of the same mindset as he was.

All six boys loved being Black. One replied, “yes, ma’am. I mean, I don’t see any difference in color.” But when asked to define identity, four out of six said, “the way you view yourself, or the way others view you.”

In response to the question, “who are you?” only one participant specifically acknowledged his race or culture of being “Black.” He did so by saying, “I’m a young African American growing up in a predominately white school.” Five out of six participants did not explicitly identify themselves as a Black male. Five participants used their abilities, their capabilities, or just their names to describe who they were. One said, “I am me!” It is evident that they see themselves as human beings first despite the negative stigmas and images presented to them in media, education, and society. Those negative stigmas and images can be categorized as *white noise*.

The Black participant boys also indicated that teachers tend to perceive them as gravitating toward sports and entertainment in hopes of acceptance from their white counterparts. However, one participant indicated that, in sports contexts, teachers care only about scoring and not about race. That participant went on to say that teachers only want boys to be a “team player,” seemingly indicating that he doesn’t think he can openly acknowledge his Blackness.

All six participant boys wanted to celebrate Black history month. Table 4 summarizes the reasons participant boys gave in response to the question of whether there should be a Black history month.

Table 4. Boys' beliefs of why Black history month should be celebrated

Boys	Reasons to Celebrate Black History Month
Gregg	“It’s important to reminisce and remember how things used to be and

Boys	Reasons to Celebrate Black History Month
Duncan	move forward with how we can make sure it doesn't happen any more." "so children growing up in this generation learn how things used to be"
Arthur	"Some people don't understand the struggle that Black people have had to go through"
Heightman	As "a reminder ... now [that there are] things going on in the news"
Carlos	Black people "have broken a whole bunch of barriers...we deserve a whole year."

Five out of six Black boys affirmed feeling able to use their voice in school. However, the boys perceived various realities of having or not having a voice in school relative to the purpose of the conversation. As Figure 13 shows, they felt they had more ability to voice their thoughts about course content than about racial topics.

Have Voice

5 of 6 felt they had a voice.



Don't Have Voice

Used voices to asked clarifying questions *but*

Struggled to use voices when 'race' was on the table

Figure 13. Participant boys' self-perceptions of their voices

The artifacts that the six participants brought variously included a photograph; a collage of photos and sport awards; a newspaper article; a rap; an excerpt from a song; and a verbal image of a sport that has a ball such soccer, football, or basketball (see Table 5).

Table 5. Artifacts boys brought to the interviews

Pseudonym	Age	Artifact
Gregg Duncan (Tug of War)	22	Excerpt from Mr. Drake's song, "You in the Sixth"
Carlos (Rebel)	13	Own rap, "Imagine a Dalmatian wit very few Black spots"
Heightman (Free Spirited)	15	Abstract description of a sport ball
Arthur (Puzzled)	13	13 th birthday picture: all white boys, one other Black boy, and himself
Calvin Johnson (Shielded)	15	Poster-board collage of pictures: 8 th grade football & other games
Anthony (Sheltered)	14	Local newspaper article about his experience at Space Camp

After reading the participant's stories, I chose a logo and corresponding visual image for each boy (see Table 6).

Table 6. Quotes supporting my choice of logo to represent each participant boy

Logo	Supportive Quotes
Tug of War (Gregg Duncan)	"But I've gotten push back, opposition from white people and Black people. "
Rebel (Carlos)	Teacher: "And you guys wonder why black people get beat and killed by the police." Rebel: "You don't know ..., like it all happens for a reason And I was just mad, like, I was cussing at him, too."
Free Spirited (Heightman)	<i>Laughed</i> after every answer.
Puzzled (Arthur)	"All the people I invited to my party, I had my good friends, are they're mostly white, and one of my really good friends are Black."

Logo	Supportive Quotes
Shielded (Calvin Johnson)	Have you ever been called Nigger by a white person? "Nah!"
Sheltered (Anthony)	When I asked if he knew who created the "N" word and what it meant, he replied: "No!"

Deriving Themes About Black Boys' Identities

I now present analysis of themes across participant boys. Table 7 provides three study foci and four corresponding themes. For the focus of cultural conditioning, the theme of his-story untold emerged. For the focus of desired perceptions, Black boys reported wanting to be seen as human first, before being seen as Black. For the focus of identity, two related themes emerged: Black participant boys loved being Black but did not feeling comfortable expressing that in white school settings.

Table 7. Study foci and themes

Study Focus	Themes
Effects of cultural conditioning	His-story not told
Desired perceptions	Want to be seen as human first
Black boys' identity	Love being Black
Effects of white noise	Not comfortable expressing their Blackness

Identity Theme: Love Being Black

Black male identity was the central focus of the study. All six participants mentioned they love being Black. Some further pointed that the reason they loved being Black was because God created them that way. In the following paragraphs, quotes from

the participants pertain to the following questions: Define identity? Who are you? How do you see yourself? At what age did you notice you were similar/different to you? Are you proud to be Black?

Mirror, mirror on the wall. “I see myself as a man who is working to make a positive impact in life and the lives of others. I see myself as someone who is loyal, willing to learn, and strives to do the right thing” (Gregg Duncan). “I’m a young African American growing up in a predominantly white school whose been harder on because of my race... I think. God made me who I am and my family and the environment” (Carlos). “The way that you look at yourself, the way other people look at you. It’s all just one big identity” (Carlos). “My family name” (Heightman). “Who you are and how the community, or people around you see you as” (Anthony).

Knock, knock-who’s there? “I am me, a person with their own frequency and vibrations” (Heightman). “I always act myself, I stay a happy person most of the time, and I am a third generation in my family” (Arthur). Just a normal guy, an, average guy” (Calvin Johnson). “What makes me who I am are my interests, like building robots and mathematics and science.” “Like, we’re all human beings, and it doesn’t really matter.”

Peek-a-boo, I see you.

I think it was kindergarten year. I think that was the first time I was like, huh? We were doing this project where we were like outlining ourselves on this long sheet of paper. I think it was one of the kids, she gave me like the brown crayon to color myself in and I was like, I think that was the first time I was like, huh. Like no one else really has to, cause its white paper, no one else really has to color there’s in, but I was like, but I do. So it didn’t make me sad or anything like that, but it

was, I think that was the first time I was kind of aware of like oh yeah, I'm a little different than most everyone else" (Gregg Duncan).

I have a picture from my birthday party. It shows that, like as you see there's only one Black friend that I had there. And the rest of them were all white. This was my thirteenth birthday. Even though I have more Black friends, but of my like really good friends, only one of them was Black (Arthur).

Do you see what I see? "I have to say probably first grade maybe. I was looking through all the classroom and I see mostly white people. Or white kids in the classroom." I don't remember how I feel, but like, in my later years, 'cause I was still super young, and I knew that there were people that looked different than me. But later on, like I started to wonder, like why are more people here? Like more people of the same color" (Arthur). "When my dad came. He came when I was in second grade. We started getting me hooked on books, and I started opening my eyes, like, how us Blacks, other Black people, are looked at. Yeah. And reading and watching documentaries about Black people. Us Black people" (Carlos). "I say about 12ish or 13. My sister Tavi, she's really talked about that type of stuff, and put my head in what is actually happening. It really helped, and like, she put it in ways that I could understand at my younger age" (Anthony).

Hide and go seek ("Ready or not, here I come"). "Oh yes, absolutely. I mean I love everything about being Black. Especially when I get to educate others about what I believe it means to be Black" (Gregg Duncan). "Yes, I'm proud. And I feel like I'm lucky to be surrounded by, like, great influences like Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X and many more" (Arthur). "Yes, ma'am. I mean, I don't see any difference in color. What do

I think of my race, um, beautiful? I don't see in difference in, you know, race, color”

(Calvin Johnson). "Black, white, Asian, yellow, green, were all the same. It's not the color on your skin that makes you do the things you do, it's the person within you"

(Carlos). “Yes, [proud to be Black] because I feel like it is empowering to myself, knowing that I'm different than everybody, then most people that go to my school and being different, I like that, so yeah” (Anthony).

“Absolutely. I mean, I'm proud to be Black because, I mean, especially going to a white school, I'm ... There aren't as many-you know, African Americans that I can talk to. So, you know, being proud of being this color and being different is pretty special, and I take pride in that. So, that's one reason I like being Black” (Heightman).

White Noise Theme: Not Comfortable Expressing Blackness

Do you feel that you're able to use your voice in school? This is a question I presented to the Black male participant. Having a voice and being able to use it to speak out when it comes to expressing his concerns and voicing his opinions when it relates to race and identity issues, is crucial.

I asked Arthur if he had ever been asked to speak on behalf of all Black people. His quick response was “No!” But he responded with this personal insight:

Sometimes I feel uncomfortable, like when we're talking about segregation and how white people and Black people didn't always get along. I don't know but I feel a little bit uncomfortable. I was in a predominantly white school, surrounded by people that are white so you're mostly gonna talk to people that are white, being taught by people that are white, and then there's not gonna be that many

Black people in the school, you may be able to talk to” (Arthur). “I don't see any difference in color.” (Calvin Johnson) ““And it comes to me like anybody can do anything, so just because I'm Black, doesn't mean I can't do something that one of my friends is doing, or what somebody that is white is doing (Anthony).

“Depends on who I'm talking to like if some white person lied on me and told the teacher something they'd automatically believe them and that's partially because of my past [behaviors], so no I don't feel like I have a voice that often in school” (Carlos). “In the classroom setting, I felt that I could speak up (although often times I did not) because Professors were looking for a difference of opinions” (Gregg Duncan). “Some racism going on, I don't feel that when I'm in the classroom” (Anthony).

I feel like in like in history classes, all my years so far, we [teachers/schools] haven't really talked anything on-the time period where there's just racism, slavery, stuff like that. When it [history] just really wasn't talked over, it was just like a gray area that we never really went over, which is like, “Wow.” They'll talk about it, but they won't go into details” (Anthony).

Do you think self-identity and diversity in your classroom affect student performance?

In the classroom setting, professor really has no clue what I'm going through or you know, what kind of appeals to me, or you know how I feeling so I'm, you know. I'm not even in here, really, mentally. So I think that kind of a detriment as far as the education system goes” (Gregg Duncan).

Looking through all the classroom and I see mostly white people. Like, I don't remember how I feel, but like, in my later years, like 'cause I was still super

young, and I knew that there were people that looked different than me. But like in my, I don't, like later on, like I started to wonder why are more people here? Like more people of the same color (Arthur).

I did have a lot of those you know subtle or ignorant comments. I think we all as Black people do. And I didn't really realize this till I got older and started looking at and I was like 'aw man, I probably should have said this in that instance.' But you know I was a kid (Gregg Duncan).

Cultural Conditioning Theme: His-story has Not Been Told or Taught

I deem cultural conditioning to be an important theme that emerged from the analysis of the responses and stories. The reason cultural conditioning was deemed to be a dominant theme was because all participants believe *his-story*, the complete story of Black males, dating back to their African ancestry to current day, is not being taught in the classroom.

Participants described experiences such as being *marginalized*, *undervalued* and *underestimated* as Black males in their white school environment. *Cultural conditioning* happens in the school setting, via teachers and curriculum. To make too low an estimate of the quantity, degree, or worth of is to be *underestimated*. Here are some examples of the participants being *underestimated*: "In the classroom setting where I would give an answer just something and it would kind of throw my teachers and professors off. Like wow, they kind of like weren't expecting me to be as insightful or open or a wide range of what I was saying." "The educational system and professors not expecting us to do well, or be interested in what's going on because they believe they're probably just interested in their sports, their recreational activities" (Gregg Duncan). Another manifestation of

cultural conditioning is the process of being *marginalized*. Here are a few examples of *marginalization*: “I mean, there's a lot of information [history] that's not being told. But it's basically the same things, you know, what we've been learning for years. It's nothing, like, new. There's nothing new being presented for African American history. Uh, you know, MLK...you know, the same basic things...from my school years” (Calvin Johnson). “Well, they taught was basically that we were slaves, and that, Africans sold Africans, and stuff like that” (Carlos). “Well as far as like history goes, growing up in my [public] schools, man they [teachers] didn't teach this in school” (Gregg Duncan).

One of the manifestations of *cultural conditioning*, *marginalization*, can also be woven into the family. “[My parents] didn’t emphasize Black culture, or what makes you Black” (Gregg Duncan). *Marginalization* happens even within your school’s peer group. Here’s an example: “But the Black people that I'm with, they don't, like, understand where they're from that much. So it's kind of like different, you know? Like, they don't know about their past history ... like, they grew up in a white school, so they're- they're not white, but that's ... their mindset's the same” (Carlos).

The third manifestation of *cultural conditioning* is being *undervalued*. “I say, [teachers] only experienced a certain type of Black male and they'd like had stereotype, like I'm apt to do this, with Black males and females or whatever” (Gregg Duncan). “Not to say that [teachers] don't have any [knowledge], they'd have the experience but as far as the understanding is, I think it's probably ignorance is where it mostly stems from” (Gregg Duncan). “I don't think they might fully understand, because most of majority all my teachers are white. They probably attended white schools, like if they went to a predominately white school, they see many kids that are white and not a lot of kids that

are Black” (Arthur). “This Black male’s really good at doing this, or this Black male's really good at doing this, whether it was sports or entertainment or whatever.” “A lot of it's basketball” (Heightman).

One of the most *devaluing* words ever created is the word "Nigger". Participants’ were asked about the “N” word (what the “N” means, and who created it). Here are a few responses: "Yes, I know who created it. It was actually white people that created it, and that's what they call Black people as an insult” (Arthur). “Slave owners. It's like a negative word to knock African Americans down” (Calvin Johnson). “I don't know who, but I know what it means. But the word nigger means, itself, not intelligent. Ignorant, yeah, that's the word” (Carlos). Has *white noise* dulled the senses of Black Boys to how such a demeaning word continues to have life in today’s society?

Desired Perception Theme: Black Boys Want to be Seen as Human Beings First

I deem Black boys wanting to be seen as human first to be an important theme the emerged from the analysis of the responses and stories because all participants mentioned they would like to been seen as human beings.

Let’s play “Now you see me, now you don’t.” This is how I think you see me.

Teachers. “Like wow, they kind of like weren't expecting me to be as insightful or open or a wide range of what I was saying. The educational system and professors not expecting us to do well, or be interested in what's going on because they believe they're probably just interested in their sports” (Gregg Duncan). *Now you don't.* "He's always gonna be like that, he can't change, that's just who he is, and we gotta keep our eye out for him” (Carlos). *Now you see me.* “But I feel like as I'm going up, my teachers warn the other teachers about me” (Carlos). *Now you see me.* “Like, they're just, like,

stereotypes, it's all stereotypes that we get" (Carlos). *Now you don't*. "Probably ... they probably watch us a little bit more than the white students. Just because of the reputation we supposedly have" (Calvin Johnson). *Now you see me*.

My school. "People don't expect that I'm playing golf, so that's like ... (laughs). Or doing robotics" (Heightman). *Now you don't*. "I think growing up in a predominantly white school, Black boys are stereotyped more because, you should be, really good at this sport." *Now you see me*. "I see myself equal, in some ways, not everything is so equal, but at school, sitting in a classroom, I feel like I can talk to the teacher without being, 'Okay, he's Black'" (Anthony). *Now you don't*. "It's hard to change the way [teachers] look at you after past" behaviors (Carlos). *Now you don't*.

My community. White teachers, students, and staff "know the stuff that a lot of people know, like that we used to be slaves." *Now you don't*. "I think white people, what they have on us is like a stereotype." *Now you don't*. To this day Black people still "say we're free, but it doesn't feel like we are, feels like there's still something, like holding us down, you know" (Carlos). *Now you don't*. "Like, any color of skin, just 'cause you are portrayed as a Black male, it doesn't make you different from anyone else. Like, we're all human beings, and it doesn't really matter" (Arthur). *Now you see me*.

Media. "I feel like with music, I really haven't seen like a Black country artist, but I like see a whole bunch of Black rappers and like-negative music and bad things, that kind of-music" (Anthony). *Now you don't*. "I know that sometimes people would say that Black males, in like bad neighborhoods they would do shootings and stuff like that, but that's not fully true" (Arthur). *Now you see me*. "kind of like, thugs, bad people, when they're not" (Calvin Johnson). *Now you don't*.

I hope you see me because this is what “hope” looks like: “Just the way that we're looked at.” “Like, how people think of us.” [Please, see me as a human being first]

The Essence of Boys’ Black Identity

This study’s participant boys seem not to have known that they don’t have a Black identity. Black boys love being Black but want to be seen as human beings first. Their history has not been and is not being told. The Black boys did not feel comfortable expressing their Blackness in the predominantly white classroom. It seems that the U.S. teacher education system has failed to educate teachers about Black male students’ and their identity.

Table 8. Participant boys know but don't know their history

Boys	Know	But Don’t Know
Arthur	Like they used to be slaves	Many people don't know, <i>which my mom told me</i> , that some of the white inventors, they got some of their ideas from Black people
Heightman	Black boys good mostly in sports	People don't expect that I'm playing golf or doing robotics
Carlos	But the black people that I'm with, they don't, like, understand where they're from that much	Like, they don't know about their past history ... they grew up in a white school, so they're not white, but that's their mindset's the same.

Chapter 4 has honored the essence of this study’s six Black boy participants in the contexts of their white school experiences. The six retold stories have provided the essence of Black boys’ identity in white school settings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter summarizes the themes and essence of the phenomenological dissertation study, answers the research questions, reflectively questions, and reflectively summarizes based on the interview and artifacts presented in the findings chapter. This discussion chapter then states limitations, makes recommendations for future practice and further research, and ends with concluding remarks.

Summarizing the Themes and Essence

I found minimal scholarly literature that represented Black boys sharing their lived educational experiences in a predominately white environment. Furthermore, I found few studies that explored the experiences that influenced, impacted, or shaped Black boys' identities. To address this gap in the literature, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and analyze the Black male identity as shaped by the context of white noise at predominately white schools in the Midwest. In other words, this study examined the educational indoctrination of Black boys in contexts of *white noise* in hopes of assisting U.S. public schools in providing supportive services for Black males.

The first of four themes that emerged from my analysis was that schools are not telling or teaching Black his-story, a theme that exemplifies cultural conditioning. The second theme that emerged was that Black boys want to be seen as human beings, a theme that represents boys' desired perceptions. Media, television, and music provide ever-present negative images that play a major role in how white teachers and white students perceive Black boys in and out of school.

The third theme that emerged from my analysis of *white noise* was identity. “I’m okay with being Black.” The participants all showed that they are proud young Black boys/men, they loved being Black, but finding freedom to proudly express the love of their race in a white school setting, which is theme four, has been a challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These themes help prepare us to better understand what is embedded in the minds of these Black boys as it relates to their experiences of *white noise* while attending a predominantly white school.

The essence of the central phenomenon of Black boys’ identity as shaped by white noise is that Black boys love being Black but want to be seen as human beings first. Their history has not been and is not being told. The Black boys did not feel comfortable expressing their Blackness in the predominantly white classroom.

Answering Research Questions

This study focused on two overarching questions that asked how socially constructed identities of race and gender impact Black boys within the U.S. educational system and who Black boys think they are relative to who others say they are. The answer to these questions is that Black boys in this study saw themselves as human beings first who love having Black skin, because that’s how they were created, and loved being Black (an expression of identity). But they are forced to suppress their outward expression of that love due to intentional methods of cultural conditioning -- such as racism, power and white privilege -- still being incorporated into their conscious and subconscious existence. On a daily basis within the school facility, classroom, student/teacher and student/student interaction, Black boys experience negative stereotypes and witness consequences of those perceptions or stereotypes in a

predominantly white school system. Some find it simply easier to suppress or ignore those stereotypes or to morph into the rules of the dominant white cultural noise.

The participants' interviews indicated the educational system inadvertently supports the marginalization of Black boys by allowing the administering of curriculum that mainly highlight the Black male role as slaves, civil rights activists, athletes and de-emphasizes or ignores the positive contributions of Black people to the United States and the world. The interviews also indicated that Black boys did not see themselves in the curriculum other than when the curriculum talked about slaves and civil right icons which portrays Blacks as being undervalued and marginalized. Three out of the six participants did not see themselves in the curriculum at all.

But if the educational system supplies *white noise*, the classrooms will not reinforce Black boys. Education systems in America were designed to create workers, not dreamers and achievers. Being educated in regard to knowing that Blacks were once used as free labor, would open the eyes of Black boys to an evil system. The system only supports them because of perceptions of Black talents and what that system can exploit from those boys. I ask you, does the education system reinforce or breakdown the stereotypes? The world would be pretty boring if all the crayons in the box were one color. In a perfect world, race would be perceived as a result of the beauty of creation. Though outwardly, Blacks look different than whites, we are equal in value in our essential existence and in our contribution to society and humanity as a whole.

First-hand information obtained from study participants indicated that: *white noise* has played a crucial role in how Black boys see themselves in society and how they choose to embrace or ignore their cultural identity in a predominately white school

environment. The findings reveal that participants' perception of the teachers' cultural knowledge, awareness and history of Black culture, outside of the stereotypical lens; is minimal and affects the openness of student-teacher relationship in the classroom.

Study participants revealed a sincere desire to gain a more well-rounded perspective of the African American culture in the educational environment outside of being enslaved people and civil rights activists. Curriculums and perspectives should not simply be developed and taught from a Eurocentric point of view. This suggests the needs for an examination of how future educators are prepared at the college level and the findings used to address not only African culture prior to colonization but also all cultures.

I believe some Black males just go along with the education system that has shown its ugliness to them, maybe by using the system like the system uses them. If no one explains to them at home, the struggles they may encounter just for being Black and male, certainly will not be answered at school. The question is whether the education system is responsible for filling in the blanks for Black boys. The answer is that yes, directly or indirectly through what the education system teaches and how that system addresses or avoids their Black skin. Sometimes not mentioning Blackness will make a boy feel invisible, especially in a class of predominately white students.

Teachers can acknowledge the skin color of Black males as being beautiful, as all colors are. If teachers acknowledge that color is just one factor that makes each of us special, then skin color will no longer be an issue for a Black male or his classmates.

Education practitioners, researchers, and scholars will benefit from this phenomenological study. Educators, have shown that they value the lives of their students

as a whole by addressing those students' perceptions, realities, concerns, and fears about their safety in school in light of recent tragic school shootings, and rightfully so.

Educators should also acknowledge the seriousness of the plight that Black boys experience in a white school environment which impacts their identity and academic experiences. Educational administrators, teachers, and communities, should value the realness of Black boys' perspectives, even if that reality differs from their own lived experience. If the goal is to have a strong chain, each link must be examined, and weaknesses strengthened. There needs to be culturally specific training, along with 'talking points' on how to engage in conversation with Black students. Addressing the needs of Black boys will benefit the school, community and society as a whole.

Superintendents, administrators, curriculum specialists, teachers and staff, are challenged to examine the current education system and determine whether it nurtures and reinforces a positive cultural identity of Black boys. Without accepting this challenge, the white education system will ignore that there is a problem.

There were a couple of unanticipated surprises I encountered during this study. Based on their comments, I was surprised at how the participants did not feel comfortable with identifying and expressing their Blackness in a white environment. Secondly, I was pleasantly surprised at how open they were in their interviews considering my personal or professional relationship with them.

The uniqueness of this phenomenological study was that it came from a demographic that is rarely given the opportunity to voice their perspective in an unaltered, free and open environment and yet be taken seriously. The study has given the reader an insight into the feelings, struggles, joys, and pains of Black boys ages 13 to 22.

The boys have shared their real-time lived experiences dealing with their Blackness in the current white scholastic system. Their raw expression goes deeper than words and challenges the reader, with all their biases, to truly reflect upon how they see and treat Black boys, as human beings. Let us never forget the deaths of 14-year-old Emmett Till, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, 12-year-old Tamir Rice, 18-year-old Michael Brown, and the March, 2018 shooting death of 22-year-old Stephon Clark. All were young, all were Black, all died at the hands of police, and why?...Because of *white noise*.

Reflectively Questioning

The participant boys discussed times when they asked questions to seek clarification, but struggled to use their voices to speak out when race was on the table. The reason could be fear of isolation, or being ostracized by their peers/teachers. Do white teachers, and white students allow Black boys the freedom to express their Blackness and their displeasure with a system that says white is superior and all else is inferior? How will these Black boys be perceived by teachers and their white peers when they speak against that system or a white person in that system (teacher or student) about its unfairness? They must have a strong foundation of their cultural identity to withstand the backlash that will undoubtedly encounter.

Reflectively Summarizing

The Black boys who participated in this study had been part of (and at the bottom of) an educational system that has not addressed the structural system of racism, power and white privilege, that its founders based it on. This system implicitly and sometimes explicitly presents a fictitious construct of race in its classroom literature, images and

overall curriculum that devalue Black boys as human beings in a way that serves as cultural conditioning.

The Black boys who participated in the study seemed to understand that U.S. society has placed them into categories of race despite how they see themselves. They acknowledged that the eye sees differences of colors but then consciously or subconsciously understands that white society categorize them as it sees necessary. This further drives home the point that race is a phenomenon constructed by man...all people come into this world as people and should deal with each other as human beings, including Black boys. But white society tells them otherwise. All study participants seemed to want to be seen and treated as a person who just happens to be Black. When I asked the participants “what label would you use to identity yourself?” Arthur said: “To be honest, I would just say, just a *human being*, because I feel that it's wrong that people should be given labeled by communities, like just 'cause we have different colors of skin, doesn't mean we're not the same. Like when someone says something, ‘Oh, that person's white, or this person's Mexican. Or something like that.’”

Study participants realized they hadn't been taught anything about the Black experience in school, but rather had only been presented with a limited view of Blacks with nothing explaining and connecting history to the current day. Most of the participants understand that being Black is not monolithic but that white society tends to group all Blacks into one stereotype. I heard the confusion and frustration in some participants' comments. When I asked if the Black male participants believed their teachers have the necessary knowledge about Black boys, most participants responded with “no”. When the curriculum emphasizes the roles of Black males as being

subservient or second class (i.e., “slaves”), it has the potential of being damaging to the psychological well-being of the Black boy. One participant said “we used to be slaves.” The Black boys love his Blackness but hate the fact that teachers and students only know the stereotypes. Heightman said, “probably not, specially in middle school. I switched schools, because I wasn't really understanding the teachers. I wasn't on the same page with them. And I also . . . had more energy than they did, so it was always a struggle for them.”

What a Black boy sees on TV shapes who he thinks he is. Internal conflict can arise from being told or shown through media that being Black is not “positive,” even if he has a “positive” view of himself. When I played the word association game with my participants, I asked them to say the first word that comes to their mind. When I said: Black, Arthur said “Brown.” When I said: Black boys? He said, “Nothing's really coming to my head.” He knew there was something missing from his life – that something was his identity.

What if white teachers also knew the untold his-story? Would their perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs about Black boys change? The whole idea of how we treat each other would not be an issue if European colonizers hadn't created the false construct of race which categorized and prioritized people based on skin color for economic gain. A group of human beings with Black skin were unjustly and brutally enslaved by assigning a false and negative identity. This ties into our current problem. Black boys who are fed these negative images, are conflicted around their white friends and teachers about being Black even if they love being Black. When I asked Heightman if he saw himself or Black males in the curriculum, he said: “Yeah, man that's a hard question.” But when I asked

about sport and clubs, his response was that it's always a question of whether “you can score” or whether “you can defend” and does not relate to being Black. Calvin Johnson said he was proud to be Black, but ended his statement with, “I don’t see color.” Was that because Heightman and Calvin Johnson had seen the horrible things white society does to Black people based on cultural conditioning and therefore avoided the issue of race? Is it in Black people’s DNA to see color but recognize people as human beings first? There is nothing wrong with seeing color, the issue is what a person thinks when they see color? *White noise* wants Black boys to see their color and associate it not with greatness, but with slavery, civil rights, and violence.

When it came to his Black race, Gregg Duncan shared how his parent(s) expressed their Christian values more than the meaning of being Black in America. Because Gregg Duncan had a lighter brown skin complexion, his parents may have felt a need to not burden him with the reality of the harsh treatment darker complexion Black males encounter. Gregg Duncan’s parents may have considered that, if he had understood his Blackness at an early age and developed a “voice,” he would have encountered resistance from white society and therefore decided it better not to talk about “Blackness” at all. Pain for him could have meant more pain for them as parents. But Gregg may have made a subconscious inference that “white” is the norm but “brown” is not. This seems to indicate that he does not have an issue with being Black but may not have experienced a lot of overt racism, possibly because he was once comfortable with racism due to being submerged in *white noise*. This is an example of the *centrality of whiteness*.

When it came to their peer group, most participants, including Heightman and Anthony, mentioned having majority white friends – [but there is nothing wrong with

having white friends]. For example, Arthur knows he is not white and because he has some understanding about how white society has treated Black folk, he feels trapped with having to be Black. He also wonders if his white friends accept him for being Black or something else. Some Black boys will act out or speak out but some will remain silent and be miserable trying to conform to the *white noise*. As for their teachers, Arthur and Calvin Johnson said that teachers treat all students the same, indicating that they haven't experienced the harshness of being Black in their current educational environments. In reality, parents don't treat all their children the same because they are not the same.

It took informal education from Carlos' dad, Arthur's mom, and Anthony's sister (a non-*white noise* source) – all sources outside the formal education system -- for the eyes of my participants to start opening. Internal conflict ranges between what he feels about himself as a Black boy -- which is "I'm okay and we're okay" -- and why white society has so much animosity toward him. He wonders if perhaps there is something wrong with him.

In relationship to teachers' negative perceptions about who he is, Carlos said "but I feel like as I'm going up, my teachers warn the other teachers about me. It's hard to change the way somebody looks at you after past stuff." A struggle with fully accepting his identity as a Black boy, seemed to affect his voice. In an attempt to address his need to love and know more about his Blackness, he became content with being a part of a Black clique that had a "white" mindset (white-washed/acting white). This association gave him some comfort and support about being Black. It would be natural for a Black boy to want to belong to a group that looks like himself. When asked to define identity, majority of the participants said, "the way you view yourself, or the way others view

you.” Or, “identity is who you are and who others think you are.” Both cannot be true. Which is it?

White noise makes it difficult for Black boys to speak about their Blackness. From my experience, Black boys don’t want to deal with the reality of white noise because doing so would disturb their dream scenario of no conflict and just joy. The bottom line is that they don’t want to upset their white friends or their teachers. Black boys in white schools are consciously aware of how society sees them and, because they inevitably experience ongoing bias, they have no reason to speak up and out.

This phenomenological study has revealed that the lack of Black teachers, especially at the elementary and middle school level, play an essential role in the identity of the Black boy and their willingness to identify themselves as Black boys who are becoming young men. The participants felt a certain amount of pressure to fit into the perceived white dominant culture. The study has shown that Black boys have no boundaries or limitations on their capabilities and/or identity until presented with stereotypes.

How can Black boys be what they don’t see? I conclude that, without positive professional role models in the lives of Black boys, they have only the stereotypes with which U.S. presents them. They only see limited options that consist of sports, entertainment, and life on the streets. The absence of positive Black role models, Black images, and positive stories about Black people told in white schools at early ages, can cause Black boys to question their worth in society.

I see a common theme of “I know I’m Black and I have no problem with who I am -- in fact, I love being Black!” The problem is that society has a problem with Black boys

being Black boys. U.S. society does not see a Black boy as a human being because *white noise* is in the way. *White noise* has prevented white educators from seeing Black boys as they see themselves. If a Black boy does not gain a strong sense of who he is at home, he will find it challenging to gain a strong sense of himself in an all-white school with curricula created by white European Americans. The current educational system prevents a Black boy from gaining a multi-faceted view of his Blackness that accentuates his positive characteristics, outside of sports and entertainment. A white system has no problem with being nice to Black boys as long as the Black boy has something that system can benefit from and which complies with that system's rules.

The self-images of Black boys have been and are being built without knowledge of untold stories, especially in white schools (see Kafele, 2012). Instead of knowing the fullness of their history, Black boys have been and are inundated with stories of docile, meek, and submissive slaves. When the subject of slavery arises in history classes, the story of slaves who fought against their plight should be covered (see Bentley-Edwards, 2016). For example, Black boys are almost never shown that most enslaved Africans/Black men fought back against the oppressive system of slavery in the United States. Having this knowledge would directly oppose the stereotype that Black males are supposed to be docile and submissive to a system that devalues them and would heighten the self-esteem and self-worth of Black boys as human beings. Surely the richness of Black history would resonate with and positively influence the lives of Black boys.

As James Baldwin said, "The future of the Negro in this country is precisely as bright or dark as the future of the country" (Baldwin/Raoul, 2017, p. 108).

Limitations

The limitations of this study included asking questions in a way that could be answered with yes or no. Similarly, my lack of probing during interviews likely limited the extent to which participants expounded on their answers. Furthermore, participants had most recently (for at least their last K-12 academic year) attended predominantly white schools in a state within the U.S. Great Plains. The experiences of the six Black boys in this study are not statistically or theoretically generalizable to those of Black boys around the United States or even in the Midwest at large. Rather, the phenomenon of Black boys' identity as contextualized by the white noise of educational settings is based specifically on the boys from this Great Plains state.

Recommendations and Implications

As I bring this study to a close, allow me to emphasize that everyone must involve themselves in the process of changing the current U.S. education system. Ultimately, parents, teachers, administrators, staff, students, and community members will serve as agents to transform schools and eliminate or minimize *white noise* in the lives of Black boys. We, as educational and educational research communities need to speak up and speak out about policies that perpetuate the miseducation of Black boys and of all students.

For future practice, I recommend:

- increasing awareness about Black concerns among district employees through
 - training in cultural competence,
 - engaging in Courageous Conversations About Race (see Singleon, 2015), and

- requiring district employees to take the Implicit Attitude Test (see Project Implicit, 2011);
- recruiting Black male teachers and administrators;
- addressing the needs and concerns of Black boys during before and/or after school programs within the school building;
- highlighting the truths of African and African American history (in addition to slavery and the Civil Rights movement) in curricula.

These strategies will allow Black boys to freely function and excel in an inclusive environment that sees them as human beings, equal in value across all humanity.

For future studies, I recommend:

- interviewing the parents of Black male students and
- interviewing white teachers, male and female.

Concluding Remarks

The work of this study has been imperative for me. When I hear Black third-grade girls say adamantly during a 2018 Black History month speech, “I’m not African,” or when I hear an 11-year-old Black boy ask during a Sunday School lesson, “so Africans are Black?” I know I must be about God’s work of transforming societal contexts for Black youth. To effectively approach this journey and give my very best to my vulnerable participants and their rich stories, I prayed for guidance, and God answered.

The initial phase of my journey started in 2015. I resigned from my position as co-head coach of the Bellevue Breeze Junior Olympic Track and Field Club, a position my husband and I had held for 24 years. My preparation for the final leg of this journey started in April 2017. It began with a complete body, mind, and soul transformation; in

other words, a cleansing. My approach was to clear my mind of all the “stuff/white noise” that I heard or saw on a daily basis. I closed myself off to social media, TV, radio and the news. I removed what I considered to be "non-critical" items and responsibilities from my plate to allow more time for my study. I took a sabbatical from all organizations that I was affiliated with (ADL, Inclusive Community, RESPECT, and Youth for Christ). I remained active in activities that were beneficial to my soul. These activities were dancing with the African Culture Connection dance group, church services, and Bible study at Antioch Baptist Church.

My quest was not only spiritual but physical and mental. I became a vegan and began to eat healthier. I removed process foods, meats, dairy among other items from my diet. I only consumed plant-based foods. I also incorporated meditation into my morning and nightly routine. April 2018 will mark one year that I have been on this journey, and I must say, this has indeed been an amazing journey.

I gave this project and my participants, all that I could possibly offer. My hope is that the young Black boys who participated in this study discovered an awareness about themselves and an inner strength that will benefit them in all their future endeavors. Though they were at different places on their life’s journey, they were all traveling the same rough road in America.

For Black boys around the United States and across generations, it is imperative that we hear their voices. The main reason we do not yet hear their voices is because of *white noise*. Hopefully, that noise will diminish over times and enable Black boys to travel a road that will lead to a better future.

To God be the Glory. Thank you and God bless.

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APPENDIX A: DOANE UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL FORM

Email from Tim Frey, Doane IRB

June 7, 2017

APPROVAL S17 007 DC IRB HS

IRB Doane <irb@doane.edu> (sent by timothy.frey@doane.edu)

to me, Marilyn, Catherine

TO: Deidre McKinley, Marilyn Johnson Farr (Faculty Sponsor)

FROM: Timothy Frey, IRB Chair

RE: APPROVAL of Project entitled "White Noise/Black Boys "

DATE: June 7, 2017

Your project, White Noise/Black Boys, has been approved via the expedited review process with 1 minor revision. Please change age of consent with parent to 19 years of age. If you agree to this change you may begin data collection.

The approval code for this project is S17 007 DC IRB HS . Please use this code to indicate to participants that the project has been approved by the Doane University institutional review board. Any changes to the procedures, protocol, or instruments will require additional review.

The project is approved for one year from today's date, June 7, 2017. All recruitment and data collection must cease prior to June 8, 2018, unless a separate request for continuation has been approved by the Doane IRB prior to that date.

Please add the approval number and correct contact information for Doane IRB to your consent form.

This approval is based upon the assurance that you will:

- Require informed consent of parent for all participants under 19 years of age.
- Protect the rights and welfare of research participants;
- To the extent allowed by the protocol, select subjects equitably among the potential populations of participants
- Adhere to all Doane University IRB Policies and Procedures Relating to Human Subjects, as written in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46);
- Maintain copies of all pertinent information related to the research study including, but not limited to, video and audio tapes and other forms of image capture, instruments, copies of written consent agreements, and any other supportive documents in accordance with Doane University IRB Policies and Procedures Relating to Human Subjects.
- Report to the Doane University IRB immediately if any of the following occur:
 - o Unanticipated problems
 - o Unanticipated deviations from previously approved protocols
 - o Any proposed changes from the previously approved research.

If you have any questions regarding the protection of human participants, or the IRB process for human subjects research, please do not hesitate to contact the Timothy Frey, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at (402) 826-8648 or irb@doane.edu.

Tim

Tim Frey

Chair, Institutional Review Board

Doane University

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE OF EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

From: **McKinley, Deirdre** <deirdre.mckinley@bpsne.net>

Date: Wed, Aug 2, 2017 at 1:48 PM

Subject: Re: [Name], White Noise/Black Boys Research

To: [Name]

Hello [Name]

My name is Deirdre McKinley, and I am the assistant principal at Middle School in Nebraska.

I am currently working on my doctoral degree at Doane University, and I will be conducting my research on Black boys (ages 12-21) and their lived experiences in a predominately white public school system. The topic of my study is...White Noise/Black Boys: The Shaping of the Black Male Identity.

The purpose of this qualitative Phenomenological study is to describe and analyze the Black male student education experience at a predominately white public school in the Midwest. This study will use in-depth interviews with Black males who currently attend/recently attended and graduated from a predominately white public school in the Midwest. The study will focus on the challenges and success each participant encountered at the predominately white school. Through the interviews, an understanding of perspective in regards to cultural experiences will be explored.

My overarching research questions are as follow:

(1) How are the socially constructed identities of race and gender impacting Black boys, especially within education (Perception)

(2) Who do Black boys think they are, as to what others say they are? (Identity)

I would love to invite your son to participate in my study and to **share his story** with me.

Please ask your son answer the following questions below. Please send/email their answers along with the consent forms. Thank you...

1. **Who are you? How do you see yourself?**
2. **What makes you who you are?**
3. **Do you feel that you're able to use your voice in school? Explain?**
4. **What would you like your teacher(s) to know about you?**

The research will be confidential, and my participant's names will remain anonymous.

I have included all the pertinent information and consent forms. (Please see attachments).

If your son agrees to a participant in my study, please call me at the number below or on my cell at [402-XXX-XXX](tel:402-XXX-XXX). Also, please sign the attached forms and return it to me, as soon as possible. I would like to have all my interviews completed sometime in August.

Likewise, if you would like to speak/meet with me, please let me know, and I will be happy to set up an appointment. Thank you so much

PS: Please send me a response confirming that you receive this invitation. Thanks again for your support.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT PROVIDED VIA EMAIL

The Research Investigator will have participants sign the informed consent form before participating in the study.

Informed Consent Script:

Your participation in this phenomenological research study interview is entirely voluntary. You may decline to respond to any questions at any time during the interview. There is no direct benefit and minimal risk to you in participation in this study. Your privacy will be maintained during the entire length of this study. You may ask questions at any time during the interview. To ensure the accuracy of your responses, your interview (face-to-face) will be audio/video recorded.

Do you have any questions?

Do you give your consent to participate in this research study interview and have it audio/video recorded (face-to-face)?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Date:

Method of Interview:

Research Investigator:

Research Participant:

The purpose of this qualitative Phenomenological study is to describe and analyze the Black male student education experience at a predominately white public school in the Midwest. Through the use of interviews, the researcher will gather detailed information from Black male students.

Script for Investigator:

When enrolled in predominantly white school, blacks learn that they have to adjust socially and academically. Black males who attend predominantly white schools also have to adjust socially, academically, and to being surrounded by Whites (Delgado, 1998; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993). Through the review of the literature, this study will focus on (1) Perceptions of the Black male in the education system, (2) Black males' and the shaping of his identity in a predominately white school system.

Participants, please bring the following with you to your interview:

Please bring one of the following describing your “live experience” as a Black male attending/attended a predominately white public school system: (a collage, a drawing, a photo/image, a poem, a song/rap, a journal, etc.)

Questions:

1. Who are you? How do you see yourself?
2. What makes you who you are?
3. Do you feel that you're able to use your voice in school? Explain?
4. What would you like your teacher(s) to know about you?

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

DOANE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB#: S17 007 DC IRB HS

Approval Date: 6/7/17

Expiration Date: 6/8/18

Title of this Research Study: WHITE NOISE/BLACK BOYS: The Shaping of the Black Male Identity

Invitation: You are invited to take part in this qualitative research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have questions, please feel free to ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study? You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a Black male who is currently attending/attended and recently graduated from a predominately white public school in the Midwest.

What is the reason for this research study? The purpose of this qualitative Phenomenological study is to describe and analyze the Black male student education experience at a predominately white public school in the Midwest. Through the use of interviews, the researcher will gather detailed information from Black male students.

What will be done during this research study? This study will use in-depth interviews with Black males who currently attend/recently attended and graduated from a predominately white public school in the Midwest. The study will focus on the challenges and success each participant encountered at the predominately white school. Through the interviews, an understanding of perspective in regards to cultural experiences will be explored. Each participant will be interviewed once. Interviews will be held in a quiet location. Face-to-face interviews will be recorded. Each interview will range from 45 to 60 minutes.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study? There will possibly be some minimal risks to participants in this research study.

What are the possible benefits to you? You are not expected to receive any direct benefit from participating in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people? It is the hope of the investigating researcher that through data collected will help us understand Black boys school experiences, and provide us with a cornerstone for dialogue that will provide authentic information about their lived experiences, which can be used to build knowledge, understanding, empathy, and relationships.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study? Instead of being in this research study you can choose not to participate.

What will be in this research study cost you? There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

What should you do if you have a concern during the research study? Your wellbeing is the major focus of this study. If you have a concern as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact Deirdre D. McKinley deedee.mckinley@doane.edu or 402-670-7056 or Dr. Tim Frey irb@doane.edu or 402-826-8648.

How will information about you be protected? Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. Only the researcher, will see the consent forms and the transcription of your interview. These documents will be locked in a file cabinet that only the researcher has access to. They will be destroyed after seven years. A pseudonym will be used as needed to maintain privacy.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person or agency required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but your integrity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research participant? You have the rights as a research participant. These rights have been explained in the consent form and in The Rights of Research Participants that you have been given. If you have any questions concerning your rights, talk to the investigator or call the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Deirdre D. McKinley deedee.mckinley@doane.edu or 402-670-7056 or Dr. Tim Frey irb@doane.edu or 402-826-8648.

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start? You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can cease to be in this research study (withdraw) at any time before, during, or after the research begins. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw, will not affect your relationship with the investigator, or with Doane University. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled. If the research investigator receives any new information during this research study that may affect whether you would want to continue being in the study, you will be notified promptly.

If you do decide to withdraw from this research study, your data will not be used.

Documentation of informed consent: You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your question(s) answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study.

If you have any questions during the study, you should talk to the investigator. You will be given a copy of this consent form for you to keep.

If you are 19 years of age and agree with the above, please sign below.

If you are under the age of 19, we must have a parent/guardian's consent and signature

Signature of Participant: Date: Time:

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date: Time:

Participant Initials _ _

My signature certifies that all the elements of informed consent described on this consent form have been explained fully to the participant. In my judgment, the participant possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participants in this research and is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate.

Signature of Investigator:

Date:

1014 Boswell Avenue, Crete, Nebraska 68333

402.826-2161 I 800.333.6263 I

Fax 402-826.8600

doane.edu

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

[Italicized font represents notes to myself.

*[*Asterisks represent analyzed questions]*

Crayon Identity Activity

Ask the participant to select a Crayon color: Why did you select that color?

Reason for Selection

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as a Black male either presently attending/or have currently graduated from a predominately white public school system in the Midwest. My research project as a whole focuses on the challenges and success each participant encountered at the predominately white school. Through the interviews, an understanding of perspective in regards to cultural experiences will be explored. It is the hope of the investigating researcher (myself) that through the data collected, it will help us (educators) understand Black boys school experiences, and provide us with a cornerstone for dialogue that will provide authentic information about your lived experiences, which can be used to build knowledge, understanding, empathy and relationships.

Interviewee Background Questions

How long have you been attending a predominately white school?

What grade are you in? What year did you graduate?

Were you born in the Midwest/where?

Did you parents attend school in the same district? In a predominately white school?

Main Interview Questions

What are your goals? What is your plan?

Who are your main influences? Why?

What can you tell me about your Heritage?

*Are you proud to be a Black male? Explain why/why not?

*Tell me about the Black males in your family as far back as you can remember?

*As a Black man, how do you/did you view yourself in the classroom or the curriculum, in academics, in sports/clubs and discipline?

*Do you think your teachers have the necessary knowledge of Black males? Explain

*If I were to interview one/two of your teachers, what would they tell me about you?

*How do you see the educational system portraying Black males?

*How does the media portray Black boys/men (news, social media, TV, music, videos)?

Name a black male and how do you relate to him?

Name two/three of your favorite TV shows? Why did you choose them?

*How do you think self-identity and diversity in your classroom affect student performance?

*If there was one thing would you change about America, as it relates to Black males?

At what age did you notice how other people were similar to and different from you? Explain?

- *Define identity?
- *What do stories teach you about identity/black identity?
- *Historically, describe the Black male and his place in society?
- *Presently, describe the Black male and his place in society?
- *How does the media portray Black boys and how has it influence/impact you specifically?
- *Describe your lived experience in school as a Black male?
- *What/who do/did you connect with in your school? Your peer group? Your relationships with teachers/administrators?
- *How many Black male/teachers of color, have you had over the years?
- *Do/Did you see yourself in the curriculum and how?
- Define “diversity”? Did your school(s) celebrate “diversity”? If so, how?
- *Have you’ve ever been asked to speak on behalf of all “black people?”
- Describe how your school experience prepared (not prepare) you for life after school?
- *Tell me about a time...you spoke up/out in class, as it relates to Bias? Behavior? Relationships? Fairness? What happened?
- *Do you believe that Black boys/males are viewed differently in school? In a predominantly white school/district? Explain/give specific examples.

***Word Association inquiry:**

I will say a word; say the first word/phrase that comes to your mind when...
 If I say cat, what would you say? I say, Black? Black Men/Boys? Strong? King?
 Beautiful? Bold? Deceitful? Gangbanger? Emmett Till? Trayvon Martin? Tamir Rice?
 Michael Brown? White Noise?

Share a story about a time...

when as a Black male, you felt differently based on your black skin? In school and out in the community?

- *Is there anything else you would like to share as it relates to this topic: The Shaping of the Black Male Identity?

Continuation of Main Interview Questions

- *What label would you use to identify yourself? Explain your answer
- What do you think about your race? Please explain/give examples
- What or who scares you and why?
- What or who makes you feel good and why?
- Should Black students be able to wear their hair in its’ natural styles to school (afro, braids, dreadlocks, etc.)?
- *Should there be a Black History Month? Please explain your answer?
- Should there be a BET (Black Entertainment Television) Network?
- Would you attend an HBCU?
- What do you think about Rap/Hip Hop culture?
- Name three successful Black people?
- What’s your favorite hang-out place and why?
- *Do you think police treat white and Black people differently? Please explain
- What are your thoughts about Barack Obama?

*Do you know who created the “N” word and what it meant?

*Have you ever been called Nigger by a white person?

Have you ever dated a white person? How were/are you treated by their parents?

Have you ever been treated differently in school than a white student?

What do your white friends say about former President Barack Obama?

****Discussion of Artifacts***

APPENDIX G: RESEARCHER JOURNAL

Recruitment/demographics

Description of the sample size and small introduction to my participants

Sample size: six participants

Ages range from 13-22

All six identify themselves as Black males

Five participants were raised in the Midwest; one was raised in the South

Five attended predominantly white schools' entire life; one attended predominantly white school starting his eighth-grade year.

Current grade in school ranges from currently completing seventh grade to graduating from predominantly white institution in Midwest, May 2017

Participants and their years attending white school system

- Carlos and Arthur both just completed their seventh-grade year of predominantly white middle school in the Midwest. Both have attended predominantly white schools since kindergarten.
- Anthony and Calvin Johnson both just completed their eighth-grade year of a predominantly white middle school in the Midwest. Anthony has been attending a predominantly white school since kindergarten. 2017 was Calvin Johnson's first year attending a predominantly white school.
- Heightman just completed his freshman year of a predominately white "private" high school in the Midwest. He has been attending a private school all his life.
- Gregg Duncan just graduated from a predominantly white university in the Midwest/2017. Gregg also attended a predominantly white elementary, middle and high school in the Midwest.

Each of the participants was asked to answer the following four pre-interview questions before our face-to-face interviews. All participants were also asked to select a crayon color that best represents who they are, and was also asked to bring an artifact (song, rap, picture, poster, etc.) that will help describe their "lived experiences" while attending a predominantly white school environment.

The Journey Begins

The Chronological Timeline

- IRB, Superintendent approval, participant invitation, scheduling Interviews
- March 17, 2017: meet with the Superintendent/shared my research topic/proposal and to ask that my research takes place in our district
- June 7, 2017: IRB approved/with a small adjustment. I had to change the legal age of consent from 18 to 19 years of age.
- July 7, 2017: Proposal defense/approval
- July 31, 2017: Superintendent signed IRB approval form
- End of July: Sent invitations via email to all selected participants, parents/guardians. I also attached a copy of the Informed Consent Script and the Informed Consent Form.

- End of July: A teacher/good friend sent an all blast Facebook message out inviting former Black male students to take part in my research. (the same day, three responded saying they were interested, and would participate).

- I had planned to interview a former Black male student who is currently incarcerated. I spoke to the Lt. in charged of the prison. He told me the person that I wanted to interview was under Marshall Hold, and for me to videotape the interview, I would have had to go through a lot of "clearance" (like the TV and Media does). That would have taken a lot of time. However, I was able to speak to his mother. She was very supportive and thank me for all I tried to do for her son.

- Others that I invited to participate were my pastor's son/no response (was very ill), a former track athlete (time crunch-heading off to college so wasn't able to participate), a 13-year-old Black male student (never was able to meet due to his family emergencies/travel. His father really wanted his son to take part in the research and asked that I keep him in mind if something else comes up. Early August: started contacting my videographer to set up interviews dates/times.

- On Sunday, Aug. 6th, I had three interviews scheduled at my videographer's Art Studio, Gregg Duncan, Arthur, and Anthony. My videographer misunderstood the time that each interview would take and only had enough tape for two hours. So I had to cancel/reschedule one of the interviews. I chose to reschedule Arthur's interview. I knew his father well and thought he'd be okay with the change. I was correct...actually he was glad. Sunday was tough for them due to Church service. Gregg Duncan was my first interview participant. I was so nervous! I arrived downtown early, sat in my car, reviewed my notes one last time before entering the Studio. While I was sitting in my car, a car pulled up next to me. A young Black male was driving. He parked. I got out and started walking towards the Studio. He looked familiar, and I wondered if this Black male could be my participant. I entered the Studio. Gregg Duncan followed shortly. I was correct; he was my participant. Once he came to the Studio, he greeted me; "Mrs. McKinley?" We shook hands, chatted a while as we waited for my videographer to show. The videographer arrived just a few minutes later, escorted us up to his Studio, and the rest is history. The interview lasted 56 minutes. My second interview participant would be Anthony. The interview was held just an hour after Gregg's. Anthony's mother came with him to the interview, which was excellent. However, during Anthony's video, his mother stayed in the room. She sat close/right behind me facing Anthony. Anthony could see his mother's face during the entire interview. He would glance over at her a few times during the interview. I'm not sure what if anything she was doing behind me...(facial expressions, mouthing answers to him, shaking her head no or yes, to specific questions). However, I do think at times Anthony looked to her for her approval. Anthony's interview lasted 44 minutes. Like I mentioned earlier, I had a third interview scheduled for this day, Arthur.

- We rescheduled Arthur's interview to take place on Tuesday, Aug. 15th. Heightman's interview would also take place on the same day. Before Heightman agreed to take part in this research, he asked the following question, "What should I expect?" I told him just to share his story; his "lived experience" as a person of color/Black boy attending a predominantly white school. Both of these interviews would take place in my office. When I arrived at my desk, I started to get organized and ready for Arthur's and Heightman's visit. Suddenly I get a call from my videographer. He told me that he had a

boot placed on his car/tire, and could not do the interview. I did not panic...I prayed. I did not want to have to reschedule Arthur's interview again! I decided to do the interview, without the video. Five minutes into the interview, low and behold, my videographer arrives. Miracles do happen! We stopped the interview, allowed my videographer to set up the camera and started over. God is good. Arthur's interview lasted 47 minutes. Heightman and his dad arrived a few minutes later. I met them both at the front door of the school. Heightman's dad sat in the commons throughout the interview. I escorted Heightman to my office, and the rest is history. Heightman's interview lasted 39 minutes.

- Aug 12th: My interview with Calvin Johnson. Calvin Johnson's guardian was busy that day and asked if I would be able to pick him up and take him to the Studio. I told her that I would. She dropped Calvin Johnson off at our church. I picked him up and took him to the Studio. The car ride over was tranquil. Calvin Johnson was texting on his cellphone and listening to his music. Calvin Johnson's interview lasted 29 minutes...my shortest interview. After the interview, I took him back to church. His guardian had not arrived. Something happened to where she would not be able to pick him up. Calvin contacted his aunt. She came about 20 minutes later. Calvin's guardian was thankful and apologized for any inconveniences. She was grateful for my help and service.

- After several emails, pleading for Carlos's mother to respond, finally, we connected. We scheduled Carlos's interview to take place on Saturday, Aug. 27th. His mother, nor his brother, was able to bring Carlos to the Studio. His mother asked if I could pick up Carlos. I picked him up from his house, and together we drove to the Studio. We arrived at the Studio, waited in the lobby area of the Studio. My videographer would usually meet us there and escort us to his Studio. After a few minutes passed, I (Carlos too) decided to go ahead and walk up to the Studio only to find out; my videographer wasn't there. After knocking on the Studio door two times, I took out my phone to call. As I looked at my phone, I saw that he (my videographer) had texted saying he was unable to make it...home with a migraine. Oh, my! So, we had to reschedule. We came up with the date...Aug. 29th. The interview took place at the Studio. Again, I had to pick up Carlos from his house. While driving to the Studio, he wrote a rap song (for his artifact). Amazing talent this kid has! During the interview, we had two interruptions where my videographer had to stop and re-mic Carlos. Carlos moved around during the interview. He was very animated and used his hands a lot. Carlos's interview was the most extended interview...*one hour three minutes*. On the way home, it was late, so I offered Carlos dinner. He wanted Wendy's. Our conversation on the drive was deep. Carlos is a very "conscious kid" to be only 13 years old.

- Aug. 14th: Sent email to all individual participants inviting them to the Focus Group interview, scheduled to take place on Aug. 16th. Gregg Duncan had mentioned earlier that he would not be able to participate in the Focus Group session. He was moving down South at the end of July. The other five participants told me that they would be happy to participate in the Focus Group. However, I only heard back from two of my participants' parents. Anthony's mom said they were coming. Arthur's dad said they could not. My idea to reconvene this group of boys has diminished. All of a certain, I had an epiphany and a plan B /Focus group idea #2 emerged.

- Aug. 14th: Focus Group idea #2, I planned to invite Former students who were members of either my MANDATE program and members of my Step Team (which my husband and I created in 2006). I asked eight Black males. Two of the eight, one, a

former Step Team member, couldn't participate because he was heading to college. The other, a former MANDATE member, never responded to my Facebook message invitation. Six agreed to take part in my research. One interested participant, Jordan King, (former Step Team & MANDATE member) is currently serving in the Arm Forces overseas. I sent his consent form, invitation letter, and Focus Group interview questions to him through Facebook messenger. He sent his responses back to me through Facebook. Five out of the six that agreed to participate in the Focus group were over my initial IRB proposed age limited of 12-19. Two were 23, one was 20, two were 19, and one was 18 years old. So again, I had to amend my IRB and changed the ages 12-19 to 13-22.

- August 16th: Oops! I forgot to email/text Anthony's mom saying that the Focus Group idea changed. He was no longer needed. However, I did not get that message to her in time...they showed at the Coffee Shop. I felt horrible and asked for their forgiveness. They forgave me...thank God!
- August 17th: Focus Group interview. It took place at a downtown coffee shop. I will discuss this more in Chapter five results.
- All of September/November: Reading transcripts and coding
- December 20th: Meet/had dinner with Dissertation Chair at Cracker Barrel. We came up with my Defense date (March 14th @ 2 pm), and time to have Final paper to chair/committee (end of February 2018).
- December 21st-currently: Started writing draft(s) of Chapter 4

Interview Settings

The Office: My office is small, has a window that opens to the schools, outdoor garden, and gazebo. The temperature in my room is always cold (cold to me). I keep a space heater on under my desk. Once you walk in, there's a long credenza to the left that holds family photos, little artifacts, and my diffuser. Next to it, is my bookshelf. Majority of the books I own all have ties to Black boys, people of color, African history, etc. All the paintings on my walls consist of Black art/Black artist. Along the floor, you will find 1st place trophies from the CSI step team dating from 2006-2014, a picture/painting of Prince and Michael Jackson that I bought from a young 15-year-old Black girl two summers ago during a Juneteenth Celebration. There's also another painting of Prince that I just got this past August during our Back to School In-service. A former Student/Artist painted the portrait while Prince's song, "Let's Go Crazy," played in the background. (Four minutes 20 sec.). In the middle of the room is a roundtable with Four chairs, which is where my participant and I set during the interview. There's a small desk/credenza in the back of the office, where my TV sits. Next to the window with the beautiful view, is my desk. A desk filled with sticky notes, my laptop, calendars, candy for my students, a plant that's near death, and much much more. Above my desk, you will find my Doane University EDS Cadre #1 photo, along with a plaque/award that was presented to me, my husband and our step team at the 2016 Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Rally & March Ceremony in Lincoln, Nebraska. My videographer would set up his camera in the doorway to my office.

The Art Studio: Beautiful place. My videographer's studio is located upstairs in an Art Gallery. Once you walk up the stairs and enter the room, you see lights that shine

brightly across a wall-length mirror. To your left, you will see the room set-up. There's a large window that faces the outside. You cannot see the entire downtown from the view, but you can see a building across the way. My videographer had his camera set up next to the window. Across the room, he had two bar-type stools for my participant and me to sit on. Between us, there was a significant table the same height as the stools. The backdrop was a canvas hanging that included his logo and website and business name. The entire set-up reminded me of something like Good Morning America or Sports Center. It was pretty impressive I would say.

The Coffee Shop: Also located downtown. Old, brick road/pavement. Enter the shop downstairs. Once inside, you will find many comfortable seating areas, a bar where you can purchase fantastic coffee/espressos, snacks, etc. Rooms can be rented out to have conferences. There's a stage floor in the center of the shop where shows/performance are put on throughout the week. My videographer had first reserved one room located in the back far left of the shop. It was too small for us, so we ended up using the larger room located right behind the coffee bar. It was open space but private due to the walls. It had one loveseat (Rico and Terry sat together) and a large couch/sofa (Denzel, Tony and Jimmy Iverson sat there). A coffee table was placed in the center. The backdrop was decorated with black curtains, which gave the room a dark essence. My videographer turned on some of the lights that were located in the room. It added some light, but not much. I believe the floors were wood. I set to the left of Jimmy Iverson in a separate chair. The videographer had one large mic (placed on the coffee table) that all participants used when they answered questions. Before the interview, I offered to buy all participants, and videographer, a coffee/smoothie/snack. They all took me up on it! :) I even got a smoothie for myself.

Participants

Names: pseudonym/participants came up with their own names

Identity: participants must identify as a Black male

Age at time of interview

Year currently in school (at time of interview)

Crayon color: was ask to select a color that best represents him

Pre-Interview questions

1. Who are you? How do you see yourself?

2. What makes you who you are?

3. Do you feel that you're able to use your voice in school? Explain?

4. What would you like your teacher(s) to know about you?

Artifact: describing their "lived experience" while attending a white school