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This study addresses African American teachers' perspectives of Black students and the ways they pass on community through their Black pedagogical practices. Furthermore, it focuses on Black teacher identities and the ways their communities have shaped the identities of the participants. For Black teachers, ethnicity along with history, experience and home community are a major piece of who they are as classroom teachers what they bring to teaching and the relationships established with African American males. Expectations, guidance, transcending relationships are characteristics that the participants received while growing up.

In the years since the Brown v. Board of Education decision that led to the integration of America's public schools, the achievement gap in areas of reading, science, mathematics, and writing continues to widen for African American students (Cooper & Jordan, 2005). Recently, the education of African American males in classrooms and the achievement gap has often been a topic of great interest to educators and administrators alike. Furthermore, Davis's (2005) research indicated that although schooling has a negative impact on both Black boys and girls, the issues facing Black boys are more severe and intense.

For Black teachers, ethnicity along with history, experience and professional community are major pieces of who they are as classroom teachers and what they bring to teaching and the relationships they establish with African American males. The identities of a Black teacher and the professional and personal importance of these

identities have effects on pedagogy as well as building relationships and ways of interacting with African American males.

Life history as a research method provides a framework that supports the use of African American teacher's life experience to explore these teachers' understanding of African American students' learning processes. Central to the development of teacher identity are the dichotomies of African American teachers, which can include given and constructed identities as well as public and private ones. Relationships built by having role models in the participants' communities lend itself to potential mentorships and cooperative relationships between mid career and late career teachers.

BLACK TEACHERS CARING FOR BLACK STUDENTS: INTERSECTING

IDENTITY, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING,

AND LIFE HISTORY

by

Toni Milton Williams

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Approved by

Dr. Colleen Fairbanks
Committee Chair

Dedicated to my parents, Beatrice T. Milton and the late Jimmie L. Milton, Sr.
You laid the foundation, and for that I am eternally grateful.

For Linda my guardian angel.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair Dr. Colleen Fairbanks _____

Committee Members Dr. Brian Sevier _____

Dr. Jewell Cooper _____

Dr. Amy Vetter _____

Dr. Silvia Bettez _____

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I love You fervently and devotedly, O Lord, my Strength. Psalm 18:1

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualizing the Study

Teachers of color are essential in our schools because, like all other teachers, they teach who they are. They teach through a lens of cultural experiences that is different from the lens of mainstream teachers. (Irvine, 2003, p. 58)

My Epiphany

As I walked into school on the first day, I knew I had made the right decision to become a teacher. The classroom walls were full of color, my materials were ready and organized and I looked like a professional teacher. The stage was set for me and I immediately assumed the role. I quickly found my teacher voice and began to use it. As a young, black, female, I knew that my colleagues might not respect me. Would I be known as the clueless black girl, the "sista" with an attitude, or the African American woman who sounded white? Which identity would I take on and with whom? How would one identity form the next one, and which would I assume? When I think of "who I am," many identities come to mind: wife, mother, teacher, novice researcher, teacher educator, but most importantly a Black woman. No matter what I consider myself, I will always be seen as a Black female first and foremost. The image that I portray has to be that of an intelligent, professional, articulate individual. Beverly Tatum (1997) explains my entangled thoughts:

> The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I? The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether? (p. 18)

Black teacher identities are influenced by the messages they receive from community members, friends, family, church members and teachers.[1] In her book, *I Answer with My Life,* Kathleen Casey (1993) uses life history narrative with her participants and allows their voices to be heard as they tell their stories. By allowing the Black women to tell their stories, she revealed the counter identities that they were not necessarily hiding, but were masked by the identities placed on them by the dominant society. "The autobiographical reflections of these black women are everywhere organized as arguments *for* a sense of self as defined in black discourse and community, and *against* an alien identity as portrayed in dominant white discourse and institutions" (Casey, 1993, p. 132). Through this research, the women were able to reflect on their experiences based on black discourses, not the white ones in which it normally occurs.

This study addresses African American teachers' perspectives of Black students and the ways they pass on community through their Black pedagogical practices. Furthermore, it focuses on Black teacher identities and the ways their communities have shaped the identities of the participants. Identity is an area in which African American teachers will be given the opportunity to unpack the many identities placed upon them

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[1] Use of the terms *Black* and *African American* will be used interchangeably throughout this discussion. Participants refer to themselves as Black and African American so they are used as such.

and that they place on themselves. This is an informative lens through which to look at African American teachers and the ways their identities inform their teaching of African American male students. For Black teachers, ethnicity along with history, experience and home community are a major piece of who they are as classroom teachers what they bring to teaching and the relationships established with African American males. Expectations, guidance, transcending relationships are characteristics that the participants received while growing up.

The voices of African American teachers, along with the impact of their life histories, can demonstrate the potentially significant role that these teachers can and do play in the lives of all African American students, especially Black males. Equally important is the way that the traditions of community are represented through the Black pedagogical methods of the participants and their ethnic identities.

Research Problem

In the years since the Brown v. Board of Education decision that led to the integration of America's public schools the achievement gap in areas of reading, science, mathematics, and writing continues to widen for African American students (Cooper & Jordan, 2005). Recently, the education of African American males in classrooms and the achievement gap has often been a topic of great interest to educators and administrators alike. As a result, there is a growing body of research on culturally relevant pedagogy/culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education in an effort to ameliorate the achievement gap and to learn about the professional practices of educators. Monroe and Obidiah (2004) state, "Specifically related to student behavior and classroom

discipline, a culturally responsive stance enables practitioners to consider possible cultural underpinnings of behaviors traditionally perceived as disruptive" (p. 259). The achievement gap for students of color, particularly Black boys can be attributed to racism and the disengagement it breeds. For Black boys, McMillian (2003) posits, "African American male students are particularly vulnerable to disengagement" (p. 28). Once disengaged, school is no longer important to them. Maton, Hrabowski, and Grief (1998) have stated, "Research on African American adolescent males has focused to a large extent on their deficits, including their academic, social and behavioral problems" (p. 640). Schools should be conducive to learning for all involved in the process particularly for students who are greatly affected by the achievement gap, namely African American male adolescents. Ladson-Billings (1995) however, identified the problem: "Thus, the goal of education becomes how to 'fit' students constructed as 'other' by virtue of their race/ethnicity, language, or social class into a hierarchical structure that is defined as a *meritocracy*" (p. 467). In fact, Cooper and Jordan (2005) argued that African American males experiences in school will be greatly improved once traditional norms of teaching have been reevaluated and restructured. Moreover, they stated, "if comprehensive school reform is to serve as a vehicle to promote greater academic and social successes for African American males, norms about race and culture must be explicitly addressed" (p. 8).

Furthermore, Davis's (2003) research indicated that although schooling has a negative impact on both Black boys and girls, the issues facing Black boys are more severe and intense. For example, they are more at risk for academic failure and remain

behind in test scores and grades; they are referred more often to special education and more likely to be expelled or suspended from school (Harry & Anderson, 1999); and are less likely to attend college (Davis, 2003).

Considering these statistics, Noguera (2003) asserted, "Consistently schools that serve Black males fail to nurture, support or protect them" (p. 436). If education is supposed to be the great equalizer in American society, then by not addressing this issue, African American males are not being adequately prepared to participate in a democratic society. Cooper and Jordan (2005) give their insight:

> Moreover, numerically, the vast majority of African American males continue to attend regular public school far more frequently than alternative, magnet, charter, religious, and private schools combined. Thus, to improve the conditions of education for African American males in this country, systemic changes must take place affecting regular community school. (p. 5)

The lack of engagement of African American males in schools is structured environmentally and culturally. According to Davis (2003), "[r]ates of Black male school attrition, relatively poor academic performance, and college enrollment and persistence are seen, in part, as a function of Black males' inability or disinterest in fulfilling their roles as conventional learners in school settings" (p. 518). The aforementioned attributes are some of the complexities that face African American males as they strive to overcome what has come to be known as the achievement gap. Indeed African American males are stereotyped upon entering the classroom, which may contribute to lack of engagement in the classroom. Steele (1997) called this idea stereotype threat, the notion of being viewed negatively because of a particular group

affiliation and not being able to fulfill a particular task because of the negative

stereotypes placed on that individual group. African American males are quite often the

target of this "stereotype threat" which can hinder any academic engagement or success.

In addition, Steele (1997) states:

> Negative stereotypes about women and African Americans bear on important
> academic abilities. Thus, for members of these groups who are identified with
> domains in which these stereotypes apply, the threat of these stereotypes can be
> sharply felt, and in several ways, hampers their achievement. (p. 2)

To remedy the effects of stereotype threat teachers must be responsible for

promoting the success of all children despite their skin color or ethnicity. Following this

further, Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) report:

> Our research bears a practical message: even though the stereotypes held by the
> larger society may be difficult to change, it is possible to create niches in which
> negative stereotypes are not felt to apply. In specific classrooms, within specific
> programs, even in the climate of entire schools, it is possible to weaken a group's
> sense of being threatened by negative stereotypes, to allow its members a trust
> that would otherwise be difficult to sustain. (p. 130)

It *is* possible for teachers to create niches in their classrooms for Black male students to

be successful. Young African American males are typically labeled as criminals and

thugs negating their ability as students. Livingston and Nahimana (2006) point out,

"These negative stereotypes lead many young Black men to devalue education and school

and develop a macho or hyper masculine posture (hard or thug) in an attempt to protect

and define themselves" (p. 212). African Americans begin school at a disadvantage, but

also the plight of the Black male has often been perpetuated through education. As a

result, African American male students do not start off with a fair advantage in the classroom simply because of their physical appearance, and it is quite possible that they conform to the typecast placed upon them. Perry et al. (2003) further highlighted that "for a great portion of Black students the degree of racial trust they feel in their campus life, rather than a few ticks on a standardized test, may be the key to their success" (p. 130). African American male students have to feel comfortable and supported by their teachers, by the school community as a whole in order to focus on and achieve greatness. Teachers have to be cognizant of the stereotypes that they place on students and their effects, specifically Black males. Bennett (2006) notes the following:

> Lower teacher expectations for particular racial or ethnic groups are based on negative racial or ethnic prejudice. Teachers, like all people, often not aware of their prejudices; thus they may not be aware of their lower expectations for some students. (p. 27)

Educators who are willing to recognize the prejudices that they bring into the class are making progress in erasing preconceptions of African American students, especially males that they may hold. Foster and Peele (1999) maintain:

> Expert teachers of African American males take responsibility for teaching and engaging all of their students in learning, whether they are indifferent, resistant, or achieving significantly below grade level. Convinced that even seemingly recalcitrant students enjoy learning, expert teachers believe that they can reach even those whom others find impossible to teach. (p. 10)

Equally important, teacher expectations play a part in the achievement of Black students, particularly Black males in classrooms. Educators who allow African American males an opportunity to reveal their authentic selves are offering them a true chance at success.

Purpose of Study

The extant research literature is laden with theories that account for the continuous widening of the achievement gap of African American males and their peers. On one hand, Davis (2003) concludes that "the most influential theories currently proposed to account for the relatively low academic performance of African American boys center on three areas: (a) student attitudes, (b) social organization of schools, and (c) masculine identity" (p. 524). On the other hand, teachers play an instrumental role, influencing the perceptions of academic pursuits of African American boys. Researcher Garibaldi (1992) argued that teachers play a pivotal role in reversing the negative stereotypes attached to African American males although they may also be inclined to perpetuate these same stereotypes. Teachers have to begin to learn *about* the students that they teach as well as learn *from* the students they teach. Garibaldi (1992) further states, "Teachers, therefore, must challenge these young men intellectually and when possible, provide them with immediate, continuous, and appropriate reinforcement as well as positive feedback for their academic accomplishments" (p. 8). Likewise, Foster's (1997) research examining the life history of Black teachers supports Garibaldi's findings regarding the importance of the role of teachers in teaching students.

More specifically, Foster focuses on the historical role and importance of Black teachers in the Black community. Teaching was deemed an honorable profession so that the number of Black teachers increased from 15,100 to 66,236 during 1890-1910 (Foster, 1997). Black teachers are largely pillars of support for young Black males academically and socially. In Ladson-Billings's (1994) discussion of culturally relevant teaching, she

contends that "as a matter of course, culturally relevant teaching makes a link between classroom experiences and the students' everyday lives. These connections are made in spirited discussions and classroom interactions" (p. 94). Indeed, teachers who are culturally responsive in their teaching practices lay the foundation of success for all students, specifically African American males.

Significance of Study

In both popular culture and academia, the intensified discourse regarding how schools are failing African American students, particularly African American males, is one that cannot be ignored. From researchers such as Delpit (2006), Foster (1997), Ladson-Billings (1994), and Noguera (2003) to policy makers such as President Obama and his mandate for educational reform, the societal issue of the achievement gap of African American boys is of global concern. This study aims to provide a counter discourse that centers race and identity of African American teachers and the effects that the histories of their lives have on teaching African American males. It is the contention of this study that the historical, socio-cultural, and political experiences of African American teachers and the students they teach have been undervalued in the research literature regarding African Americans and schooling for too long; understanding the African American teacher experience must be given legitimacy and priority as an alternative framework by which to propose policy and practice. Davis (2003) explained that "schools are critical sites for young Black males as they make meanings of who they are, what they are supposed to do, and how others perceive them" (p. 133); therefore, there is no reason not to believe that the ways in which African American teachers use

themselves and define their identities in the classroom to instruct Black males might not be beneficial in helping to close the achievement gap.

Furthermore, communities are instrumental in shaping the ethnic identities of Black teachers, and their professions become more than delivering instruction to students. Hence, this study will be significant in terms of reconsidering the role of identity, pedagogy, and education, providing an avenue to understand the role of African American teachers' experiences and life histories, as well as promoting educational success by utilizing the lens of responsive, democratic and liberating teaching.

History of the Education of African Americans

To understand the significance of this study for the education of Black males, it is vital to recognize the struggles and perplexities African Americans have had to endure throughout the years in order to obtain an education. Historically, the institution of school has done a disservice to African Americans, especially male students. Lynn (2006) described the injustice of the educational system towards African Americans dating back to post slavery:

> As history shows, this system of education has not served African Americans well. While ex slaves and their children were taught to read the word within a European culture that denigrated other forms of communication and learning, they were not taught to "read the world" in a Freirean sense. Schooling extended the arm of the slave master in the sense that it was a vehicle through which whites could continue to transmit Eurocentric values and morals to the oppressed, namely, African and Native Americans. More important, education and schooling in America continued the de-Africanization or acculturation process because it forced Africans and others who were not of European descent to ignore their culture and their history and to accept Euro-American culture as their own. (p. 118)

Over time there have been deficiencies in educating African Americans. Being taught only what White citizens felt was important for them to know, which was very little, African Americans were taught ideals and values of another culture. For African Americans the journey for literacy and education began in the 1800s. The message that has permeated the African American community for generations has been that of learning and education. Education has been symbolic for many things including freedom, opportunity and advancement at the same time disappointment, downfall and struggle. Perry et al. (2003) note the importance:

> For African Americans, from slavery to the modern Civil Rights movement, the answers were these: You pursued learning because this is how you asserted yourself as a free person, how you claimed your humanity. You pursued learning so you could work for the racial uplift, for the liberation of your people. You pursued education so you could prepare yourself to lead your people. (p. 11)

Quite simply, learning was not an option for African Americans and the message was clear. Learning was the key to many things freedom, mobility, and leadership to name a few. It was not to be taken for granted. Once slavery ended, education for African Americans became a matter of contention and, the next step for free blacks, was to obtain universal education. "Blacks emerged from slavery with a strong belief in the desirability of learning to read and write" (Anderson, 1988, p. 5). Although becoming literate was dangerous for slaves, there was very little hesitation when the opportunity presented itself. There was such a thirst for knowledge because literacy equated to freedom. Learning to read was an act that was shared in the community. If a member of the community was able to take one step ahead, they were expected to turn around and help

another do the same. African Americans were expected to teach those who were not literate and help the community. "While learning to read was an individual achievement, it was fundamentally a communal act. For the slaves, literacy affirmed not only their individual freedom but also the freedom of their people" (Perry et al., 2003, p. 14).

Education and literacy was the means for ex-slaves to become leaders in their communities. Anderson (1988) wrote,

> Ex-slave communities pursued their educational objectives by developing various strata, but the one they stressed the most was leadership training. They believed that the masses could not achieve political and economic independence or self-determination without first becoming organized, and organization was impossible without well-trained intellectuals—teachers, ministers, politicians, managers, administrators, and businessmen. (p. 28)

Organized leadership was important in order to achieve education and liberation for ex-slave communities. Black Americans were receiving a message to assimilate to the European culture when they did receive education. African Americans were expected to receive the kind of education White Americans wanted to give. Woodson (2005) writes:

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. (p. xix)

African Americans students were expected to go back into their home communities and attempt to bridge the gap between the formalized education they received at school and the reality of their communities. The most esteemed education could not prepare African American students in terms of successfully functioning in a European society especially

if they were not grounded in their ethnic identity (Perry et al., 2003). Furthermore, Perry et al. argue, "[s]imultaneously negotiating one's identity as a member of mainstream society and as a member of a cultural group also creates dilemmas, given the oppositional nature of these identities in the American imagination" (p. 107). In the eyes of the oppressor, although there was resistance, educating African Americans was another means of control and supremacy, which included insufficient schools and resources. Anderson (1988) noted that early advocates of educating African Americans were of three various classes: slave masters who wanted to increase their labor, sympathetic individuals who wanted to "help" the oppressed, and missionaries who taught slaves to read in order that they could learn principles of the Christian language.

Additionally, it is important to note that Black teachers were historically employed in areas of the country where there was a large population of Black students and also where the schools were segregated (Foster, 1997). Many Black teachers held advanced degrees and were considerably qualified and were limited to teaching Black children (Ladson-Billings, 2004). For example, Siddle Walker (1996) shared an account of a segregated community and the first class education the students received, while highlighting the dedication of the African American teachers and relationships they established within the community. Although the conditions were inferior, the quality of the education and the dedication of the teachers as well as the community were superior. "The dominant memory of students—that their teachers cared about them should not be construed, however, to mean that teachers ignored classes' academic content or that their efforts to engage students were always successful" (p. 126). Teachers were concerned

with students both inside and outside of the classroom. Content was carefully covered, and if the teacher felt that the student was not ready to move on because material was not mastered, then the student would not be promoted to the next grade (Siddle Walker, 1996).

Hence, in contemplating the current achievement gap of African American males and the impact that their teachers have on them, Foster's (1997) statement reflects a central theme that will guide this study: "We needed to look at the past through new eyes in order to determine what we might learn to help address the apparently difficult educational issues of providing an excellent education for all African American children" (p. ix).

African American teachers are not as prominent in classrooms as are their White colleagues. African American educators bring to the class with them cultural teaching styles that help Black students connect to knowledge (Irvine & Fraser, 1998). According to the National Education Association (n.d.), "Nationally, about 20 percent of public school students and less than eight percent of teachers are Black" (p. 48), and research that focuses on African American male academic performance is often viewed from the White teacher/African American male student teaching dyad (Appleman, 2003; Noguera, 2003). Irvine (1990) posit that there tends to be a lack of cultural synchronization between African American students and White teachers especially since the number of White teachers teaching African American children is increasing.

While there are benefits to this research model with White teachers and African American students, there should be other paradigms by which to examine the role of teachers in teaching African American students. Irvine (2003) declares that

> Recently, researchers have begun to examine another explanation for the lack of achievement among African American students: the quality of their teachers. However, the research on teacher quality variables has not included the perspectives of African American teachers. (p. 27)

Furthermore, Cooper and Jordan (2005) maintained that for the academic success of African American males, it is just as important to know *who* the teachers are, as it is to know what they teach and the content they present.

Race, Pedagogy, and Education

The significance of this study also rests on the unique experiences of African American teachers and within the framework of the history of race and education in America, which has been a divisive issue with competing viewpoints. Gresson (2008) argues that the relationship between race and education has taken two orientations, one that suggests that certain racial qualities are "inherent and essential" (p. 10) and the other deals with the shifting nature of tolerance, skills and achievements among various groups. These two orientations have evolved into two traditions "with regards to race and education: indoctrination and liberation" (p. 10). Indoctrination into mainstream discourses or education that values and builds on the underlying racism of the society perpetuates the control that schools and institutions hold over both students and teachers to varying degrees. The present day struggle regarding African American males and schooling can be seen as a fight for liberation against policies and practices that have not

benefited these students and have given them the title of endangered species (Kunjufu, 1986). Clearly, African American males encounter tension within classrooms due to the lack of culturally responsive teaching and continually being stereotyped. Consequently, they become disengaged and in some instances give up on schooling and the school system altogether (Davis, 2003; McMillian, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999).

Hence, the achievement gap for students of color, particularly Black boys, can be attributed to racism and the disengagement it breeds. For Black boys, McMillian (2003) posits, "African American male students are particularly vulnerable to disengagement" (p. 28). Once disengaged, school is no longer important to them. Maton et al. (1998) have stated, "Research on African American adolescent males has focused to a large extent on their deficits, including their academic, social and behavioral problems" (p. 640). The focus on African American males should to shift to look at the methods used to teach them as well as the men and women who teach them.

Although educators are beginning to incorporate culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education into their lessons, there continues to be a lack of understanding and consistency throughout all classrooms and teachers. Because all students bring various backgrounds and experiences into the classroom with them, particularly African American males therefore it is imperative that institutions begin to acknowledge the perspectives of these male students in order to facilitate learning and academic growth. Although this is a challenge that is gender and culturally based, schools have to be willing to learn about the complexity of being an African American male both inside and outside the school (Davis, 2003). Furthermore, underachievement

in public schools in some cases may set African American males up for failure upon

graduation. Howard (2008) asserts:

> PreK-12 schools and higher education, but more disturbingly, the widespread
> failure has a direct correlation with the quality of life they face after an
> unsuccessful school experience. (p. 958)

Considering the many risk factors that face African American males in school, examining

how African American teachers use their life histories to teach African American males

and in the same way understanding how their life histories provide them with teaching

resources is significant because what is learned from this study can provide an

empowering perspective that other teachers can learn from instead of acquiescing to

culturally deficit models of schooling.

African American Teachers and Teaching

My study is of African American teachers and the ways in which their life

histories may contribute the achievement of African American students, especially males,

in the classroom is significant because of the paucity of research in this area. Despite this

paucity, history informs us that African American teachers have always played a

considerable role in the Black community. Teaching was a highly regarded profession,

and after the Civil War, and African Americans became teachers to advance socially and

to uplift the Black race. Although there were tremendous job loss and demotions within

the teaching community following integration, Black teachers always took great pride in

the work that they accomplished as role models in their communities (Ladson-Billings,

2004; Siddle Walker, 1996). African Americans were typically locked out of middle-

class professions such as law or medicine; however teaching and preaching were available and were both considered a high status profession (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Moreover, African American educators enter the classroom daily, with sociohistorical, political, and cultural factors that affect their knowledge and practice of teaching styles. With this in mind, African American teachers and their perspectives on teaching to provide a unique and useful framework in closing the achievement gap of African American males. Ladson-Billings (2005) explained, "They may be more direct in their questioning, more exacting in their requirements, or more expressive in their presentation" (p. 17). Hence, Black teachers place high values and expectations on their Black students in ways that warrant academic and social achievement.

The unconscious use of cultural practices among African American teachers perpetuates the impact of community among Black students. Likewise, these practices emphasize cultural behaviors acquired from the communities of Black teachers. Life history allows teachers to think about the history of their lives in the context of their teaching and both their personal and professional identities. It also brings taken-for-granted practice to consciousness so they can be explored and understood.

Responsive, Democratic, and Liberating Teaching

Historically, for African Americans, education meant an avenue to liberation and mobility. Listening and responding to their needs along with displaying mutual respect in the classroom between teachers and students can achieve an equitable education for Black students. This study is significant because in order to provide equitable education to African American students, educators will have to become knowledgeable about the

history of the education of African Americans. Ware (2006) concluded, "The historical,

cultural model of Black teaching is being lost" (p. 430). Understanding that the

foundation and history of Black teaching included social as well as academic skills and

was inclusive of the community as well as the students may help educators link

instruction to cultural aspects that students bring to the classroom. If teachers are to give

students the tools they need for survival inside and outside of the classroom, as Lisa

Delpit (2006) asserted, they must include community: "Black parents, teachers of color,

and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion

of what kind of instruction is in their children's best interest" (p. 45). Displaying a

commitment to Black students and demonstrating respect for them should begin in

community.

American schooling gave African Americans a false sense of hope as well as

treated them with a set of low expectations. Becoming familiar with these ideas will give

educators an insight on the behaviors of students of color. Perry et al. (2003) point out:

> In other words, a child's belief in the power and importance of schooling and
> intellectual work can be interrupted by teachers and others who explicitly or
> subtly convey disbelief in the child's ability for high academic achievement, and
> the child having a rightful place in the larger society—unless a counternarrative
> about the child's identity as an intellectual being is intentionally passed on to him
> or her. (p. 79)

As Perry et al. indicate, it is imperative for educators to believe in students and eradicate

stereotypes placed on students. Counter-narratives of Black educators give Black

students an opportunity to identify intellectually with various possibilities for

achievement in conjunction with the ones they may live and see from day to day. These

stories defy the conventional stereotypes placed on Black students. They are ones with intentionality, positionality, and contestability (Gay, 2010). Furthermore, they are stories untold that can make a positive difference for Black students.

In order to embrace the diversity of Black students, teachers must be mindful of their particular cultural needs. Culturally relevant pedagogy gives teachers an opportunity to share counter-stories and display the importance of community to invite students to become part of the community. The culture of Black students and teachers need to be explored in new ways in an effort to bring closure to the achievement gap.

Closing the achievement gap between white students and students of color has become a major concern for educators, researchers and policy leaders. Attempts to *close* the achievement gap are beginning to be associated to culturally relevant teaching, warm demander pedagogy, cultural synchronization and multicultural education (Banks, 2006; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Ware, 2006). Hence, in order to close the gap, teacher educators must become increasingly aware of *how* and *what* they are teaching teacher education candidates. Furthermore, it is vital to focus on how teacher educators can learn from African American teachers, their pedagogical practices, as well as how they were influenced, supported and cared for by their communities. As Ware (2006) explains:

> The literature appears to indicate that (a) Black teachers have fulfilled many roles in the lives of Black students, and (b) the field is in danger of losing the special knowledge of the interaction of Black teachers and their students that may have provided the synergy and the foundation for academic success. (p. 430)

Additionally, teachers must look past what they think they see of students in their classrooms begin to learn the culture of the students and begin to make connections to their teaching, thereby encouraging the success and achievement of all students, particularly African American males.

Addressing issues that hinder the achievement of students of color requires educators to construct their classrooms around the idea of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive pedagogy is defined by Geneva Gay (2000):

> Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are more easily and thoroughly. (p. 106)

Acknowledging the perplexities of education with regard to African Americans arises first and foremost when preparing to teach African American students. Ignoring the history and the struggle of African Americans and presuming that students will assimilate upon entering the classroom, thereby becoming mainstream American students, is unrealistic. Likewise, educators should be preparing students to become transformative through multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching. To demonstrate, Banks (2006) articulated his notion of multicultural citizenship education as a form of cultural transformation.

> Citizenship education must be transformed in the new century because of the deepening ethnic texture in the United States. The increasing ethnic, racial, cultural, and language diversity requires that educators reconceptualize citizenship education and educate citizens who can maintain attachments to their

cultural communities as well as participate effectively in creating an overarching, shared national civic culture. (pp. 193-194)

Through this transformation, Black educators and students will begin to break free of the traditional norms imposed on them in the classroom. This transformation will enable groups and ethnicities to learn from one another as well as discover new ways of learning together while acknowledging the voice of the individual as well as the group at the same time maintaining a sense of community within the classroom.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In this introduction, I have argued that the education/achievement gap has had a devastating effect on African American students in various ways. The power and value of education cannot be lost for Black students. Teacher educators must remain informed of the effects of stereotype threat, inequities, and failure to respect culture of Black students as well as their impact on future teachers. Educators have to help African American students find the fervor in education, the same fervor that slaves felt as they longed to read and write. Researching the life histories of African American teachers will provide a lens from which to understand what may be considered Black pedagogical methods. There is a need to understand that the ways in which Black teachers teach is more than just about delivering instruction. Considering the research problem, purpose statement and significance of this study the overarching research questions will be:

1. How do the life histories of African American middle school teachers influence their professional identity as a teacher?

    a. What experiences do teachers name as influential in becoming teachers?

2. How do teachers' life histories shape understandings of African American students?

As teacher educators and researchers we should feel compelled to acquire knowledge about the cultural communities and identities teachers contribute to their classrooms.

The purpose of this study is to utilize the frameworks of critical race theory (CRT), sociocultural theory, identity and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) to examine the identities and life histories of select African American teachers, specifically seeking to reveal the meanings of their communities and how their communities have shaped their pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the ways in which these practices offer support to Black students in their classrooms. For this reason, the voices of African American teachers will be captured and magnified as they share the stories of their lives.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

When we speak of love and teaching, the connections that matter most are the relationship between teacher and subject taught, and the teacher-student relationship. (hooks, 2003, p. 127)

In this section the literature concerning critical race, sociocultural, and identity theories, along with culturally responsive pedagogy, will be discussed in order to build a conceptual framework for this study. The discussion will begin with critical race theory and its constructs. Sociocultural theory and its meanings of culture, community and teaching will follow. Next, there will be an examination of the role of identity and ethnicity in shaping Black teacher experience and pedagogy. I will then draw on culturally responsive pedagogy as a central framework to understand the interconnectedness between race, gender, and schooling. Finally, othermothering and caring are included due to their importance to building community and developing and maintaining relationships.

Critical Race Theory

Race and racism play a crucial role in society and more specifically in the education of students of color and their identities as well. Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the 1970s as a way of not only addressing forms of racism in society but also in order to understand how society aligns itself racially and to work toward transformation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Although CRT began as a law movement,

it has become increasingly popular in the field of education as a means of understanding structural and institutional racism in schools and society. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002) this kind of racialized discourse is important to unpack: "Whether we refer to them as monovocals, master narratives, standard stories, or majoritarian stories, it is important to recognize the power of White privilege in constructing stories about race" (p. 28).

There is a plethora of literature on CRT and each theorist has constructed the language to fit his/her discussion. Critical race theorists generally subscribe to the followings propositions: Ordinariness/permanence of race, interest convergence, challenge to dominant ideology, voices of color and commitment to social justice (Carter, 2008; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005).

The social construction of race holds that "race and races are products of social thought and relations . . . races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Race is socially constructed and associated with power, as those in power are the ones who began labeling and treating others differently simply due to the color of their skin.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that U.S. society is based on property rights, and physical and intellectual property, are included in these rights. With property come certain privileges, which include: rights of disposition (whiteness is transferable through dress, speech, etc.), rights to use and enjoyment (enjoying and use the privilege of being white), reputation and status property (diminishing the reputation of a person by

associating them in a nonwhite manner) and the right to exclude (white flight) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Within the CRT discussion property relates to education implicitly and explicitly. Having access to property, whether it is intellectual or physical, gives those in power the ability to manipulate the rules according to their needs. For example, a school in an urban area may not have the availability of resources in regards to materials and class selection as a school in a suburban district. Educational property rights involve the privilege to exclude students of color based on course offerings/selections in various schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As a result, intellectual property (educating students of color) is undergirded by real property and both are connected to through distribution and access systems.

Ordinariness/Permanence of Race

The first tenet addresses racism and explains how it is implemented and maintained in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Given the history of race, it is a permanent component of African American life and its effects are real although it can be argued as a social construct. There is an illusion of standard treatment across racial and ethnic groups making racism ubiquitous and difficult to see. Race cannot be concealed although some teachers who claim to be colorblind do more harm than good with students by not acknowledging their culture and all that they bring to the class. Educators who tend not to "see" race may not pay close attention to the needs of all students, thereby giving the same treatment to all. Milner (2007) referred to the ordinariness as the "ingrained nature of race and racism" (p. 390), as did Ladson-Billings

and Tate (1995). The premise is that race so much a part of the everyday routine of society that they have both become normalized (Milner, 2007). If race and racism were isolated acts, there would be a better chance that society would recognize what they are and the effects they have on individuals and groups.

To be clear, race is defined as a "notion of a distinct biological type of human being, usually based on skin color or other physical characteristics" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 153), while racism, on the other hand, is categorized as "any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 154). Indeed, race and racism are permanent components of African American life.

Race is endemic in society, yet there is a tendency to avoid the discussion of it and its impact. Similarly, when the discussion is focused on race, it can be viewed as biased. Race has been so ingrained in the nature of mankind that when there is awareness of color then it appears as a negative occurrence. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) contend that if we accept whiteness as normal then anyone who is not white is abnormal. They further assert:

> Thus, within polite, middle class mores, it is impolite to *see* when someone is *different*, abnormal, and thus, *not white*. Hence, it is better to ignore, or become colour-blind, than to notice that people of colour have the physical malady of skin colour, or *not whiteness*. (p. 16)

DeCuir-Gunby (2007) addresses ordinariness as the permanence of racism. She discusses how racism is not only implemented but how it is maintained in society whether it is a conscious or unconscious act. Individuals may respond to or act in racist behaviors

without being aware or acknowledging the behavior is inappropriate. Yet, race is a central and significant factor in determining inequality in the U.S. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) declare that race is so enmeshed in our social order that it appears normal to people in this society.

Interest Convergence

Interest convergence is racism advancing the interest of the white elite and the working class (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In other words, those in power are willing to help people of color as long it benefits those in power. Converging interests of whites and people of color may not always benefit those of color as much as they do those in power. Thus interest convergence is a means by which dominant groups maintain power and position:

> People in power are often, in discourse, supportive of research, policies, and practice that do not oppress and discriminate against others as long as they—those in power—do not have to alter their own systems of privilege; they may not want to give up their own interests to fight against racism, confront injustice, or shed light on hegemony. (Milner, 2007, p. 391)

In addition, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) demonstrated the workings of interest convergence in a study of a predominately white independent school. In this study, an African American male student attended the school and the majority of students and teachers assumed that all he had to offer was his athletic ability (in order to get the school a competitive sports record). Although the student had the opportunity for a quality education the priority for the school was sports not academics. There was no real

promise that the African American athletes were getting the superior education that their parents paid for. DeCuir and Dixon (2004) further assert:

> According to Malcolm, his only asset, in the eyes of school officials, was his athletic ability. Thus, the school's interest in making its athletic program more competitive converged with some African-American families' desires to provide a "rigorous" education for their children. (p. 29)

The school was more interested in maintaining a winning record for the athletic program rather than providing Malcolm with an authentic education. The self-interest of the school was great and opened an opportunity for a Black athlete yet failed him as a student.

Challenge to Dominant Ideology

Meritocracy and colorblindness are often ideas that are relied upon to provide equal opportunity for all students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However when teachers rely on such paradigms, they represent a form of microaggression for students (Dixson & Rosseau, 2005). Colorblindness is the refusal to see race while meritocracy implies that the reward for hard work is success for everyone, not just the privileged, yet it does not take into account inequality caused by systemic racism (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). Questioning liberal notions of meritocracy and colorblindness in order to address inequity is means of social transformation. Furthermore, colorblind teachers do not possess the knowledge necessary to connect with diverse students (Milner, 2007).

Meritocracy works largely for those students who are already privileged in society, thus students of color are typically excluded (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Meritocracy in classrooms leads to unconscious biases between students and teachers. It

could lead to ignored issues in school that include discipline and student-teacher relationships. Take for instance stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) when various ethnic groups are negatively viewed, stereotyped, and overrepresented in special education classes (Howard, 2010; Noguera, 2003). The aforementioned are issues because the expectation is that everyone behaves in the same way, like the dominant group, White people, and those who do not, also do not merit good grades or academic recognition.

Voices of Color

The final tenet addresses the uniqueness of the voices of people of color. Because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, people of color may be better able to communicate issues/matters of which whites have no knowledge or experience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) referred to this notion as "naming one's own reality" (p. 57). As such, "The story of one's condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57). Naming one's own reality gives the namer value in his or her own story as well as being able to see the ways he or she has been mistreated by the dominant groups. Understanding that everyone has a story to tell, and recognizing the importance of that story, regardless of its contrast, is an important facet of this tenet.

Milner (2007) affirmed that race and racism are voiced from the center of the narrative and counter-narrative in critical race theory. "Counter-story telling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate stereotypes" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). The counter-narrative gives the dominant society an opportunity to

hear the struggle and journey of people of color. Hearing the voices of people of color is

a unique experience for the dominant group, as they do not always recognize the ways in

which they experience privilege and the varying ways in which their story differs from

people of color. The voice of people of color is significant in order to complete the

analysis of the educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The counter-narratives of Black teachers can shape understandings of historical

and cultural happenings that have impacted their pedagogical styles. Additionally, these

stories are used to counteract those of the dominant group (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005),

thereby offering context to historical and cultural events of people of color. DeCuir-

Gunby (2007) affirms, "counterstories serve as a tool of empowerment; they enable the

de-silencing of marginalized groups and the exploration of alternate realities" (p. 28).

The stories of those in the dominant group tend to be the most respected. According to

Solorzano and Yosso (2002), "A majoritarian story distorts and silences the experiences

of people of color" (p. 29). Stories of people of color include a cultural richness that

cannot be left out of history. Such narratives come together and validate Black

pedagogical methods of teaching. Voices of color and the counter-narratives they

contribute are especially important in my study of African American teachers and their

narratives.

CRT has been useful in examining the experiences of teachers and students of

color, as well as the implications of systemic and institutional racism. It is a way for

educators to begin naming the situations they see occurring within schools as well as

within their lives. This lens is useful because it helps to understand the inequities and

experiences of students and teachers of color. The use of life history in correlation with CRT is a means of recognizing the complexity that affects African American teachers and the ways in which they relate to students, specifically African American males. Milner (2008b) argues, "People come to see themselves situated within the various storylines of events, situations and experiences" (p. 1575).

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory draws on the work of Vygotsky. The theory is based on the idea that human actions occur in cultural contexts. Language and other tools mediate the activities in which we participate (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Therefore, culture is created and recreated throughout time and within local contexts. In other words, in order for development to be fully understood, it has to be examined within the context of the community, not just the individual. The life histories of African American teachers fit nicely into this frame, as I am not only looking at the experiences of these teachers, but the context of the experiences in their lives and how these experiences shape their identities as teachers and the perspectives of African American students. Participating in cultural events by the use of cultural tools emphasizes the importance of certain tools in the culture of the child. Above all, culture is not only carried across generations, it is recreated across time (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Traditions may continue to be a part of a culture; however the ways of enacting actual traditions may vary from generation to generation.

Participation in various traditions may be considered membership in a community of practice. Wenger (1998) asserts that communities of practice are everywhere and

generally people are involved in a number of them whether they have names or not.

"Communities of practice develop around things that matter to people. As a result, their

practices reflect the members' own understanding of what is important" (Wenger, 1998,

p. 2). Communities of practice can be a means of understanding and building

relationships with Black students. Interacting and learning from one another is a

characteristic of communities of practice; therefore, interacting with Black students while

learning from them allows authentic relationships to emerge.

Cultural Tools and Artifacts and Their Mediation

The cultural tools and artifacts that people encounter in their daily activities are

imperative to learning and development (Nasir & Hand, 2006). These tools are produced

culturally and therefore have meaning within the culture. "The importance of tools and

artifacts in structuring the environments within which children learn and develop has

been echoed in much of the research on learning and development from cultural

perspective" (Rogoff, 2003, as cited in Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 461). The means by

which people participate in and learn from their communities is by sharing passion for

what they like to do and regular interaction.

Furthermore, Enciso (2007) explains that "the tools themselves—the meditational

means available within a cultural milieu—undergo transformations in the particular

contexts in which they become generative and useful for the construction of ways of

being and thinking" (p. 52). Because the tools transform, so will their meanings, and

they will vary depending on who hears the story and who tells it. "Within the nexus of

mediation, cultural materials are changed, and so too is the person who encounters and

addresses the social, historical, and cultural meanings available in that material" (Enciso, 2007, p. 52). The result of this process is reinterpretation of cultural meanings. Consequently, the teachers in this study transmit these interpretations to their students while emphasizing the cultural connections.

Cultural Practices

There are commonalities across individuals and groups, which make up our identities both individually and within our groups. Tools are a means of development because they are intertwined with the nature of thought. For instance, language can be a type of tool. It is what we use to communicate, although there are several ways in which language can be used. Enciso (2007) argues, "cultural forms and tools are mediated alongside a narrative of their production and transformation. Both the cultural forms and their narratives are produced within the limitations of available language and narrative forms" (p. 53). The language of life history can be considered a tool in that it provides a means by which individuals construct their life narratives and from them, reinterpret their experiences growing up. These meanings are constantly rewritten over time in telling as the contexts of their telling change.

The use of life history is means of putting the cultural practices together for a better understanding of how the life history impacts the present. That is to say that life history as a research tool examines several areas of the life of an individual and consequently examines how development and growth of those particular areas have influenced the individual in the present. Enciso (2007) explains:

> . . . our life stories are inextricably tied together by places and relationships built on interdependence, inequity, and economics that have shaped one another's sense of being. The description of histories as incommensurable can be understood as an intervention in sociocultural narratives of continuity and change. (p. 66)

Although the participants in this study may have different histories, these histories have common themes in that they are all African American educators. Furthermore, personal histories of people of color drive against the narratives that maintain the "happily ever after" story, those of white individuals.

Identity Theory

The ways in which we see ourselves are derivative of our histories, experiences, and even current conditions. Several researchers (Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Wortham, 2006) posit theories regarding identity that are relevant to this study. The various scholars of identity have provided a foundation from which to begin cultivating a lens to further discuss identity in relation to life history and African American educators. The principles I found to be consistent in my review of identity theory are as follows:

- *Identity has societal and cultural basis*

- *Identity is fluid*

- *Identity is not only the ways you view yourself, but also how others see you.*

- *Identity can be linked to language and discourse*

Theories of identity reveal that it is fluid, dynamic, and is formed in relation to the individual's sociocultural realities. One of the many things to remember in this model is that identity forms in practice. Holland et al. (1998) argue, "Identity is a concept that

figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations" (p. 5). Thus as we participate in daily interactions, our identity for that particular practice emerges.

Holland et al. (1998) based their theory of identity on a cultural and socio-historical model. They contend that identities are formed in practice. As we participate, we are forming the identities in context:

> Identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations. We are interested in identities, the imaginings of self in worlds of action, as social products; indeed, we begin with the premise that identities are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in social practice. (p. 5)

Identity formation is not a static process, therefore identities are constantly produced and reproduced and modified depending upon their context. Holland et al. (1998) contend that people figure who they are based on context and the social relationships created. Identities for teaching are constructed and developed within these social relationships. Teachers are able to examine their identities within the classroom and outside of it.

This study aims to examine how Black teacher identity in conjunction with the life history of African American teachers is used as a catalyst to support African American students' school success.

Identity Theory and Life History

Life history as a research method provides a framework that supports the use of African American teacher's life experience to explore these teachers' understanding of African American students' learning processes. Central to the development of teacher

identity are the dichotomies of African American teachers, which can include given and

constructed identities as well as public and private ones. Danielewicz (2001) studied

preservice teachers through their first year of teaching to understand how their teacher

identities were formed and changed from student teachers to professional teachers.

Danielewicz's research on self-image and public image can contribute to the ways in

which African American teachers define themselves both in their professional and

personal lives. She affirms:

> Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who we think other people are.
> Reciprocally, it also encompasses other people's understanding of themselves and
> others (which includes us). Theoretically, the concept of identity involves two
> notions: similarity and difference. So identities are the ways we relate to and
> distinguish individuals (and groups) in their social relations with other individuals
> or groups. (p. 10)

In her study, she followed the creation of personal identities of professional teachers as

preservice student teachers and the discourses used to develop these identities. The

formation of identities through relationships and language is well suited with Holland et

al.'s (1998) notion of the socially constructed self. According to Holland et al., "selves

are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts"

(p. 26). Social identities and their development are imperative to African American

teachers in that it is the social identities that can position them. Danielewicz's (2001)

discussion is important because understanding the social interaction between African

American teachers and African American students in conjunction with community will

allow the teachers' perspectives to be voiced and valued.

Wortham (2006) conceptualized the relationship between social identity and academic learning. "By 'model of identity' I mean either an explicit account of what some people are like, or a tacit account that analysts can infer based on people's systematic behavior toward others" (p. 6). Academic and nonacademic activities can overlap in the classroom, as well as social identification and academic learning, and they typically interact with one another. Social identity is made up of several elements including relationships, subject matter, and interpersonal struggles in the classroom (Wortham, 2006). He further contended that social identification and academic learning are inclusive of one another. Although his study examined students and their social identification with regard to academic learning, it will enhance this study in terms of the social identification and positioning of African American teachers and their relationships with students.

People are positioned by particular situations and by other individuals. According to Holland et al. (1998), "positionality refers to the fact that personal activity (the identified action of a person) always occurs from a particular place in a social field of ordered and interrelated points or positions of possible activity" (p. 44). After a period of time people may be aware of being positioned in the particular ways. When they become aware of the identities they perform, they resist or transform the way others position them. For example, historically, African American students have been assigned a predetermined identity that assumes they devalue school and are lazy.

The concept of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) consists of artifacts, discourses, and identities. These tenets are essential to the discussion of identity formation. According to Holland et al.:

> Figured worlds take shape within and grant shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances, artifacts. A figured world is peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks and who also have styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on, and orientations toward it. (p. 51)

Within the figured world of teaching, African American teachers can utilize culturally relevant activities, artifacts, discourses, to provide a perspective that reflects African American ideals and mores. Urrieta (2007) further explains, "Figured worlds are therefore processes or traditions of apprehension that give people their shape and form as their lives intersect with them" (p. 108). The figured worlds of African American educators will vary from those of White teachers in terms of meanings, acts and even terminology. The narratives of individuals provide a substantial backdrop to provide cultural resources that are durable and recreated through associations with others (Urrieta, 2007). According to Holland et al. (1998), artifacts are a "means by which figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learned and made socially and personally powerful" (p. 61). Artifacts are used within figured worlds, are integral to that figured world, and may carry different meanings for various figured worlds.

Figured worlds are socially constructed over time. "When talking and acting, people assume that their words and behavior will be interpreted according to a center context of meaning—as indexing or pointing to a culturally figured world" (p. 52).

People are grouped in these figured worlds based on their actions and words. Hence the stories of African American educators may be significant in providing a different perspective on the figured worlds of teaching.

African American Educators and Identity

The literature regarding African American educators as it relates to identity is scarce. There are very few studies that actually explore the role that identity plays in the lives of African American educators. However, the studies that pertain to African Americans and identity are based on a framework that highlights ethnic or racial identity.

Although ethnic identity is a complex and broad area, it must be included in this discussion in order to grasp the full scope of the various identities that emerge for African American teachers. Coupled with the variety of identities that teachers perform the idea of identity and African American educators can be quite an intricate concept. As Gay (1987) notes, "Ethnic identity development is a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic process. It has both, public and private, individual and communal, conscious and unconscious, positive and negative, past and present, cognitive and emotional, expressive and symbolic dimensions" (p. 35). Ethnic identity is a piece of the multiple identities that African American teachers contend with on a daily basis whether in or out of the classroom. Although teachers have multiple identities, the identity of race is ever present for African American teachers. As Brock (2005) asserts, "My race, class, and gender intertwine to make me who I am. And my consciousness of these three domains constructs every aspect of my identity including my identity as a teacher" (p. 12). For

African American teachers, identity is not a simple concept; it is always based on race, class, and gender.

The life history method will aid in this exploration of identities and the ways in which they have affected teaching practices, specifically the teaching of African American students. Agee (2004) states, "Yet the problems facing teachers of color are not always easy to identify because they are often deeply embedded in the very discourse that is used in teacher education" (p. 751). By definition, identity as it relates to the multiple roles held by African American teachers is essential to understand the ways in which African American teacher experience aims to create a space for African American males in the classroom. Agee further argued that "a teacher also brings a desire to construct a unique identity as a teacher and that in the various contexts of her work; she negotiates and renegotiates that identity" (p. 749).

The life history of these teachers ties their experiences, identities and their figured worlds together, which make their voices significant for the existing literature on Black teacher identity. Identity theory helps me make sense of how figured worlds and positioning contribute to connecting the racial and personal with the professional lives of African American teachers and how complex this process can be.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

All too often, teachers assume that incorporating the text of a particular race/ethnicity or acknowledging particular religious holidays within a certain content area is multicultural education. Although, these activities represent some aspect of multicultural education, the concept is more broadly defined. As such, multicultural

education is based on the idea of respecting culture, diversity, and educational equality and equity, which goes beyond changing the curriculum. The main goal of multicultural education is to reform institutions in order to provide students from diverse racial, ethnic and social class with equality in education (Banks, 2006). Complimentary to the concept of multicultural education is the term culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy embodies the student as well as their strengths. Defined as culturally responsive teaching, by Geneva Gay (2000), a pioneer in the field, it is described as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 29). Thus, while multicultural education is based on curriculum and institutional reform, culturally responsive teaching focuses on the student and shaping and expanding their individual learning.

There have been a myriad of studies utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy and I will discuss a few in order to provide the framework for this study. Culturally relevant teaching is a concept that centers the student and his/her cultural background at the center of teaching. This type of instruction is important for students of all ethnicities, religions and backgrounds as it gives them a chance to incorporate themselves into their own learning process. Ladson-Billings (1995) conducted a three-year study of successful teachers of African American students in an effort to describe CRP. She maintained that CRP must meet the following standards: developing students academically, nurturing cultural competence, and developing critical consciousness. This particular study is of importance in that it adds to the significance of the literature for the academic and

sociocultural identities of Black student. This research should continue in an effort to support new ways of thinking and collaborating in order to successfully teach Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In 2001, Tyrone Howard conducted a qualitative study of four elementary school teachers and the ways in which their culturally responsive pedagogy impacted their everyday teaching and understanding of students. Three major pedagogical strategies proved effective as a means of culturally relevant instruction. The strategies included: holistic teaching, skill building strategies, and culturally consistent communicative competencies. Each strategy was an extension of culturally responsive pedagogy and incorporated core values of what the teachers thought were vital to their students' education. Furthermore, the teachers believed in the students' ability to excel. Howard notes, "Teachers' belief in student capability also has cultural connections" (p. 198). A finding of this study is concerned how the participants incorporated their individual ways of extending CRP and making sure that their teaching was not limited to academic achievement alone.

In another, qualitative researcher Marvin Lynn (2006) addressed African American male teachers and their culturally responsive pedagogies are the focal point. Specific practices of the teachers included "otherfathering," which is defined as giving students a chance to be heard, building on prior knowledge and having pride in one's heritage. The men used their own experiences to relate to students and encourage learning. Lynn demonstrated how important Black male teachers are along with the caring and passion the men have for teaching and their students. Lynn explained, "This

study has begun to shift the conversation about teaching as a profession that is not only raced but also gendered in ways that significantly impact the teaching and learning process, particularly in poor urban schools" (p. 23).

The final study from Ware (2006) considers the term "warm demander" to describe effective culturally responsive teachers. Teachers in her qualitative study were all warm demanders but categorized as disciplinarians, caregivers or pedagogues. All of the teachers displayed strong cultural/racial identity that embraced Black children. Othermothering, the act of women who have feelings of shared responsibility and are committed to the development of children in a community (Collins, 2000) is another example of a successful quality/strategy that these teachers exhibited. Their behavior demonstrated genuine concern for students both in and out of school. She concluded, "Specifically, teachers who skillfully use warm demander and culturally responsive pedagogies have a strong sense of racial identity can create a new classroom culture" (pp. 453-454). Helping students to achieve academic success while having knowledge of the multiple learning styles of their students are qualities these teachers embody.

In order to illustrate the impact culture has on the knowledge, which extends from the practices of various ethnic groups, Carol Lee (2007) designed a cultural modeling framework. She contends that cultural modeling "offers a framework for thinking about these problems in the design of instruction in ways that help students see generative connections between prior knowledge and the new problems they will meet in the academic domain" (p. 44). Cultural modeling recognizes the core knowledge students obtain from their environments that is often ignored or devalued in the classroom.

The Significance of Caring in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Care is imparted in many ways and at different levels. It is not only about being cared for, but learning how to care (Noddings, 1992). Schools have an obligation to teach students how to be carers and be receivers of care. Gay (2010) includes caring in the form of culturally responsive caring in her discussion of culturally responsive teaching. She maintains, "When combined with pedagogical competence, caring becomes a powerful ideological and praxis pillar of culturally responsive pedagogy for students" (p. 75). Caring is powerful in that it can invoke success with students by relationships that are both demanding and supportive with students. Gay further declared:

> In other words, teachers who really care for students honor their humanity, hold them in high esteem, expect high performance from them, and use strategies to fulfill their expectations. They also model academic, social, personal, and moral behaviors and values for students to emulate. Students, in kind, feel obligated to be worthy of being so honored. They rise to the occasion by producing high levels of performance of many different kinds—academic, social, moral, and cultural. (p. 48)

Knowledge about caring assists teachers in understanding the cultural characteristics of the diversity in their classes. Teachers can build authentic relationships by employing pedagogical aspect of caring that Gay (2010) mentioned above.

Teachers play an important role in this mission when they show students that they are respectful of all subject areas, not just the ones they teach. Valenzuela's 1999 study of subtractive schooling focused on the role that schools play in the lives of U.S.-born Mexican youth and other minority youth such as African Americans, American Indians

and Puerto Ricans. She explained the dissimilarity in the meaning of caring between

U.S.-born Mexican youth and their non-Latino teachers:

> Teachers expect students to demonstrate caring about schooling with an abstract,
> or *aesthetic* commitment to ideas or practices that purportedly lead to
> achievement. Immigrant and U.S.-born youth, on the other hand, are committed
> to an *authentic* form of caring that emphasizes relations of reciprocity between
> teachers and students. (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 61)

Culturally responsive pedagogy in conjunction with caring allows teachers to strengthen

student relationships, particularly with Black students. When African American students

know that they are cared *for,* according to Noddings (1992), it means they are in

relationships with teachers, and these relationships equate to being received and accepted.

Furthermore, Gay (2010) explained the devotedness of teachers who are culturally

relevant and the ways in which they care for students:

> Caring teachers also place student at the center of the learning orbit and turn their
> personal interests and strengths into opportunities for academic success. They are
> persistent in their instructional efforts; they do not give up on students, diminish
> or belittle their possibilities, even when it appears that everyone else does. (p. 50)

Providing continuous support and genuine belief in students is an aspect of caring.

Various histories of teachers and students intermingled can encourage relationships

between the two (Valenzuela, 1999). Caring relationships will show students how to care

and embrace being cared for by teachers. Noddings (1995) maintains that caring

demonstrates respect for the full range of human talents and that students can be led to

develop the skills and knowledge necessary in order to make positive contributions

regardless of the occupation they choose.

Othermothering and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Othermothering is an example of the distinctive qualities that African American teachers possess. Mothering within the wall of school does not mean a biological connection with students. Many African American teachers care for their students in ways that reflect the role of mother. Othermothering can be a term used in the classroom as well as the community. Researcher Karen Cage (1997) defines othermothering as follows:

> Othermothering as it relates to teaching, is a matter of responding to and reacting with the students. They have to feel not only your voice. They have to feel the warmth and caring that comes from you as a person. (p. 35)

Attending to the whole child is a crucial aspect of teaching. Black women teachers are more often connected to the community of the Black children in which they teach and through this connection, a relationship is established. Othermothering demonstrates authentic care and a sense of responsibility for Black students. It is a technique that occurs through the connectedness African American teachers have with the community and the fictive kin that is established. Because of this, classrooms may become safe, yet challenging places for students to grow and begin to learn. These teachers share their wisdom and life experiences with students in order to help them to be able to be successful in a society that will not always be supportive of them.

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Summary

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In this section I have reviewed the literature on critical race, sociocultural and identity theories, along with culturally responsive teaching in order to crystallize the

importance of these theories to the narrative method. Examining culture through individuals and their communities while attempting to understand the identities of African American teachers and the role that race plays in their teaching offers a robust approach that may provide better insight into the lives of African American teachers. Race plays a pivotal role in identity formation and culture as it relates to teaching and the relationships that African American teachers have with African American students. Examining life histories of African American teachers using critical race, sociocultural and identity theories, along with culturally responsive teaching as frameworks sets a solid foundation through which to better understand the roles and meanings that constitute the term African American teacher. Experiencing their truth and the stories of their lives will show African American teachers and how their notions of education, teaching and learning connect and have shaped their existence. Moreover, an understanding of their own journey provides a means of understanding not often heard perspectives on teaching African American males.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Black teachers' unique historical experiences are either completely overlooked or amalgamated with those of white teachers. (Foster, 1997, p. xlix)

Introduction

African American teachers bring not only a different view of teaching into their classrooms, but also the rich culture of African Americans is a basis for suitable means of culturally relevant teaching. According to Anderson (1988), post-slavery African American educators viewed literacy as a means to liberation and freedom. Therefore, like their post-slavery counterparts, I posit that African American teachers who critically reflect on their life experiences will gain more insight on the ways that they understand Black students along with the impact their communities have on their pedagogical styles.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to share the voices of African American teachers' life histories and the influence of these histories on their teaching in an effort to facilitate teaching, learning and successes of African American students. Using critical race theory, identity, sociocultural theory, and culturally responsive teaching as a framework, I investigate the following research questions:

1. How do the life histories of African Americans influence professional identity as a teacher?

    a. What experiences do teachers name as influential in becoming teachers?

2. How do teachers' life histories shape understandings of African American

    male students?

I will begin the chapter by explaining the research design for the study. Next, I describe

the participants and my subjectivity and role as a researcher and how my life history will

be woven throughout this study. Then I discuss the data collection and data analysis

procedures. I will address the issue of reliability, ethics and limitations of the study.

Finally, I will give an introduction of the participants in the study.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodology to examine the identities and life

histories of select African American teachers, specifically seeking to capture their

perspectives on the educational success of African American males. The qualitative

approach is appropriate in that it will give participants the opportunity to speak freely and

tell the stories of their lives inside as well as outside the context of the classroom.

According to Creswell (2003),

> Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. This means that the researcher
> makes an interpretation of the data. This includes developing a description of an
> individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making
> an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally. (p. 183)

My intent was to understand the meanings teachers make of life experiences from their

perspectives as it relates to the African American male students they teach. Standards

and expectations that African American teachers, in particular, bring into their classes are

developed over time and through community. Narratives of these teachers provide

insight into their teaching of African American males. Interpreting life histories proved

to be challenging during the beginning stages. However, I depended on Atkinson (1998) and his in depth discussion on interpreting life history. He explains:

> Essentially, the two aspects of interpretation are to validate the story itself and to explain the meaning of the story. This is an ongoing process that takes place throughout the planning, doing and interpreting phases of the interview. A balance between subjectivity and objectivity is what usually works best in interpreting a life story. (p. 58)

In order to validate and explain the meaning of the stories I listened to, I constantly examined my role as a researcher. I took an interpretive approach in which I looked at meanings participants made over time in specific social settings (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). This paradigm is also valuable in that it will improve the understanding of identity formation and the role of race as a way of recognizing African American teachers and the stories they tell. Hence, using the interpretive approach allows for the constructed reality of these teachers to emerge. Atkinson (1998) further asserts, "The storyteller tells his or her story through interpretive eyes to begin with" (p. 60). As a researcher, my role was to recognize and capture the interpretive eyes of the participants.

Since the experience of the teachers is vital to this study, a qualitative research paradigm maintains the legitimacy of these experiences and voices and the importance of sharing. Thus use of a narrative design will allow these stories to be told. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "narrative is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 21). The narrative structure is an

efficient way to learn about teachers' lives as it involves them sharing their personal

experiences through conversation. The life history method is useful because it allows the

participants to tell their stories and makes a much, needed contribution to teaching

African American students. Additionally, educators, policymakers and communities can

utilize to understand the sociohistorical, cultural and political factors that influence the

life history of the selected teachers. As Riessman (1993) notes, "Individuals construct

past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives" (p.

2). Sharing the stories of African American teachers, in particular how they shape the

understanding of their African American students, further validates the importance of

using the narrative lens. Atkinson (1998) echoes this argument:

> Stories can affirm, validate, and support our own experience in relation to those
> around us. They enforce the norms of a moral order and shape the individual to
> the requirements of the society. Stories help us understand our commonalities
> with others, as well as our differences. Stories help create bonds, while fostering
> a sense of community, by helping us understand the established order around us.
> Stories clarify and maintain our place in the social order of things. (p. 10)

The narrative researcher makes available the voices of those seldom heard in educational

research (Creswell, 2005). As teachers reflect on the stories of their lives they may begin

to relate their individual stories to their teaching philosophies with attention to particular

beliefs, expectations, identities and actions they hold in their classrooms. For this reason,

the life history approach is a valuable method thereby enlightening society on the unique

experience of African American teachers.

Life History Research

Within narrative based research methods, I specifically used life history as a method for this study. Life history is the telling of one's life in the broader context. Foster's (1997) conceptualization of life history is crucial to understanding why a life history methodology was selected for this study. Foster's (1997) research examined the life histories of veteran, elders, and novice African American teachers. According to Foster, using a life history methodology to study African American teachers is particularly useful in the following ways:

> Life history and the associated techniques of oral history and personal narratives are forms of analysis that can bring the experience of blacks, including teachers into view in ways that reveal the complexity of their experiences. Life history not only provides materials about individual lives but also offer the opportunity to explore how individuals lives are shaped by society. Thus life history research offers critical insights into larger social processes by connecting the lives of individuals to society. (p. x)

This particular study encompasses similar methodological underpinnings in terms of the participants, the purpose of study, and the interview questions. A life history approach is culturally relevant and contextually appropriate for the African American teachers in this study. Moreover, "first-person accounts have long been employed by individuals to encode and record the experience of blacks, and such accounts have served as valuable information for both scholars seeking to understand the black community and for the black community itself" (Foster, 1997, p. xxi).

Similar to Foster (1997), Marshall and Rossman (2006) framed life history as not only a macro view of self and society but also of the cultural factors that affect life

histories. They assert, "life histories are valuable in studying cultural changes that have occurred over time, in learning about cultural norms and transgressions of those norms, and in gaining an inside view of a culture" (p. 116).

Life history, a narrative design, is a method not only concerned with the experiences of individuals, but also the meaning of these experiences in relation to the individual and society. Cole and Knowles (2001) explain:

> In as much as it is humanly possible, life history inquiry is about gaining insights in to the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans. It is about understanding a situation, profession, condition, or institution through coming to know how individuals walk, talk, live, and work within that particular context. It is about understanding the relationship, the complex interaction between life and context, self and place. It is about comprehending the complexities of a person's day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in that life so that insights into the broader, collective experience may be achieved. (p. 11)

Life history is concerned with how individual experiences play into the broader scope of reality. "The concept of 'history' in life history research refers to the practical aspects of how investigators must document the ways in which people experience the world" (Labaree, 2006, p. 124). Life history is a type of research that will bring the experiences of African American teachers to the forefront. An asset of life history is that because it shares a good portion of the person's life, the reader will also experience those events as well (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The perspectives of the participant are the focus of life history as stated by Cole and Knowles (2001): "both narrative and life history research rely on and depict the storied nature of lives; both are concerned with honoring the individuality and complexity of individuals' experiences" (p. 20).

As a research method, life history is concerned with how individual experiences play out into the broader scope of reality. Sikes and Everington (2001) note that "life history is a story that someone tells about his or her life, the account that they give about things that have happened to them, set within a wider context" (p. 9). African American teachers deserve to tell their stories; yet it is essential to know how these stories play out in their classrooms and more importantly the ways in which these stories play out with respect to expectations for African American students. Furthermore, the stories of African American teachers enable them to be seen as educators' along with the various roles that they play in the classroom. Life history helps in understanding the cultivation of these roles and how they facilitate learning. Teachers who are aware of their cultural experiences become attuned to the needs and want to learn about those of their students (Mitchell, 1998).

African American teachers bring with their voices, the traditions, history and culture of their communities. "Life history research also tells people's stories in their own works and, in this way, conveys a representation of human experience that draws readers into the interpretive process" (Labaree, 2006, p. 123). Forms of inquiry for the life history method may be unstructured and open-ended interviews. Analyzing the data can not only be done chronologically, but can also focus on critical aspects of the life of the individual, key turning points of the individual and characteristic means of adaptation of the individual (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Furthermore, the telling of stories can invite new understandings of life along with meaningful events that strongly impact identity.

As a researcher, I too have begun the process of understanding my history as an African American teacher, which is why I am able to share in the stories of the participants, and the life history I share below provides insight into my subjectivities as well as their importance to my teaching identity. As such, the narrative of my life is interweaved along with that of the participants. Life histories play an important role in the individuals' understanding themselves, and understanding themselves in the contexts of their worlds (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). My life history also plays a major role in the ways in which my interpretations of the participants are presented in that my experiences mirror those of the participants. Being the mother of a Black male the familiarity of experiences that I share with participants allows me to identify what I have learned about effective strategies for educating and supporting Black boys. Accordingly, the interpretations that I make are strongly based from personal connections with previous Black male students. The process of understanding has been a complex one for me, because the more I become aware of the identities I enact, the more intense the process because I had always felt as though my identity was a static one. However, I will continue on the journey, along with the participants.

Researcher Subjectivity

It is vital for me to provide the reader with an understanding of personal experiences, assumptions and biases that guide me in this research. It is also essential that I do not devalue the thoughts, ideas and perceptions of the participants in the study. Jansen and Peshkin (1992) argued, "Researchers should bring these biases to consciousness, understand them as part of one's methodology and acknowledge them

when drawing conclusions" (p. 706). Therefore my desire is to provide the reader with an understanding of how I arrived at this area of research.

In my second year of coursework I was required to complete a critical autobiography and in doing so it heightened my sense of the kind of teacher I had been in the classroom. As I reflected over my life experiences, I began to realize how they shaped who I was and who I wanted to be in the classroom. Becoming aware of my community and my upbringing made me rethink my position in the classroom as a teacher. As an educator there has always been a strong connection between the African American males and myself. During my years in the classroom I have found myself being not only teacher, but also a mentor to these adolescents. My experience working with these young men has afforded me the opportunity to see beyond what they present in the classroom.

As I continued through my graduate work and began reading research on the achievement gap I realized I wanted to gain more insight about African American male students and their plight in school. I began my pursuit of learning about African American males and the men and women who teach them and in many ways influence their lives; thus, I am interested in the voices and stories of African American teachers. Rochelle Brock's (2005) powerful words come to mind as she explains her journey by searching for understanding and talking with her Black female students; "I seek awareness. Awareness of myself as a Black woman. Awareness of myself as a teacher. Awareness of how I join the two" (p. xvii). I am seeking the same awareness as I learn about myself and from the life histories that are shared by the selected teachers.

Researcher Role

According to Schram (2006), researchers should consider seriously the impact of presence, selectivity and subjectivity in their research endeavors. Similarly, Maxwell (2005) suggested that explaining biases is key to the research for this reason it is important to discuss my experiences and background in relation to teacher identity and my personal life history.

Firstly, being the mother of an African American male in the first grade, I embark on this journey for him and the many Black males that I have worked with and taught during my ten years of being an educator. Watching my son progress through kindergarten and thinking about the opportunities that lie ahead of him as he begins first grade, I constantly grapple with the question "Which of his teachers will give him a *real education and opportunities*?" Upon entering kindergarten, I spoke truthfully to him about the stereotypes that would be placed on him by society and how he would have to work extra hard in school, as not to be labeled. With a befuddled look in his eyes, he simply answered, "Yes ma'am."

I believe that all students, especially African American males, can learn and be successful. They require support, encouragement and guidance them as they grow and advance throughout school.

Secondly, growing up in the first predominately black neighborhood in Jacksonville, NC, I did not think that our neighborhood was out of the ordinary. My parents were among the first families to purchase a home in the community thirty-five

years ago. The elementary school I attended was diverse as was my junior high and high school.

Moreover, being raised as a middle class, black, female, my surroundings were varied. Consequently, I received several messages from my family, the media, school and my community regarding expectations that would be placed on me based on my appearance. My father, a black business owner, emphasized tacitly the unequal status given to black owned businesses in our community. Because of their location, availability of resources and structural and systemic racism African American businesses and services were often seen as inadequate to their white counterparts. Unconsciously I internalized these messages, which later manifested themselves at the beginning of my teaching career.

When applying to colleges, although I applied to two Historically Black College/Universities (HBCUs), I also applied to a Predominately White Institution (PWI) knowing that was the most important one for me and the one that I desperately wanted to attend. In introspection, I realize that as the acceptance letters came I shrugged off the ones from the HBCU's and quickly accepted admission to the PWI because of these unexamined assumptions about the relative quality of these institutions. The research literature is laden with studies discussing issues regarding assimilation, African American schooling, and how it affects the African American worldview of self in a white-dominated society (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999; Fordham, 1996; Hale, 2001; Perry et al., 2003). I have learned that I have assimilated with regard to my choice in colleges (PWIs) as well as what I chose as an undergraduate major.

To further clarify this statement, in her ethnography, *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity, and Success at Capital High* (1996), Signithia Fordham examined the high achieving and under achieving males and females of Capital High school. She explores the issue of students "acting white" and how it implies assimilation of the "Other." The idea of the "other" is one being singled out looked at as different. I have often felt the sting of being the "odd one out," although I constantly tried to fight the feeling of uneasiness that often overcame me. I felt that I was expected to perform well in all that I attempted to do. People were watching me. I had to look good. I had to be the best. This pressure was something I put on myself because I felt that I was among the best, being at a PWI. No matter how hard I worked in school or in extracurricular activities, I knew that ultimately, I would still be the African American in the class, the Other. For me, playing the role of the other means that I can walk the walk and talk the talk of the dominant culture, yet I understand that my identity is still that of a Black woman.

During my last two years of undergraduate work, I attended Peace College, which is a predominately white, all women's College. I enjoyed the small atmosphere and getting attention for being one of very few women of color on campus. I believe I used that time in my life to prove myself. I wanted the Peace College community to see that young Black women could be on top academically, be engaged in extracurricular activities, work part time, and still survive and shine. Gary Howard discusses social positionality saying that it has both subjective and objective dimensions. "The subjective dimension relates to how I see myself and how others see me" (Howard, 1999, p. 33). While at Peace College I was determined to show the small predominately-white

community that young Black women were powerful, smart, and efficient. I did not want to be looked at as a "dumb Black girl." There were not many African American students on the campus; therefore, the handful of us had to "represent" African Americans as a whole.

Looking back on this experience reminds me that I work hard and I tend to surround myself by those who do the same, those who are able to be of great assistance if I need it. The drive that I had in my undergraduate career to consistently work hard stems from my need to succeed, because after all, if "you work hard, then you will achieve success." This ideology is a tenet of critical race theory, known as meritocracy (discussed in the previous chapter). Success is very important to me and I think that my parents instilled in me that if I worked hard, I would obtain success. Little did I know that I was afforded more tools to acquire success than some of my classmates, and furthermore, hard work does not always equal success. As a teacher, I want to see my students grow both inside and outside of the classroom. Because I constantly wanted to prove myself as a pupil, I expected my students to do the same, especially African American male students and other students of color who are in predominately white settings. As such, I find myself easily drawn to students in environments that are predominately white. I feel that I am able to show them how to operate and furthermore succeed in these surroundings.

Critically reflecting on my experiences growing up has made me think about my philosophy of teaching. My teaching philosophy encompasses the importance of self, society and culture with an emphasis on challenging dominant ideology and promoting

freedom and liberation. The life story is powerful in that it causes individuals to think on the actions, behaviors and attitudes they have had throughout their lives. "Telling a life story the way one sees it can be one of the most emphatic answers to the question, 'Who am I?'" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 12). Who I am as a teacher in some ways varies from who I am as an African American teacher. As an African American teacher, I feel the need to be sure to always dress exceptionally well, as not to look tattered, as well as code switch and speak what is considered standard. It also varies from the experiences of white teachers. Casey's (1993) study affirmed this perspective: "To analyze the discourse of black women, therefore, we must recognize the ways in which their narratives challenge the dominant white meanings which have always already been constructed around their personal, work, and social relations" (p. 111).

When I began teaching ten years ago in a rural middle school, I knew that I had to make an impression, not only on my students but also on my colleagues as well. I was a young woman, who was easily mistaken for students; however I felt that I had to be at the height of professionalism because of the color of my skin. I wanted to be a positive role model for all of my students because the school was in a rural area and I knew that the African American students did not see very many African American teachers. It was difficult for me to make connections at first. Sometimes the Black students read me the wrong way, as a snobbish teacher, rather than one who was there for them.

I have learned that the classroom can be a place of leadership and freedom for African American teachers, while at the same time being a place of feeling alone and at times forgotten and slightly used. By using a life history research strategy, my study

attempts to crystallize the life experiences of these teachers, which will provide a complimentary framework to the discourse on teacher education. African American teachers have a way of speaking to and dealing with African American students that is unique and at times misconstrued. They give students similar treatment given them by relatives and teachers, which is tradition in the African American community (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Siddle Walker, 1996). This approach requires African American teachers to think about personal problems that they have encountered and begin to unpack the discourse of teacher education to find out how their life histories either support or challenge such discourses. I approached this project with the anticipation that my participants would be able to speak to and identify with some of the same issues that I encountered growing up. I was challenged to confront the assumptions that I have regarding African American teachers and students. Being objective is essential because I have to be cognizant not utilize by own biases in analyzing the interview data and participants' reflections. In this manner, I mirrored Foster's (1997) perspective that "while belonging to the same speech and cultural community as one's narrators can facilitate the recovery of authentic accounts, even interviewers and narrators who share social and cultural characteristics are likely to be separated by other characteristics" (p. xxi). I was careful to ensure that the two are separate even if my story bears similarities to the participants' stories. It was essential to this study that I heard, shared and honored the voices of the participants.

Participants and Purposeful Selection

Purposeful selection was used for the participants in this study who are former co-workers and teachers with whom I presently work through intern supervision. Purposeful selection, according to Maxwell (2005), is "a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 88). Being familiar with the participants enables them the freedom of speaking candidly with me. All five teachers are highly regarded in their schools by colleagues and students. I believe that there is something of value that can be used to inform other educators that can be learned from these teachers, their lives and styles of teaching.

Purposeful qualitative sampling involves selecting people who will best help understand the research problem as well as answer the research questions (Creswell, 2005). Furthermore, convenience sampling was also employed when choosing participants. "In convenience sampling the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied" (Creswell, 2005, p. 149). After years of working with the participants, I felt that they all displayed a style of teaching that is demonstrative of culturally relevant pedagogy. All of the teachers were interested in the study and agreed to participate upon being asked.

Being a former middle school teacher and presently working with middle school teacher education candidates, I felt compelled to employ middle school teachers as participants in this study. Likewise, because this study focused on the life history of African American teachers and the understanding of the African American males they

teach, they are all African American. To ensure that the participants are familiar with the classroom and have had full exposure to teaching, they have all been teaching for at least eight years. Seasoned educators who have experience working with students and managing the classroom provides a firm foundation for researching identities and understanding the life histories of the participants.

As is typical in qualitative research, the sample size is small, yet large enough to obtain extensive responses (Creswell, 2005). The five participants selected, one male and four females, all African American, teach at three different middle schools in the area and they vary in the subjects and grade levels taught. I have included a brief description of the participants in no specific order.

Ginger Hill

A charming woman in her late thirty's, Ginger grew up in a small town in North Carolina. She wore a warm smile each time we met and spoke with such affection as she chronicled her life. She was one of few African American students in her high school and attended a historically Black University (HBCU). She has taught for sixteen years and is firm in her faith in God, which guided her from day to day. Religion plays very strongly in her own experiences and her identity as a teacher. For Ginger, teaching was her "purpose" in life, she was guided by God and sought to glorify Him in all that she did in and out of the classroom (Interview 1, 56-60). In her early days of teaching she had to learn that the theories in the books and classes that she was taught did not help her in terms of classroom management and developing her teaching style. She has since found that building relationships with students is imperative in terms of coming up with lessons

to which students will relate. In her words, "It will strengthen that student-teacher

relationship" (Interview 2, 303-304). Throughout her sixteen years in the classroom,

Ginger has grown into a very reflective teacher, one who is willing to accept students

"where they are" and who wants to connect to students in order to adjust to their learning

styles (Interview 2, 297-306).

She has taught language arts and social studies at predominately white suburban

middle schools throughout her career and sees herself as a positive representative of an

African American teacher. Dedicated to being a role model and encouraging Black

students at these schools, she is constantly pushing them to accomplish their goals.

Ginger is not only sincere in her actions with students but holds high expectations as well

as a genuine concern for them. Due to medical complications, she has been able to take a

year off and "clear the clutter" of her mind (Interview 3, 82) while working through

emotional obstacles that have affected her attitude toward teaching. She now feels

refreshed and has a new purpose in what she does. She is a teacher who puts students at

the forefront of her teaching and has gained confidence in her ability to work with

students through her relationship with Christ.

> I like things being done right and then if they're not, if I feel like I'm not working
> up to *my* potential, I feel like I'm a failure. So I put myself under that
> unnecessary pressure but *now* after being away from the students for a year and
> have had time to reflect on my life, reflect on my role as a teacher and while
> I'm—you know my purpose as a teacher [pause] *now* when I go back my focus is
> going to be totally different than that 'cause the outside distractions—like
> personalities from teachers, the unnecessary things—ah huh that's not going to
> get in my way. I'm not going to let the, the outside distractions bring me down.
> I'm not going to let it upset my self-esteem. My purpose now when I go back it's
> just going to be about the students. Not saying it wasn't there before but I'm
> just—I just know that I'm going to handle things differently. I'm not going to

take things personally [pause] to the point where it brings me down emotionally and mentally. And I'm just going to find more joy in teaching. (Interview 3, 41-52)

Savoy Smith

Teacher of the year during 2008-2009, Savoy has been teaching for thirteen years and considers herself fair with all of her students. She is congenial and uncompromising in her profession and dedication to teaching. Now in her mid-thirties, Savoy's teaching career began at a private school, and she now teaches eighth grade science at a suburban middle school. She considers herself an astute role model for the Black students in her school as well as a compassionate teacher.

I was taught to be open minded, I was taught to be you know, non-prejudiced to people. So that's helped me a lot because I AM real compassionate and I was taught that way. Well my mom and dad ARE so that comes out of me. So I think that that's helped a lot. The way I was raised helped me be open-minded and compassionate, and everybody is different, everybody has different way of doing things and nobody's the same, nobody's better than the other person just different so try to find the good and find the positive side to deal with students and how they are. (Interview 2, 80-85)

Savoy had always known that she wanted to teach as it had been a profession that was a part of her family for generations. Like Ginger, she attended an HBCU because she wanted the history, but she felt like it was a bit biased in teaching and had a "Black power" mentality which seemed to be a justification in her mind for the success (or lack thereof) of African Americans (Interview 1, 489; Interview 2, 132-138). Savoy was a neat organized teacher who is forthright in her expectations with students. Currently in school to complete her masters in English as a Second Language (ESL), she felt that it

was necessary to "differentiate instruction and make learning relate to the students' world" (Interview 3, 10).

A passionate teacher, she was dedicated to student success. She understood her students' needs and saw herself as a "mama figure" to them (Interview 2, 58). During the first year at her present school, Savoy had an unlikely altercation with a Black female student. Tamika was "a wreck, a train wreck and nobody could deal with her, she was always cursing and screaming in the hallways" (Interview 1, 77-178). Savoy felt that her principal thought that she would be able to "relate" to Tamika because they were both Black. Savoy was extremely candid and let the principal know that the only thing they had in common was the color of their skin, not background or experiences (Interview 1, 184-189). Over time their relationship flourished and Savoy has mentored Tamika since seventh grade, tutoring her, taking her places, and even helping her apply for college.

Sheila Rich

A veteran social studies teacher of 26 years, Sheila attended a segregated school from first until sixth grade, and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling of 1954, she went to an integrated school from seventh grade through twelfth grade and attended an HBCU for her undergraduate and graduate degrees. During her time in the segregated school, her teachers and community instilled in her the value and importance of education. She was a product of the struggle Black Americans had to endure in order to achieve equality in education. The Black teachers in Sheila's life always emphasized self-confidence, pride, and genuine caring by insisting that she "hold her head up high" and by "building her up" (Interview 1, 169; 188). In her community, teachers were very

highly regarded, so the decision to teach came as an easy one for her. "You know people always looked up to teachers and people just treated them well within the environment" (Interview 1, 5-6). A strong, uncompromising teacher, Sheila was very clear with what she expects her students to do in the classroom and holds them accountable for their actions. "I expect you to come in, sit down and get ready to work cause this is your job . . . I'm not here to play with you, we can have a good time but within parameters . . ." (Interview 1, 408-410).

Sheila attributed her parents, neighbors, church, and community for impressing upon her the sense of responsibility she has for Black students in her classroom. She said those were the people who disciplined her as well as took care of her. "It's a part of that whole it takes a village, even though we didn't say it back then, but people looked out for you" (Interview 2, 58-59). She regarded her students' needs in terms of her own children's needs and understands that they need guidance past middle school. Sheila was a Black teacher who carried on the tradition of being diligent and focused when getting an education in which she was raised.

> I want this generation of students to embrace the importance of education again and to understand that you don't really get anything with working for it. Because you know they've grown up in the self-esteem generation and the helicopter parents and all of that it's like they just don't understand that *they* have to work to get something and that once they get to be an adult they're not going to have all of this stuff—you know people making excuses for them, parents doing everything for them, they're just going to have to do it on their own and understand how— particularly for our Black students what was sacrificed for them and how they just blow it off. They blow it off. (Interview 3, 44-51)

She had a "strong personality" which oftentimes equated to being a "bitch" (Interview 1, 318-319). She was a confidant teacher who wants to see all of her students live up to their potential. Sheila believed that her students should embrace the value and meaning of education, which is exemplified in her life history and her philosophy of teaching.

Marcus King

An African American male from an upper middle class family, Marcus, an agile male in his early forties, has been teaching for 17 years and currently teaches eighth-grade social studies. His parents and grandparents were all college educated and all pushed him in school and instilled in him pride and value of an education. A variety of teachers throughout his life help set the foundation of learning in Marcus, which has shaped him and the ways in which he teaches and relates to African American students (Interview 1, 185-210). In the same way, he was candid with his expectations and he lived by his grandfather's wisdom and advice that each generation has to build the next. Marcus gave his students "tough love" (Interview 2, 214) and goes out into their communities to talk with parents. He was determined to connect real world situations to learning in the class. "I'm the coach that teaches rather than the teacher that coaches" (Interview 2, 262-263). He influenced his students with lessons in the classroom as well as on the field. Marcus took his role as mentor and role model seriously and felt that his students are like his own children (Interview 2, 37-45). He strongly believed that "children should be nurtured and encouraged, not always scorned and discouraged" (Interview 2, 209-210).

Marcus is concerned with pushing African American males to think critically and is dedicated to their success in and out of the classroom.

> Your highest ethnic population in your prison system is your African American males. Your highest unemployment rate is usually your African American males. So it you don't do something to push them to—to a point where they can be successful in life without doing illicit and illegal things then what's the—then why you even there to begin with? Yeah you can spout Shakespeare and you can talk about the Holocaust and you can do you know, you can talk about cell biology or whatever but if you don't do something to catch them you know in a way that they're hooked in the schools—you know you can lecture all day but you know—but that goes for ANY student, if you don't try to hook them in school then what's the—where's that going to lead them later in life? (Interview 2, 72-84)

Determined to achieve favorable outcomes with Black males, Marcus started his teaching journey by teaching elementary school in order to reach Black male students before adolescence, with fervor in his voice he acknowledged, "We're at war to save these boys" (Interview, 1, 454). He mentioned that he wants to go back and work "in the trenches" (urban schools with more diversity than where he is now) which is where he feels he can make the most impact. Marcus felt a strong sense of responsibility for Black male students and prides himself on being a role model to them.

Lauren Brown

Lauren has been teaching sixth grade social studies and language arts for eleven years. An amiable woman in her early thirties, Lauren is a former teacher of the year. Her goal for teaching was to find out what her students need and do her best to give it to them in the classroom (Interview, 2, 215-216). Unlike the other participants, Lauren grew up in a predominately white neighborhood. She attended Catholic school from

kindergarten until fifth grade however she did attend an HBCU for college. When

transferred to public middle school Lauren was faced with a largely predominately Black

environment in which she had never encountered before thus tried to "fit in" with her

Black peers. Eventually Lauren was removed from that middle school. Throughout her

second middle school and high school years, Lauren was surrounded by more of a diverse

group of students and was able to "be herself" (Interview 2, 39).

She emphasized respect with her students, was very honest and straightforward

with them, and pushed them to exceed her expectations. "I can definitely see a child's

potential sometimes when they can't see it themselves or parents can't see it" (Interview

2, 97-98). She demonstrated love and caring towards her students and felt like more than

just a teacher to students she referred to herself as "kind of like a mom to them"

(Interview 1, 168). She believed that all students can learn and recognized that all

children have different ways of learning. Lauren had several students which she has kept

in contact with after they leave her class, she felt that her students are always hers, "you

just don't let them go, they're always ours, once they're—once they're ours, they're

always ours" (Interview 3, 281-282).

Each participant tells their narrative in careful, meaningful ways that gave me

insight to why they all have such compassion for their students. Atkinson (1998) posits:

> Our lives consist of a series of events and circumstances that are drawn from a
> well of archetypal experiences common to all other human beings. Each time we
> tell a story about our lives that follow this pattern, or mirrors a universal
> archetype or motif, we better understand the psychological trajectory we are on
> while learning something new about ourselves. In the process of telling our life
> stories, we share important personal truths, as we see them, and in so doing create

vital links with those who participate in the exchange. Telling and listening to life stories is a powerful experience. (p. 3)

All five narratives offer an extensive look into the lives of five African American teachers. Each participant recounted stories of growing up and being in unparalleled ways, yet all carried commonalities that emphasized their caring and communities and each complimented one another.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Participants				
	Tiffany	**Sheila**	**Marcus**	**Lauren**	**Ginger**
Years of experience	12	26	14	11	16
Grade and subject	8th grade Algebra/Science	7th grade Social Studies	8th grade Social Studies	6th grade Language Arts	7th grade Social Studies
Education	HBCU/MEd.	HBCU/MEd.	PWI & HBCU/MEd.	HBCU/BS	HBCU/NBCT
Children	None	1 male/1 female	1 male/1 female	1 female	1 male
Identity	African American	Black	Black	Black	Black

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection Procedures

According to Maxwell (2005), the method used is the means by which the research questions are answered. Therefore, the type of data collected for this study was in the form of three semi-structured interviews (see Interview Protocol, Appendix A). Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Schensul et al. (1999) state, "questions on a

semistructured interview guide are preformulated, but the answers to those questions are

open-ended, they can be fully expanded at the discretion of the interviewer and the

interviewee, and can be enhanced by probes" (p. 149). The semi-structured interview

allowed me to listen to the teachers as they chronicled their stories and allowed me to ask

for clarity when needed. At each second interview, I invited participants to read over the

first interview and did the same with the second and third interviews and provide oral

feedback. The advantage of this type of data collection is that it afforded me the

opportunity to use the written words and language of the participants (Creswell, 2003).

Conducting three semi-structured interviews and getting oral feedback with each

interview was a form of member checking. I also met regularly with a colleague who has

similar research interests as a way of peer debriefing.

Data Analysis

Riessman (1993) asserts, "taping and transcribing are absolutely essential to

narrative analysis" (p. 56). Data collection was completed in March 2010. Data sources

included three interviews with each of the participants. Analyzing each interview was an

iterative process: I first transcribed each interview and then considered next interview

topics before I proceeded anew with each interviewee. I then repeated this process before

I coded and reanalyzed the data for preliminary themes and findings. Upon receiving and

reading the first set of transcripts my initial read of them was that as a casual reader.

Thus, I read the interviews as if I had not previously heard the information. For

subsequent readings of the transcripts, I listened to the interview tapes and made notes of

potential relationships (Maxwell, 2005). Reading over the transcriptions, I was certain to

read past the content, which required careful and countless readings of each interview. Riessman (1993) recommends reading from the inside from the meanings encoded in talk and moving outward, which privileges the experience of the participant. I organized the data in several different ways; in the form of a chart with all participants, their backgrounds and preliminary themes, each participant interview individually and lastly, with the major themes that emerged. Interacting with the data in various ways permitted me to read past my perceptions of what was being said to what the participants were actually sharing with me. Atkinson (1998) reminded me that my purpose was not to judge, but to make connections.

It was imperative to note themes that arose from informants' narratives that connected to their discourse about Black males and their individual and professional identities. However, my participants did not speak as much about Black males specifically as they did Black students; this is when the real analysis began. In addition, I did not persuade the participants to respond in the way I thought was most important. Instead, I yielded to the authentic and rich stories they wished to share. I incorporated my own narrative with that of the participants to note the similarities and critically analyze my story. According to Holland et al. (1998), "Persons do bring a history to the present—an important aspect of which is usually an untidy compilation of perspectives, some developed into symbolized identities" (p. 46). African American teachers may be drawn together by varying parts of their history, which in turn affects identity.

Coding is the main categorizing technique in qualitative research and through coding arranging things into like categories will help in developing theoretical concepts

(Maxwell, 2005). Connecting themes from each category provided an understanding of the situations, the participants, and the ways in which they perceive their roles in the lives of African American students. Maxwell (2005) suggests putting analysis into the following categories; organizational or issues established prior to interviews, substantive or descriptive based on the participants' own words and theoretical, which represent the researcher's concepts. Therefore, as I categorized my analysis I followed this pattern. The categories that emerged began as isolated themes. Atkinson (1998) maintained that my purpose was not to judge, but to make connections. Consequently, as I continued to read through the data in various ways, I began to see the ways in which they all associated with one another.

Findings will be represented with a narrative discussion. A narrative discussion is a passage in which the findings from data analysis are summarized in detail (Creswell, 2005). Learning about the lives of individuals through the stories they share allowed me to fully examine the commonalities that African American teachers share about becoming teachers and how they understood their students. Exploring the teacher narratives while juxtaposing them with those of my life will offer a contrasting perspective on the essence of African American teachers.

Validity

Maxwell (2005) reported that researcher bias and reactivity are the two major threats to validity. I have addressed the former earlier in the chapter when I shared my experiences in school as a teacher and through childhood experiences. It was my intent

during this study to share the purpose of the study with the informants and make myself

fully available for questions and comments. Maxwell (2005) also states:

> Validity is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative: It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions. (p. 105)

Throughout this process it is important to be precise and consistent when sharing

information as well as collecting data. Furthermore, Atkinson (1998) asserts:

> A life story interview is a highly personal encounter; an analysis of a life story is highly subjective and may have as much to do with the quality and depth of the interpersonal exchange itself as with any theory that might be applied to the content of the narrative. (p. 59)

What my participants revealed to me, I believe was based on our established

relationships.

Reactivity is defined as "the influence of the researcher on the setting or

individuals studied" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 108). Hence I was cautious not to ask leading

questions or make assumptions when conducting interviews. Furthermore, I was in

control of my facial expressions, as they tend to get animated when I am intently

listening. I did not want my "thinking expression" to deter a participant from freely

answering a question. In addition, respondent validation (member checking) is another

technique that was used to ensure that participants' stories are not misinterpreted.

Maxwell (2005) states:

> Respondent validation is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed. (p. 111)

My intent for this study was to be a precise and thorough novice researcher. Therefore I explicitly addressed potential problems or misunderstandings by asking the participants to elaborate on questions when data were elusive to me.

Limitations

Although life history allowed me to capture the voices and experiences of African American middle school teachers, it would not allow me to observe the interactions of the teacher and students. Another concern with life history is the degree to which participants would be willing to delve into their pasts and potentially deal with old wounds or as a result of the interview, discover new ones.

Because of the extensive nature of the interview required of a life history, I interviewed five participants. The sample size in life history is typically small because of the intensity of collecting, coding, interpreting, and analyzing the data (Labaree, 2006). I received very rich data from the three interviews I conducted with participants. All participants were eager and willing to share their experiences with me on a deeper, personal level.

It is difficult to identify problems that teachers of color face because of the discourse of teacher education (Agee, 2004). Teacher education does not always explore the issues and problems of teachers of color, specifically African American teachers. My

study allowed teachers to not only recount their stories through their life histories, but also to verbalize the challenges that come along with being an African American teacher.

Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed the methods used in this research in order to crystallize the importance of life histories with respect to teaching African American boys. I have also given a small discussion on my subjectivities as a researcher and my biases along with the ways I have addressed them. The participants were introduced in this section also. I addressed data analysis and validity throughout this study discussed in order to make clear the process and my thoughts throughout. Chapter IV will examine the impact of community and caring on the lives of the participants in their teaching lives and the different meanings that are connected with community and caring.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Community and Caring

> Stories are means for individuals to project and present themselves, declare what is important and valuable, give structure to perceptions, make general facts more meaningful to specific personal lives, connect the self with others, proclaim the self as cultural being, develop a healthy sense of self, and forge new meanings and relationships or build community. (Gay, 2010, p. 3)

Growing up, my neighborhood, established 50 years ago, was and still is a tight-knit community, and families naturally looked after one another's children. It literally took "a village to raise a child." Even though I often arrived home from school before either of my parents, my elderly babysitter and neighbor, Ms. Mary, always knew when I got home from school. I knew I could go over to her house if an emergency arose or I needed help in any way. Although Ms. Mary was my neighbor, if she or any of my other neighbors saw me being mischievous in the neighborhood or elsewhere, they would all reprimand me and then inform my parents about what they saw. My parents then chastised me too. When there were concerns with my behavior or performance in school, several neighbors were teachers and would simply walk over to my house to notify my parents. The community where I grew up had a *real* responsibility for me and for my education, success, health and overall well being. My childhood neighborhood was a

collective of families that were attentive by supporting, encouraging, and disciplining *all* children.

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the ways in which African American teachers' identities were shaped by their community and more specifically, to understand how their identities transformed into responsibility for African American male students. An overarching idea from the interviews was the participants' ways of recognizing that African American students in their classes as "our children." A *sense of responsibility* for bringing up a child and taking care of students translated into the following initial themes: expectations that are firm and clear, receiving guidance from their families and communities, along with transcending relationships that are deeper than simply teacher/student. After further review of the data, I found that the following themes emerged and demonstrated the main areas that were inclusive of a sense of responsibility which are as follows: community, caring, Black teacher identity, and supporting a positive identity for African American students. I initially began the process thinking that I would amplify the voices of each of the teachers' narratives individually, however as I read through the transcripts, I realized that several of their stories paralleled one another, which is how I will tell them. This chapter will focus on the role that community and caring played in the lives of the participants. Notions of community and caring described by participants frequently overlap. These parallel constructs have been assigned to one section or another but might be considered equally valid in either section. In this chapter I will begin with a discussion of community and what it means for the

participants. Then I share the participants' accounts of their interactions with their communities and the meanings communities had for them.

Community: The Source of Caring

> When I was growing up it was like teaching was one of those professions in the Black community where it was very respected. You know people always looked up to teachers and people just treated them well within the environment. (Sheila, Interview 1, 3-6)

Community is a vital contribution to the participants' love and dedication to teaching and is inclusive of parents, teachers, college professors and church members. Each participant spoke of one or more ways in which the community had played a role in their development as individuals and teachers. Participants recalled how community members encouraged, pushed and imparted values in them, mainly emphasizing the importance of education. As stated in Chapter I, Black teachers historically had integral roles in the uplift and support of the Black community. Participants were beneficiaries of such caring because of the encouragement they received from teachers in their neighborhoods.

Community Callings: Otherparenting, Role Models

Participants spoke of specialized ways that the community interacted with them, which I translated to be the ways in which the community showed caring toward the participants. Consequently, when the participants in this study shared their life histories, the previously mentioned qualities were salient in their accounts. Lauren recalled a teacher from her community,

> Ms. Camp in first grade and she was like a mom to me and she would take us home because of the fact that my dad was in service so my mom was the only person there at the time . . . (Interview 1, 113-115)

For Sheila and the other participants, community included parents, teachers, college professors, neighbors and church members. This myriad of individuals fostered a kinship with the participants, which helped them to become insightful, caring teachers. Kinship or fictive kinship is a term that conveys the idea of brotherhood and sisterhood of all African Americans regardless of class, gender and sexual orientation (Fordham, 1996). Furthermore, according to Ebaugh and Curry (2000) in their study of how fictive kin were considered a source of social capital in immigrant communities state that, "African American communities in the United States have been examples of communities with a fictive kin model where networks were expanded to included individuals referred to as 'aunt or uncle'" (p. 194). The community has provided implicit and explicit cues with regard to the importance of education. For example othermothering (also known as otherfathering or what I refer to now as otherparenting) demonstrates a form of fictive kinship in the African American community. Othermothering is defined as taking on a parenting role for a child, regardless of blood relationship (Cage, 1997). Ms. Camp stepped into the role of othermother for Lauren and provided her with extra support and encouragement.

Teachers and professors in the participants' communities served as devoted role models and otherparents that nurtured the participants. Ginger described her eighth-grade teacher who was influential in her teaching career; in response she felt strongly about teaching and the value placed on being a role model:

> I remember she took a lot of time out with me. When she looked at me, or when she called my name, she looked me in the eye. It's not like Ginger you need to do this. She just had—she was a compassionate person. And like I said, I haven't talked to her since this day but I wish I could find her, I remember her last name, don't remember her first name, I don't even know if she's still living. I don't know anything but she was a role model for me but see that's the thing, she didn't know this and so even now with *me* being a teacher, I know I'm a role model to a lot of my students but they might not even realize that I'm a role model too. They might not realize until years later like, "Oh, I remember Mrs. Hill" just like I remember Ms. XX and I would love to tell her what she did and she doesn't even know it but it did, it made a difference, it really did. Yeah matter of fact, I think she was my *only* Black teacher . . . no I had one in high school. (Interview 3, 195-215)

Ginger's recollection of the teacher who was a role model for her was an African American teacher. Although the teacher did not realize the impact she had on Ginger, she made a difference to Ginger. As a result Ginger was also mindful of her interactions and their potential effects on her students.

As stated in the section on sociocultural theory, traditions may continue to be a part of a culture; however, the way of enacting the actual tradition may vary from generation to generation. Ginger explained how she was raised and what it represented to her.

> My sense of responsibility, it comes from, I tell you I'm at a loss for words but, it comes from within, I mean. I was raised this way, very traditional family. When you do something, you do it right and when you do it, you take it seriously. Whatever you do, it represents yourself, it represents your family, it represents who you are, what you believe. And that's my drive. And the biggest thing is that being that I am a Christian woman, anything I do now I have to do it through prayer so what I do I have to do to please God and when I please Him, it's glorifying Him. (Interview 2, 176-184)

Ginger's drive comes from how she was raised and the values transferred to her

especially her Christian faith. She has a strong connection to her faith and puts it at the

forefront of teaching and prays about her classroom and students.

Community was also influential in shaping Sheila. For example, she saw her

teachers at school she saw them in church and on occasion they had dinner at her house.

In this sense, community was an active part of Sheila's upbringing.

> I think it's just a part of me. It's a part of me growing up. It's a part of that whole
> it takes a village even though we didn't say it back then, but people looked out for
> you, disciplined you, took care of you. Your parents did but other people all the
> people in the neighborhood, the church, everywhere else you know it was their
> responsibility as well as your parents and we don't have that anymore and I think
> that's because we have moved away from the extended family. (Interview 2, 58-
> 63)

Sheila felt an obligation to be a positive influence to her students, and she feels a

responsibility to them. Her community emphasized the importance of helping one

another. Sociocultural theory (Enciso, 2007; Nasir & Hand, 2006) refers to these

community behaviors, such as helping one another, as tools that were passed on to Sheila.

She engaged in helping in a way that varied from her community but that nonetheless

carried on its traditions.

The community of teachers built Sheila's confidence and validated the fact that

she was somebody valuable. She elaborated on her experience with her first Black

teacher after integration in middle school.

> And I don't think I had a Black teacher at all that year and then by the time I got
> to eighth grade it got a little bit better and there was a Black teacher, who was a
> social studies teacher, and I just thought she was a kid because she was probably

at the time in her early thirties and she was just, she was just the epitome of what I thought a teacher was. When she had us in this class she would just TALK to us and tell us about what we COULD be, you know she treated us just the same of course because she was Black too and all the other kids. She just made SURE that we knew that we were somebody and you know that we were worth something. (Interview 1, 33-40)

Sheila had a teacher who cared about her and demonstrated it by the way that she spoke to the students in her class. Her teacher cared by encouraging the students and speaking positively to them. Caring was displayed through conversations not just actions.

According to Gay (2010), "Caring teachers also place students at the center of the learning orbit and turn their personal strengths into opportunities for personal success" (p. 50). Through genuine care and concern for students, teachers can become a major source of moral support and encouragement for students. Sheila was able to identify with the teacher who validated her as a student, and over time has attempted to transfer her sense of the responsibility for her students received from her community to her own teaching. The following anecdote emphasizes the tools Sheila took advantage of in her community such as a commitment to care by otherparenting. To this end, she frequently spoke to her students as she would speak to her own children:

I think this was my first year in the trailer and everybody comes to the trailer you know and here comes this crew. Here they come and I would stop them on that ramp before they got in and I'd say, Ok guys, you know you can't do this because it's all about perception. I said, I know you don't mean me any harm and I KNOW you're not going to do anything but imagine somebody looking at this from a distance and this is all they see, is a group coming towards them and you're walking and you know you got the posse and I said, It's all about perception, I said, and you have to know—I just talk frankly with them about it. I said, you have to be aware of how other people perceive you. And even though you know, you express yourself through your clothes and hang out with your friends and what not—I mean it's a whole different thing from this whole crew of

you guys walking down and a whole crew of female students. And you're just perceived differently. And they understood that, you know. (Interview 1, 453-463)

Sheila demonstrated care by talking to her students and letting them know how they were perceived walking into the classroom. Taking the time to explain perceptions of others and actions to students exhibits caring. Sheila, a veteran teacher passed on her wisdom to students and made them aware of behaviors they displayed.

Likewise, Marcus, a sensible, considerate teacher, lived by the words of his grandfather who spoke of each generation helping and building up the next. "My grandfather used to have a saying that, each generation has to build one another, if you do this you have to do more, if you do that, your children have to achieve more" (Interview 1, 79-81). His grandparents were an integral part of his life and conveyed to him the value and hard work of an education. Marcus recognized his responsibility to his students, especially the Black males in his class.

Because a lot of times they come in with their pants sagging, and don't feel that school's important and if school's not important where does that lead you? What kind of path will that lead you to in life? So, yeah I have different expectations. Why? I can see myself in them. If you can't see yourself in them as a Black male teacher when you're teaching Black males then you just have blinders on or you just really shouldn't be teaching. I know that sounds kind of biased. (Interview 2, 62-67)

He stressed further, "As an African American teacher, I feel I HAVE to give back to if I'm going be HALF the teacher I think I need to be before I retire. It's just something in me" (Interview 1, 400-402). In the same way, teaching the whole child is an element of culturally responsive teaching just as caring has to take place beyond the classroom.

Geneva Gay (2010) explained that the emphasis should be on holistic or integrated

learning, which begins with the sense of responsibility and caring that Marcus suggested.

He was deeply concerned with the well being of the Black male students in his

eighth grade social studies class, throughout high school and past graduation.

> Are you just trying to graduate a person from high school or are you trying to make a person that can go on and have a life for themselves. Don't get me with numbers, I look at PEOPLE, numbers don't mean anything to you, I look at people. If that young boy can go and I'm not even saying college but go and let's say take a civil service exam and get a job, a GOOD job in the government, then you've kind of done something to you know, IMPROVE not only HIS life but the life of others around him. But if you just want to just get them out, just get them out, just get them out, you know, of high school and be, Oh yeah, we graduated them. What's that mean? Can he read on a twelfth grade level? Can he think critically? Can he go in front of a person that he needs to get a job and talk fluently and with good English or are you just worried about getting him out are you just worried about him being your . . . you know your super star on the football field but afterward what happens after that's over? Or your super-star on the basketball field or the track. What happens when that's over? That's where I'm coming from. (Interview 1, 492-504)

Marcus was concerned with the skills African American males have outside of the

sporting arena. He was conscious of the short-term and somewhat unrealistic goals that

Black males carry with regard to financial stability and success. He was devoted to

providing a "real education" to African American male students in order that they have

opportunities and choices in life. Marcus's interest in Black males beyond the classroom

was centered on the connection and involvement his community had on his achievement

and he had the same connection and dedication for his present community.

I am reminded of an episode of one of my favorite childhood sitcoms, *Good*

Times as I read this transcript. This particular episode has just as much significance

thirty-six years later as its content relates to the eldest son, J.J. being passed on to the

twelfth grade. When his parents, James and Florida, begin to look through J.J.'s actual

schoolwork and question him about what he has learned, it is evident that he has no

understanding of what was being taught in school. Upon meeting the principal, James

and Florida express their dismay with the system and how it pushes students through to

graduate. J.J. is clearly being passed on in order to maintain funding for the school for

the upcoming school year. Florida shared her frustration,

> Our son is going to be facing a tough world pretty soon and we want to make sure
> he has a *real education*. We don't want him pushed through high school like he
> was going through a three-minute car wash and coming out still wet behind his
> ears.

When thinking of this particular episode, I find myself pondering whether J.J.'s teachers

provided him with a *real education* and made him aware of *opportunities* that came with

it. Black boys require support and encouragement in order to see themselves as

competent learners sufficiently prepared for the classroom challenges that they face, and I

believe their teachers are one of the main providers of this support. Improving the

academic performance of African American males is contingent on influence of the

cultural forces they carry with them into the classroom. Marcus's earlier sentiments on

Black boys and the significance of their academic success, performing on grade level,

and the ability to speak fluently are the opportunities that are a result of getting a real

education.

Family and teachers were also an important part of the community for Savoy, and

she discussed their impact on her teaching. She attributed her success as a teacher to her

parents for being parents who are "the bomb": open minded, compassionate and fair,

which is the essence of who she is and how she teaches.

> The way I was raised helped me be open-minded and compassionate, and everybody is different, everybody has different way of doing things and nobody's the same, nobody's better than the other person just different. So try to find the good and find the positive side to deal with students and how they are. (Interview 2, 80-85)

Savoy also talked about her style of teaching, which was connected to her own learning

and the influence of her teachers.

> My English teacher, tenth grade year she was just no nonsense and at the time it was like, "Dang, she's mean. But she's no nonsense." You ain't going to do it and you're going to close your mouth. And the thing about that, I try to be like that now I mean I'm a little hard in the classroom. But it means it worked for her we were all—we walked that line. We walked the line every day in her room. And she was a little small lady, she's a Black lady but she was a small framed and she didn't take NO mess. "You're going to do what I said to do, close your mouth." So we did and I remember that because she didn't play any games. (Interview 1, 74-81)

Teaching in the ways in which we were taught are things that Savoy brought into her

classroom and teaching procedures. In an auto-biographical account of her life, Jefferson

(2008) recounted her experiences as a child in school and how it shapes teachers:

"Whether we remember school as a joyful haven, a temporary refuge, or a lonely prison,

we became educators because of what we experienced in those spaces and how those

spaces impacted our daily work in schools" (p. 24). Savoy experienced school as a joyful

haven overall and attempted to continue practices she learned in school similar to those

Jefferson (2008) has mentioned for her students.

She also recalled the importance and the relationships that she had with teachers in her community. The community was such that she and her class were able to spend time with their teacher in a social setting.

> S: It's so crazy I'm in kindergarten [laughter again] and her name was Ms. Amos, she's now passed away. And we slept at her house, had a sleepover at her house. I just remember that so vividly. I don't know why I was in kindergarten.
>
> T: [laughing] You spent the night with the teacher?
>
> S: Yeah! Of course now you couldn't definitely—cause that was thirty years ago but that was so vivid we spent the night at her—the whole class had a sleep over at her house. I remember that. I do, I remember that. [laughs]. (Interview 1, 65-71)

Having a teacher in the community who cared and showed it by having students sleep at her house left Savoy with a vivid memory of school and what it means to be a caring teacher outside of school. Even though Savoy had been a role model to her "train wreck" female student, she described how she related to the male students in her classes, "I guess I'm like Mama, I'm a little sassy to them (Black males) and I guess they need that" (Interview 2, 54-55). Savoy recognized her role as "mama" to the young males in her class and acknowledged her position as an "othermother" to them. She respected the African American males in her class and was sure not to be a "bossy Black woman." Black boys require support and encouragement in order to see themselves as competent learners sufficiently prepared for the classroom challenges that they face (Davis, 2003; Noguera, 2003). Savoy provided the support and encouragement the males in her class required.

Support and Encouragement from the Community

Tyrone Howard's 2010 study of the importance of race and culture in school

contends that parental involvement was a critical element in creating ideal learning

spaces for students to succeed. Howard states,

> Parents were not seen as opponents in a tug of war for what was in the best
> interests of children, but were viewed and treated as equal partners working in
> collaboration with school officials to create optimal learning environments for
> students at school and home. (pp. 145-146)

The community supported the participants in various ways including parental

involvement in school, encouragement and lessons taught at home. Participants

described support along with encouragement from the community in various ways. Their

communities provided validation; built confidence, and served as fictive kin, and

otherparents and as role models for teaching and caring. Because the administrators at

Lauren's middle school knew her and her family outside of school, for example they

were able to effectively troubleshoot when she began having problems adjusting to her

first middle school.

> I had a principal—or assistant principal who was actually an African American
> female and she was and she was also friends with my aunt and she was the one
> who realized—and not only that but the counselor at the school was friends with
> my mom, so with the two of them they realized ok, this is why she's acting out,
> they didn't just classify me as being bad but they didn't classify me as that they
> said, she's acting out BECAUSE this is not the environment for her and they
> realized that. (Interview 1, 41-46)

The community support that Lauren had during her challenging middle school transition

was a benefit for her because the adults who cared about her recognized the real issue for

Lauren, which was trying to fit in with friends rather than being an out of control student.

This experience allowed her to have the same compassion for her students.

> Because I am—I feel that I am a major part of their future or their upbringing and I feel that I have to steer them or guide in the right direction and with education that is definitely helping them. (Interview 3, 9-11)

Lauren shared this commitment to her students and was concerned that they were not

misread, as she could have been without the support of community friends.

This commitment was especially important for the Black males she taught. She

spoke about her approach to guide her African American male students.

> I think I try to understand them and where they're coming from, I think that's number one just to you know find out their situation, you know a lot of their home situations are not the best situations and I find out what they're lacking at home and I try to give that to them as a teacher and you know a lot of times—and I have to say I've been blessed being able to do this but I'll be open with them. I don't sugar-coat things with them, I'll be very open and honest with them and I think they really appreciate that sometimes it backfires though especially the eighth graders cause they'd always get in trouble to come sit in my classroom which was NOT good but at least you know, they would get their work done—and their teachers would actually let them come you know, they would let them come up and they would call me, "Hey, so and so needs to come up, can you make sure they get their work done?" and I would stay on them and they would get—I would be teaching, of course, but they would have to get their work done or they couldn't go to electives and stuff like that and I had several boys that would actually—African American males that would actually do that a couple times a week just to come, and they would get their work done and stuff so I think that just that. Like I said, just finding out what they need and trying to give it to them. (Interview 1, 201-216)

Lauren's supportive community valued her as a student. As a teacher, she does the same

for her students by encouraging academic competence and success.

As Cooper and Jordan (2005) argue, "African American male students can be better served educationally when traditional notions of teaching and learning are reconceptualized" (p. 7). Lauren identified with the males in her advanced language arts class who she has had to "push harder" to complete the work because they simply were not motivated to work hard in a class with very few or none of their Black male peers.

> I push them harder I'm like you're in this class (advanced language arts) for a reason, you're in here because you can do it, you're smart, you're just like everybody else, but they you know, sometimes when you get in groups you want somebody that looks like you and they don't have that in that classroom a lot of the time and you know they know they're smart but sometimes they don't want to feel smart because they don't want to be in that class. (Interview 1, 322-326)

In this way, Lauren and the other participants provided African American male students the individualized attention and encouragement they needed. Specifically, the examples of Lauren and Marcus highlight the careful attention given to what needs the African American male students had. Davis (2003) states,

> As teachers are being held accountable for structuring student's learning opportunities, so must teachers take a more active role in understanding Black boys and intervening when necessary with social lessons that cultivate an appreciation for the importance of school and achievement. (p. 531)

Community influenced the participants' ways of understanding and structuring learning for their students. The way the participants interacted with their communities allowed them to become more active teachers in the lives of African American students. Participants talked *to* Black students and not *at* them while creating a nurturing classroom

community that provided Black male students with respect. Hence, supporting Black students and believing in them can result in engaging, caring relationships.

Caring as a Vehicle for Teaching Black Students

> The students, 'cause I feel I have a responsibility to them, a responsibility to teach them, to help them, and to guide them. (Lauren, Interview 3, 6-7)

A Caring College Professor

I sat in the small library conference room for an English literature class, anxious to begin anew at Peace College yet, a bit apprehensive. I did not know what to expect at this small, predominately white, all women's college. The professor with a head full of beautiful grey and black naturally curly hair walked in with a warm smile and in a gentle voice welcomed all eleven of us to class. Instantly, I relaxed and knew I had signed up for the right class.

Dr. Hanson was one of my first professors at Peace College, and the first college professor who modeled for me that it was possible for instructors in higher education were capable of caring. Sitting out of school for a year and a half, my writing was not where it had been, and I was having problems getting ideas to connect to the literature that we were reading for class. Upon receiving my first paper covered with suggestions and comments, I reverted back to the feelings of anxiety on the first day of class. I looked through my paper and there was a note from Dr. Hanson telling me to come to her office to talk with her about ways that she could help me improve my writing. A bit reluctant at first, I decided to meet her one-on-one to hear what she had to say. Once I stepped in her office, my anxiety left as her smile greeted me. Throughout that semester

a relationship evolved between us through a series of weekly office meetings. What Dr. Hanson taught me went much further than writing structure and connecting ideas. She taught me that no matter one's age as a student, caring is crucial to building relationships and student success. Before knowing her, I did not think it possible to have a caring relationship with a college professor similar to that of a classroom teacher.

In this study, caring represented a host of ideas for these teachers, such as encouragement, high expectations, candidness, responsibility, personal relationships, role models, other-mothering/fathering, tough love, being real with students, cultural understanding. Caring took place within the realms of the classroom as well as outside of it.

Authentic Caring

In Noddings's (1992) discussion of caring, she described it as a "connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care" (p. 15). Caring involves giving and receiving feelings, which equates to a relationship. Two themes of caring, according to Noddings, connect teachers person-to-person with students. Teachers become real for students, not just emit warmhearted feelings. Moreover, it is a way for teachers to display their ability to generate quality work while building relationships. Marcus admitted,

> I just try to respect them. I try to treat them like human beings even though they're thirteen, fourteen years old and I don't try to talk down to them. I will correct them, I will discipline them and you know in a way that is appropriate if they act out. But I just try to treat them not really as *my* equal, because I'm older than them, but they know that they're respected in my classroom and you know they can come to me if they need, I guess someone just to talk to or someone to

hear their problems. Or sometimes I'm just a sounding board. (Interview 3, 74-79)

Marcus demonstrated his ability to be caring and competent enough to understand the various needs of his students.

The experiences that the participants shared as students are reflected in the ways in which they discussed interactions and expectations of their own students. The major common themes among the participants were the ways in which they portrayed caring about their students. Teachers in this study went above and beyond to support students and it was evident in conversations about their students. Supporting students was a part of the identities of the participants, which result in a sense of responsibility exemplified by community and their active roles in shaping children. Irvine (2003) addressed caring by noting, "Caring comes in many forms and manifests itself in many ways" (p. 42). All participants spoke about the varying levels that care was expressed to them as students. The following statement by Marcus explained the way that caring manifests in the value he places on teaching; "If you're in the teaching business you have to have some kind of caring, some kind of responsibility for the students. If you don't, you don't need to be in the teaching business" (Interview 2, 37-39). For Marcus it was clear, what was involved in teaching students and what should happen if those things were not apparent. His insight into what is important in the "teaching business" reflected the caring community in which he was raised. Marcus recognized the potential in the African American males he taught despite the fact that they were not always working up to their capabilities:

These boys can be brilliant, BRILLIANT but at the same time some of them kind
of want to HIDE it, can't be too smart. Some of them don't care, some of them
are just brilliant period. I taught African American males who were the smartest
in the class, and they know they're the smartest but I've also taught some who
just, who just don't see the value of education and I try to impart on them, I say,
"Where you going to go without an education?" (Interview 1, 419-424)

Marcus was clearly devoted to making sure his African American students understand the

importance and value of education. He wanted his Black boys to realize that life was

more than playing sports or "hustling on the streets." He was deeply concerned with the

well being of the Black male students in his eighth grade social studies class, throughout

high school and past graduation. Marcus gave his students the same push that he

received from his teachers. He reflected on the importance of having that push as a

student:

Because they pushed me to better than—they wouldn't let me settle Ms. Paris
didn't like my handwriting coming out of second grade. She made me change it
and to this day you know my handwriting's pretty good. She said "I'm not going
to tolerate that King." That's exactly what she said so I had to change it or else.
Ms. Green was just very supportive in that she made sure that I knew my
multiplication tables back and forwards, she put me in the highest reading group
in her class, she was always encouraging others to—well not others but me to do
the best I can, trying to be a leader. I remember one thing and I still, I've told this
to this day, I was out on the recess field, something happened and I got hurt and
the first person that when I guess I got knocked unconscious for a short period of
time but the first person I opened my eyes and was standing over me almost about
to lift me up was Ms. Green and so to make sure I was all right and all that other
stuff so you know it's. And she also gave me a kind of love for reading because
she would read to us EVERY afternoon and she would read books that BOYS
want to hear like Henry and Rigsby and stuff like that and so it was, maybe the
girls didn't want to listen to it but I guess she kind of geared to what boys want to
do so that kind of endeared me to her. And Ms. Rich, she didn't take any mess.
She was like Marcus, you're going to make As or Bs in my class, if you got to
stay after school, you got to stay after school. So a lot of times I had to stay after
school because I was somewhat lazy and she would, school would get out at 2:15
but I wouldn't get home 'till 4 something because she would make me stay after

and do the work and you know make sure I got all my work done. And so she was she DEFINITELY, definitely in my mind she's probably the best. She NEVER would let me SETTLE and that's the key. You have a lot of students now who are like, "I can settle for the C. I can settle for a B" but you know it's just not something that was in her nature, I didn't want, she did not want me to settle for being less than the person I could be and that's very significant and unfortunately, and I can't say where those teachers now a days but I don't see as many of them. (Interview 1, 153-177)

Marcus recognized that the teachers that he mentioned cared for him in several ways that seemed to draw him to them. Mrs. Green cared for him by introducing him to books that boys wanted to hear, Mrs. Price because she insisted that his handwriting was impeccable, and lastly Mrs. Rich wouldn't let him "settle." All of which have had a lasting effect on Marcus and his dedication to the African American males in his class.

Care is at the essence of every act and word of the participants. Whether the teacher identity for the day is that of otherparent or warm demander, what motivated them all was the way that care manifested itself through the participants day by day. Gay (2010) explains, "Teachers who genuinely care for students generate higher levels of all kinds of success than those who do not. They have high performance expectations and will settle for nothing less than high achievement" (p. 49). Sheila demonstrated the genuine care that played out in her class.

That's it, you know what you're supposed to be here for, you know this is your job, you know I'm not here to play with you, I'm not here to give you candy because you got something right and you know they learn early on that I won't be passing out stuff just because they got a right answer you know and um I [?] a conference to do where this kid asked me, "Well, what are we going to get when you do—" And I said, "The satisfaction of knowing you did a job well done" and that was the end of them speaking about that. It just goes against everything inside of me you know to say, "Well, since you did your homework I'm going to give you candy for it." (Interview 1, 399-405)

Sheila's "old school mentality" and messages the she received in her community on the value and purpose of the meaning of an education are the same ones that she conveys to her students. The significance of the value and purpose of school for Sheila was that she knew what was sacrificed to gain education for African Americans as a result of her integrating the seventh grade. She wanted students to know that in order to attain things in life, one has to strive and work hard without always relying on others.

Sheila was also concerned with the next generation of teachers and their ambition for students and themselves.

> Well it means carrying on that tradition from back when that was basically all we could do, between that and nursing. So it means carrying on that tradition. It also means that I'm in a position to be a guiding force, an influence—hopefully a positive influence on some people who maybe don't have that in their lives and the longer I teach the less of that guiding influence I see in people's lives. There are two or three other teachers in this building and I talk all the time, who are also like near the end of their career, who are Black teachers and they—we always say, "What is going to happen to these kids when all of the people who started with us, when *this* generation starts to retire?" What happens? Because as you can see, even in this building, the younger ones that come in they have a whole different mindset. They either just only here for a while because they see exactly what teaching is like so they going to do it for a while until they move on *or* it's, I don't know they have grown up in a different environment—which they don't really *know* that they're Black and so—you know what I mean? They don't feel that responsibility they don't feel that because they've always been in that other environment, because integration was a wonderful thing but then it was not. It was not. So they don't know that that's part of their responsibility 'cause they're going to see themselves as being that. (Interview 2, 76-91)

Sheila expressed her concern over what the future will bring for the next generation of educators in that they do not all share her experience of a close community. For Sheila, integration has led to disengagement between the community and its responsibility to the children. If the next generation of teachers does not carry the same sense of

responsibility, as does her generation, Sheila believed that there would continue to be a

teaching and learning gap between students and teachers, and students will not obtain the

real education they deserve.

Sheila's sense of responsibility received from her community caused her to have a

heightened sense of carrying on traditions of responsibility to the younger generation.

She was mindful of her own son when she spoke of interactions and stereotypes placed

on Black males.

> I do, I feel that I can't sit back knowing what it is that they need to do and
> knowing what I expected of my own children and what was expected of me, and I
> can't really sit back and say, "Well that's just what they're going to be." You
> know what they're going to turn into. I *do* feel a sense of responsibility for that
> and I also feel a sense of responsibility for it because as I was telling Ms. Owens
> the other day when I said, "I know I'm hard on a lot of these kids I said
> particularly the Black male students." When they start talking about Black males
> just as a group I says, "My son is included in that group and he's nothing like
> what it is that we're looking at," and I said, "It just bothers me that through no
> fault of his own he's just lumped into that." So I do feel like I do have a
> responsibility to try to guide them out of that, try to do what I can. (Interview 2,
> 47-56)

Once Sheila expressed her concern about her son "being included in a group that he is

nothing like," my thoughts immediately shifted to my own six-year-old son who is likely

to be categorized in the same way because, like Sheila, I am sensitive to Black males and

am aware of the difficulties they are likely to face because of their appearance.

Similarly, Ginger and Savoy's caring included establishing relationships with

students with whom they felt they were least likely to fashion relationships. Each of

these teachers extended care to troubled students. Both teachers had no idea that the

relationships with these African American young girls would reach the levels that they

did, yet both were pleased that they decided to engage those particular students because it

was beneficial to them as teachers and to the adolescent girls.

Savoy displayed a wealth of emotions from joy to pride in *her* "train wreck" when

she mentioned, "She's a sweetie and I love her to death. I'm glad that I had the chance to

bond with her she's a sweetheart. She's a sweetie" (Interview 2, 419-420). She

recounted their first meeting:

> S: She failed sixth grade and now I got her at seventh grade and I mean she was
> a wreck, a train wreck and nobody could deal with her, she was always cursing,
> screaming in the hallways and I got her in my class and my teammates, I had
> teammates my second year there we went to Winston Salem for two years and we
> had her and she came in with the same attitude that fall and I didn't know
> anything about her until I got her, I think I heard her name but I didn't KNOW her
> and I wasn't going to pass judgment because I didn't know her. And so she came
> in and she was just, "Arghhh" [animated and angry expression] all the time.
>
> T: Was she a Black girl or White girl?
>
> S: Black girl very socio-economically, low socio-economically family, very low.
> Out of East Winston and my principal I think had this idea that I'm Black, she's
> Black, she can handle it and I'm going to be honest, that's how I took it. And I
> think that's how she meant it. And I told her I let her know in ultimate terms that
> just because I'm Black and she's Black, we alike, and we not alike and I don't
> come from where she come from. But we're Black, I know, but that's about all
> we got. But long story short, you know, I did find a liking to her . . . (Interview 1,
> 175-190)

Savoy's unexpected relationship with Tameka flourished into a "success story." Savoy

was very straightforward when she spoke with Tameka. She provided Tameka with

structure and set limitations while pushing her to succeed and these attributes portrayed

Savoy's way of caring for Tameka.

Ginger, on the other hand, did not think it possible that she would become so connected to Angel, as she had always maintained a strictly professional relationship with her students. Angel propelled Ginger to express her feelings toward Angel through daily hugs and personal conversations. Angel was the first student with whom Ginger had developed a personal caring relationship, in which Ginger allowed herself to display caring and a genuine concern for her student. She explained their relationship in her initial interview.

> For example, the student Angel I was telling you about awhile back. You know for some reason she became attached to me, I became attached to her. She ended up being in a car accident with her mother um, her mother was driving drunk, 90 miles per hour, throwing wine bottles and all this stuff out the car. They crashed. It almost killed both of them. Well the first person when Angel was in the ambulance the first person she wanted to call was ME. So she called ME before she called any of her family members and I thought "OH MY" so in a situation like that THEY didn't teach me that in school so what am I supposed to do and that's when I find out, that's when I kind of step out of that teacher role and I become actually more of who I am which is a compassionate person who's going to go all out of the way to address the needs of my students. Really the only thing she wanted FROM me was to tell me what happened and then of course I went to see her that evening to visit with her. So I guess to answer your question towards my journey as a teacher it hasn't been easy because my journey is broken up into years because every year is different, every situation I come across is different, every student is different and actually I'm different because I've matured over the years. (Interview 1, 19-33)

In the second interview, she followed up and explained why the relationship with Angel has impacted her and made her a different kind of teacher. Before her close relationship with Angel, Ginger would not allow herself to be emotionally connected with her students. She made sure that she maintained her professional role as a teacher and role model without becoming too personal with students. She explained:

G: I like to be compassionate now that Angel has taught me this other side of me.

T: She's broken you down?

G: Yes she has and I realize that if I if I step down a little bit to their [the student's] level, I can know them on a different level where as otherwise it's going to be strictly business.

T: Now does that surprise you?

G: [laughs] Well . . . [sighs] well yes I guess it surprised me. *Yes* it surprised me but I think a lot just have to do with me, who I am. It's just me, but I do find I have more fun [laughs] cause when I step down to their level, I can still do things on their level and I can. I don't know it's just fun, it's a different type of interaction, but they got to be ready to change when I'm ready to change [laughs] that's the part I have to make clear with them and that's why I really don't like stepping down because they don't know how to turn it off like I can so as a protector for me I try to stay up there and make them rise to my level instead of me dropping down to theirs. (Interview 2, 252-277)

Prior to her relationship with Angel, Ginger did not allow her emotions to control the way she interacted with students. She was able to keep the personal and professional emotions distinctly separate. After creating a bond with Angel, Ginger became aware that it is possible to care for students while maintaining her professional role and the importance of doing so.

Both Ginger and Savoy were able to transmit this particular aspect of caring by establishing personal relations within their students and pedagogy. Holland et al.'s (1998) study on identity is relevant to Savoy and Ginger's sense of who they are and their classroom philosophies are portrayed through their ways of being: "Identities are a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them. They are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways

of being" (p. 5). In this way, Savoy's parents impressed upon her fairness in her as a

child thus she has been able to convey this quality in her teaching. She explained:

> Our mentality I think just came from that immediate house, my mom and dad.
> And my dad was in the military so it's just, they came from families of diversity
> where, you know, they were taught tolerance early so we were taught tolerance so
> even though I saw and heard and maybe even was a part of it sometimes, I still
> came back to that tolerance that I was taught. (Interview 2, 350-354)

Having an open mind is an important aspect of caring especially with regard to working

with Black males (Howard, 2010). Tolerance enhances a teachers' ability to relate to

Black males and become understanding of the complexities they may face (Howard,

2010). Savoy has been able to apply what she learned from her parents in her classroom.

Equally important is the way in which Ginger defined the kind of teacher she

desired to because she understood the importance of caring for students outside of "being

focused on the curriculum" (Interview 1, 170). She explained further,

> I feel that I'm one step closer to finding out who I am. I said I change all the
> time. NOW I'm sort of defined you know, I want to be that person who's willing
> to work that and to really help that child that's struggling, you know whatever
> issue it is I mean it may not be academically, it may be socially but I want to be
> there to help that child or be the one who encourages that child to keep going or
> you know even if it's just asking them how they're doing—you'd be amazed at
> how many students who just love the idea that you're appearing to know how
> they're doing that day. I mean sometimes the parents don't even ask, "Well, how
> you doing?" you know it's those little things or just even that smile or just even
> that compliment or just you know letting them know that, "You can do it!" You
> know. (Interview 1, 176-185)

These candid expectations are characteristics of caring that inform students that they are

all being held to a high standard. Lauren said that she did not "sugarcoat" ideas to her

students, and along with Marcus, Ginger, Sheila, and Savoy, was adamant about letting

the students know what was expected with regard to academics and its importance. All

participants "keep it real" with students about their behaviors, attitudes and academics in

their classes. Marcus, for example was very forthcoming with his expectations.

> When I deal with them I just try to be very honest but at the same time respectful
> and they know that I care about them and they know that I'm not going to sit there
> and lie to them. If you're messing up, I'm going to tell you to your face but let's
> move on. Ok, if you're not doing your work, I'm going to get on you but at the
> same time I'm going to encourage you to do better just not going to give you
> zeros. (Interview 2, 192-196)

According to Gay (2010), "teachers who genuinely care for students generate higher

levels of all kinds of success than those who do not. They have high performance

expectations and will settle for nothing less than high achievement" (p. 49). So often in

the African American community students and young children "rise to the occasion"

because the neighbors and fictive kin in the community will accept nothing less than

one's best effort.

Siddle Walker (1996) demonstrated this idea through her account of Caswell

County, before the integration of schools. She noted the commitment of the community

to the success of all children. The community also expressed personal concern for the

students and felt responsible that the children were accomplishing goals and met

expectations. Similarly, Savoy reflected on her budding relationship with Tameka and

how she was able to sustain it.

> Wow, she's listening to me maybe I can keep her if I am just consistent with her.
> So then I felt responsible, I felt like I *had* to do it, I *had* to keep on. 'Cause if

there was another person in her life that had went by the wayside that, for one or two months was in her face but then cut her loose, that's all she knew. (Interview 3, 37-40)

After connecting with Tameka, Savoy's sense of commitment to ensuring her success became a priority. Savoy knew that Tameka was listening to what she had to say and that Savoy cared for her. Savoy became committed to Tameka's academic and social success. Lauren maintained that being candid with students was a way that she cared for them while "toughening" them up (Interview 2, 107-108). The heart of caring is shown by being "tough" or "hard" on students through explicit expectations with high achievement, consistency and success for students being the end result.

Taking ownership in the education of young community members was a means of caring through responsibility. The sense of responsibility the teachers had for their students was connected to the ways in which their communities supported them. As Jefferson (2008) reminds us, "Early Black educators circumvented and appropriated the system to ensure that their students were educated. Those of us leading twenty-first century urban schools should strive for this common goal" (p. 34). The sense of responsibility that the teachers possessed manifested itself through obligations to student achievement. Their communities placed expectations on them as means of caring and gave them support through church programs, teachers, professors, and family members. The teachers in this study, in turn, did the same for next generation.

Summary

This chapter established the connection between community and caring by illustrating the various ways in which the teachers interacted with their communities

through the caring individuals they encountered in them. Communities were considered an array of individuals who fostered the participants' ways of thinking about caring. The participants all had a sense of commitment to all of their students and specific methods of caring for Black male students. Teachers spoke of themselves as role models and "mamas" to their Black male students. Davis (2003) reported, "Clearly, schools are critical sites for young Black males as they make meaning of who they are, what they are supposed to do, and how others perceive them" (p. 520). Schools, teachers and various members of the community can and do play a critical role in the development of Black students in general and their academic success.

Traditions of African American communities and their relationship to teaching are critical in understanding the foundation of relationships between Black students and teachers. Delpit (2006) advises: "We risk failure in our educational reforms by ignoring the significance of human connectedness in many communities of color" (p. 95). They are a means of support, encouragement, and understanding, and they create essential dialogue for Black students. Participants were not solely motivated by their individual families, but through their communities as well, and carried this sense of community into their classrooms.

CHAPTER V

BLACK TEACHER IDENTITY

One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (W.E.B. DuBois, 1903, p. 3)

Layers of Me

When I think of "who I am," many identities come to mind: mother, wife, teacher, novice researcher, teacher educator, but most importantly, a Black woman. No matter what I consider myself, I will always be seen as a Black female first and foremost. The image that I represent has to be that of an intelligent, professional, articulate individual. There will always be a spotlight on me, especially in the academy. I know that I am constantly being judged and that there is always implicit pressure on me to perform to the best of my ability. Growing up, I was told to apply two hundred percent of my effort in school by virtue of being heavily scrutinized because of the color of my skin. "You have to work extra hard, Toni," my parents would always say. "I always work hard," I would think to myself, but the words that they spoke to became very clear to me as I encountered the demands placed on my identity upon entering a predominately white all female college. As I walked on the campus, my Black identity immediately challenged me. I began to wonder if I had made the best choice by attending Peace College, as I did

not want my identity to conform to the "token Black student," having no purpose except to become a puppet and forgetting who I was, a Black female.

Becoming a teacher has impressed upon me the need to examine the many roles I bring into the classroom and the impact these roles have on African American students. Life history allows me to actively journey through the events throughout my life while giving meaning and purpose to them. Collins (2009) contends, "For most African-American women those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences" (p. 276). The more I discover who I am and how I change, the more I am compelled to look at my changing identities within the broader context of society and history. I have empowered myself by defining who I am while exercising assertiveness and maintaining a positive self image. I am a mother, wife, teacher, role model, and an othermother.

The following sections will analyze the manner in which participants mediate double consciousness and competency along with modeling values learned from their communities in conjunction with their identities as Black teachers. First concepts of double consciousness, racial identity, and scrutiny of a Black teacher are examined. Second, I will address the significance of being a Black role model for students, including a positive black identity, community and family values that influenced the role model attributes, and the role of appearances. Finally the last section focuses on relationships the participants have with black males. All sections will give an analysis of the various influences on the professional and personal identities of the participants. All of the ideas

presented connect to one another and should not be viewed as linear concepts. From my experience, they occur simultaneously. Although they will be explained as separate concepts, that they are closely related to one another.

Double Consciousness and African American Teachers

W.E.B. DuBois's discussion of double consciousness explains why people on the margins are able to develop the ability to live/perceive multiple realities by looking at issues through the perspectives of people in the mainstream and on the margins (Merryfield, 2000). In fact, understanding my role as a Black person versus that of a woman are the two identities I contend with daily. DuBois used the term "double consciousness" to describe the contradictions that are associated between the social values and the daily routine experience for Black Americans. Double consciousness refers to African Americans' individual and collective identities. Being American and Black suggests inconsistencies with various identities, which include: American, Black, Black American, Black female and American female. Double consciousness addresses the notion of the internal conflict experienced by Black Americans living in a racist society and the powerful effects racism and stereotyping has on their identities.

The following subsections will address how ethnic identity plays a role in the professional lives of the participants and their appearance, behavior, combating stereotypes, and professional expertise. Moreover, it relates to double consciousness as double consciousness addresses the consciousness of one's own culture learned from family and community as well as that of mainstream culture. Ethnic identity is developed

through a stream of double consciousness. It is the process of navigating between two different worlds while living them simultaneously.

Ethnic and Professional Identity

Teaching requires several roles and specifically for Black teachers, identity and positioning play key roles in establishing relationships with students. Identity is a central means by which selves and the actions they organize form and reform over personal lifetimes (Holland et al., 1998). The role of ethnic identity is a means of reformation. As Gay (1987) asserts, "how we perceive our ethnic identity—in fact, our ethnic self-concept—results, from an accumulation of life experiences, personal perceptions, social interactions, and developmental growth" (p. 35). Above all, ethnic identity is a complex process; however, their identities as Black teachers comprised of them being polished, intelligent role models and upholding a standard of high esteem in teaching within the Black community. Ethnic identity provides structure for the negotiation of two worlds, one's own culture and that of the mainstream. Furthermore, ethnic identity is comprised of an individual movement of a conscious understanding and identification with one's own culture through the beliefs, attitudes and traditions (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999).

The teaching profession has been regarded as noble and honorable in the black community (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1997). Traditionally teaching was a means of sharing knowledge with the community. Hence, knowledge was the means of learning, which could lead to liberation and uplift of the African American community (Perry et al., 2003). The meaning of a Black teacher for all of the participants included being highly respected, having and sharing wisdom, insight, and values that are displayed

through teaching competence along with physical appearance. Marcus expressed his

thoughts:

> Being a Black teacher means you sometimes walk on egg shells, means you sometimes walk on that thin ice and hope it doesn't always break through and it's almost like an imaginary paparazzi is around you because you always feel somebody's looking at you or feel like you really do any wrong. It's a fine line to walk. I mean I think a lot of teachers walk a fine line but unfortunately there are negative images of Black men portrayed in the media. (Marcus, Interview 3, 129-135)

Marcus was especially sensitive to the typecast placed on Black teachers, specifically

Black male teachers. He has an established a rapport with White students along with

Black students and because of their relationships his sense of responsibility extends to all

students. Marcus described a conversation with a White female student who came to him

for help because she was having a problem with the Black students on her bus. The

student confided in him with regard to dealing with Black students on her bus. When

Marcus reminded his student that *he* was Black, she simply emphasized to him that he

was Mr. King. Positional identities have to do with day-to-day relations of power and a

person's concern of the social position in a lived world (Holland et al., 1998). Marcus

was quickly reminded that his White students do not see him as a Black teacher because

his demeanor is not representative of the stereotypical Black male, thus his positional

identity with some white students does not include the color of his skin.

Marcus also knew that there were stereotypes placed on him because of his social

grouping yet he maintained his professionalism and remained firm in his identity.

According to Steele (1997), social identity group memberships are specific to categories

such as age, gender, or ethnicity. Hence the social identity of a person could be attached

to a negative stereotype. Furthermore, he told the story of being approached by an older

white male after school one day. The man was "impressed" with the way Marcus kept

the school clean.

> I had to enlighten him that, "No sir, I *teach* at this school." And he was really
> somewhat in shock. I mean he was an older White gentleman, but he was in
> shock because I guess *we* [African Americans] can't do that effectively. But I
> really wasn't—I really didn't get mad at him because you know ignorance
> touches a lot of people so it's one of the things I had to enlighten him that yes
> somebody that looks like me can do the same job as somebody that looks like
> your wife you know so, it's just one of those things . . . (Interview 2, 272-277)

Marcus appeared to be accustomed to such occurrences and did not speak about it with

malice but instead as a way of informing and dispelling the Black male stereotype for a

White male. As a Black male, he faced challenges and stereotypes everyday, which is

evident from the previous examples. Working through contradictions that dehumanize

people and committing to social change are areas of the development of racial identity

(Thompson, 2003). He handled what appeared to be an uncomfortable situation with

ease and was willing to share facts about himself with individuals who were unfamiliar in

hopes of dismantling stereotypes placed on Black males.

In Chapter III, I concluded from my interviews that identities promoted in the

context of school for Black teachers include fictive kin and role models. Ginger and

Savoy considered certain teachers as role models and have taken on that role extensively

for some of their students while Marcus, Sheila, and Lauren understood the relationship

between themselves and their communities through the fictive kin of community

members and neighbors. The ways that the participants interacted with their communities is representative of their professional identities. Each learned from their fictive kin and role model relationships, which has cultivated their identities as Black teachers. Interaction of role models and fictive kin leads to a consciousness of the dynamic impact of the cultural values learned from the community, which are portrayed in the professional lives of the participants. Thus the construction of multiple identities begins through cultural activities.

In addition, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) describes multiple identities, which are acquired through the various values and experiences of community. She stated, "When we think about our multiple identities, most of us will find that we are both dominant and targeted at the same time. But it is the targeted identities that hold our attention and the dominant identities that go unexamined" (p. 22). The dominant identity I hold as an able-bodied or heterosexual person, for example, never gets fully examined by me because I am so entangled with my targeted identity as an African American (which is the one I explore and constantly refer to) that I never take the time to understand my dominant one and how it can be oppressive. With regard to my identity as Black teacher, I believe that my dominant identity, Black, has not been examined as closely as the identity I hold as a teacher. Being in the classroom and working with preservice teachers affords me the ability to continuously examine my role as a teacher.

As Jefferson (2008) argues, it is imperative to focus on the successful and powerful images of Black Americans:

> Through reading the lives of other Black women and writing my own, I uncovered the falseness of the controlling images I have internalized. I now work to define myself incorporating images of empowered and successful Black women. I reject internalized images of myself as less intelligent, less capable, and less deserving and redefine myself as a competent, capable, and empowered Black woman educator. (p. 29)

There has been a concise discussion on racial and ethnic identity and the ways it impacted the participants professionally in this subsection. Teachers' professional identities are always intertwined with race as Marcus illustrates. The following subsection will present an examination of the participants' experiences demonstrating their teaching capabilities despite the ways they have been positioned.

We Are Accomplished, Competent Black Teachers

Ethnicity and race are salient for black teachers with regard to identity. Some participants felt positioned as less than capable by white colleagues because of the behaviors that some Black students exhibit. Savoy was concerned that the boisterous behavior of some African American female students at her school was the exact behavior her colleagues expected her to have. Savoy was aware of the positioning and identity that was placed on her by colleagues, however she chose not to acknowledge or assume the dissenting role:

> And this school's majority White so colleagues that I work with and it may be unconscious that they think that but they do, they think—because what they see in the halls, the girls are *loud*, the young girls here are loud, they're rude, they're ghetto, they are. It's all they see. *It's all they see* in the halls so they think they're—their thought process is majority of Black women are loud and rude and have no couth—I'm going to show you that I *can* be loud but on an average day and I *can* do my job very well. [whispers] Do you think that's harsh? (Interview 3, 66-70)

I won't say pressure, I'm going to say it is, it is a standard that I have to I *have to* keep my crap together. I have to show folk [laughs] that I'm competent, that I am not one of those hood rats, that I am not the ghetto girl, that because everybody else that they meet in the hall because they loud, I ain't like that. That I have a brain and I have got to show them that dog gone it [chuckling] I can use it too [laughs]. (Interview 3, 53-57)

Savoy saw and heard the perception of the "loud girls" on the hall from her colleagues and does not want to be compared to the students, which may mean that she could be seen as a less than capable teacher. Moreover, she did not take on the identities and roles that Black female students at her school portray because she did not share those identities with the girls and they did not represent Savoy's persona.

Savoy shared her impressions of the meaning of a Black teacher with predominately white colleagues with respect to individual identity.

T: Do you feel competition? [*In a predominately White teaching environment.*]

S: Maybe, yeah the competition would not be as in my face you know. [*In a predominately Black teaching environment*] I don't know. That isn't coming out right but . . . I don't think that I would have—feel the need to compete as much as I do

T: Ok, so it goes back—part of the image it might be competing or competitive but it is also you showing your colleagues that you are—

S: As competent as *you* are.

T: Right.

S: Or *more* competent I mean.

T: Weren't you teacher of the year?

S: [both laugh] Yeah. (Interview 3, 89-99)

Savoy was selected teacher of the year by colleagues, yet she was still concerned with the

way they positioned her; she still felt that she had to be "better than." Double

consciousness played a major role in her reflection of what it means to be a Black teacher

as it does for all participants, and it certainly does for me. The complexity of negotiating

the identity as Other and as role model requires a strong sense of individual culture.

Savoy has proven herself as a competent Black woman with colleagues and students. Yet

she remains conscious of her actions, looking at herself through her own eyes and the

eyes of others.

Likewise, Sheila was aware of how she was able to function in various settings

and acknowledged that her identity was constantly validated which has had an influence

on her teaching. Sheila felt secure and assured in her identity as a Black female teacher,

she was grounded in her identity:

> I don't actually think teaching shaped me, I think I was who I was when I came to
> teaching and I think my teaching was shaped by who I was not by teaching
> shaping me . . . Well, the personality that you bring that helps shape your
> classroom, your influence on the kids from your background, from your morals,
> even though we're "not" supposed to teach those kinds of things but I guess that
> is character education, you know your belief in things that are greater than
> yourself and I think just the composite person that I am that I bring to the
> classroom helps to shape the decisions that I make within my classroom that are
> hopefully for the best. (Interview 3, 65-66; 70-75)

Sheila recognized that her strong sense of self is how she made decisions in the class, and

she was concerned that the decisions were in the best interest for her students. All

participants were very confident in their capabilities of teachers, regardless the college or

university attended. Even though these teachers were confident about their content and

teaching strategies, they also considered the ethnic part of their identity as Black teachers scrutinized.

Yet, having a strong identity is vital to Black teachers who maintain their personas as role models and teachers. This next characteristic surveillance of the identities of a Black teacher who constantly felt as though were are being scrutinized for everything and all time is addressed next.

Under the Microscope—Feelings of Scrutiny

This section will provide a short discussion of the ways the participants understood themselves to be carefully examined at all times. In the book *Beyond the Big House: African American Educators on Teacher Education*, Ladson-Billings (2005) explains the feelings of slaves working in the *Big House*, known as house slaves: "Unfortunately, many African American teacher educators feel a similar tension. They are *in* the academy but not *of* the academy. Their roles are circumscribed by race and the social conditions of African Americans in the broader society" (pp. 4-5). Although this quotation mentions teacher educators, it can easily be associated with professional teachers. Black teachers can be lead to think that they are *in* the classroom, not *of* it within the environment of their schools. Ginger recounted her feelings:

> I feel that the position I'm in, based on the climate that I'm in right now 'cause I'm truly am a minority within my school. It's not but so many of us based on the school itself so in a sense I feel that being in my position I feel like I'm constantly watched. I feel as if there are other [White] teachers who may have gone to like the big four schools [University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina State]. [They] feel that I may not *know* as much as they know because I graduated from a predominantly—or a historically Black university but then it's a catch twenty-two because they have this perception. Yet we making the same amount of money and sitting at the same table in the cafeteria, but other than that sometimes I feel

like I have to prove myself that I'm just as smart as they are and I'm just as
capable as they are and I can do the same job. (Interview 2, 18-27)

Although Ginger has primarily taught at suburban middle schools, she felt as though she

was not always considered as good or prepared a teacher by colleagues because she

graduated from an HBCU. Ginger had complete confidence in her ability as an educator,

which can be attributed to the preparation she received from the HBCU she attended.

This institution promoted behaviors that supported and encouraged connections and

relationships with teachers. These academic practices are characteristic of HBCU's,

which have historically been dedicated to teaching academic achievement by

commitment to hard work, and a desire to do one's best (Perry et al., 2003).

Confidence and ability were not the only characteristics Ginger possessed that

made her a "perfect fit" for the predominately White schools in which she has taught.

However, her polished appearance has afforded her the opportunity to work at suburban

schools that do not have a great deal of diversity among teachers. Appearance is salient

to Black teachers because of the feeling constantly being scrutinized, and it begins with

one's presentation. Ginger recounted her experience with interviews throughout her

career.

But I've always been at the predominantly White schools because the principals,
once they see me, they always think that I'm the perfect candidate for being a role
model or an African American for the students. And I'm just being honest with
you, I don't know if they think that I'm pretty *and* intelligent and they're like,
"Ohhh, I think that she'll fit in perfectly with the faculty." But *every* interview
I've gone to, as soon as they see me, they hire me on the spot and I don't know
what it is. I'm just being honest with you, I don't know what it is I mean yes, I do
feel like I'm a good role model and it's not like I'm being arrogant but I find that
interesting, I've never been turned down for a job. *Never*. (Interview 2, 92-98)

Ginger is an attractive Black woman with a beautiful smile; however, she is more than

just a "pretty face," which is evident from her successful interviews. She added further:

> This school was predominantly *White*. I was the *first Black female* hired for that
> hallway. I'm telling you as soon as I went in for that interview I knew this was
> going to be my first teaching job. As soon as that principal looked at me I really
> felt like he probably looked at me and said, "Oh she's beautiful, she's young,
> she's intelligent. I think she'll look *good* at this school." More like, not just
> being the teacher but just look good at the school. Like I would represent the
> school and he wouldn't be embarrassed for other administrators to come and see
> me. (Interview 2, 106-112)

In that Ginger is well-spoken and clean-cut, she knew those factors influenced her getting

a position at that school. She was aware that she represented a "good" Black teacher,

who held the proper credentials, and was attractive and well groomed; hence, she was the

perfect Black teacher role model in a predominately white setting. Juxtaposed to the

school hiring a White teacher who may not have the same credentials as Ginger but is

able to get the position primarily because of skin color. In this instance, interest

convergence is another tenet of CRT that is revealed. The predominately white school

can credit itself with hiring diverse teachers. Ginger gets a job, yet there is a double

standard at work because a Black female is hired, but primarily because she represents

the "right" kind of African American teacher.

Similarly, once I began teaching at a suburban school I am reminded of feelings

of inadequacy and inferiority I received from my new colleagues. My new teammate and

I were the most recent additions to the eighth grade and constituted the only two-teacher

team on the hall. Throughout that first year my teammate and I were faced with

challenges on a daily basis from students and grade-level colleagues. My team had a

group of students who were strenuous, and we were offered little advice on ways to deal

with them. *I knew* that I was a competent teacher, but there always seemed to be a

question regarding my abilities from my content area colleagues. I worked assiduously

that first year to prove that I was not only *in* the classroom but also *of* the classroom.

Although I was an eighth-grade teacher, my role as a member of the grade level was not

well respected by my colleagues because I was a novice to the profession, the school, and

I believe most importantly, because of my skin color. As a new Black teacher, I knew

that everything I did with students, whether it was academically or for an extracurricular

activity, would be subject to close examination by my colleagues. There would always

be positive or negative comments regarding my interactions with students. My actions

and behavior were continuously under the microscope.

Appearances are just as important to the identity of the participants as the

attributes they convey in their everyday teaching. Looking professional includes the

physical image but most importantly the intelligence that the participants have and the

various ways that image is portrayed with Black students. Image sets the tone of the

demeanor that the participants carry. The role of a competent, professional Black

educator is equally important to the teachers as knowing the content and making

connections with students.

One area of contention raised by teachers was that they felt that colleagues called

their qualifications into question. Ginger explained the pressure she at times feels:

> Sometimes *that* [being the only African American woman on her hall] gives
> *others* the perception like, "I wonder if she's going to make it? I wonder if she's
> can handle it? I wonder if she can handle all these children and keeping up the

scores and meeting with the parents?" You know, just a combination of things so—and it's not that it's said out loud. I know it 'cause I can feel it, I can feel the eyes constantly on me. Constantly and even when we're in meetings, they ask certain question just, you know just want to know my response or my perception, my view points on things. So *even then* I feel like I have to have my shoulders up straight, and articulate what I'm doing, and yes, I know I shouldn't have to explain everything I do but sometimes I have to do it just to put others in their place, and at the same time show them that I can do it. (Interview 2, 34-42)

Ginger maintained that she always had to display the image of a confident, articulate teacher to her students, parents, and colleagues. In her 2003 study of racial identity, multicultural and peace education, Thompson determined that many teachers across races find that their professionalism is called into question by parents and colleagues. Nonetheless, all participants believed that by presenting a positive, professional image and portraying it to Black students would demonstrate their contributions as polished, competent Black teachers.

Being a Black teacher has various meanings for each of the participants with regard to the interactions they have with students. Thompson (2003) further noted that teachers of color can experience particular challenges with students which can be a result of how they are perceived by students, parents, colleagues and administrators.

Being a Role Model for Black Students

This section emphasizes the importance of Black role models in the lives of the participants as students and how the positive examples they encountered influenced them to become role models for their students. Role models were a crucial aspect of identity development for the participants because they were individuals who were a primary source of success and support for the participants. All participants have become role

models for their Black students as a result of the guidance and positive reinforcement they received as students.

Lauren spoke of being a role model for students who may not have had a role model, particularly an African American female with whom she had become close and had credited Lauren for positively impacting her life. "I think that being a Black teacher shows or gives students, especially African American students, a role model, someone to look up to because of course you always encounter students who don't have role models" (Interview 3, 132-135). For Lauren, being a Black teacher alone meant she had to be a role model because she believed that teaching is a noble profession. A culturally responsive role model is one who helps students of color develop a critical consciousness of who they are along with their values and what they are capable of becoming (Gay, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 2003). The absence of a role model could have a negative effect on African American students academically and socially, for without a role model, there is the possibility that Black students will not have a strong positive sense of self or the ability to see their potential as they grow (Ladson-Billings, 1994; McMillian, 2003).

Role models connect with students, which impacts the quality of teaching and learning and helps students feel valued (Gay, 2010). Savoy addressed her position as a role model:

> I'm pleased that I'm able to, to be a role model, a positive role model that. I'm not saying that they all have a negative home lives, they don't all have them but many of them do have you know where their only experience with adult African American women is you know, somebody fussing at them or you know it's not always the case but if I can be stern but also love on them in a positive way, I think that's a good thing. I think they [Black students] need that. (Interview 3, 8-12)

> Once I gained Tameka's trust, I had to keep it. That's where it came from. Initially I didn't feel any obligation to her. And once she came to me and once she started to respond to my redirection and to my advice, then I felt a need. Wow, she's listening to me maybe I can keep her if I am just consistent with her. So then I felt responsible, I felt like I *had* to do it, I *had* to keep on. 'Cause if there was another person in her life that had went by the wayside that, for one or two months was in her face but then cut her loose, that's all she knew. (Interview 3, 35-40)

Savoy was aware of the impact she had as a role model to Black students and emphasized the importance of having a positive Black woman in the lives of students. It is through this kind of love that she shared with her students that authentic relationships with students are developed and role modeling takes place.

Formative experiences throughout the life of teachers not only shape the identities, but they also influence the ways in which educators understand teaching and incorporate that knowledge into their own teaching skills. In addition, these experiences are especially important to their identities as role models. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teachers are academically demanding but personally supportive and encouraging. Demanding academic excellence while being personally supportive are qualities that one of Lauren's college professors demonstrated towards her. She recalled an incident with one of her college professors:

> I did have one teacher though—and actually it's funny because later on I ended up teaching her son in middle school, but she taught me a special education class and I kind of goofed around in her class and I ended up making a C out of her class but she gave me an F and I was FURIOUS and I was like, "Dr. Small, there's no way I made an F in your class," and she's like, "Well, yes you did, yes you did," and I had to go to summer school and retake that class in summer and I was LIVID—actually it was three of us that did and of course we used to sit by each other in class and kind of goof off but I made a C but she failed all three of us so we retook the class and of course we got an A and at the end of the class she said,

"Just wanted you all to know you all really made a C in my class but I failed you because I knew you could do better." (Interview 1, 352-362)

Lauren demonstrated the importance of talking to students and being frank with them about grades, which is a part of her identity. As Lauren reflected on how she would react to the same situation over ten years later as a teacher, she responded:

> No it was. No it was a lesson learned. The lesson was to always push myself and I appreciate that she did it, but you know I had to pay for that (class). So she should have just talked to me before I failed you know before you know she failed me, ok? But no, I would not fail a child. I would talk to them. And I've had that plenty of times I've had kids with low C's and D's that I know could have A's or B's and I would definitely talk to them and push them harder. (Interview 3, 230-235)

Lauren understood the message that her professor was trying to convey; however, she would employ a different method for her own students. She would communicate and be up front with her students about their grades and her expectations, which is what she expected from her teachers. Such experiences shape Black teachers' identities and influence how they act in certain situations. In this case, Lauren reflected on her experience as a student to handle a similar situation as a teacher. She is cognizant of the manner in which a role model should help guide students even though she would not do the same to her student. Lauren's professor was nonetheless a role model who expected academic excellence and she knew Lauren was capable of more.

Cooper and Jordan (2005) emphasized the importance of a Black male teacher or an effective teacher of any racial background as a successful role model for Black male students. For the purposes of this study, I contend that all of the participants encompass

the qualities of a successful role model that follow. The advantages of having a Black

mentor include modeling appropriate behavior, strategic use of shared cultural knowledge

and potential common social experiences (Cooper & Jordan, 2005). It is evident from the

conversation that role models have a critical factor as a part of participants' identities.

The discussion will now focus on factors of a positive Black identity for Black students.

In order to be positive role models for students, Black teachers have to first identify

themselves as effective individuals.

<center>**A Positive Black Identity for Black Students**</center>

Tatum (2000) emphasizes the importance and complexity of identity. Identity is

shaped by individual factors, social and historical contexts, individual attributes, and

family dynamics. The following section addresses the emphasis on having an identity

that represents positive qualities for all students.

Community Values and Black Males

Sheila shared her thoughts on the meaning of teaching: "It just means just being

able to kind of help to shape what it is I feel like they should become." She wanted the

positive qualities she identified for herself to transfer to her students. Ginger spoke of

presenting herself as a role model by displaying confidence and hoped that she could

encourage her students to be confident as well. Likewise, Savoy expressed her concern

for students to see her as a positive, professional Black woman.

Marcus addressed some challenges as he considered the family involvement of

some African American students:

I'm thinking to myself, okay, what's our mentality in the Black community? If you're good, you can bet it, for some of these mothers and hopefully fathers that come to a parent conference, how come [when we need] volunteers at the school they won't do it but let there be a recreational football game, not only will they be there but aunts and uncles, cousins, sisters, everybody at the football game, everybody at the basketball game. Okay and I ask my son, "Why can't you say that at the band concert? Or why can't you say that when he's doing something else that's academic like get them in the chess club?" You know things of that nature? [getting family support] . . . I'm tired of those excuses so my thing is, it's very, very frustrating at times, very frustrating sitting here as a Black male, you know at times I think I'm more of a mentor in my position now and it's not a bad thing because I need to be a mentor to ALL boys and all girls but I think a lot of times your, your young White males, your Caucasian males, they gravitate at especially at this school towards me almost faster than Black boys. Well I know this for a fact. (Interview 1, 463-475)

Although he lamented parental involvement beyond sports, Marcus considered himself a role model and mentor to all students regardless of their ethnicity, and the students seemed able to acknowledge that Marcus expressed his role as a mentor to all students. As a result of his personal interest and genuine caring demeanor, he assumed a mentor position to White males more so than to Black males in his current school. Mentoring was significant to his identity as a Black teacher in that he is able to counteract the negative stereotypes placed on Black men. Yet as a Black male teacher, Marcus had the capability to inspire students, and this capability was a characteristic significant to his identity. It is important that Marcus might have influenced his students' identities positively by virtue of him counteracting the stereotypical Black male identity. Perry et al. (2003) explained, "The success of Black students may depend less on expectations and motivation—things that are thought to drive academic performance—than on trust that stereotypes about their group will not have a limiting effect in their school world" (p. 122). When his African American male students experience Marcus as a role model and

teacher, they may be able to better understand and further appreciate him as a Black male teacher.

Students may gain a deeper appreciation of Marcus's role as a teacher and mentor once an authentic connection is established, thus there is a mutual respect. Marcus was concerned with parents and their attendance at non-sporting events, which implied the importance he placed on values learned about ways to demonstrate support in the community. Supportive relationships that include home, school community, and parental interaction can nurture and provide academic support to Black male students. Sheila and Marcus felt the need to instill community values. Marcus certainly was concerned that parents take an active role in supporting academic functions and extracurricular events, hence strengthening the home, school, and community connection.

Modeling Community and Family Values

Ginger became ill during the second half of the school year and took a leave of absence. She shared her experience of the past year of reflection before she returned as a substitute. It was as if she had an epiphany with regard to the importance of the values her family conveyed to her:

> So it's the values before teaching, before the sixteen years, or before I became sick. The values were there but I didn't understand the values. *Now* that I've had this year to reflect on my life and go through the changes. Now I understand the values, I truly understand the values and because of that when I go back the values will show, not just things I know but it'll actually show in what I do. (Interview 3, 120-125)

Ginger found herself giving her students the same personal attention that she received from teachers in her community when she was a student. She knew that the values she

acquired in her upbringing played a major role in how she interacted with her students. Reflecting on her experiences as the youngest child and relating them to becoming a teacher, Ginger was able to see the value in hard work and dedication to the family displayed by her father.

Ginger also acknowledged that it takes more than formal education to build relationships and teach students:

> One more thing . . . if a teacher builds a child's character then he/she will be able to grasp the academics. That's exactly what I needed from a teacher. . . . Oh and the degrees didn't teach me how to be a good teacher, it was getting to know the students that taught me how to be an effective teacher. (Personal communication via phone text, 3/5/10)

Ginger was cognizant of what she needed from her teachers and knew that it was not something that she was taught in school. Drawing on her own upbringing, she has transitioned into a teacher who is sensitive to the feelings to students and teaches them through building relationships and character that perpetuate the traditions and values of the African American community.

Sheila also recounted the importance of her community and the value it placed on teachers:

> I think of myself as like the old school people, like the ones that I grew up with where it's that person who is respected and appreciated because that is what you are and not just because it's what you are because people think you do a good job at it and down in my home town, down East, you *still* see that from the older people from like my mother-in-law . . . So you're not just a teacher you're a school teacher and they're always like, "Come here school teacher and what are you—" and it's so cute but it's that kind of respect thing that goes. (Interview 2, 174-181)

Sheila's community has showed her respect and pride as a teacher and she portrays this respect and pride in her teaching and relationships with her students.

Relationships with Black Males

Arnetha Ball (2009) introduced the term generative change in the classroom, which refers to the ability of the teacher to persistently grow their understanding of students through connecting personal and professional knowledge. This connection allows teachers to produce original knowledge and pedagogical problem solving. Sharing and reflecting on narratives of their lives is one way the participants began to articulate their understanding of Black males. Participants recollected the ways their teachers and mentors demonstrated respect through caring in various ways.

Sheila acknowledged being very careful of the approach when speaking with the Black males in her classroom because she was a strong Black woman. Having the persona of a strong Black woman can at times be misconstrued. Sheila described her attitude:

> You also have to realize too that you have to back up off of that strong woman thing sometimes cause basically what a lot of them [Black males] have in their lives that is the woman that they have, not necessarily always in their best interest. (Interview 1, 446-448)

Sheila became aware that the identity of a strong Black woman could be negative and recognized the potential damage it could have when working with African American males. Adjusting the strong Black woman identity can benefit relationships with African American boys because respect plays a critical role in relationships with them (Davis, 2003; Gay, 2010). Receiving respect is just as important as giving respect, which may

translate into a strong sense of self for the Black male. Exhibiting her strong Black

woman identity could potentially counteract her Black male students' sense of feeling

valued. Sheila recognized that she needed to become more nurturing and supportive

towards Black male students in order to promote their success. Gay (2010) explained

that culturally responsive teachers provided spaces and relationships where students feel

respected, recognized and valued in their classrooms. Sheila was able to create these

spaces for her Black male students by adjusting her interactions with them and showing

them respect.

Davis (2003) explained the importance of actively understanding Black boys and

the significance of school and achievement. Sheila defined herself as a strong woman

and she recognized this position is not always in the best interest for the achievement of

young Black males. She shared her insight.

> I think you have to respect them [African American males]—well you have to respect all of them but you also have to understand that culturally where they are in their head as far as somebody teaching them and stuff like that and when you approach them, you know they're still going to give them but you also to do what you said for them to do, within those boundaries that you—I think the mistake that a lot of people make and that's when they get that push back from them is they just get up on them, they feel like—because our boys and girls tend to be loud that's just kind of how we are right, and they tend to be that way that they've got to get right up on them and you start making demands and things and you push them into a corner. Well they're going come out fighting but so you have to realize that that's what you're dealing with. (Interview 1, 437-448)

Sheila's strong Black woman image is transformed into the role of a Black teacher who

provided direction and guidance, which allowed Black male students to make

connections to how their actions may be perceived by other teachers. Marcus' approach,

like Lauren's is that of a warm demander with young males while offering them his

support. He admitted:

> When I deal with them [Black males] I just try to be very honest but at the same time respectful and they know that I care about them and they know that I'm not going to sit there and lie to them. If you're messing up, I'm going to tell you to your face but let's move on. If you're not doing your work, I'm going to get on you but at the same time I'm going to encourage you to do better just not going to give you zeros. (Interview 2, 192-196)

Furthermore, Savoy thought of herself as more of a mother figure in her relationships

with her African American male students rather than "somebody trying to tell them what

to do" (Interview 2, 58-59). Savoy's othermothering to her male students was a means

by which she built relationships with them, offering advice and encouragement.

This section represented the relationships and the ways in which the participants

interact with African American males. They are what Irvine (2003) referred to as "strong

yet compassionate disciplinarians, who are admired, not resented by their pupils" (p. 13).

Authentic relationships and a commitment to teaching and reaching Black males can help

towards obtaining academic achievement for these students.

Summary

Reflecting on family history, cultural background, and schooling experiences

supports understanding connections to broader social and educational issues and

interactions with Black students. Culturally responsive teaching can be better employed

in classrooms if educators take the time to bring to focus their own educational and

personal experiences with that of their pedagogy (Skerrett, 2008). For Black teachers,

ethnicity along with history, experience and professional community are major pieces of

who they are as classroom teachers and what they bring to teaching and the relationships they establish with African American males.

The identities of a Black teacher and the professional and personal importance of these identities have effects on pedagogy as well as building relationships and ways of interacting with African American males. Academic scaffolding will be more likely to occur, hence learning will be promoted at all levels because of the relationships built and nurtured by support of Black teachers. Gay (1987) posits,

> For most Black Americans, pride in their ethnic identity does not happen automatically, nor does it happen for everyone. When it does happen, it is the result of individual developmental growth and learning, as well as a person's changing perceptions of, and interactions with, different ethnic referent groups. (p. 70)

Double consciousness allows people of color to acknowledge the duality and complexity of maintaining multiple identities. Recognition of double consciousness also allows teachers to prepare their students for the dualities of being Black and American. Likewise, teachers' recognition of the multiplicity of identities can result in an appreciation for other cultures.

This chapter has reviewed the various ways identities of the participants impacts their ability to be role models to Black students. The participants possess collective and individual identities as Black educators. They are an aggregate of self-definitions along with the definitions offered to them from others and are continuously undergoing adjustments. Participants had to contend with the perpetual stereotype of being a Black American. This chapter also examined the interactions participants have with Black

males as an enactment of the identities they perform. Significant influences on African

American students, particularly males include making lasting impressions and

representing realistic views of success. Furthermore, the authenticity of ethnic and

professional identity seemed to shape the participants' pedagogical styles by

demonstrating the importance of respect in relationships.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Good teachers could help launch a child into a life that would otherwise not have been possible. (Siddle Walker, 1996, p. 150)

The Core of Who I Am

As I am nearing the next major stop on this journey I am reminded of the importance that my childhood community, Bell Fork Homes has had on me. It was a loving environment and neighbors safeguarded all of the children and became mentors to us. Each street was named for a prominent African American and was well known by the children for a particular activity such as kick ball or roller-skating. On Labor Day weekend 2010, I attended the fiftieth reunion and was reintroduced to the community motto "Unity in the Community." Observing the neighborhood teachers and elders with their children and great grandchildren smiling throughout the weekend made me proud to be a product of such genuine closeness and caring. The emotion I have about growing up in a community such as Bell Fork Homes is one that I cannot begin to explain. I am reminded of all of the teachers in our neighborhood who made sure the youth completed all assignments and tests with superior marks. It is increasingly clear to me that the commitment, responsibility and dedication the neighborhood teachers had for us, was genuine and it was an investment in the neighborhood children. The rich culture of the neighborhood is almost indescribable. There are connections across neighbors and

between each generation. It took a village to raise the children and the tradition continues in Bell Fork Homes.

Findings from this study represent that community involved a host of individuals such as parents, teachers, college professors, neighbors and church members. Bell Fork Homes consisted of men and women who like the communities of the participants were caring, candid, and held high expectations for the children. The residents of my neighborhood had a sense of responsibility for all of the youth, which has been an attribute of my teaching. The traditions that were transferred to me as a young child years ago continue to be a part of the culture of the community today. I now recognize that my life history has fashioned the kind of teacher I am and the interactions I have with students and in understanding teacher identities. Like the narratives of Ginger, Sheila, Marcus, Lauren and Savoy my life story is more than a memory. It connects me to those in my community who taught me respect, and mentored me. My life history, nonetheless, involved my return to the community to issue a talk for the teens. I returned to my community for support, and appreciation but most importantly approval.

The purpose of this study was to examine the life histories of African American teachers to understand how their identities were cultivated. Furthermore, this study was aimed at distinguishing how Black teacher identities informed the pedagogical styles of the participants. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do the life histories of African American middle school teachers influence their professional identity as a teacher?

    a. What experiences do teachers name as influential in becoming teachers?

2. How do teachers' life histories shape understandings of African American students?

Findings from this study validate the ways African American teachers impact Black students academically, socially, culturally through their pedagogical methods. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the significance of the findings from the previous chapters. First I will present a discussion on community and caring and Black teachers. Next, the discussion will focus on Black teachers and life history research, which will detail the importance of life history research and Black teachers. Next the discussion will focus on voices of color and the impact the narratives of the participants have on educating Black students, followed by the implications of this research on the recruitment and retention of African American teachers.

Community

Community emphasized the importance of family and it was clear that family was not necessarily a blood relative, thus the notion of fictive kin was significant in this study. The first research question sought to identify how the life histories of African American teachers influence their professional identity. Participants learned values from parents, teachers, and neighbors, which became evident in the way that the participants viewed their students. Culture was valuable because it was an idea shared, created and re-created through relationships and over time. Cultural modeling benefits this study by offering students a fresh way of thinking about generative connections between new and prior knowledge (Lee, 2007). Participants benefited from cultural modeling in that it shaped their ideas and interactions with students, they have transferred lessons they learned into

similar ones for their students. For instance, Sheila conveys to her students content knowledge, but also the validation and confidence she received from her communities. Likewise, Ginger exhibited a tolerance while Marcus extended encouragement, Ginger modeled how to be a representative and Lauren provided her student with empathy and caring. All participants demonstrated one characteristic or more, which helped the cultural modeling that occurred in their classes and had influenced them as teachers and community members. Cultural behaviors are influential in the development of the personal and professional identity of the teachers in this study.

Each of the participant's communities displayed a sense of responsibility and accountability for the adolescents in their neighborhoods. The result of such a strong sense of community is teachers who are knowledgeable about the various ways that cultural models impact their understanding of African American students. Figured worlds are spaces in which individuals 'figure' how to relate to one another (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007). Participants learned how to relate as fictive kin, and teachers as well as to family members and other individuals in their communities in the ways they had learned growing up. Participants entered into the figured worlds of the African American community as children, which have given them meaningful context to effectively teach Black students. The specialized attention participants received from their communities gave shape to the figured worlds they reproduced in their classrooms. Marcus' story of staying after school to practice his handwriting gives shape to his identity as a Black male teacher, but also it shapes his pedagogy and his understandings of what is required to impact African American students.

Life history advances understandings about complex interactions between individuals and the broader context of society (Cole and Knowles 2001). Examining the life histories of participants and how they shape teachers' understanding of African American students provided a context of community and culture that influenced the teachers' interactions with Black students and their behavior. Teachers and teacher educators must be knowledgeable about students' backgrounds as they are crucial to their pedagogical methods. "Thus the racial and ethnic background of teacher educator, their students, and their interests are those that have been considered and should continue to be raised in raced studies in teacher education" (Milner, 2008a, p. 335). When these issues are raised, there is a deeper knowledge and understanding of the context of community and culture. Sheila commented on those influences from her community:

> But I think they DID have a strong hand in shaping that from my mother to my aunt to my grandmother to the people at church you know, people like my first grade teacher, my third grade teacher, Ms. Hughes, I had her for third and fourth grade and [stern voice] she was a real strong lady, [normal voice] you know you just did the right thing, but she loved you, you KNEW that. (Interview 1, 333-338)

The correlation between life history and identity is that the individual voice can be heard and in so doing, the participants were able to express how their identities have been negotiated throughout their lives. Contextualizing community for each of the participants has connected them to what community is and its significance on their lives and identities as teachers.

Caring

Admonitions participants received from their teachers later translated to adages

for living and teaching. Marcus was made to stay after school to practice his

handwriting; while Lauren was required to take a college course over because her

professor told her she failed. Participants shared their accounts of particular reprimands

while they reflected on the ways they would handle similar situations in their classes.

The narratives offered multiple ways the participants received caring. Critical race

theory identifies these narratives as counter stories or voices of color (DeCuir & Dixon,

2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007;

Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Rumination of childhood events provides participants an

opportunity to remember what brought them to teaching and become accountable for the

motivation behind their choices as educators. Persistent teacher expectations with regard

to student behavior and instruction are characteristic of culturally relevant caring (Gay,

2010).

Siddle Walker (1996) further demonstrates the importance of community and

caring in the predominately Black community.

> The other point—worthy of a discussion of its own—was in the way the teachers
> and principal proved to them they were genuinely interested in their children.
> This was through their "caring." (p. 91)

The schools in Caswell County reached out to the community by offering classes for

adults. Principal Dillard was a driving force in the community to maintain the

relationship between teachers and parents, and he required teachers to get out into the

communities of their students. "If you could see the circumstances out of which the children have come, you would understand better how to teach them" (Siddle Walker, 1996, p. 87). Teachers were in the community of their students, they were familiar with the community climate and the impact it had on their students. Marcus recounted his behavior in class because of the relationship his teacher had with his grandmother.

> I had Ms. Pepper in third grade who was very close friends with my mother's mother so I could do NOTHING wrong in that class I mean because Ms. Pepper and my grandmother they'd meet every Sunday and they probably go over what I did all week. Ahh, and my grandmother told me if I ever cut up in her class she was going to get me, so I mean I had to be perfect in Ms. Pepper's class. (Interview 1, 132-136)

Having a teacher in the community reflected his behavior and expectations that were given to him. Participants tended to speak about teaching their students similar to ways in which they were taught. The participants seemed to understand that each of their students had various strengths. There are different themes of caring that can be cultivated in classrooms. The role of caring in teaching includes that of a relationship in which the teacher demonstrates caring by listening to student needs in order to help them achieve their academic goals (Noddings, 1992).

Black Teachers and Life History Research

Sharing their stories gave participants an opportunity to reflect on and discuss their life histories with regard to their identities and pedagogical practices. Ethnic identity is multifaceted yet critical to the individual and collective identities of African American teachers (Gay, 1987; Tatum, 1997). Ethnic identity is means of negotiating highly conscious ideals of one's own culture, values and beliefs (Chávez & Guido-

DiBrito, 1999). The participants' Black pedagogical teaching practices emanated from their ethnic identities and their community lives. Initially, I sought to examine the conduits of success for African American boys in middle school. As I read transcripts and took notes, I realized this study was becoming more about African American students in general not just African American males. Further, I concluded that the identity that I hold derives from a coalescence of people and experiences. As a teacher this awakening has helped me to become a more reflective teacher and I am constantly challenging my assumptions about students. The participants' understandings of who they are as educators have been refined over the years. However, the love and dedication they all have for their students was consistent.

Life histories of African American teachers are vital to educational research in order to take notice of and give utterance to exceptional Black educators in unfamiliar ways. Certainly close examination of the life stories of teachers of all ethnicities is important in understanding the interactions between students and teachers. Ladson-Billings (1994) contends, "We must also look for more innovative and nontraditional ways to bring the right people into teaching" (p. 131). This study has been able to conceive how this collective of African American middle school teachers saw themselves and their communities in their pedagogy. The pedagogy of Black teachers provides insight and reasoning for the ways that Black teachers and students respond to one another. African American teachers may learn more about themselves in an effort to improve their teaching and interactions with Black students by reflecting on their life histories.

Two main principles that guide life history research according to Cole and

Knowles (2001) are empathy and care. It was crucial to my role as a novice research to

honor the stories that were shared with me and in order for me to accurately do that I

listened with empathy and care. Additionally, by sharing my life history I learned about

myself as a Black educator, which has helped me to understand and interpret the

teachers' stories. All stories have a unique context that shapes them yet strengthens the

richness of the culture of future generations. I have ascertained the meanings for only a

small share of African Americans attributed to education. Nevertheless, it is increasingly

clear to me that our collective expectations and ways of teaching and interacting with

African American students derive from our culture. The elders in my community gave

me words of wisdom, which I did not always understand. However, I listened and

remembered the things that made sense to me at the time. Throughout this journey I have

been able to reconstruct ideas that mystified me as a child thus have helped me

formularized ideas for my students. Along with my participants, I am able to look back

on the events of my childhood as meaningful in my role as an educator.

The admonishments that I received growing up have channeled the ways I speak

to students and nurture them. The lessons I learned as a child are innately a part of who I

am as a Black woman. Brock (2005) shares my feelings:

> It's not just taking a slice of my life without regard to my past or future. Instead, I
> try to figure out what has happened in my past to bring me to my current place
> and how that relates to where I hope to go in the future. Simply put, it's a holistic
> point of departure into the present experiences of me but one still able to be
> analyzed. (p. 127)

Life histories are more than just the story of one's life. They are complex stories made up of sub-stories, themes and experiences from the lives and contexts of others. They are intertwined with the hopes, conflicts and dreams of others. They are inextricably linked to the environment created by the internal and external factors that shape human lives. In fact, Holland and her colleagues (1998) reflected on the Alcoholics Anonymous stories they have researched. "It became clear that there were regularities in the stories each person told, even as they were adapted to the different settings" (p. 88). The personal and professional identity of the participants began with their neighborhoods and communities. "Our identities, overdetermined by history, place, and socially, are lived and imagined through discourses or knowledge we employ to make sense of who we are, who we are not, and who we can become" (Britzman, 2003, p. 54). Throughout the interviews, the participants acknowledged who they were and were not. They had become teachers who were able to encourage Black students and develop personal relationships with them in order to understand them as learners.

Teachers in this study shared their experiences learning and growing through their life histories. The various situations participants encountered growing up had a lasting effect on them. Participants recognized the importance of family, personal relationships and expectations placed on them as students by teachers and other members of their community. Meanings constructed by participants throughout this study, illustrates the literature on critical race, sociocultural, and identity theories along with culturally relevant pedagogy. For example, counter narratives and storytelling have had a long history in the Black community and as a principle of CRT. CRT has also been useful in

examining the experiences of teachers and students of color, as well as the implications of systemic and institutional racism. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) argue for including "multiple faces, voices, and experiences" in the CRT discourse on education based on the institutional power of racism that permeates all aspects of schooling. Life history in conjunction with CRT is a way for educators to begin naming the situations they see occurring within schools as well as within their lives. Communication cannot exist without culture while culture cannot be known without communication. When classroom communication is culturally responsive, teaching and learning are more effective for ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010). This study has demonstrated the importance of culturally responsive communication through the ways that the participants talk with their students about expectations. Equally important, it has suggested that the culture of the participants' communities and their ways of caring are in relationship with one another thus shapes their identities as African American teachers.

Transformative Voices of Color

Each step made toward critical reflection empowers Black teachers who would not otherwise give consideration to their lives in context. According to hooks (1994), "Professors who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply" (p. 22). From a macro perspective, self-actualization of educators can function to inform practice with regard to encountering the achievement gap for African American students.

As I reflect on my own teachers in elementary, middle and high school, I am reminded of their warm hearts that were also formidable and consistent, along with the exquisite and tasteful ways in which they presented themselves. Each of the preceding attributes resonates with me because they are the exact qualities I possess as a teacher. Ladson-Billings (2005) denotes, "[r]ather, I argue that some of the collective experiences of Black life may find their way into the classroom, just as the home, community, and cultural experiences of White teachers influence their classrooms" (p. 17). Demonstrating these qualities are ways that I knew that my teachers wanted me to be triumphant in the classroom and throughout life.

In elementary/fourth grade Mrs. Baird was a truly caring, gentle and compassionate teacher who was sensitive to her students. I recall the loving hugs and back rubs she always gave to the entire class. The kind gestures made me more inclined to listen to Mrs. Baird, because I knew that she cared about me, I wanted to ensure that I paid attention in class and completed my work so that she knew I appreciated and cared for her in return. Mrs. Moore was a Black teacher who was firm yet caring, and was the first and only teacher to paddle me. I had always thought of myself as an attentive, yet quiet student who was respectful and hard working. However, Mrs. Moore reproved me, with a firm tap on the palm of my hand for not following directions. Because of this action, I realized that being a quiet student did not excuse me from following directions. Ms. White taught language arts, maintained command of her content and was extremely forthcoming with her expectations. She did not accept mediocre work from her students, and expected us to master her subject. Mrs. Moore and Ms. White were the two teachers

who provided me with tough love, and demonstrated the importance of an education and studying through demonstrating discipline aimed at learning.

Finally, in tenth-grade chemistry, Mrs. Boyle, with a pleasant aroma, always dressed in the latest styles. Although chemistry was my least favorite subject because of the way she presented herself, I always went to class ready to learn while pushing myself to understand the content. They were the teachers who made a difference to me and perhaps did not know it. These four individuals impacted me as a student because they were dedicated to their work, were fair-minded and had a no nonsense approach to teaching. As an educator I am inspired because I have the same expectations and concern for my students. Even though all of the teachers that I mentioned are not all black, it is through reflecting on my own history and experiences that I have acknowledged the way their teaching has impacted me. In short, I realized that their teacher identities have helped to fashion my teacher identity.

Through this study, I also recognized how the participants and I shared common themes of growing up through individualized stories. Each event provided a matchless perspective, which adds to the identity of each participant. Teachers' life histories bring to the class a multitude of perspective and experiences, which can contribute to teacher education (Bennett, Cole, & Thompson, 2000). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2005) ascertained the uniqueness that African American teachers bring to teaching, direct questioning, exacting in requirements and more expressive in presentation. Participants had the ability to maintain the two-ness that DuBois (1903) spoke of while mentoring students and helping them to develop positive identities.

Teacher Education

When working with teacher candidates it is important not to make assumptions about the knowledge they carry. Paramount for teacher educators is providing educational experiences that help pre-service teachers understand the role of culture. Have teacher candidates examine the central aspects of their own culture via life history/critical autobiography. Ladson-Billings (1994) ascertains, "Because these teachers' own cultural backgrounds remain unexamined, they have no way to challenge their intrinsic assumptions" (pp. 131-132). Ladson-Billings's ideas have implications for recruitment and retention because to be effective, teacher education programs will need to acknowledge the cultural lives and learning of prospective and practicing teachers and work diligently to increase the diversity of the teaching corps.

Implications for Recruitment of African American Teachers

The participants illustrated how important it is for Black students to have Black teachers. Overwhelmingly Black students are being taught by middle class white women, who may not have similar cultural knowledge and background to that of Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2006). This study highlights the need for the knowledge and understanding that Black teachers have for their students. When recruiting Black teachers, one of the main goals for teacher educators should be to have conversations with them about their expectations and experiences with teaching. Acknowledging the attitudes that pre-service carry will begin to develop an exploration of the importance of the needs of students in the classroom. Milner (2008a) describes the goals of this process:

Teachers from any ethnic, cultural or racial background can be successful with any group of students when the teachers possess (or have the skills to acquire) the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs necessary to meet the needs of their students. (p. 336)

Ladson-Billings (2005) further explained the value in reflection on life experiences:

African American teacher educators' biographies and backgrounds may create for them a dual existence within and beyond the academy. They know that although the two spaces are different worlds, they are both very real. The idea that the work of teaching is preparing students for the "real" world stands in opposition to a notion of multiple worlds that are complex, nested overlapping, and messy. (p. 18)

Discussing their experiences and encouraging pre-service teachers to connect with them through critical reflection will allow teacher educators to connect principles from their personal historical context to the present one. Considering that teachers do bring their values into their classrooms (Nieto, 2003), and as the underpinnings of these values are acknowledged, the life histories and stories shared will begin to have real meaning for pre-service teachers as a part of their classes. In her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) posits, "To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing and a host of other differences" (p. 130).

The education system has to adapt to the various ways of teaching that attract African American teacher candidates. In a 2000 study of preparing teachers to be multicultural and global educators, Merryfield found that if teacher educators had not examined their privilege, they would not be effective teachers of multicultural, diversity

and equity education. For this purpose, conversations with experienced, competent Black teachers would prove valuable to the area of teacher recruitment. Providing educational experiences that help pre-service teachers understand the role of culture is beneficial in the realm of teacher education. Equally important are strategies that include screening teacher education candidates on cultural sensitivity and the development of a clear cultural and ethnic self-identity. Screening teacher education candidates on their understanding of culture provides awareness of cultural connections for the candidates. Raising awareness of cultural connections can help teacher education candidates' understanding of their ethnic identify. Self-examination of ethnocentrism, teaching on the dynamics of prejudice and racism are also critical for the area of recruiting Black teachers (Bennett et al., 2000). Requiring teacher candidates to examine the central aspects of their own culture via critical autobiography is vital in that they begin to become aware of the privileges and biases that they embody (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Participants spoke highly of the teachers who were in their communities particularly the various ways in which they interacted with their teachers outside of the classroom. Savoy spent the night with her kindergarten teacher and Sheila recalled having teachers over for dinner, while Lauren referred to one of her teachers as being "like a mom" to her:

> I remember having one teacher, Ms. Cabella in first grade and she was like a mom to me and she would take us home because of the fact that my dad was in service so my mom was the only person there (at home) at the time. If my mom couldn't get off work she would always tell my mom Don't worry about it, I'll take 'em with me home" and she would take my sister and I with her home and she would help us with homework and actually my mom still keeps in contact with her now. (Interview 1, 112-117)

These experiences outside of the classroom with teachers had as much impact on the participants as interactions that occurred within the class. Teachers transmit information subconsciously about culture and society through their behavior and interactions with students (Enciso, 2007; Nasir & Hand, 2006). The participants' ideas of teaching were shaped by these different opportunities for communication with their teachers. There is value and potential for classroom achievement and connecting outside knowledge to content when teachers know about the communities in which they teach. The wisdom participants offered through their life stories enhanced their understandings about the ability and needs of Black students. Recruiting teachers of color while encouraging them to focus on their authentic/individual learning communities can strengthen their professional identity.

Equally important, teacher education programs can benefit from this study. African American students pursue teaching degrees at Historically Black College's (HBCU) and Universities as well as predominantly White institutions (PWI). Hence, student teacher education collaboration between HBCU's and PWI's can strengthen the skills taught from each institution. Teacher education programs must also emphasize that learning about African American history and culture is equally as important as teacher education candidates are actively engaged in their personal history. Consequently, utilizing the talents and skills of the veteran teachers and listening to their experiences is a facet of life history that can benefit Black and White preservice teachers. Moreover, incorporating culturally responsive teaching is critical for prospective teachers with regard to learning about individual and cultural backgrounds of students, which is an

insightful tool for teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Quintessential are new ways of thinking, learning and collaborating for the sake of recruiting African American teachers.

Implications for Retention of African American Teachers

Sonia Nieto (2003) explored why dedicated teachers continue to teach and noted that the number of teachers of color is declining. While teaching is a very demanding job and many teachers are enthusiastic about being in the classroom, this enthusiasm soon dissolves. Thus for a profession with a scant amount of teachers of color, the number will continue to get smaller. Implications for successfully teaching and favorable outcomes for Black teacher candidates in the profession of education involve the life history of the teachers.

In her 2006 discussion of mentoring African American students, Joplin maintains, "If educators plan to close the achievement gap between African American students and White students, academic instruction needs to focus on how to harness the many African American cultures of students and teach to their worlds" (p. 282). Developing collaborative relationships with school administration the community and colleagues to form a network to support Black teachers would encourage teachers to share their stories, which could influence other Black teachers in the community to contribute their narratives in an effort to produce several counter-narratives. Teacher input with regard to African American students and successful schooling would be beneficial to my participants because it would highlight respect for their unique knowledge and understanding of Black students.

Limitations

Admittedly, there were factors that neutralized the study in a variety of ways. First and foremost, the absence of classroom observations of the participants impacted how much of their stories I could share. In that I was able to share the words and feelings without relying on formal observations to support what I heard, I had to be certain to listen intently and pay close attention to the emotions and body language emitted from the participants as they told their stories. Even so, I am reminded of Patton (2002) and what he defines as the focal point of narrative research: "The central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings" (p. 116).

My familiarity with the participants at times I felt was quite limiting. Participants who knew me on a professional level may not have wanted me to know about aspects of their home life. While those who knew me on a personal and professional level may not have felt comfortable opening up about individual events and people that have helped shape their identities and communities. This study was also limited because of the small number of participants who were all from middle class communities. Riessman (1993) notes, "narrative analysis is not useful for studies of large numbers of nameless, faceless subjects" (p. 69). Narrative research, specifically life history is an interpretive method, and interpretations of interviews conducted are of my own.

An expansion of this study would tease out gender and class as it pertains to the relationships participants establish with African American students. The purpose of this approach would be to further examine the impact these characteristics have when

teaching Black male students. This type of study would also crystallize the major

considerations that gender and class play in the Black community. Furthermore, it would

refine analysis of experiences that shape the identities of the participants.

Final Thoughts

Relationships built by having role models in the participants' communities lend

itself to potential mentorships and cooperative relationships between mid career and late

career teachers. Most teacher educators of color are conscious of being perceived as

Other by whites. The more characteristics a person shares with those who are privileged,

the closer they move from margin to mainstream (Merryfield, 2000). Hence some

teacher educators fail to recognize how close they may be connected to mainstream

ideologies. Encouraging the exploration of the life history will assist teacher educators

and teacher candidates begin to closely examine the impact life history has had on their

perspectives about teaching. Researchers should continue to build on this line of inquiry

in an effort to redirect what we know as we work to provide the best learning possibilities

for all students, especially Black students (Milner, 2006).

Inasmuch that teachers are lifelong learners and hold various roles in the

classroom, they must be empowered by connecting their lives to their teaching and being

able to share these experiences with their students. These shared experiences are

especially important for African American teachers and students in the interest of the

voice of the participants and the African American students they teach. Each story came

from various times and places, yet each participant maintained their individual culture

and community while attempting to pass on the historical traditions to their students.

Marcus admitted, "I see a need for somebody that's going to not only instruct them, but

also care for them at the same time, because there are some people in education that don't

need to be in education" (Interview 3, 65-67). Yet, Savoy and Lauren wanted students to

recognize the ways in which they are fair with their interactions with all students. Ginger

was reminded of the values she was given from community,

> So it's the values before teaching, before the sixteen years, or before I became
> sick. The values were there but I didn't understand the values. *Now* that I've had
> this year to reflect on my life and go through the changes, now I understand the
> values, I truly understand the values and because of that when I go back the
> values will show, not just things I know but it'll actually show in what I do. So
> [chuckles] I know, interesting. (Interview 3, 120-125)

In her wisdom, Sheila shared her hope for new teachers and their students,

> My hope is that somehow we get a handle on making them accountable because
> you know when we went through the whole thing in education about self-esteem
> and building up kids self-esteem and nobody can fail and you got to be praising
> them all the time. Well it becomes empty right because you know if you've done
> something you're supposed to do or you've done this small thing and I'm just
> gushing all over you then what happens when you do something really big you
> know it doesn't make any difference and then they grow up thinking that
> everything comes so easily to them and I think that with our children a lot of that
> has happened . . . (Interview 2, 133-139)

Each participant brought to this academic mosaic, their individual stories, yet somehow,

they seemed to "fit" together by virtue of themes that include; community, caring, and

Black teacher identity. As Atkinson (1998) reminds us,

> A personal story can be like a trail, or a journey, lending us somewhere
> completely new. Or it could so strongly validate something we already know that
> could lead us to a new conclusion about something we were tentative about
> previously. (p. 73)

I often ruminate on the Bell Fork Homes "Unity in the Community" theme for the

neighborhood's fiftieth anniversary. I marvel at the community that helped shape the

Black person/woman I am. The local newspaper reported:

> Neighborhood resident Brian Jackson found it difficult to keep his composure when he stood up to talk about what the people of Bell Fork Homes had done for him.
>
> "When I was up there, all of it started coming back," he said.
>
> The neighborhood had been a family to him as he grew up, he said, with community residents babysitting him as a child and mentoring him as a young adult.
>
> If all children had a similar support system growing up, he said, "our country couldn't help but be better." (Hodge, 2010, para. 9-12)

The previous comment demonstrated the care and nurturing that Brian received from his

neighborhood community. He exemplifies a Black male who recognized the worth in the

support and mentorship of his community. Findings from this study broaden the dialogue

regarding definitions and complexities involved with increasing the role that the

narratives of African American teachers play in their pedagogical methods. This study's

findings also suggest that examining life histories through the lens of identity and

culturally-relevant pedagogy uncovers areas of strengths that are not fully developed in

the current research literature. These areas of strengths, the influence of the Black

community on ethnic identity, the ways of caring in the Black community, and the

importance of the Black community as a vehicle for the academic success of Black

students should be considered in any serious discourse regarding the success of African

American students.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

Consent Form for Interview

Project Title: Teaching to Make a Difference for African American Males—The lives of African American Middle School Teachers: Intersecting Life History, Identity, and Critical Race Theory

Project Director: Dr. Colleen Fairbanks

Participant's Name: _____

Purpose of Study
The purpose of this project is to determine how the life history of the African American teachers position African American males students and creates spaces for their success.

Procedures for the Interview
You will be completing a series of three 90 minute to two hour interview. During the interviews you will be asked about your experiences growing up, becoming teachers, and working with African American males. I intend them to be conversational and at no time do I want you to feel uncomfortable. At any time, if you are uncomfortable please let me know and we can stop. With your permission the interview will be audio recorded for accuracy.

Risks and Discomforts
You may view the interview questions before we begin and decline to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. If you are concerned with protecting your privacy, please be assured that all data will remain confidential.

Maintaining Confidentiality
Raw data from this study will not be shared with others. In any written reports of the data (e.g.: publications or presentations) your identity will be protected by use of a pseudonym. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office and/or on my personal computer. Electronic data collected will be stored on my personal computer in a password protected file. All data will be kept for five years after the completion of the study. When data are destroyed, paper copies will be shredded and electronic files will be erased.

Potential Benefits
Participating in this study will assist me in exploring a fresh lens in which to examine the role of African American teachers when teaching African American male students. Using the life histories of teachers to carefully canvass the ways in which they understand and create spaces for African American male students to obtain success while examining the history of their lives provides a counter discourse that is seldom heard. This discourse is critical because the historical experiences of African American teachers play a role in their teaching and this research will highlight these benefits.

Consent
By signing this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary.

You have the right to review the interview instrument before you sign the consent letter. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at 336-256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Dr. Colleen Fairbanks at 336-334-3746 or Toni Williams by calling (336)288-4888. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the interview with Toni Williams

Participant's Signature   Date

ORAL PRESENTATION TO PARTICIPANTS

My name is Toni M. Williams and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting research for my dissertation "Teaching to Make a Difference for African American Males". This research will shed light on the stories of African American teachers whose voices are seldom heard in research. The research will provide a counter discourse, which will allow society to get the perspective of African American teachers as well as learning how the history of their lives has impacted their teaching and creating spaces for African American males to succeed. As such, I am recruiting African American teachers who are currently teaching in middle school.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in three 90 minute to two hour interviews. These interviews will take place at a time and location convenient to you. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office and/or on my personal computer. Electronic data collected will be stored on my personal computer in a password protected file. All data will be kept for five years after the completion of the study. When data are destroyed, paper copies will be shredded and electronic files will be erased/deleted. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to review the interview instrument before you sign the consent letter. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

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Please be aware that there are no individual benefits for your participation in this study however, your participation will help you to reflect on your identity and what you bring consciously and unconsciously into the classroom as an educator.