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Within the United States, African American students experience school socialization that exposes them to racial segregation, economic stratification, and rote learning masked as education. Consequently African American families are compelled to engage in socialization practices that buffer against the adverse influences of racism, oppression, and dehumanization that threaten African American students' pro-social identity development within a racialized society. To investigate how African American students' develop their racial and educational identity within this racialized context I conduct a qualitative investigation to (a) explore African American students' perceptions of the socialization experiences they identify as salient influences on their racial and educational identity; (b) theoretically deconstruct the racialized contexts (i.e., secondary educational institutions) within which African American students are socialized prior to entering college; and (c) examine how variations in African American students' post-secondary contexts differentially reflects their identity development at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). I utilize critical race theory (CRT) and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) to explore African American students' counternarratives while simultaneously deconstructing the racialized context in which they develop their racial and educational identities. Findings from this study reveal that schools adversely impact African American students' pro-social educational and racial identity development. At a micro-level schools socialize African American students through tracking them into advanced placement, honors, general education, and special education programs. In addition schools engage in macro-level socialization practices that restrict African American students' postsecondary options, skew their perceptions of postsecondary

opportunities, and provide substandard preparation for educational advancement. Such institutional practices perpetuate whiteness as property through the right to exclude African American students from access to educational resources; and by maintaining a favorable reputation for white students while perpetuating the characterization of black students as intellectually inferior. Findings also illustrate how African American families engage in racial socialization that includes the educational socialization of African American students through educational modeling, educational continuation, and educational trailblazing. This study yields implications for families, secondary institutions, post-secondary institutions, and future research that promotes educational equity for African American students.

NAVIGATING RACIALIZED CONTEXTS: THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY  
SOCIALIZATION ON AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' RACIAL AND  
EDUCATIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

Shuntay Z. McCoy

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Approved by

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Committee Co-Chair

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Committee Co-Chair

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To the lives I have been sent to improve, African American students past, present, and future whose inherent worth, dignity, strength, and value could never be measured I dedicate this work to you.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Shuntay Z. McCoy, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Co-Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN RACIALIZED CONTEXTS

Identity development is a dynamic process that is a normative aspect of development (Erikson, 1968; Spencer et al., 2006). African American students' identity affects their academic achievement (Byrd & Chavous, 2012b; Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009; Wright, 2011), self-esteem (Oney, Cole, & Sellers, 2011), mental health (Elion, Wang, Slaney, & French, 2012; Mandara, Gaylord-Harden, Richards, & Ragsdale, 2009; Pillay, 2005); and future life outcomes (Brook & Pahl, 2005; DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Hurd, Sanchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012). However for African Americans students, identity development occurs within an overarching racialized society that presents enormous risk factors to their normative development (Spencer et al., 2006). Within the United States, African Americans experience risk factors such as institutional racism, discrimination, and exclusion from economic and educational resources (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Johnson, 2006; Ore, 2006; Spencer et al., 2006). These experiences are particularly salient with educational institutions; and are highly problematic because they create barriers that restrict African American students' educational opportunities, access to resources, and future life outcomes thus endangering their pro-social educational and racial identity development (Zinn, 2010; Ore, 2006; Spencer et al., 2006). Exposure to such risk factors threatens African American students' pro-social identity development by forcing them to simultaneously navigate their cultural positionality, plight as oppressed minorities, and fit as a citizen within mainstream society (Boykin & Toms, 1985).

In addition, African American students must develop their identity while being socialized by various macro-level and micro-level influences; such as schools and families (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998). For example, the public schools within which African American students' are educated serves as microcosms of the larger society. This context serves as socializing macro-level context where they are racially stratified, economically excluded, and perpetually marginalized (Ferguson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These same institutions are contexts where African American students are socialized through direct interactions with teachers and school personnel who maintain low-expectations, espouse negative perceptions, and engage in discriminatory practices on a micro-level. African American students are also socialized by their families at a micro-level. While at times their familial contexts offer support that buffers against the adverse influence of institutional socialization through culturally specific strategies; at other times they transmit socialization messages that African American students must learn to resist in order to develop pro-social educational and racial identities. Thus, understanding African American students' identity development, within the context of a society that racially stratifies people of color requires an examination of their experiences within school and family contexts (Bell, 1992; DeCuir-Gunby, Martin, & Cooper, 2012). As a result, this dissertation qualitatively examines African American students' perceptions of their racial and educational identity development in a racialized context where they are relegated to the bottom of the social stratum (Bell, 1992). I also theoretically deconstruct their perceptions of salient macro and micro-level socialization influences to reveal the institutional practices that threaten pro-social racial and educational identity development.

The most optimal developmental period to explore African American students' identity development is during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Tanner, 2006). Yet much of what is known about African American students' identity development is based on their

perceptions during the developmental period of adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1989; Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez, & Sellers, 2012). Although adolescence is a period in which identity development *begins*, the extent to which students can autonomously engage in identity exploration behaviors during adolescence is limited by their age (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Tanner, 2006). In addition, youth who describe salient influences during adolescence may be more apt to discuss the experiences they are inundated with rather than the family and school socialization they perceive as salient influences on their decision making. Alternatively, it is during the developmental period of emerging adulthood, a time when African American students enter college, that students' identity exploration reaches a new level both because of lowered parental supervision (the student is on his/her own), and because there are more opportunities for autonomous exploration related to identity (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Tanner, 2006). Consequently, an investigation of African American students' identity development during emerging adulthood is optimal for understanding their identity development and the influences they perceive to be most salient. As a result, this dissertation examines the perceptions of African American emerging adults who are post-secondary college students within the context of a racialized society.

### **Identity Development: Ecological Socialization within a Racialized Context**

To investigate African American students' identity development and the influence of the racialized context within which their identity development takes place, I will proceed by conceptualizing the central concepts explored within this dissertation. The following discusses how identity development, ecological socialization, and racialized contexts are conceptualized within this dissertation study; and how identity development is influenced by ecological socialization. In defining these concepts, I articulate how African American students are both positioned within and influenced by an overarching racialized context. Thus, I also deconstruct

the interconnectivity of identity development, ecological socialization, and racialized contexts for African American students.

### **Racial and Educational Identity**

African American students' identity development is a multidimensional process. It includes the formation of various aspects of their self-concept such as racial identity (Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995; Phinney, 1989, 1992, 1996; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Umana-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bamaca-Gomez, 2004; Way, Santos, Niwa, & Kim-Gervey, 2008), and educational identity (Brown, Linver, Evans, & DeGennaro, 2009; Howard, 2003; Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008; Powell, 1989; Welch & Hodges, 1997). Racial identity is how African American students perceive themselves as an African Americans (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). It is reflective of the internalized messages they have received, accepted, rejected, and reinterpreted to represent themselves as African Americans (Cross, 1991, Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Educational identity is how African American students' perceive themselves as students (Howard, 2003). It also includes their perception of their academic ability, how relevant school is to their life goals, and how they perceive their educational responsibility (Chavous et al., 2003; Kerpelman et al., 2008). Research indicates that African American students' educational identity is evidenced by the effort they put forth and the outcomes of their academic performance (Howard, 2003, 2008; Powell, 1989; White, 1984). Consistent with existing literature, this dissertation conceptualizes racial and educational identity as unique aspects of African American students' self-concept.

### **Ecological Socialization**

African American students' racial and educational identity is influenced by various ecologies such as their families, schools, churches, media, and community contexts. Although each of these ecologies influence racial and educational identity, research indicates that family

and school ecologies exert the most significant influence on African American students' identity development (Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002; Jeynes, 2007; LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008; Libby, 2004; Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009). Within these ecologies African American students receive both explicit and implicit messages about what it means to be African American and how to they are expected to position themselves educationally. These messages influence African American students' self-concept regarding race and education (Baker, 2005; Neblett et al., 2009). This socialization is conceptualized within this dissertation as ecological socialization, defined as the collective socialization messages African American students receive from their family and school contexts. Ecological socialization directly and indirectly influences African American students racial and educational identity (Neblett et al., 2009; Spencer et al., 2006).

Although ecological socialization influences the racial and educational identity of all African American students, the extent to which ecological socialization influences their future outcomes varies. For some African American students ecological socialization is consistent and equally supportive. In these cases, African American students receive affirming positive messages regarding race and education both from their family and school ecologies. However, for other African American students their ecological socialization is reflective of incongruent socialization messages, which expose them to risk factors from one context while the other context creates a supportive environment that affirms their self-worth (Howard, 2008). For example, students may experience racism and discrimination from their school context juxtaposed with socialization that translates proactive coping strategies from their family ecology. In extreme cases African American students experience ecologies that present equally adverse risk factors and threaten their survival. In these situations, African American students receive negative messages from both their family and school ecologies. However, the ecological socialization

African American students experience is not completely indicative of how they will perceive themselves racially and educationally (Byrd & Chavous, 2012a). For example some African American students engage in counter-productive behaviors even when they experience supportive and encouraging ecologies. Alternatively, other African American students emerge from toxic environments and prove to be extremely resilient (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescence, 2008; Luthar, 1991). These individuals may perceive themselves to be capable of succeeding despite the risk factors they encounter. Consequently they engage in behaviors that result in their future success, such as high academic achievement, despite a lack of resources or support from influences within their ecologies. In an effort to gain a better understanding of these processes, I will investigate the extent to which African American students perceive their ecological socialization to influence their identity development processes within this dissertation.

### **Racialized Contexts**

A racialized context is the societal context in which an overarching racialized ideology that “assigns racial meaning to differences among individuals or groups produces hierarchies of power and privilege among races” (Burton, Bonillia-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010, p. 445). Ecological socialization of African American students takes place within this racialized context (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Burton et al., 2010; DeMarris & LeCompte, 1999; Johnson, 2006). Societal institutions, such as schools, are founded upon these racist ideologies and thus engage in practices that maintain hierarchies of power and privilege through socialization processes. Consequently, African American students experience race related stress resulting from both inadvertent and explicit racist and discriminatory institutional interactions during their identity development (Allen, 2010; Johnson, 2006; Solórzano, 1998; Spencer et al., 2006). Such interactions communicate to African American students that they are often expected to

underperform their peers and be unengaged in prosocial behaviors, such as high academic achievement (Baker, 2005; Bell, 1992; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

**Microaggressions.** African American students respond to racialized context in various ways. Regardless of their response, African American students are particularly vulnerable to the assaults they are exposed to within the racialized context. Such assaults are microaggressions; defined as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of Blacks by offenders” (Pierce, 1978, p. 66). Many African American students resist microaggressions by allowing the support of other ecological contexts to buffer their negative experiences (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). However, other African American students are disillusioned by microaggressions and come to believe that even working hard and focusing on academic achievement will not translate into racial equality and access to future life options (Buttaro, Battle, & Pastrana, 2010; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Johnson, 2006; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). Nevertheless existing literature continues to reveal that the microaggressions African American students are exposed to threaten their identity development in various ways (Baker, 2005; Ferguson, 2003; Gay, 1987; Gray, 2005).

**Postsecondary racialized contexts.** The racialized societal context also influences the postsecondary institutions African American students’ choose to attend. Historically, the racial stratification of society legally prevented African American students from attending predominately white universities (Avery, 2009; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Stewart, Wright, Perry, & Rankin, 2008). As a result, historically Black Colleges and Universities were established to educate African American students (Stewart et al., 2008). Although the 1964 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* permitted the integration of public schools, including postsecondary institutions, many African American students continue to attend HBCUs. Alternatively, many other African American students choose to attend predominately

White institutions (PWIs) for their postsecondary educational experience. Researchers assert that HBCUs and PWIs differentially impact the academic achievement of African American students. These scholars argue that African American students who attend HBCUs experience increased levels academic achievement, psychological wellbeing, postsecondary educational support, and positive levels of racial identity (Avery, 2009; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Lee, 2010; Mykerezi & Mills, 2004). Alternatively, other researchers suggest African American students who attend predominately White Institutions (PWIs) are constantly confronted with microaggressions, lower academic expectations, and threatened racial identity (Chavous, 2002; Stewart et al., 2008). However, this research does not yield much insight into how African American students' racial and educational identities influence the postsecondary institutions they choose to attend. As a result, this study will explore African American students' perception of the extent to which their identity development impacts their choice to attend an HBCU or PWI.

### **Specific Aims: Examining Identity Development**

The primary aim of this research is to investigate how African American students' perceive ecological socialization to influence their racial and educational identities within a racialized context. In conducting this study I will utilize critical race theory (CRT) and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) to explore how African American students perceive their identity development. I will also utilize critical race theory to deconstruct the extent to which African American students perceive ecological socialization to impact their identity development within a racialized context. For this investigation, I conducted two preliminary focus groups and two rounds of 17 interviews with African American emerging adults during their freshmen year in college. I engage in an in-depth analyses of African American students' perceptions of 1) salient influences on their racial and educational identity development, 2) the racialized contexts within which they develop their identity, and 3)

variations in their selection of postsecondary institutions into predominately White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

### **Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. In this introductory chapter I briefly provided an overview of this dissertation, including the dissertation topic and key concepts included in this investigation (e.g., identity development, ecological socialization, and racialized contexts). I also detailed the specific aims and organization of this dissertation. Chapter II begins with a discussion of culturally relevant frameworks framing this study, and how such frameworks are essential for examining the identity development of African American students within racialized contexts. I identify and describe Critical Race Theory (CRT; a macro-level theory) and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST; a micro-level theory) as the culturally relevant frameworks simultaneously guiding this dissertation. I begin Chapter III with an examination of existing literature that reveals what is known about identity development and ecological socialization within a racialized context. I highlight how this dissertation builds and extends existing literature to gain a better understanding of African American students' perception of their identity development processes. In Chapter IV I explain my research design. I specifically discuss my sampling techniques, data collection protocol, data analyses techniques, and my reflexivity as a researcher. Chapter V investigates the ways educational institutions socialize African American students through micro and macro-level schools socialization. Each of these methods of socialization directly impacts the development of African American students' educational identity. Chapter VI explores how families impact the racial and educational identities of African American students through culturally specific racial and educational socialization. Finally, in Chapter VII, I discuss implications of the research findings and how

these findings can inform family and school ecologies regarding how to engage in socialization strategies that foster optimal educational success among African American students.

## CHAPTER II

### **CULTURALLY RELEVANT FRAMEWORKS: UNDERSTANDING THE RACIALIZED CONTEXTS WHERE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR IDENTITY**

Within the United States African American students develop their racial and educational identities within an inherently racist society (Bell, 1992). However, there is a great deal of variation in how African American students perceive and navigate the various contextual influences that impact their identity development (Spencer et al., 1997). Too often such intra-group variation has been misinterpreted as evidence that that educational inequalities no longer exists. For instance, solely focusing on the educational success of some African American students while others appear to be victims of educational inequalities ignores the racist contexts African American students experience within societal institutions, such as schools. As a result, the blame of existing educational disparities has unduly been placed primarily on African American students and their families; and explained as a lack of academic motivation and educational values (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Hosstler & Stage, 1992; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). However, Schwalbe (2005) asserts that it is essential to “pay attention to context, to history and to power, so that we can see when . . . [biased explanations] make inequalities seem to disappear” (p. 217). Attention to context, history and power is vital to understanding that intra-group variations among African American students’ educational outcomes and academic performance are not indicative of educational equality, but are rather reflective of resilience and alternative sources of support in the presence of racist institutional socialization. Therefore it is essential that a study designed to understand how African American students perceive and experience their identity development within a racialized context strategically takes into account how context,

history, and power impacts their developmental processes. Utilizing theoretical frameworks to explore how African American students differentially navigate their micro-level socialization, while simultaneously taking into account the influence of existing macro-level socialization is vital to understanding African American students' racial and educational identity development. As a result, this dissertation utilizes culturally relevant frameworks to understand how African American students perceive their racial and educational identity development within a racialized context.

Following a brief definition of culturally relevant frameworks, and a discussion on the importance of employing such theories to understanding the identity development of African American students; I utilize this chapter to provide a detailed discussion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST). I continue with an in-depth discussion of the historical progression of critical race theory; highlighting how it has emerged as an interdisciplinary theory with a social justice mission. I also utilize CRT to dialogue about race, how it operates within The United States, and how macro-level racialized context influences African American students' identity development. In doing so, I specifically deconstruct the racialized context within which African American students are situated, and how this context influences their identity development. I define race, privilege, power, and hegemony; and how they are perpetuated at the macro-level within educational institutions. Next, I provide a detailed discussion of PVEST and how it was developed as a culturally relevant lifespan development theory. I then describe the how this theory explains cultural variations of intra-group processes among African American students. Continuing with a discussion of how the micro-level racialized contexts constrain the educational realities of African American students; this chapter collectively illustrates the effectiveness of CRT and PVEST in dismantling the influence of the macro and micro-level racialized contexts within which African American

students are socialized and educated. I will conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the methodological implications of these culturally relevant frameworks.

### **Culturally Relevant Frameworks**

A culturally relevant framework is a theoretical lens that takes into account the realities of African American students within a racialized context. It accounts for variations in how they draw from the strengths of their culture to respond to institutional barriers, and the existing challenges in doing so (Daniel, 2007; Dixson & Rousseau; hooks, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Spencer et al., 2006). Culturally relevant frameworks are imperative for understanding the influences of multiple contexts within which African American students are socialized (e.g., schools as well as families), and how African American students respond to the implicit and explicit racial socialization of various contexts (Spencer et al., 2006). For example, culturally relevant frameworks are optimal for understanding of how socialization from one context (e.g., family environments) is perceived by African American students to interact with the effects of socialization from a different context (e.g., schools) while highlighting the processes involved in how students make sense of such interaction (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Howard, 2003; Spencer et al., 2006). Exploring developmental processes of African American students without culturally relevant frameworks leads to fragmented misunderstandings regarding the realities of African American students, and has contributed to the inaccurate assessment that African Americans have inferior educational values. Alternatively, culturally relevant frameworks yield a holistic understanding of the influences of both macro and micro-level factors that impact African American students' racial and educational identity development. There are two culturally relevant frameworks utilized in this dissertation. Critical race theory (CRT) and the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) guide this study

with a culturally relevant lens for understanding African American students' perceptions of their identity development within a racialized context.

### **Culturally Relevant Frameworks Guiding This Dissertation**

Critical race theory and PVEST collectively guide this study in deconstructing the racialized societal context in which African American students are socialized; while simultaneously accounting for variations in how African American students navigate their experiences to form their racial and educational identities. Critical Race Theory is distinctively useful for deconstructing how educational institutions perpetuate the racialized context of society through racist practices and the extolling of racist ideologies on a macro-level. It also actively engages in social justice scholarship and activities to dismantle the existing oppressive social structure. The PVEST is fundamental to understanding how racist institutional practices directly impact African American students' racial and educational identity development. It provides a framework for examining individual perceptions and processes vital to understanding within group variations among African American students (Spencer et al., 2006). This theory also acknowledges that multiple contexts (e.g., schools and families) influence individual processes, such as identity development. The PVEST provides a theoretical lens that informs intervention strategies most effective for enhancing African American students' developmental processes (Spencer et al., 2006). Taken together, these culturally relevant frameworks guide this investigation of African American students' perception of their racial and educational identity, and the influence of contextual socialization on identity development within a racialized context. Simultaneously, I use CRT and PVEST to engage in transformative scholarship that asserts a long overdue dismantling of the "normative" perspective of European Americans that marginalizes and trivializes the realities of African Americans by engaging in social justice scholarship (Duncan, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Through the utilization of these culturally relevant

frameworks I actively engage in social justice scholarship that counteracts the oppressive tendency to ignore the ramifications of racist institutional socialization operating to marginalize the experiences of African American students' and misinterpret intragroup variations in the developmental processes of African American students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Spencer et al., 2006).

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) deconstructs how racism is endemic to all societal institutions within the United States (Bell, 1980, 1992). In its original inception CRT was used to analyze how race differentially impacts protection under the law for Whites and people of color through discriminatory practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberly Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado critiqued the status quo "and argued that critical legal studies did not go far enough in challenging the specific racialized nature of the law and its impact on persons of color" (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 259). As a result, they made three assertions that became the foundation of critical race theory. First, they explained how racism was infused in every aspect of society, including legal and educational institutions, to the extent that it is nearly unrecognizable (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1996; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Second, the scholars opposed the status quo of esteeming European Americans as the "normative standard" by considering the "experiences of people of color" as credible, reliable, significant, and widespread information (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 260). Third, CRT scholars deconstructed and "attacked liberalism and the inherent belief in the law to create an equitable just society" (Lynn & Parker, p. 260). Thus, despite how liberal one claimed to be, and regardless of how objective the law was esteemed; early CRT scholars highlighted the undisputable fact that laws written to ensure and maintain the oppression of people of color, could in no way be regarded as having their best interests at heart. Furthermore, CRT scholars exposed the notion of liberalism as

faulty in both ideology and practice, because everyone within society was essentially educated and socialized by the very discriminatory ideology that was designed to oppress people of color. Consequently, the mission of CRT to ‘attack’ injustices was foundational to its inception.

Liberalism, much like it is today, was considered the progressive ideology favoring individualism and egalitarianism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). While in theory this ideology was privileged as a solution to racism and discrimination, the liberal ideology created the illusion of social reform, instead of actually dismantling societal inequality. Furthermore, this ideology explained the social conditions of individuals as a reflection of individual behaviors and circumstances, rather than the consequences of oppression transmitted through racist and discriminatory institutional practices within the existing social structure (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Crenshaw et al., 1996 ; Lawrence, 1987). As a result, the hegemonic ideologies and practices inherent within institutional practices were ignored while “liberal race reform served to legitimize the basic myths of American meritocracy,” or the belief that advancements, or the lack thereof, are based solely on individuals’ initiative (Crenshaw et al., 1996 ). Alternatively, CRT scholars condemned both overtly racist expressions and covert microaggressions within “institutional policies and practices that are fair in form but have a disproportionately negative impact on racial minority groups” (Lawrence, 1987 as cited in Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 260). The critique of these scholars challenged the incongruence of legal practices designed to uphold justice, and the institutional maintenance of White Supremacy that actually occurred.

Since its original inception, CRT has been expanded across various disciplines such as education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and family studies (Burton et al., 2010; Few, 2007). Each discipline adapts this theoretical framework to actively engage in deconstructing and challenging racist institutionalized practices. There are several CRT theoretical assumptions used to deconstruct and counteract inequality within the racialized context of society. The following

information discusses the tenets most relevant for guiding this dissertation study in deconstructing the racialized context in which African American students are socialized and educated.

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

Critical Race Theory has been expanded across several disciplines. Each field has adapted its own core tenets and assumptions. The original legal inception of CRT was composed of several theoretical tenets that included; “the endemic nature of racism, interest convergence, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and counter narratives” (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Within the education literature, the central aspects of CRT most widely discussed include the endemic nature of racism, Whiteness as property, the critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and counter narratives (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2008; Stovall, 2006a, b). These tenets are central to this investigation because they reveal how discriminatory ideologies and racist practices are transmitted within educational settings. In addition, these assumptions provide a framework for investigating the implications of such practices and ideologies on African American students’ processes of identity development. I discuss these theoretical assumptions in further detail below.

**Endemic nature of racism.** Critical race theory recognizes that all institutions within the United States were founded upon discriminatory ideologies and established through racist practices (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1996). Although many of the explicitly racist practices, such as Jim Crow laws, have been deemed socially unacceptable, the ideologies behind such behaviors are endemic within all social structures (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). As a result, the endemic nature of racism within all societal institutions is a major assumption of CRT (Bell, 1992; Lawrence, 1987). This endemic nature of racism is perpetuated through “mundane practices and events that are infused with some degree of unconscious racial mal-intent” and is entrenched in the institutionalization of societal structures such as schools (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 260;

Saddler, 2005). For example, the instructional practices and basic curriculum delivered within public schools perpetuate racist ideologies such as the intellectual inferiority of African American students and discriminatory practices such as racially assigning them to low achieving classrooms (Ferguson, 2003).

Critical race theorists deconstruct the endemic nature of racism by critiquing explicit racialized practices such as “prejudice based on skin color,” and attacking existing institutional policies and procedures that extend privilege to Whites while oppressing people of color (Crenshaw et al., 1996). In doing so CRT highlights the interconnection of race, privilege, and power in maintaining hegemonic institutional practices. “The historical, educational, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an educational debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5). This debt has severe and enduring adverse consequences for African American students and adversely impacts their future quality of life and their ability to contribute to the larger society (Baker, 2005; Ferguson, 2003; Howard, 2008).

Thus in order to address these issues it is imperative to realize:

Race still matters and must be a central aspect of any discussion that is concerned with racial inequalities, because as a country, and as a community of researchers we have yet to engage one another in an authentic, honest, and sustained dialogue about race and racism. (Howard, 2008, p. 960)

Critical Race theory exposes how the effects of school desegregation, created the illusion of equal opportunity through racial integration while the inherent racist ideologies continued to dehumanize African American students while extending privilege and power to White students (Baker, 2005; Bell, 1992). Thus racialized practices, such as the disproportionate assignment and excessive referral of African American students to special education, is reflective of the endemic nature of racism within educational institutions (Baker, 2005; Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

This endemic nature of racism exerts an oppressive and detrimental influence on the identity development of African American students within educational settings.

**Whiteness as property.** Critical race theory posits that whiteness, or having white skin, is treated as a property right within the capitalist society of The United States (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Within this context, property grants hierarchal status, privileges, and power to individuals' who possess property. Within the United States Whiteness as property confounds property with race creating an irony that compromises human rights for African Americans (Ladson-Billings, 1999). For example, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain that:

. . . there exists a tension between property rights and human rights. The tension is greatly exacerbated by the presence of African people as slaves in America. The purpose of the government was to protect the main object of society—property. The slave status of most African Americans (as well as the similarly restricted rights of women and children) resulted in their being objective as property. A government constructed to protect the rights of property owners lacked the incentive to secure human rights for the African American. (p. 17)

Consequently, understanding whiteness as property reveals how the property of whiteness is perpetuated societally by extending privileges to White People that people of color are denied (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). These privileges are lawfully protected within the racialized context and perpetuate oppressive social structures, such as public schools.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) identified four aspects of whiteness as property as: “1) rights of disposition, 2) rights to use and enjoyment, 3) reputation and status property, and 4) the absolute right to exclude” (p. 59). Each of these aspects treats Whiteness as property by privileging White people and oppressing people who are not White. The right of disposition allows people who are White to maintain a favorable status exclusive to Whites. This status can only be occupied by those who are racially identified as White. Thus individuals with white skin

are societally perceived to have a disposition that is ranked above those who do not possess white skin. McIntosh (1993) describes the rights to use and enjoyment as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in on each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (p. 210). She identified two types of privileges that she, a critical White scholar, is afforded the opportunity of using and enjoying. The first type of privilege is received by White people in the form of “unearned advantages” (McIntosh, 1993, 212). This happens when Whites are granted basic necessities, such as a sense of safety, belongingness, and appreciation for their contributions (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 1993). Although these rights should be extended to every human being, within the context of society the right of disposition assumes that only Whites are entitled to having these needs met (Johnson, 2006).

The second type of privilege McIntosh (1993) identified is enacted through “conferred dominance” which is the position of superiority conferred to White people based on their disposition of being White (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 1993). This form of privilege ensures that Whites will maintain a disposition of power within all social structures that they are perceived to rightfully possess. These assumptions create heightened levels of skepticism and increased barriers for African Americans who are able to secure positions of authority and higher statuses (Johnson, 2006). For example, African American students who are in advanced level courses are constantly questioned and challenged to prove their right to be worthy of such an appointment while their White peers are afforded the privileged assumption that they rightfully deserve such a status, even in cases when they do not.

The reputation and status of property associated with critical race theorists’ conceptualizations of whiteness refers to the assumption that positive attributions are synonymous with possessing whiteness and unassociated with those who do not possess whiteness (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) state that “in the case

of race, to call a White person ‘Black’ is to defame him or her” because by virtue of not possessing whiteness, a Black person is assumed to represent negative attributions that are the antithesis of being White (p. 23). For example, when a school is comprised predominately of African American students it is perceived to have a lower status than schools that are predominately White, regardless of the academic performance levels the school may have (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The final aspect of whiteness as property allows those who possess whiteness to exclude those who do not own the property of whiteness from all of the above mentioned aspects of whiteness as property. Taken together, Whiteness as property is illustrative of the endemic nature of racism, and is perpetuated within educational institutions in various ways, that threaten the identity development of African American students.

**Critique of liberalism.** As previously discussed, CRT purposively attacks the notion of liberalism because liberal ideology only creates an illusion of equality instead addressing oppressive institutional ideologies and practices that perpetuate inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Saddler, 2005). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) identified three aspects of liberalism that are critiqued within CRT: “1) the notation of colorblindness, 2) the neutrality of the law, and 3) incremental change” (p. 29). The notion of colorblindness is the liberal ideology that posits racial differences do not exist. While the theoretical premise of this argument asserts race is a social versus a biological construct is true, this ideology ignores actual social constraints that racist practices maintain (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1996; Dixson, & Rousseau, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Thus to assert that one is colorblind is an illusion; because those who position themselves as colorblind or racially neutral have still been socialized and influenced by the institutional socialization of structures in which racism is ingrained (Bell, 1992). As a result, even without engaging in overtly racist actions, the endemic nature of racism permits racialized microaggressions to be communicated by those asserting their colorblindness and neutrality.

Critical race theory posits that liberal ideology permits practices that “justify ignoring and dismantling race-based policies that were designed to address societal inequality” (DeCuir & Dixson, p. 29). For example, although increased numbers of African American students enter postsecondary institutions using such trends as a rationale to discard practices that are targeted to increase educational equity (i.e., affirmative action policies) for African American students, under the auspices of liberalism and racial equality is antithetical to establishing true educational equity (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Abating such policies does not eradicate practices that restrict African American students’ postsecondary options in other ways. In addition, CRT critiques the notion of incremental change because incrementally granting equality is only beneficial to those in power (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). While it is comfortable for those with power to slowly change, doing so prolongs the dehumanization of marginalized groups. Dixson and Rousseau (2006) assert that liberalism is “far from racial neutrality and being in the best interests of persons of color; instead, it supports the operation of White privilege” (p. 47).

**Interests convergence.** According to CRT, interest convergence asserts that racial progress only takes place when it aligns with the interest of those in power (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 28). However, this convergence is masked or reframed to highlight the progress of racially marginalized groups. For example, when postsecondary institutions engage in activities to diversify their student population and in turn advertise existing cultural diversity without embracing institutional practices that reflect a climate of inclusivity and support for people of color, interest convergence takes place. Such convergence results in the institution admitting a more diverse student population. However, the increased diversity serves to benefit the institution by bolstering their enrollment numbers. This practice is framed as advancement for people of color to enter the university in larger numbers. Nevertheless the admission of people of color into the university converge with this perceived advancement by serving as an institutional marketing

strategy to increase enrollment instead of reversing institutional trends that restrict educational access to people of color and further marginalize them after they are admitted. In this situation and similar ones like it, those in power are positioned as liberals for addressing issues of inequality, despite the fact that doing so is actually in satisfaction of their personal interests.

Interest convergence also asserts that the perceived advancements of marginalized groups are usually not as significant as they are esteemed to be. For example, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) highlight that while it may seem that athletic scholarships for African American students are indicative of educational access, there are disadvantages that go unrecognized. They state that “while the African American student athletes would theoretically have access to a high-quality education by attending [an affluent institution], many of those same African American athletes rarely participated in honors or advanced placement courses” that would benefit them beyond athletics (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29). Their admittance serves the institution by enhancing their athletic rankings while giving the appearance of educational access to underrepresented students. Thus the needs of students of color are met only to the extent that doing so converges with the institutional interests. Taken together, CRT asserts that access to resources is only given to marginalized populations to the extent that such access guarantees the convergent interests of those in power. Alternatively, when meeting the needs of people of color does not serve to benefit the institutional structure it is highly unlikely that institutions would engage in strategies and practices that would create equity for people of color.

**Counternarratives.** Critical Race Theory emphasizes and validates the experiences of People of Color by utilizing counternarratives. Counternarratives are a methodological tool that amplifies the voices and experiences of people of color (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Stovall, 2006a,b; Milner, 2008). As a methodological tool, counternarratives require a qualitative methodology, such as interviewing, for reporting the narratives of people of color. This approach requires

readers to “suspend judgment, listen for the story’s points, and test them against *their own* version of reality *however conceived*” (Stovall, 2006a, p. 244; emphasis added). Amplifying the voices of people of color affirms them as creditable informants of their own experiences (Lynn & Parker, 2006). As such the experiences of African American students’ are not only acknowledged, but also reflective of their personal voices to express reality from their perception. Milner (2008) asserts that “counternarrative allows the researcher and participants to study and name a reality inconsistent with what might be considered the norm or pervasive otherwise” (p. 1575). Thus, counternarratives centers African American students’ experiences to reveal how their reality “counters” what has previously been conceptualized as the “normative standard.” This study will utilize in depth semi-structured interviews, as well as narrative and thematic analyses to ascertain the counternarratives of African American students as credible informants of how institutional socialization impacts their identity development processes. Critical race theory will guide this dissertation in deconstructing the racialized society in which African American students are educated and socialized. While it is essential to examine this racialized context in order to understand how African American students’ develop identity within it. Thus the following section utilizes a CRT lens to define race, privilege, power and hegemony to dismantle the macro-level influence these factors have on the identity development of African American students.

### **Dismantling Macro-Level influences on African American Students’ Identity Development**

Understanding the macro-level influence of the racialized context within which African American students develop their racial and educational identity requires an examination of how race, privilege, and power operate to create a hegemonic society. Thus CRT dismantles the operation of these societal influences regardless of an individual’s awareness (or lack of awareness) regarding how these things impact their daily lives. From a CRT lens, the

deconstruction of race, privilege, power, and hegemony that functions to oppress African American students' is apparent, regardless of existing variations in how African American students respond to these factors. The following section will utilize CRT to understand how African American students' identity development processes take place within an inherently racist society. To dismantle this macro-level influence of society I will define the constructs of race, privilege, power, and hegemony as they are conceptualized within this dissertation.

**Race.** Although race has been conceptualized in various ways, it is most widely understood within social science as a social construction (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Omi & Winant, 1994). Critical Race theorists, Solórzano and Yosso (2002), concur with James Banks in defining race as “a socially constructed category created to differentiate racial groups and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another” (p. 24). This social construction serves the purpose of hierarchically stratifying individuals within society based on phenotypic differences, such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features (Keith & Herring, 1991; Hunter, 2002). Within this hierarchy, people with White skin are placed at the top of the social structure, and those with Black skin are relegated to the lowest levels of the social structure (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Although race has no biological significance, the social ramifications of race within society imposes severe consequences for African American students and results in markedly different social experiences for them (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Within this racialized society positive attributes commonly associated with having White skin, and negative attributes are associated with having Black skin (hooks, 2000). For example, White people are treated as racially, intellectually, economically, and politically superior to people who are not White, regardless of their intellectual, economic, and political status. Thus, individuals with White skin receive favorable treatment when they interact within various societal institutions even when in they occupy subordinate positions (Bell, 1992; McIntosh, 1993). Alternatively, individuals who are

not White will be more likely to experience interactions characterized by microaggressions resulting from a negative perception of individuals who are not White (Pierce, 1978). As a result, African American students must develop their identity within a society where they are inundated by such racist messages.

It is important to note that within this dissertation black is used interchangeably with African American. Within this racialized society such racial designations are highly controversial. Some scholars differentiate race and ethnicity (Coard, 2008 panel discussion at the Biennial meeting of the Society of Research of Adolescences). In such cases black students include various ethnic groups such as Jamaicans, Nigerians, Puerto Ricans, and other ethnic groups that have black skin. While such distinctions are beneficial in areas reflecting high levels of cultural diversity such as Brooklyn, Miami, and San Francisco; these distinctions are less appropriate in contexts where such diversity is not prevalent (Sellers, 2008, panel discussion at the Biennial meeting of the Society of Research of Adolescences). This is the case for southeastern states like the one examined for this dissertation. Consequently, for this study black students primarily perceived themselves as African American students. Recruitment efforts targeting participants who self-identify as African Americans are discussed further in chapter 4.

**Privilege.** The racial stratification within society is also illustrative of the privilege that White people maintain within society (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 1993). Johnson (2006) defines privilege as the systemic access to or denial of resources solely based on racial stratification. Similarly, McIntosh (1993) asserts that privilege is granted or denied to people based on how others perceive their social status. This status grants Whites valuable resources while denying African Americans access to resources based solely on their racial status (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 1993). Privilege is not something that White people choose to have or to disown, but rather something that is conferred upon them based on their racial classification (Johnson, 2006;

McIntosh, 1993). This classification grants Whites the freedom to choose how they will represent themselves and others in society within popular media and educational curriculum (Delpit, 1995). For example, White people are permitted to mandate an educational curriculum that creates the illusion that Whites have made only favorable contributions to society while minimizing the societal contributions of African Americans. Privilege also affords White people the opportunity to “go through life with the relative ease of being unmarked” (Johnson, 2006, p. 33). Thus, privilege prevents people who are White from adverse consequences of racial stratification by associating Whiteness with positive attributes such as integrity, hard work, respect, and wealth. Alternatively, this same privilege positions White people with the ability to associate negative attributes to African Americans. For example, bell hooks (2000) described that “privileged people are the individuals who create representations of blackness where education is deemed valueless, where violence is glamorous, where the poor are dehumanized” (p. 99). Such privilege to control how people are represented within society is an illustration of privilege and a function of power. Thus African American students must develop their identity within a context where they are oppressed by the privilege of whites maintain.

**Power.** Power is the ability to influence, control, and dominate resources and access to resources (Johnson, 2006). Within the context of the United States, most societal institutions are controlled and easily accessed by white people (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 1993). This access affords people who are white the ability to perpetuate the possession and maintenance of economic, social, and political power within society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Power also grants authority to White people to determine “whose voice gets to be heard in determining what is best for poor children and children of color” (Delpit, 1995, p. 296). The societal hierarchy of race and privilege permits people who are White the power to establish and reify a social structure that ensures “social relations and practices enforce White supremacy” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 9). This

racialized social structure ensures that non-White people are oppressed within society. Power within a racialized society also allows White people who possess power to maintain it through the social construction of realities that suggest they do not possess such power. For example, Bonilla-Silva (2006) states,

if anyone dares to point out that in this land of milk and honey there is a tremendous level of racial inequality...they can argue this is due to minorities' schools, lack of education, family disorganization, or lack of proper values and work ethic. Whites can blame [African Americans] for their own status. (pp. 47–48)

Consequently, power gives White people the opportunity to protect themselves from relinquishing their status within society. Power allows White people to perpetuate their hierarchical racial status and the privileges they are afforded within the context of this racialized society. This interconnected system of domination and oppression is hegemony.

**Hegemony.** Hegemony is “a social consciousness created by dominant groups who control socializing institutions such as the media, schools, churches, and the political system; these institutions prevent alternative views from gaining an audience or establishing their legitimacy” (DeMarris & LeCompte, 1999, p. 17). It is through these socializing institutions that racism, privilege, and the current power structure is perpetuated. This hegemonic system reifies the perception that African American students do not value education, have dysfunctional families, and have low moral values (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). It is within this hegemonic social structure that African American students are socialized and educated. The influence of hegemony on the identity development of African American students is most frequently transmitted through educational socialization within the school context (Davis et al., 2004; Edman & Brazil, 2007). The operation of hegemony within the racialized context of educational institutions influences both the racial and educational identity development of all African American students regardless of their awareness of it. However, the ways in which African American students perceive and

internalize the macro-level influence of hegemony within the school context varies a great deal. The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) is a culturally relevant framework that is particularly beneficial for understanding within group variations in how African American students develop their identity within a racialized context (Spencer et al., 2006). The following section will provide a detailed examination of the PVEST and how it will be utilized to guide my dissertation study.

### **Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory**

Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) is a lifespan developmental model that emphasizes the role of identity, culture and ecology on normative development (Spencer et al., 2006). This framework provides a culturally relevant perspective for understanding processes unique to African American students, by conceptualizing the influence of race and culture on their normative development. For example, race influences the identity development of African American students who must determine how they will perceive and express themselves as Black individuals (Cross, 1991; Spencer et al., 2006). Consequently, African American families may engage in specific cultural practices that address the intersections of race, class, and gender of their children; such as racial and educational socialization (Hughes et al., 2006; Peters, 2002). Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory both acknowledges the influence of race in these processes, and offers a theoretical lens for understanding how African American students make sense of these processes to develop their racial and educational identities. Thus, PVEST guides my exploration of African American students' identity development within a racialized context, and my understanding of how African American students perceive their ecological socialization to impact their identity development.

The PVEST centralizes identity development throughout the life course. It is particularly beneficial for examining within group differences of identity development among African

American students because it is designed to account for individual perceptions of context, as well as factors contributing to and/or hindering individual resilience. Within this theoretical framework various contexts, such as families and schools, are understood to exert influence on the identity development of African American students. However, the meanings that African American students attribute to their socialization experiences across contexts, and the behavior that they engage in as a result of their socialization experiences varies by individual interpretations (Spencer et al., 2006). Thus, PVEST provides a culturally relevant framework for the “analyses [of] the meaning making processes that underlie identity development and outcomes that transpire as [African American students] transition across contexts” (Spencer et al., 2006, p. 640). Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory asserts that when African American students successfully navigate the existing life challenges to develop a healthy pro-social identity, they demonstrate resilience (Spencer et al., 2006). Resilience is defined within this framework as, “the successful negation of exacerbated challenges” (Spencer et al., 2006). Thus PVEST takes into account various exacerbated challenges African American students are exposed to within the racialized context of schools such as, lowered expectations, disproportionate assignment and over referral to special education, educational tracking, institutional racism, substandard resources, and a host of other challenges that threaten their ability to succeed. I use PVEST to explore how African American students perceive these and other pre-college socialization influences to impact their racial and educational identity development.

### **The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)**

The Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory utilizes five theoretical stages for understanding how the identity of African American students is developed within the racialized context of The United States. The five PVEST stages are “net vulnerability, net stress,

reactive coping processes, emergent identities, and stage-specific coping outcomes” (Spencer et al., 2006, p. 641). The PVEST accounts for existing variability throughout each of these stages, thus acknowledging within group variation in how African American students respond to racialized contexts. In addition, PVEST is extremely useful for examining how socialization differentially impacts the identity development and academic achievement of African American students. Furthermore, because the PVEST is a lifespan developmental model, the stages of net stress, reactive coping processes, emergent identities, and stage-specific coping outcomes are perceived to be cyclical and recursive throughout the life cycle (Spencer et al., 2006). This theoretical framework is designed to explore normative identity development, and as such it is not based on a deficit model of understanding African American students (Spencer et al., 2006). Instead, PVEST asserts that all students undergo identity development, but within the context of a racialized society, African American students have greater barriers they have to overcome (i.e., racial oppression, White privilege, institutional oppression, hegemony, etc) throughout their identity development process.

**Net vulnerability.** The first stage of the PVEST is net vulnerability. Net vulnerability is the potential of risk and protective factors within an individual’s environmental context (Spencer et al., 2006). All individuals have various potential risk and protective factors within their environments. For example, in low income urban environments, potential risk factors may include the conditions of poverty, exposure to violence, and home school dissonance (Byrd & Chavous, 2012a; Spencer et al., 2006). Alternatively, authoritative parenting practices, racial socialization, and parental educational socialization may serve as protective factors that help students overcome the existing risk factors within their environment. However, although various net vulnerabilities may be present within an individuals’ environment; an individuals’ perception of these factors determines the extent to which they are potential risk and/or protective factors.

For example, according to PVEST, individuals' perceptions of their net vulnerability differentially impacts their identity development, regardless of the extent to which risks and protective factors are actually present. Thus, it is essential to assess African American students' perception of their family and school socialization in order to understand how existing net vulnerabilities such as institutional socialization actually influences their identity development.

**Net stress.** According to PVEST, net stresses are the manifested risks (i.e., institutional racism) and protective factors (i.e., parental racial socialization counteracting discrimination) encountered by African American students experience (Spencer et al., 2006). This is distinct from the potential net vulnerabilities that may be present within African American students' environments; because net stresses are the manifestation of African American students' perceived risk and/or protective factors within their personalized experiences. For example, some students perceive their family to be a protective and supportive environment that buffers the oppression within educational institutions. Conversely, other students may perceive their family environment to be unsupportive and a threat to their educational success. In the latter case, families may be conceptualized as a manifested risk; while conceptualized as a protective factor for the first group. Thus net stresses can either be perceived as social supports or environmental challenges (Spencer et al., 2006). African American students' perception of their net stresses directly impact the third stage of PVEST, their reactive coping processes.

**Reactive coping processes.** Within PVEST, reactive coping processes are the "problem solving strategies that can lead to either adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies" (Spencer et al., 2006, p. 642). For example, when African American students are confronted with net stresses, such as discrimination from their teachers, this presents a risk that threatens their ability to successfully engage in the learning environment. Consequently, African American students are faced with decisions to employ adaptive coping strategies such as seeking academic assistance

from sources external to the classroom environment or through maladaptive practices such as physically confronting their discriminatory teacher. Examining the various coping processes African American students engage in highlights which processes contribute to academic success and which contribute to academic failure. Furthermore, PVEST acknowledges that the context is influential in determining which reactive coping processes are adaptive and which are maladaptive (Spencer et al., 2006). For example, assertive practices of speaking ones' mind may be considered to be adaptive within the family context, while being considered threatening or maladaptive within the school context (Spencer et al., 2006). Such school-home dissonance presents increased net stresses within the school environment for African American students (Byrd & Chavous, 2012b).

**Emergent identities.** Emergent identities are the internalized processes that develop into identity formation over time (Spencer et al., 2006). Spencer and colleagues (2006) state that, “emergent identities define how individuals view themselves within and between various contexts of development (e.g., family, school, and neighborhood)” (p. 642). African American students' emergent identities affect their behavior. For example, how African American students perceive themselves racially and educationally will impact their educational behaviors that directly determine their academic achievement. Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory also acknowledges that emergent identities may be perceived as either positive or negative. Emergent identities are positive or negative. They are not static, but rather continue to develop overtime. This study examines African American students' emergent racial and educational identities and their perceptions of the ecological socialization that impacts their identity development.

**Stage-specific coping outcomes.** Stage-specific coping outcomes are the productive or unproductive consequences individuals experience as a result of their identity motivated behavior

(Spencer et al., 2006). According to PVEST individuals are resilient when they achieve productive stage-specific coping outcomes, such as high academic achievement, despite exposure to negative experiences (Spencer et al., 2006). Alternatively, unproductive stage-specific coping outcomes may include school dropout and incarceration (Spencer et al., 2006). Unproductive outcomes greatly reduce the future life options for individuals; whereas, productive stage-specific outcomes result in enhanced future life outcomes. African American students' stage specific outcomes are a direct reflection of their emergent racial and educational identities. Taken together, the PVEST provides a framework for examining variations in how African American students perceive their socialization to impact their racial and educational identity development.

#### **Dismantling Micro-Level influences on African American Students' Identity Development**

Understanding the micro-level influences of racialized contexts within which African American students develop their racial and educational identity requires an examination of adverse factors African American students are directly influenced by within the school context. These factors include the historical and current educational ideologies and practices that function to undermine the academic achievement of African American students. However, many of these things are implicit and virtually overlooked due to seemingly well intentioned policies and practices that were theoretically designed to alleviate educational inequalities. Nevertheless, the current trends reveal that the historically racist practices that lawfully segregated public schools are still apparent in the current educational ideologies. Although PVEST highlights that students differentially respond to these micro-level influences, it is essential to understand the factors that perpetuate institutional racism African American students are exposed to within the school context that influences their racial and educational identity.

### **African American Students' Exposure to Micro-level Racialized Context of Schools**

Despite historical and current educational interventions, such as *Brown versus The Board of Education Topeka, Kansas*, and *No Child Left Behind*, that in theory addressed the educational inequalities African American students are exposed to; the educational socialization of African American students are characterized by institutional racism and discrimination (Baker, 2005; Davis et al., 2004; Edman & Brazil, 2007; Ferguson, 2003). Educational research examining comparisons between African American students and their European American peers continue to reflect the existence of educational inequalities within the educational experiences of African American students (Baker, 2005; Davis et al., 2004; Edman & Brazil, 2007; Ferguson, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These current educational trends illustrate the adverse influence of the racialized context on African American students' identity development, and reflect glaring discrepancies in academic performance of African American students when compared to their white peers. These existing inequalities plague African American students' educational experience from their elementary through their postsecondary educational journey (Gray, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Mathis, 2005). For example, African American students disproportionately experience higher dropout rates, underrepresentation in academically advanced courses, overrepresentation in special education and disproportionately higher rates of disciplinary actions, such as suspensions, within educational settings (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Furthermore, postsecondary educational trends reveal that only forty-two percent of African Americans admitted into four year institutions graduated with a bachelor's degree within six years of being admitted, in comparison to sixty percent of Whites who earned a bachelor's degree within six years of being admitted (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Taken together, these trends underscore the perpetual educational socialization African American students are exposed to within the context of a racialized society (Baker, 2005; Chavous, 2002; Ladson-Billings,

2006). To gain a better understanding of what African American students are exposed to, the following section will discuss the educational ideologies inherent in educational institutions and how such ideologies translate into micro-level institutional practices that adversely socialize African American students.

### **Educational Ideologies and Practices**

Prior to the landmark *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, Supreme Court decision, that led to the integration of public schools, African American students were treated by majority culture as inferior to Whites, incapable of learning, and undeserving of resources. Despite the fact that explicitly excluding African American students from well-resourced public schools is now unlawful; educational practices and the curriculum delivered within public schools did not reform the discriminatory and racist ideologies and practices inherent in the institutional structure of schools (Ferguson, 2003). As a result, *de jure*, overtly discriminatory practices such as lawful segregation were aborted while the same embedded ideologies that served the purpose of dehumanizing African American students while advantaging White students continued; allowing *de facto* (practiced) segregation to continue (Baker, 2005; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Chapman, 2006). Consequently, institutional race-based practices such as tracking, disproportionate assignment and referral of African American students to special education, and racial conflict between students and teachers have been characteristic of African American students' educational experience (Baker, 2005; Chapman, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

The consequences of the more recent No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Legislation, that federally mandated the implementation of educational standards of accountability, continue to perpetuate the discriminatory racialized experiences of African American students (Mathis, 2005). In theory, this legislation was applied to improve the overall quality of education for

students, improve the quality of educators, and most essentially, to alleviate educational disparities of students assessed to be underperforming (Gray, 2005; Mathis, 2005). Alternatively, this legislation actually worsened the educational disparities by mandating educators to divert attention from educating students to focus on teaching students to test in order to achieve specific educational outcomes (Gray, 2005). Furthermore, NCLB threatened schools with sanctions as severe as having school districts succumb to state control if test scores did not reflect “adequately yearly progress” (NCLB Act, 2002). When scores fail to meet the set standards, they are faced with complete budget reorganization leading to increased class sizes and even closure by the state for not achieving the legislated accountability measures.

Although the federal mandates of NCLB impacted public education throughout the nation, the impact of the legislation was particularly harmful to African American students (Barron, 2009; Gray, 2005). NCLB nullified the advancements that the previous integration legislation of *Brown versus The Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* had achieved (Gray, 2005). For example, under NCLB legislation schools that were already suffering financially experienced financial sanctions that reduce the resources schools have to work with (Gray, 2005; Mathis, 2005). Such financial sanctions were followed by district rezoning and subsequent re-segregation of the educational system (Barron, 2009). Barron (2009) asserted that these changes resulted in “the national trend of schools becom[ing] de facto, rather than de jure, segregated” (p.373). These decisions impact the educational socialization that African American students receive by reducing their educational experience to leaning how to take standardized state tests, instead of gaining educational access through college preparation and exposure to future life options (Gray, 2005).

The perpetual racist educational ideologies and practices situate African Americans within a racialized context that restricts their access to educational resources and marginally

prepares them for educational advancement. It is within this racialized context that African American students are challenged to form their racial and educational identities. Culturally relevant frameworks like CRT unveil institutional practices of secondary schools that racially socialize African American students, and emphasize the marginalized counternarratives regarding of how African American students perceive institutional practices to interact with the socialization messages they receive from their families. In addition, PVEST yields an understanding of existing variations in how African American students interpret and respond to racialized contexts, while they develop their racial and educational identity. Taken together, this dissertation will be guided by CRT and PVEST in exploring variations in how African American students develop their racial and educational identities within a racialized context.

#### **Methodological Implications of CRT and PVEST**

The culturally relevant theories that frame this study also have direct methodological implications for the research design. Within the context of this dissertation, CRT will be utilized to strategically collect the counternarratives of African American students through in-depth interviews. The counternarrative analyses of African American students will be used to explore how they perceive their socialization experiences to impact their identity development. In addition, CRT tenets will guide the analyses of data in identifying themes that illustrate the impact that educational socialization has on the racial and educational identities of African American students, and how such processes influences African American students' educational experiences. Simultaneously, PVEST will guide my analysis of the within group variations among African American students' developmental processes, such as racial and educational identity development. Taken together, CRT and PVEST will inform my research design, analysis, and interpretation as I investigate how African American students' perceive their

precollege socialization from families and schools to influence their racial and educational identity development.

### CHAPTER III

#### LITERATURE REVIEW: IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND ECOLOGICAL SOCIALIZATION WITHIN A RACIALIZED CONTEXT

African American students face a number of challenges during their identity development, which are particularly salient during their transition into college (Parade, Leerkes, & Blankson, 2010; Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009; Toldson & Owens, 2010). For example, African American students transitioning into college are faced with decisions regarding how to define, express, and enact their racial and educational identities (Arnett, 2000; Davis et al., 2004; Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, & Mugenda, 2000; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). In navigating these decisions, they must simultaneously decide how to integrate lessons from their socialization experiences into their identity (Arnett, 2000; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). The ecological socialization African American students' experience prior to their transition into college influences how they will position themselves within society based on their racial and educational identity (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008; Brown-Wright & Tyler, 2010; Fleming, 2001). Thus, it is critical that any examination of African American students' identity development explore both the ecological influences on their identity (e.g., family and school socialization). Such an investigation would be remiss not to emphasize African American students' personal perceptions of their own identity development; especially considering that identity is an individuals' internalization of their self-perceptions (Cross, 1991; Erikson, 1968; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998).

To explore African American students' educational identity development within a racialized context I utilize this chapter to provide a review of theoretical, conceptual and empirical literature that informs this dissertation. I specifically discuss existing literature on

identity development and how precollege ecological socialization influences African American students' identity development. I begin this chapter with a discussion of conceptual and theoretical literature detailing how the concept of identity is understood. This includes a chronological progression of the most widely cited identity theories and emergent ethnic and racial identity theories that were created to explore the influence of race and ethnicity on the process of identity development within a racialized context. Next, I proceed with an empirical examination of ecological influences on African American students' identity development. In doing so I illustrate that existing literature is replete with evidence that socialization within the family and school contexts exert the most significant influence on African American students' identity development (Baker, 2005; Boykin & Toms, 1985; Chavous et al., 2008; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009; Maton et al., 1998; Way et al., 2008). I conclude this chapter by critiquing the fact that most existing research on African American students' identity development explores these processes in adolescence either during their middle school or high school years (Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Neblett et al., 2009). Thus I posit a long overdue need for an investigation of how African American students' perceive their identity development, during a transition that actually requires them to draw from the socialization experiences they find most salient in influencing their identity development. I suggest that such an investigation should explore how African American students perceive their identity development during the developmental period of emerging adulthood, which can be captured during their transition into college. Taken together, this chapter will provide a detailed examination of conceptual and empirical findings reviewing what is known and has yet to be explored regarding how African American students' identity development is influenced by their ecological socialization.

### **Identity Development**

Erikson's identity development theory is one of the most widely cited theories for defining identity and understanding the identity development process. Erikson posited that identity is achieved during adolescence (1968). His identity theory is based on the conceptualization of 'crisis' defined as, "a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth recovery, and further differentiation" (Erikson, p. 16). Erikson (1968) highlights adolescence as a developmental period where identity is formed. However, he suggested that it is often misunderstood as a time in which adolescents ask themselves "who am I" (p. 314). Rather, he asserts that an accurate description of this developmental period is one in which adolescents ask themselves "what do I want to make of myself and what do I have to work with" (p. 314). This assumption implies that adolescents do not have their identity imparted to them by their parents, but rather they have to determine their own identity based on their desires (*what do I want to make of myself*) and perceived ability (*what do I have to work with*). He believed that everything that happens during the life course, prior to adolescence, was directly related to identity, asserting that "not until adolescence does the individual develop the maturity, and social responsibility to experience and pass through the crisis of identity" (1968, p. 91). Furthermore, Erikson asserted that everything occurring within the life course after adolescence was a direct result of if identity formed during adolescence. Taken together, the foundation of identity literature suggests that examining an individual's identity is best understood by examining the early experiences that influence their identity and the behaviors they consequently engage in. Specific to this dissertation, the investigation of African American students' identity will include an examination of the pre-college socialization experiences they perceive to influence their identity development.

Both before and after Erikson's seminal work on identity development, African American scholars have asserted that the social construction of race within the United States exerts a unique influence on African Americans' developmental processes, particularly identity development (Clark, 1965; Bilingsley, 1969; Cross, 1971, 1991; Dubois, 1903). These scholars suggest that within the racialized context of the United States African American students face both the developmental challenges that Erikson articulates within his identity theory (that all adolescents face regardless of ethnicity), and the challenges associated with being racially oppressed in a society that marginalizes African Americans (Cross, 1971, 1991; Frazier, 1939; Nobles, 1978; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Several scholars have also argued that such racial oppression is most salient to African American students as they navigate the school context (Boykin, 1986; Boykin & Toms, 1985; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Stevenson, 1994). As a result, this dissertation focuses on African American students' racial and educational identity development. I continue with an in-depth review of existing literature that highlights Erikson's identity theory and the relevant expansions of his theory that inform the processes involved in how African American students develop their racial and educational identities within a racialized context.

### **Theoretical Progression of Identity Development Theories**

Identity theories that have informed current conceptualizations of identity development are built around Erikson's widely cited monograph, *The Identity Youth and Crisis* (1968). It was in this publication where he outlined distinct developmental stages throughout the life course. Each stage was thought to be reflective of a unique 'identity crisis' universal to all individuals (Erikson, 1968). Within his framework optimal development was characterized by the successful chronological progression through each stage and the successful resolution of each "crisis." Failure to successfully progress through an identity stage (via resolution of the crisis) was thought to stagnate development; thus, causing problems for the individual in both the immediate or distal

future. However, a major critique of Erikson's work is that it failed to consider the impact of race and ethnicity on identity development (Phinney, 1989; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Despite this limitation, his research has advanced an understanding of the processes involved in identity development.

Erikson (1968) asserted that individuals' experiences were rooted in their "individual identity" and their "communal culture" or group identity (p. 22). However, this claim was most evolved through the work of other scholars that made race and ethnicity central aspects of the identity development process (Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995; Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Phinney, 1989, 1992, 1996). Nevertheless, according to Erikson an individual's crisis took place within the context of "significant others in their immediate community" (Erikson, p. 50). His theory suggested that identity development was a contextualized process that simultaneously resulted in the formation of both individual and group identity. Erikson's theory focuses most centrally on identity development, he asserted that his lifespan developmental stages before the adolescent period influenced identity development and the stages after identity development were a reflection of the developed identity. Although life course identity development stages are less central to my study, I include Erikson's conceptualization of each identity development stage in an effort to illustrate the centrality of identity development throughout the life course. The following details the developmental stages of his theory.

### **Erikson's Developmental Stages**

**Trust versus mistrust.** The first stage of Erikson's developmental theory is "*trust versus mistrust*" (1968, pp. 96–97). This stage takes place during the first year of life. Borrowing from Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Erikson described that this stage parallels the oral stage of infantile development. During this stage the infant interacts with their environment, which consists mostly of interactions with the maternal figure. Consequently they either develop a

secure trust of others translating into individual confidence; or an unhealthy sense of mistrust which translates into the inability to connect well with others.

**Autonomy versus shame-doubt.** Erikson (1968) related the second developmental stage to Freud's anal stage of development which takes place during the child's second and third year of life. The primary goal of this stage is for the child to successfully become autonomous from their mother through their cognitive and physical development. Such autonomy is attained through the child's ability to establish "free will" (Erikson, 1968, p. 109). Erikson asserts that "a sense of self-control without a loss of self-esteem is the ontogenetic source of a sense of free will" (p. 109). Alternatively, if such a task is not achieved during this crisis the child is thought to experience an overwhelming sense of shame for their unsuccessful attempts and doubt in their ability to succeed at future attempts for autonomy. Consequently, children who fail to become autonomous during this developmental stage will develop identities hindered by their internalized shame and doubt.

**Initiative versus guilt.** Between ages three and five Erikson contends that children face the crisis of "initiative versus guilt" (1968, p. 94). During this stage the child initiates various tasks in an effort to explore the world around them and how they fit into it. This exploration is healthy for children who experience necessary correction that guides their continued exploration. However, Erikson asserts that if such correction prohibits the child's desire to continue to explore the world around them, their ability to engage in initiative will be threatened. As a result, the child may develop an overwhelming guilt that prevents them from progressing through this developmental stage and subsequently adverse identity development. The child's ability to attain and maintain initiative is essential to the development of their maximum capabilities (Erikson, 1968).

**Industry versus inferiority.** Erikson posits that school aged children experience the crisis of “industry versus inferiority” (1968, p. 94). Industry is defined as “a sense of being able to make things and make them well and even perfectly” (p. 123). To achieve this sense of industry children interact with their environments to engage in various developmental tasks where they attempt to exercise industry. Children’s pivotal entrance into schools not only extends their environments beyond the home; but consequently, provides them opportunities to develop a “sense of industry” through environmental interaction with adults, peers, and objects from various contexts (i.e., home and school) (Erikson, 1968). Although, it is characteristic of the child to experience trial and error, their ability to develop and maintain an overall sense of industry is necessary for their progression through this crisis. However, if the trial and error that children experience is not interpreted by the child as a progression toward achieving industry, they may internalize the errors they experience as a sign of inferiority. Erikson asserts that such inferiority prevents successful identity development by hindering the pursuit of industry. As a result, children will adapt a sense of inferiority.

**Identity versus identity confusion.** Erikson’s fifth stage of development is “identity versus identity confusion” (1968, p. 94). He describes this crisis as, “the stage of adolescence [that] becomes an even more marked and conscious period...a way of life between childhood and adulthood” (p. 128). The stage of adolescence is monumental because it is characterized by the child’s shifting perspective of their contextual world. Erikson (1968) explains that this shifting is distinguished by:

morbid, curious, preoccupation with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototypes of the day. (p. 128)

The shifting that occurs during this developmental stage causes adolescents to move beyond their need for the affirmation of adults within their immediate environments, towards a necessity for affirmation from the larger society (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents' seeking of their sense of self as individuals characterize this developmental stage. This pursuit takes place within the larger society and is achieved as they simultaneously establish a connection to and identification with a group with whom they experience "a sense of continuity and sameness" (Erikson, 1968, p. 128). The alternative of this crisis is adolescents' inability to develop a sense of self, connection to, and identification with a group within the larger society; which is called identity confusion.

It is important to note two essential characteristics of identity within Erikson's (1968) theoretical conception of this construct. First, Erikson asserted that "identity is never 'established' as an 'achievement'...or of anything static and unchangeable" (p. 24). This assertion highlights that identity is a dynamic process. Thus, even when identity has been secured, it is likely to change over time. Secondly, Erikson focused on "'psycho'-'social' identity," referring to the 'psycho' or internalized/core of the individual as well as the identified 'social' (group); consequently, there are various aspects of an individual's identity that may be a central part of their individuality as well as connected and identified to similar groups. For example, global identity may include various identities such as ones' racial identity and educational identity (Erikson, 1968). However, as result of the societal consciousness aroused during the 'adolescing' period, the identity versus identity confusion crisis includes the pursuit of multiple aspects of identities (Erikson, 1968).

**Intimacy versus isolation.** Erikson describes the "intimacy vs. isolation" crisis as a stage beyond identity (1968, p. 135). He states that "it is only when identity formation is well on its way that true intimacy—which is really a counterpointing as well as a fusing of identities—is

possible” (Erikson, p. 135). Intimacy is characterized by the ability to establish “a true and mutual psychosocial intimacy with another person” (p. 135). Alternatively, when a person is unable to establish intimacy, it is believed to be a reflection of their insecurity to share their identity with another (Erikson, 1968). Their failure to share their identity results in isolation, or their inability to connect with others.

**Generativity versus stagnation.** Erikson’s generativity versus stagnation crisis is the seventh stage of development. The goal of this stage is to achieve generativity, “the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson, 1968 p. 138). Individual’s identity development directly influences how they position themselves to guide the next generation. For example African Americans with a heightened sense of racial identity may focus on guiding the next generation to be productive African Americans within society. This desire is perceived to be an evolutionary “need to be needed” and to meet the needs of others (Erikson, 1968, p. 138). It is distinguished by procreation; thus, offspring is necessary for successful progression through this stage of development. Failure to have children results in failure to progress through this stage, resulting in a “sense of stagnation” (Erikson, 1968, p. 138). This stagnation not only includes individuals who choose not to have children, but also those who are unable to conceive.

**Integrity versus despair.** The final stage of Erikson’s theory is “integrity vs despair” (1968, p. 139). Integrity is the byproduct of the prior seven stages. By successfully progressing through each of the identity development stages, individuals are believed to have acquired wisdom over time that is unique to their experience and beneficial for imparting into others (Erikson, 1968). These individuals have not only successfully experienced life, but have developed contentment with their life in a way that allows them to accept the fact that it is coming to an end. The alternative to this crisis is characterized by disappointment and despair at the

thought of facing the end of their life. The regret of individuals in despair supersedes their contentment during their reflection of life.

### **Marcia's Expansion and Operationalization of Erikson's Theory**

Although Erikson's theory of identity development offered various concepts for theorizing, it left much to be desired regarding how to operationalize the theoretical constructs for empirical analysis. As a result, a number of theorists have focused their work on expanding and operationalizing Erikson's theory (Marcia, 1966; Phinney, 1989). Among these scholars, James Marcia's expansion of Erikson's identity development is most frequently cited for his theoretical typologies (Marcia, 1966, 1976, 1989). His work has also been credited for providing the much needed operationalization of Erikson's original work (Umana-Taylor et al., 2004).

Marcia's (1966) theoretical framework expanded Erikson's theory of identity development in two monumental ways. First, it provided a progression from Erikson's developmental stages, characterized by polar opposite decisions, into typologies that further explained variation in identity formation. To accomplish this task, Marcia conceptualized developmental crisis, to be consistent with Erikson's work, as an instance where individuals were faced with alternative decisions. However, where Erikson concluded that such instances would result in either the successful 'achievement' of identity, or failure to achieve identity resulting in identity confusion; Marcia articulated that variation existed within Erikson's conceptualization that resulted in various types of identity development. Thus, Marcia expanded Erikson's model by offering additional explanations of identity formation beyond the *polar opposites* proposed by Erikson (Marcia, 1966). Secondly, Marcia's identity theory offered theoretically based constructs for operationalization. As a result, his theory outlines criteria for the empirical assessment of identity development.

**From stages to typologies.** Marcia's extension of Erikson's theory advanced the previous stage theories of identity to typologies of identity development. This was done primarily through Marcia's emphasis on individual agency. By reconceptualizing Erikson's 'crisis' as a period of exploration, Marcia (1966) highlighted adolescents' ability to "engage in choosing among meaningful alternatives" (p. 551). In addition, he asserted that such exploration was accompanied by an individual's "degree of personal investment in the individual exhibits"; he defined this as the concept of commitment (p. 551). Taken together, Marcia's theory emphasized the processes involved in identity development by identifying four distinct *types* of identity. These typologies are determined by individuals' level of exploration and commitment.

#### **Marcia's Typologies of Identity Development**

**Identity achievement.** The identity achievement typology parallels Erikson's (1968) conceptualization of identity that is achieved during the identity versus identity confusion stage of development. Individuals experiencing this type of identity formation have encountered their identity crisis and responded to it by exploring and weighing out the available options on their own terms. In the process, they develop an ideology that emerges from their actual experiences and the lessons they learn from their reflections on those experiences. As a result, these individuals are highly committed to the ideology they develop (Marcia, 1966). The outcome of individuals who experience this type of identity development is a firm commitment to their chosen occupation.

**Identity diffusion.** Parallel to Erikson's (1968) conceptualization of identity confusion, individuals who have a defused identity have not experienced the normative exploration characteristic of the period of adolescence. Marcia (1966) suggests that individuals with a diffused identity lack a definitive perspective about their future and subsequent future possibilities. He suggested that individuals may experience this type of identity development

because they have not experienced an identity crisis that encourages them to explore potential options necessary for ideological and occupational commitment. Consequently, their lack of commitment may result in making impulsive decisions regarding their occupation (Marcia, 1966).

**Moratorium.** Individuals experiencing moratorium are struggling through their decisions of commitment. They are actively engaging in identity exploration by weighing out their options. As a result, these individuals are in the process of figuring out their identity by considering the influence of their family, peers, and society on their personal desires; while negotiating how they will get their desires met. This process is particularly normative to the development of college students, who are enacting their racial and educational identities. Marcia (1966) further describes these individuals as being “in the crisis period with commitments” (p. 522). Their active exploration demonstrates their emerging commitment.

**Foreclosure.** Marcia (1966) describes foreclosure identity as characteristic of individuals who “have not experienced a crisis, yet express commitment” (p. 522). These individuals do not engage in their own identity exploration. Rather they tend to take on their parents’ perspectives and desires. Without resistance, they fulfill the expectations their parents have for them. Consequently, these individuals demonstrate a great deal of commitment to their parentally influenced occupation and ideology (Marcia, 1966).

**Marcia’s empirical examination of identity constructs.** Marcia’s goal for developing his identity typologies was to operationalize Erickson’s (1968) identity development model. As a result, he utilized both qualitative data, via semi-structured interviews, and quantitative data, via survey, to assess the criteria for his proposed typology from a group of 86 college males (Marcia, 1966). In essence, his typologies were the results of both his adaptation of Erikson’s theory and the findings from his study. Ten years later Marcia (1976) did a follow up study with the men from the original study. Although, findings from the follow up study are cited far less frequently

(if at all), Marcia reached an insightful conclusion that both critiques his early conceptualizations of his identity typologies and supports Erikson's (1968) assertion that identity changes over time.

Marcia states:

the identity statuses have been a typology...informally the identity statuses have encompassed process aspects not included in the formal criteria. [As a result, a better solution would be] to attempt to dimensionalized the crucial processes whose configuration at any given point in time can be called an individual's identity. The problem with the statuses is that they have a static quality and identity is never static, not even for the most rigid Foreclosure, who must somehow accommodate himself to each new life cycle issue. (pp. 152–153)

### **Ethnic and Racial Expansions of Identity Development**

Erikson's (1968) identity theory and Marcia's subsequent expansion, have been perceived as universal theories of identity development. However in the final chapter of *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, Erikson (1968) stated that the work of Dubois, Ellison, and Baldwin (African American scholars) were "supremely active and powerful demands to be heard and seen, recognized and faced as individuals with a choice rather than as men marked by what is all to superficially visible, namely, their color" (p. 297). With this statement Erikson marginally acknowledged the unique struggle of African Americans who had to develop their identity within the context of a racialized society that presented societal constraints based on the social construction of race. Although his acknowledgement was tangential to his primary discourse on identity; and Marcia's expansion and operationalization of his theory did not even reference Erikson's mention of race; other scholars have emphasized the work of Dubois (1903) to purposefully examine the how racial stratification impacts the identity development process (Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995; Phinney, 1989, 1992, 1996; Sellers et al., 2006; Umana-Taylor et al., 2004; Way et al., 2008).

Identity scholars that emphasize the impact of racial stratification within the United States, and how consequences of racial oppression impact identity development process, have differentially focused on issues of race (Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995; Dubois, 1903; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998), ethnicity (Hughes et al., 2009; Phinney, 1989; Quintana, Casteneda-English, & Ybarra, 1999; Umana-Taylor et al., 2004), and culture (Phinney, 1992; 1996). Scholars such as Cross (1971) examined the explicit and implicit prejudices based on race, or phenotypic features such as skin color, hair texture, nose width, eye color, and other visible features (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). Whereas Phinney (1989) explored ethnicity as being reflective of minority group status that is indicated by an individuals' ethnic origin label and characteristics that they associate with that label. Her theoretical expansion of Erikson's work is much broader in the sense that it encompasses the influence of both a persons' racial and ethnic background. Phinney's (1992, 1996) theoretical expansions of identity theory also include the expression of culture; the language, behaviors, and traditions that a person associates with their ethnic group of origin. Some scholars argue that the definitions of racial, ethnic, and cultural identities are ambiguous (Worrell & Gardner, 2006). Worrell and Gardner (2006) assert that such ambiguity is a reflection of the conceptualizations of racial and ethnic identity within models used to examine these constructs. Beginning with Phinney's theoretical expansion of identity development theory, that emphasizes ethnicity, I will utilize the following sections to review ethnic and racial identity theories that shifted the theoretical perspective of universal approaches of understanding identity development to an awareness of the influence that race and ethnicity has on identity development within a racialized context.

### **Phinney's Ethnic Identity Development Theory**

Jean Phinney's (1989) work on ethnic identity development is one of the most frequently cited theories of ethnic identity. Her work extends Marcia's (1966) conceptualizations of identity

typologies; but varies to the extent that her work is characterized as a stage theory of ethnic identity. Similar to both Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1976, 1989), Phinney's work posits that ethnic identity changes over time. Her conceptualizations emerge from both Marcia's (1966) identity typologies, emphasizing the concepts of exploration and commitment; as well as Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, which recognizes how the societal status of one's group membership impacts their identity. However her major contribution to the identity literature is that she centralizes the influence of ethnicity in the process of identity development. Although, her initial work conceptualized four stages of identity development that coincided with Marcia's (1966) typology, the empirical results from her work lead her to identify three distinct stages of identity development—"diffused/foreclosure; moratorium; and achieved identity" (Phinney, 1989, p. 43).

### **Phinney's Stages of Ethnic Identity Development**

**Diffused/foreclosure.** Phinney (1989) initially identified diffused identity and foreclosure identity to be two distinct stages. However, upon empirically examining the variations of these stages in an ethnically diverse sample, she concluded that she could not "reliably distinguish" the parameters of these stages within her sample. As a result, she suggested that this stage was reflective a single stage in which individuals experienced minimal or no exploration into their ethnicity. Consequently, these individuals did not have a sense of the societal issues surrounding their ethnic group.

**Moratorium.** Individuals in the moratorium stage of ethnic identity have explored what it means to be a member of their ethnic group (Phinney, 1989). Phinney noted that her conceptualization of moratorium assumes a developmental drive to explore ones ethnicity instead of the occurrence of an event that makes ones ethnic identity salient. This stage of ethnic identity is also defined by confusion regarding what it means to be a member of one's ethnic group.

**Achieved.** Similar to Marcia's (1966) identity achievement stage of development, Phinney's (1989) conceptualization of the achieved identity is considered to be the most optimal stage of identity development. It is during this stage that individuals have successfully explored what it means to be a member of their ethnic group. In addition, these individuals have emerged with a "secure understanding and acceptance" of the meaning of their ethnicity and how they fit into their ethnic group (Phinney, 1989, p. 38).

**The operationalization of Phinney's ethnic identity model.** After establishing a model of ethnic identity development, Phinney (1992) developed a theoretically derived measure for the empirical assessment of her theory—The "Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure" (MEIM, p. 169). Her model was based on the notion that although there was a great deal of variation both between and within ethnic groups, there were certain characteristics that are 'universal' to all ethnic minority groups. She identified these commonalities as the need to develop "self-identification as a group member, a sense of belonging, and attitudes toward one's [ethnic] group" (Phinney, p. 158). Consequently, Phinney's emphasis on characteristics common to all ethnic minority groups lead her to assert that her theoretical measure is useful for the analyses of both within and between group comparisons of various ethnic minority groups. In doing so, her assertion implicitly confronts Erikson's logic for emphasizing the universality of the majority group identity at the exclusion of ethnic minorities. Phinney's measure of ethnic identity development remains among the most frequently utilized measure of ethnic identity.

#### **Umana-Taylor, Yazedjian, and Bamaca-Gomez's Expansion of Phinney's Model**

Umana-Taylor et al. (2004) extended Phinney's (1992) theoretical operationalization of the MEIM. Umana-Taylor and colleagues critiqued Phinney's development of the MEIM asserting that it was theoretically incongruent with her theoretical conceptualizations. They argued that Phinney operationalized achieved identity as the measure of individuals' "positive

responses to their ethnic group”; although, her theoretical conceptualization suggested a process of exploring how ones’ feelings varied (both positive and negative) about their ethnic group affiliation (Umana-Taylor et al., 2004, p. 12). Consequently, Umana-Taylor and colleagues expanded Phinney’s theoretical operationalization by developing a typology for ethnic identity.

Similar to Phinney’s work, Umana-Taylor et al. (2004) adapted their theory of ethnic identity types from the work of Marcia’s (1980) identity typologies and Tajfel’s (1981) social identity theory. They utilized all four of Marcia’s identity typologies—achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. Their contribution followed Marcia’s (1976) suggestion to “dimensionalized the crucial processes” of identity (pp. 152–153). Consequently, Umana-Taylor and colleagues dichotomized the achievement, moratorium, and foreclosures identity types to be characteristic of high and low levels of identity typologies. Their theory explained ethnic identity development by operationalizing a measure of ethnic identity assessing individuals’ positive and negative perceptions of ethnic identity in a manner that was theoretically congruent with their theoretical conceptualizations of ethnic identity types.

Umana-Taylor and colleagues, (2004) offered another major expansion to the work on ethnic identity development by expanding the ethnic identity concepts of exploration and commitment to include affect. The concept of affect was defined by the (positive or negative) meaning individuals ascribed to their ethnic identity, and was the result of both their exploration and commitment (conceptualized as the resolution of identity exploration; Umana-Taylor et al., 2004). However, Umana-Taylor and colleges asserted that affect should be examined separate from exploration and commitment/resolution with the implication being that ethnic minority adolescents may well explore what their ethnicity means and develop a commitment to their cultural group identification, without necessarily internalizing a positive sense of pride in their

group membership. The operationalization of their model was titled the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS).

### **Racial Identity Development**

Racial identity has been explored in various ways within existing literature. Despite this variation, racial identity scholars concur that racial hierarchy within the context of a racialized society poses unique challenges to those who are oppressed because of their race. These challenges include the added stressors involved with selecting a frame of reference for identity (Cross, 1971, 1991; Dubois, 1903). For example, adolescents who identify themselves as African Americans must refer to other African Americans in order to determine what it means to be African American in the same manner that female adolescents interpret meaning about their gendered identity by referencing the lives of other females. Another challenge of racial hierarchy within the context of the United States is that African Americans are categorized into an oppressed status (Cross, 1991, 1995; Phinney, 1989, 1992; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). The oppression of Black people in society forces adolescents to decide the degree to which they will be defined by their oppressed status. In essence African American adolescents are forced to choose between internalizing the devalued societal definitions of Blackness or to create their own drawing from the examples of other Black people. Describing what he referred to as “double-consciousness” Dubois (1903) described:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1903, p. 9)

Similarly, Cross (1971) argued that although the meaning race has on the identity of minorities varies, “it is obvious that some other processes or ‘model’ is at work transforming [their] minds”

(p. 14). Taken together, race exerts a significant influence on the identity development of African Americans within the context of the United States that impacts their identity development.

Existing literature conceptualizes racial identity through both developmental stage models (Cross, 1971, 1991) and multi-dimensional constructs (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998; Spencer et al., 2006). Both stage and multidimensional models explain of racial identity as a dynamic and fluid process that occurs overtime. Stage models posit that racial identity develops sequentially in reaction to the situations that African Americans experience and how their meaning of race varies by their situational experiences (Cross, 1991). Alternatively, multi-dimensional models of racial identity, assert that there are various dimensions of racial identity that develop simultaneously; and that these dimensions become more or less salient during the identity development process based on the African Americans' experiences within various contexts (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). The most widely cited racial identity models are Cross's (1971) developmental theory of Nigrescence and, The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) developed by Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998). The following provides a detailed overview of these racial identity models.

### **Cross's Theory of Nigrescence**

According to Cross's (1971; 1991) theory of Nigrescence, there are five stages that individuals progress through as they develop their racial identity. This stage model of racial identity development presupposes a hierarchical progression through stages of Blackness in which the final stage is the ultimate attainment of racial identity. The development of one's racial identity is believed to develop in reaction to one's racialized experiences. Although Cross (1971) identified five stages of racial identity development, he acknowledged the variation in African American experiences; and asserted that not all African Americans would progress through all five stages. Rather, both their initial and continued progression through each stage was

completely determined by how they perceived their experiences to be related to race (i.e., racialized), and how they subsequently responded to such instances. Cross (1971) coined the stages of identity development, Nigrescence (defined as the “process of becoming Black”). Nigrescence includes the stages of “pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment” (Cross, 1991, p. 15). His revised model suggested that Black people could “recycle through” any of these stages at any point in their lives (1991, p. 220).

**Pre-encounter.** The pre-encounter is characterized as the stage of identity where one's race is not salient to them. This stage is conceptualized by Cross as the “pre-discovery” stage (1971, p. 15). African Americans who are in this stage appear to define themselves according to a mainstream identity (Boykin & Toms, 1985). As a result, they either de-emphasize their Blackness through the engagement in White middle class norms; or detest their Blackness by embracing pathological representations of African Americans. According to Cross, individuals in the pre-encounter stage do not maintain a connection with African American culture collectively. Rather, they perceive their accomplishments and motivations to be very individual.

**Encounter.** The encounter stage of Nigrescence is characterized by a racialized experience that occurs to or in the presence of African Americans that makes their race salient to them. The encounter includes an immediate experience of the event followed by a reinterpretation of the meaning of the events within a racialized context (Cross, 1971, 1991). This reinterpretation jolts the reality of African Americans, causing them to consider their minority status. Cross (1971) describes this as a traumatic experience because once one has an encounter they are ever mindful of it. Consequently, the experience causes feelings of anger, disgust, frustration, guilt or even rage (Cross, 1971). When a person's rage does not dissipate, they are thrust into a pursuit of a deeper understanding of what it means to be Black. This pursuit

leads them into the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity development. However, despite strong feelings about the event, in some instances a person may not be motivated to continue their reflections. As a result, they may stagnate at this stage of racial identity development.

**Immersion-emersion.** The immersion-emersion stage of development is characterized by two levels of development. First, the person, fueled by rage from their encounter, immerses themselves in everything they perceive to represent Black culture. They simultaneously seek to disregard all representations of their previous acceptance of mainstream White culture. African Americans in the immersion stage seek to redefine themselves by adapting a Black culture although such a culture is not yet clearly defined for them. This stage is characterized by increased feelings of unity to Black people, both in their surroundings and from a historical perspective (Cross, 1991). The second level of this stage is the emersion; where the pursuit of and immersion into Black culture results in a self-defined resolution of what it means to be Black (Cross, 1991). Their complete rejection of mainstream White culture is balanced by recognition of mainstream normality. As a result, African Americans in the emersion stage have experienced a decreased amount of rage that allow for inter-racial interaction; that is often scarce during the immersion stage. Individuals experiencing emersion regain control over their emotions, as opposed to the previous rage driving their behaviors. Consequently, if such control is compounded with a sense of awareness they move onto the internalization-commitment stage of development. However, it is possible for them to stagnate and remain in either the immersion or emersion levels of this stage.

**Internalization.** The internalization stage of racial identity development is characterized by African American's conceptualization of what it means to be Black is internalized into a persons' self-concept. Their conclusions are drawn from their experiences from the previous immersion-emersion stage. Internalized definitions vary in their positivity. In fact, some African

Americans internalize negative conceptions Blackness. Cross (1971) describes that in this case “they resort to a nihilistic, hopeless, even anti-people world view” (p. 21). In extreme cases this despair may result in the belief of racial inferiority or a hatred for mainstream White culture. However, the progressive level of this stage is when African Americans adapt a positive sense of Black identity into their self-concept and internalize a deep appreciation for their own culture. Consequently, societal oppression no longer dictates their self-concept.

**Internalization-commitment.** The final stage of Cross’s theory of Nigrescence is characterized by a secure positive sense of racial identity where African Americans become committed to activism that will uplift the African American community. African Americans in this stage will work toward advancement of the African American community collectively. Their frame of reference extends beyond mainstream White culture to a global definition of culture. As a result, they come to understand the collective struggle of African Americans domestically and Black people globally. In addition, standards for success extend from the models within US society to the international progress of various Black cultures.

### **Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI)**

Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998) developed a conceptualization of racial identity that was based on two foundational premises. The first assumption, similar to Cross (1971), is that racial identity is defined by the meaning that African Americans attribute to race. Second, such meaning varies based on African American’s situational experiences. Consequently, this model asserts that not only is racial identity conceptualized by “the qualitative meanings they attribute to being [Black],” but it is also defined by “the significance of race in [their] self-concepts” (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 19). To understand this process the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) examines the simultaneous development of African Americans’ perceptions of Blackness; and the situational integration of these definitions into African American identity.

According to the MMRI, there are four dimensions of racial identity development—“racial salience, racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology” (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 24).

**Racial salience.** Racial salience is the degree to which individuals perceive their race to be a significant aspect of their identity (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). This dimension includes both momentary and situational interpretations of racial salience. For example, an African American student who has experienced a racialized event within the school setting may perceive their race to be a significant, or salient, factor of their identity during their momentary experience. However, the following week they may have re-evaluated the situation causing them to no longer perceive their race as a significant factor of their identity within the school setting. The situational interpretation of racial salience may cause the individual to interpret the school setting to be an environment in which race will be a significant aspect of their identity. Because racial salience is based on situational appraisals, it is considered to be an unstable dimension of racial identity.

**Racial centrality.** Racial centrality is the extent to which being Black is a central aspect of African Americans’ self-concept. The MMRI conceptualizes this dimension to be a stable factor of one’s identity. Racial centrality captures African American’s “normative perceptions of self with respect to race across a number of different dimensions” (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 25). Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998) assert that traditional models of racial identity primarily focus on this dimension of identity. They argue that unidimensional models are not able to adequately assess the existing variability in the process of racial identity development.

**Racial regard.** Racial regard is conceptualized as how African Americans feel about being Black and how they perceive their Blackness. This dimension has two distinct aspects—“private regard and public regard” (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 26). Private regard captures both the positive or negative feelings African Americans personally attribute to being Black; as

well as the feelings they ascribe to African Americans in general (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Public regard is based on the perception that African Americans have of their minority status within a racialized context (Boykin & Toms, 1985). In essence this aspect is defined by the feelings African Americans attribute to their perception of their minority status. For example, African Americans who perceive that society has a negative view of African Americans, according to the MMRI will low levels of public regard. Alternatively, if they believe that African Americans are positively perceived in society, they will have high levels of public regard.

**Racial ideology.** Racial ideology is the adaptation of African American's "philosophy about the ways in which African Americans should live and interact with society" (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 27). According to the MMRI, there are four distinct racial ideologies—nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist, and humanist. A nationalist ideology assumes the perspective of African Americans as a unique cultural group. Such uniqueness is both valued and preferred over engagement in alternative practices (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). The oppressed minority ideology acknowledges commonalities in the experiences of oppression between African Americans and other ethnic minority groups. Such acknowledgement results in an ideology of unification with other ethnic minorities to alleviate their common experiences of oppression. The assimilationist ideology de-emphasizes race to focus on integration of mainstream ideology. This ideology assumes the belief that if inequality exists the established systems should be the vehicle for change. The humanist ideology is characterized by an emphasis on the similarities of all humankind such as unique personalities. As a result humanist ideology does not focus on group differences such as race.

Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998) operationalized the MMRI through the creation of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). The MIBI measures "the stable dimensions of the MMRI" (Sellers et al., 1997). It

is utilized to assess how African American students identify across the racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology dimensions. The MIBI is central to this dissertation study because it is used to assess the racial regard (public and private) and racial ideology of participants to ensure variability within the sample. Specific details regarding how this occurred is detailed further in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

### **Understanding Educational Identity**

As aforementioned, there are multiple aspects of identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Phinney, 1992). However, limited empirical attention has been devoted to understanding the development of African American students' educational identity (Brown et al., 2009; Howard, 2003; Kerpelman et al., 2008; Powell, 1989; Welch & Hodges, 1997). Too often the attention geared toward highlighting existing educational disparities overshadows the fact that educational identity is an important aspect of African American students' identity. Consequently, what is known about African American students' educational identity is less theoretically developed and cohesive in comparison to the theoretical and conceptual knowledge of racial identity. Nevertheless, educational identity is a distinct aspect of identity development that deserves attention. Research indicates that educational identity is influenced by African American students' ecological socialization (Chavous et al., 2003; Howard, 2003; Powell, 1989). Thus investigating African American students' educational self-concepts is central to this dissertation. The following will describe how educational identity is defined within existing literature and conceptualized within this dissertation.

### **Educational Identity**

Educational identity has been described in various ways within existing literature. For example, educational identity is a direct reflection of how students perceive themselves educationally (Kerpelman et al., 2008). Other scholars suggest that educational identity is

defined by the extent to which students, feel attachment to their schools, believe that school is relevant for them, and consider school as important (Chavous et al., 2003). Welch and Hodges (1997) assert that educational identity is “a dimension of a larger, global self-concept and is central to academic performance and achievement” (p. 37). Alternatively, Powell (1989) takes a contextual approach to understanding educational identity by positing that educational identity emerges from the influence of previous experiences and interactions. She states, that educational identity includes “pro-social strategies for coping with racism and overcoming the blocked opportunities that [African American students] may encounter because of racism” (Powell, 1989, p. 79). Similarly, White (1984) defines educational identity as “the personal commitment to a standard of excellence, the willingness to persist in the challenge, struggle, excitement and disappointment intrinsic in the learning process” (p. 121). Taken together, educational identity is a unique aspect of identity that is directly influenced by the racialized context within which educational identity takes place. Drawing from both interpersonal and contextual definitions, educational identity is conceptualized within this dissertation as African American students’ internalized beliefs about their educational ability and the strategies they engage in to succeed educationally despite their exposure to racialized educational barriers (Chavous et al., 2003; Garcia-Reid, 2008; Powell, 1989).

African American students’ educational identity is influenced by the socialization they experience within various ecological contexts, including their family and schools (Brown et al., 2009; Howard, 2003; Kerpelman et al., 2008). Although the limited research on educational identity has been dedicated toward understanding the processes involved in how African American students develop their educational identity; attention to this developmental process is vital to understanding African American students’ identity development within a racialized context. Furthermore, the examination of how African American students perceive these

processes is scant within the empirical discourse (Howard, 2003). Nevertheless, investigating African American students' educational identity will reveal the influence that ecological socialization has on their educational identity. Thus, exploring African American students' educational identity is central to this investigation.

### **Ecological Influences on African American Students' Identity**

#### **Family Socialization: The Impact of Family Ecology on African American Students' Identity**

African American families engage in various racial socialization strategies to positively impact their children's identity (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes et al., 2006; Peters, 2002). These socialization practices have distinct influences on African American students' racial and educational (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004; Neblett et al., 2009; Powell, 1989). In addition, racial socialization serves as protective factors in the presence of existing educational risk factors such as discriminatory school climate (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Marshall, 1995; Stevenson, 1994). These proactive practices include the socialization around issues of race and education (Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). Understanding the influence of African American families' the identity development of African American students' requires an examination of racial socialization African American families engage in, such as racial and educational socialization. The following sections examine how this process has been discussed within existing empirical and theoretical literature.

#### **Parental Racial Socialization**

African American parents experience an enormous challenge in their child rearing practices that is qualitatively distinct from that of white parents. Peters (2002), explains this challenge by stating:

the task Black parents share with all parents—providing for and raising children—not only are performed within the mundane extreme environmental stress of racism but include the responsibility of raising physically and emotionally healthy children who are Black in a society in which being Black has negative connotations. (p. 59)

This unique balancing act by African American parents to create environments that prepare African American youth to thrive within the context of a racialized society is what researchers have referred to as racial socialization (Boykin, 1996; Coard & Sellers, 2005; Coard et al., 2004; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997; McAdoo, 2002; Murray & Mandara, 2002; Peters, 2002; Stevenson, 1994; Thornton, Chatters, & Taylor, 1990). McAdoo (2002) identifies racial socialization as one of the most significant responsibilities for African American parents. She suggests that parents must racially socialize their children by teaching them how their race will impact how they fit into society. This also encompasses fostering a sense of self-worth and equality that will help them navigate through the obstacles they will encounter because of their race. In this regard, racial socialization is a protective factor parents use to prevent their children from being harmed by the effects of racism. Coard and Sellers (2005) extended this notion stating racial socialization incorporates teaching transferable problem solving skills African Americans' can use to handle racial issues in a way that will protect their dignity, enhance their self-esteem, and resist the internalization of dehumanizing racialized assaults to their character. Thus, racial socialization is the process of equipping African American children to cope and succeed in a racialized society.

Racial socialization within African American families requires developmentally appropriate guidance and instruction for navigating various societal experiences (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Hughes et al., 2006). Boykin and Toms (1985) explain that racial socialization must equip African Americans with the skills necessary for successfully navigating three separate societal experiences—mainstream, minority, and African American culture. They posit that each of these

three realities require youth to develop specific knowledge within each experience in order to be educationally successful, as well as psychologically and emotionally healthy. The mainstream reality requires an adaptation of “White middle-class standards” (Boykin & Toms, 1985, p. 39). Such standards are necessary for navigating the school context and future employment opportunities. The minority status requires knowledge of how African Americans are socially and historically positioned in society. Minority status considers the historical enslavement of African Americans and the subsequent societal oppression, but also recognizes the resilience of African American people within the confines of oppression. African American culture is where youth learn about aspects of their culture from within their own cultural perspective. African American students must develop their identity as they navigate each of these societal experiences (Boykin & Toms, 1985). Racial socialization is the process African American families engage in to foster the skills their children will need to successfully navigate each of these societal experiences.

**Methods of racial socialization.** Hughes et al. (2006) recounted four methods of racial socialization most frequently utilized by African American families as “cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism” (p. 748). African American families engage these methods of parental racial socialization to foster the development of skills African American students will need to navigate societal racism and discrimination in various contexts such as educational institutions. According to Hughes and colleagues (2006), cultural socialization are processes through which families socialize African American students to have a sense of esteem and pride in being African American. They engage in practices that include teaching children about their cultural and racial “heritage, history, customs and traditions” (p. 749). Families engage in cultural socialization through daily interactions, discussions, and practices that provide positive representations of African American culture. This includes talking

about significant contributions of African Americans have made, enjoying ethnic foods, and exposing youth to “culturally relevant books, artifacts, music, and stories” (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 749). African American families have reported using this method of racial socialization most frequently (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Hughes & Chen, 1997).

Preparation for bias a method of racial socialization characterized by African American families’ attempts to prepare their children for existing racial prejudice and discrimination they may encounter as a result of their race (Hughes et al., 2006). This method of socialization teaches African American students to cope with hostile and oppressive racially motivated situations (Hughes et al., 2006). Families who engage in racial socialization through preparation for bias foster awareness in their children of the existence of racial biases; and prepare them with strategies for how to handle such biases when they are encountered.

Promotion of mistrust is a racial socialization method thorough which families “emphasize the need for wariness and distrust in interracial interactions” (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 757). This strategy is used primarily by parents that have experienced adverse interracial interactions, which they try to prevent their children from experiencing. Hughes and colleagues (2006) describe the egalitarian method of racial socialization consistent as a process through which African American parents foster the skills that African American students need to develop to excel in mainstream society (Hughes et al., 2006). This parenting practice stresses the importance of “hard work, virtue, self-acceptance, and equality” (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 757). It stresses the fact that African American students are equal to other racial groups and encourages peaceful co-existence (Coard et al., 2004). Research indicates that African American families engage in racial socialization strategies that combine methods, or use them in isolation. Various factors influence the racial socialization methods families engage in.

**Factors influencing racial socialization.** Researchers have taken various approaches to examining racial socialization. These approaches have revealed multiple factors that determine the transmission, frequency, and content of racial socialization processes (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Coard et al., 2004; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997; McAdoo, 2002; Peters, 2002; Stevenson, 1994; Thornton et al., 1990). Hughes et al. (2006) identified various predictors of the transmission and frequency of parental racial socialization messages within the existing literature. These predictors included the age, gender, and discrimination experiences of the child. Other predictors include the immigration status, socioeconomic status, and discrimination experiences of the adults racially socializing the child (Hughes et al., 2006). The neighborhood in which children are reared also influences racial socialization practices (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Coard et al., 2004; Hughes et al., 2006; Peters, 2002). Research has consistently indicated that racial socialization is a complex and nuanced process (Coard & Sellers, 2005). Although there are tremendous benefits to racial socialization, optimal socialization strategies must be both age and developmentally appropriate in order to foster the necessary skills African American students need to succeed in the racialized context of society.

**Benefits and risks of racial socialization.** As evidenced, parental racial socialization is an essential aspect African American family processes, and occurs in various ways. However, there are numerous benefits and risk associated with these processes (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Marshall, 1995; Stevenson, 1994). Major advantages to racial socialization include children's increased self-esteem, enhanced academic achievement, and pro-social racial identity (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Marshall, 1995; Murray & Mandara, 2002). Coard and Sellers (2005) reported that racial socialization methods that focus on racial preparation are associated with lower levels of depression. They also found failing to racially socialize children leaves them at a greater risk for hardship when they encounter experiences with discrimination

and prejudice. The disadvantages of racial socialization are experienced when racial socialization is overemphasized, or done at developmentally inappropriate times. For example, Coard and Sellers (2005) pointed out that overemphasizing messages regarding racial biases may negatively impact children's development increasing their chances of isolation. The overemphasis of racial socialization may also create a skewed reality for children causing them to be hypersensitive to potentially unthreatening situations (Coard & Sellers, 2005). In addition to the inappropriate timing of racial socialization, an overemphasis on the wrong method of racial socialization may also have adverse effects. Constantine and Blackmon (2002) warned that placing an emphasis on racial socialization messages that focus on mainstream values without balancing them with messages that are culturally relevant has detrimental effects on self-esteem and the development of racial identity. They further state that this imbalance of messages directly contradicts the goals of racial socialization, by communicating the inferiority of Blacks in relation to Whites. Existing research highlights the benefits of racial socialization includes fostering positive self-esteem, pro-social racial identity, enhanced academic achievement and other benefits that will enhance the successful development of African American youths (Murray & Mandara, 2002). Alternatively, failure to ensure that the content, timing, and frequency of racial socialization is carefully considered, well thought out, and developmentally appropriate will cause racial socialization to be counterproductive to African American students pro-social development. Within the context of a racialized society, African American families also socialize students around issues of education. Given the significance of race within society, the educational socialization African American families engage in emphasizes educational attainment as a tool for countering the assaults of racial discrimination and oppression. Despite African American families' engagement in such strategies, existing racist ideologies continually characterize them as disengaged and uninvolved in the educational experience of African American students (Chapman, 2006).

Consequently, this study examines the distinct educational socialization practices that African American families engage in to counter the hegemonic narrative.

### **Family Educational Socialization**

African American families place a strong emphasis on the educational success of African American students (Carson, 2009; Chapman, 2006; Jeynes, 2007). Although, empirical studies have reported that African American students are at risk for decreased academic achievement when their parents do not obtain postsecondary education, such perceived risk does not reflect a decreased value in education among African American parents (Boykin, 1986). In fact, even when African American parents have not received an education beyond the secondary level; both empirical and socio-historical research has revealed that they maintain high educational expectations for their children (Boykin, 1986; Chapman, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Maton et al., 1998).

Existing literature conceptualizes educational socialization as “beliefs and behaviors that influence children’s school-related development” (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004, p. 163). Although this process has previously been explored as a dimension of racial socialization (Boykin, 1986; Stevenson, 1994), empirical studies are increasingly conceptualizing educational socialization, as a distinct cultural process that African American families engage in (Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Taylor et al., 2004; Smalls, 2009; Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007; Suizzo et al., 2008; Suizzo & Soon, 2006). Through educational socialization African American families foster an importance and focus on education to overcome racial barriers. For example, Boykin (1986) explained that African American parents emphasized their desire and motivation for “their children to function successfully in mainstream America, even while they retain many traditional African propensities in their psychological transactions” (Boykin, 1986, p. 62). Thus

educational socialization prepares African American students for the racialized contexts in which they are educated and develop their identity (Smalls et al., 2007).

African American families engage in specific strategies to foster the educational success of African American students (Bempechat, Graham, & Jimenez, 1999; Chapman, 2006; Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Smalls et al., 2007). These strategies include making sure their children have designated homework times, locations and academic tutors when necessary (Suizzo & Soon, 2006). Through educational socialization African American families place an emphasis on the importance of earning good grades and use their children's progress to proactively follow-up with their children's teachers to ensure optimal academic success (Taylor et al., 2004). Like racial socialization, educational socialization been conceptualized within the literature as a protective factor for African American students (Bempechat et al., 1999; Suizzo et al., 2008). For example, Smalls (2009) illustrated that the extent to which youth engaged in academic activities, such as classroom participation and academic effort, was positively associated with the educational socialization they received in their families. The educational socialization strategies that African American families engage in are influenced by a number of factors, such as parent's educational experiences, parents' educational level or the employment and economic constraints they try to prevent their children from experiencing (Chapman, 2006). Taken together, understanding various ways that African American parents racially and educationally socialize their children offers insight into how socialization influences African American students' identity development processes such as their reactive coping processes, and identity development (Spencer et al., 2006).

The educational socialization that African American families engage in has traditionally been discredited within the racialized context of schools (Chapman, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Such discrediting often occurs as a result of African American families' culturally distinct

expressions of investing in their children's education. Such practices may vary from the herald strategies of educational investment espoused by schools (Chapman, 2006). For example, while public schools limit their interpretations of parental involvement in education to be expressed through school sponsored events such as parent-teacher conferences; African American families' educational socialization includes practices that foster a connection between educational attainment and economic survival within African American students (Smalls et al., 2007). However, the educational practices of African American families may not always include school sponsored events for a variety of reasons such as employment constraints. When this is the case the educational socialization that African American parents engage in often goes unrecognized. As a result, exploring the influence of familial educational socialization on African American students identity development, offers vital insight for understanding the most influential methods of educational socialization that African American families engage in. Thus, this study will investigate the extent to which African American students perceive racial and educational socialization from their families to impact their identity development.

### **School Socialization: The Impact of School Ecology on Identity Development**

Schools socialize African American students in various ways (Ferguson, 2003). Such socialization is often overshadowed by existing educational disparities between the educational successes of African Americans in comparison to their European American peers remains (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Even when African American students enter school at the same educational preparedness as White students they experience an academic decline over time (Howard, 2008; Toldson, 2008). This examination of this trend reveals that educational institutions racially and educationally socialize African American students in ways that have adverse effects on their identity development (Delpit, 1995; Feagin, Hernan, & Imani, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Thomas, Caldwell, et al., 2009). The consequences of adverse school

socialization has resulted in African American students experiencing lower levels of academic achievement in comparison to their European American peers (Baker, 2005; Ferguson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; U.S. Department of education, 2010). Such practices make it difficult for African American students to succeed despite the effort they may put forth within the classroom setting. Steele (1997) reported that the very threat of failure within educational settings can have significantly adverse effects on African American students' educational performance. In addition, the teacher discrimination within educational settings African American students encounter has been associated with African American students' academic disengagement (Thomas, Caldwell, et al., 2009). The negative socialization African American students receive within the school context presents risk factors to their racial and educational identity development. As a result, this dissertation will examine how African American students perceive the influence of school socialization.

### **Institutional School Socialization**

Empirical literature has highlighted adverse influences that schools have on the identity development of African American students. Among the most widely cited explanations for how school socialization influences African American students' identity is Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) 'acting White hypothesis. Their findings posit that the institutional climate of the schools African American students attend cause them to experience a dissonance between the effort they put forth educational success. Thus their experience with educational socialization causes them to perceive that educational engagement does not always result in educational success. Consequently, African American students may cope with the adverse educational socialization they experience by disengaging from putting forth effort their educational pursuits in fear of being perceived as acting White.

This problem arose partly because White Americans traditionally refused to acknowledge that Black Americans are capable of intellectual achievement, and partly because Black Americans subsequently began to doubt their own intellectual ability, began to define academic success as White people's prerogative, and begin to discourage their peers, perhaps unconsciously, from emulating White people in academic striving, i.e., from acting White. (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 177)

Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) assertion highlights several significant factors that problematize the educational socialization within public schools. First, schools send clear socialization messages to African American students. The primary message communicated is denial of the very opportunities for 'intellectual achievement' that schools are designed to create. Secondly they acknowledge that students come to school with a desire to engage in learning, which is discouraged as a result of educational practices and ideologies that create barriers to learning within the educational climate. Third, Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) hypothesis reveals that African American students are vulnerable to the educational socialization messages and are at risk for the dangers in internalizing adverse educational socialization from the school context. Although support or opposition for Fordham and Ogbu's acting White hypothesis is beyond the scope of this dissertation, their assumption deconstructs the fact that schools educationally socialize African American students in ways that both directly and indirectly impact how they perceive their racial and educational identity development.

African American students' are exposed to adverse educational socialization messages within public schools (Baker, 2005; Ferguson, 2003; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Steele, 1997). Such socialization includes educational messages that African American students are intellectually inferior to their white peers. These messages are communicated through lowered expectations from their teachers (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). In addition, African American students are taught that they should esteem and present a culture free or assimilationist perspective and demeanor (Delpit, 1995; Feagin et al., 1996; Thomas, Caldwell, et al., 2009).

This is particularly problematic in light of the fact that pro-social racial identity has been associated with positive educational outcomes, enhanced mental health, and high levels of self-esteem (Coard & Sellers, 2005). Thus, students with a high private regard, who have positive feelings about being Black, may perceive abating cultural representations as too great of a personal cost and consequently choose to disengage educationally (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998).

Educational socialization is also communicated through educational curriculum. According to Delpit (1995), educational socialization is transmitted within the context of academic curriculum, reflecting an implicit “hidden curriculum” that devalues the cultures of African American students. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) assert that such educational socialization is problematic when such socialization messages are incongruent with pro-social African American family socialization, such as racial and educational socialization (Howard, 2003). Thus, examining the extent to which African students perceive educational socialization to influence their racial and educational identity development is vital to understanding the impact of educational socialization.

From a critical race theory perspective, school socialization is illustrative of the endemic nature of racism embedded within the educational practices of public schools. Deconstructing educational socialization practices reveals how schools engage in racialized practices that create an adverse educational climate. This climate educationally socializes African American students to disengage from putting forth effort in their educational endeavors. The CRT tenets that most clearly reveal the socialization that takes place in schools are: whiteness as property, the critique of liberalism, and counternarratives. They offer the clearest examples for theoretically understanding how schools socialize African American students. Thus the following sections

will employ a CRT to understand educational socialization African American students are exposed to within public schools.

### **Theoretically Examining Institutional School Socialization**

Critical Race theory deconstructs how schools educationally socialize African American students' by "reward[ing] only for conformity to perceived 'White norms' [and] sanction[ing] cultural practices (e.g., dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge)" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 59). The CRT critique of liberalism is a call to action for educators and families to engage in the resistance necessary to bring about institutional reform. A primary tool of resistance to hegemony within schools is amplifying the voices of African American students who are victims of institution racism. Only by centering the voices of these students, through highlighting their counternarratives, can we truly come to understand and work toward alleviating the educational debt within racialized context (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

**Socialization through whiteness as property.** Schools educationally socialize African American students by maintaining whiteness as property through school curriculum. (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Delpit (1995) describes that "white educators [have] the authority to establish what was to be considered 'truth' regardless of the opinions of the people of color, and the latter were well aware of that fact" (p. 26). Thus schools socialize students to esteem and internalize whiteness as the standard to strive toward. For example, Michael Datcher (2001), an African American author, described the following educational experience:

Why hadn't any of my government teachers told me that George Washington owned American flesh? I had learned about Thomas Jefferson's brilliant mind and humanism but not about his slaves and concubines . . . I had been learning so much about white oppression perpetrated against Blacks: slavery's almost unbelievable horrors; the Black Codes; lynchings and the burnings of Black bodies around the turn of the twentieth century; the racially motivated murders of the fifties; the FBI-sponsored assassinations of Black Panther party leaders in the sixties and seventies . . . It began to dawn on me. The propagandistic history I had been learning about Black people wasn't true. We weren't the violent, less civilized race. We weren't the lynchers and the baby killers. We weren't

the trainers and the financiers of Latin American death squads. It was the White people who were debased. And here I was trying to seek their approval? Wearing corny glasses and speaking like them so they'd embrace me? Trying to become them? Seeking their affirmation for my own humanity? I felt like such a fool. (Datcher, 2001, pp. 139–140)

Delpit (1995) further illustrates whiteness as property by discussing an ideology she terms as the “culture of power” (p. 24). The culture of power ensures that people of color are excluded from obtaining power through schools' refusal to explicitly teach the rules or codes of the culture despite the measurement of student success by these codes. The educational socialization African American students are exposed to is characterized by the ‘hidden curriculum’ and maintained by the ‘culture of power.’ Datcher illustrates that in most cases the hidden curriculum only becomes apparent through retrospective accounts of educational experiences, instead of something that students are aware of when they are striving to educational success. Consequently, exploring African American students' perception of their educational socialization during their emerging adulthood, where they are developmentally reflective of their socialization experiences, is an optimal time for understanding the influence of school socialization on their identity development.

**Socialization through critique of liberalism.** Schools educationally socialize African American students by engaging in practices rooted the liberal ideology that upward mobility within the context of society is solely based upon the individual merit, and that the educational attainment of African American students is indicative of educational equity. This ideology of liberalism masks the reality of racial and economic barriers to educational attainment for African American students. Thus, emphasizing the racial progress of some African American students undermines existing institutional hegemony perpetuated through educational practices. Critical race theory provides a lens for critiquing liberalism within educational institutions by deconstructing liberal ideologies that adversely socialize African American students. For

example, many schools boast of the placement of African American students into advanced placement programs as evidence of educational equality, when in actuality hegemonic institutional practices often create hostile climates for African American students within advanced placement programs. Henfield et al. (2008) illustrated this trend through their investigation of the experience of African American students within gifted programs. Their analysis revealed the undue pressures that African American students received from their teachers to be the 'role models' to their peers. Such pressure isolated gifted African American students from their 'non-gifted' peers and proved to further marginalize African American students who were in gifted classrooms. Similarly, male students in Howard's (2008) study also shared their experiences of isolation when teachers heralded them as model students. A student in his study reported that "one teacher even told me once, 'you're not like the rest of them'" (Howard, 2008, p. 970). Taken together, CRT critiques of the liberal ideologies that inform educational socialization practices to deconstruct how such ideologies and practices work to deliberately and inadvertently marginalize African American students; adversely impacting their identity development.

**Socialization through counternarratives.** African American students' counternarratives are their lived experiences that counters the dominant ideology of white middle class normative standard (Milner, 2008). While the dominant ideology asserts that public schools are environments in which students can earn an education for upward mobility, counternarratives of African American students reveal that educational socialization threatens the educational success and adversely impacts their identity development. In addition, the educational socialization African American students experience from public schools discredits their counternarratives through the minimization of their life experiences and/or completely having their counternarratives silenced. Howard (2008) illustrated the silencing of an African American

students' counternarrative through an example of an African American male student who got into a fight with a White student. Although both students said the other started it, the African American student's side of the story was ignored by the principal who chose to believe the White student. This exclusion of the African American students' account of the fight allowed the African American student to be characterized as "hostile and aggressive" despite his good track record in school (Howard, 2008, p. 975). Thus, when students' counternarratives are ignored, students of color are rendered incompetent, devalued, and dehumanized (Delpit, 1995). African American students have described this as the perpetual indication that "teachers never let you forget that you are Black" (Daniel, 2007; Howard, 2008, p. 971). Such instances communicate to students of color that they are inferior, thus undeserving of attention. As a result African American students, who enter school to learn, often leave psychologically traumatized, demotivated, and academically failing. This dissertation qualitatively examines the counternarratives of African American students to strategically amplify their voices and deconstruct their educational experiences within the racialized context of public schools.

### **Exploring Identity Development during Emerging Adulthood**

Most of the literature on identity development highlights the experiences of African American students during adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966, 1976; Phinney, 1989; Brown et al., 2009; Howard, 2003). However, some scholars have suggested that the period of adolescence leaves much to be desired regarding how individuals will engage in behaviors that are reflective of their identity development (Arnett, 2000, Arnett & Tanner, 2006). For example, adolescents who are in middle school experience socialization from their school and family context, but are subject to the rules and regulations of these contexts. Thus, they lack the independence to engage in identity exploration (Marcia, 1966), the autonomy to commit to decisions that are reflective of their identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004), and the adult status to

fully engage in the racialized context in which they are situated (Arnett, 2000; Spencer et al., 1997). As a result, emerging adulthood is a particularly suitable developmental period for exploring how African American students perceive their identity development, and how they are influenced by ecological socialization (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Chavous, 2002; Fleming, 2001; Lee, 2010). The following section will further describe emerging adulthood as an optimal developmental period for investigating African American students' identity development.

**Emerging adulthood.** Emerging adulthood is distinct from adolescence and is more characteristic of a “period of life that offers the most opportunity for identity explorations” (Arnett, 2000, p. 473). Similar to the developmental period of adolescence, emerging adults ask the developmental questions of “what do I want to make of myself and what do I have to work with” (Erikson, 1968, p. 314). Thus, they seek social acceptance and engage in identity exploration activities. However, Arnett (2000) argued that when youth are in adolescence their desire for identity exploration is severely limited by their inability to autonomously engage in exploration of activities outside of parental supervision. Alternatively, emerging adulthoods can engage in identity exploration that is reflective of their identity development (Arnett, 2000). Consequently, he conceptualized emerging adulthood as capturing the period of development between the ages of 18–25; which aligns with the vast majority of traditional college students. African American students in their first year of postsecondary education are in the developmental period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). This study will explore identity development process for a sample of African American freshmen.

According to Arnett and Tanner (2006) the developmental period of emerging adulthood is also characteristic of a self-focus where emerging adults reflectively integrate life lessons into their self-concept. This focus allows them to develop racially and educationally. Emerging adults also have the autonomy from their parents to engage in behaviors that are reflective of their racial

and educational identities. Thus, their university selection may be reflective of their identity development. Although all African American students receive family and school socialization prior to college, the influence of these socialization messages is most salient to first year postsecondary students. Consequently, this dissertation will explore identity development among African American emerging adults who are within their first year of college. To gain a better understanding of how African American students perceive their identity within racialized contexts, I will explore the influence of ecological socialization on the identity development of students who attend a historically Black college and university (HBCU) and students who attend a predominately White institution (PWI). In doing so I can explore the extent to which African American students' university selections are reflection of their racial and educational identity development.

### **The Empirical Need for My Dissertation Study**

This dissertation will build upon existing literature by qualitatively examining African American students' perceptions of their identity development during their first year of college. I also explore their perceptions of how precollege socialization influences their racial and educational identity development. Conducting this investigation during African American students' transition into college is particularly optimal because they are developmentally able to draw from their precollege ecological socialization experiences to help them to explore their identity while adapting to their new environment (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Tanner, 2006). Consequently, they are well positioned to reflect on which socialization messages and experiences are most influential and valuable to their racial and educational identity development. Such an investigation that also emphasizes how African American students' perceive their identity development by centralizing their counter-narratives is long overdue (Howard, 2003, 2008). Investigating African American students' perceptions of their socialization experiences is

both necessary and timely. This study emphasizes the far too often silenced counternarratives of African American students to explore their racial and educational identity development within racialized contexts, and the extent to which ecological socialization influences identity development processes (Chavous et al., 2003; Howard, 2003; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2008).

## CHAPTER IV

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN: INVESTIGATING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN A RACIALIZED CONTEXT**

To deconstruct existing inequalities within the racialized context of society, this investigation explores the socialization and educational practices African American students perceive as salient influences on their racial and educational identities. The counternarratives of study participants reveal the perceived influence of families, schools, and post-secondary institutions on African American students' identity development. This chapter articulates the research design employed in this dissertation. I begin with a discussion of the school and racial context from which the study sample was drawn. Next I discuss the various sampling techniques utilized to engage in an intra-group analysis of the perceptions of African American students. I continue with a description of my data collection protocol. I conclude this chapter by attending to issues of trustworthiness by articulating my subjectivity as a researcher, and my overall critical reflexivity. This study is designed to (a) explore African American students' perceptions of the socialization experiences they identify as salient influences on their racial and educational identity; (b) theoretically deconstruct the racialized contexts (i.e., secondary educational institutions) within which African American students are socialized prior to entering college; and (c) examine how variations in African American students' post-secondary contexts differentially reflects their identity development at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

### **Racialized Context**

All African American students are socialized and educated within the racialized context of society that inescapably “assigns racial meaning to . . . differences among individuals or groups [and] produces hierarchies of power and privilege among races” (Burton et al., 2010, p. 445). However, historical and empirical evidence has revealed variations in regional perspectives and experiences of African American students (Coats, 2010; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; Tolnay, Adelman, & Crowder, 2002). Thus, there are distinct contextual influences that vary based on geographic location. For example, African American students in California were directly influenced by the elimination of affirmative through Proposition 209 (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Alternatively, students in southern states have to contend with enduring racist ideologies from the historical segregation of the south (Coats, 2010). Given such variations in the influence of racialized contexts, sampling students from a single geographic location is particularly beneficial for understanding how African American students cope with the influence of racialized contexts (Spencer et al., 2006). Consequently, I began this investigation by identifying a specific racialized context within the United States from which I draw my research sample; a southeastern state. This sampling strategy permits me to soundly investigate African American students’ perceptions of influences on their identity development processes without confounding such perspectives with existing variations in racialized geographical influences.

Although racism is endemic to all aspects of the United States, the history of slavery makes existing racist ideologies and discriminatory practices most salient in the south (Bell, 1992; Tolnay et al., 2002). The explicitly racist practices, such as Jim Crow, plagued the south from emancipation through the civil rights era of 1960s; and such ideologies remain imbedded in institutional structures and practices, particularly in southern states (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Frazier, 1939). Despite social progress and advancements of the civil rights era and subsequent

social justice victories for African Americans, the racialized context of the south is continually reminiscent of the historical legacy of slavery. Indicators of racist exploitation remain visible though the erection of confederate flags in public places and preserved historical sites indicative of racial segregation. In addition, racially charged highly publicized events such as the charge of attempted murder of teens in a school yard altercation in the case of Jena 6 in Louisiana; and the cold-blooded murder of Trayvon Martin in Florida, continue to underscore that the endemic nature of racism is particularly salient within the south. Thus, identifying the south as an environment that significantly influences the identity development of African American students is optimal for understanding how racialized contexts influence the identity development of African American students.

To investigate the influence of racialized contexts in the south, the sample from this study was drawn from a single southeastern state. This state is the site of 17 public postsecondary institutions; including 5 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), 11 predominately White institutions (PWIs), and 1 predominately Native American institution. The southern state selected was pivotal in the civil rights movement, and has a history of racialized events. To ensure continuity in the socialization experiences of African American students recruited for this investigation, participants of this study were recruited from one of two public universities that are a part of the states' public university system. Half of the sample was recruited from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), and the other half was recruited from a Predominately White Institution (PWI) within the same city. Just under three miles apart, each institution has a rich history and legacy that permeates their respective campuses. This investigation revealed that African American students' decision to attend the HBCU or PWI was directly influenced by their familial and educational socialization prior to college. African American students' perceptions of their university selection will be discussed further in chapter 5. However, it is important to note

here that findings of this study reinforce the importance of sampling students from both an HBCU and PWI.

The HBCU from which participants from this study was selected is a land-grant University. It was established in 1891 to accommodate African Americans who were legally excluded from the White land-grant university. This HBCU has a history of activism and renowned for its scholarship particularly in the fields of engineering and technology. It boasts of alumni who continue in the tradition of activism and social justice. The PWI from which participants from this study were selected is also a public institution that was historically a women's college established in 1891. It became a co-educational university in 1963. This PWI is the most diverse institution in the state system. It has an undergraduate class that is currently approximately sixty-two percent White and approximately twenty-three percent Black.

### **Sample**

To conduct this investigation, 17 African American first year students who attend a predominately White institution (PWI) or a historically Black College and University (HBCU) were recruited to participate. Consistent with qualitative methodology, the identification of participants from a specific locale is suitable for understanding the processes being examined (Creswell, 2005). Thus involvement in the study was limited to students who were reared and educated within the same southern state. Collectively the sampling criteria, purposeful sampling strategies, and data collection protocol of this investigation reflect an effort to gain a better understanding of variations in how African American students' perceive the socialization influences from similar racialized contexts.

The seventeen students selected for this study participated in two in-depth, semi-structured interviews during the second semester of their first year of college. Nine participants attend the HBCU and 8 attended the PWI. There were a total of 8 female participants and 9 male

participants. The sample participants represented 13 different majors and hailed from 14 different cities within the southern state they were sampled from. They were offered a \$10.00 gift card for each interview they participated in. Specific characteristics of the 17 African American students selected for this study are featured in a chart in Appendix B. The following sections detail the recruitment strategies, sampling criteria, and data collection methods utilized in the design of this study.

### **Participant Recruitment**

Several steps were utilized to collect data for this dissertation study. I initially recruited students from both the HBCU and PWI by contacting university instructors of entry level courses, such as Math, English, African American studies, foundations for learning, or university experience courses. These courses were targeted because of the large number of freshmen required to enroll. I identified the instructors through the course listings of each university. I e-mailed each instructor introducing myself, describing the study, and requesting two to three minutes to speak to their students and distribute a sign-in sheet for those interested. Interestingly, the response rate and method varied by institution. I made adjustments accordingly in order to secure the largest pool of interested students. After these adjustments were made, the recruitment yielded a substantial number of students from each institution.

After approval from both the of the respective institutional review boards, I sent the exact same e-mail to instructors at both the HBCU and PWI. Several of the instructors at the PWI responded immediately and two of the instructors at the HBCU responded immediately. Of the PWI instructors who responded, 8 of them allowed me into their classrooms to make a recruitment announcement and circulate a sign-up sheet to interested students. I recruited students from 13 classes at the PWI (this yielded 7 students selected into the study). Several other instructors from the PWI responded to my email by stating that they had very low number of

African American students in their courses, and that it would be most effective for them to post the recruitment announcement and flyer on blackboard, or e-mail their African American students directly (this later method yielded one student who was selected into the study). Most of the PWI instructors identified with the processes of recruitment for dissertation research, they themselves identifying as doctoral candidates or recently hired assistant professors. Like the instructors at the PWI, the two HBCU instructors who invited me to come into their classrooms also identified with the data collection process. One instructor was a PhD, and offered her students extra credit if they ‘helped me’ with my study (this yielded one student who was selected for the study). The other instructor was an aspiring doctoral candidate and discussed his future need for recruiting participants (this yielded over seventy interested participants, 6 of whom were selected for the study).

During my recruitment, I observed two uniquely distinct trends unfolding in my recruitment of students from the HBCU. First, word of mouth played a major role in the invitation of additional instructors who later invited me into their classrooms. For example, several instructors invited me make a recruitment announcement after they had either heard me make an announcement in their colleagues’ classes, or if their colleague introduced me to suggest I be allowed me to also make an announcement in their class. The second trend I noticed during recruitment of HBCU students was that relationship building was pivotal and essential for me gaining access into classrooms; even among instructors who had received my initial e-mail. For example, while at a community forum I ran into a former colleague. She introduced me to her colleague who worked at the HBCU I was recruiting from. As we chatted to catch up, my colleague asked me how my dissertation was going. I shared with her that I was still working to get a better response rate from the HBCU. Her colleague then asked me what I was researching. Upon explaining myself, she interrupted, “oh you’re the one who sent me that e-mail. I didn’t

know who you were.” She then invited me to come into her class to make my recruitment announcement. Thus, the relationship I had with her colleague appeared to add validity to my request, and based on the relationship of our mutual friend, I was granted further access into the HBUC. These variations in the approaches to recruitment reflected the necessity in adapting culturally relevant recruitment strategies across contexts. While traditional strategies worked well for recruitment for the PWI, they were far less effective for recruiting students from the HBCU. Rather culturally relevant strategies for recruitment required relationship building, and validation through mutual acquaintances for gaining trust and access for recruiting students from the HBCU.

During the recruitment announcement I communicated the 5 study criteria, research incentives, an invitation for participating in the focus group, and a request to complete the survey for potential selection in the larger study. All students who expressed interest in the study after the recruitment announcement were asked to take a flyer and to document their name, e-mail address, and phone number on a circulated sign-up sheet. This allowed me to have the students' contact information for informing them of the focus group date and times, and/or to follow-up with them regarding the survey. Students who expressed interest in participating in this study by signing the sign-up sheet were invited to participate in one of two pre-scheduled focus groups on their respective campuses. Two focus groups were held, one at the HBCU and one at the PWI. All interested students were also asked to complete the survey assessing their demographic information and racial identity. I selected study participants based on their survey scores (further described below). Both students who were selected to be interviewed in the study and those who were not were invited to the focus group.

### **Sampling Criteria**

Participants of this study were required to meet five criteria which included: (1) self-identifying as African American; (2) classifying as a traditional first year student, within a year of graduating with their high school diploma, HSED, or GED; (3) being at least 18 years of age; (4) having attended high school within the identified southeastern state; and (5) currently having a permanent residence within the identified southeastern state. These criteria were designed to explore the perceptions of African American students from similar educational and familial contexts in various ways. The first criterion was designed to explore the experiences of students who *self-identify* as African American, regardless of their racial or ethnic ancestry. Increasingly, research has reported that there are distinct variations in the experiences of African Americans who have two biological African American parents when compared with African Americans with parents who are biologically bi- or multi-racial (Keith & Herring, 1991). Such research asserts that the perceptions of African Americans can produce markedly different experiences for African Americans with lighter skin color in contrast to African Americans with darker skin color despite how African American students perceive themselves (Hunter, 2002; Rockquemore, 2002). However, the examination of how others perceive African Americans is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, this examination is designed to explore the self-perceptions of African American students to understand how they internalize the socialization they are exposed to in ways that impact their racial and educational identity. Consequently, African American students who self-identify as African Americans will be included in this study, regardless of their parents' racial or ethnic background. This decision is also theoretically sound from the CRT perspective guiding this study. Critical Race Theory requires that African American students are able to construct their own reality in a way that affirms them as credible informants of their own experiences (Milner, 2008).

The second and third criterion for this study allowed me to investigate African American students during their transition into college. This transitional period is significant because it is when the influence of students' socialization experiences is most salient. In addition, they theoretically possess the necessary autonomy for lawful identity exploration, as opposed to being constrained by parental rules and limitations within adolescence (Arnett, 2000). This developmental period of emerging adulthood is captured for all study participants. As students mature and adapt to university life they become more independent of their parents, and the influence of their socialization experiences may become less significant. Consequently, excluding students beyond their first year in a post-secondary institution is both theoretically and methodologically appropriate. The fourth and fifth criteria allowed me to purposively sample from a specific geographic location. According to Creswell (2005), "purposeful sampling [methodologically] applies to both individuals and sites" (p. 204). Sampling students who have been reared and educated in the same southeastern state makes this study particularly suitable for understanding the influence of a racialized context on African American students both during their secondary education and their postsecondary transition into university life.

Despite the intentionality and clarity of the 5 sampling criteria, there were two exceptions to the criteria that did not emerge until the study was well underway. Thus, these exceptions were permitted because that added to the variability of African American student perceptions. The first exception emerged from the fourth criterion, that all students attend high school within the identified southeastern state. One female interviewed from the PWI only spent her junior and senior year of high school within the required state, with the first two years of high school taking place within a neighboring state. Both high schools she attended had a similar demographic composition, and she reported having similar experiences within each context. The second exception that emerged was related to the first criterion, that participants self-identify as African

American. One male interviewed from the PWI revealed that he was African American and Indonesian. He explained that he identifies as both African American and multiracial depending on the situation. He clarified that “demographic wise, like if I was like going to fill out something, I would most likely put multiracial; but if it was for like a minority, I would put African American.” Throughout his interviews he referred to himself as both African American and multiracial. At no time did he identify himself as being Indonesian. In fact, only after specifically asking about the ethnicities of his parents did he specify his ethnic identity. In both situations the exceptions to the criteria did not emerge until after the interviews began. Thus, I made the decision to keep both students in the study to highlight the diversity of African American students within the selected geographic location who self-identified as African American students.

Existing literature suggests that African American students’ socialization experiences are significantly influenced by various factors such as their gender, parental education, socioeconomic status, and racial identity (Brown-Wright & Taylor, 2010; Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Howard, 2008; Jeynes, 2007; Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley, & Zamel, 2009). As a result, in addition to the sampling strategies I used to select students from the same geographic region, I simultaneously utilized strategies to recruit a diverse representation of African American students within the southeastern state identified. I diversified the sample by administering a demographic survey to all interested participants who fit the five study criteria. Fifty-three students completed the 58-item survey; 17 from the PWI and 36 from the HBCU. I used this survey to assess African American students’ self-reported gender, socioeconomic status, secondary school racial composition, parental education, high school advanced placement, and two dimensions of racial identity as defined by Sellers, Smith, and Colleagues’ (1998) Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) and operationalized by the Multidimensional

Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; further detailed below). I purposefully selected students based on the variability of their self-reported gender (9 males; 8 females), secondary school racial composition (8 predominately black high school; 3 equally diverse high school; and 6 attended a predominantly white high school); parents educational level, and MIBI scores (as detailed following). This sample variation allowed me to explore existing variation in the ways that African American students perceive their socialization experiences to influence their identity development. The demographic chart included in Appendix B illustrates the sample variation.

The MIBI subscales for racial ideology and racial regard was included in the survey. Racial regard assesses “public and private regard,” which captures African Americans’ students’ perceptions of being African American (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 26). Among participants within this study, 16 of the 17 students reported high scores of private regard, reflecting positive feelings of being Black; alternatively one student reported having low private regard, or negative feelings about being Black. Eleven of the students scored high on public regard; thus, illustrating their beliefs that African Americans are positively perceived in society; whereas, 6 reported African Americans were negatively perceived in society.

The MIBI Racial Ideology sub-scale assesses African American students’ perceptions of how they integrate their definitions into various situations as a reflection of their racial identity. Most of the students who completed surveys reported ideologies of humanist and assimilationist. Seven of the selected students reported a humanist ideologies which maintains a philosophy that African Americans should live and interact in ways that are consistent with humankind. Alternatively, one student reported having a nationalist ideology that maintains a philosophy that African Americans should live and interact within society as a culturally unique group (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). This was the only student across both institutions that reported having a nationalist ideology. Five students maintained ideological philosophies consistent with

assimilationist. Assimilationist ascribe to the belief that African Americans should live and interact in society by de-emphasizing race to integrate into mainstream society; alternatively 4 students identified with an oppressed minority philosophy that acknowledges similarities between African Americans and other oppressed groups with the belief that African Americans should live and interact in a way that unifies with other minority groups to alleviate the common experiences of oppression. The detailed counternarratives presented in Chapter V will make note of the racial ideologies African American students reported based on their survey. This is particularly interesting given that the counternarratives both reflect similarities to and divergence from the definitions of racial ideologies as defined by Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998). Although the survey was used primarily as a measure to diversify the sample, the data yielded unique and relevant findings for examining the perspectives of African American students within this study. The demographic chart included in Appendix B illustrates the sample variation including their reported racial regard and racial ideology.

### **Data Collection Methods**

#### **Focus Groups**

The purpose of the focus groups for this study was to develop and finalize the semi-structured interview questions for the dissertation interviews. Thus, the preliminary focus groups provided useful information for the research design by informing the best approach for qualitative inquiry. These focus groups were designed to understand how African American students from a southern state think about and describe their socialization experiences, identity development and postsecondary academic achievement. They were used to ground my thinking regarding how African American freshmen conceptualize their socialization experiences in a way that helped me to construct culturally relevant interview questions (see Appendix A) emerging from the experiences that would capture African American students' counter-narratives. Eighteen students

participated in the focus groups. One focus group was comprised of 10 students who attended the HBCU and the other was comprised of 8 students who attended the PWI. Each focus group was held for approximately 60 minutes on students' respective campuses. Dinner was provided for the focus group participants, and a \$25.00 gift card was raffled to a focus group participant at the conclusion of the group. The audio files from the focus groups were analyzed to identify the central themes. These themes were developed into a semi-structured interview protocol for the 17 African American freshmen participating in the full study. The resulting interview questions are presented in Appendix C.

### **Individual Interviews**

All students expressing interests in the study were asked to complete the demographic survey; students were selected to be interviewed based on the diversity of their submitted surveys. It is important to note that 12 of the 17 students interviewed participated in the preliminary focus group; the other 5 only completed the survey. This selection was based primarily on the demographic survey and not the actual focus group. Although I initially designed the study with the intent of selecting an equal amount of students from both the HBCU and PWI, the demographic surveys submitted from the male students at the HBCU were so varied that I chose to add an additional male student from the HBCU (who had attended the focus group). As a result, I ended up with 5 instead of 4 males from the HBCU and 4 from the PWI.

I personally conducted each of the interviews. The first interview took place before their midterm exams, and the second just before their final examinations. The length of each interview varied in time, ranging from 45 minutes to just over an hour. The first interview was designed to understand how African American students perceived of their racial and educational identity; and to capture perceptions of their pre-college socialization from their families and high school experiences. The second interview was shorter than the first interview and lasted an average of 30

minutes. The purpose of the second interview was to explore how African American students' perceived salient socialization experiences to influence their identity and postsecondary academic achievement. The second interview also explored potential changes in African American students' racial and educational identity, how they perceived their transition into college, and their perceptions of current events within a racialized context. In addition, African American students self-reported their academic grades. Their grades will be used as an institutional measure of their academic achievement.

Each of the study participants were contacted via e-mail and phone informing them of their selection into the study. Each of the 17 students selected completed both of their scheduled interviews; the completion rate of the study was 100%. Most of the interviews conducted with students from the PWI were held in a small, private group study room. I selected the location based on my availability to select such space on campus that would render an optimal sound quality for the audio recording. In addition, a few interviews were conducted in my graduate student office and a one in a departmental conference room. The interviews with students from the HBCU took place at a location of their choice. Given my inability to secure an isolated space on the campus of the HBCU, the students chose a location they could most readily access. Most of these interviews took place in a cubicle in the library of the HBCU. Other interviews took place in dorm rooms, and study lounges.

### **Data Analyses**

After audio recording each interview I assigned the digital files to one of three undergraduate students, to transcribe. Collectively they transcribed 32 interviews, and I transcribed two interviews. Students participating in the dissertation lab were trained on how to utilize transcription software and hardware to successfully transcribe the digital interview files, and engage in dialogue about the data collection process during monthly meetings. Thus, the lab

meetings were also a part of my initial stages of data analyses. Lab conversations informed necessary revisions to the interview protocol. For example, during one lab meeting one of the students participating in the lab observed that the wording of a specific question appeared to be ambiguous, and difficult for the research participants to respond to. Consequently, I worked with this student to revise the question; which added clarity for future interviews. The students working with me on the dissertation lab were also a source of data triangulation given that they were also students who were educated in the same southeastern state the sample was drawn from.

My data analyses continued upon receipt of the transcribed interviews. I immersed myself in the data through engaging in the quality control of the completed transcriptions; this included personally editing each transcript for accuracy. During this process I also used Microsoft Word software to highlight student responses that appeared to be reflective of the socialization experiences and indications of their racial and educational identity. Such instances included responses related to unique student experiences, articulation of complex concepts related to the topic of this study, examples of participant perceptions of racialized contexts, and other emerging factors characteristic to the study participants. I also employed attribute coding as defined by Saldana (2009), which is particularly suitable for qualitative studies that sample from various sites, utilize various data sources, and include multiple participants. This coding yielded a descriptive summary of each participant that included their institution type, date of their interviews, their major, parental education level, perceived SES, racial regard levels, racial ideology classification (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998), the ratio of African Americans in their high school, their place of birth and the location of their high school.

I began organizing this data by printing hardcopies of each transcript and filing them into binders by the participants' institutional type (HBCU or PWI). I also electronically uploaded each edited transcriptions into Nvivo 9 qualitative software for data management, coding and further

data analytic procedures. However, given the emergent, nuanced and recursive process of the coding process, the Nvivo 9 software was primarily used for data storage. Most of the data analysis processes were done manually. In addition to memoing and working with the dissertation lab, my ongoing analytic process included conversations with colleagues who were also doctoral candidates born, reared, and educated in the southern state from which my sample was drawn. Such conversations yielded invaluable insights for understanding the racialized context from which my sample was selected.

### **Coding**

Despite the formal processes of coding described below, it is important to note that data analysis began in the early stages of data collection. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) caution that coding is not the totality of analysis; rather it is merely part of the analytic process. Thus, the findings discussed in the following chapters reflect information emerging from all stages of data analysis; both formal and informal. In addition, it is also important to note that the coding procedures used are both theoretically centered in PVEST and CRT and guided by CRT methodology. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) assert that critical race methodology uses “multiple methods, often unconventional and creative, to draw on the knowledge of people of color who are traditionally excluded” (p. 37). Similarly, Saldana (2009) affirms that coding within qualitative research often utilizes intersecting and overlapping techniques. Thus, I utilized organic and emergent data analyses techniques that emerged from the data collected; this includes the utilization of multiple coding procedures that are at times employed in tandem.

Formalized coding for this study took place in three stages. First I organized the data by utilizing attribute coding described above. Next, I manually utilized invivo and value coding simultaneously (Saldana, 2009). Finally, I reviewed the data to implement narrative coding in tandem with invivo coding. Invivo coding is using “a word or short phrase from the actual

language” of participants (Saldana, 2009, p. 74). This technique was extremely beneficial for coding within critical race methodology because it emphasizes the counternarrative of study participants (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Using Invivo coding decenters myself as the researcher, and highlights the counternarratives of the study participants (Saldana, 2009). Within my utilization of CRT methodology, Invivo coding allows me to challenge the traditional paradigm that suggests that I, as the researcher, can best articulate the lived experiences of students of color by allowing the words of the participants to define the coding of their words (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Value coding is “the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldana, 2009, p. 89). This is used in tandem with invivo coding within my CRT methodology, to ensure that this research maintains a “focus on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color...viewing these experiences as sources of strength” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Narrative coding was used to reveal how African American students perceived their identity development processes. According to Saldana (2009) “narrative coding is appropriate for exploring participants’ intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story, which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing” (p. 109). Within CRT such stories are counternarratives that “reveal experiences [of] and responses to racism and sexism” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33). Through CRT methodology, counternarratives “challenges the separate discourse of race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). Taken together, the formal coding processes utilized for this dissertation were both theoretically and methodology sound.

The process of analyzing data was also inductive and recursive. Thus, in addition to formalized coding strategies, several readings of the transcripts highlighted concepts and themes

that informed the data analysis process. As aforementioned, conversations with graduate students who were born and educated within the southeastern state were pivotal in the data analytic process. Two colleagues were especially resourceful in offering feedback on the inductive process of data analyses. The first colleague was an African American male student who had a background in social work. He was completing his doctoral degree in human development and family studies. This colleague was particularly helpful in data interpretation, due to the feedback he offered from the perspective of African American parents and students. The second colleague was an African American female with a degree in adult education. She was completing her doctoral degree in cultural foundations of education. This colleague was particularly resourceful in deconstructing the perspective of students who attended an HBCU.

The recursive processes of data analyses involved the reiterations of coding given new knowledge that emerged throughout the process. For example, the early rounds of coding included highlighting general concepts and themes. However, after coding the first round of interviews, I was referred to several additional sources of coding strategies; such as Saldana's (2009), *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Thus, more theoretically sound coding strategies were recursive processes causing me to go back and re-code transcripts several times throughout the data analysis process.

### **Triangulation**

Despite the initial purposes of the demographic surveys as a tool for diverse participant selection, and the focus groups being as source of solidifying the interview questions; these points of data collection were later used as sources of data triangulation. Given that 12 of the 17 participants were a part of the focus groups, and all participants completed the demographic survey; data from these sources were referenced in the data analysis and interpretation and later included in the articulation of the research findings. Such triangulation added to the clarity and

understanding of participants' counternarratives. The findings in the following chapters reflect the triangulation of this data.

### **Researcher Subjectivity: My Counternarrative**

. . . when the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism can find their voice. . . those injured by racism and other forms of oppression. . . become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others . . . (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27)

I was drawn to this work through my passion to advocate for educational equity of African American students. The deeper I immersed myself in the critical race theory, guiding this study; the more I understood that I am inextricably connected to both the experiences of African American students in this study and my developing theoretical lens through which I engage in this work. Consequently, my subjectivity is rooted in the experiences that drew me to my topic of investigation, how I am situated in relation to my qualitative inquiry, and how my experiences influence my empirical investigation. As a result I will utilize the sections that follow to articulate my subjectivity as it influences this dissertation research

I went to graduate school to become a school social worker. My undergraduate experiences as a social work major provided me several opportunities for working with youth within various group home models; this included transitional living facilities as well as crises shelters. Each of these opportunities afforded me the opportunity to work with eight youth at a time. I chose to enter the school system in an effort to help as many youth as possible, realizing that of all the youth that I worked with in the group home; they all went to school. Thus, I identified public schools as a context that I could be most influential by helping as many youth as possible. However, while my social work education at a Midwestern, research one, university yielded optimal training in theory and practice around social issues such as poverty, drug abuse,

mental health issues, and collaboration across contexts such as schools and families; my formal training on addressing racial issues was scant.

My graduate education as a school social worker was supplemented by a year-long internship at a public school. Desiring to be licensed as a kindergarten through 12th grade social worker, I took a position within a high school just outside of the capital city in a Midwestern state. During the orientation to my internship, I was introduced to the cultural liaison; a position that I had never heard of. The school, like most of the schools I had attended throughout my life was predominantly white. Throughout my internship I learned that the cultural liaison worked closely with the school social worker to address the specific needs of students of color, particularly in regard to providing academic support, accessing educational resources, and fostering cultural awareness for staff and students school wide. It was with this roll that the institutional issues of racism and diversity were tackled both among the staff and student body. Ironically, the cultural liaison that I worked with during my internship year resigned; and I applied when the vacancy was posted. I was hired and spent the next three years at the high school as the cultural liaison.

The unprecedented amount of institutional racism existing within the high school was rather implicit during my experience as a social work intern; however it was unmistakably evident as I assumed the position. As the cultural liaison, I witnessed teachers engaging in diatribes with students and parents over their justification for using racially charged epithets; I witnessed parents who previously attended the high school making unrelenting complaints of the generational racism that specific teachers engaged in; and I sat through site counsel school governance meetings revealing the racist ideologies of staff who expressed no interests in extending their well protected educational resources to low-income students of color who were assumed to be academically undeserving. I realized that although I worked in an affluent high

school, African American students benefited least from the resources the school had access to. In fact, the experiences of African American students were latent with institutional racism and discrimination. The high school, while boasting of overall elevated scores in state standardized tests, struggled to offer an equitable education to students of color, particularly African American students. Alarmed by this reality, I did the best I could to develop and implement empirically based staff trainings, culturally relevant curriculum for students, and collaborations with community agencies. As a result, I made several changes to the hegemonic institutional practices. However, upon my resignation, I came to grips that the challenge of educating students of color within a racialized context is much larger than one can address in isolation. Thus, I continued my journey by pursuing a doctoral degree to explore, what I perceived as the cultural incongruities between African American families and predominately white educational institutions; as well as to deconstruct the role the school played in failing to grant African American students' educational experiences that translated into their future success.

It was during my doctoral program that I realized that the racialized context in which African American students are educated is also the context that influences their development. Thus, it became increasingly salient to me that as an African American student, I was being educationally socialized. Furthermore, I came to learn that such institutional socialization impacts how I, and other African American students, perceive ourselves both racially and educationally. As an advanced graduate student, I came to reflect upon how this socialization took place during my adolescence and emerging adulthood. The more I learned, the more enraged I became about the perpetuation of racist institutional socialization. Consequently, I devoted my dissertation to deconstructing the processes involved in institutional socialization of African American students, and how such socialization influences our racial and educational identity.

### **My Positionality**

Whereas my early career experiences gave rise to my research interest, my doctoral journey situates me within this study as an African American student educated within a racialized context. As a result, I am developing educationally within a context that implicitly socializes me racially and educationally. I am situated both within this study, as an African American woman who identifies with being educated and socialized within a racialized context; and as a researcher conducting a study to better understand the extent to which African American students perceive their racial and educational identities to be influenced by their family and school socialization. I believe that identity development is a lifelong process, in which ones' identity is ever evolving and changing (Spencer et al., 2006). Thus, my qualitative inquiry of African American students in this study is also shaped by the ways in which I have evolved and changed over time. I de-center myself within this dissertation, by emphasizing the counternarratives of the research participants, while acknowledging that our stories are connected. To add to the interpretive validity of this study, I will continue with an explanation of how I am situated within the qualitative inquiry I am engaging in. Thus, the following reflects how I fit into this study by examining how my perception of various events that leads me to this qualitative inquiry.

**Being African American.** I am proud to be African American; and I realize within the context of the racialized society I live in, this comes with an enormous amount of responsibility. This responsibility I have is both to my family, past and future generations. I emerge from a loving and supportive African American family that places a strong emphasis on educational attainment. My family like many African Americans believes that education is an important tool for upward mobility and economic advancement (Boykin, 1986; Chapman, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Maton et al., 1998). However, the fact that I am a first generation doctoral student reveals that education does not always translate into educational and economic access for *all*

African Americans. Furthermore, my journey reveals that for African Americans even access into higher education is characteristic of oppression, discrimination, and racism; for my journey has been latent with such experiences. Nevertheless, I have had the support and encouragement of my family members, some of which were not able to earn more than an eighth grade education, to buffer the microaggressions that I experience daily within racialized institutional contexts.

**Predominately white institutions.** I was educated primarily within the context of predominately white institutions. Thus, within such settings, I have grown used to being one of few or one of the only students of color within my educational context. In fact, as I advance in my education; seeing faces, hearing ideas and being accompanied by perspectives similar to my own is much less frequent. Within PWIs I have been often called upon to provide perspectives on behalf of my entire race. Although I am often faced with this charge; I refute it to assert that African Americans are NOT a monolithic group, but rather a diverse racial group worthy of being understood on our own cultural terms. In essence, this dissertation; written on the campus of a predominately white institution, is written to counter the notation that the lived experience of one African American can embody the experiences of an entire racial group. Rather, I write to amplify the voices of a diverse racial group from the perspectives of several African American students that have experiences that are both similar and divergent from my own. I realize that although I have often been educated within the context of predominantly white settings, not all African Americans have been. Many African American students are permitted to develop their racial and educational identity within a context that affirms their self-worth and dignity as they develop. These voices are also heard within the context of this dissertation.

My collective experiences and interactions with both African Americans students who share my experience of being educated within a PWI, as well as with those who have been educated within an HBCU has expanded my understanding of existing variations in the

experiences of African American students. What I have learned has also lead me to ask various questions about the experiences of African American students' such as: how do African American students perceive their racial and educational socialization within their family contexts; how African American students perceive racial and educational socialization from their secondary school contexts; and to what extent do African American students perceive their socialization experiences to impact their racial and educational identity development? I realize that being an African American doctoral candidate and my previous experiences are directly connected to this dissertation topic and the lens through which I approach this study. As Glesne (2005) explains, my subjectivity leads me to "shape new questions through re-examining [my own] assumptions" (p. 120).

### **Critical Reflexivity**

My unique subjectivity poses potential advantages and disadvantages to conducting this investigation. Whereas the advantages of my positionality give credence to the investigations' interpretive validity, the disadvantages present the need for additional measures in ensuring the trustworthiness of the design. I will present both the advantages and disadvantages of my subjectivity below, because they contribute to my personal counter-narrative. The advantages of my positionality include my racial status, my disposition as a student, my professional experience as a social worker, and my training as a qualitative researcher. Alternatively, disadvantages of my subjectivity include the generational dissonance between myself and the African American students I am researching and the contextual geographic differences in how I was educationally socialized.

As an African American, my race is an advantage of my subjectivity relative to my chosen topic. I am situated as a racial 'insider' of this study. This directly influences my epistemology, regarding "how I know what I know" (Glesne, 2005, p. 6; Pillow, 2003).

Consequently, there are aspects of the African American experience that I will understand personally. As an African American I am a part of a collective community with other African Americans. This cultural experience is rooted in the African American cultural practice of being connected to others who have a similar historical background of oppression, marginality and resilience. Although, the expression of this connectedness is expressed in various ways (including in rare cases, a total disregard for such connectedness), it allows me to connect racially and ethnically to a cultural experience with other African Americans within the U.S. For example, in the event that culturally relevant terminology and/or cultural practices such as emotional expressiveness (i.e., looks, or gestures) characteristic of African American culture are presented, I have a general understanding about what these things mean.

In addition to being African American, my disposition as a student is an advantage of my subjectivity. As a student I can relate to the classroom dynamics, structure, and nuances of being in a postsecondary institutional setting. As a student, I will be able to connect with the students with an ability to understand the power dynamics that exists between an instructor and students. However, while strengthening my connection to my subjects, my status as an advanced level graduate student simultaneously distances me from experiences characteristic of the transition into college. In these instances I can draw from my experience as a professional social worker to engage in another level of understanding regarding the experiences of African American students.

My training as a clinical and school social worker allows me to engage in the simultaneous assessment of subjects' responses, (or lack thereof), body language, eye contact/diversions, and overall engagement levels. In addition, I have the ability to inquire about my observations within an interview setting. This professional training is extremely beneficial for qualitative inquiry via interviews, and positions me to conduct in depth assessments of African American students' true perceptions. In addition to my professional training, I have received

empirical training that strengthens my ability to engage in qualitative research. Altogether, I have taken several research methods courses, two of which focused solely on qualitative research. In one course I was given hands on experience in engaging African American students in qualitative research. I have also had the opportunity to analyze qualitative research through various appointments as a graduate assistant. In one study, I utilized narrative analysis to interpret the interview data from African American parents. In another study, I engaged in a thematic analysis of focus group data. Taken together, both my professional and graduate student experiences have prepared me to engage in the qualitative inquiry of African American students.

Although my subjectivity presents advantages to my ability to successfully carry out this dissertation study, it also presents potential dilemmas that may impact my research. Two specific issues that emerge from my subjectivity include the existing dissonance between myself and the African American students I am researching; and the contextual geographic differences in how I was educationally socialized. First my age, educational level, identity, and overall attention to contextual issues impacting African American students, may lead me to draw different interpretations of my participants than their intended responses. For example, the salience of socialization from my family and secondary schools was null prior to my investigation of these issues. In asking African American students to reflect on these issues, I may be raising their consciousness regarding the endemic nature of racism. Alternatively, as African American students reared in the south, they may already have a heightened sense of social consciousness regarding issues of race and racism that may surpass my own understanding. From this perspective, I am challenged to frame my questions in ways that are more characteristic of their experiences and less reflective of my empirical inquiry. Thus, without paying close attention to the questions I ask, and how they may be interpreted, I may reflect dissonance in my understanding instead of an understanding of the processes I am inquiring about. To address the

potential challenges, I rely on feedback from the undergraduate students in my research lab, my colleagues who are geographically connected to my sample and have professional and educational expertise I can draw from, and consultations with my dissertation advisors.

Secondly, my socialization presents a disadvantage to investigating African American students who were within the racialized context of the south. I was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I received both secondary and postsecondary education in Wisconsin. As an African American postsecondary student, it was common to my experience that I was the only or one of few African American students in my classes. Furthermore, during the course of my postsecondary undergraduate experience I recall having only two African American instructors. This is in stark contrast to many of the African American students who participated in my study. Many of the students in my study have experienced undergraduate classrooms where fifty percent or more of their classmates will have been African American students. For students who attend HBCUs they have experienced courses where all of the students in their classrooms and majority of the students on their campus are African American. This makes their socialization experiences markedly different from my own. Thus, my experience with institutional socialization is completely different from many students who participated in my study. Consequently, it is imperative that the participants of this study describe their own perception of salient socialization experiences. In the following chapters, I highlight the counternarratives of African American students by recognizing their experiences as valid and credible sources of knowledge for understanding the perspectives of African American students in the south.

## CHAPTER V

### NAVIGATING RACIALIZED CONTEXTS OF SCHOOLS: THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL SOCIALIZATION ON AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL IDENTITY

As African American students developmentally ask themselves “what do I want to make of myself and what do I have to work with” (Erikson, 1968, p. 314) educationally, they are inundated by educational socialization from schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006). School socialization exposes them to racial segregation, economic stratification, and rote learning masked as education (DeMarris & LeCompte, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although the theoretical goal of public schools is to provide an education that will grant African American students access and opportunities to a future with unlimited options, financial stability, and optimal potential for future success; the nature of public schools within a racialized society leaves much to be desired in this pursuit (DeMarris & LeCompte, 1999; Ferguson, 2003). Within the racialized context of educational institutions, school socialization threatens African American students' racial and educational identity development (Byrd & Chavous, 2012a, 2012b; DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Howard, 2008). Thus, instead of experiencing school climates that encourages their unlimited potential, affirms their self-worth, and esteems their inherent value, they must negotiate hostile terrain in pursuit of an education while striving to develop pro-social racial and educational identities. As a result, their navigation of racialized educational contexts are reflective of complex and nuanced developmental strategies of internalizing and resisting school socialization influences into their emergent identities (Spencer et al., 2006; Spencer et al., 1997).

Examining African American students' counternarratives is critical for understanding their identity development within the racialized context of society (Milner, 2008). Their

counternarratives illustrate how African American students navigate school socialization and the extent to which they perceive schools to influence their educational identity development (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Powell, 1989). Theoretically deconstructing these experiences unveils the institutional ideologies and practices of schools that transform African American students' experiences of educational oppression into dominant narratives of their educational inferiority, and characterize them as deviant disengaged students (Daniel, 2007; Delpit, 1995; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Howard, 2008).

This chapter utilizes critical race theory to examine African American students' counternarratives of the educational socialization they experience within the racialized context of schools. Their experiences expose how school socialization perpetuates whiteness as property, through which they are marginalized by institutional practices that racially segregate and economically stratify African American students under the auspices of ability grouping (DeCur-Gunby, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). I utilize this chapter to theoretically condemn such practices through the CRT critique of liberalism, because such practices imply a "notion of colorblindness" while operating to exclude African American students from being adequately educated within the context of a racialized society (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 39).

The counternarratives of African American students in this study reveal how school socialization exerts adverse micro and macro-level influences on their educational identity development. I begin this chapter with a discussion of emerging adults' counternarratives that illustrate how African American students' postsecondary university selections reflect their emergent identities and negotiation of existing educational hegemony (Spencer et al., 2006; Spencer et al., 1997). Next, I discuss findings that reveal how African American students' experience micro-level school socialization through educational tracking into advanced

placement, honors, general education, and special educational programs. I continue this discussion by theoretically deconstructing macro-level educational socialization ideologies and practices that influence African American students' educational identity. Finally, I conclude this chapter by examining African American students' perceptions of their educational identity within racialized educational contexts.

### **School Socialization**

African American students do much to persist even when the school socialization they are exposed to threatens their educational identity development (Luthar, 1991; Spencer et al., 2006). Their resilience reflects their tenacity to develop pro-social educational identities that lead to future success. Although African American students' differentially interpret the net stresses (i.e., manifested risks and protective factors) they are exposed to within racialized educational contexts; they must navigate the same educational hegemony, micro and macro-level educational socialization within racialized contexts (Spencer et al., 2006). Such micro-level socialization is latent with educational practices such as tracking, racial segregation, economic stratification, and racial socialization (Chapman, 2006; DeCuir-Gunby, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Macro-level school socialization includes restricted exposure to postsecondary opportunities, skewed perceptions of educational options, and substandard preparation for educational advancement (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Stovall, 2006; Yosso, 2006). Although study participants discussed various reactive coping processes that led to their educational resilience; each of them were keenly aware that the odds of educational success was not in their favor. They reported that their presence within postsecondary institutions ran counter to the dominate narrative of African American students as academically disengaged, high school dropouts, and/or prison bound. For example, Greg explained,

I am surpassing everything that statistics say I would be doing right now. I'm supposed to have a baby; I'm supposed to be in jail; supposed to even be dead, if I'm not in jail. Or I am supposed to be selling drugs; and on top of that I was born in a single parent home. I am not supposed to be *here* . . . all that put on me, I was just like I'm gonna prove ya'll wrong.

Such examination of African American students' counternarratives unveil the endemic nature of racism within educational institutions, and how they experience it through school socialization practices (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1996; Lawrence, 1987). These counternarratives also reveal how African American students must develop their educational identity while being exposed to racial hegemony within educational institutions (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998; Spencer et al., 1997). I begin with an examination of how African American emerging adults engage in practices reflective of their identity development and navigate hegemony through their university selection.

### **Navigating Educational Hegemony: Emerging Adults' University Selection**

African American emerging adults must navigate educational hegemony in their selection of postsecondary institutions. While their university selection in part reflects their racial and educational identity; their postsecondary choices are also reflective of how they navigate educational hegemony within the racialized societal context. Several participants described the selection of their post-secondary institution as a reflection of their racial and educational identity. For example, several students reported that they selected their post-secondary institution based on where they felt they could fit in racially while pursuing their educational goals. This was illustrated by Evan who stated,

[I chose this HBCU] mostly for [my major], but I also was accustomed to Black culture and schools because I went to a predominantly Black [high] school. So I said well, I'ma go to [the HBCU] cause of their engineering program. It will also be a good fit, cause it's a HBCU. ~Evan (HBCU)

In this case Evan, not only chose to attend an HBCU because of his educational major, but also for the racial climate of being in an all-Black environment. He explained that being in a racially homogenous setting would aid him in his transition as opposed to shifting to a predominately white institution where he would be constantly reminded of his race.

Other study participants reported that their postsecondary institutions were selected because of hegemonic limitations such as institutional deadlines and measures of educational success, such as grade point average (GPA) or class ranking, which they did not meet. Although many students fall victim to low class rankings and grade point averages, within a racialized societal context African American students are disproportionately impacted by such trends (Culpepper & Davenport, 2009). Consequently, such standardized measures of educational success prevent African American students from being admitted into many predominately white postsecondary institutions (PWI). In such instances, hegemonic admission practices limit African American students' postsecondary options to historically black colleges and universities (HBCU). While historically such limitations were solely manifested through de jure segregation by lawfully restricting access to educational resources based on skin color; current trends reflect standardized enrolment guidelines reflect de facto segregation practices (Chapman, 2006). These instances underscore the critical need for HBCUs for the same reasons they were originally established; to grant students of color educational opportunities in a racialized context where they are prevented from entering PWIs (Albritton, 2012; Douglas, 2012). Regardless, of the rationale, the results are the same; African American students are restricted to educational options that are under resourced when compared to PWIs. For instance, Alex explained:

I really wanted to go to [a PWI], I decided to apply late, and my GPA wasn't as competitive as everyone who sent there transcript in, and I didn't get in. So really at the last minute I had to go with [my HBCU] and I ended up loving it. ~Alex (HBCU).

Although Alex's situation ended in a selection he grew to appreciate, the competitiveness of his grade point average was a combination of his high school experience as well as the elevated GPA of the post-secondary institution he initially wanted to attend. Although grade point average is used as a reflection of individual performance, thus deemed as an institutional method for recruiting the highest performing students, in the context of a racialized society such standards serve as techniques that limit educational access for many African American students. For example, grade point averages can be understood as a representation of the sum total of one's educational experiences (J.E. Cooper, personal communication, March 4, 2013). For African American males, such educational experiences are characterized by teacher bias, institutional discrimination, and hegemonic practices that marginalize them (Wang & Huguley, 2012; Thomas, Coard, et al., 2009). Thus, the GPA of African Americans represent their academic achievement as well as the psychological stress of being educated within a racialized context. As a result, the GPAs they earn are often lower, and less competitive than the GPAs of their white peers who are educated without the psychological stressors of racism and discrimination. Given this fact, Alex's less competitive GPA is reflective of hegemonic practices that limit his postsecondary educational access.

Participants also reported selecting post-secondary institutions as a reflection of their resistance to the hegemonic educational socialization they received. For example, Patience's experiences lead her to attend a PWI because,

When I first started high school, my freshman year we would go on college trips and I was wondering why they only took us to the HBCUs, and not the predominately White schools. I went to [one HBCU] at least 7 times. So I asked our Gear-Up (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for undergraduate programs) advisor why can't we go to [visit PWIs], and he said well a lot of students here aren't gonna end up going to those schools, so I want to take you to the schools where most people are gonna go. That was his answer and I was just kind of sad. ~Patience (PWI)

Patience's experience reveals her resistance to the implicit hegemonic assumption that African American students would be most suited to attend an HBCU. Thus, her university selection asserts her belief that she is academically prepared and able to thrive at a PWI. Overall, African American students' university selection yields valuable information regarding how they navigate educational hegemony. To acknowledge the various strategies African American students engage in to navigate educational hegemony despite the educational socialization they are exposed to, I indicate the postsecondary institutions participants have opted to attend. Doing so further illuminates various aspects of their counternarratives. Thus, in my presentation of African Americans' counternarratives throughout this chapter, I annotate participants' post-secondary institution as either HBCU or PWI in parentheses after their pseudonym. Although, I do not further analyze participants' university selections throughout this chapter, to avoid distracting from the theoretical deconstruction of school socialization, it is important to note that their postsecondary university selection is one of many ways they navigate educational hegemony.

#### **Navigating Micro-level School Socialization: School Socialization through Tracking**

Consistent with existing literature, African American students described their school socialization experiences as characteristic of teacher biases, lowered educational expectations, and racial microaggressions (Ferguson, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Spencer et al., 2006). However their counternarratives revealed that their school socialization experiences were predicated upon how they were educationally tracked. For example, the placement of students in curricular tracks such as advanced placement (AP) and special education determined the extent to which African American students perceived their teachers' expectations of them. Their counternarratives revealed four distinct educational tracks; advanced placement, honors, general education, and special education. Variations in participants' curricular experiences accounted for differences in their level of college readiness and interactions with peers. In addition, participants

reported that each track differentially impacted their educational identity. Such educational experiences revealed how African American students were educational socialized by schools through educational tracking. The following details African American students' perception of educational tracking, the influence they perceived it to have on their educational identity, and theoretical deconstruction of how the practice of tracking served as methods for school socialization.

Each of the African American students in this study reported being in either advanced placement, honors, general education, and/or special education during high school. With the exception of Lance, students described advanced placement as a fluid curricular track. Thus, they could opt to take one or more AP courses without completely being tracked into advanced placement. Alternatively, Lance reported being enrolled in an early college program where he took AP classes throughout his junior and senior years in high school. The remainder of the students described honors, general education, and/or special education as primary tracking assignments that described their high school curriculums. For example, students like Alex took a couple AP classes but was primarily tracked into general education curriculum. Within the study sample, Lance was the only student completely tracked into an advanced placement program. Twelve students reported being in a general education track; nine of which had taken at least one AP class in high school. Three students' identified as being in an honors track and one student reported being in a special education program.

### **Advanced Placement**

All participants unequivocally identified the advanced placement (AP) as the highest curriculum within which students could be tracked. Students who took AP courses reported that they were perceived by peers as smart and had a reputation of being high academically achievers. However, their counternarratives revealed that even when African American students were

tracked into high performing curriculums, they were not exempt from having to navigate the adverse influence of micro-level school socialization. Rather they described their school socialization experiences within AP to include 1) college preparation, 2) economic stratification, and 3) school racial socialization. Although each student benefited from the college preparation they received from AP curriculums; the economic stratification and school racial socialization they were exposed to created problematic school climates illustrative of colorblind ideologies. Participants' counternarratives reveal how such climates marginalized African American students within the racialized contexts of schools.

**College preparation.** All African American students who took AP courses concurred that AP courses prepared them for college. For example, Evan (HBCU) described that “teachers really motivated to get us out of high school and graduate. Instead of getting a lot of homework, we’d actually do a project to help us learn the material.” Alex (HBCU) highlighted specific strategies teachers implemented such as, “not giving you so much leeway” to foster a sense of autonomy. Bradley (HBCU) reported that the content of AP courses “seemed to be about on par with the test I’m taking right now in college in terms of information.” Juan (PWI) described that although he did not initially appreciate his AP classes, the skills he learned in his AP classes were a point of reference when he encountered academic challenges within his postsecondary experience. He explained, “I didn’t pay much attention to it then, but I’m paying a lot more attention to it now.” Collectively, students who reported taking a higher number of AP courses reported a smoother academic transition into college in comparison to those who only took one AP course.

Brian (PWI) reported that AP classes were also intellectually stimulating. In comparison to other general educational classes he took in high school he described,

I had been making consistent C's in English, until I did an AP class which challenged me. I was just bored in the other classes, but when I had AP English it was so thought provoking. I mean honestly, to take me back tickles my brain! I made an A in that class and I was really proud of myself. I was like wow, this is really interesting I want to keep learning like this, I don't want to go back to not challenging myself. ~Brian (PWI)

In Brian's experience, the stimulation of AP classes encouraged him to come to college. It helped him re-ignite his passion for learning in ways that being tracked into general education curriculum did not. Both students who opted to attend HBCUs and PWIs reported being tracked into advanced placement curriculums. However, such tracking did not alleviate the hegemony they had to navigate in their postsecondary institutional decisions. In addition, the benefits of being prepared for college and intellectually stimulated did not prevent them from the adverse consequences of micro-level school socialization experienced through tracking. Thus participants tracked into AP classes also described experiences of school socialization that negatively impacted their educational identity.

**Economic stratification.** Participants who were tracked into AP courses reported experiencing school socialization through economic stratification. Each AP class culminated in an advanced placement test that required a fee between fifty to a hundred dollars. Students who successfully passed the test earned up to three credits per AP course. Of the ten students who reported taking AP courses, only three of them reported entering college credits. However, this was not merely a reflection of African American students' inability to pass AP exams. Rather, participants reported that the economic demands of AP exams prevented many of them from either taking the exam, or even from enrolling in AP courses when educators had identified them as students with the ability to do so. Consequently, the financial requirement of AP exams illustrates ways in which school socialization economically stratifies students within the racialized contexts of schools. Although African American students' report that financial constraints prevent them from earning college credits through AP courses, further theoretical

examination of their counternarratives unveils institutional practices reflective of economic exclusion from educational resources within the racialized contexts of schools. Thus public schools appear to engage in practices that espouse colorblind ideologies while engaging in practices that economically exclude African American students from accessing resources that would prepare them for college and afford them advanced postsecondary standing (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Some African American students who cannot afford AP exams still elect to take the course. In such instances the financial obligation of the AP exams prevents them from earning college credit despite their ability to progress through the course. For example, Evan (HBCU) described,

I came in college with a couple of credits. I took the AP classes, but I didn't always take the test. You have to take the exam to get the credits. The exam was about 80 dollars, that's why I didn't take it. ~Evan (HBCU)

In situations such as Evan's, African American students are able to benefit from the intellectual stimulation and college preparation that comes with taking AP courses. Because many students, other than African Americans, cannot afford to take AP exams, on the surface affordability of AP exams appears to be solely reflective of students' economic resources. Thus in Evan's situation, and other students like him, educational access is limited to those who have the financial means to access them. This liberal perspective espouses a notion of colorblindness that ignores the extent to which economic constraints maintain the racist school socialization practices that excludes African American students from gaining access to advance standing in postsecondary institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). In addition, within the racialized contexts of schools, when African American students who progress through AP courses do not take the culminating exam, it is not understood within the educational discourse as a

reflection of financial limitations. Rather economic exclusion becomes a racialized school socialization practice that allows well-resourced white students to take AP exams, while denying under-resourced African American students this opportunity. The fact that most white students possess the economic resources, that translates into educational opportunities, that black students do not contributes to the overarching narrative of African American students' intellectual inferiority. Thus, students are racially socialized to expect that white students belong in AP classrooms, and African American students do not. As a result, economic stratification racially socializes the entire school to perceive African American students as lazy, unmotivated, and disengaged.

School socialization through economic stratification also thwarts African American students from enrolling in AP courses. For example, Greg (PWI) a student who went through the honors curriculum explained,

I didn't have the money to pay for AP, but I wanted to push myself so I could at least have something like that. Yea I wanted to take AP math, cause I love math and I love numbers. I think for every test that you took you had to pay for it, and the test weren't cheap. I don't see why they would do something like that considering how bad times were. One of my teachers said that they would set up a payment plan...I was like okay, but if I miss that payment then what am I going to do? Something may happen that week and I may not be able to pay that. ~Greg (PWI)

The economic exclusion of African American students also prevents them from taking any AP classes. In such instances school socialization cause students like Greg to be tracked into lower level curriculums that do not adequately prepared them for college regardless of their potential to educationally excel at within AP courses. Rationalizing these instances solely as economic issues ignores the intersectionality of race and class, and how issues of class are racialized within a context that is racially stratified. As a result, schools can utilize economic arguments as a justification for “ignoring and dismantling race-based [practices that contribute to educational

inequality]” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29). As a result public education, theoretically designed to prepare all students for college, prepares only students who can afford to access to educational resources. Students like Greg, are then prevented from ‘pushing themselves’ in ways that would optimize their educational identity. Thus school socialization through economic stratification adversely influences African American students’ educational identity development by excluding them from engaging in educational experiences where they can enhance their educational ability and engage in educational identity exploration (Powel, 1989; White, 1984).

**Racial socialization.** Participants’ narratives reveal that schools racially socialize African American students. Such racial socialization is most apparent in AP classes within schools that are racially diverse or predominately white (as opposed to schools composed of predominately African American students). Students who reported taking AP classes within predominately white high schools reported that they were either the only, or one of two, African American students in their AP classes. Even in racially diverse schools where the majority of the students are African American, the AP classes tended to be composed primarily of white students. For example, Alex (HBCU), who attended a diverse high school with approximately 55–60% African American students, described the racial demographics of his AP classes as follows;

I would say that out of 27–30 students, I was probably one of 3 black people, or maybe 4 people of different descents as far as race goes. In my regular classes it was definitely more people of color. The majority of the white population was definitely in AP classes.  
~ Alex (HBCU)

Such trends reflect that even when demographically possible, schools do not establish racially diverse AP classes. Their failure to do so maintains whiteness as property through reputation and the right to exclude (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Whiteness as property simultaneously privileges white students and oppresses African American students by perpetuating a racialized hierarchy of ability. This stratification reifies white students’ reputation

as high academic achievers and perpetuates the perception of African American students as low achievers. Thus schools do not to actively engage in practices that would diversify AP classes because doing so would challenge the reputation of whiteness by engaging in educational practices that equate the reputation of African American students with white students. DeCuir-Gunby (2006) explains that “because the preservation of white identity [is] essential to maintaining the reputation of whiteness, segregation [is] necessary” (p. 104).

The school racial socialization African American students are also exposed is also characteristic of hegemonic ideologies and practices such as the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Within racialized contexts schools maintain “the right to establish a system of exclusivity which withholds or converts opportunities, access, and rights based on race” (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006). Thus, schools’ racial socialization practices ensure that even within diverse schools, African American students are virtually excluded from AP courses, and prohibited from accessing the resources they offer. Such practices racially socializes both African American and white students to perceive the academic achievement of African American students within AP classes as an anomaly. For example, Nicole (PWI) described her experience in an AP class as follows:

Senior year I was in AP Stats, I actually ended up getting an A in that class but I was *shocked*. I was the only black person in my AP class. Male, female, yeah I was the *only* Black. Everybody else was white; it had like 25, 30 kids in there. I was the only Black person. It kind of sucked, cause I was the one struggling in the class also, but I mean I give myself a round of applause because AP Statistics is not the easiest thing. So you’re the only Black person [out of] all the White kids, you do feel some type of way; but at the same time you feel kind of proud, because I’d rather try and know that I did it than to not do it at all. ~Nicole (PWI)

Nicole’s experience also illustrates that schools racial socialization through AP tracking also adversely influences African American student’s educational identity. The racial demographics of the class caused her to question her ability in an academically challenging course. Thus, she

describes being ‘shocked’ at her own academic success despite the fact that she is a high achieving student. By allowing AP classes to stay segregated, even within a diverse institutional setting; schools perpetuate whiteness as property. Doing so reifies negative racial socialization messages that undermine African American students’ educational identity.

### **Honors**

With few exceptions, African American students in this study who were tracked into honors curriculum reported that their educational experience did not prepare them for college. Participants described honors programs as “a tiny step up from regular classes, and [lower than] AP [which] is like college level.” Similar to students who were tracked into AP courses; honors students also experienced whiteness as property through the right to exclude and reputation. For example, Greg (PWI) reported “that did not teach me about studying in high school. I could not study and pass with an A.” Participants who were tracked into honors described themselves as good students who had to put forth little effort to do well. In the few instances where participants reported being marginally prepared for college, they identified only one or two educators throughout their high school experience that went above and beyond to prepare them for college. For instance, although Julia (HBCU) was a high achieving student who graduated high school with a 3.5 cumulative GPA the expectations of her Spanish teacher was her only recollection of being academically challenged within her honors program. She described,

My high school overall did not prepare me for college. I know one teacher who was so strict. He was hard, he was that teacher that everybody talked about, but he made me really prepared. He was my Spanish 3 and 4 teacher. I’m in like the Spanish 3 course here, and it’s *nothing* compared to my high school. It’s like a breeze now. I’m just [like] oh this is easy, this is nothing. Everybody is like oh this is so hard, but no he really prepared me. He didn’t baby. He gave pop quizzes like every two days. He wanted to make sure you were paying attention. [He assigned] readings that you always had to finish, projects, it was a lot for a Spanish class. ~ Julia (HBCU)

Although such intellectual stimulation creates optimal school climates for African American students to develop their educational identity, participants tracked into honors programs reported that such stimulation was few and far between.

The counternarratives of students tracked into honors programs also reflect whiteness as property through reputation. For instance, Rachel reported:

I think the White privileged sometimes are more focused, because they can probably see a future, and then the lower class Blacks just kind of feel like they can't really do anything. So they just stay in the easier classes and then the Whites want to be like challenged. I was more with the middle class, but if I would of taken the opportunities I could have been with more the privileged. I was taking the easy way out most of the time. If I would have applied myself then I could have been in one of those AP classes. I wanted to take AP classes, but I felt like if I went in there and made a C it would look bad on my transcript when I could just get an A in a regular class. So I just kept staying in honors. ~Rachel (PWI)

Rachel's experience illustrates how school socialization within honors programs perpetuates the reputation of whiteness as focused, privileged, and driven. Alternatively, perceptions of African American students' are constructed as unmotivated, lazy, and lacking an orientation toward future goals. While her personal account of 'taking the easy way' may reflect her educational identity; her perception of white students as more educationally astute is reified by the racial segregation of AP classes. Thus even students who are not tracked into AP curriculums are well aware of the racial socialization schools engage in. Such constructions threaten the identity development of students like Rachel who acquiesce to whiteness as property by opting not to challenge themselves educationally despite the potential benefits of doing so.

### **General Education**

Students who were tracked into general education curriculums described their educational experiences to be characteristic of unengaged teachers lowered expectations for them. These students reported that their educational experience often overlapped with personal social issues,

such as having anger management issues or receiving disciplinary actions. For example, Daja (HBCU) reported much of her experiences were related to problem behaviors she engaged in as a reaction to her parents' divorce. Her reflection of interactions with her teachers illustrates the school socialization experiences of student tracked into general education track are exposed to.

The [teachers] that are supportive, if you have troubles will come [help you if] you raise your hand and ask. Ones that didn't [offer support], you raise your hand, and then they will not help you with anything. They just say well what do *you* think is the answer? Well obviously I don't know; I been sitting back here looking at this question for 5 minutes 10 minutes already. You making me waste my time even more coming to you ...it's like really, what are you here for? How do you call yourself a teacher? You're not even helping. A teacher is not only supposed to teach you, but their supposed to help you; and if a teacher isn't helping you their only doing half of their job. ~Deja (HBCU)

Thus, participants reported that the student-teacher interaction of students in general education tracks did not traditionally prepare them for college. Rather they describe the school socialization to be salient through student-teacher interactions. Such interactions either adversely impacted students' educational identity by exposing students to various microaggressions or served as sources of educational support and empowerment. For example, Richard (HBCU) described his high school as very poor and characteristic of teachers that were often not certified. Yet he reported that the staff and "administrators always said keep your grades up; do this, do that. Someone was always saying make sure your GPA is good." In such instances school socialization was characterized by teacher-student interactions that focused on educational behaviors instead of educational skill building.

### **Special Education**

School socialization within special education programs was described as educational pampering. Travis (HBCU) illustrated this point as he recounted that:

High school didn't really [prepare me for college] cause they coddled us. But I did like that feeling, so I won't say it's necessarily they're fault . . . but I know the AP classes

really prepared [other students] for college. So my high school did prepare people, but it was if you was in that class they prepared you. Some teachers did prepare the regular classes for taking notes cause we used to take notes all the time, cause we was a preparatory high school. We was preparing for college. Other than that, the work was easy. I usually did it and knocked it out in a couple seconds, cause it was fun work to do, and the next day we would have a big lab or something. ~Travis (HBCU)

Travis reported having the most difficult time transitioning into college among all the study participants, based on his high school experiences. He earned a 2.2 cumulative GPA in high school and entered college on academic probation. His first semester GPA of a 0.8 caused him to continue his probationary status. He described his transition into college as,

Bumpy! Being on academic probation [made it bumpy]. It's hard but it's motivated me to do work, cause I don't want to get kicked out of school and waste my mom's money. I have to get above a 2.0 this semester or I will be kicked out of school. It's surprising how much you gotta do by yourself. Not having that small class environment, I can't just raise my hand and say teacher come here for like eleven times in the classroom. That, and they're doing a whole bunch of lectures and I'm not good [at] staying up in lectures. I usually fall asleep. I don't like that. Can you give something for us to do in class where I can get the information while having fun? But they still haven't, so I'm just tryna stay afloat. No, [I don't feel I was ready for college]. I just wanted to run away and go back to high school. It was too tough, I wasn't ready for my high school career to be over yet. ~Travis (HBCU)

Travis's tracking into special a special education program not only failed to prepare him for college, but it also socialized him to have a false expectation of learning. Although special education curriculums are designed to implement modifications tailored to students' learning styles; they are required by law to provide an individualized education plan. However, Travis's counternarrative suggest that the special education programs African American students are placed in are often characteristic of educational entertainment, which they later expect in an institutional setting; rather than the delivery an educational curriculum that adequately prepares students to succeed in a post-secondary setting.

### **Navigating Macro-level School Socialization: School Socialization through Racialized Educational Practices**

African American students' counternarratives revealed various instances where African American students had to navigate macro-level socialization. Because schools are microcosms of the larger society, students who attended both low-income and well-resourced schools were exposed to societal level, ideologies and practices such as power, privilege, and hegemony. Macro-level school socialization are practices within the school setting that perpetuate hegemony through power, privilege, and racism. For example, macro-level policies such as No Child Left Behind, situates African American students within a racialized context where educators are more concerned with the test performance of students than they are with educating them in preparation for future postsecondary options. Thus their educational experiences are directly impacted by societal (macro) level policies that also influence their educational identity development. Several participants described such macro-level socialization within the school context to be directly related to the limited resources African American students have access to within schools, particularly within predominately black high schools. For example, Patience (PWI) described that her schools "resources were horrible." Similarly Richard (HBCU) explained,

My high school hasn't met AYP, the adequate yearly progress, for like the last couple years. So when they don't, they have to share that information with us by the state law. So they sent letters to our house. Letting us know that because my school was so low performing. My high school was pretty much poor. I remember being in a class, we didn't even have a board; not even a chalk board. A lot of classes were behind. In most classes it wasn't enough books for everyone. Couldn't take books home, so most classes were considered class sets. Our library as a resource was just pathetic. Book selection . . . they didn't have any money for funding, wasn't a lot of computers in the school. There weren't any computer labs were you could go and do your work or anything, none of that. There wasn't no tutoring or nothing. ~Richard (HBCU)

Richard further explained that his high school experience resulted in him applying to only one institution, the HBCU he opted to attend. Although he reported that his selection worked out for

him, his experience reveals how limited educational resources influence African American students' educational identity. Richards' limited access to educational resources restricted his exposure to post-secondary options; consequently, he only applied to one university. Macro-level schools socialization also impacts the educational identity of students within well-resourced schools. For example, Julia described the macro-level socialization she experienced restricted her engagement in co-curricular activities. She expounded,

I did not like high school. I went a predominantly White school, and I just didn't connect with the teachers, the people, my other peers. We all kind of clump together as Black people in the school, but I was very uncomfortable. It discouraged me from doing a lot, like joining different honor societies, different clubs, cause I don't wanna be the only Black girl. So I just felt not as comfortable, not as proud. Teachers kind of tryna talk over your head. Tryna dumb you down a bit. I would have rather went to a predominately Black school for comfort. But the white school *did* give me more educational values. I did do *really* good at the school. ~Julia (HBCU)

Julia's recollection that 'the white school did [gave her] me *more* educational values' reveals that macro-level school socialization maintains whiteness as property. Thus even when students like Julia select to attend HBCUs they internalize the belief that predominately white schools offer superior educational experiences even when school socialization is latent with hegemonic practices that marginalize students of color. Collectively, both Richard's and Julia's counternarratives reveal that African American students must navigate school socialization at macro-levels. Participants counternarratives revealed that African American students experienced macro-level school socialization influences in three distinct ways; through (a) restricted exposure to postsecondary options; (b) skewed perceptions of educational options, and (c) substandard preparation for educational advancement. Each of these macro-level influences impact African American students' educational identity development.

### **Restricting Exposure to Post-Secondary Options**

Several participants reported experiencing macro-level schools socialization through restricted exposure to postsecondary options described. Macro-level socialization emerged from hegemonic societal perceptions of African American students' postsecondary options and educational policies that influence micro-level educational practices. Patience's (PWI) experience in a precollege program designed to expose her to postsecondary options illustrates how hegemonic perceptions can restrict African American students exposure to postsecondary options. She recounted how her Gear-Up advisor chose to expose her and her classmates solely to HBCUs because they were less likely to attend PWIs for higher education. In navigating her experience she realized that "some white schools don't expect black students to come. So, it was a big thang for me to go to a white school." Thus, she chose to attend a PWI in resistance to the hegemonic practices her Gear-up advisor engaged in. In such cases African American students educational identities are directly influenced by macro-level school socialization. When educational policies impact macro-level school socialization African American students' educational experiences are adversely impacted. For instance, Courtney (PWI) reported that her teachers "taught to the [standardized] tests" instead of allowing her to explore postsecondary opportunities. Thus, educational mandates to focus on state testing restricted her teachers from providing information related to postsecondary options and fostering skills for her future success.

### **Skewed Perceptions of Educational Options**

African American students must navigate macro-level school socialization that construct skewed perceptions of educational options. These skewed perceptions maintain that HBCUs are inferior to PWIs without contextualizing the hegemonic practices that account for inequalities (such as disproportionate resources). Consequently several participants reported having negative perceptions of HBCUs. These students included both students who opted to attend HBCUs and

those who attended PWIs. When elaborating on why they did not want to attend HBCUs they reported “I like diversity” and “I wanted to be different.” A closer analysis of participants’ counternarratives reveals how they are institutionally socialized to internalize negative perceptions of HBCUs. For example, Courtney (PWI) reported “counselors said to look for what you think will make you succeed, resources, class sizes.” However, within a racialized contexts where the allocation of resources to PWIs exceed the appropriation of educational resources to HBCUs the such advice skews the perceptions of HBCUs as inferior to PWIs. Although factors such as increased class sizes and fewer educational resources present challenges to educational success, such disparities are more reflective of differential state allocations to public institutions within the racialized context of society. For instance, Travis, a student attending the HBCU described his perception of the contextual differences of the local PWI in comparison to the local HBCU by explaining,

I do like coming to this school. But I wish they had some more stuff to do here. I went to [the local PWI] campus the other day, and it was like a lot of activities that was going on around campus. And their student union, well it’s not even called the union . . . they kinda have two of them. There’s one call the dining hall and one called the something else. And they got *everything*! And I went in their big store for food and everything. That’s like our little store that we go to. We can walk all the way over across the street, and go to it and that’s our little gas station store. [The PWI] got it all on [their] property so they can just walk to it. It seem just like a new building. It’s like Oh my God! I can like go and buy a whole box of big cereal in here and don’t even have to worry about going to leave campus to buy some groceries. But nope, we have to go to Wal-mart for all that. I don’t like doing that cause it’s too far of a walk, and now since I don’t have a car . . . I’m not doing that.[There are] shuttles, but I gotta wait an hour. And what if I just wanna go in there just get something and leave? I’m not gonna make it back to that shuttle, so I just waste an hour. ~Travis (HBCU)

Travis’s observation is skewed because he does not understand that the resources he observed his postsecondary institution to lack is a reflection of several hegemonic factors such as differential appropriations of state funds, variations in institutional-business partnerships that could lead to the establishment of business that could serve to enhance the campus (such as business that

provide healthier eating options), and access to resources such as efficient transportation in neighborhoods that have a lower income bracket. Consequently, students like Travis' are at risk for drawing conclusions about their educational options that decenter the macro-level socialization taking place.

### **Substandard Preparation for Educational Advancement**

Participants described that macro-level school socialization left them under prepared for postsecondary educational advancement. Several participants reported receiving substandard preparation for their post-secondary experience. Each of these students were high achieving within in their respective high schools, only to realize during their transition into college that their schools did not socialize them for post-secondary educational success. For example, Greg (PWI) described,

High school should have taught me better study habits. Like don't make the test about something that you went over, make it about something that you went over but make it way different so they can't be like I don't gotta study; I just got to remember what they said. In high school you just had to regurgitate information. College, you have to remember information. Because they will reword it, re-write it, and most certainly put it in a *whole* nother way. I had to combine my notes and my book. Regurgitating information is a lot easier than remembering. Because with regurgitating I can, not do anything as long as I kind of sort of listen to what you are saying. But when I have to remember, and I eventually have to reuse it . . . that makes a difference. ~Greg

Greg's analysis describes what DeMarrais and LeCompte (1999) define as schooling; "the learning that takes place in the formal institutions whose specific function is the socialization of specific groups within society" (p. 2). Schooling in this sense is contradictory to education, which is defined as "the process of learning over the span of one's entire life" (DeMarris & LeCompte, 1999, p. 2). Education includes gaining awareness of subject content, learning how to problem solve, drawing conclusions based on empirical findings and maturing intellectually.

Taken together, students who have been institutionally socialized to receive schooling, find they have received substandard preparation for their postsecondary experience.

Even when students, like Lance (PWI) enter post-secondary institutions with advanced academic standing, they may still find that they lacked sufficient post-secondary preparation. For example, although Lance reported having earned 15 college credits prior to entering college he further recalled;

I didn't know what a degree evaluation was until I got here. So I didn't know we had to take certain classes like gen-ed courses or something like that, before I got here. I would have probably taken classes that I actually *needed* at [the HBCU] so they can transfer over here, so I can get my degree faster. But that's the only thing [I wish I would have] really [known before coming]. Our school counselors [should have told us that]. As well as the director of the early college academy. ~ Lance (PWI)

Lance's experience illustrates that even when African American students are educated through advanced placement curriculums, they may still be educationally socialized through substandard preparation for postsecondary experiences.

### **Educational Identity: Development within Racialized Educational Contexts**

African American students' school socialization influences their educational identity development. Their navigation of micro and macro-level school socialization reflects their reactive coping process where they either internalize school socialization or resist hegemonic practices they experience within the racialized context of schools (Spencer et al., 1997, 2006). Participants in this study described their emergent educational identities to be reflective of simultaneously resisting and internalizing socialization messages to develop "pro-social strategies for coping with racism and overcoming the blocked opportunities that they may encounter because of racism" (Powell, 1989, p. 79). To understand how African American students' identity development, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of African American students' perceptions of their educational identity influenced by salient institutional socialization.

I like to take in as much as possible. I love school. I just work very hard. I have this fear of failing. I don't want to mess up. You know I do my work, but at times I slack off too. I do just enough to get by. ~Richard (HBCU)

Richard, like many participants in this study has both a distinct, yet contradicting, sense of educational identity. While he has a high level of academic achievement that resulted in making the dean's list his first semester of college, with at 3.8 grade point average; his fear of failing prevented him from pushing himself to enroll in his universities' biology honors program. He explained that doing so "was going to be added pressure." Similarly, the African American students in this study are relatively high achieving students. They each reported that although both their families and schools influenced their educational identities, they found their school socialization experiences to have a more salient impact on their current educational identities.

### **Educational Ability**

African American students in this study discussed various ways school socialization impacted their educational ability. However, the most salient influence on their educational identity was their grade point average (GPA). Each of the 17 African American students in this study reported a shift in their educational identities during their first year of college. These shifts were directly impacted by the grade point averages they earned during their first semester. In each case, students reported earning a first semester post-secondary GPA ranging from 0.2 to 1.2 grade points less than their high school cumulative GPA. In their explanation of these shifts participants described that GPA, an institutional measure of academic success, impacted their educational identities; either as a reflection of their perceived limited or alterable educational abilities. For example, students who felt their educational identities were a reflection alterable behaviors reported, "I thought that I knew how to balance my time and friends, but I didn't. I had to get adjusted to it." Thus, they did not internalize institutional measures of academic success into their educational identities. Alternatively, students who perceived institutional measures of

academic success to be reflective of their educational identities reported that their grade point averages revealed they were not as strong academically as they initially perceived. Most study participants espoused educational identities that resisted hegemonic school socialization. Thus, they believed that their GPA didn't accurately reflect their educational socialization. Rather, their GPA highlighted that they needed to improve their academic behaviors. These students understood that although grades mattered, they were not the sole indicator of what they knew. As a result, when their grades were low, they realized they were going to have to improve their ability to demonstrate their understanding of the things they had learned. This included changing their behaviors to enhance their grades.

**Limited abilities.** Students who perceived their GPA to be a reflection of their educational identity reported being extremely devastated when they received their first semester postsecondary GPA. These students explained how their GPA revealed that they were not as academically ready for college as they initially believed. Consequently, they distinctly believed that their academic abilities were limited and below the standard of both their goals and the institutional indicators of success. Greg's counternarrative was most illustrative of the turmoil students who internalized the institutional measure of success into their educational identity experienced. Having completed high school with a cumulative GPA of 3.3; Greg would be the first in his family to earn a four year degree. He identified himself as smart and reported hanging with high achieving peers prior to college. However, when he realized that the workload of 18 credit hours was too overwhelming he associated it with his inability to do that much work at once. Thus, he described his educational identity as an 'average' measure that other students would compare themselves against. He described;

When I finished this semester I was threatening myself telling myself that this isn't...*no*, C's, *no* there's no such thing as a C! I didn't know what a C looked like! You try your hardest, and you're too scared to go to the teacher for help . . . I was upset, and my mom

was like it's your freshman year it's okay, it's okay. You just got there, and I was like no a 2.5 is *not* what I wanted. I had set a goal for myself of 3.4. I don't know why I set it so high, I made a 3.3 in high school; but if I can just get passed the 3.0 I'll be happy. Cause right now I'm sitting at a 2.50 I feel like I'm average, like I'm doing just average work. I'm what people look at and be like ohh I gotta surpass you in order to do better. I want do better than that! I don't want to be average! I don't know, maybe I pushed myself a little bit hard, over worked myself doing 18 credit hours I will never do that again. College is tough my goal was to make a 3.5 off bat and I ended up with a 2.5 and I was beating myself up . . . I thought I was a good student but I'm not a good student anymore. I feel sad. I just feel horrible that I messed up or I tried to put too much on myself, one of the two. ~Greg (PWI)

Greg's experience is not only reflective of an educational identity that internalized institutional measures of success, but it is also developed by his opposition of the prosocial messages he received from his mother who attempted to normalize his experience by stating 'it's your freshmen year its ok.' This illustrates the strength of the school socialization, through institutional measures of success (i.e., GPA). When students internalize the institutional measure of academic success as the most significant influence to their educational identities, there is little that can be done by their parents to offset the negative messages. Thus, African American students adjust their behavior according to what they feel they are able to successfully accomplish. Greg reported that he registered for 15 credits his second semester and that he learned from his first semester that he will never again take on more credit hours than this. His resolve reflects his foreclosure on his educational identity as having the limited ability to complete no more than 15 credit hours a time. This is distinctly different from other African American students in the study who conceptualized the disappointment of their academic achievement to be reflective of behaviors that they needed to alter for future success.

**Alterable behaviors.** Most of the participants in this study reported that their decreased GPA indicated they needed to adjust their educational behaviors. Thus, they perceived an existing dissonance between the institutional measure of academic success and their educational identity. This disparity revealed to them that they needed to 'step up their game' to enhance their

performance. Consequently, these students developed educational identities that asserted their ability to excel despite earning GPA's that were lower than they anticipated. Page and Daja experiences best illustrate students who resist the internalization of institutional socialization into their educational self-concepts. They articulate;

Well I *thought* that I was ready for college and the first couple of weeks, I realized I had to get adjusted to it. I thought that I knew how to balance my time and friends, but I didn't. When I missed my first assignment, and it was a big assignment and there wasn't no makeup...I was like I've got to do something else. I've got to learn how to get my work in on time. That's how I learned it from that one mistake the first time. ~Page (HBCU)

My grades from last semester; I messed up. I failed some classes and my GPA shot down so fast. I'm on probation right now. I can't do that no more, cannot go down anymore! My GPA was 1.23. So I'm trynna change things that I did last semester. I just feel that I've been a little ignorant when it comes to school for me to have to be to this point. Cause I've never been to a point of ever failing a class or ever having to be almost kicked out of school. Like it's a wakeup call I can tell you that. A *big* wakeup call! You look at your grades like man, I'll try harder another time; and you should have been trying hard in the first place. I don't have time to be slacking in any kind of way. So I gotta schedule my way out, organize my way out, and make sure that hey, if I'm at a C how can I get it to a B. If I got an F how can I get it up to a D or C. I just work harder. I have to motivate myself. ~Deja (HBCU)

Like Page and Deja, participants who came to a realization that they needed to change their educational behaviors did so after earning a grade that they perceived as a wake-up call. For most students, such a grade came in the form of a quiz or paper during their first semester. However, for four of the students their first semester grades landed them on academic probation. Nevertheless, students who believed they could alter their educational behaviors to enhance their academic achievement felt they could do so regardless of the significance of their academic decline. In the most severe case, Bradley reported earning a 1.2 his first semester. He described his first semester by stating:

Crap! I could of done a lot better first semester. I probably should of actually did my work, so I wouldn't have failed three classes. I should probably talk to [my professors]

more often if I have a problem with something in class or if I need to ask them about something. I'm getting work done and everything, but because of the three classes I failed, I retook one this semester, all the other classes I just have to take in the fall. "My time management skills are slowly improving. They're still not where they should be or anywhere close to it, but they're improving. ~Bradley (HBCU)

Although these students defined their educational identities beyond the scope of institutional measures of success like GPA, they were keenly aware that institutional measures impacted how they were perceived as students. For example, Juan, a student attending a PWI, explained, "I feel that my GPA impacts how another person would see me as a student, because I know my work ethic and how much I try to put into my academics." Thus, even when students defined their educational identities beyond institutional measures of academic success, they strived for educational excellence on the measures they knew they would be judge by. The thing that set them apart was when they fell short of such institutional markers of success, they did not internalize it as a reflection of their own ability; rather they maintained that they could always adjust their educational behaviors to enhance their academic progress.

Students in this study were still in the process of developing their educational identity. Although most of them reported having the ability to resist the institutional socialization they were exposed to, many other African American students are not. Consequently, their educational identities are overwhelmingly shaped by hegemonic institutional socialization that threatened their academic success. Overall the experiences of African American students in this study shed light on how African American students experience school socialization. Participants' counternarratives revealed that school socialization was experienced through micro-level educational tracking into advanced placement, honors, general education and special education curriculums. In addition, African American students also experienced macro-level school socialization through hegemonic practices such as restricted exposure to postsecondary opportunities, skewed perceptions of educational options, and substandard preparation for

educational advancement. Navigating through micro and macro-level school socialization adversely impacts African American students' educational identity.

## CHAPTER VI

### NAVIGATING THE RACIALIZED CONTEXT OF SOCIETY: THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY SOCIALIZATION ON AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' RACIAL IDENTITY

Within the United States African American students are tyrannized by the endemic nature of racism through social institutions, such as schools; consequently their families are compelled to engage in socialization strategies to protect them against the detrimental influences of racism, oppression, and dehumanization within a racialized society (Coard et al., 2004; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Ore, 2006; Spencer et al., 2006). These socialization processes provide a buffer against the brutal assaults that threaten African American students' pro-social identity development (Hughes et al., 2006; Spencer et al., 1997). Thus family socialization processes are dynamic, adaptive, and essential for fostering culturally specific problem solving skills (i.e., reactive coping strategies) that prepare African American students to navigate existing inequalities within the racialized societal context (Coard et al., 2004; Hughes et al., 2006; Spencer et al., 1997; Spencer et al., 2006). These processes include racial and educational socialization that influences African American students' internalization of developmental reactive coping processes that result in their emergent racial identities (Powell, 1989; Spencer et al., 2006; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998).

Understanding of African American students' racial identity development requires in examination of the family socialization they experience within racialized contexts. While their identity is not *solely* based on the family socialization they experience, their identity development is *influenced* by family socialization (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). During emerging adulthood African American students are developmentally able to reflect on their life experiences and articulate the extent to which they perceive family socialization to influence their

identity development (Arnett & Tanner, 2006). Although research is replete with evidence that families socialize their children to thrive in the context of a racialized society; less is known about how emerging adults perceive such process to influence their racial identity. Thus, exploring the influence of family socialization is particularly is optimal during this developmental period.

This chapter examines the perceptions of African American emerging adults regarding their family socialization, to investigate how familial socialization influences their racial identity development. I posit that the endemic nature of racism emphasizes the importance of family socialization for fostering African American students' pro-social racial identity development (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1996; Lawrence, 1987). I conceptualize familial socialization through the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) as a protective factor that cultivates reactive coping strategies influencing African American students' racial identity development (Spencer et al., 2006). I also utilize this chapter to theoretically contradict existing racialized narratives of African American families as indifferent, uninvolved, and unconcerned about African American students' education; by illustrating how participants' counternarratives reveal distinct educational socialization processes African American families engage in.

As African American students develop their racial identity they must overcome barriers such as racial oppression and institutional hegemony. To examine how their familial socialization prepares them to navigate such barriers within a racialized context, I begin this chapter with a discussion of participants racial ideologies. Next, I describe how participants experienced family racial socialization processes through cultural socialization, preparation for biases, and egalitarianism. I continue with an illustration of how African American families extend their racial socialization practices to include educational socialization processes such as educational modeling, educational continuation, and educational trailblazing. Thus, participants'

counternarratives revealed that familial educational socialization influences African American students' educational identity. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the various ways in which African American students' perceived their racial identity.

### **Racial Identity within a Racialized Context**

Racial identity is a dynamic and synergistic developmental process that is multidimensional (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). It has been empirically conceptualized as “the qualitative meanings [African American students] attribute to being black”; and defined as “the significance of race in [their] self-concepts” (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 19). Although this study qualitatively explored African American students' perceptions of their racial identity, all participants were quantitatively assessed with the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) to ensure sample variability (Sellers et al., 1997). Thus the MIBI assessed students' personal feelings about being black (e.g., private regard), and their racial ideologies. Interesting findings from their MIBI scores coupled their counternarratives describing their perceived racial identity highlighted dynamic nature of racial identity development. Interestingly, at times participants' counternarratives contradicted their quantitatively assessed racial ideology. For example, there were instances when participants' MIBI scores categorized them as espousing a racial ideology (i.e., assimilationist), that was inconsistent with their counternarratives (e.g., they described their racial identity to be reflective of an oppressed minority ideologies). Such instances illustrated that participants' racial identity was continually developing, and thus not defined in terms that could be captured solely quantitatively.

### **Participants' Racial Ideologies**

Family socialization differentially influenced African American students' ideologies about race. According to the Multidimensional Model of Racial Ideology (MMRI), racial

ideologies reflect African American students' "philosophy about the ways in which African Americans should live and interact within society" (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 27). Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998) identified four distinct racial ideologies; assimilationist, humanist, nationalist, and oppressed minorities. MIBI scores from Courtney, Nicole, Greg, Daja, Alex, Richard, and Bradley reflected a humanist racial ideology. According to Sellers, Smith, and colleagues (1998) these students maintain a philosophy that African Americans should live and interact in ways consistent with human kind. Patience, Rachel, Lance, Page, and Evan's MIBI scores indicated that they espoused an assimilationist racial ideology maintaining the belief that African Americans should de-emphasize race to integrate into mainstream society (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Brian, Juan, Julia, and Travis's MIBI scores indicated that they ascribed to an oppressed minority ideology; maintaining the belief that African Americans should unify with other minority groups to alleviate the common experiences of oppression (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Susan was the study participant who reported a national ideology. Thus, she reported having a philosophy that African Americans should live and interact in a society as a culturally unique group (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998). Although analyzing scores from the MIBI assessment is beyond the scope of this qualitative investigation; acknowledging the categorization of African American students' racial ideologies is beneficial for acknowledging that familial socialization differentially influences African American students' racial identity. As a result, I indicate participants' racial ideologies based on their MIBI scores in parentheses next to their pseudonym for two distinct reasons, (a) to illustrate the sample variation in participants' ideologies of racial identity, and (b) to stress that familial socialization differentially influences African American students' racial identity. I do not further analyze participants' racial ideologies throughout this chapter to avoid distracting attention from participants' perceptions of how familial socialization practices counter hegemony within the racialized societal context.

### **The Influence of Familial Racial Socialization within a Racialized Context**

Participants' counternarratives revealed that African American families engage in various racial socialization processes. African American students described that their familial racial socialization buffered the impact of societal hegemony (Hughes et al., 2006). Consistent with existing literature, these socialization methods were found to include specific familial practices, messages, and experiences that equipped African American students to navigate the racialized societal context (Hughes et al., 2006). In addition, participants reported that the familial racial socialization they experienced positively influenced their racial identity. There were three methods through which participants reported experiencing racial socialization from their families; cultural socialization, preparation for bias, and egalitarianism (Hughes et al., 2006). The promotion of mistrust was not a method of racial socialization participants described as a salient influence on their racial identity, although this socialization process is described at length in existing literature. The following section reveals the familial racial socialization participants described as salient influences on their racial identity.

#### **Cultural Socialization**

Many African American students described their families' racial socialization to be reflective of cultural socialization. Their counternarratives were consistent with empirical characterizations of cultural socialization defined as "practices that teach children about their race or ethnic heritage and history; that promote cultural customs and traditions that promote cultural, racial and ethnic pride, either deliberately or implicitly" (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 740).

Participants' recollection of their cultural socialization experiences illustrated how their families exposed them to African American role models, taught them to dress in culturally appropriate ways, fostered a sense of pride in their character, and esteemed their skin color. Specifically, participants described their family's cultural socialization practices included talking about

positive race (e.g., the strength and preference of African Americans), providing frequent representations of black images (e.g., black toys and books, modeling positive role models (e.g., a good father, a hard-working man), and exposing them to black history (e.g., visiting black history museums). Overall, participants reported that their familial cultural socialization taught them to have “pride in who you are.” They explained that such experiences were directly related to how they perceived themselves racially. Several, participants reported that they were not aware of the cultural socialization they were exposed until they were asked about it. In these instances they recalled that their engaged in cultural socialization as far back as they could remember. For example, Rachel (assimilationist) recollected:

When I was younger my parents made it known that I was black. They gave me black Barbie dolls. If my cake had a princess on it, it would always be a Black princess or my teddy bears would be brown. But they never really made a big deal out of it, like you need to be proud of you color. They just kind of let it be. I didn't notice actually until I saw pictures of it. I was like you know you gave me a lot of Black toys. And my mom was like yea. ~Rachel (assimilationist)

In these instances families normalize African Americans racial experiences by making it apart of their race a part of their daily interactions. Hughes and colleges (2006) describe that such practices may also include “talking about important historical or cultural figures; exposing [students] to culturally relevant books, artifacts, music, and stories; celebrating cultural holidays; and eating ethnic foods” (p. 749).

Participants also described their cultural socialization experiences to include reactive strategies that families engaged in to counter the hegemony they experienced. For instance, Brian (oppressed minority) described;

When I was really young and we were learning about the colors of our skin, people would go around [saying] ‘oh I’m White, oh I’m tan’, and I was like well I’m brown. The lady was like no, you’re Black. I’m like this is definitely not Black. We got into an argument over it, cause I kept telling her I was brown, but she didn’t seem to want to look

at my skin. I told my grandma about it . . . she just went off, and took me on this crusade thing and went to all these museums teaching me about my past. I'm really grateful [to her] for that. It made me more situated in my skin cause for a while I didn't want to be Black. Cause people treated me differently. ~Brian (Oppressed Minority)

Whereas Rachel's cultural socialization experiences reflect implicit strategies her parents engaged in that she was not aware of until she was older; Brian's' experiences illustrates how cultural socialization can also be apparent to African American students as they experience them.

At times participants described cultural socialization as a bi-directional process that families adapted based on their specific situation. For example, Nicole explained;

All my family went to HBCUs, [most of them went to the same one], so I'm like the first person in my family to go to a PWI. So it was kind of like well why don't you go to [the HBCU the family went to; or] why aren't you going to [a different HBCU]? I was just like, I love my black people I just wanted to be diverse. Cause when I go into the work field it's not just gonna be all African American people. My grandma did not like it! She didn't like it cause she was a professor at [the HBCU most of family went to], and I just did not want to go to a place where everybody went. I felt like me going to a PWI that shouldn't affect who I am as an African American, that should not make me less than, anybody else that went to [an HBCU] or something. My grandma's proud now though. She's like yea my baby goes to [the PWI] and I'm like yeah you were saying that you wanted me to go to a HBCU, but now she's proud of me so that makes me feel good. I'm doing good in school so they're happy too. I just think she wanted me to continue the family tradition pretty much. And I just kind of wanted to go against it. ~Nicole (humanist)

Nicole's decision to attend an HBCU challenged her families' cultural norm. Thus her grandmother had to adapt the cultural socialization practices she engaged in to include Nicole's decision to attend a PWI. Consequently, Nicole's grandmother now engages in cultural socialization by stressing the importance of her esteeming herself within the context of a PWI. This shift in the socialization messages Nicole received is a direct reflection of the bi-directionality that takes place within the racial socialization practices families engage in. Overall, participants who described their familial racial socialization to be reflective of cultural socialization processes reported that their experiences positively impacted their racial identity.

### **Preparation for Bias**

African American students who described their families to engage in racial socialization through preparation for bias discussed being cautioned about impending racial discrimination within society. Participants explained that their parents racially socialized them through methods of preparation in various ways. These methods included, parents sharing their personal experiences encountering racial biases (e.g., complaining about white people at work); helping students make connections between earning an education and resisting low expectations (e.g., using education to prove ‘them’ wrong); setting high educational goals that designed to resist racial bias; fostering personal characteristics such as strength to withstand racial bias, and teaching students to anticipate racial bias as a means of coping with it (e.g., accepting the fact that you have to live with). In addition each of them reported that their parents taught them that earning a good education would be necessary for resisting the racial biases they would encounter within society. Thus, even when students reported that they had not yet personally experienced racial bias, they explained that they were aware that such biases exist and that they were prepared to face such encounters. Juan (oppressed minority) described the preparation for bias he experienced below:

They keep reiterating, that I’m subjected against, I’m gonna be discriminated against when I get into the real world. That I have a big target on my back for being a black male student who’s smart and talented, like there’s a target on my back no matter where I go. You live with it. Education is the most important thing. Without it you not gonna be able to live the life you wanna live. ~Juan (oppressed minority)

Juan’s experience underscores the necessity of education as a tool of resisting the ‘target on his back’ due to his race. Similarly, Evan (assimilationist) reported that although he had not personally encountered racism, he was prepared to face racial biases in society. He stated,

My father talked to me a lot about I'm always gonna be a step behind because of my race; because I'm Black. They always said work hard because you are black and you don't always have every opportunity that most white people do. [My family] told me education was very important, so college was a must. So I had to get to college, and once you get to college you have to finish college, and once you finish college; if you can, try to go get another degree. Once you get another degree, just make sure you good at what you do. I wanna get at least my masters in industrial systems engineering. ~Evan (assimilationist)

Evan's family not only told him that education would be a tool for countering the racial biases he would experience; but they also discussed that earning an additional degree *and* making sure he good at what he did would be necessary. Although both of Evan's parents held bachelor degrees in engineering, they warned him that being a step behind would not alleviate him from being a step behind within the context of a racialized society. Thus, his familial racial socialization included messages that existing racial biases would be continue to be present even after he earned a degree.

Participants' counternarratives also revealed that African American families also engaged in racial socialization through preparation for bias by disclosing racist situations personal experiences. For example, Julia reported,

my mother . . . she's kind of bitter sometimes. She's always complaining 'them white people at work, *I can't stand them.*' I kind of could relate to her somehow; from the way people at school always tryna knock you down. I did see that some ways they want you to do bad. So she was always like do better than them; like they're my *main* competition. ~Julia (oppressed minority)

Unlike Juan and Evan, Julia had encountered racism at the high school she attended. Thus she explained her ability to relate to her mothers' frustration. However, despite her understanding, she still described her mother to be 'bitter sometimes.' This characterization suggests that although she understood her mother, she did not completely internalize the bitterness she perceived her mother to have. Thus the racial socialization African American students experience within their families is not always internalized into their racial identity.

## **Egalitarianism**

Participants described familial racial socialization through egalitarianism as consistent with various theoretical perspectives. Hughes and colleagues (2006) characterize racial socialization through egalitarianism as “encouragement to value individual qualities over racial group membership, or the avoidance of any mention of race” (p. 757). However, other scholars conceptualize egalitarianism as the processes of racial socialization that emphasizes peaceful co-existence; in which case families emphasize equality from a humanistic perspective (S. I. Coard, personal communication, February 17th, 2013). Such instances include parents engaging in practices that teach students that they are “just as good as people in other racial groups” (S. I. Coard, personal communication, February 17th, 2010). Participants described racial socialization through egalitarianism to be reflective of both of these approaches. They explained egalitarianism methods of racial socialization to include practices such as teaching values to look for in personal relationships (e.g., character); and setting standards of what is and is not acceptable (e.g., not letting people put you down under any circumstance). For example, Lance (assimilationist) described egalitarianism consistent with Hughes and colleagues (2006). He reported;

[My family taught me] to just look at people from their values and their deeds, rather than their skin tone. I don't really judge anybody from the outside, basically their skin color, just look for their content and their character. The same as Martin Luther King said that's what they taught us.

Similarly, Bradley (humanist) reported his family taught him “race isn't important as much as the personality behind the person. So if they have a sour personality, but they're still Black doesn't exactly matter as much as if they were White and had a good personality.” Page (assimilationist) described the egalitarianism socialization messages she received were irrespective of race. She recalled, “my momma said don't look at the skin color first, just cause

someone is black, white, or Hispanic you always look at the personality.” Collectively these students describe egalitarian socialization as processes that de-emphasize race to focus on the individual characteristics such as personality and behavior. Alternatively, Deja (humanist) explained:

My family taught me if [somebody] try to treat you wrong then you shouldn't be around that cause nobody should have to put you down, and you shouldn't let anybody put you down neither. Never judge anyone by their skin tone color, because if you do that it's not making you any different than everybody else from the past. We're trynna live in a better world so why do that?

Daja's counternarrative indicates that her racial socialization through egalitarianism was characteristic of equality across the board (S. I. Coard, personal communication, February 17th, 2013). Thus she was taught that she was just as good as anybody else, and 'nobody should put her down.' Overall participants described that socialization through egalitarianism taught them more about how to interact with people, and to esteem themselves within the context of a racialized society. Unlike students who reported experiencing racial socialization through cultural socialization and preparation for biases; the counternarratives of students who experienced racial socialization through egalitarianism did not describe their experiences as directly influencing their racial identity.

### **The Influence of Familial Educational Socialization within a Racialized Context**

The endemic nature of racism within the United States intensifies the urgency in that African American families engage in socialization processes that will not only *prepare* African American students to navigate institutional hegemony; but their socialization processes must also equip African American students with strategies for counteracting hegemonic practices such as microaggressions, white privilege, and institutional oppression. The counternarratives of African American students in this study reveals that African American families identify education as the

most effective strategy for combating hegemony within the context of a racialized society. Thus they extend their racial socialization practices to include distinct processes through which they educationally socialize their youth. Familial educational socialization processes are predicated by the level of education that African American families have attained. However, even families who have not personally experienced educational success tend to engage in familial educational socialization.

Participants' counternarratives unveil three distinct methods of familial educational socialization process that African American families engage in (a) educational modeling, (b) educational continuation, and (c) educational trailblazing. Each of these educational socialization methods are designed to equip African American students with education as a tool for resisting hegemony within the racialized societal context. Familial educational socialization helps African American students connect their educational behaviors to future life outcomes. For example, Deja (humanist) recalled being taught, "do your best and you will get a job. Otherwise you're gonna be living low, and I'm not gonna help you cause you put yourself in that situation." Such messages, not only help African American students connect their educational behaviors with future outcomes, but these strategies also foster a sense of educational agency to ensure that students take responsibility for their future by focusing on their education. These socialization practices directly impact African American students' racial and educational identity development. The following section describes participants' experiences of educational socialization.

### **Educational Modeling**

Participants' counternarratives revealed that parents who had earned at least a four year degree were most likely to engage in educational socialization through educational modeling. Educational socialization through educational modeling was characterized by references to families' educational attainment and stressed the importance of attaining an education that would

serve as an example for others to model. This method of socialization included pressure to conform to high academic expectations, removing excuses for mediocrity by example (e.g., I didn't settle for you less you cannot either); strict parenting practices (e.g., spanking); detailed instructions (e.g., what to do to be academically successful); being visible in their child's school (e.g., being present at the school for conferences, etc.); providing exposure to college life (e.g., taking them to homecoming and other events on a college campus); and fostering an internal motivation for high academic achievement (e.g., teaching them to want to do well personally). At times students whose parents engaged in educational modeling reported feeling an extreme sense of pressure to do exceptionally well academically, because the "bar was set high." For example, Nicole explained,

Everybody pretty much had their degree in my family. And they pretty much have their master's or above. So it kind of sets the bar for me in a way, because even though I'm not like the first person in like my generation to go to college, it's still like I'm tryna like push the bar up more in my family so it's a lot more pressure cause it's like I can't fail. I have no excuse, so it's definitely hard. ~ Nicole (humanist)

Similarly, Lance explained that his mother not only had a degree, but also worked in the school system. This added an even higher standard of excellence. He described,

My mom being in the school system already actually prepared all of us. We didn't want to be drop outs. My parents would always tell us if you want a good career and you want to make good money, then school is what you have to go to obtain. My mom was always in the school since she was always a teacher . . . since like elementary she was a teacher . . . so I always had to get on point since my mom was a teacher; in the in the same school at that. . . . They taught us to just strive to be the best. They really wanted us to be good scholar students, and make all As and Bs. So that's what we strive for even though I may have got like a C or D. They just wanted us to do good in school, in our academic lives. ~ Lance (assimilationist)

Collectively, Nicole and Lance's experiences illustrate that well educated parents modeled the educational behaviors they expected of their children in explicit ways. Although students often

perceived this as additional pressure, their counternarratives revealed that they internalized these educational socialization messages into their personal educational identity. Consequently, these students were extremely high academic achievers.

At times the educational modeling families engaged in included parents who returned to school to get their degree. For instance Julia reported, “my father went back to school. He was like, after you were born, I knew I had to go back to make more money.” Her educational socialization experience was included witnessing the educational behaviors her father modeled he progressed through school. She reflected that his graduation had a tremendous impact on her educational identity; explaining that “my family prepared me for college cause they gave me good morals, standards, and values.”

### **Educational Continuation**

Participants described educational continuation as socialization processes that emphasized the importance of being educated in an effort to continue their parents’ educational pursuits. These socialization strategies included warning of potential pitfalls that could thwart educational pursuits; teaching students to have a focus on educational goals; prioritizing the students time to foster positive educational behaviors; and taking away any excuses that would deemphasize school (e.g., not allowing sick days at a young age). Participants who reported experiencing educational socialization through educational continuation recollected that their parents had dropped out of college or high school as a result of distractions from education. Consequently, students were socialized to perceive their educational endeavors as a completion of the goals their parents set out to accomplish. Counternarratives revealed that participants whose families engaged in educational continuation processes held a strong internalized commitment to completing their educational endeavors for both themselves and their families. For example,

Greg (humanist) described he was in school “not only for myself, but for my mother and an example for my little brother.” He explained his socialization experiences by sharing,

I asked my mom why she quit college and she said that she was pregnant with me. We would always talk about it because around the time she was having me she was going to college; so that kind of classed with each other. I said, so you quit college because of me? And she said don't you ever say that again. I quit college cause I wasn't taking care of myself like I needed to. ~Greg (humanist)

Similarly, Patience recalled her mother told her;

When I graduated I went to the community college. She keeps saying, ‘oh I was chasing behind your daddy, and I had to drop out.’ I have a boyfriend and I don't want to get the mentality where I'm chasing him. I learn from my mother to get your education first and all the rest will come later; that's what my grandma tells me too. ~Patience (assimilationist)

Collectively, Greg's and Patience's counternarratives reflect an internalization of the educational socialization they experienced. They both illustrate the significant influence that educational continuation has on African American students' educational identity.

Alternatively, Rachel's experience of educational continuation more explicit socialization practices. She described that her parents “told [her] I really don't have a choice but to finish college. They both went to college, but didn't finish. I don't think any of my family finished college.” Consequently, she was well aware of her parents' expectations that she would exceed her parents' educational achievements to complete college. Overall, students who identified their familial educational socialization processes as educational commitment reported that their educational identity was directly related to their experiences.

### **Educational Trailblazing**

African American students who described their familial educational socialization as educational trailblazing reported that they were the first generation in their family to attempt a

four year degree. Thus their parents had never attended college. Counternarratives revealed that two distinct subcategories of educational trailblazing that were both characterized by socialization process that taught them to educationally achieve in an effort to defy the odds and expectations. The first subcategory of educational trailblazing, coined *inspirational trailblazing*, was characteristic of an emphasis on the importance of educational achievements that would take their family to a higher status. Participants described the methods of inspirational trailblazing to include establishing good study habits (e.g., making sure students started their homework upon getting home from school); and making education an absolute priority (e.g., making students study at least an hour a day; and/or making educational success a priority for living under their roof). In addition methods of socialization through inspirational trailblazing included fostering a sense of awareness in students that the risk of not having education included increased stress, financial instability, and struggling on every level. The second subcategory of educational trailblazing, coined *oppositional trailblazing*, was characterized by socialization messages that defied what participants perceived to be bad examples. These students explained that their educational pursuits were fueled by their drive to be better than the examples set by adults they did not want to be like. Participants described socialization through oppositional trailblazing as practices that equated poor academic performance with personal failure, and emphasizing the ‘failures’ of those who did not earn a postsecondary education. They explained that bad examples pushed them to achieve beyond what has been done in their families before. The counternarratives of Alex (inspirational trailblazing) and Brian (oppositional trailblazing) illustrate both subcategories of educational trailblazing.

My mother motivated and inspired me because she works so hard. Just seeing my mother work so hard and being so stressed out, you know to take care of us, and living paycheck to paycheck was definitely motivation for me. She’s stressed out she’s crying, sometimes she’s losing her hair. You know it’s hard for her working well over 40 hours a week and you know that definitely gave me motivation to work hard and to get my education and to

get a higher education as far as college. My family prepared me for college just from their trial and error. ~Alex (humanist)

All of the mistakes he's made . . . my dad ruined a family. He ruined me. Like alcohol, drug abuse in college. He talks about all the mistakes he made in college and the path he went down and I'm determined not to make the same mistakes, do the same things. I think the fact that I don't want to be like my dad has influenced me the greatest. ~Brian (oppressed minority)

Both Alex and Brian reported that beyond a friend or extended family member, they would be first generation to earn a college degree. They each reported that socialization through educational trailblazing positively influenced both their racial and educational identities.

Although parents who socialized through educational trailblazing had never been to college, at times their socialization methods included the specific educational practices they perceived would help their children educationally succeed. These strategies were consistent with how educational socialization is defined in existing literature; they included practices such as implementing specific times and locations for homework completion and stressing the importance of good grades for future success (Suizzo & Soon, 2006; Taylor et al., 2004). Page's experience is illustrative of how participants recalled the influence of such academic behaviors.

My mama always said as long as you're in this household, as long as you are under my roof, you will go to school. You will make something of yourself. She always wanted [us] to be better than what she had already accomplished. So pretty much don't cheat yourself out of your own education and what you can do. Go for the mountains. We had to sit down in the living room and do our homework because my mom was serious about school and getting our education. So we had to sit down and not leave out the office area. We had to stay in there for an hour to do our work, even if you were just studying, even if you didn't have homework. You had to go in there, and go over your work that you did even from previous days. My mama of course wanted to see our work and make sure we did it. I think that's how she prepared us making sure that we do our work even if we set out for an hour at a time. ~ Page (assimilationist)

## **Racial Identity**

Consistent with existing literature examining racial identity, participants described their racial identity as dynamic and synergistic (Sellers, Smith, et al., 1998; Spencer et al., 2006). Despite the fact that participants' counternarratives revealed that both institutional and familial socialization influenced their racial identity. They unequivocally reported that familial socialization exerted the most salient influence on their racial identity development. Although several of them discussed having a clear sense of their racial identity, others described their struggle with making sense of their racial identity given the various socialization messages they received coupled with their personal experiences. Furthermore, participants' quantitative assessments of their racial identity through the MIBI reflected that their reported empirically defined racial identity was both at times consistent and inconsistent with their counternarratives regarding their racial identity. Consequently, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of how participants perceived their racial identity. Findings indicated that African American students perceived their racial identity in one of three ways: (a) as a measure of their cultural heritage, (b) as a phenotypic indicator, and (c) as a marker of social stratification.

### **Cultural Heritage**

Participants who described their racial identity as a measure of cultural heritage identified their perception of being African Americans to be characteristic of a connectedness to historical triumphs, an internalized sense of cultural pride, and perceived responsibilities to improve the lives of African American people as a whole. Participants whose racial identity was connected to historical triumphs discussed intergenerational connections between themselves and the history of African Americans. For example, Page (assimilationist) stated "I am from a long heritage. I can identify myself with the things from our past, like Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr." Similarly, Bradley (humanist) explained "being African American we have a history,

culture, roots, tied down to Africa.” Alex added that such cultural connections were a source of strength; asserting that “being African American to me means that I’m very, very strong in my culture.” His counternarrative also reflected his internalized sense of cultural pride. He further expounded,

Me being Black, it also is a pride thing to me because everyone can’t be what I am. So I just feel that being black is a strong thing. Especially from where we come from; we came over here as slaves, and now we have the president being black. It’s definitely something great to me being black. ~Alex (humanist)

Patience concurred that being African American “is a sense of pride. I feel proud of where I’m from and where I’m going. It’s pride and motivation together.” Like Alex, Julia explained cultural heritage as a combination of factors. Her perception of racial identity encompasses a connection to historical triumphs, internalized pride and perceived responsibility. She explained her racial identity by stating,

I describe myself as a proud African American woman. I’m African American. I’m proud to be it. Cause the contributions that we made. We’ve come a long way in this country. I see me kind of making it better for our next generations. I want to see how much further we can go, and I want to contribute to that. Black culture is ...a proud people when we come together into something good. We’re very determined. We all have that one set goal of making it to the big top of the chain, proving ourselves; like we should be here, and we’re gonna be here to stay. It’s wanting to help your people rise. ~Julia (oppressed minority)

Collectively, participants describing their racial identity in terms of cultural heritage perceived their racial identity as a connection to their cultural heritage. These students described an internalized sense of pride in being African American.

### **Phenotypic Indicator**

Several participants described being African American in terms solely related to race. These students explained that being African American was primarily an indicator of the

phenotypic character of skin color. Travis (oppressed minority) explained being African American was “just the color, with dark skin. It’s just a skin tone.” Similarly, Greg (humanist) reported “it’s really just a word. I was raised that everyone was the same. As soon as you cut them, everyone is going to bleed red.” Students who espoused a racial identity characteristic of phenotypic indicators were not swayed by alternate definitions of racial identity although they were aware of other perspectives. For instance, Richard explained,

In the focus group I know a lot of people went into depth with [explaining what it means to be African American] and [saying it was] the culture, family values, religion. Me personally, I know people [of] other races who are just like me, you couldn’t tell the difference until you saw their skin color. So that’s why for me it’s just a skin color  
~Richard (humanist).

Collectively, these students all perceived their racial identity to have the sole meaning of their skin color. Yet counternarratives, such as Travis’s, suggest that their perceptions are continuing to develop. Although he posits that being African American is ‘just a color,’ he later discussed his belief that racism, targeting African Americans, still exists. Ironically, Travis’ MMRI assessment suggests that he perceives the oppression of African Americans to unite with other oppressed groups in society (Seller, Smith, et al., 1989). Such contradictions illustrate the fluid and complex nature of African American students’ racial identity development.

### **Social Stratification**

Several participants described their racial identity in terms that highlighted being African American as a measure of social stratification. These students described the barriers they had to overcome as a result of their race. Nicole (humanist) reported, “we have a lot of things that hinder us from going to school, a lot of things put up against us.” Similarly Rachel (assimilationist) explained her perception of race as a connection to historical social stratification. She reported, “back in the slavery African Americans weren’t allowed to read, so because of my race it’s my

job to finish school, because not that many African Americans have the opportunity.” Her description reveals her belief that gaining an education is a tool of resistance as well as privilege. More explicitly, Nicole (humanist) explains that being an African American in higher education contradicts societal perceptions of being African American. Consequently, her internalized racial identity is based upon resistance to social stratification. Thus when I asked Nicole what it meant to be African American, she replied:

[Being an African American student], It’s unique because first of all, we have a lot of things that hinder us from going to school or we have a lot of things put up against. Most people think that we’ll probably end up in jail and end up pregnant and so it’s just a good step to get into there. ~Nicole (humanist)

Taken together, students who perceived their racial identity as a tool for social stratification appeared to have a keen sense of the racialized context within which they were socialized. Thus, they described a racial identity that developed in resistance to social stratification. Students who described racial identities reflective cultural heritage and phenotypic indicators referred to the influence of their familial socialization. However, participants who perceived racial identity as in relation to social stratification make references to institutional socialization as the most salient influence on their racial identity.

## CHAPTER VII

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS: TACKLING THE RACIALIZED CONTEXTS THAT THREATEN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' PRO-SOCIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

Qualitatively investigating how African American students' navigate racialized contexts yields valuable information for understanding their identity development processes. Through utilizing critical race theory (CRT) and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) this study reveals how African American emerging adults perceive ecological socialization to influence their identity development within a racialized context; while simultaneously deconstructing how racialized contexts perpetually threatened their pro-social identity development processes. Findings from this study offer implications for how families and schools can tackle the racialized contexts that oppress African American students' by threatening their pro-social racial and educational identity development. The 17 African American participants of this study shared their counternarratives regarding (a) salient influences on racial and educational identity development, (b) their experiences within racialized contexts within which they develop their identity, and (c) the extent to which their selection of postsecondary (e.g., HBCUs or PWIs) differentially reflects their identity development. Their counternarratives reveal their experiences navigating the toxic racialized contexts during the process of developing their emergent racial and educational identity. In conclusion of this dissertation, I begin this chapter by briefly theoretically summarizing major findings from this study. Next, I acknowledge limitations of this study. Finally, I conclude by discussing the implications for African American families, public schools, and future research.

### Summary of Findings

Participants' counternarratives reveal the complexity involved in navigating racialized contexts as they develop their racial and educational identities. Their navigation experiences include exposure to adverse micro and macro level school socialization as well as protective familial racial and educational socialization that directly impacts their racial and educational socialization. Specifically, schools socialize African American students through tracking them into advanced placement, honors, general education, and special education curriculums. The counternarratives of students tracked into advanced placement reveal that schools engage in practices that perpetuate whiteness as property the right to exclude and reputation status. For example, participants' counternarratives unveiled that within advanced placement courses students are economically stratified. Those who can afford to take the advanced placement test at the end of the course are granted access to earning college credits, while those who cannot afford it are denied educational opportunities that prepare them for college and grant them advanced postsecondary status. From a CRT lens, the connection between race and class, within the racialized societal context, is apparent. The students who have economic resources to afford advanced placement are predominately white; and students denied access to educational opportunities are black. As a result, the institutional practice of economically stratifying students is an institutional practice that further marginalizes African American students by excluding them from accessing educational resources, even within a public school setting. In addition, advanced placement courses racially socialize students by ensuring that even in diverse schools, advanced placement courses are comprised primarily of white students. DeCuir-Gunby (2006) asserts that this institutional practice of segregation is essential for "the preservation of white identity" (p. 104). Consequently, these practices result in both black and white students coming to believe that advanced placement classes are by in large for white students; and they ensure that white students

have the reputation of hard workers, high achievers, and academically focused students. These racialized practices perpetuate hegemony within schools by maintaining whiteness as property through and perpetuate the characterization of black students as intellectually inferior. School socialization practices also include macro-level practices that restrict African American students' postsecondary opportunities, skew their perceptions of postsecondary options, and provide substandard preparation for educational advancement. Collectively, these school socialization experiences adversely influence African American students' emergent racial and educational identity development by socializing them to perceive they have limited ability to educationally succeed.

The familial socialization African American students experienced buffered them from the negative influences of racialized contexts. Familial socialization practices included racial socialization processes such as cultural socialization, preparation for biases, and egalitarianism. Participants' counternarratives also revealed that African American families extend their racial socialization strategies within the racialized contexts to include educational socialization. Familial educational socialization includes methods such as educational modeling, educational continuation, and educational trailblazing. Familial racial socialization fostered pro-social racial education identity development; while familial educational socialization positively influenced students educational socialization. Overall, findings revealed that the process of African American students' racial and educational identity development is dynamic and synergistic within the context of a racialized society.

### **Study Limitations**

Although this study is theoretically and qualitatively sound, there are several limitations to that should be acknowledged. The limited sample size of 17 participants, coupled with the geographically homogeneous location from which this sample was drawn prevents this study

from being generalizable to African American students outside of the southeastern state where the participants reside. Although the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize, the findings suggest directions for future inquiry on a larger scale would be beneficial for investigating the consistency of the conclusions drawn. Another limitation of this study is that a definitive conclusion cannot be drawn regarding the characteristics of students who internalize versus resist institutional socialization. In part this related to the small sample size; however, it is also related to the qualitative nature of this study. This qualitative investigation explores participants' perceptions of the socialization messages they are exposed to; however, perception data does not lend itself to desegregated findings that tease apart process that were internalized versus those that were resisted. As a result this study is well suited for highlighting the complexity of identity developmental process and that it includes both a process of internalizing and resisting institutional and socialization. Yet, this is the full extent of such conclusions. Alternatively quantitative investigations that permit controlling for various constructs (i.e., internalizing behaviors) is better suited for drawing such conclusions. Another limitation of this study is the gap in time between the interviews conducted. Given the nature of this dissertation, I was not able to interview these students at developmentally significant time points. For example, the data was collected during the spring semester of participants' freshmen year. To best capture developmental changes in perceptions of African American students' racial and educational identities, interviewing them at the beginning of their freshmen year then at the end of their freshmen year would have been a more appropriate time frame for inquiry that would have captured developmental shifts. However, interviewing the students over a period of 2–3 months limits the data from capturing potential developmental shifts. Nevertheless, despite the existing limitations of this study, the data yields valuable information for implications for future research. This dissertation will conclude with a brief discussion of these recommendations.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

The critical race lens of this study highlights several implications for research and practice. Such implications are specifically useful for families, secondary schools, and post-secondary institutions. Because the racialized context of the United States, is inherent with racist hegemonic practices that adversely impact African American students' racial and educational identity development, it is essential that findings from this study are designed to opposed the continuation of inequality. Consequently this study will conclude with a discussion of implications designed for families, secondary schools, and post-secondary institutions.

#### **Implications for Families**

Familial socialization buffers African American students from the adverse influences of school socialization. Consequently, parents should be aware of and strengthen the educational and racial socialization they communicate to their children. Educationally, students who were exposed to educational modeling earned the highest grade point averages. This emphasizes the importance of parents earning their education, even if it means returning to school later in life. Thus the exposure that parents had to higher education better equipped their youth for how to navigate various institutional settings. However, even if parents do not earn degrees they should be open with their children about the importance of doing so. Participants' accounts of parents who communicated the importance of continuing the educational trajectories of their parents maintain a strong commitment to completing their education to improve the lives of both themselves and their family. Furthermore, participants who reported their parents employed educational trailblazing as a socialization message, fared better academically when their parents engaged in specific practices such as designating a specific location and time for them to consistently complete their homework. Taken together, it is vital that parents understand the impact they have on their children's educational identity development. Engaging in strategic

practices that educationally socializes them is extremely important given the hegemonic school socializations students are exposed to.

### **Implications for Secondary Institutions**

The institutional socialization that occurs in schools threatens the pro-social identity development of African American students. Thus, it is essential that secondary institutions take proactive measures to counter the institutional socialization communicated through educational curriculum and restricted exposure to post-secondary options. Such measures should include specific strategies for racially integrating advanced placement courses, and offering financial assistance to students who are unable to afford the advanced placement tests. Participants' accounts of not taking advanced placement classes because of the perceived workload should be directly addressed. For example, guidance counselors should explain the importance of the preparation for college offered by advanced placement courses. Doing so would not only prepare students for the rigorous expectations of college, but it would work toward dismantling the elitist reputation of advanced placement courses. However, such measures should be strategic to avoid a mere increase in the number of African American students enrolled in advanced placement courses. Such over simplistic measures run the risk of what critical race theorist identify as interest convergence. Interest convergence primarily benefits educational institutions while creating the illusion of addressing the educational inequality that marginalizes African American (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Thus the emphasis becomes the institutional efforts to bolster the number of African American students who take advanced placement courses, instead of examining the extent to which they engage in practices that dismantle the hegemonic ideologies and practices that perpetuate hegemony within the school context.

Another option, particularly geared toward addressing the perception that rigorous courses threaten grade point averages for students who avoid AP classes to enhance their GPA; is

offering advanced placement study sessions, support classes, and/or preparation course. Such resources would ensure that students get the support they need to do well academically, while affording them the challenge of a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum. Offering financial assistance to students who take AP course provides them the opportunity to earn college credits. Failing to do so, serves to not only limit their access to earning college credit; but it also reifies the perception that African American students who cannot afford the test are intellectually inferior.

Secondary schools should offer thorough unbiased exposure to and preparation to for postsecondary options. Beginning with building partnerships with various postsecondary options, secondary institutions should provide students with accurate information about various postsecondary options, both HBCUs and PWIs. Such relationships would not only alleviate biases that reify hegemony, but it would also open a variety of options for African American students seeking postsecondary options. Often the perpetuation of racists practices is inadvertent under the auspices of finding the best fit for students perceived to be average; however, limiting student options serves to limit their potential to grow and strengthen their educational behaviors toward academic success. Thus, students interested in schools that place an educational demand on incoming freshmen, beyond what they may be accustomed to, should be made aware of the postsecondary educational resources they can access when necessary. For example, a student who has difficulty writing at a high level should not be directed away from institutions considered to have high standards for scholarship. Rather, they should be made aware of resources such as writing labs and tutors that they can access if admitted. These steps would not only prepare students for their transition into college, but also empowers them to be stronger students as they mature educationally. Furthermore, such practices counter the adverse school socialization

practices that skew perceptions of postsecondary options by implying that HBCUs are less rigorous and substandard.

### **Implications for Post-secondary Institutions**

Institutional measures of academic success (i.e., grade point averages) are central to African American students' educational identity. Consequently, post-secondary institutions that help students connect their educational behaviors with their academic performance are most likely to enhance the academic performance of African American students. For example, bridge programs targeting students at risk for low-performance have reported that preparing students to align their educational behaviors (i.e., study habits) with their academic performance (grades earned), resulted in students being more academically successful. Thus, students who were previously considered at risk, learned to relying on available resources to enhance their educational ability. Another strategy postsecondary institutions should engage in is an awareness of students' educational identities. Assessing students' self-perceptions as learners yields important information regarding how to engage them in their learning process. When students are engaged in their learning process, supported institutionally, and aware of how to access necessary resources when needed; university retention and graduation rates will be reflective it. Thus, it is vital that post-secondary institutions shifting to achievement based measures of accountability pay close attention to the educational identities of African American students to appropriately design retention programs that are culturally relevant for African American students.

### **Future Empirical Directions**

Findings from this study highlight several directions for empirically investigating African American students' perceptions of their racial and educational identity development. For example, exploring African American students' identity development during emerging adulthood yields valuable insight for understanding their perception of salient familial and school

socialization experiences. The independence African American students have in college reveals more about their perceptions than their supervised home environment during adolescence. Thus, as emerging adults experience life on their own, they are able to draw from the socialization messages they find to be most helpful. This reflectiveness is another developmental benefit of investigating the experiences of emerging adults.

Future studies should also be designed to inquire about African American students' racial and educational identity development overtime. Given time and resources, following the participants of this study would have yielded far more insight into their racial and educational identity over the four year period of college. Longitudinal studies have the potential for examining the extent to which salient of socialization messages shift over time. For example, findings from this study suggest that familial socialization has a greater impact on African American students' racial identity, whereas institutional socialization has a greater impact on African American students' educational socialization. Exploring this trend overtime may reveal the extent to which familial socialization weakens and institutional socialization becomes more salient; or vice versa.

Further investigation of the educational socialization processes African American parents engage in is necessary. Understanding how African American families engage in educational socialization strategies as an extension of families racial socialization is critical to countering hegemonic ideologies that construct African American families as unengaged in their children's educational experiences. This study postulates that African American parents educationally socialize their children through three distinct methods; educational modeling, educational continuation, and educational trailblazing. Examining these trends qualitatively with a different population, then quantitatively with a larger sample is necessary for understanding the extent to which African American families engage in educational socialization processes.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

Focus Group Questions

1. When I asked you to be a part of this study, I asked you to sign up if you considered yourself “African American” what does being African American mean to you?
2. How would you describe what it means to be a student?
3. How would you describe what it means to be an African American student?
4. What/Who do you feel influenced your (racial and educational) identity the most before coming to the University?
5. What/Who influences your academic performance at your University the most?

## APPENDIX B

## SAMPLE VARIATION CHART

N = 17	HBCU (9)	PWI (8)
<b>Gender</b> 1 item assessment	Females (4) Males (4)	Females (4) Males (4)
<b>SES</b> 1 item assessment	Upper/Middle class (2) Middle Class (4) Lower/Middle Class (2) Lower Class (1)	Upper/Middle class (0) Middle Class (7) Lower/Middle Class (1) Lower Class (0)
<b>Secondary school racial composition</b> 1 item assessment	Predominately Blacks (4) Half Blacks (1) Predominately White (4)	Predominately Blacks (4) Half Blacks (2) Predominately White (2)
<b>Parental Education</b> 3 item assessment	Parents w/ some high school (2) Parents with high school diploma (1) Parents with a college degree (associates or bachelors) (5) Parents with a graduate degree (1)	Parents w/ some high school (0) Parents with high school diploma (2) Parents with a college degree (associates or bachelors) (3) Parents with a graduate degree (3)
<b>Advanced Placement within High School</b> 2 Items	Students in advanced placement tracks (6) Students not in advanced placement tracks (3)	Students in advanced placement tracks (6) Students not in advanced placement tracks (2)
<b>Racial Identity</b> Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1997) Regard scale (with public and private regard subscales 12 items total); Racial Ideology scale (with Nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist, and humanist subscales (36 items total)	<i>Racial Regard</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Public (6)</li> <li>• Low Public (3)</li> <li>• High Private (8)</li> <li>• Low Private (1)</li> </ul> <i>Racial Ideology</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nationalist (1)</li> <li>• Oppressed minority (2)</li> <li>• Assimilationist (2)</li> <li>• Humanist (4)</li> </ul>	<i>Racial Regard</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Public (5)</li> <li>• Low Public (3)</li> <li>• High Private (8)</li> <li>• Low Private (0)</li> </ul> <i>Racial Ideology</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nationalist (0)</li> <li>• Oppressed minority (2)</li> <li>• Assimilationist (3)</li> <li>• Humanist (3)</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Interview 1 Questions (PWI)

- Where (city/state) are you originally from?
- What high school did you attend?
  - Name of the high school
  - Where was it located?
- Why did you decided to be a part of this study?
  - How did you hear about the study?
- What does being African American mean to you?
- What does being a student mean to you?
- What does being an African American student mean to you?
- In your own words, please describe to me what your high school was like in general and for you personally (i.e., support of your teachers/ school resources/ SES of school)?
  - Racial composition?
  - Racial composition of AP/IB courses?
- In your own words, please describe your family (specifically the family members that had the biggest influence on you)?
  - What did they teach you about race?
  - What did they teach you about education?
  - What racial group are the people who raised you from (i.e., mother/father/grandparents)
- Why did you choose to come to this institution?
  - What are your future aspirations?
  - Did your goals change since you arrived?
- How would you describe your transition into college?
  - What was surprising/difficult/enlightening?
  - Do you consider school or were your family lives to be “home” for you?
- Based on what you experienced during your first semester, did you feel prepared/ready for college?
  - In what ways did your family prepare you for college?
  - In what ways did your high school prepare you for college?

- Was there anything you didn't know about college that you wish you would have known before you got here?
  - Who's responsibility do you feel it was to inform you of these things?
- How many credit hours did you take your first semester?
- What were your grades your first semester?

## Interview 1 Questions (HBCU)

- Where (city/state) are you originally from?
- What high school did you attend?
  - Name of the high school
  - Where was it located?
- Why did you decided to be a part of this study?
  - How did you hear about the study?
- What does being African American mean to you?
- Describe yourself as a student? (What kind of student would you say you are?)
- In your own words, please describe to me what your high school was like in general and for you personally
  - Support of your teachers
  - School resources/SES of school
  - Racial composition?
  - Racial composition of AP/IB courses?
- In your own words, please describe your family (specifically the family members that had the biggest influence on you)?
  - What did they teach you about race?
  - What did they teach you about education?
  - What racial group are the people who raised you from (i.e., mother/father/grandparents)
- Why did you choose to come to this institution?
  - What are your future aspirations?
  - Did your goals change since you arrived?
- How would you describe your transition into college?
  - What was surprising/difficult/enlightening?
  - Do you consider school or were your family lives to be “home” for you?
- Based on what you experienced during your first semester, did you feel prepared/ready for college?
  - In what ways did your family prepare you for college?
  - In what ways did your high school prepare you for college?
- Was there anything you didn't know about college that you wish you would have known before you got here?
  - Who's responsibility to you feel it was to inform you of these things?

- How many credit hours did you take your first semester?
- What were your grades your first semester?

### Questions for Second Round of Interviews (PWI and HBCU)

*The first interview we had focused a lot on things you experienced from your family and high school before coming to college. This second interview will focus more on how you see yourself and various things that may influence how you perceive yourself. In some ways it may be a bit more personal than the first interview, so please feel free to include information that you feel makes you who you are today.*

1. When you think about your life and the friends you had growing up, how would you describe your closest friends? (Race(s), What context did you know them from? What did you all have in common? What attitude did they have toward school?)
2. People grow up in a lot of different places, in terms of their racial/ethnic background. How would you describe the places that you grew up? (neighborhood; racial groups you were most around, etc.)
3. As you reflect on your experiences what would you describe as having the biggest influence on who you are today?
4. As you think about your life, how do you see yourself as a young Black male/female? In what ways do you think your gender impacts how you see yourself?
5. When you reflect on your life, do you recall any experiences with racism or discrimination? (how did you handle it, how did it impact how you felt about yourself?)
  - a. During our first interview you mentioned that your mom is Indonesian and your dad is African-American. How would you describe your experience growing up with parents from different racial/ethnic groups?
6. Thinking about your college experience and all that you have learned, how would you describe your first year as a college student (i.e., support of your instructors, racial compensation of your classes, resources you feel you have access to)?
7. Considering this, how do you feel about your decision to attend this institution?
8. How would you describe the amount of effort you put forth toward your school work this year?
9. To what extent if any, do you feel that being an university student has influenced how you see yourself as a Black man/woman?
10. A lot is displayed in the media, and research about Black people. To what extent do you feel that current perceptions of Black people impact what your experience has been like as an African American man/woman?

11. Many people feel that the election of President Obama, is evidence that racism is no longer an issue because he is Black. Considering this, how does having a Black president impact how you perceive racism in society?
  - a. Do you feel that his being in office is evidence that racism no longer exists?
  - b. Were you impacted by his election? In what way?
  
12. Have you heard of the Trayvon Martin situation in Florida? If so what was your reaction to this situation? (i.e., have you participated in any local/national rallies protesting this situation/ have you read or circulated anything regarding this situation on your facebook, e-mail, or twitter)
  
13. Are you aware of another situation of injustice, locally or nationally that has impacted you personally?