RACIAL IDENTITY, RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION AND STEREOTYPE THREAT: THE IMPACT ON STUDENT EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

A Dissertation

by

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SPRING 2011
RACIAL IDENTITY, RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION AND STEREOTYPE THREAT: THE IMPACT ON STUDENT EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my mother, Minter Beatrice Stevens of 87 years, who has always been an encouragement me, letting me know the sky is the limit. I could do whatever my heart desired. Also to my sister Deborah Stevens who has struggled all her life partly because of her challenged early beginnings in schooling. As a result of this study, a possible glimpse into why her challenges like so many others could have been avoided.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation came about because of my search for answers involving the difference in treatment of African Americans particularly in schooling. It is the culmination of a journey which started long ago as a professional educator. A journey first inspired by my mother, Minter Stevens. It is a journey reflective of a life’s work and accomplishment, second only to the rearing of my son.

I am grateful to my son Amariah Stevens-Martin and his new wife Darleen for your patience and your continued inspiration. And to my three-year-old granddaughter who motivated me to complete this work and who holds great promise and potential. Also, to my eldest sister, Allie (Frieda) Woodberry-Jenkins and her husband Dennis, who continued to encourage me and provide comfort during challenging times, to my youngest brother Jerome (Jerry) Stevens and his wife Lil for your years of unwavering patience and support, and to my other brothers and sisters Diane Garth, Beatrice (Jackie) and her husband Otis Brewer, Rev. Stevens and his wife Vicky, William (Billy) and his wife Louise, my sister Deborah Stevens and my nephew-son Deon DeSean Foreman, and all other extended family members for your confidence, encouragement and support.

A special thanks and appreciation goes to the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Rosemary Blanchard for encouraging and inspiring me to complete this work. Thank you for the countless hours spent in your office, at your kitchen table, lunches and dinners. I will forever be grateful for your unwavering commitment to see it through. Much gratitude goes to Dr. Virginia Dixon for recommending Dr. Blanchard. The
knowledge and wisdom you have shared of your years of experience in education makes you a pillar in the field and force to be reckon with. And to Dr. Figueroa who was the first to begin this journey with me as my faculty advisor. Your insistence of the importance of my becoming familiar with the writings of the leaders in the field of my research was priceless and for that I will continue to keep abreast. Thank you for your encouraging guidance every step of the way. And to Dr. Jolynn Britt, for your expertise in statistical analysis, I thank you. You brought me from zero to having a working understanding of statistical analysis. So much so, I am seriously considering continued work in the area of statistical analysis.

To my cohort II family of the Sacramento State University doctoral program, thank you for sharing your experiences, providing your support and making this experience a very rewarding one. A special thanks to Rhinny Hang and Daryl Camp for your encouragement in helping with the studying for the qualifying exams, dissertation and sharing family times together. A special thanks to Daryl for keeping the deadlines in the forefront to keep us on track.

To St. Paul Baptist Church community particularly, Pastor Williams, for allowing me the opportunity to conduct my research at the church, to the parents for their consent, to the youth for their cooperation, to the youth minster, youth teachers and communications ministry for making it all happen without which it may not have been possible.
To my professional colleagues at Rosa Parks Middle School and Luther Burbank High School, where through my experiences I first began to question the policies, practices and learning strategies as they affected students of color, particularly, African Americans. Thank you for your inspiration, motivation and support to pursue doctoral studies. It has been well worth the journey.
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Abstract

of

RACIAL IDENTITY, RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION AND STEREOTYPE THREAT: THE IMPACT ON STUDENT EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

by

Francine Stevens

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between middle/high school students’ racial identity, religious participation, and perception of stereotype threat and the effect on student educational outcomes (student engagement, student achievement, academic identification, withdrawal, and dropout). The focus of this study was on African American students who participate in church-related religious activity on a regular basis.

The Black community church has long provided the vehicle for the open expression of African American social, political, and educational discourse and organization needed to enact critically needed community change efforts. Environment assets such as the community Black church involvement for African American students may prove to hold resources for overcoming the achievement gap. When African Americans as a church community taught students who were denied access to public schools, the curriculum was culturally relevant and the teachers shared the same values, beliefs, traditions, and custom as the students they taught (hooks, 1992). This contributed to students’ feeling of belonging and identity and provided critical social capital, which is
significant for African American student learning and development as a marginalized ethnic group.

The literature reviewed for this study provides a discussion of four themes. The first theme examines the theoretical frames informing this study. These include: racial identity theory, critical race theory, stereotype threat theory, community cultural wealth, and critical social capital. The second theme provides a clear cultural context for the understanding and interpretation of the social and political climate of the study. This theme reviews the concept of race, racial socialization, and institutional racism as a pretense of the sociopolitical institutions and agencies in society, particularly education. The third theme explores the importance of youth development and community-based organizations in building self-esteem, racial identity development, and ethnic efficacy of adolescents. This includes the significance of the Black church community for African Americans politically, socially, and spiritually in racial identity development and ethnic pride. The fourth theme reviews the educational implications and outcomes these social and cultural factors have for African American middle/high school students attending American public schools.

The research design was mixed-method, quantitative and qualitative. Data was collected from a 36-question self-reported survey, focus group activity, and adult interviews, which were transcribed and analyzed for patterns and themes. The researcher utilized the linkages among the various data sources through coding, categories, and concepts to identify relevant findings related to the research questions. The researcher
then triangulated the various data sources to build an understanding of student subjects’ experience of their world and the implication for educational outcomes.

The findings indicated there were both statistically significant (p= .05 or less) and statistically suggestive (p=.10 or less) correlations between racial identity, religious participation, and stereotype threat and the impact on education outcomes such as grade point average, academic identity, academic engagement, social acceptance, future aspirations, as well as self-handicapping and academic disengagement. Students who experience stereotype threat without the buffer of resilience-making support, are more likely to participate in self handicapping and disengaging behavior over time. Steele (1994) suggested that these are the very students who eventually withdraw and/or drop out of school. The cost to the nation and states for students failing to complete high school is measured in billions of dollars. In addition, for students who drop out of school, the cost in human potential is priceless.

The concluding chapter discusses the implications of the study including implications for transformational leadership, policy implications, and suggests future research studies with the final reflection of the researcher.

It is imperative that researchers, educators, and policymakers explore the influencing factors and cultural assets of African Americans in their efforts to close the achievement gap, a persistent phenomenon that continues to undermine the national security and economic stability of the United States. The cost to the nation for students who do not complete high school or are unable to function and contribute as citizens is
catastrophic. This study attempts to provide some possibilities for further knowledge and understanding research and reform efforts.
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Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954) was the first attempt toward race-based educational equity reform in this country. This landmark decision was enacted after decades of legalized (Plessey v. Ferguson) racial segregation and racial inequity in education for formerly enslaved African Americans. In that decision, the justices clearly stated their purpose of striking down segregation in public schools was to increase education equity and to eliminate the racial stigma associated with segregation (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). Chief Justice Warren wrote, “that to separate African Americans from others of similar age and qualification on the bases of their race (racism) would generate feelings of inferiority which may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to be undone” (as cited in Martin, 1988, p. 173). Brown v. Board of Education represents the United States’ acknowledgement of its struggles with issues of race, racism, and racial equality (Zirkel & Cantor). Fifty years after Brown v. Board of Education, schools remain segregated and issues of racial and ethnic stigma (negative stereotypes) and their relationship to identity and motivation remain central in education reform (Zirkel, 2005). In the end, all that Brown was able to address was the end of legally sanctioned racial segregation in public schools.

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, legislated education reform efforts requiring the disaggregation of data for the different ethnic
subgroups, represents the extent to which underrepresented minorities (URM) continue to be underserved nationwide in the public school system. Educational research indicates possible factors associated with the lack of positive educational outcomes include intellectual deficits (Hernstein, 1994), cultural deficits, cultural differences (Bourdieu, 1986), and institutional racism (Helms, 2005) among others (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005). However, recent research by Claude Steele (1997) suggested that individuals may suffer negative performance outcomes (lower standardized test scores, less engagement with academics, higher drop-out rate, low graduation rates) because they are burdened by the prospect of conforming to cultural stereotypes which position them to doubt their intellectual and academic abilities. This burden is called “stereotype threat” (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

It is the social psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype (Taylor, Gilborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Stereotype threat is a situational threat – a threat in the air – that in general form can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists (e.g., skateboarders, older adults, White men, gang members) (Steele, 1995). Where negative stereotypes about these groups apply, members can fear being reduced to that stereotype. And for those who identify with the domain to which the stereotype is relevant, this predicament can be self-threatenning (Taylor et al., 2009).
Problem Statement

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954), the Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation in schools has been called the defining legal decision of the 20th century (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002; Kluger, 1977), framing as it did the United States’ struggle with issues of race and racial equality (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). In that decision, the justices clearly stated they were striking down segregation in public schools both to increase educational equity and to eliminate the racial stigma associated with segregation. According to Tate (1994), the stigma of imputed Black inferiority was derived from the slave condition.

Fredrick Douglas (1852) wrote, “We are then a persecuted people; not because we are colored, but simply because that color has for a series of years been coupled in the public mind with degradation of slavery and servitude” (p. 18).

Chief Justice Warren drew upon the psychological literature (as cited in Martin, 1998), which emphasized the stigma associated with racial segregation and the internalized “self-hatred,” defeatist attitude, and lowering of professional ambitions that resulted from it (Scott, 1997). At the heart of Brown v. Board of Education was the conception that if de jure segregation stigmatized African Americans by conveying a message of inferiority or unworthiness, desegregation would reduce or even eliminate this stigma (Zirkel, 2004).

Unfortunately, America’s schools remain as segregated today, if not more so, than they were 50 years ago (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). The hope however, was that by
eliminating *de jure* segregation, the very concept of race as a meaningful category for making assumptions about young people’s abilities would also eventually vanish. *De jure* segregation has been replaced by *de facto* segregation, and racial and ethnic stigma has not been eliminated and disparity in educational outcomes for students of color continue to be a challenge in schools at all levels of education (Zirkel, 2004). As a result, too few students of color experience positive educational outcomes of proficiency or above on standardized test scores, higher graduating rates from high school and institutions of higher education, lowered dropout rates from high school and college, and career readiness. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between middle/high school student racial identity, religious participation, and the perception of stereotype threat and the impact of these influences on student educational outcomes (student engagement, student achievement, academic identification, withdrawal and dropout). There is ample research on racial identity, stereotype threat and academic achievement (Berry & Annis, 1974; Ethier & Deaux, 1990; Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Kim & Berry, 1985; Steele, 1994).

However, limited studies have examined the relationship between student racial identity, stereotype threat, and religious participation, particularly participation in a community-centered African American church and the impact of these contributing factors on student educational outcomes. Fewer studies, if any, examine the relationship between African American student religious participation and the effects of stereotype threat on educational outcomes. This study also differs in that the participants are
recruited from within a local community church as opposed to the school community. The results of the study will contribute to the body of research regarding the factors associated with African American student educational outcomes.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE; 2010) reported that recent estimates show high school graduation rates for African American, Latino, and American Indians hover only slightly higher than 50%, which is more than 20 percentage points lower than their White peers. The report stated that poor educational outcomes are especially troubling given Census projections indicating that, by the middle of the century, America will become a minority-majority country in which no single demographic group commands majority. But by 2050, minorities are projected to make up 54% of the U.S. population. Minorities already account for half (49%) of U.S. births in the year ending July 1, 2009, a record high (AEE, 2010).

Educational Settings

Racial and ethnic stigma are still widely present in educational settings, and they continue to have a strong influence on Students of Color’s perceptions of self, their identities and identifications, and on their performance (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Stigmatized individuals are certainly aware of the negative stereotypes held about them (Clark, 1988) and employ active processes to cope with them. For some, the awareness of these negative stereotypes becomes a defining feature of how they perceive the world, and they become highly sensitive to race-based rejection or develop a strong stigma consciousness. The awareness of stigma and the everyday experiences of it remain a
stressful and exhausting aspect of life for the stigmatized (Allison, 1998). In the following section is research highlighting the role racial stigma continues to play in academic performance, classroom climate (student-teacher relationships and peer-relationships), identity development, and students of color’s willingness to invest in academic identities.

Student identity. The identity formation process begins at birth, peaks during adolescence, and continues to develop throughout adulthood, thus allowing an individual to fully negotiate multiple identities. While identity development occurs over a lifetime, the period of adolescence has been considered the most critical (Arnett, 2006; Mitchell, 1992). According to Kroger (2006), adolescence addresses the period from ages 11 to 22. Adolescence begins with the onset of puberty and ends at the beginning of adulthood. Ages 10-14 are considered early adolescence as the range spans the pubescent years; the age range 15-17 is considered middle adolescence and centers on defining the self; and age 18 through 22 is described as late adolescence/early adulthood and is characterized by a focus on vocations and values. While numerous researchers have explored the importance of adolescence (Archer, 1994; Kroger, 2006; Waterman, 1985), Erickson’s (1950, 1968) concept of the importance of adolescence has remained most influential. According to Erickson (1950), adolescence serves as a buffer between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence also bridges the stages of childhood when the bodily self and the parental images are given their cultural connotations; and it bridges
the stage of young adulthood, when a variety of social roles become available. One social component that strongly influences identity is race.

Helms (1993) defined racial identity as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 9). For most individuals, racial identity does not begin to emerge until adolescence (Phinney, 1993; Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1996), although as early as three years of age, children of all backgrounds recognize skin color differences and associate distinctly hierarchical valuations with these differences (Banks, 1993). Racial identity emerges in adolescence, rather than earlier, because a level of maturity is required to comprehend the permanence of racial classification and racial group membership. Acquiring a racial identity requires the ability to evaluate associations made with skin color/race and understand that by identifying with a particular racial group, one becomes linked with others who hold that same racial classification.

Relative to younger children, adolescents have more highly developed cognitive abilities related to perceiving discrimination in more complex, abstract, and indirect ways, and this period also involves the intensification of particular social-cognitive attributes (e.g., a heightened awareness of how they are viewed by others) that might relate to a higher likelihood of perceiving discrimination (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartman, 1997; Brown & Bigler, 2005). In addition to individual differences in social cognition, structural and social influence include the increased likelihood of exposure to and awareness of personal and societal racism (Du Bois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale,
& Hardesty, 2002; Garcia-Coll & Vasquez Garcia, 1996; Greene, Way, Pahl, 2006; Hughes & Chen, 1999) along with other stressors or risk factors, such as socioeconomic strain, experienced disproportionately by African American families (e.g., McLoyd, 1990). At the same time, adolescents’ capacities and skills for coping with negative experiences are still evolving (Du Bois et al., 2002; Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). Finally, primary developmental tasks of adolescents are the integration and internalization of belief systems regarding personal identities, including racial identity (Phinney, 1990; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Blasovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele, 2001; Swanson, Fegeley, & Harpalani, 2003).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Fordham (1988) further described the relationship between African American student racial identity in which racial identity influences behavior and psychological states. They attribute poor academic performance among African Americans to the social stratification, marginality, and racism they have experienced in the larger society at large (Ogbu, 1978; Spencer, 1987). School failure may also be interpreted as African American attempts to form a personal identification; by failing to succeed in school, children demonstrate their distinctiveness from and opposition to the dominant White culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). On the other hand, students who do succeed strive for academic success by adopting many of the attitudes, behaviors, and values most associated with mainstream European American culture.

To the extent to which high-achieving African American children minimize their relationships with their communities, these children are criticized by their peers but are
not fully accepted by White Americans. These high achieving students pursue a raceless persona and, as a result, experience a great deal of interpersonal conflicts and ambivalence due to their inability to integrate the demands of the school environment with those of their own culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). These students consciously behave in ways that help them gain the approval of teachers. They modulate their speech and behaviors to avoid affiliation with other African Americans who are not as academically motivated and do not participate in activities that have been defined as “Black” activities. According to Fordham and Ogbu, (1986), this form of racial disidentification is associated with negative psychological consequences. Also these students tend to believe the negative stereotypes of African Americans are credible, but do not apply to them personally, and, despite its flaws, the American social system as a whole is fundamentally egalitarian and meritocratic. These researchers argued that African American adolescent attempts at success and social mobility often distance them from their community and result in feelings of alienation, depression, and anxiety. On the other hand, several studies have characterized high achieving African Americans as self-confident, industrious, adaptive in their social environments and tough minded (Allen, 1985; Comer, 1988; Evans & Quarteman, 1983; Foster & Seltzer, 1986; Lee, 1984; Sewell, Farley, Manni & Hunt, 1982).

Academic identification. Despite relatively high levels of overall self-esteem, African Americans do often grapple with issues regarding how much to identify themselves with achievement domains in which they are stigmatized (Ogbu, 2003), such
as whether and where to attend college, where to live, and which careers and social situations to pursue or avoid. The concept of identification with the academic domain is rooted in the symbolic interactionist perspective of self-esteem. Interactionists such as William James (1890/1981) through Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) to the present, have held that (1) people receive feedback from their environment; (2) this feedback, if attended to, is perceived and interpreted; (3) if this feedback is deemed accurate or valid, it is incorporated into the self-concept; and (4) if that domain is central to the self-concept (i.e., an individual is identified with that domain), then the changes in the self-concept will affect an individual’s self-esteem (Marsh, 1993,1995; Pelham, 1995; Pelham & Swann, 1989). According to this model, outcomes in a domain will only affect an individual’s global self-esteem to the extent that an individual identifies with that domain. Changing identification with academics appears to be one prominent self-defense mechanism people employ in protecting and maintaining their self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989; Tesser, 1988; Tesser & Campbell, 1980). Although identification with a domain is viewed in terms of an outcome, it can also be viewed as a predictor or as influencing motivation and performance in that domain (Osborne, 1997a; Steele, 1997). For students strongly identified with academics, good performance should be rewarding (higher self-esteem, leading to more positive emotions) while poor performance should be punished (lower self-esteem, leading to negative emotions). For students not identified with academics, there may be little motivation to succeed in academics because there is no contingency between academic outcomes and self-esteem.
– good performance is not intrinsically rewarding, and poor performance is not intrinsically punishing (Osborne & Walker, 2006).

Voelkl (1997) reported that identification with academics was related to academic achievement and classroom participation, and other researchers have reported similar supporting evidence (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Some research has shown that engagement in certain behaviors (punctuality, preparedness for class, and effort expenditure on academic tasks) or lack thereof (absenteeism, truancy, disruptiveness, and delinquency) are each predictive of persistence or early withdrawal (Finn & Rock, 1997). Osborne (2004) has theoretically linked these engagement behaviors with identification with academics, creating a comprehensive model linking identification with academics, the behaviors that this motivates, and the outcomes associated with these behaviors. However, according to Osborne (2004), a decrease in identification with academics is not enough to motivate withdrawal. Although most children begin schooling strongly invested and motivated to succeed, not all children do. As strong identification with academics and poor performance are incompatible with a positive self-image (i.e., high self-esteem cannot be maintained in the face of poor outcomes in a highly valued domain), school becomes aversive (Osborne & Walker, 2006). At this point one of three things must happen; (1) Student chooses to identify with a different domain (such as delinquent behavior or peer relationships) (Gold & Mann, 1972; Osborne, 2004) and reduces the extent to which he/she identifies with the academic domain, (2) student seeks
assistance to improve performance, or (3) the student seeks to escape school through absenteeism or withdrawal.

*Student performance.* Steele’s (1997) model of stereotype threat highlights the way stigma continues to stifle the performance of students of color today. The fear of possibly confirming a negative stereotype, sometimes combined with a fear the stereotype might be true, causes some students of color to shy away from investing themselves in academic and achievement pursuits. Situations who evoke negative stereotypes are stressful and anxiety producing (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999), and this stress has implications for students’ performance and their willingness to identify with stereotype-relevant domains. The authors state that students of color can be highly identified with academics and doing well in school, yet the more strongly identified a student of color is, the more aversive schooling could be, and, therefore, the more likely they may be to seek to escape the aversive situation, through either disidentification (Osborne, 1995, 1997b) or withdrawal. An important caveat of Steele’s theory, however, is that stereotype threat affects minority students who are negotiating their identity with academics. Steele (1997) suggested that stigmatized students’ “susceptibility to this threat derives not from internal doubts about their ability (e. g., their internalization of the stereotype) but from their identification with the domain and the resulting concern they have about being stereotyped in it” (Steele, 1997, p. 614). As a result, the stereotype threat hypothesis not only has potential to explain why minority students tend to underperform compared to members of other groups on standardized achievement test (anxiety
inhibits optimal cognitive functioning), but also why identified minority students are at risk of dropping out or disidentifying with school.

Many studies have documented the ways that stereotype threat can impair performance. Gougis (1986) found African American participants’ performance faltered on a cognitive task when negative stereotypes about African American were primed. Similarly, Steele (1997) and others have undertaken a series of studies that demonstrate decreased levels of performance when participants are asked to perform a task that measures some aspect of a negative stereotype about themselves, as when African Americans are asked to perform a tasks that will measure “intellectual abilities” (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995), when women or girls are asked to complete task that will measure their mathematical abilities (Ambady, 2001), and even when White male college students are asked to complete a task that will measure their mathematical abilities relative to Asian men (Aronson et al., 1999). In every case, performance does not falter when those same tasks are labeled in a way that does not evoke negative stereotypes, and performance improves when positive stereotypes about participants’ social identity (e.g., the mathematical abilities of Asian students) is invoked (Ambady, 2001). These effects are significantly reduced when a teacher encourages students to see intelligence as a malleable capacity increased by effort and learning rather than a fixed capacity measured by performance (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002). Over time, the threatening nature of negative stereotype-relevant activities serves to undermine one’s identification with the relevant domain (Schmader, 2002).
Psychological disengagement. African Americans and Latino/students face negative cultural stereotypes that portray members of their ethnic group as less intelligent than European Americans (Steele, 1997). These stereotypes are compounded by statistics suggesting that, on average, members of these ethnic minority groups score lower on achievement tests, have lower grade point averages, and attain lower levels of education than their European American peers (Steele, 1997). One would think the negative stereotypes and educational outcomes would threaten the self-esteem of ethnic minority students. However, research consistently indicates that African American and Latino students have high levels of self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997) and academic self-concepts (Graham, 1994) that are on average equal to or higher than those of their European American counterparts.

One way in which members of negatively stereotyped ethnic minority groups might cope with academic threats is by psychologically disengaging their feelings of self worth from academic outcomes (Major & Schmader, 1998; Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolf, & Crocker, 1998). There are two distinct processes that theoretically can produce psychological disengagement of self-esteem from academic performance based on perceived ethnic injustice (Major & Schmader, 1998).

The first process of disengagement involves devaluing the domain, so outcomes received in that context are no longer viewed as relevant or important to how a person defines or evaluates the self. Both correlational (Harter, 1986; Rosenberg, 1979) and experimental evidence (Tesser & Campbell, 1980) suggested that this strategy of
psychological disengagement is often adopted for domains in which one’s personal outcomes imply incompetence. Recent research theories posit that devaluing is a strategy that might be used to cope with threats to one’s social identity (Crocker & Major, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, Crocker and Major asserted that members of socially stigmatized groups might protect their self-esteem by selectively devaluing that domain in which their stigma places them at a disadvantage.

The second pathway to disengagement involves discounting the validity of an evaluation one has received. Crocker and Major (1989), Crocker et al. (1991), and Major and Crocker (1993) have argued that because people’s evaluation of others are often shaped by social stereotypes, members of socially stigmatized groups such as ethnic minorities frequently perceive ambiguity regarding the causes of their outcomes. Given the social prejudices are at times plausible alternative explanations for their negative outcomes, ethnic minority students might be more likely than European American students to discount negative outcomes rather than accept them as valid indicators of ability. By attributing negative outcomes to prejudice and discrimination, members of socially stigmatized groups might maintain relatively high levels of self-esteem in the face of negative outcomes (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). The processes of devaluing and discounting are also influenced by the degree in which one believes one’s ethnic group is treated unfairly in a domain. This belief is likely to be related to general beliefs that outcomes in society are inequitable or unfair (Major, 1994). Thus, in addition
to academic performance, perceptions of ethnic injustice predict processes of psychological disengagement among ethnic-minority students (Schmader et al., 2001).

Schmader et al. (2001) stated that the disengagement arises from the awareness that ethnic injustice exists at a systemic level and is targeted against one’s own ethnic group. Ethnic injustice is referred to as the perception that there are status differences between various ethnic groups in society resulting from illegitimate practices of discrimination and members of an ethnic minority group, no matter how able or motivated, cannot improve their position in society because barriers impede the advancement of certain social groups. They reported that group level beliefs of injustice against one’s ethnic in-group include the more specific perception that members of one’s ethnic in-group have been targeted by system injustices such as prejudice and discrimination. Theorists (Schmader et al., 2001) believe ethnic minority groups who perceive a great deal of injustice in current status hierarchy (at a systems level or directed against their own group) are more likely to believe that such injustices also permeate the academic establishment. Thus, perceptions of ethnic injustice are important predictors of the tendency among negatively stereotyped ethnic minority students to discount academic feedback and to devalue academic success. The belief in system ethnic injustice or injustice against one’s ethnic group could lead to an inference among ethnic minority students that their own personal outcomes are not valid indicators of their abilities and efforts and, thus, should be discounted (Schmader et al., 2001).
Resiliency. Many African Americans do not view schooling as an avenue for achieving positive life outcomes because they perceive race-based labor market discrimination as a relatively permanent barrier that cannot be overcome through the educational system (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Both a shared history of discrimination and the perception that schools are primarily controlled by Whites lead many Black students to actively resist activities and behaviors associated with academic success, since these activities are equated with assimilation into White middle class and, thus, viewed as compromising a Black social identity and group solidarity (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

However, a growing body of psychological and sociological literature highlights the significance of understanding racial identity and its relationship to achievement ideologies and school behaviors. Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998) posit that an individual’s beliefs about the significance of race will influence his/her behavior during specific events in a specific context. The authors suggested that in the school context, heightened racial salience (or the extent to which one’s race is a relevant part of one’s self-concept at a particular moment or in a particular situation) might moderate the extent to which one’s racial beliefs influence his/her interpretation of a specific event in school and subsequent behavior in response to this event. A Black student who has strong racial pride and heightened sensitivity to negative intellectual stereotypes about his/her racial group may take on a prove-them-wrong attitude, critical race achievement ideology in the classroom where those stereotypes exist (Carter, 2005).
This type of higher racial salience is related to higher academic achievement (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998).

Young people observe patterns of racial discrimination in academic and employment settings (Bigler, Averhart, & Liben, 2003). These observations influence their assessment of the connection between effort in school and economic advancement opportunities later in life (Ogbu, 2003). These observations can undermine their motivation to identify themselves with and exert high levels of effort in academic pursuits (Cross, 2003), but the reverse is also true. Students of color who reported having race and gender matched role models employed in a career the student was interested in pursuing were more likely to strongly invest in their academic work and perform at higher levels as a result (Zirkel, 2004). Similarly, students of color were more likely to pursue academic goals and find them interesting, important, and enjoyable to the extent that they made strong social connections to peers, or reported feeling welcomed at school (Zirkel, 2005).

Other studies suggest that students’ feelings of connection to school can influence a wide range of adolescent behavior. Interventions designed to increase students’ feelings of belonging on school campuses decreases self-destructive behavior such as high-risk sex and drug and alcohol abuse among all students, but particularly among students of color (Lonczak, 2001).

A strong ethnic identity can help ameliorate some of the negative impact of racial stigma on students’ motivation and goals. A strong ethnic identity has consistently been
shown to be associated with higher levels of self-esteem and greater overall psychological development (Collins, 2000). More importantly, ethnic identity can serve as a strategy by which young people from stigmatized ethnic groups can persist and succeed in educational settings. A strong ethnic identity has been shown to be associated with higher levels of academic achievement, academic motivation, and comfort in academic settings (Chavous, 2000). Racial and ethnic identity can provide a buffer against the effects of stigma and concerns about racial discrimination (Cross & Strauss, 1998), in part by protecting them against feelings of threat (Ethier & Deaux, 1994) and providing a community through which issues of stigma and discrimination can be discussed and addressed (Cross & Strauss, 1998).

Spiritual and religious resources through parenting have been a mainstay of African American family experience and the emotional and intellectual experiences generated through the church, mosque, and extended family gatherings also give meaning to the collective sense of being African American. Knowledge of one’s heroic and oppressive cultural history has lots of implications for the importance of a collective definition of self (Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). For African Americans, the church, through its religious and cultural activities and programs, provides a strong ethnic identity and influence in promoting social skills and academic achievement (Chavous, 2000; Johnson & Matre, 1999). The church has and continues to be a vehicle through which African Americans develop strong leadership skills, social meaning through
critical social capital interaction, as well as literacy skills through ethnic social discourse regarding the Black experience.

Educators and administrators must come to understand the significance of African American students’ racial identity and the effects of teacher attitudes on their educational outcomes. African American educators and administrators have a particularly valuable opportunity to contribute to this understanding through their research and reflective practice.

Nature of the Study

This study seeks to explore the worldview and self-reported experiences among a group of African American middle/high school students who are participants in an African-American community church. In particular, the study explores the relationship between their religious participation and racial identity and students’ perception of stereotype threat and the possible impact(s) of these multiple signifiers on the students’ educational outcomes. The questions this researcher asked the students concerned their identification with ethnic group membership, the extent and nature of their religious participation, and their perception of being treated differently because of their race. Students’ were also asked questions relating to school-related identities (academic engagement, academic identity) and non-school related identities (social acceptance, belonging). Students’ self-reported academic performance was analyzed relative to the above factors to examine the impact or lack of impact of these factors on student
educational outcomes. Data were gathered from the students through both a survey questionnaire and through their participation in a researcher-initiated but student-led focus group activity; related data were gathered through in-depth interviews of adults involved with the students’ church-related activities.

According to Delida Sanchez and Robert T. Carter (2007), religion carries significant weight on the prospect of identity development, especially in the minds of adolescent and college-aged students. But the authors concluded that for African Americans, it carries the most weight because religious beliefs and practices have and continue to be a salient aspect of culture and upbringing. The researcher posits that African American students’ religious participation relative to racial/ethnic identity has a positive effect on student educational outcomes because of the culture of shared beliefs, values, and lifestyle behaviors encompassing empowering ideologies about family and community (Sanchez & Carter, 2007).

This study intended to inform the researcher, educators, administrators, policymakers, parents, and community stakeholders on students’ experience of the impact of racial identity, perceptions of stereotype threat, and student participation in culturally grounded religious activities on the educational outcomes of African American middle/high school students. The self-reported survey questions were designed to gather data on the following research questions:
I. To what extent do racial identity, stereotype threat, and religious participation affect the educational outcomes of African American students in grades 7-12?

II. What are the factors associated with stereotype threat that affect student performance?

III. How does engagement with a church, particularly a church situated within the student’s home community and culturally associated with the students’ racial identity, affect African American students’ racial identity, student achievement, and the response to stereotype threat?

The survey data was collected in person. The participants were a purposeful sample of between 25 and 50 middle/high school students, grades 7-12 from various middle/high schools within the surrounding area of Sacramento County. In addition, the student participants engaged in a focus group process and reported out the conclusions of their respective groups. The researcher also interviewed two youth teachers from the African American community church with which the students were affiliated. A more detailed description of the research design, including methodology, participants, quantitative and qualitative instruments, data collection, and analysis is provided in Chapter 3.
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

While there are multiple theories used as foundational for this study, below are the most influential theories with a brief overview. A more detailed discussion is provided in Chapter 2.

**Stereotype Threat**

Specifically, this research suggests individuals may suffer negative performance outcomes (lower standardized test scores, less engagement with academics, higher dropout rate, low graduation rates) because they are burdened by the prospect of conforming to cultural stereotypes and doubting their intellectual and academic abilities. This burden is called “stereotype threat” (Steele & Aronson, 1995). According to Steele and Aronson (1995), this social psychological threat arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype (Taylor et al., 2009). It is a situational threat – a threat in the air – that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists (e.g., skateboarders, older adults, White men, gang members). Where negative stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype. And for those who identify with the domain to which the stereotype is relevant, this predicament can be self-threatening (Taylor et al., 2009).
Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) evolved since the mid 1970s as “a form of opposition scholarship concerned with the overt and covert racism facing people of color within educational institutions (Calmore, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT posits that racism is endemic in society and in education, and racism has become so deeply engrained in society’s and schooling’s consciousness, that it is often invisible. CRT confronts and challenges the liberal pursuit of meritocracy, colorblindness, and incremental change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). While CRT focuses on race and racism, these processes “are also viewed at the intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination” (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122). CRT values experiential knowledge as a way to inform thinking and research. As a result, narrative accounts and testimonies are valued as key sources of data by CRT scholars (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Finally, CRT is activist in nature; CRT scholars maintain a commitment to social justice.

Racial Identity Theory

Race is and continues to be a significant factor in the United States historically, socially, and politically. According to Winant (2000), racial formation views the meaning of race and the content of racial identities as unstable and politically contested; as the intersection/conflict of racial “projects” that combine representation/discursive elements with structural/institutional ones; and sees these intersections as iterative sequences of interpretations (articulations) of meaning of race open to many types of
agency, from the individual to the organizational, from the local to the global. Race does matter in American society (West, 1989). The consumption and production of knowledge and wealth is distributed largely based on one’s racial identity and along racial lines (Omi & Winant, 1986). Racial identity theory posits that racial identity develops through stages.

Helms’s (1995) Black and White racial identity theories describe the transformative process Blacks and Whites go through to achieve racial self-actualization. These theories describe the process through which the unresolved dilemmas of the lower statuses of development gradually emerge into an appreciative, internally defined, more complex, and humanistic self. Achieving access to the schemata and information processing strategies of the final statuses of these theories means an increased likelihood of perceiving the realities of racism and other oppressive forces and, therefore, having the ability to cope with these realities using complex and higher level information-processing strategies; a freeing from individual acts of racist behavior (for Whites) or from the attitudes and behaviors that reflect internalized racism (for People of Color); and a commitment toward the erosion of institutionalized and cultural racism, as well as other forms of oppression (Thompson & Carter, 1997).

Unlike the White church in America which serves as one institution among many, the Black church in the United States, from its beginning, has been a central institution of strength and influence within the Black community. The Black church in all of its diverse denominations has been a primary vehicle for Black culture and identity (Johnson
Matre, 1999). For African Americans, the church has always been the education and political power base for the community, has served both spiritual and temporal needs of the Black community, and is a vital partner in youth development. Recent studies indicate the Black church and religious involvement for African American adolescence has a positive impact in assisting youth with positive psychosocial development (Markstrom, 1999) and these religious institutions significantly buffer or interact with the effects of neighborhood disorder on crime, and, in particular, serious crime, racism, and discrimination (Johnson, Jeng, DeLi, & Larson, 2000).

Critical Social Capital/Community Cultural Wealth

Pierre Bourdieu (1986), a leader in the field of cultural capital states that those whose cultural capital and social capital are of the White middle class are at an advantage over underrepresented minorities within the American institutions, particularly education. American educational institutions serve as cultural reproduction centers. Those who assimilate successfully, that is, walk, talk, act, and appear as much as possible to endorse the White middle class status quo and receive the stamp of approval to succeed.

However, critical social capital (Ginwright, 2007) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) are predicated on the cultural assets African Americans possess that enable the community to collectively address the political and social needs of the community. Ginwright (2007) reported that critical social capital departs from traditional notions of social capital by placing a greater focus on the collective dimensions of community change, and it centers on how racial identity and political awareness serve as an
important community and social resource for youth. Critical social capital involves creating a collective racial and cultural identity among African Americans, including Black youth that provides them with a unified understanding of their collective situation in American society (Ginwright, 2007).

According to Yosso (2005), community cultural wealth, on the other hand, is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression. Yosso (2005) makes reference to six forms of cultural capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant that work together as part of community cultural wealth. These theories are discussed further in Chapter 2.

Operational Definitions

Critical Race Theory

Posits that racism is the norm in American society and is pervasive in economic, political, social, and educational institutions (Taylor et al., 2009).

Critical social capital

Centers on the racial identity and political awareness of African Americans and the collective dimensions of community change efforts
Cultural capital

Refers to White middle class tastes, etiquette, demeanor, speech, writing, and general interaction styles, arbitrarily more valued in the middle class institution of schooling than those of their working class counterparts (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural wealth

An array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts utilized by communities of color to survive and resist all forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005)

Racial Identity

A sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he/she shares a common racial group (Helms, 1993)

Stereotype threat

A social psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged stereotypically, or the prospect of conforming to the stereotype.

Stigma

Negative stereotypes about a racial/ethnic group

UMR

Underrepresented minorities; African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans
Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a group of African American public school students and to examine the extent to which membership in a Black church community and regular participation in its religious activity affected their racial identity, their perceptions of stereotype threat, and educational outcomes. The study, in particular, examined these issues in regard to African American middle/high school students. Since this study was based on middle/high school students’ perceptions of and response to racial and ethnic experiences within educational settings impacting student outcomes, there are several limitations that must be addressed.

1. Data collected from student participants represent a cross-section of African American students attending various schools within the Sacramento and surrounding area who also participate regularly (two to four times per month) in religious activities associated with a particular church situated within the African American cultural community. Therefore, the data reflects student perceptions of the underlying phenomena discussed rather than the phenomena themselves and are particular to students associated with the church, the site of the research.

2. The participants represent the same ethnicity of the researcher, which may have caused some participants to assume unfamiliar familiarity possibly affecting data results. At the same time, this shared racial/ethnic identity may also have served to remove barriers to an honest expression of student views.
To minimize any effects, the researcher asked participants to provide honest views and explained that both positive and negative perceptions were important. The researcher, an African American woman, was supported in this request by adult members of the church community involved with youth activities, including both adult men and women.

3. Since participants were selected from a local church, attended various schools (urban and suburban) with various demographics, the data have limited generalizability. However, because of the general demographics of urban and suburban schools, other urban and suburban schools may be able to apply results respectively.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the body of research on the effects of stereotype threat on the racial identity of African American middle/high school students who participate in religious activities on a regular basis within a community-centered African American church. The study also examines the relationship of these factors with student educational outcomes. There is ample research that details how racial identity of adolescence is impacted by negative stereotypes relevant to educational outcomes (Steele, 1997). However, there is limited research indicating the extent of this effect on students participating in religious activities in a strong community setting on a regular basis and few, if any, relevant to African American youth.
The church has long been the center for educational, political, and social leadership and activism for the Black people in America (Johnson & Matre, 1999). The Black church has been the strongest and only institution of influence within the Black community. The Black church has been the central vehicle for Black culture and a great motivating force in terms of political voice. The Black church from the beginning has been involved in political and educational activities.

Boston’s first anti-slavery meetings were held in a Black Baptist church. Out of the modern Black church of the 1960s raised the voices that condemned racism and appealed for the change of discriminatory practices affecting Blacks in every phase of American life. Out of the Black church raised the most powerful revolutionary efforts in civil rights in the United States, the Civil Rights Movement. As a result of the church’s status as a cohesive institution accessible to Black people following the Civil war, it provided opportunities for Black men and women to develop leadership qualities in a stable environment. Church leaders such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Lucy C. Laney and Janie Porter Barrett founded their own schools (Giddings, 1984). According to Johnson and Matre (1999), the Black church buildings served as classrooms in cities and towns where Black children were not permitted to attend public schools, and deacons and elders served as teachers.

As African American students continue to experience disparity in educational outcomes affecting their educational and career plans, employment opportunities, and ability to manifest their dreams and goals, the Black church has some of the greatest
potential and the richest possibilities for leadership in not only closing the ‘achievement gap,’ but moving beyond its very existence. The Black church sponsored schools and colleges that sprang up after the Civil War in response to the need felt by Blacks for literacy and that literacy was directly tied to social dignity and progress in America. Black church members saw schools and the pursuit of education as a basis for hope. Many felt the economic standing of the Black community was directly proportional to the literacy development among Black people (Johnson, 1994).

The role of the Black church in educating African American students is traced back long before Brown v. Board of Education. The disparities in existence then exist now. However, the difference is African Americans are being taught by a historically racist educational system that has, over time, devalued, discriminated against, and underserved African Americans giving rise to what is now being termed the “achievement gap.” Brown v. Board of Education failed to end racism, discriminatory practices, and the stigma of inferiority experienced by African Americans. Hence, African Americans continue to be underserved throughout the educational system; elementary, middle, high school, and higher education.

Today the Black church serves as a vital political engine within the Black community. White and Black politicians seek the endorsement and support of Black church members as they campaign for political office. The Black church serves as one of the major Black sponsored sources of motivation and strength for Black students through its recognition and support of high school and college graduates, and through its varied
youth programs and activities at the local, state, and national levels. Because the church provides a strong social context for language development and connections for many Blacks, and as such serves to shape the form and content of Black discourse, the church bears rich possibilities as a leader in family literacy (Johnson, 1994).

More than any institution in the Black community, the church bears the greatest potential for assisting the Black community in the area of literacy development because it has been a strong and influential community leader in politics and education; because it has been flexible enough to assist Black people in surviving the mental and emotional strains of slavery and oppression in America; and because it provides a meaningful social context for Black expression (Johnson, 1994).

The Black church also provides the spiritual faith sought by African Americans who endured chattel slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crowism, segregation, and who continue to endure racism and discrimination as experienced today. The early Black church sustained its duality of serving the spiritual and earthly needs of oppressed African Americans. According to Wilmore (1983), the Black church was “born in protest, tested in adversity, and led by eloquent and courageous preachers, the Black church was the cutting edge of the freedom movement during most of the nineteenth century” (p. 95). The researcher argues that in light of this, it stands to reason the church has the potential to close the achievement gap and support the development of literacy and critical thinking skills of African American students performing poorly in the public schools across this nation.
Despite relatively high levels of self-esteem, African Americans, do often grapple with issues regarding how much to identify themselves with achievement domains in which they are stigmatized and how to tie their self-worth to performance in the academic domain (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Stigma continues to influence many of the identity choices students of color make in life, including how much effort to invest in their schoolwork (Ogbu, 2003; Schmader et al., 2001; Steele, 1997; Zirkel, 2002). The authors state that the stigma of negative stereotypes causes some students of color to perform poorly on standardized tests, disengage from the learning process, and over time drop out of school.

According to the report, *The Economic Benefits of Reducing the Dropout Rate Among Students of Color in the Nation’s Forty-five Largest Metropolitan Areas* (AEE, 2010), students of color made up a sizable portion of the 600,000 students who dropped out of the class of 2008 in the nation’s 45 largest metropolitan areas. Of these students, approximately 113,600 were African American, 200,000 were Latino, 30,800 were Asian American, and 3,750 were American Indian. Cutting the number of these dropouts in half would likely produce vast economic benefits by boosting the spending power of these communities of color and spurring job and economic growth in these regions (AEE, 2010). The most recent estimates show that high school graduation rates for African American, Latino, and American Indian hover only slightly above 50%, which is more than 20 percentage points lower than their White peers. The outcomes of this study can
inform educational reform efforts toward more positive educational outcomes for students of color.

In addition to reviewing data on the demographics of the dropout rate, also important is the demographics of the teaching force and their generalized beliefs about the abilities of students of color. Statistics on the racial composition of teachers in the U.S. are startling. In 2004, 90% of the K-12 teaching force was White (National Collaborative on Diversity of the Teaching Force, 2004). Almost half the schools in the U.S. do not have a single teacher of color on staff; therefore, many students will graduate from high school having been taught only by Whites (Jordan-Irvine, 2003). The immediate future will not be very different because 80% to 93% of all current teacher education students are White females (Cochran-Smith 2004), and they are being instructed by a teacher education profession that is itself 88% White (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

This demographic imperative (Banks, 1996; Cochran-Smith, 2004) implores educators to look deeply at Whiteness and its relationship to teaching, particularly as classrooms are increasingly filled with students of color. The sheer number of Whites in the teaching field in a country marked by racial inequality has implications for the role White teachers play in creating patterns of racial achievement and opportunity.

When one looks at the demographics associated with the low achievement scores, the dropout rate, and the demographics of the teaching force, these continuing patterns suggest that unless something changes, the same results will occur. The Black church has
always been and continues to be a powerful educational and political base for the Black community.

The church has the potential for impacting academic success for African Americans today, as it did before Brown v. Board of Education. This does not imply that African American students cannot learn from White teachers, or that church membership is necessary for academic success, but rather that the educational needs and the motivation to learn for African American students go far beyond the ability to read and write effectively. Particularly in the current social environment, community institutions that draw strongly upon the values, traditions, and beliefs of the African American community, can, this research argues, play an important role in providing cultural supports for young African Americans’ commitment to academic excellence and may provide insights for educators in the public schools regarding the importance of nurturing a positive configuration of values, self-concept, and expectations for educators of African American students. The researcher posits that African American students need a culturally relevant pedagogy contextualized within a social justice emphasis to address their present everyday circumstances of which they can respond as do all other citizens of the United States. Having effective critical literacy skills allows for full participation as citizens provided the opportunity to respond effectively to the liberties (or lack of) within society.

One of the greatest threat to these students’ learning according to Claude Steele, (1997) is stereotype threat. Because of the nature of evaluating and discriminating
against students based on negative stereotypes and the threat of conforming to the stereotypes, students’ performance suffers. Over time, to protect their self-esteem and self-concept, students disidentify with academics (the threatening domain) and eventually withdraw from school. This study examines the factors associated with African American students’ educational outcomes and addresses possible factors effecting poor school performance.

Conclusion

Ethnic and racial stigma and their relationship to identity, motivation, and achievement remain central issues for those interested in creating racially equitable educational settings today. The stigma of imputed Black inferiority was derived from the slave condition (Tate, 1994). Slavery and racial oppression were the external factors that provided the impetus for segregation. African Americans aspirations for freedom, self-determination, and political and social equality were powerful internal factors leading to the Brown v. Board of Education and the civil rights movement (Tate, 1994). The Black community church provided a vehicle for the open expression of African American social, political, and educational discourse and organization needed to enact the above stated community change efforts.

Environment assets such as Black community church involvement for African American students may prove to hold resources to overcome the achievement gap. When African Americans as a church community taught students who were denied access to
public schools, the curriculum was culturally relevant and the teachers shared the same values, beliefs, traditions, and custom as the students they taught (hooks, 1992). This contributed to students’ feeling of belonging and identity and provided critical social capital, which is significant for African American students’ learning and development as a marginalized ethnic group.

Several theories posit foundational research informing this study. Helms’s (1997) racial identity theory, Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (2000) critical race theory, Steel’s (1997) stereotype threat theory, and Ginwright’s (2007) critical social capital. In addition, this research explores the continuing relevance of the historical prominence of the church in the African American community before, during, and after slavery to the present time. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between middle/high school students’ racial identity, religious participation, and perception of stereotype threat and the effect on student educational outcomes (student engagement, student achievement, academic identification, withdrawal, and dropout). The focus of this study is on African American students who participate in religious activity on a regular basis.

The exploration by researchers, educators, and policymakers of the factors and cultural assets of African Americans in an attempt to close the achievement gap is imperative to the national security and economic stability of the United States. The cost to the nation for students who do not complete high school or are unable to function and
contribute as citizens is catastrophic. This study attempts to provide some possibilities for further knowledge and understanding, research, and reform efforts.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed literature review of the research on the selected theoretical and conceptual frames and studies concerning religious participation, racial identity, stereotype threat, and the impact on educational outcomes for students of color. Chapter 3 describes the research methodologies used in this mixed method study, including a self-reported survey, student focus groups, and in-depth interviews of adults involved with church-related youth activities. Chapter 4 provides the analysis of data collected via self-reported survey, focus group interview, and individual interviews. Throughout the chapter, the research questions are used as guides to interpreting the findings. Chapter 5 continues the examination of the data by expanding on the findings through discussion of common themes that surfaced out of the data. The chapter concludes in recommendations for reducing stereotype threatening situations and utilizing student assets such as religious participation, leading to positive educational outcomes for students of color and suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of community church participation and the relationship between racial identity and stereotype threat on the educational outcomes of African American middle/high school adolescents. This chapter provides a review of the literature and research associated with racial identity, stereotype threat, community identity support, and participation in a Black community-centered church and the impact on significant youth signifiers such as educational outcomes. Ultimately, the study sought to advance the understanding of the extent in which various elements of racial identity of African American middle/high school students serve to buffer or hinder their performance in educational settings. In addition, this study also sought to examine the relationship between student participation in community-based church activity and the extent of the perceived threat of racial discrimination and prejudice on educational outcomes.

Students of color today are experiencing tremendous challenges in schooling. Race has been and continues to be a signifier in matters of schooling (Bartlettt & Brayboy, 2005). A myriad of reports, books, and articles provide evidence of significant differences in test scores, high school completion rates, course selection, college attainment, and other educational outcomes that exist between students of various racial
and ethnic minority groups and their White counterparts (Ferguson, 2001; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Kao & Thompson, 2003).

By 2050, the United States Census Bureau projects that about 50% of the U.S. population will be African American, Hispanic, or Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, assessed 2008). Given these steep demographic shifts, the performance of students of color and the characteristics of the schools they attend are important factors that must concern all Americans.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, African American students made up 16% of the public school population in 2004. The students, disproportionately concentrated in high-poverty, low-performing schools, are vulnerable to poor educational outcomes that undermine their chances for success in life. The nation’s public high schools, in particular, are failing too many African American youth. The following statistics are from the AEE (2010):

**Graduation, Dropouts, and Preparedness**

African American high school students are notably falling behind their White counterparts in graduation rates, dropout rates, literacy rates, and college preparedness rates. In 2005, only 55% of all black students graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma, compared to 78% of Whites (Education Week, 2008). In 2005, the on-time graduation rate for Black males was 48% nationally; for White males it was 74% (Education Week, 2008).
Nearly half of the nation’s African American students, but only 11% of White students, attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). In 2002, 23% of all Black students who started public high school left it prepared for college, compared to 40% of Whites (Greene & Winters, 2004). On average, African American and Hispanic 12th-grade students read at approximately the same level as White eighth graders (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2002).

About half of poor, urban ninth graders read at only a fifth- or sixth-grade level (Neild & Balfanz, 2001). The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that 88% of African American eighth graders read below grade level, compared to 62% of White eighth graders (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). The 12th-grade reading scores of African American males were significantly lower than those for men and women across every other racial and ethnic group (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

**Schools, Segregation, and Teacher Quality**

A disproportionate number of failing schools, across grade levels, are predominantly comprised of poor, racial, and ethnic minority students. These situationally segregated schools tend to have fewer financial, human, and material resources than schools in more affluent areas. By the time students who attend these schools reach high school, the academic challenges they face have been compounded by years of substandard education.
More than 60% of Black students attend schools where more than 50% of the school population is identified as living in poverty, compared to 18% of white students (Orfield & Lee, 2005). U.S. schools are now 41% nonWhite and the majority of the nonWhite students attend schools that show substantial segregation (Orfield & Lee, 2005). A high-poverty, majority-minority high school is five times more likely to have weak promoting power (promoting 50% or fewer freshmen to senior status within four years) than a majority White school (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

In the 49 states studied, the school districts with the highest minority enrollments receive an average of $877 less per student than school districts with the lowest number of minorities enrolled (Arroya, 2008). In high schools where at least 75% of the students are low-income, there are three times as many uncertified or out-of-field teachers teaching both English and science than in schools with wealthier populations (National Center of Education Statistics, 2004). Black students were more likely than White students to attend schools where trash was present on the floor (29% vs. 18%), graffiti was present (10% vs. 3%), and ceilings were in disrepair (12% vs. 7%) (National Center for Statistics, 2002).

Special, Gifted, and College Preparatory Education

Research shows that African American students experience disparities in other important areas of education. In 2004, 13% of African American students aged 6 to 21 received services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, compared to 9% of the total student population (National Center for Statistics, 2007).
In 1999, 35% of African American students in grades 7-12 had been suspended or expelled during their school years, compared to 13% of Asians and 15% of Whites (National Center for Statistics, 2003). Of students who graduated with the Class of 2007, African Americans scored lower than all other racial and ethnic groups on all three parts of the SAT (College Board, 2007). The number of Black students taking Advanced Placement (AP) exams increased between 1984 and 2000; however, the percentage of African American 12th graders who took the exam in 2000 was lower than that of whites or Hispanics (National Center for Education, 2003).

This achievement gap also constitutes the basis of a major U.S. education policy initiative, the No Child Left Behind Act, which became the first piece of federal legislation on education to require schools to disaggregate data on academic achievement by race. The data suggest, however, that the national policy and the school-site experience do not align and that African Americans have been and continue to be underserved in the public school through this nation.

Historically, various racial and ethnic groups have confronted discrimination and marginalization in schools. However, studies show that certain immigrant minority groups (Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and South Asian Americans) fare better academically than many other racial and ethnic groups (e.g., African American, Mexican American, and Native Americans) (Donohue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Kasinitz, Mollenkopt, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008; Knapp, 2005). Because the former groups outperform students who are descendents of slaves or
colonized peoples, the ensuing logic is that there must be something either group-specific or cultural that explains these differences (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). An exception to this picture is the experience of Southeast Asian immigrants (Hmong, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Laos); recent research indicates that these immigrants also do not fare as well academically possibly due to cultural differences (Ngo & Lee, 2007). The purpose of this literature review is to explore the factors associated with the educational outcomes of African American students.

The literature provides a discussion of four themes. The first theme examines the theoretical frames informing this study, which include racial identity theory, critical race theory, stereotype threat theory, and critical social capital. The second theme provides a clear cultural context for the understanding and interpretation of the social and political climate of the study. This theme reviews the concept of race, institutional racism, and racial socialization as a pretense of the sociopolitical institutions and agencies in society, particularly education. The third theme explores the importance of youth development and community-based organizations in building self-esteem, racial identity, and ethnic efficacy of adolescents. The fourth theme explores the significance of the Black church community for African Americans politically, socially, and spiritually with regard to racial identity development and ethnic pride. The chapter concludes with a summary of the educational implications and outcomes for African American middle/high school students attending American public schools.
The review seeks to inform the problem statement and research questions of the present study below:

I. To what extent do racial identity, stereotype threat, and religious participation affect the educational outcomes of African American students in grades 7-12?

II. What are the factors associated with stereotype threat that affect student performance?

III. How does engagement with a church, particularly a church situated within the student’s home community and culturally associated with the students’ racial identity, affect African American students’ racial identity, student achievement, and the response to stereotype threat?

Theme One: Theoretical Frames

The following theories provide the theoretical/conceptual foundation and framework underpinning this study: racial identity theory, stereotype threat, critical race theory, and critical social capital/community cultural wealth theories. This study seeks to explore and understand the significance of racial identity of adolescent youth development, their experiences in coping with racial inequity and discrimination, and the effects of regular religious participation on their overall educational outcomes.

Racial Identity Theory

Race is and continues to be a significant factor in the United States historically, socially, and politically. Race does matter in American society. The consumption and
production of knowledge and wealth is distributed largely based on one’s racial identity and along racial lines (Omi & Winant, 1986). Racial identity theory posits that racial identity develops through stages. Helms’s (1995) Black and White racial identity theories describe the transformative process Blacks and Whites go through to achieve racial self-actualization. These theories describe the process through which the unresolved dilemmas of the lower statuses of development gradually emerge into an appreciative, internally defined, more complex, and humanistic self (Helms, 1995). According to Helms (1995), achieving access to the schemata and information processing strategies of the final statuses (stages of racial identity development) of these theories means an increased likelihood of perceiving the realities of racism and other oppressive forces. In doing so, having the ability to cope with these realities using complex and higher level information-processing strategies; for Whites, a freeing from individual acts of racist behavior and for Blacks, from the attitudes and behaviors that reflect internalized racism and a commitment toward the erosion of institutionalized and cultural racism, as well as other forms of oppression (Thompson & Carter, 1997).

Cross (1971, 1991) delineated a developmental model of Black racial identity that has been widely researched and cited in psychology literature. Instead of using a “stage model” to describe the evolving process of becoming Black, the stages are now referred to as “statuses,” which allows for more fluidity of progression between statuses in reaching adulthood. Statuses are best thought of as mindsets through which one may pass but to which one may return in response to significant life events (Helms, 1995).
The first status is referred to as the *Pre-encounter* status, characterized by a de-emphasis or even denigration of being Black; being Black is considered unimportant. For yet others, there is an unquestioning acceptance of the negative stereotypes others believe about Blacks (e.g., intelligent, prone to crime, etc.) (Cross, 1971). Carter (1991) demonstrated that the pre-encounter attitudes are correlated with anxiety, psychological distress, as well as feelings of inferiority.

The next status, *Encounter*, denotes a situation in which circumstances induce an identity metamorphosis. This involves an event occurring that pushes matters of race and culture to the forefront of one’s thinking about what being Black means. During these occasions, individuals must choose whether or not to deny the racial encounter or consciously change behavior that precipitated the event(s). The decision to reinterpret one’s worldview differently as a result of the encounter experiences facilitates the transition of the individual to the next status. *Immersion-Emersion* status, the next status is one in which an individual might change his/her dress to a more Afro-centric attire or narrow his/her social contacts to predominately Black organizations and people. In addition, for many at this point, there emerges an us-versus-them mindset where Whites are seen as the enemy. Over time, this dichotomous way of thinking evolves into the final status, *Internalization*; the individual embraces an identity that is not exclusionary. That is, an individual realizes that one can be pro Black without having to denigrate Whites. For example, an individual who is racially profiled may use the experience to get involved in efforts to end racial profiling or other injustices and forms of
discrimination. In contrast, an individual with Immersion-Emersion status attitudes might generalize one instance of discrimination to all White people or all police officers, possibly leading to feelings of anger and helplessness but little action. Thus, different statuses of racial identity development are proposed to underlie different responses to racially relevant situations (Carter, 1971).

Stereotype Threat

Numerous factors combine to influence the discrepancies in assessed school-based achievement between African Americans and Whites such as language barriers and low socioeconomic status. However, one contributing factor that cannot be overlooked is that of the subtle effects expectations and beliefs about people of color in general, and African Americans in particular, can have on the way these students are treated in the classroom. Many widely held expectations toward students emanate from stereotypes about certain groups (Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvulo, 1990). Stereotypes represent a host of prepackaged expectations that have very real consequences for the beliefs and behaviors of both the user of stereotypes and for those being stereotyped (Reyna, 2000). To understand the consequences stereotype threat may have on achievement settings, it is important to first examine the information stereotypes convey and the ramifications of this information (Reyna, 2000).

Stereotypes serve multiple functions (Ashmore and Delboca, 1981; Fiske, 1998; Hamilton and Sherman, 1994). At one level, stereotypes are descriptive: that is, stereotypes represent a coherent picture of what a social category or group is like
(Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981; Hamilton, 1980). However, stereotypes also serve an explanatory function (Allport, 1954). Along with information about what a group is and does, stereotypes provide information about why group members are the way they are. One kind of explanation stereotypes provide concerns the cause of a particular state of affairs regarding a group (Reyna, 2000). For example, the stereotype that “Blacks are lazy” is not just a putative description of African Americans, but is an explanation of why African Americans are not successful in our society. “Women are not good in math” is a stereotype often invoked to explain why women are less likely than men to pursue math-oriented careers. “Japanese are hard-working” is one interpretation for Japanese’s economic success. The popular movie *White Men Can’t Jump* has as its theme a stereotype used to justify beliefs that Caucasians are not good basketball players (Reyna, 2000). These stereotypes can also be used by holders of a more privileged status in regard to the particular characteristic and by the larger public for “explaining” outcomes for members of these respective groups. For instance, they can be used to justify African Americans losing a job, women failing in math, Japanese getting into a good college, or a White student doing poorly in sports.

The causal interpretations and explanations communicated through stereotypes have the consequences they do because they convey attributional information that impacts the way stereotyped individuals are treated by others as well as the way those being stereotyped perceive themselves (Reyna, 2000). For example, the negative attribution of low intellectual ability to African Americans has been linked to low
expectations for future success, which in turn may limit the opportunities offered to members of that group because they are not deemed capable (Weiner, 1986). Thus, assessing guilt or innocence, worthiness or unworthiness, capability or ineptitude, or deciding to help or to punish are decisions informed, and even justified, by the casual attributions conveyed in stereotypes. The social psychological factor experienced by certain marginalized ethnic group members being evaluated or judged according to a stereotype, in turn impairing their performance, is referred to as stereotype threat.

According to Claude Steele (1994), the phenomenon of “stereotype threat” exists and affects concrete outcomes such as academic performance in school. He maintains that low academic achievement among students of color is very likely based on institutional racism and the impact of societal stereotypes and perceptions about certain groups’ academic achievement. This theory posits that students’ perceptions of how others stereotype their abilities based on race or ethnicity affect their self-image and academic outcomes. The fear of possibly confirming a negative stereotype, sometimes combined with a fear that the stereotype might be true, causes some students of color to shy away from investing themselves in academic and achievement pursuits. Situations that provoke negative stereotypes are stressful and anxiety producing (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele, 2001) and this stress has implications for student performance and their willingness to identify with stereotype-relevant domains. Often, this results in their opposition and withdrawal from academic pursuits to prevent the appearance of their academic inferiority. Readers may recognize in this theory echoes of Cooley’s
“looking-glass self,” a theory which posits the individual’s construction of identity from reflection of the perceptions of others (Marshall, 1998; Cooley, 1902).

Many studies have documented ways that stereotype threat can impair performance. Gougis (1986) found that African American participants’ performance faltered on a cognitive task when negative stereotypes about African Americans were primed. Similarly, Steele and others have undertaken a series of studies that demonstrate decreased levels of performance when participants are asked to perform a task that measures some aspect of a negative stereotype about themselves, as when African Americans are asked to perform a task that will measure “intellectual abilities” (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995), when women or girls are ask to complete tasks that will measure their mathematical abilities (Ambady, Shih, Kim, & Pittinsky, 2001; Brown & Josephs, 1999), and even when White male college students are asked to complete a task that will measure their mathematical abilities relative to Asian men (Aronson et al., 1999). In every case, performance does not falter when those same tasks are labeled in a way that does not evoke negative stereotypes, and performance improves when positive stereotypes about participants’ social identities (e.g. the mathematical abilities of Asian students) are invoked (Ambady, 2001). These effects are significantly reduced when a teacher encourages students to see intelligence as a malleable capacity increased by effort and learning rather than a fixed capacity measured by performance (Aronson et al., 2002). Over time the threatening nature of negative stereotype-relevant activities serves
to undermine one’s identification with the relevant domain (Schmader et al., 2001; Steele, 1997; Zirkel, 2004)

*Racial Identity and Stereotype Threat*

Much of the research concerning outcome variables such as self-esteem (Parham & Helms, 1985a), self actualization (Parham & Hems, 1985b), and psychological well-being (Carter, 1991) have emerged from counseling psychology literature. However, the few known studies examining racial identity and stereotype threat in tandem are equivocal concerning whether racial identity is protective in such situations. For example, Schmader (2002) demonstrated that gender identification moderated the effects of stereotype threat when gender identity was linked to math performance. Women who indicated their gender was central to their self-definition were more likely to underperform in response to stereotype threat. Women in the Schmader study who did not list gender as a significant aspect of their self-conceptions did not underperform in response to the threat. On the other hand, Oysterman and her colleagues found higher levels of racial identification do indeed buffer African Americans against self-esteem and social threats (Oysterman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001).

According to Cross and other racial identity theorists, both buffering and amplifying effects are possible outcomes of different racial identity statuses. Amplification of threats should occur primarily among individuals with early statuses; those identified with the later Internalization status have attitudes predicted to buffer threats to the self. Thus, Schmader’s (2002) gender identification results may not
generalize from women taking a math test to African Americans’ test performance because Black racial identity, as it is typically measured, is far more nuanced than gender identity as measured by Schmader with a single item. As in past studies summarized (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998), there are important differences between each groups’ experience of stereotype threat; women and African Americans show different patterns of vulnerability. As stated above, presumably, internalization of related attitudes that play a protective role against social threats associated with race (Cross & Flahagen-Smith, 1996) will indeed guard against the deleterious effects of stereotype threat that moderate intellectual performance in high (test-taking situations) and low (general academic situations) stereotype threat situations.

The study conducted by Davis, Aronson, and Salinas (2006) created low, medium, and high stereotype threat situations, which allowed for the exploration of additive effects of stereotype threat cues in the environment. The authors proposed that in the low threat condition, the Pre-encounter and Immersion-Emerson status attitudes were associated with decreased performance on the task. The literature suggested the most vulnerable to stereotype threat are individuals with preponderances for Pre-encounter status attitudes because they believe many of the negative stereotypes suggested about African Americans. Individuals strongly endorsing Immersion-Emerson status attitudes are also at risk for the opposite reason. Consistent with Schmader’s (2002) findings, Davis et al. (2006) believe that these individuals’ strong identification with being Black makes them especially vulnerable to the threat.
Furthermore, Paham and Helms (1985b) demonstrated that individuals with high Immersion-Emersion attitudes often report feelings of anxiety and stress. Given the above it seems clear that contradicting the stereotypes of African Americans as intellectually inferior would be a high priority for individuals with Immersion-Emersion status attitudes, thereby making them vulnerable to stereotype threat. In contrasting Immersion-Emersion status are individuals endorsing Internalization attitudes. Subjects with Internalization attitudes have fewer conflicts about what it means to be African American and appear to be less likely to see their testing situation (and their resulting performance) as a confirmation or validation of their race. Internalization attitudes should serve as a protective factor because the individual is thought to be free from the vulnerability factors mentioned previously – they neither endorse the negative stereotypes nor are they bent on disproving them (Purham & Helms, 1985b).

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) can be viewed as a subdivision of Critical Legal Studies scholarship about race that grew out of several seminal events. CRT evolved in response to a perceived stalling of traditional civil rights litigation in the United States in arenas such as legislative districting, affirmative action, criminal sentencing, and campus speech codes (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Williams Crenshaw, 1993). In response to the advances of the 1950s and 1960s dismantling discrimination in schooling, hiring, and housing, there arose a backlash against progressive racial reforms. From the Supreme Court to the lower courts a general hostility toward policies (such as affirmative
action) unfolded that took race into account in redressing historical and contemporary racial discrimination (Taylor et al., 2009).

The legal requirements to prove illicit prejudice became onerous, and the pace of racial reform slowed and began to reverse. The hiring of faculty of color at leading educational institutions stalled. School integration, as promised by *Brown v. Board of Education* did not materialize. White flight from newly integrated neighborhoods re-established familiar social and racial separations. Entrenched hiring and lending practices further cemented underclass status for many families of color (Taylor et al., 2009). Frustrated by this backlash, and the perceived failure of traditional civil rights theories and methods, a group of legal scholars, including Derrick A. Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, began to openly criticize the role of law in the construction and maintenance of racially based social and economic oppression. They also began looking for an explanation of why this seeming retraction occurred and how to formulate new strategies to effect transformation (Taylor et al., 2009). Critical race theory is both an outgrowth and separate entity from an earlier legal movement called critical legal studies (CLS).

Critical legal studies is a legal movement that challenged the traditional legal scholarship that focused on doctrinal and policy analysis (Gordon, 1990) in favor of a form of law that spoke to the specificity of individuals and groups in social and cultural context. Critical legal studies also challenged the notion that the “civil rights struggle represents a long, steady, march toward social transformation” (Crenshaw, 1988, p.1334).
CLS scholars critique mainstream legal ideology for its portrayal of U.S. society as a meritocracy but failing to include racism in its critique. Thus, CRT became a logical outgrowth of the discontent of legal scholars of color (Taylor et al., 2009).

Critical race theory (CRT) evolved since the mid 1970s as “‘a form of opposition scholarship’ concerned with the overt and covert racism facing people of color within educational institutions (Calmore, 1992, p. 2161; see also Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995)” (as cited in Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005, p. 366). CRT posits that racism is endemic in society and in education, and that racism has become so deeply engrained in society’s and schooling’s consciousness that it is often invisible. CRT confronts and challenges the liberal pursuit of meritocracy, colorblindness, and incremental change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). While CRT focuses on race and racism, these processes “are also viewed at the intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination” (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122). CRT values experiential knowledge as a way to inform thinking and research. As a result, narrative accounts and testimonies are valued as key sources of data by CRT scholars (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Finally, CRT is activist in nature; CRT scholars maintain a commitment to social justice.

For the field of education, Daniel Solorzano (1997, 1998) identified five tenets of CRT that can and should inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy: (1) the inter-centricity of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches. For the purposes of this study, it is important
to understand the relationship that exists with CRT in education, specifically in curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation.

Curriculum. Critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact, designed to maintain a White supremacist master script. As Swartz (1992) contends,

Master scripting silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily legitimizing dominant, white upper class, male voicings as the “standard” knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. Thus the content that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, mastered, and then reshaped before it can become a part of the master script. (p. 341)

This master scripting means stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power. Thus, Rosa Parks is reduced to a tired seamstress instead of a long-time participant in social justice endeavors as evidenced by her work at the Highland Folk School to prepare for a confrontation with segregationist ideology (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Or Martin Luther King, Jr. becomes a sanitized folk hero who enjoyed the full support of “good Americans” rather than a disdained scholar and activist whose vision extended to social justice causes throughout the world and challenged the U.S. on issues of economic injustice and aggression in Southeast Asia (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition to the distortions, omissions, and stereotypes within school curriculum content that must be considered, attention must also be paid to the curriculum rigor deemed “enriched”
curriculum via gifted and talented courses and classes. Jonathan Kozol (1991) described such enrichments:

> The curriculum (the white school) follows “emphasizes critical thinking, reasoning and logic.” The planetarium, for instance, is employed not simply for the study of the universe as it exists. ‘Children also are designing their own galaxies,’ the teacher says. (p. 96)

In my [Kozol’s] notes: “Six girls, four boys. Nine White, one Chinese, I am glad they have this class.” But what about the others? Aren’t there ten Black children in the school who could enjoy this also? (p. 96)

This restricted access to the curriculum is a good illustration of Harris’s (1993) explanation of the function of property in terms of use and enjoyment (Ladson-Billings, 2000a).

Instruction. According to Taylor et al. (2009), CRT suggests that current instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient. As a consequence, classroom teachers are engaged in a never ending quest for “the right strategy or technique” to deal with (read: control) “at-risk” (read: African American) students. They continue by explaining that cast in a language of failure, instructional approaches for African American students typically involve some aspect of remediation. This race-neutral perspective purports to see deficiency as an individual phenomenon. Thus, instruction is conceived as a generic set of teaching skills that should work for all students. When these strategies or skills fail to achieve desired results, the students not the techniques, are found to be lacking (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, the authors point out new research efforts to reject the deficit model by investigating and affirming effective teachers of African American students such as Chicago teacher Marva
Collins and Los Angeles teacher Jaime Escalante. Both of whom are recognized for their persistence in believing in the educability of all students (Taylor et al., 2009).

Assessment. Throughout U.S. history, the subordination of Blacks has been built on “scientific” theories (e.g., intelligence test) that depend on racial stereotypes about Blacks that make their condition appear appropriate (Ladson-Billings, 2000b). Intelligence testing has been a movement to legitimize African American student deficiency under the guise of scientific rationalism (Alienikoff, 1991; Gould, 1981). In addition, according to Marable (1983), one purpose of the African American in the racial/capitalist state is to serve as a symbolic index for the poor Whites. He stated that if working class Whites are achieving at a higher level than Blacks, then they feel relatively superior. This allows Whites with real power to exploit both poor Whites and Blacks. Crenshaw (1988) contended the point of controversy is no longer that these stereotypes were developed to rationalize the oppression of Black, but rather, “[T]he extent to which these stereotypes serve hegemonic function by perpetuating a mythology about both Blacks and Whites even today, reinforcing an illusion of a white community that cuts across ethnic, gender, and class lines” (p. 1371). In the classroom, a dysfunctional curriculum coupled with a lack of instructional innovation (or persistence) adds up to poor performance on traditional assessment measures. These assessment measures may demonstrate that students do not know what is on the test, but fail to tell what students actually know and are able to do (Taylor et al., 2009)
**School Funding.** According to Taylor et al. (2009), the area that most prominently underscores the racism and inequity in schooling is funding. CRT argues that inequity in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism. The inability for African Americans to qualify for educational advancements, jobs, and mortgages creates a cycle of low educational achievement, underemployment and unemployment, and substandard housing (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Without suffering a single act of personal racism, most African Americans suffer the consequence of systemic and structural racism. CRT argues that the import of property provides another way to consider the funding disparity. Schooling is a function of individual states, is differentially administered by various state legislatures. Most common however, is the way public education is funded. Almost every state funds schools based in large measure on property taxes. Even states like California with centralized funding of instruction still rely to a large extent on local property taxes for school infrastructure. Those areas with property of greater wealth typically have better funded schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Without a commitment to redesign funding formulas, one of the basic inequities of schooling will remain in place and virtually guarantee the reproduction of the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

**Desegregation.** Not all school districts experienced desegregation in every school, however; on the national level, it is an important enough phenomenon to be included with the more common experiences of curriculum, assessment, and funding. Although the historical fight for school desegregation was undertaken as a solution to
social inequity, CRT scholars argue that school desegregation has in fact been promoted only in ways that advantage whites (Bell, 1990). Lomotey and Staley’s (1990) examination of Buffalo’s “model desegregation” program revealed that African American students continued to be poorly served by the school system. African American student achievement failed to improve, while suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates continue to rise. What made Buffalo a model desegregation programs were the benefits Whites derived from the program and their seeming support for desegregation. Whites were able to take advantage of special magnet school programs and free extended childcare. Thus, the dominant logic is that a model desegregation program is one that ensures Whites are happy and do not leave the system altogether (Lomotey & Staley, 1990). Conversely, desegregation strategies had the result of African American teachers and administrators losing jobs within the public school system and had the effect of depriving African American students of role models and mentors from their own schools within the community (Hudson & Holmes, 1994).

Critical Social Capital/Community Cultural Wealth

Instrumental in the work of social and cultural capital are the writings of Pierre Bourdieu (1986). According to Bourdieu (1986), certain advantages are granted to middle class students, whose cultural capital, or tastes, etiquette, demeanor, speech, writing, and general interaction styles, are arbitrarily more valued in the middle class institution of schooling than those of their working class counterparts. He also emphasized the advantages granted middle class youth by virtue of their social capital,
which may be defined as a durable, interpersonal network of relationships that can be mobilized to provide social and other forms of support (Bourdieu, 1986). For those who have it, this capital provides advantages in how to negotiate the school’s cultural environment, which is often based on tacit understanding of middle class ways of being and communicating, styles, and preferences (Bourdieu, 1986; Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2003; Lee, 2007; Lewis, 2003; Murrell, 1994).

Classic cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is limited in its concept because it excludes the cultural values, traits, and custom of those not of the White educated middle class. In particular, African American students whose history is marred by racial discrimination and marginalization draw upon resources of critical social capital (Ginwright, 2007) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). These concepts identify cultural resources arising out of the collective community resources and experiences which specifically address the cultural and social skills needed to successfully navigate institutional racism and oppression encountered by African Americans in society in general and educational institutions in particular.

Critical social capital. Community institutions such as schools, churches, and youth programs located in Black communities are key in developing and sustaining critical social capital for Black youth and their communities. Rather than view social capital as mere interpersonal relationships and connections to resources, critical social capital in Black poor communities must address fostering a critical consciousness,
building a strong racial identity, and developing political optimism and expectations about community change (Ginwright, 2007).

Formulations of social capital are broadly defined as “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, which facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993, p. 36). That is, as people extend their relationships with other persons, institutions, and groups, they are more likely to have greater access to resources such as jobs, educational opportunities, and neighborhood safety (Fuchs, Shapiro, & Minnite, 2001).

Critical social capital departs from traditional notions of social capital by placing a greater focus on the collective dimensions of community change, and it centers on how racial identity and political awareness serve as important community and social resources for youth. Critical social capital is facilitated by intergenerational advocacy that challenges negative concepts about Black youth; it is developed by building a collective racial and cultural identity, and it is sustained by cultivating an understanding of personal challenges as political issues (Ginwright, 2007).

Critical social capital is created and sustained through opportunities in which Black youth are viewed as legitimate political actors and by providing meaningful opportunities to give voice to Black youth to articulate their feelings (Ginwright, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Critical social capital involves creating a collective racial and cultural identity among African Americans, including Black youth that provides them with a unified understanding of their collective situation in American society. This is important
given the entrenched ways in which Black youth in urban communities have been socialized to view each other through fragmented adversarial neighborhood identities (Ginwright, 2007).

**Community cultural wealth.** Community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppression. A critical race theory lens can ‘see’ that Communities of Color nurture their collective cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). The various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth. *Aspirational capital* refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. *Linguistic capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style (Faulstich Orellana, 2003).

*Familial capital* refers to that cultural knowledge nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002). *Social capital* can be understood as networks of people and community resources. *Navigational capital* refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind. For example, strategies to navigate through racially-hostile university campuses draw on the concept of academic invulnerability, or
students’ abilities to “sustain high levels of achievement, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly at school and, ultimately, dropping out of school” (Alva, 1991, p. 19; see also Allen & Solórzano, 2000; Auerbach, 2001; Solórzano et al., 2000).

*Resistant capital* refers to that knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Delgado Bernal, 1997; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1994; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This form of community cultural wealth is grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Color (Deloria, 1969).

**Theme Two: Overview of the Issues of Race**

In understanding the dynamics and complexities of racial identity, an understanding of racial formation from its origins to the present provides a base for interpretation of the distinctions of race and racial categories and the effect on institutions and agencies, particularly education. Historically and socio-politically, the meaning of race has been unstable. This overview emphases the origins of race, racism as the system employed to maintain distinct advantages of race, and the process of socialization, which perpetuates the existence of and distinctions of race.

*Race*

In most cases, the definition of race has proven to be primarily arbitrary and an unscientific social category based on the notion of race as a biologically based
characteristic and its persistence across generations (Jones, 1991; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Omi & Winant, 1986). According to Smedley (1993), it is a human invention often confused with culture and ethnicity. However, there are distinct differences. According to Landrine and Klonoff (1996), “A culture can be defined as a highly specified pool of information, categories, and rules for categorization, inter-subjective meanings, collective representations, and ways of knowing, understanding and interpreting stimuli, as a result of a common history” (p. 37). Like race, culture operates at the unconscious level, “like an unwritten dictionary that tells its members what things are and what they mean-how to process, evaluate, and interpret the world” (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996, p. 37).

Cross and Cross (2007) however, argued that regardless of these differentiations, racial and ethnic elements interact within individuals’ lived experiences and should not be artificially isolated from one another, as in the exploration of ethnic features of African Americans racial identity (Corkely, 2005). Unlike the constructs of culture or ethnicity, race was and is defined primarily on the visible markers related to biological factors. According to Helms (1995), skin color and physical features are primarily visible markers for race. Race is conventionally associated with visible features that in turn are linked with certain purported moral, intellectual, and cognitive dispositions (Helms, 1995). Racial classifications are imposed, and, in American society, ideas associated with racial group membership have endured for more than four centuries. Whereas ethnic identification is often lost after three generations to blend into the American mainstream, race lasts across generations (Helms, 1995).
Based on a convergence of references on race, Jones (1991) defined this construct as:

A group of people who share biological factors that come to signify group membership and social meaning such membership has in the society at large. Race becomes the basis for expectation regarding social roles, performance levels, values, and norms and mores for group and non-group members and in-group members alike. Since there is a compelling tendency to categorize individuals in groups, and since the phenotypical racial factors are easily detected, race is one of the most salient grounds for social categorization. (p. 9)

Smedley (1993) concluded in her exegesis, “race should not be seen as something tangible that exists in the outside world which has to be discovered, described, and defined… [it is} a cultural creation, a product of human invention” (p. 6).

According to Winant (2000), race can be defined in a more modern term as a basic concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies. He went on to state that although the concept of race appeals to biologically based human characteristics (phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. There is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of race, and the socio-historical categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be imprecise if not completely arbitrary (Omi & Winant, 1994).

The idea of race began to take shape with the rise of a world political economy. The onset of global economic integration, the dawn of seaborne empires, the conquest of the Americas, and the rise of the Atlantic slave trade were all key elements in the
genealogy of race. Hough intimated that throughout the world in innumerable ways, racial categorization of human beings was a European invention (Winant, 2000).

**Institutional Racism**

According to Thompson and Carter (1997), in American society, race has a powerful and distinct social and political meaning. Race is used to structure our society and distribute social and economic rewards and punishments. In describing the origins of race it becomes necessary to also discuss the collective term for those forces that keep the idea and practice of racial stratification alive – racism (Helms, 1994). Many people think of racism as individual acts of prejudice and discriminatory behavior (Hacker, 1992) for primarily two reasons: 1) Americans are culturally predisposed to see the world through the experience of individuals; accordingly, socializing forces (e.g., mass media, education, institutions) encourage us to think of prejudice and discrimination principally as aberrant behaviors committed by a few isolated people and 2) this perspective perpetuates the idea that racism is relic of the past. When racism is perceived from this standpoint, the systemic elements and group-based aspects of racism are ignored, denied, or distorted (Gaines & Reed, 1995). When Fredrickson (1988) compared the United States, Brazil, and other Latin American countries, his conclusion was that unlike other these countries,

> The United States has been (and remains) a genuinely racist society” and that “on the whole it has treated Blacks as if they were inherently inferior, and for at least a century of its history this pattern of rigid social stratification has been buttressed and strengthened by a widely accepted racist ideology. (p. 190)

According to Jones (1991), racism
Is developed and maintained by more complex human systems that just individuals. We refer to organizational and institutional racism when the structures and processes that establish and perpetuate racism develops a life of their own that exist apart from whatever individuals may fulfill roles and responsibilities in higher-order systems. When Plessey v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision in 1886 approved “separate but equal” facilities for Blacks and Whites, an entire institutional fabric for racism was created. (pp. 132-133)

W.E.B. Dubois the famous African American scholar posited that America will forever contend with the “color line” drawn between Black and White.

Institutional and cultural racism began taking shape centuries before the Plessey v. Ferguson decision. According to social historians, institutional and cultural racism began when Europeans created social systems of subordination and when they began to exploit people culturally different from them (Thompson & Carter, 1977). Thompson and Carter (1977) state that in North America, ideas of racial supremacy of Whites began when Europeans had their first contact with Native Americans in the 15th century. In most cases, this involved the physical and violent taking of land, attempts to destroy culture, and the displacement of indigenous people (Thompson & Carter, 1977).

Institutional racism is systemic, with structured inequalities that support a schema replete with policies, practices, norms, and traditions, that automatically disadvantage and exploit one social group for the good of another (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009). The authors contend that oppression, the visible operant tool of racism, “involves institutional control, ideological domination, and the imposition of the dominant groups’ culture on the target group” (p. 345). White privilege, the unseen partner to oppression, is “an
invisible package of unearned assets that [Whites] can count on cashing in each day, but
about which [they are] meant to remain oblivious” (McIntosh, 1997, p. 291).

White privilege and racism are interconnected and cannot be separated when
discussing the individual, institutional, and structural nature of racism (Scipio, Colin, &
Lund, 2010). Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2010), researchers of the structural
dimensions of racism, concluded that the American educational system is pervaded by
institutional racism in both public schools and higher education. They reported that both
racism and White privilege are supported in public educational institutions, as evidenced
by biased examinations (SAT, admissions), White middle-class curriculum, classroom
interactions, tracking, disproportional numbers of African Americans in special
education, as well as the separating out of honors classes for enriched curriculum denied
to others (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010). Further, they observed individual
racism and White privilege experienced by students in adult education programs during
the admissions process and through interactions with faculty and students (Baumgartner
& Johnson-Bailey, 2010).

Two views emerged regarding policy and practice that perpetuate racism: one is
that Whites are not conscious of the privilege they hold because of their racial group
membership; they do not see a correlation between this privilege and racism and are,
therefore, unaware of how it influences their attitudes and behaviors. These influences
have grave education implications for students of color. White racial attitudes and
behaviors contribute to the disparity in educational outcomes of students of color in
public and higher education. The other perspective is that they are aware but choose not to change (Scipio et al., 2010).

**Implications for teaching and learning.** Statistics on the racial composition of teachers in the U.S. are startling – 90% of the K-12 teaching force is White (National Collaborative on Diversity of the Teaching Force, 2004); almost half of the schools in the U.S. do not have a single teacher of color on staff; therefore, many students will graduate from high school having been taught only by Whites (Jordan-Irvine 2003). The immediate future will not be very different because 80% to 93% of all current teacher education students are White females (Cochran-Smith 2004), and they are being instructed by teacher education professionals that are 88% White (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

This demographic imperative (Banks, 1996; Cochran-Smith, 2004) should compel educators to look deeply at Whiteness and its relationship to teaching, particularly as classrooms are increasingly filled with children of color. The sheer number of White people in the teaching field in a country marked by racial inequality has implications for the role White teachers play in creating patterns of racial achievement and opportunity.

To better understand how White teachers construct identities of people different from themselves, Du Bois (1997), Woodson (2006), Omi and Winant (1986), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), and Lynn (1999) each noted that race is a key organizing category for inequality because of the permanence of racial ideology and White supremacy in American society. As evidenced by the ways in which pre-service teachers
addressed race, particularly Whiteness, in a study that explained their life experiences, it is clear that racism is “endemic and deeply ingrained in American life” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995 p. 52) to the extent that it should be seen as the major condition that must be analyzed, in conjunction with other forms of oppression, to understand inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In examining race as the organizing principal of domination (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995), it is critical to state that the system of domination the pre-service teachers are maintaining is White supremacy (Jenson, 2005). Within this system, Whiteness is the ideology and way of being in the world used to maintain White supremacy. Bush (2004) argued that Whiteness “reveals the ways in which Whites benefit from a variety of institutional and social arrangements that often appear (to Whites) to have nothing to do with race” (p. 15). According to Jenson (2005), this system of inequality has everything to do with race, as demonstrated by an analysis of the founding of this republic on the land of Native Americans with the labor of African Americans. Ladson-Billings (2001) contended:

> Typically, White middle-class prospective teachers have little to no understanding of their own culture. Notions of Whiteness are taken for granted. They rarely are interrogated. But being White is not merely about biology. It is about choosing a system of privilege and power. (p. 81)

As a result, the people who are making decisions about what and how Black children are to be taught, and how their progress is to be evaluated, have little understanding of Black people and their culture (Knowles & Kenneth, 1969). These authors contend that despite reform after reform group, there are too few Black teachers,
and Black principals and superintendents are rare. Even though per pupil expenditure in urban schools is less than that in suburban schools, grants in aid to urban schools will not solve the educational crisis of the achievement gap. The problem is not merely one of resources but rather the lack of willingness to share power.

As a consequence of centralization of power in White hands, most urban schools confront Black children with a curriculum and a set of learning conditions that do not relate to the student’s life outside school. Textbooks and procedures are developed by and for Whites and have little relevance to Black parents or their children (Knowles & Kenneth, 1969). From the classroom to the PTA, Black students discover the school does not like them, does not respond to them, does not appreciate their culture, and does not think they can learn (Riessman, 1962).

Working class parents feel a powerlessness and lack of personal effectiveness against the authority of the school system, although they have great respect for education as an important tool for achieving a better status in life (Hess & Shipman, 1969). As a result, Black people are alienated from a system that does not recognize them. School authorities often rationalize the dropout rates, absenteeism, discipline problems and teachers’ complaints of lack of parental concern by saying socioeconomically disadvantaged, racially/culturally deprived persons do not value education. Yet a study by Hess and Shipman (1969) on the attitudes of Black mothers demonstrated that 73% of their subjects from the lowest socioeconomic group wanted their children to attend college. Another study showed that in every socioeconomic class, Black parents have
higher educational and occupational aspirations for their children than White people (Deutsch & Brown, 1964). The problem is not a lack of interest in education but a lack of power (Knowles & Kenneth, 1969).

Social scientists and educators attempt to describe and explain educational difficulties of Black students solely on the basis of “lower socioeconomic class” or low status group. This approach obscures the relationship between race and membership in low socioeconomic groups. This approach considers Black and White students from the same perspective, ignoring the effects of institutional racism on Black students and ignoring cultural differences in determining curriculum.

Within the present educational system Black students suffer from institutionalized discrimination in many ways particularly in IQ testing, classroom ability grouping, and negative teacher attitudes.

Standardized tests are the basis for student placement into an ability group. The tests strongly influence the teacher’s attitude toward the student. Consequently, students’ scores largely determine the quality of education they will receive, an education that, in turn, continues to affect their test performance. Ability groups (advanced placement, college prep, gifted) serve to maintain “segregated” classrooms in “desegregated” schools. Black students are often placed in the lower groups. According to Nathaniel Hicherson (1966), racial minorities are discriminated against by bigoted and race-minded school officials. They are channeled out of academic courses by counselors with no training in dealing with minority students. They are evaluated as slow learners and
herded into slow learning groups as early as the first grade on the basis of observation by teachers who themselves may be filled with prejudice or sympathy for the “poor little things” (Hicherson, 1966, p. 114). Whatever the basis for placement, the tracking system discriminates against Black students. Tracking condemns Black and poor children, on the basis of inappropriate aptitude tests, to a “blue collar” education in the lower tracks distinctly unequal to that provided White children in upper tracks.

Students readily perceive the teachers’ attitudes and expectations toward them. Studies show that students may be greatly affected by what their teachers think the children can accomplish. Kenneth Clark (1965) stated, “Stimulation and teaching based on positive expectation seem to play an even more important role in a child’s performance in school than does the community environment from which he comes” (p. 132). In the study, those students who were randomly labeled to be “spurters” (poised to become advanced learners) were described by their teachers as having a better chance at being successful in life. By contrast, students in the randomly chosen control group who also made gains in learning were described by the teachers unfavorably. The more the children gained intellectually, the less favorably were they rated by their teachers. The study concluded that children who gain intellectually when improvement is not expected of them “are looked on as showing undesirable behavior” (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968, p. 22). A disturbing implication of this finding has to do with the rigidity of stereotypes derived from presumed ability group labels (Knowles & Kenneth, 1969).
This study challenges the notion that the school system allows the student to “develop at his own pace.” On the contrary, it appears that once the child’s intellectual ability is fixed by standardized testing scores and teachers form an opinion of the student’s potential, his/her intellectual growth is largely determined. For the Black student, such a combination of testing procedures, ability grouping, and teachers’ stereotypes, the practices of the institution, trap him into an inferior education. Dr. Pearl (1969) summarized, “The teachers responsibility is to teach, but instead we engage in self-fulfilling prophecy. We decide that certain people cannot be educated. We refuse to educate them; they grow up uneducated and we pride ourselves on our exceedingly predictive index” (p. 3). Teacher expectations strongly influence student self-images and, therefore, the students’ abilities to learn in the classroom. However, teachers’ expectations and preferences are often influenced by racial and class stereotypes.

The combined effect of these factors is a progressive lessening of the child’s self-esteem as he/she proceeds through school. In addition, within each socioeconomic group, self-esteem of Black students is less than that of White children. The self-concepts of Black students who bear the double stigma of Blackness and poverty are consistently lowest of all. The result of this process is a steady decline in academic performance, particularly in the critical skills of verbal and reading ability (Comer, 1966).
Racial Socialization

Racial socialization refers to the process individuals experience in constructing appraisals of themselves and others as racial beings (Thompson & Carter, 1997). Racial socialization informs identity, which Erickson (1968) defined as “a subjective of an invigorating sameness and continuity” (p. 19). It intersects with other socializing factors, such as social class, culture, and gender as well as biological and maturational factors. There are several places to begin when understanding how the socialization process works. On a personal level, one could consider grappling with race in terms of the past, where one grew up, or how race influences one’s choice of intimate partners and associates (Thompson & Carter, 1997). These factors and others all influence how people are socialized racially. For the purposes of this study, a description of how race is used to structure the society and how these structural factors influence personal and interpersonal factors is discussed.

Racial-socializing at the ecological level is discussed by Boyd-Franklin (1989) who pointed out that socialization and identity formation occur in the context of the family (to include biological parents or relatives, adoptive or foster parents or group homes). But the influence of communities and society on families is unmistakable. From the beginning days of European settlements and colonies to the present and with few periods of exception, members of American racial groups (i.e., Native Americans, Latino(a), White, and Asian) have lived in separate or racially homogenous communities (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). Thus, in this country, racial segregation has been the norm, and
as communities and families serve as powerful socializing forces, race is an integral component of the socialization experiences. Who one sees on a day-to-day basis, the roles they see people assume, and importantly, how these people appear and are treated in comparison to others communicate powerful and lasting messages about who one’s own self is and is not (Boyd-Franklin, 1989).

According to Carter and Thompson (1997), there are two primary mechanisms being used to establish and maintain the norm of racial separation; these are residential segregation and employment discrimination, which, in effect, have relegated most People of Color to menial jobs and to less powerful positions and occupations than Whites. Residential segregation and discrimination in employment operate as institutional and cultural practices that have powerful effects on socialization and identity formation. They help reinforce and sustain myths and foster the idea that socio-race is equated with dramatic and distinct differences beyond skin color and appearance. Skin color and appearance also become associated with moral, intellectual, and behavioral characteristics. The mass media contribute to the socialization process by reinforcing the lessons and rules taught in our immediate environment (Thompson & Carter, 1997).

Racial separation as a form of racial socialization in residential living was initially established by force and legal statutes that prohibited interracial contact, housing covenants restricting particular people on the basis of race and religion, and unfair mortgage lending practices. For instance, Haymes (1995) noted,

Until the 1950s federally sponsored mortgage programs… reinforced racial exclusion in that Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and Veteran Administration
(VA) mortgages went to White middle-class suburbs, while few were awarded to Black neighborhoods...The rational for the practice was that increased Black populations would drive down property values. (p. 5)

The presumption inherent in the practice of these mortgage programs was that White people were responsible and reliable whereas Black people were not. These practices are resonant of the power of institutional racism in shaping attitudes and beliefs about people in accordance to their racial group membership.

The idea of Blacks being unmotivated and irresponsible was also extended to other racially marginalized groups. Taken together, earning low wages, having unstable employment records, and living in substandard housing (often unkempt and frequently owned by nonresident landlords) help create the impression of the inherent characteristics of a group so visibly recognized by race (Carter, 1997). But what is especially powerful about racial images and messages is that they are not always communicated directly. Rather they are conveyed through meta-communications, which are subtle and often unspoken messages learned early in life and reinforced without aid of spoken words (Carter, 1997). One example of a racial meta-communication is the trend in racially mixed schools toward racially homogenous eating areas in lunchrooms. The unspoken rule was not to violate the lunchroom boundaries, which were usually racial. Whites ate with Whites, Blacks with Blacks, Hispanics with Hispanics, and Asians with Asians (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These are messages parents may not have taught their children verbally, but were conveyed implicitly in racially segregated housing patterns, as well as in social, economic, educational, and occupational spheres (Thompson & Carter,
1997). According to Greene (1990), the process of racial socialization encompasses a legacy of skills taught to Black children by their parents or extended family members to deflect and negotiate a hostile environment. He also noted that these skills may be communicated consciously as well as unconsciously. Carter (1995) argued that racial-role socialization is similar to sex-role socialization. In the same way that children are raised to assume the proper attitudes and behaviors commensurate with one’s gender, so is one raised to behave appropriately for one’s racial group. Carter (1995) observed:

In the same way that gender identity is modeled, shaped, learned, or identified with, I contend that race-appropriate roles are also communicated through socialization…Social and personality development are intertwined with prevailing assumptions about race that are learned through imitation, and internalized and reinforced by a need to conform to racial norms and be accepted by society at large. As an individual matures, he or she develops a personality that is informed by social and moral attitudes, behaviors, and feelings. In general, personality is thought to be constellation of attributes and characteristics of a person that are internally enduring and which guide his or her interpersonal behavior. (p.18)

According to Lund (2010), the socialization of what it means to be White is very strong. Whites learn about values, rules, roles, and assumptions from those they trust. In conforming to their messages without question, they, in turn, pass those same messages to others (Lund, 2010). Whites set the rules, guidelines, and foundation for society, the standard for everyone else (Wildman, 2000). Whites have no need to investigate their identity or think of themselves as racial beings. There is no need to know about people of color; therefore, “dominant access to information about subordinates is often limited to stereotypical depictions of the other” (Tatum, 2000, p. 12). The White race thus provides all groups with the way to view the world, the only “legitimate way to view the world”
(Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 258). It is almost impossible to ignore these messages received on a daily basis. Harro (2000) contended, “What makes this brainwashing even more insidious is the fact that it is woven into every structural thread of the fabric of our culture” (p. 18). It is the invisibility and silence of racism that renders Whites unable to see it, unable to name it, unable to take action against it. It is part of their society, culture, and lives (Lund, 2010).

Adolescents are socialized to a myriad of social norms and practices in order to become well-adjusted and functioning adults in society. However, the task of socialization is shared between the school environment, neighborhood, extended family, and other social agents, the primary responsibility for socialization rests with the parents. Parents are expected to manage identity development, puberty, peer conflict, and school difficulties. African American parents have added responsibility: the task of socializing their children to function in a society where their racial status is devalued. As a result, parents spend a significant amount of time and energy socializing their children to the role race will play in their lives. In doing so, parents often convey messages about racial and individual pride, expectations of discrimination, and intergroup relations (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006; Stevenson, 1997). Research documented associations among different racial socialization messages and a variety of important outcomes including more mature identity development (Barr & Neville, 2008), higher levels of self-esteem (Neblett et al., 2008), reduced problem behaviors (Bennett, 2007), better academic adjustment (Anglin & Wade, 2007), reduced
acculturative stress (Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2005), and increased resilience (Brown, 2008). Perhaps most importantly, racial socialization messages buffer African American adolescent’s mental health from the harmful effects of racial discrimination (Neblett et al., 2008).

Racial identity has the potential for providing young people with a framework to identify, evaluate, and buffer the meaning and detrimental consequences of racial tension within varied social interactions both in and out of school (Cross, 1991; Delpit, 1995). Recognizing these tensions can be useful in helping African American youth make friendship and school engagement choices within academic and public settings. Without skills in deciphering racial politics, Black youth may not be able to engage and function fully in social arenas. Racial socialization and the experience of racism influence racial identity development and determine the coping skills relevant to the social threats of the moment, which for many African Americans presents a unique parental challenge (Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001). Arrington and Stevenson (2006) found that as school racism experiences increase the psychological sense of school membership and school self-esteem for Black adolescents decrease. Stevenson et al. (in press) found that direct and vicarious racism experiences were associated with higher levels of anger expression and depression symptoms among Black adolescents. However, Scott (2003) did not find a relationship between youth’s personal experiences with discrimination and their racism-related socialization.
The adolescent perspective on racial socialization recognizes that although parents may provide race-related child rearing messages, children and youth are mutually active agents who filter what they hear and then eventually endorse, reject, and express their interpretations of those messages through identity and behaviors and style (Bentley, Adams, & Stevenson, 2009). The research on racial socialization from the perspective of adolescents has focused on two areas: beliefs and experiences (Stevenson, 1998). Racial socialization beliefs reflect a focus on social identity. By contrast, racial socialization experiences reflect a behavioral or exposure focus (Stevenson et al., 2002).

Adolescent reports of the frequency of family racial socialization interactions and messages have been categorized into five types: coping with antagonism, alertness to discrimination, cultural pride reinforcement, cultural legacy appreciation, and mainstream fit (Stevenson et al., 2002). Coping with antagonism (CA) and alertness to discrimination (AD) can be seen as parts of the protective dimension. Cultural pride reinforcement (CPR) and cultural legacy socialization (CLS) can be seen as elements of the proactive dimension. The combination of these strategies is referred to as racial/ethnic socialization (R/ES) but does not include mainstream fit, which represents an assimilationist dimension.

Constantine and Blackmon (2002) studied adolescent-reported racial socialization experiences among middle-school students in predominately Black school environments and found that those students with high rates of cultural pride showed high levels of peer self-esteem whereas those students with high rates of mainstream fit socialization showed
low academic self-esteem. Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor, and Davis (2005) found that the cultural diversity of Black youths’ neighborhood influenced the frequency and type of racial socialization they reported receiving from their parents, and that boys and girls experienced this socialization differently. Racial socialization by parents would involve a set of strategies ranging from cultural pride to racism awareness to protect the emotional lives of Black youth, especially in environments where Black youth are in the distinct minority (Tatum, 2003). Children benefit academically, behaviorally, and cognitively when parents are explicit in teaching them to prepare for racial hostilities and to be proud of their culture (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Caughy, O’Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). Research on racial socialization beliefs suggested that as adolescents believe in the importance of racial socialization, they are also likely to endorse pro-Black racial identity attitudes (Demo & Hughes, 1998; Stevenson, 1995).

**Modern Racism/Denial**

The racial climate today can be characterized by the minimization of the sociopolitical influences of race (Thompson & Carter, 1997). People of all races, but primarily Whites, are eager to dismiss race as irrelevant to any issue, to profess their color blindness, and to contend that race and racism are the preoccupations of Blacks and other visible racial-ethnic group members who want to gain rewards and resources without putting forth the work necessary to earn them (Skillings & Dobbins, 1991). As a result, a key feature of the construct of race in the United States is denial, a strategy used to minimize the role of race in structurally imposing inferior characteristics on People of
Color and positive, superior characteristics on Whites (Skillings & Dobbins, 1991). It is a denial of the reality of racism that has historically brought on deep-seated pathologies in American society, contradictions between public and organizational policy and practice, disingenuous self-expression, and divisiveness among people in their interactions with one another. It is a cloaking of race and racism that Pettigrew and Martin (1987) termed modern racism – a racism that replaces the image of angry, violent mobs with assorted tactics that mask racism’s existence. It is denial that makes those (particularly People of Color) who provoke or question racist policies or practices to be labeled paranoid (Ridley, 1984), terribly touchy (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987), liberal, or simply hostile.

Giroux (1997) described the characteristics of Whiteness as White privilege, denial of the significance of race and racism, and denial or misunderstanding of systemic racism. Being color blind to race and racism results in a lens of denial, through which White individuals cannot see race and systemic racism. He stated that some may recognize racism but only as individual acts by individual people. This allows those who are color blind to relinquish responsibility and maintain White privilege for a racist society.

Such a climate also promotes separation of racial groups where people come to believe they can express themselves racially with little provocation when they are among those who are similar to them racially and ideologically (Carter, 1997). Another
byproduct of the dismissive strategies is the belief that racism no longer exists.

According to hooks (1992),

This erasure, however mythic, diffuses the representation of Whiteness as terror in the Black imagination. It allows for assimilation and forgetfulness. The eagerness with which contemporary society does away with racism, replacing this recognition with evocations of pluralism and diversity that further mask reality, is a response to the terror. It has also become a way to perpetuate the terror by providing cover, a hiding place. (p.176)

In essence, according to Helms (1992), Whites do not perceive themselves as members of a racial group, or responsible for perpetuating racism. Issues pertaining to race are presumed to be the onus of visible racial-ethnic group people and not inclusively to all racial beings. This notion is particularly frenetic when one begins to acknowledge that Whites have a stronghold over other racial groups and the responsibility for ending racism lies with them.

Fine (1990) described how parents and administrators who have an interest in maintaining the racial status quo advocate their concerns not in racial terms, but in terms that bespeak virtuous, universal values. These defenders laud the principles of humanitarianism, patriotism, parental choice, and fairness, while obscuring the reality of racism and other structures of inequity. In evaluating a set of schools, Fine found that these terms were used to legitimize and gloss over the exclusion of students from the full benefits of public education.

Another manifestation of denial is portrayed in institutions that have long excluded people of Color, which see themselves as exceedingly virtuous and promote the suggestion that intentionally introducing People of Color in these settings will
compromise their virtue (Thompson & Carter, 1997). In addition, a similar manifestation of modern racism is the unspoken phenomenon of restricting the numbers of People of Color in various institutions. The unspoken assumption is that if or when the proportions of visible racial-ethnic group people become significantly bolstered in any institution or organization, positions within these settings will lose their prestige (Thompson & Carter, 1997).

In normative American culture, celebrating cultural diversity has become equated with an end to racism. However, curiosity about or even genuine appreciation of non-White American cultures or cultural aspects can occur without meaningful recognition of the structures that dismantle and distort these cultures (Thompson & Carter, 1997). Vaz (1994) argued that this phenomenon is related to racial aliteracy. Vaz stated that aliteracy is used in the publishing industry to refer to persons who are able to read but refuse to do so. She defined racial aliterates as those people who, when in interracial situations, seem oblivious to their own knowledge of discrimination. Furthermore, Vaz (1994) posited:

Racial aliterates say that they welcome and even encourage the participation of Black people in White institutions, and they do not “see” difference in people based on skin color… African American culture is acknowledged and even celebrated, but Whites appropriate aspects of African American culture to make it fit into a White world view. This lack of sensitivity, empathy, and arrogance is a recognition and dismissal of the “other.” Central to the ideology of racial aliteracy is that the other does not simply exist… the other exist for White purposes. (p. 6)
Theme Three: Community-based Sources of Student Identity and Self-determination, Youth Development and Community-based Organizations

Ecological theory suggests that people should view the different settings in young people’s lives as distinct learning environments that provide differing structures of opportunity for development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lenner, 2002; Whiting, 1980). Organized youth activities, including extracurricular school activities and community-based programs, are settings that provide favorable conditions for adolescents to actively engage in psychosocial growth (Larson, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

During the 1990s, the nation experienced many challenges with its youth and in its communities. The increased level of violence that permeated rural, suburban, and urban communities has been documented and visualized nightly on local newscast. A number of factors, including the increase in drug use among parents and young people, increased gang involvement, teen parenthood, and the overall violence in many communities were perceived as destroying the ability of communities to grow and prosper (Rozen-Battle, 2002). Teens, those between the ages of 12-18, were seen as particularly affected by the challenges presented in urban communities. The same group of young people were also identified as dropping out of school at astonishing rates, particularly African American and other minority students. Standardized exams have indicated lower scores for students of color, regardless of economic status (The College board, 1999).

Researchers, political actors, and community leaders have sought to find ways to increase the social competence of adolescents as they navigate through these many
challenges. Socially competent adolescents have been defined as possessing a sense of belonging, feeling valued, and having opportunities to contribute to society through their schools, neighborhoods, and the broader society (Gullotta, 1990). Adolescents need to have real opportunities to develop and explore their capacities. They need the support from parents, adults, and communities. Absent these supports and adult advisors, youth advocates warn that young people will fail, and ultimately, the nation will fail (Rozie-Battle, 2002). Youth need to venture into this world of technological advances as confidently and effectively as possible. In a 1992 publication, *A Matter of Time*, James Comer was quoted as follows:

> Our country’s family policy continues to place most of the responsibility for raising and rearing of children on the parent or parents with whom they reside. And yet, these parents are increasingly unavailable to these children…Just as families have changed so have communities. The supportive and protective functions of the neighborhoods-two subtle but essential functions-have been lost for many of America’s youth. (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992, pp. 120-150)

Extended family, community-based organizations, afterschool programs, and church activities have been identified as critical resources to meet the basic emotional and developmental needs of many youth, particularly when family-based resources are under stress. For those young people unable to make connections with family or the other critical replacements mentioned, the streets and gangs often become the source for meeting their basic emotional and developmental needs (Rozie-Battle, 2002).

The “positive youth development” (PYD) movement began in the early 1990s and emphasis was placed on the positive verses the negative attributes of young people.
Several key components included ongoing positive relationships with adults and other youth, active involvement in community life, and availability of positive choices for young people to participate in during their non-school hours (Walker, 2000). Focusing on the strengths of young people has proven useful in helping to improve the outlook and confidence of young people (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992) and reducing high-risk behaviors (Quinn, 1995).

Youth Development when it is successful, creates a plethora of non-events -- young people not using drugs, not dropping out of school, not breaking the law, not getting pregnant, and not illiterate. Although this state of non-events is what we desire, we seldom see these non-events on the evening news or in the newspaper headlines. (Dunkle, 1997, p. 4)

Too often media and public officials highlight the crime and violence perpetuated by a small number of youth. As a result, the small numbers of young people involved in this negative behavior become the poster children for all African American youth (Rozie-Battle, 2002). Rozie-Battle pointed out that although young African American youth are achieving at greater heights than ever before in this nation, for many people, the images they see in the newspapers, on the nightly news, in movies, and on television emphasize the stereotypes in inner city, poor, and out of control youth (Rozie-Battle, 2002).

Rozie-Battle further pointed out that the majority of the current research on African American youth also focuses on the negative as opposed to the positive. For example, if 20% of children under 18 in this country are in poverty, than 80% are not; if 12% of teens are victims of crime then 88% are not; if 15% are teen parents, then 85% are not; if 14% are high school dropouts than 86% are not. Positive Youth Development,
PYD looks toward the assets and strengths of youth and provides programs with an opportunity to develop services and supports that direct youth toward these outcomes. The PYD concept requires youth providers an opportunity to re-assess how they provide services that assure young people develop the social, emotional, cognitive, and moral competencies necessary to become productive adults (Rozie-Battle, 2002).

PYD’s expanded approach partners youth and community development to combat the negative effects of some urban communities, such as high crime, substance abuse, unemployment, and high dropout rates. It is critical in African American communities that young people feel a sense of belonging and a pride in their respective communities. As they develop and mature into young adults, there will be a higher likelihood of them remaining in the community and becoming involved in efforts to continue its improvement (Rozie-Battle, 2002).

Social competence in youth development programs is facilitated through supportive relationships and a supportive socioeconomic environment, while the inhibitors of social competence include cultural and social barriers based upon factors such as race and socioeconomic status (Bloom, 1990). For African Americans youth who have historically been discouraged, disenfranchised, and turned off to many programs and services, a community-centered model of youth development allows them to have more input into the types of programs they desire.

Another important aspect of this approach for the African American community is that it does not focus only on the high achievers and college-bound youth. It is inclusive
to all youth and perhaps more concerned about youth perceived as non-college-bound who have fallen through the cracks in the past. A youth development approach seeks to capture the young person who has not already been labeled as a troubled child and who likewise may not be perceived as an outstanding student in their community (Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2000). With proper implementation, Youth Development Programs provide a variety of opportunities and connections through which these youth can be encouraged to pursue their dreams and build their self-confidence.

Proponents of community-centered youth development insist there must be a focus on the cohort of young people in the middle through high school years. This is a group that with appropriate adult involvement, positive activities, and good peer relationships can achieve a number of successes. In general, with appropriate positive supports they will remain in school, they will graduate, they will not be involved in the criminal justice system, and they will not become parents before they reach adulthood. Studies indicate that all the outcomes listed will be more positive for the young person who feels confident and supported (Gambone, 1997; Dunkle, 1997; Roehlkepartain & Benson, 1996).

Generally speaking, community-based organizations are created to serve a particular need in the community. The National Research Council report on community youth organizations (Eccles & Gootman, 2001) concluded that community programs that enhance youth development provide youth with six kinds of resources: physical and psychological safety, supportive relationships, appropriate structure, opportunities for
belonging and skill building, positive social norms, and support for efficacy and mattering. Community organizations serve to provide differing structures of opportunity for positive youth development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 2002; Whiting, 1980). Participation in organized activities is associated with positive outcomes on general developmental indicators, such as school completion, employment opportunities, and civic engagement. Different activities engage youth in distinctively different developmental opportunities from sports to arts to service.

For example, youth involved in sports activities are associated with positive developmental experiences. Organized sports provide opportunities for goal setting, persistence, problem solving, teamwork, managing emotions, and managing time (Danish, Taylor, & Fazio, 2003). Many of the skills deal with learning to organize and manage effort and fit under the heading of what Larson (2000) has called initiative.

Organized art activities (music, dance, drama, and art clubs) are frequent venues for identity exploration and development as well as interpersonal skills (Soep, 1996). Empirical evidence, primarily cross-sectional and qualitative, connects participation in arts activities with youth engagement in identity work (Fredricks et al., 2002; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). Other research suggested that arts activities may help youth develop initiative and interpersonal skills (Soep, 1996). Academic clubs and organizations including school-based activities that have an educational focus (science club), a student government or leadership focus, or a cultural, social, or honorary focus
provide opportunities for development of academic dispositions and skills (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Community oriented activities are aimed at connecting youth to community adults, institutions, and careers. This includes community-based youth programs such as Young Men’s Christian Association, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and school-based career and technical clubs (e.g., Future Farmers of America, Future Business Leaders of America). These programs provide youth with opportunities to learn pro-social norms and develop social capital (Dubas & Snider, 1993).

Service activities foster youth development of an altruistic and civic ethos. Research documents a connection between participation in service and the development of social responsibility and moral and political identity (McIntosh, Metz, & Youniss, 2005; Yates & Youniss, 1996). Community service engagement provides rich experiences in the domains of identity and positive pro-social relationships.

Growing literature shows that many adolescents experience religion as an important part of their lives (McKinney, 1999; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006; Smith, 2005). Limited studies suggest that religious youth groups integrate young people into a community of youth and adults (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Regnerus, 2000; Smith, 2003) and provide opportunities for identity development (Markstrom, 1999).

Community institutions such as schools, churches, and youth programs located in the Black communities are key to developing and sustaining critical social capital for
Black youth and their communities (Ginwright, 2007). Access to and possession of critical social capital prepares youth to address issues in their own communities. Critical social capital is embedded in neighborhood-based networks of collective interests, collective identities, mutual trust, and people’s shared capacity to act on behalf of the common good, thus, facilitating political development and civic engagement (Ginwright, 2007). Critical social capital consists of intergenerational ties that cultivate expectations about the capacity for Black youth to transform the conditions that shape their lives. For Black youth, access to critical social capital provides a culturally grounded base for challenging negative concepts about Black youth in public policy, developed by building racial solidarity and sustained through political consciousness about personal issues (Ginwright, 2007). Acquisition of critical social capital is facilitated by intergenerational advocacy that challenges negative concepts about Black youth; it is developed by building a collective racial identity; and is sustained by cultivating an understanding of personal challenges as political issues.

For the African American community, the Black church is a vital partner in youth development. Recent studies indicate the Black church and religious involvement for African American adolescents has a positive impact in assisting youth with positive psychosocial development (Markstrom, 1999) and that these religious institutions significantly buffer or interact with the effects of neighborhood disorder on crime, and, in particular, serious crime (Johnson et al., 2000). The next section of this chapter looks
more particularly at the role of the Black church in building critical social capital within African American youth.

**The Black Church Community**

The significance of religion to the social identity of African Americans can never be underestimated. The Black church for African Americans was and remains the epicenter of spiritual, cultural, political, and social expression and discourse since its inception during chattel slavery. Understanding the role of the Black church in the development of racial identity and youth development is crucial to informing this study.

For African Americans, the church has been the center of religious, cultural, political, and community activities (Richardson & June, 1997). In the article “Exploring the Relationship between Racial identity and Religious Orientation Among African American College students” by Delida Sanchez and Robert T. Carter (2005), the authors suggested that religion carries significant weight on the prospect of identity development (particularly in the minds of adolescent and college-aged students), but it carries the most weight for African Americans as well. For African Americans, religious beliefs and practices have been and continue to be salient aspects of culture and upbringing.

“Religious denominations provide frameworks from which to practice specific beliefs, rituals, and rites. These frameworks encompass empowering ideologies about family and communal unity, shared values, and life style behaviors” (Sanchez & Carter, 2005, p. 281).
The Black church as a voluntary organization has always played a major role in the organization of Black social and political life. Speaking about Black social life in his landmark study of Philadelphia, W. E. B. DuBois (1899) astutely noted,

The Negro churches were the birthplace of Negro schools and all agencies which seek to promote the intelligence of the masses; and even today no agency serves to disseminate news or information so quickly and effectively among Negros as the church. …Consequently, all movements for social betterment are apt to center in the churches. Beneficial societies in endless numbers are formed here; secret societies keep in touch; co-operative and building associations have lately sprung up; the minister often acts as an employment agent; …so far reaching are these functions of the church that its organization is almost political. (p. 201)

DuBois described the unique ways social capital functioned in Black community churches. Building mutual trust among community members, disseminating information, and simply functioning as a central social hub, the Black church has served political, social, and religious functions. As such, Cohen and Dawson (1993) noted,

African America social institutions and networks are critical elements in providing an information nexus through which African American perceptions of racial group interest are framed…It is through these networks that the intergeneration transmission of African American political values, mores, and beliefs occurs. (p. 290)

Community institutions such as schools, churches, and youth programs located in Black communities are key in developing and sustaining critical social capital for Black youth and their communities. Critical social capital in Black poor communities must contend with fostering a critical consciousness, building a strong racial identity, and developing political optimism and expectations about community change (Rozie-Battle, 2002). For the African American community, the Black church is a vital partner in youth development. Recent studies indicate the Black church and religious involvement for
African American adolescents has a positive impact in assisting youth with positive psychosocial development (Markstrom, 1999), and these religious institutions significantly buffer or interact with the effects of neighborhood disorder and crime.

The Black Baptist church has always promoted literacy among the African American community because of the significance of literacy in Black social mobility, economic advancement, social meaning, culture, and identity. Black church members understood the connection between literacy and freedom. Paulo Friere (1993) crystallizes this concept in his works, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He understood that freedom would come for those who knew about themselves as well as those who sought to make decisions regarding their lives and livelihood. Freire recognized the discourse of social justice and equality was the first lesson of literacy. He stated that unless an oppressed people was able to use the tools of language to first free themselves and change the course of their lives, then all other discourse was useless and irrelevant. This researcher posits that this is the dilemma facing African Africans in the public schools today.

According to Fitts (1988), the curriculum model used in education today continues to oppress and seeks to reproduce the status quo. The many and varied contributions to American society by African Americans, such as medicine, education, music, technology, arts and sciences, architecture, and more, have historically been excluded from the textbooks. In today’s public schools, the “banking” model of education oppresses and silences the voices of African American students. Because of a lack of connection to the curriculum and the threat of being stereotyped and treated
differently, many African American students today withdraw or disengage from learning or drop out of school (Fitts, 1988).

Community Activism

The Black Church has, from its earliest days, been a center of community activism and identity building in the Black community. In the 1930s and 1940s, the religious belief dictating social reform and activist movement began to emerge. Among the sects were the Universal Peace Mission Movement, the United House of Prayer for All People, the Gospel Spreading Church of God, and the Nation of Islam, all of which were led by men or women held in the highest esteem. Many of these individuals were openly exalted as the Black Messiah (Richardson & June, 1997). Another point of interest concerning these groups is they were formed in the context of the economic situation paralleled to today. The Black church evolved in a larger culture that oppressed, subjugated, and discriminated against Blacks and, as far as possible, sought to relegate them to the most extreme margins of American society. Before the 1960s and the success of the Civil rights Movement, Blacks found refuge in the Black Church’s prophetic voice (Swain, 2008). The Black Church was often the leading voice in advocating the course of action that might best rectify conditions of racial injustice confronting Blacks at any given time.

In the context of community change, the church serves as critical social capital and a source of community cultural wealth. Social capital is broadly defined by Sampson and colleagues as “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that
facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (as cited in Putnam, 1993, p. 36). That is to say, as people extend their relationships with others, institutions, and groups, they are more likely to have greater access to resources such as jobs, educational opportunities, and neighborhood safety (Fuchs, Shapiro, & Minnite, 2001; Portes, 1998). However, critical social capital departs from traditional notions of social capital by placing emphasis on collective dimensions of community change, and it centers on how racial identity and political awareness serve as an important community and social resource for youth. Critical social capital is facilitated by intergenerational advocacy that challenges negative concepts of Black youth; it is developed by building a collective racial and cultural identity; and it is sustained by cultivating an understanding of personal challenges as political issues.

Religion/Spirituality

One could argue that the religious beliefs of students are just as important as, and perhaps more important than, the social beliefs of the educational institutions they attend. To the extent that this is true, it may be that the historic academic advantage students of religious schools have had over students from public schools may have more to do with the individual levels of commitment of the students than whether they attend a public or religious school (Jeynes, 2003). This research will touch briefly on this issue, both because of the situated experience of the students studied and because of the students’ own expression of the significance of this relationship.
There are numerous articles published on the topic of religion and spirituality as aspects of human identity development (Ball, Armistead, & Austin, 2003; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Jagers & Smith, 1996; Kelly, 1995; Mattis, 2000; Smith & Richards, 2005; Worthington, 1989; Young, Griffin, & Williams, 2003). One of the most important areas explored during the self-examination period of adolescence and adulthood is religion (Erickson, 1968; Sciarra & Gushie, 2003). For example in a study conducted by Earnshaw (2000), it was found that college students turned to religion when searching for answers to important questions related to meaning and purpose of life. For ego identity development in adolescence, the acquisition of religious belief systems is particularly important. This is because it enables an individual to develop a “world view” (Erickson, 1968). The development of a worldview is a central role in identity development and encompasses how one perceives society and feels connected to it (Dehaan & Schulenberg, 1997).

Quarrel and controversy among researchers have often been the result when efforts are made to classify distinguishable definitions between religion and spirituality (Smith & Richards, 2005; Souza, 2002). Religion is often defined as an institutionalized systems of attitudes, beliefs, and practices through which people manifest their faith and devotion to an ultimate reality or deity (Kelly, 1995). It is expressed in such world religions as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (Jagers & Smith, 1996; Mattis, 1997). Spirituality has been defined as a more inclusive concept for describing an individuals’ personal relationship with God or
acknowledgement of a higher power (George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000). One’s spirituality may or may not encompass membership in a particular religious organization (Taylor, Chatters, Jayakody, & Levin, 1996).

For people of African American descent, religious beliefs and practices have and continue to be a salient aspect of culture and upbringing (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Many African Americans have been reared with exposure to religion, spiritual convictions, and a belief in God or a higher power (Richardson & June, 1997). While much of the literature about African American religion and spirituality focuses on the Black church, many African Americans belong to other religious denominations and sects including Judaism and Islam (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The importance of religion and spirituality in the psychological development of African Americans has been described in the psychological literature (Ahia, 1997; Bell & Mattis, 2000; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Carter, 2003). On average, the baseline rate of religious involvement for African Americans is higher than that of the general U.S. population with African American women demonstrating higher rates of religious participation, commitment, and spirituality than African American men (Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999; El-Khoury, Dutton, Goodman, Belamaric, & Murphy, 2004; Jagers & Smith, 1996; Taylor et al., 1996).

Collectively, these rates of religious involvement are manifested in different ways. In particular, African Americans have been found to report higher levels of attendance at religious services than Whites (Johnson & Matre, 1991). read more
religious materials, monitor more religious broadcast and seek spiritual comfort through religion more often than Whites across their lifespan (Constantine, Lewis, Conner, & Sanchez, 2000; Johnson & Mattre, 1991). For African American college students in particular, religious and spiritual issues may represent an integral part of their self-identity (Constantine et al., 2000; Spencer et al., 2003). African American college men and women tend to score higher than their European American counterparts on measures of spiritual and religious characteristics, including the belief in the unique power of God (Mattis, 1997). Religious attitudes have also been found to be related to academic performance and success among African American college students (Johnson, Oates, Jackson, Miles, & Strong, 2003).

Racial Identity and Religious/Spiritual Identity

Helms (1990) discussed racial identity in terms of “ego statuses” (Carter, 1995). The term “ego status” refers to the various differentiations of the ego, which holds and transforms racial identity information. Each ego status has its own constellation of emotions, beliefs, motives, and behaviors, ranging in level from less to more mature. The level of maturity of each racial identity status influences its expression. Helms (1990), explained, “at any one point, an individual has many levels of identity but only one dominant level” (p. 19).

African American racial identity development consists of four statuses as outlined by Helms (1990). Helms (1990) also referred to the statuses as levels. The Pre-encounter level can be expressed as the deliberate idealization of White culture and
denigration of African American culture through behaviors as well as attitudes. The *Encounter* status is characterized by racially salient experiences that provoke awareness of one’s racial identity. These experiences can be positive or negative. The *Immersion-Emersion* status is characterized by a strong sense of endorsement of African American attitudes along with the psychological and physical withdrawal from White culture into an African American world. When an individual begins to internalize and integrate one’s new African American identity into their personality, the Emersion status becomes more salient (Carter, 1995). The *Internalization* status reflects an acceptance and satisfaction with one’s African American identity within the larger context of the human race (Helms, 1990; Settles, Cooke, Morgan, & Sellers, 2004). The racially internalized individual becomes socially flexible and able to move comfortably in varied racial contexts (Carter, 1995).

Like race and racial identity, religion and spirituality are exceedingly complex. Religious orientation, defined as one’s particular attitude towards one’s particular religious or spiritual beliefs is the construct most widely used in the empirical study of religion in psychology, particularly with college students (Cannon, 2001; Earnshaw, 2000; Mattis, 2002; Smith & Richards, 2005; Young et al., 2003).

Mattis (1997) is one of the few investigators who explored religious orientation among African American college students finding that religious orientation was predictive of spiritual orientation and spiritual well-being. Specifically, Mattis (1997) found that intrinsic religious orientation was associated with higher levels of spiritual
practices and contentment with one’s spirituality or spiritual well-being. This suggests that a profound personal faith may be positively related to a sense of spiritual connectedness with others (Mattis, 1997). Given the powerful implications of both race and religion for personal development among African Americans (Carter, 2003), the complex relationship between racial identity attitudes and religious orientation was explored in a study conducted by Mattis (2002). It was found that a significant relationship exists among racial identity statuses and religious orientation. Moreover, some of the relationships between racial identity statuses and religious orientation differ by gender (Mattis, 2002). These findings suggest that racial and religious issues are an integral part of self-identity processes for African Americans during college. Because of the complexity of racial identity and religious identity development processes, they vary among college students (Sanchez & Carter, 2005).

*Religion and Educational Outcomes*

About half of American adolescents regularly participate in some kind of religious organization (Smith et al., 2002), and, therefore, it is useful to consider the ways in which religious participation might prove beneficial during this critical stage of development. There are a number of research studies associated with a wide range of positive developmental outcomes such as improving psychological well being (Wright, Frost, & Wisecarver, 1993; Donohue & Benson, 1995) and health-enhancing behaviors (Jessor, Turbin, & Costa, 1998). Yet other research found that religious participation fosters several beneficial academic outcomes.
Some research observed an inverse relationship between religious involvement and delinquency and other high-risk behaviors (Cochran & Akers, 1989; Donahue & Benson, 1995). Nationally, representative data suggested that religious involvement predicts greater educational expectations, higher standardized test scores, more time spent on homework, less truancy, and a lower likelihood of dropping out of high school (Regnerus, 2000; Muller & Ellison, 2001). Several studies suggested that religious involvement enhances educational outcomes for particular groups of adolescents as well. For example, involvement in religious activities predicts greater verbal ability among girls (Parcel & Geschwender, 1995) and higher grades among rural teens (Elder & Conger, 2000) and immigrant children (Bankston & Zhou, 2002). Other research suggested that religious involvement may be particularly important for disadvantaged adolescents. Jeynes (2003) observed that the effect of religious commitment on a host of academic outcomes is larger for adolescents who reside in the urban areas than those who do not, and Regnerus and Elder (2003) found that the influence of religious attendance on academic progress is greater in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Although previous research demonstrated positive associations between religiosity and adolescent outcomes, very little is known about the processes through which religion influences these outcomes. The mechanism that influences academic outcomes among teens by way of religious participation is social capital, focusing on intergenerational relationships and on relationships with peers.
**Intergenerational Closure**

One way religion may affect educational outcomes is through adolescent relationships with adults. Religious participation may influence the structure of adolescent social networks by increasing intergenerational closure, or the extent to which parents know the friends of their children and know the parents of their children’s friends (Muller & Ellison, 2001; Smith, 2003). Religious involvement may enhance intergenerational closure because it is one of the few settings in which American adolescents regularly interact with adults outside of the family (Muller & Ellison, 2001; Smith, 2003). Most religious activities involve multiple generations, increasing the likelihood for active youth to form relationships with adults, such as parents of those friends. Church activities can provide a context in which parents get to know their children’s friends as well as parents of those friends. Closure may facilitate better educational outcomes by facilitating norm enforcement and communication with other parents (Coleman, 1988). Carbonaro (1998) found that intergenerational closure enhances mathematics achievement and decreases the likelihood of dropping out of high school.

**Friendship Networks**

In addition to shaping relationships with adults, religious involvement might also influence adolescents’ friendship networks in ways that encourage academic achievement. Voluntary organizations like churches provide an organized context for joint activities; therefore, they shape social networks (Feld, 1981; McPherson, Smith-
Lovin, & Cook, 2001). In general, religious groups support norms that encourage positive development and discourage high-risk behaviors. Therefore, during adolescence, a time when children are becoming more independent of their parents, regular involvement in a religious community may facilitate the development and maintenance of social ties with teens who share pro-social and goal-oriented values (Brownfield & Sorenson, 1991; Freeman, 1986; Muller & Ellison, 2001). Religious attendance of youth can provide an additional means for parents to steer their children toward more conventional teens. In addition to providing an opportunity to form and maintain ties with conventionally oriented friends, religious attendance likely leads to the selection of friends with similar values.

Friends can influence each other’s academic trajectories in several ways (Crosnoe, Cavanagh, & Elder, 2003). First, they act as agents of socialization through which pro-social norms can be encouraged and enforced, which can translate into more successful academic outcomes. Having academically successful friends provides an adolescent with access to educational resources. Furthermore, friends act as role models. Crosnoe et al. (2003) observed that having friends with a higher GPA and higher school attachment decreases off-track academic behaviors (a composite of low GPA, expulsion, truancy, suspension, and having trouble doing homework).

**Extracurricular Involvement**

Another area of religious participation influencing academic outcomes is through extracurricular participation. Among adults, religious participation often leads to
involvement in secular voluntary associations (Lam, 2002; Liu, Ryan, Aurbach, & Besser, 1998; Wuthnow, 1999). There are several reasons why this dynamic may connect teenage religious involvement and extracurricular involvement as well. It is possible that sociability generated within a congregation facilitates joining school social activities. Additionally, most churches provide religious incentives for involvement in outside social groups (Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernandez, 2008).

While school-based extracurricular participation is not in itself social capital, it may provide access to the kinds of social capital that facilitate academic achievement. Participation in extracurricular activities serves as an additional context in which to interact with unrelated, supportive adults (Broh, 2002; Darling, 2005) and likely aids in parental and adult monitoring in that it organizes students' time (Osgood, Wilson, O'Miley, Bachman, & Johnson, 1996). Extracurricular participation also likely shapes friendship networks in ways that connect participants to more conventionally and academically oriented adolescents (Broh, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Maloney, 2000). Participation in extracurricular activities is associated with a host of educational outcomes, including higher grades (Broh, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles et al., 2003; Marsh, 1992), higher achievement test scores (Broh, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003), greater attachment to school (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005), higher educational aspirations (Marsh, 1992) and lower likelihood of dropping out of school (McNeal, 1995).
Summary

African Americans in the United States occupy the lowest status position of any ethnic group (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Few would argue the assertion that African Americans are continually stereotyped, discriminated against, and generally treated in a derogatory and inhumane fashion (Marshal, 1994). The ethnic and racial stigma endured by African Americans continues to be a part of the historical legacy of racial inequality and discrimination past, present, and future in the United States due to the permanence of race as a socially constructed category (Jones, 1991; Fredrickson, 1988; Montagu, 1964; Van den Berghe, 1967). This is reflected in the various institutional practices such as employment, housing, social services, and education (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010). The focus of this study is on the educational institution in American society that racially stigmatizes underrepresented minorities, particularly African Americans and the effect on their educational outcomes.

Ethnic and racial stigma and its relationship to identity, motivation, and achievement remain central issues for those interested in creating racially equitable educational settings today. In addition, environmental assets such as church involvement for African American students may prove to hold resources for overcoming the achievement gap; the underachievement/underserved African American students versus their White counterparts. The research has proven vital to the body of research on African American educational outcomes, which include racial identity and the impact of stereotype threat and religious participation. Several theories built upon foundational
research inform this study: racial identity theory (Helms, 1994), critical race theory (Taylor et al., 2009), stereotype threat theory (Steele, 1995), critical social capital (Ginwright, 2007), and community cultural capital (Yosso, 2005).

In addition, this research explores the continuing relevance of the historical prominence of the church in the African American community before, during, and after slavery to the present time. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between African American middle/high school students’ racial identity, religious participation, and perception of stereotype threat and their effect on student educational outcomes (student engagement, student achievement, academic identification, withdrawal, and dropout). The focus of this study is on African American students who participate in religious activity on a regular basis.
Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which racial identity, religious participation, and stereotype threat affect educational outcomes for African American students. The study identified the mechanisms (disidentification/disengagement, withdrawal, and drop out) through which the effects of stereotype threat are manifested and how participation in religious activities serves as a moderator (buffer) for these mechanisms. Considering the significant disparity of academic achievement among African Americans and Whites, an augmented understanding of the phenomenon stereotype threat and its relationship with racial identity development and religious participation could serve to identify possible solutions and interventions to this complex and enduring problem. The remainder of this chapter describes the research design, population, sampling, instrumentation, data collection, and the measures taken to protect the privacy and rights of the participants. The research design, data collection, and analysis for this study are guided by the following three research questions:

I. To what extent do racial identity, stereotype threat, and religious participation affect the educational outcomes of African American students in grades 7-12?
II. What are the factors associated with stereotype threat that affect student performance?

III. How does engagement with a church, particularly a church situated within the student’s home community and culturally associated with the students’ racial identity, affect African American students’ racial identity, student achievement, and the response to stereotype threat?

Methodology Literature Review

This study sought to examine the relationship between the racial identity of African American middle/high school students who participate in religious activities in a Black church community and their experiences with negative stereotypes (stereotype threat) and the impact they had on their educational outcomes. This study utilized a self-reported survey, focus groups, and interviews as data sources to inform the study. The research method used to address this purpose required a mixed method approach, a quantitative and qualitative research design.

Conducting quantitative and qualitative, mixed methods research involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon. As noted by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 17), “its logic of inquiry includes the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding
one’s results).” Because of its logical and intuitive appeal of providing a bridge between the qualitative and quantitative paradigm, an increasing number of researchers are utilizing mixed methods research to undertake their studies (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

Extremely important to the research object and purpose are the research questions because the research questions narrow the objective and purpose to specific questions the researcher attempts to address in the study (Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In mixed method studies, research questions are even more important because mixed methods researchers make use of pragmatic methods and systems of philosophy. As such, in mixed methods studies, research questions drive the methods used (Newman & Benz, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Moreover, research questions in mixed methods studies are vitally important because they, in large part, dictate the type of research design used, the sample size, sampling scheme employed, and the type of instruments administered as well as the data analysis technique (i.e., statistical or qualitative) used.

According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006), an extensive review of research literature revealed no article in which mixed methods research questions had been defined or described. Thus, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) attempted to provide a nuanced discussion on mixed methods research as follows. Mixed methods research questions combine or mix both the quantitative and qualitative research questions. A
mixed methods research question necessitates that both quantitative and qualitative data be collected and analyzed concurrently, sequentially, or iteratively.

An example of a concurrent mix methods research design is “What is the relationship between graduate students’ level of reading comprehension and their perceptions of barriers that prevent them from reading empirical research articles?” (p. 484). To answer the question, information about both the levels of reading comprehension (quantitative, independent variable) and the perceived barriers to empirical research articles (qualitative, dependent variable) must be obtained. In the quantitative phase, a reading comprehension test could be administered to a relatively large sample of graduate students. The quantitative research design then would be descriptive in nature. In the qualitative phase, the same sample of students could be interviewed and asked about their perceptions of barriers that might prevent them from reading empirical research articles. The qualitative research design then would be phenomenological in nature.

If the overall research design were concurrent, the quantitative phase of the study would not inform or drive the qualitative phases or vice versa, although the intersection of the two data sets would be inter-analyzed in the final research analysis to draw relational conclusions. Conversely, if the data were gathered in a sequential research design, the overall mixed methods research design most likely would be sequential in that the quantitative phase would inform the qualitative phase. That is, the researcher would administer a test of reading comprehension, rank these comprehension scores, and then
purposely select students who attained scores that were in the top third and bottom third, say, of the score distribution. These students would be interviewed and asked about their perceptions of barriers that prevented them from reading empirical articles, or they could be asked to complete a survey containing one or more open-ended questions that tap these perceptions. Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) conceptualized that when analyzing quantitative and qualitative data within a mixed methods framework, researchers undergo at least some of the following seven stages: a) data reduction, b) data display, c) data transformation, d) data collection, e) data consolidation, f) data comparison, and g) data integration. Data reduction involves reducing the dimensionality of the qualitative data (e.g., exploratory factor analysis, memoing, etc.) and quantitative data (e.g., via descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, cluster analysis). Data display involves pictorially describing the qualitative data (e.g., matrices, charts, graphs, networks, list, rubrics, and Venn diagrams) and quantitative data (e.g., tables, graphs). This is followed (optionally) by the data transformation stage, wherein quantitative data are converted into narrative data that can be analyzed qualitatively (i.e., qualitized) (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) and/or qualitative data are converted into numerical codes that can be represented statistically (i.e., quantitized) (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Data correlation involves quantitative data being correlated with qualitized data or qualitative data being correlated with quantitized data. This is followed by data consolidation, wherein both quantitative and qualitative data are combined to create new or consolidated variables or data sets. The next stage, data comparison, involves
comparing data from the qualitative and quantitative data sources. Data integration is the final stage, whereby both quantitative and qualitative data are integrated into either a coherent whole or two separate sets (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) of coherent wholes.

In this study, the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data, graphically represented key outcomes within the quantitative data, and determined what correlations existed among responses to the survey questions. The qualitative data was analyzed for themes emerging from the data and the themes were identified by a code term designating the theme. This allowed the researcher to consolidate instances in which the same theme is addressed, to compare occurrences and expressions of the themes between groups, and to use these thematic statements as interpretive tools in analyzing the meaning of certain trends found in the quantitative survey data. Because the qualitative data involved solely the report-out content of the focus groups and in-depth interviews occurring on one occasion only with two adult participants, the researcher did not use coding to quantitize the qualitative data from the participants.

*Inside/Outsider-Positionality*

In line with the positivist tradition, the outsider perspective has traditionally been considered optimal for its “objective” and “accurate” account of the field, while insiders, who possessed insights about the people, place, and events, were believed to hold a biased position that complicated their ability to observe and interpret (Chavez, 2008). However, scholars (Banks, 1998; Merton, 1978; Naples, 1996) have argued that the outsider-insider distinction is a false dichotomy since outsiders and insiders have to
contend with similar methodological issues around positionality, a researcher’s sense of self, and the situated knowledge she/he possesses as a result of her/his location in the social order. Indeed, if anything, the insider may be more likely to recognize and take account of his/her positionality. One factor to consider in examining insider/outsider positionality is reflexivity.

Reflexivity

There are many indications that seeking to maintain outsider status can itself cause discomfort, especially when revealing negative aspects of one’s own cultural group. However, crucial matters emerge as a result of conducting insider/outsider research. Self-awareness is critical for success in conducting this kind of research (Hamdan, 2009). This awareness is closely associated with the concept of reflexivity (Hamdan, 2009). According to Hamdan (2009), reflexivity is a metaphysical analysis of the researchers’ account, one that examines the researcher’s own input into the process. She stated it involves the researcher observing him/herself in the act of observing, researching him/herself in the act of researching. In other words, employing reflexivity throughout the research process entails the researcher paying close attention to his/her involvement in all aspects of the process and being prepared to assess the impact of that involvement on the research (Hamdan, 2009).

Lather’s (1991a, 1991b) notion of reflexivity envisions the practice as mandating a sincere attempt to deconstruct one’s own work and motives behind it. The researcher must closely monitor him/herself in the process of determining the research problem and
theoretical framework and of creating the research design. This process is governed by
the researcher’s values and, reciprocally, these choices help to expose the values of the
researcher. Gadamer (1975) argued that researchers should acknowledge their values and
prejudices as a first step, being aware they are embedded in their experiences of
knowledge formation and also in their epistemological experiences. The researcher’s
general personal awareness and values are all channeled into what is called reflexivity.

The advantages of insider status include positionality; expediency of access;
access to more in-group activity; insiderness insight in understanding the linguistic,
cognitive, emotional, and psychological precepts of participants, and historical and
practical happenings of the field. The disadvantages involve the insider’s social role in
groups or community constraints of researcher roles and objectives. In addition, in
collecting data, the interview process or observation conflicts with community interaction
style. Particular to this study are focus groups and interviews in which the researcher’s
positionality was an element of the research environment, affecting both access to the
relevant data and the process of data interpretation.

Focus Groups

At the broadest possible level, focus groups are collective conversations or group
interviews. They can be small or large, directed or nondirected. They have been used for
a wide variety of purposes over the past century. The U.S. military (e.g., Merton, 1978),
multinational corporations, Marxist revolutionaries (e.g., Freire, 1993), literacy activists
(e.g., Kozol, 1985), and three waves of radical feminist scholar-activists, among others,
have all used focus groups to help advance their concerns and causes (Kamberelis, & Dimitriadis, 2005). These different uses of focus groups have overlapped in both distinct and disjunctive ways, and all have been strategic articulations of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry. For the purpose of this study, the focus group serves as an instrument of qualitative research inquiry.

Interest in focus groups in the social sciences emerged in 1941 with Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton as the pair embarked on a government-sponsored project to assess media effects on attitudes toward America’s involvement in World War II (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Because the data from the quantitative component of this work could help answer the “what” questions but not the “why” questions about participants choices, the researchers used focus groups as forums for getting participants to explain why they responded in the ways they did.

The focus group is a research methodology that has gained popularity in a growing number of contexts over recent decades (Hyden & Bulow, 2003; Wilkonson, 1998). In this method a small group of participants gather to discuss a particular issue under the guidance of a facilitator (the researcher) who often plays a detached role (Klenke, 2008). Focus groups are unstructured or semi-structured interviews with small groups of people who interact with each other and the group leader. Focus groups are of particular value because of their ability to allow researchers to study how people engage in collective sense making, that is, “how views are constructed, expressed, defended, and (sometimes) modified in the context and discussion and debate with others” (Wilkonson,
According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), a focus group interview brings several different people into contact through a process that is open and emergent. The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people consider their own views in context of the views of others (Patton, 2002, p. 386).

Kruger (1994) identified six characteristics of the focus groups interview, the combination of which sets it apart from other group processes. The defining characteristics of focus group interviews are (1) they involve people; (2) they are conducted in a series; (3) participants are reasonably homogeneous yet unfamiliar with each other; (4) they are methods of data collection; (5) the data are qualitative; and (6) they constitute a focused discussion. The author suggested, “The focus group is beneficial for identification of major themes but not so much for microanalysis of subtle difference” (Kruger, 1994, p. 133). As will be described in the next chapter, this researcher’s use of a focus group methodology differed in some key elements from Kruger’s definition to better draw authentic data from the youth participants.

Focus groups interviews have several advantages including cost-effective data collection and the presence of group members who tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weeds out false or extreme views (Kruger & Casey, 2000). Focus groups, like all data collection techniques, also have their limitations, such as a restricted number of questions that can be asked in a group setting, the limited time available for individual interviewees so all voices are heard, and considerable group process skills on the part of the interviewer. Critics of focus groups as a research method (e.g., Agar &
MacDonald, 1995; Kitzinger, 1994) pointed out that even though the interaction between participants is considered to be hallmark of such research, the interaction itself has seldom been evaluated or analyzed.

Summary

African Americans in the United States occupy the lowest status position of any ethnic group (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Few would argue the assertion that African Americans are continually stereotyped, discriminated against, and generally treated in a derogatory and inhumane fashion (Marshal, 1994). The ethnic and racial stigma endured by African Americans continues to be a part of the historical legacy of racial inequality and discrimination past, present, and future in the United States due to the permanence of race as a socially constructed category (Fredrickson, 1988; Jones, 1991; Montagu, 1964; Van den Berghe, 1967). This is reflected in the various institutional practices such as employment, housing, social services, and education (Baumgartner, & Johnson-Bailey, 2010). The focus of this study was on the educational institution in American society that racially stigmatizes underrepresented minorities, particularly African Americans, and the effect of it on their educational out comes.

Ethnic and racial stigma and its relationship to identity, motivation, and achievement remain central issues for those interested in creating racially equitable educational settings today. In addition, environmental assets such as church involvement for African American students may prove to hold resources to overcome the achievement gap; the underachievement /underserved African American students verses their White
counterparts. Proven vital to the body of research on African American educational outcomes include racial identity and the impact of stereotype threat and religious participation. Several theories posit foundational research informing this study; racial identity theory (Helms, 1994), critical race theory (Taylor, Gilborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009), stereotype threat theory (Steele, 1995) critical social capital, (Ginwright, 2007) and community cultural capital,( Yosso, 2005). In addition, this research explores the continuing relevance of the historical prominence of the church in the African American community before, during and after slavery to the present time. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between African American middle/high school student racial identity, religious participation, and perception of stereotype threat and their effect on student educational outcomes (student engagement, student achievement, academic identification, withdrawal and dropout). The focus of this study will be on African American students who participate in religious activity on a regular basis.

Research Design

The methodological design employed in this study was mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative research design. The design is used by researchers when research questions are quantitative and qualitative in nature and serve to drive the research. The data collected in a mixed methods research design is analyzed concurrently, sequentially, or iteratively (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). The quantitative phase of this study utilized a self-reported survey of 36 questions administered to a
sample of African American middle/high school students. In the qualitative phase, the same sample of students participated in a focus group activity and was asked about their perceptions of being treated differently at school because of their race (stereotype threat) and their sources of resiliency. The qualitative research design is phenomenological in nature, involving asking the students to describe their experiences as African American students in school, as well as asking the adult interviewees to describe their experiences in working with the participants (Creswell, 2007). The overall research design is concurrent because the quantitative phase of the study did not inform or drive the qualitative phase. That is, the same students participated in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study, and the qualitative focus group took place prior to any analysis of the students’ survey responses.

The quantitative research included a self-reported survey of 36 questions using a Likert-type scale. The survey took up to 25-30 minutes to complete. Several of the questions were sampled from the following surveys: a revised two-item scale of Multi-dimensional Model of Black Identity (Sellers et al., 1998); a five-item scale measuring Stereotype Threat (Sears, 2005); an eight-item scale of Academic Engagement (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Osborne, 1995). In addition, questions on school-related identities (academic identity) and non school-related identities (social acceptance) used the Self-Perceptions Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988). The survey also collected demographic information, including parents’ education and occupation, family structure, race, age, and gender.
The qualitative research design included the same sample of students participating in a focus group activity segmented by school grades (i.e., seventh and eighth grades, grades 9-10, and 11th-12th grades). All students were asked to describe their experiences in school, support from church members, and relationships in both school and church. The qualitative phase also included individual interviews with the adult church members (2) who worked closely with the youth to further inform the quantitative phase of the study. The adult interviews (2) asked questions regarding their work with the youth, their perceptions of the needs of the youth in school and church, and their perceptions of what the church and school can do to support youth to be more successful academically.

**Instrumentation**

The instruments used in this study were, in regard to the survey, pencil or pens and paper, in regard to the focus group activity, observation of the participation, in regard to the focus group report-out, a digital recorder, and, in regard to the open-ended interviews, a list of generative questions and a digital recorder. For the survey, student participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree (see Appendix A). The focus groups received questions asking them to describe their experiences in school and church and were student-led. Although the process of the focus group activity was not digitally recorded, the results were openly reported by the students and digitally recorded for accuracy. The open-ended interviews of youth group leaders from the church served to provide an additional basis for contextualizing student responses.
According to research (Chavous, 2000), the extent to which students identify more or less strongly with their race, affects the extent to which they are impacted by racism and discrimination. The research also suggested the relationship between racial identity and religious participation for African Americans is an important signifier for positive educational outcomes although not all scholars agreed. Research indicated students who attend religious services are also more likely to engage in school activities, develop social networks, and are better able to manage social situations and demonstrate positive educational outcomes.

Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants’ identities. Signed consent was obtained prior to the administering of the survey and conducting the focus groups and interviews (see Appendix B). The consent forms were securely stored in the researcher’s home office in a locked file cabinet. All consent forms, notes, and transcripts were destroyed within six to nine months after the survey. No discomfort or harm occurred using the instruments during the research.

Population

The participants in this study were African American middle/high school students attending a local church located in South Sacramento and the adults from the church who worked with these young people. The survey portion of this study and the focus group activity were given to the students and the interviews were given to the adults at the church site in an activity area chosen by the church leadership.
The people who made up the church congregation came from a wide variety of religious traditions and practices. The church theme included “Edifying the Church to do the work of the Kingdom” as quoted from Ephesians 4:11-16 of the Bible. The vision of the church is to become a church according to the great commission that it discipless its members and ensures that an opportunity is provided for every member to become active in ministry and mature spiritually (Handbook). The mission statement includes: Bringing people to Christ through evangelism, developing them through discipleship, encouraging intercessory prayer, and ministering through outreach and missions.

Thirty-four middle/high students from the church were recruited via open announcement by the pastor and distribution of an invitation to participate and a letter of consent by the researcher. Participants who chose to participate met at a predetermined and agreed upon location. Prospective participants had the right to decline to participate by either responding in the negative or simply not replying to the open announcement. However, those who chose to participate were able to participate in a pizza party as well as a raffle to possibly receive bowling passes, movie tickets, itunes (music), McDonald’s gift certificates, or similar prizes.

Sampling

The qualitative phase of the study was phenomenological in nature because the study asked the participants to describe characteristics considered evidence of a phenomenon (stereotype threat) and how they had experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Stereotype threat (ST) is a psychological awareness of being evaluated, judged, and in
fear of confirming a negative stereotype regarding a racial/ethnic group of which one is a member (Steele, 1997). ST is posited as affecting the educational outcomes of African Americans. As a result, African American students may perform at low levels, disengage the learning process and, overtime, withdraw or drop out of schooling.

According to Creswell (2007), it is essential in a phenomenological study, that all the participants studied have experienced the phenomenon. As such, criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon. All participants in the study were self-identified African Americans and were perceived to have been at risk of experiencing stereotype threat by virtue of their racial identity. The size of the sample was also important.

According to Duke (1984), the number of participants in a phenomenological study ranges from 1 up to 325. Other researchers suggest that the capping number should be lower (Klenke, 2008). This study utilized a purposeful criterion sampling of 34 African American middle/high school students attending a local African American church. Students were chosen specifically because of the potential of experiencing the stereotype threat phenomenon and because such experiences during early adolescence have a tendency to affect educational outcomes (Ogbu, 1978; Spencer, 1987; Steele, 1997). This study sought to examine the extent to which student religious participation impacted the effects of this phenomenon.
Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was as an investigator and facilitator. As an investigator, the researcher identified a particular site, the Black community church where the research was to be conducted, as a fruitful setting for obtaining both access to subjects with experiential knowledge of the research phenomenon and an environment that supported the student subjects in regard to their perceptions of safety and their willingness to express themselves honestly. The researcher acquired permission in writing to conduct the study and consent for the subjects’ participation in the study as well as consent to facilitate the study. The researcher sought to minimize any effect on the study or environment due to her presence.

As a facilitator, the researcher conducted implementation of surveys and collected data. Because the researcher was a member of the racial/ethnic group being studied (insider) but was also a member of an educational institution (outsider), participants may have experienced some level of apprehension in regard to their responses. Insider/outsider positionality is referred to in research by some scholars as having the potential to compromise the ability to be objective and unbiased in interpreting data results (Chavous, 2008). However, other scholars view insider/outsider positionality as a false dichotomy because both insider and outsider have to contend with the same methodological issues around positionality: the researcher’s sense of self and the situated knowledge she/he possesses as a result of her/his location in the social order (Banks, 1988; Merton, 1978; Naples, 1996).
To ensure participants’ level of comfort, the researcher utilized adult members from the church as co-facilitators to implement and collect data. The researcher also encouraged participants to be honest in their responses whether their responses were negative or positive. The researcher exercised confidentiality in the collection and storage of data collected and the data remained stored under lock and key (locked file cabinet). Data was discarded according to the procedures outlined by the Human Subjects Committee at Sacramento State University.

Data Collection

The researcher obtained the approval of the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects of California State University, Sacramento to conduct the study. The church, parents, and students granted permission for student participation. Students were contacted at church and informed of the study and encouraged to participate. The study attempts to utilize a purposeful sample of 34 students. The students attending the church were selected voluntarily by responding to the pastor’s announcement, receiving parental consent, and giving student consent. Data was collected from the survey, focus group and adult interviews and analyzed for emerging patterns and themes.

The survey was administered at a time and place designated by church leadership. The youth were gathered together in a centralized location. Volunteer adults assisted in distributing and collecting the survey. The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete at which time the surveys were collected by youth teachers and the researcher.
The youth were then segmented by grade level into smaller focus groups for the purpose of personal interaction and discussion of group interview questions. The open-ended questions were given verbally as well as displayed on large LCD screens. The interactions of the focus group were not digitally recorded to ensure a level of safety for open and free expression among the students.

The culminating results of the students’ interactions were reported out and digitally recorded by the researcher. The focus group members also reported their results on large paper on the walls. The adult interviews were scheduled at an agreed upon time and place within the church by the researcher and the adults interviewees. The interviews were conducted with the adults at different times and different locations within the church. The digital data from the focus group (interview) report-out, wall poster data and the adult interviews were transcribed by the researcher for themes and patterns relative to the research questions. Coding was used to categorize themes and patterns. For the survey data, the researcher used statistical analysis and charts and graphs to display data results.

When the focus group reported out and the adult interviews had been transcribed, patterns and themes were coded and categorized for significance of research questions and for possible further research (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The researcher reviewed the student report-out responses and identified themes that recurred relating to the research questions. The researcher then analyzed the context in which the themes arose and the frequency. As themes were identified and coded in the interviews with the youth
teachers from the church, the researcher also identified themes that arose in both the focus group reports-out and the youth teacher interviews, noting both similarities and differences in the ways in which these themes and seminal concerns were addressed by the two categories of subjects.

The coded statements from the qualitative data (focus group report-out and youth teacher interviews) were also employed in interpretation of responses to the survey in terms of the subjects’ own meaning, as the objective responses to the survey were also employed in interpreting the qualitative data. This coding linked all these data fragments to particular ideas and concepts. Concepts were in turn related to one another. Codes, categories, and concepts were, thus, related closely to one another. The analytical work lie in establishing and thinking about such linkages and in the use of the coding and concepts in the identification of relevant relationships (Coffey & Atkins 1996).

The researcher triangulated among the various data sources to provide an explanation toward the understanding of student subjects’ experiences of their world and the implications for their educational outcomes. The researcher utilized the linkages among the various data sources through coding, categories, and concepts to identify relevant concepts related to the research questions.

It should be noted that the researcher’s access to the participants, particularly the student participants, was limited in duration and frequency. The researcher met with church representatives initially to explain the purpose of her research and to seek their approval to recruit student participants and their parents through the church. This
permission was obtained; however, it was not open-ended in regard to frequency and intensity. Consistent with this permission to engage with students and parents, the researcher met with potential participant students and their parents to inform them about her research and seek participants. The researcher met again with participants to receive permission slips. A final meeting involved the actual gathering of data. The researcher also was provided an opportunity to interview two youth teachers on one occasion for the research. As a member of the church community, the researcher has had an ongoing opportunity to observe the interactions of the church leadership and its student members. However, there has been no additional focused opportunity to gather particular data. Thus, the research is not and cannot be longitudinal in nature and involves responses from participants at one point in time, not over the course of a long period of interaction.
Chapter 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the data collection procedures and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data includes a self-reported survey while the qualitative data consists of focus group interviews and two interviews with adults. The results of both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and then triangulated in order to compare and cross check data. This chapter first presents the quantitative data analysis to demonstrate the critical connections between the dependent and independent variables. Next, the qualitative data analysis is presented to describe the participants’ experiences in school and church as they relate to their educational outcomes.

The quantitative portion of the study consists of survey responses from the 34 participating African American high school students. The survey responses include a self-reported GPA measure and school/placement level (based on English placement; basic, standard, and honors) as dependent variables were analyzed by the multiple independent variables of racial identity, stereotype threat, and religious participation to determine if they could explain the impact on student educational outcomes. For the qualitative portion, the students were asked to describe their experiences in both school and church. The adults were asked to respond to what they thought about the youth experiences in
school and church. These questions and others were then coded to identify themes related to the research questions and the extent to which the students’ experiences in church helped them cope with their experiences of being an African American student of color in public secondary schools. The chapter closes with a detailed analysis of how the research questions were answered through the quantitative and qualitative portions separately. This last analysis also includes a discussion of how the qualitative responses explained or described certain quantitative findings.

Research Questions

The following research questions have guided the study, data collection procedures, and presentation of analysis. The researcher’s goal was to collect data that would explore the relationship between students’ racial identity, experiences of being treated differently because of their race, and the students’ educational outcomes. The researcher also sought to identify how and to what extent students’ religious participation with a Black church centered in their community served as a protective factor in coping with the racism and discrimination in their school experiences. In order to do so, the researcher asked questions designed to examine the students’ racial identity, religious participation, and experiences of being treated differently (racism) because of race which has proven (Seller, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006) to have significant impact on student’s educational outcomes. The following questions will be answered separately based on the data presented later in this chapter.
Research question #1: To what extent do racial identity, stereotype threat, and religious participation affect the educational outcomes of African American students in grades 7-12?

Research question #2: What are the factors associated with stereotype threat that affect student performance?

Research Question #3: How does engagement with a church, particularly a church situated within the student’s home community and culturally associated with the students’ racial identity, affect African American students’ racial identity, student achievement, and the response to stereotype threat?

Data Description

Data for this research was collected from student members and adult youth leaders within an African American Christian church located in and serving an urban African American community. The data was collected at facilities operated by the church, including the site of its youth-centered program. The research was conducted with the permission of the church leadership, including the pastor. Data consisted of a survey administered to the student participants, a focus group process involving the student participants, and in-depth interviews of two adults from the church who were involved in the youth-centered program of the church.
The Likert-type scaled survey for quantitative data collection included questions on racial identity, religious participation, and stereotype threat. The survey also included questions on school-related identities including academic identity, academic engagement, valuing schooling, and future aspirations (attending college). Of the 36 questions asked, two were determined to elicit a response regarding participants’ racial identities. One of these questions merely asked the participant to identify racial/ethnic membership. The other question asked participants to indicate the extent to which the participant identified with and felt a connection as a member of their racial group. Two of the 36 questions asked the participant about his/her level of religious participation. These questions were asked to determine the extent to which each participant engaged in religious activities on a weekly basis. The response to these questions indicated the frequency with which the participant was engaged in church-related activities during the week and the extent to which religious belief affected choices of extracurricular activities outside of church.

Six of the questions asked the participants about their experiences of being treated differently because of their race – their experiences of stereotype threat. One question asked about participants’ levels of placement in their English class. This question was used to determine the academic placement level of the participants. One question asked participants to self-report their grades in core subjects. Since students had very recently received their grade reports, this question tapped fresh information from which approximate current GPA status could be determined. Four questions were related to academic identity, and five were related to academic engagement.
One question related to academic disengagement and the extent of the participant’s resistance to such disengagement. Another question addressed the extent to which the participants engaged in self-handicapping behavior in school or showed resilience in avoiding such behavior. One question related to the extent to which participants valued school and one related to participants’ future aspirations (college, trade, etc.). The other 10 questions consisted of self-reported demographic information: family, parent education, parental occupation, student age, grade, gender, and school district attended (see Table 1)

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The initial recruitment of student participants consisted of a meeting with the potential student participants and their parents to gain consent (parent) and assent (participant). The initial group of student participants recruited totaled 36. However, 34 participants actually arrived for the survey completion and focus group session and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Education</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond College Graduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents Living in the Home</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother Only</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother and Father</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent and Step-Parent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation of Parent(s)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service/Retail</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
participated. The permission slips were collected on three separate occasions: once after church service and twice after bible study. These were the times that minimized interference with scheduled church activities.

The quantitative data from the 36-question self-reported survey was collected from African American students at a local Christian church in Northern California. The church is predominately African American with a membership of approximately 4,000. The participants were 7-12th grade students who attend the church. The participants were also students from various school districts throughout Sacramento County. The study took place at the church in a room designated by the church. The participants completed a paper and pencil survey. The room in which the study was conducted consisted of nine round tables with seating for six per table. The youth teachers (2) from the church were also present to assist with the survey. The researcher requested the youth teachers’ participation to increase the comfort level for the participants given the nature of the study.

As the participants arrived, they first approached the youth directors who guided them to take a seat. Several participants offered to help pass out materials. As the participants arrived, they began to gather in friendship clicks. They were instructed by the researcher and the youth teachers to sit wherever they were comfortable. After a brief introduction of who the researcher was and what they would be doing, the youth teachers and the researcher passed out pencils and survey to participants. One of the participants asked if he/she should be completely honest in answering the survey. The researcher
responded, encouraging and ensuring the participants that confidentiality was in effect and honesty was being encouraged. The participants were given 45 minutes to complete the survey questions.

Analysis of the Quantitative Data

Table 2 describes the independent variables: racial identity, religious participation, and stereotype threat. Racial identity refers to the participants feeling a strong connection to other members of their race. Religious participation refers to the number of times the participants engaged in religious activities during the week and/or the extent to which religious belief influenced the participant’s extra-curricular involvements. Stereotype threat refers to the participant’s experience of being treated differently because of race in school and socially.
Table 2

Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(31) Racial Identity – I feel a personal connection to other members of my race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) Religious Participation – How often do you participate in church/religious activities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times per month</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times per week</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times per week</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) Religious Participation – I sometimes participate in extra –curricular activities because of my religious beliefs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(30) Stereotype Threat</strong> - People often form opinions about me based on my race.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(32) Stereotype Threat</strong> – Some teachers think that I am dumb because of my race.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(33) Stereotype Threat</strong> – When I am called upon in class some teachers think I will give the wrong answer because of my race.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(34) Stereotype threat</strong> – Some teachers think I will do poorly on my test because of my race.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(35) Stereotype threat</strong> - Some of my teachers give me bad grades because of my race.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(35) Stereotype threat</strong> - Some of my teachers give me bad grades because of my race.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(36) Stereotype threat – Some of my teachers don’t like me because of my race.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 contains the independent variables along with the corresponding questions and responses to the independent variables given on the survey. Racial identity reports that 28, or 82.4%, of participants identified and had a personal connection with other members of their race. Religious participation indicates that 31, or 91.25%, participated in church activities on a regular to frequent bases. In addition, almost all participants reported experiencing encounters of racism and discrimination in schooling on some level.

Table 3 describes the dependent variables in this study: grade point average and ability/placement. Grade point average includes the self-reported grades averaged for English, math, history, and science. The survey took place immediately following first semester grading period. This allowed for a more accurate reporting by the participants of their grade point averages. Ability/placement was established based on each participant’s self-reported placement level in their English class: basic, standard, honors, and high honors.
Table 3

Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Point Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (D)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (C)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (B)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors (A)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3, for grade point average, 7-22 of the participants, 21%-65%, had a grade point average of a “C” or “B.” In terms of placement, the majority of participants, 53%, were in Standard English classes and 29.4% were in honors. This indicates that most participants were doing well and performing at an average to high achievement level. Table 4 indicates the patterns of responses on the other school-related variables.
Table 4

Other School – Related Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Engagement</strong> - How often do you ask questions in class?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the time</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Engagement</strong> - How hard would you say you try in class work, school work and test?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not hard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat hard</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very hard</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely hard</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Engagement</strong> – How often do you turn in your homework?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the time</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Engagement</strong> – About how many hours do you spend on homework each night?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 hour or less</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 hours or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic engagement</strong> – Do you think that you have to do well in high school to get a good job later on?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes/unsure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>79.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(18) Future Aspirations</em> – Which of the following describes your educational plans after high school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No plans/unsure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(19) Disengagement</em> –Some teenagers have given up on being involved in things at school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(20) Valuing School</em>– Some teenagers feel learning at school is important.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(21) Academic identity</em> – Some teenagers feel that they are just as smart as other their age?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(22) <em>Academic Identity</em> – Some teenagers are pretty slow at finishing their work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23) <em>Academic identity</em> – Some teenagers do very well in their class work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24) <em>Self-handicapping/Resilience</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25) <em>Academic Identity</em> – Some teenagers feel they are pretty intelligent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26) <em>Social Acceptance</em> – Some teenagers find it hard to make friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>79.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(27) <em>Social Acceptance</em> – Some teenagers are hard to like.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(28) <em>Social Acceptance</em> – Some teenagers feel they are socially accepted.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(29) <em>Social Acceptance</em> – Some teenagers wish that more people their age accepted them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really true for me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of true for me</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(31) <em>Racial Identity</em> – I feel a personal connection to other members of my race.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4, the other school-related variables are listed along with the corresponding questions on the self-reported survey given to the participants. There were
six questions on academic engagement; one was eliminated in this report because there was no correlation to dependent or independent variables. The answers to these questions were elicited to determine the extent to which participants engaged in the schooling process. Social Acceptance questions included four questions such as making friends, being accepted by others, and feeling socially accepted. These questions reflected the participants’ sense of belonging in the school environment by peers and teachers. Academic identity refers to four questions related to feeling as smart as others, being slow at finishing work, doing well in class work, feeling intelligent. Valuing school consisted of one question, whether or not learning at school was important. Future aspirations included plans to go college. Academic disengagement referred to a question on giving up on being involved in school. And self-handicapping included not working hard so as to have an excuse for not doing well in school. These variables are defined in Table 5.
### Table 5

Definitions of School-related Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic engagement</td>
<td>asking questions in class; doing class/homework; doing well for future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic identity</td>
<td>feeling as smart as other; doing well in class; feeling intelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social acceptance</td>
<td>making friends; being accepted by friends; feeling socially accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing school</td>
<td>learning at school in important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future aspirations</td>
<td>planning to attend college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Disengagement</td>
<td>giving up on being involved in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-handicapping</td>
<td>not working as hard so as to have an excuse for not doing well in school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) assesses the degree that quantitative variables are linearly related in a sample. Each individual or case must have scores on two quantitative variables. The significance test for $r$ evaluates whether there is a linear relationship between two variables in the population. Table 6 reports the correlation coefficient for independent and dependent variables in this study.
Table 6

Relevant Correlations Within Survey Answers – Statistically Significant or Statistically Suggestive

GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Racial I.D.</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.408</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.289</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic(15) Engagement</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Academic Engagement (17)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Self-Handicapping</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>-289</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td></td>
<td>.351</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotype Threat (33)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Stereotype Threat (34)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Academic Identity (25)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.329</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>-.402</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td></td>
<td>.315</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Racial Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Identity (21)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Social Acceptance (28)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Religious Participation (11)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.391</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td></td>
<td>.308</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religious Participation (11) (Within Church)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic identity (22)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Academic Engagement (14)</th>
<th>Pearson Corr</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.404</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>-386</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 continued

Religious Participation (12) (Outside Church)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic Identity (21)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stereotype Threat (32) (Teachers think I’m dumb – race)

|                                | Disengagement          |                       |                       |
|                                | (haven’t given up)     | Pearson Corr.         | -.300                 |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)        | .085                  |                       |
|                                | N                      | 34                    |                       |

Stereotype Threat (33)
( Teachers expect wrong answer in class – race)

|                                | Social Acceptance(28)  |                       |                       |
|                                | (feel socially accepted)| Pearson Corr.         | -.407                 |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)        | .017                  |                       |
|                                | N                      | 34                    |                       |

Stereotype Threat (35) (Teachers grade down – race)

|                                | Academic Identity (25) |                       |                       |
|                                | (Feel pretty intelligent) | Pearson Corr.     | -.327                 |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)        | .059                  |                       |
|                                | N                      | 34                    |                       |

Resistance to Disengagement Behavior (haven’t given up on school)

|                                | Academic Engagement (14) |                       | Academic Engagement (16) |
|                                | (Trying hard in class)   | Pearson Corr.         | .367                   |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)          | .037                  |                       |
|                                | N                        | 34                    |                       |

|                                | Academic Engagement (16) |                       |                       |
|                                | (Time on homework)       | Pearson Corr.         | .292                   |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)          | .093                  |                       |
|                                | N                        | 34                    |                       |
Table 6 continued

Self-Handicapping Behavior – Resistance To (Resists making excuses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Social Acceptance (27) (Not hard to like)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.351</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valuing School (Learning in school is important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Engagement (15) (Turn in assignments)</th>
<th>Academic Identity (23) (Doing well in class)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.446</td>
<td>.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Acceptance (26) (Not hard to make friends)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Identity (21) (As smart as anybody)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Acceptance (27) (Not hard to like)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Identity (22) (Not slow at schoolwork)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Future Aspirations (College, Trade, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Engagement (16) (Time on homework)</th>
<th>Academic Identity (25) (Feel pretty intelligent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.385</td>
<td>.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 presents the correlations found between survey responses given by the student participants, including correlations with the independent variables and correlations among various dependent variables analysis indicated were relevant to the underlying research questions. As noted, these include the relationship between independent and school-related variables. Correlations are evaluated in terms of their strength and direction (positive or negative). Only those correlations deemed relevant to the underlying research questions and which were either statistically significant or were suggestive although not reaching statistical significance are included in this analysis. In addition, in this discussion not every correlation is given equal attention. However, some correlations are important with regard to the underlying research questions and, thus, required more discussion.

The strength of the correlation coefficient is determined within a range of -1.0 – +1.0. r scores that equal zero reflect a finding of no correlation. A +1.0 = perfect position correlation, as one variable increases so does the other to an equal degree. A -1.0 = a perfect negative relationship, as one variable decreases the other increases to an equal degree. The size of the r value indicates the strength of the correlation. The measure of statistical significance indicates the reliability of the correlation expressed as the probability that the recorded correlation could have arisen by chance. For purposes of this study, a p-value of .05 or less is considered to be statistically significant. A p-value of .10 or less but more than .05 is considered to be suggestive but not statistically significant.
Table 7

Size and Direction of Correlation Effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>-0.09 to 0.0</td>
<td>0.0 to 0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>-0.3 to -0.1</td>
<td>0.1 to 0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>-0.5 to -0.3</td>
<td>0.3 to 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>-1.0 to -0.5</td>
<td>0.5 to 1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GPA

In Table 6, there is an unsurprising correlation between GPA and academic placement. It may not be surprising that those students in the higher sections of classes overall have higher GPAs. However, this does raise the question as to whether the students in the Basic and Standard sections of high school English are making progress even within those sections. If placement in a lower section is correlated with a lower GPA, suggesting that these students do not benefit from the lower placement with a higher grade, how are they ever to progress?

There is a statistically suggestive (p=.09) correlation of .289 between GPA and racial identity. As can be seen, this is a small correlation and while it does not pass the test for statistical significance to a level of .05 or less, it is still statistically suggestive to a level of less than .10. Thus, a strong racial identity appears to bear at least some degree of correlation with higher achievement in school for these students.
Gender

There is a statistically significant and medium-sized correlation between gender and one measure of academic engagement – turning in homework assignments. Thus, the responses indicate that the female students are more diligent in turning in their homework than their male counterparts, a behavior associated with academic success. However, there is a statistically suggestive negative low correlation between gender and another measure of academic engagement – the belief that success in high school is necessary for employment success later in life. Thus, the male students expressed a stronger conviction that doing well in school is important for their life chances, while they also admitted a greater tendency not to do the work required in a diligent manner. This pattern of engagement in behaviors contrary to one’s aspirations will recur in the male survey responses.

There is a statistically significant medium correlation between gender and resilience against self-handicapping behavior and/or between gender and self-handicapping behavior, depending on whether one approaches the question from the perspective of the girls or the boys. In short, the female students were more likely to identify themselves as a student who does not make excuses for poor performance by avoiding doing hard academic work. The male students were, by contrast, more likely than the girls to identify themselves as a student who will avoid doing hard work in order to have an excuse for a poor outcome. When considered in light of the gender difference in responses to the question about doing homework on time and the question about belief
in the value of school success, this paints a picture of boys being more likely to believe that school success is important while engaging in behaviors associated with doing poorly in school. Girls, by contrast, appeared to be less strongly convinced that success in school is needed for success in life but more likely to do what school requires.

*Age*

Age was not highlighted in the research questions underlying this study. However, age proved to be an important variable in terms of the susceptibility of students to both positive and negative influences. As will appear later in this chapter, the analysis of the interviews with the youth teachers from the students’ church, younger students, particularly, according to one of the youth teachers, younger male students, are at a critical point in their passage to adulthood. Their experience of the journey through this life stage plays an important role in setting them on whatever path they follow into adulthood.

In this study, there was a statistically significant (p=.035) and medium strength negative correlation (-.402) between age and one measure of stereotype threat – feeling teachers expect the student to perform poorly on tests because of his/her race. There was also a statistically suggestive (p=.062) medium strength negative correlation (-.329) between age and a similar measure of stereotype threat – feeling that teachers expect the student to answer incorrectly because of race. These responses indicate the younger students in this study were more sensitive to encounters with their teachers in which they felt put down in one way or another because of their race. At the same time, there was a
statistically suggestive (p=.074) medium strength positive correlation between age and one measure of academic identity – the belief that one is pretty intelligent, suggesting the older students in this study were more likely than the younger students to have faith in their own intelligence.

Likewise, there was a highly statistically suggestive (p=.052) medium strength negative correlation (-.341) between age and a measure of academic engagement – the length of time spent doing homework, suggesting the younger students in the survey were more likely to buckle down and spend time on their homework in the evenings. Finally, there was a statistically suggestive positive correlation between age and a measure of social/personal acceptance – the feeling that one is socially accepted by others, meaning that the older students in the study were more likely to feel alright about themselves in relation to others.

The picture these responses paint is disturbing. The younger students are revealed as particularly vulnerable. They are more sensitive to perceived racial slights and more connected to their lives as students than the older student participants. They are more diligent in their schoolwork than their older peers, but they experience the slights of racial profiling more strongly. Their older peers in this study showed less attachment to the school culture but more comfort in their own identity and less vulnerability to racially-based slights. As will appear in the analysis of the interviews with the youth teachers, this configuration of susceptibilities places younger African American students at risk for disappointments that can lead them to turn away from the positive associations
over time and disengage from school and even from the supportive resources available to them outside the school like the Black church.

*Racial Identity*

There is a statistically significant (p = .024) medium strength correlation (.391) between racial identity and one measure of academic identity (feeling as smart as one’s peers). This suggests that students with a strong sense of their racial identity feel a sense of comfort in general with themselves, reflected in their greater identification with the belief that they are as smart as any of their peers. There is also a statistically suggestive (p = .08) medium strength correlation (.304) between racial identity and one measure of social acceptance – feeling that one is socially accepted by others.

It is notable that there is also a very similar level of correlation between age and this measure of social acceptance, suggesting that as the students mature, they become more at home with their racial identity and their social identity. Finally, there is a statistically suggestive (p = .076) medium strength correlation (.308) between racial identity and a measure of religious identity – extent of participation in church-based activities. At the least, those students who continue to move forward in their schooling and their positive social environment (in this case, the Black church), appear to grow in strength in these three identity measures. It goes without saying that the students who do not weather the earlier years of secondary education would not appear in a survey such as this or in the setting in which this survey was conducted. The older students in this study
are the survivors. Racial identity and church-based identity appear to serve as protective factors in their path through their racialized adolescence.

Religious Participation

There were two questions that measured the degree of religious participation of the student participants in the survey. The first, which was more consistently answered by all of the students, asked how frequently they participated in activities in their church. Frequency of participation in church activities showed a statistically significant (p=.02) medium strength correlation with one measure of academic identity – feeling one is just as smart as one’s peers. There was also, surprisingly, a statistically significant (p=.024) medium strength negative correlation (-.386) between frequency of participation in church activities and one measure of academic engagement – how hard one tries in performing class work, school work, and tests. It is not clear to the researcher what this correlation represents – whether for some reason students who are more involved in the church are less engaged in their class work, which seems inconsistent with many other responses by the same students and their overall academic records, or, whether the students interpreted this question in a manner other than the researcher intended. They may have interpreted the question as asking about their level of struggle rather than their level of diligence.

The other question regarding religious participation asked students the extent to which they made choices about activities outside the church, participation in extra-curricular activities, because of their religious beliefs. While not every student responded
to this question, among the 30 students who did answer it, there was a statistically significant (p=.026) medium strength correlation (.407) between participation in extracurricular activities because of one’s belief and one measure of academic identity – feeling as smart as one’s peers.

Despite the one correlation whose meaning is unclear, these responses do demonstrate an overall positive association between these students’ religious identity and their academic identity. These two measures also can be seen as part of a configuration of attitudes, values, and beliefs associated with a positive self-concept.

*Stereotype Threat*

This analysis has already noted that the younger student participants showed greater awareness of and sensitivity to instances of stereotype threat, particularly in their interactions with their teachers and peers. The various measures of stereotype threat also showed a statistically significant (p=.039) medium strength negative correlation (-.356) with resilience in avoiding self-handicapping behavior and a statistically suggestive (p=.085) medium strength negative correlation to resilience in avoiding acts of academic disengagement. Put another way, there was a positive relationship between the negative experience of stereotype threat and the negative behaviors involved in self-handicapping conduct and academic disengagement. That is, students in this study who reported higher levels of exposure to stereotype threat also reported a higher incidences of self-harming academic behavior.
The data also shows a statistically significant (p=.017) medium strength negative correlation (-.407) between one measure of stereotype threat and the strength of one’s feeling of social acceptance and a statistically suggestive (p=.059) medium strength negative correlation (-.327) between another measure of stereotype threat and one’s feeling of intellectual competence. These findings suggest that sensitivity to the experience of stereotype threat is particularly associated with feelings of insecurity with regard to oneself and one’s abilities and social skills. As noted above in the analysis of the effect of age on student responses in the survey, the younger students are both most sensitive to stereotype threat and most insecure with regard to their academic and personal competence. Again, this data confirms the vulnerability of the young African American students the youth teachers from the church referred to as a serious concern in their interviews.

The research questions relevant to the quantitative data analysis are as follows:

*Research question #1*: To what extent do racial identity, stereotype threat, and religious participation affect the educational outcomes of African American students in grades 7-12?

*Research question #2*: What are the factors associated with stereotype threat that affect student performance?

The results of the quantitative data analysis indicate that the three independent variables – racial identity, religious participation, and stereotype threat – were statistically significant and suggestively significant with other school-related variables
effecting educational outcomes. Racial identity had a statistically significant \( p=.024 \) medium strength correlation between racial identity and one measure of academic identity (feeling as smart as one’s peers); and one statistically suggestive \( p=.08 \) medium correlation measure of social acceptance (feeling that one is socially accepted by others) and a statistically suggestion \( p=.076 \) medium strength correlation (.308) between racial identity and a measure of religious identity (extent of participation in church-based activities. This implies that at least for these African American students, attending religious activities on a regular basis creates a strong sense of connection with members of their racial group and supports positive educational outcomes as demonstrated by the GPA with 73% earning the average grade of a “B” or higher, 94% answering positively on one measure of academic engagement (how often do you turn in your home work), 91.2% valuing learning in school, 82.4% answering positively on one measure of academic identity (feeling just as smart as their peers), and 85.3% planning to attend college. The National Assessment for Educational Progress reported grade point averages for 2000 for Whites and Blacks as 3.01 and 2.63, respectively. In 2005, for Whites it was 3.04 and for Blacks 2.69. Thus, the students in this study who reported a relatively high level of religious participation tended to be ahead of the curve on these important measures of academic success.

Among these African American students, participation in religious activities tended to be associated with doing well in their school experiences. In this study, the students’ participation in church activities showed a statistically significant \( p=.02 \)
medium strength correlation with one measure of academic identity – feeling one is just as smart as one’s peers. In addition, a statistically significant (p=.024) medium strength negative correlation (-.386) between frequency of participation in church activities and one measure of academic engagement – how hard one tries in performing on class work, school work, and tests. It means that the more frequent participation in church activities the less they engage in school.

This was a surprising outcome and the researcher questions whether the participants interpreted the question as the researcher intended. The other question regarding religious participation asked students the extent to which they made choices about activities outside the church, participation in extra-curricular activities because of their religious beliefs. There was a statistically significant (p=.026) medium strength correlation (.407) between participation in extracurricular activities because of one’s belief and one measure of academic identity – feeling as smart as one’s peers. These responses demonstrate an overall positive association between these students’ religious identity and academic identity.

The various measure of stereotype threat indicated a statistically significant (p=.039) medium strength negative correlation (-.356) with resilience in avoiding self-handicapping behavior and a statistically suggestive (p=.085) medium strength negative correlation to resilience in avoiding acts of academic disengagement. In short, this means students experiencing stereotype threat also engage in self-handicapping behaviors. However, for these students, participation in a faith-based youth program in the church
provides the additional support needed for them to persevere. This suggests that for these African American students, participation in religious activities on a regular basis and the internalization of a strong African American racial identity are protective factors that reduce the effect of stereotype threat (racism and discrimination).

The factors associated with stereotype threat for these students include academic disengagement and self-handicapping behavior, a configuration of behaviors suggesting the younger participants were more vulnerable to stereotype threat yet more engaged in the schooling process and are at a critical and dangerous juncture in their young lives. Just now, they are still in school, still in church, and still hopeful. However, over time these encounters of racial profiling of which the younger students reported a greater frequency (sensitivity to?) have been shown to cause many students to disengage, withdraw, and eventually drop out.

The older students in this study present as less affected by stereotype threat, more confident in who they are, and, at the same time, less engaged in the school culture. In addition, the girls often do what is required and are less likely to engage in self-defeating behaviors than the males. At the same time, the males, while valuing school and indicating the importance of doing well in school to get a good job, are more likely not to turn in homework and engage in academically defeating behaviors. Construed together, these responses reflect the greater vulnerability of the young African American male students to negative and racialized school-based experiences. After all, the older students, male and female, have already survived this period of early adolescence. Those
who were brought down by their experiences and dropped out of school were not found in this group of participants. This is not surprising since dropping out of school is so often associated with other acts of disengagement, like dropping out of church. In the interviews with the youth teachers, one participant, Robert, expressed a particular concern to reach out to young African American males before the accumulation of negative experiences “turn” them from positive pursuits. For the students in this study, being a part of a church-based youth program provides the support needed for them to be successful in school and life.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis presented in this next section provides some insight into the experiences and influences of the participants, as well as supports the quantitative findings. The qualitative data analysis consisted of transcribing and coding the focus group responses and the interview response themes. These themes were then categorized in reference to the research questions: racial identity, religious participation, church and school related experiences, and stereotype threat. The researcher then reviewed the responses within these categories and looked for relationships and recurring themes and concepts. The themes that emerged from the youth focus group activity included:

- Participants’ high aspirations,
- Barriers to their success,
- Support systems for success,
• Treatment by teachers and peers,
• Experiences of being students of color
• School and church experiences

The themes were then analyzed and linked together by ideas and concepts to address the research questions. The third research question relevant to the qualitative analysis is as follows:

Research Question #3: How does engagement with a church, particularly a church situated within the student’s home community and culturally associated with the students’ racial identity, affect African American students’ racial identity, student achievement, and the response to stereotype threat?

Qualitative Design: Focus Group Activity

After participants completed the self-reported survey, they were asked to group themselves in grade-level segments and directed to a table. The qualitative research design consisted of focus groups of three grade-level segments. The three segments consisted of seventh and eighth graders, 9th-10th graders, and 11th-12th graders, respectively.

The focus group process of having the students engage each other to answer the open-ended questions was explained to the students. They were informed that the process by which they engaged each other to answer the questions would not be digitally recorded. Only the report outs would be digitally recorded. They were then asked to choose a facilitator and a note taker from their group. At the end of the group process,
each group chose the student who reported out for their group. The person chosen may or may not have been the facilitator or note taker.

The largest group was of 11th-12th graders consisting of two groups, requiring two separate tables, both located close together. This group engaged and reported out separately as two distinct groups from the same grade-level segment. They were all given lined paper, a sheet of wall post-it paper (flip chart), markers, and pens. The questions to which the participants were asked to respond were provided verbally and shown on two LCD screens located on the wall in two locations visible to all participants. This took into consideration the differences among teenagers’ communication and learning styles. The youth teachers assisted in getting the materials passed out.

While the quantitative data in the self-reported survey sought to determine the extent to which students were personally connected to their racial group (racial identity), how often they participated in religious activities and the extent to which the participants made choices outside of church because of their beliefs (religious participation), and whether they experienced being treated differently because of their race (stereotype threat). Along with determining the impact of these variables on educational outcomes, the questions used to generate the qualitative data sought to understand how these variables were experienced by the students in school and in church. The researcher analyzed the responses for patterns of emergent themes. The emergent themes were then categorized and coded based on the research questions. After a detailed description of
the data, the researcher returned to the individual research questions to determine the extent to which the data answered the questions.

*Focus Group: Emergent Themes*

Questions asked throughout the focus group attempted to expand on the information gathered in the quantitative survey. The dependent variable for the quantitative portion was GPA and ability/placement. The exploration of the dependent variables for the qualitative portion focused on the participants’ experiences in school and church and how religious participation affected their experience of racial identity and affected their educational outcomes as African American middle/high school students. The qualitative portion asked student participants to describe their experiences as persons of color, as students, as church members, and as young people in their world.

After the students engaged with each other in their focus group, their chosen spokesperson reported out to the researcher and other adult church representatives present. The focus group process was not taped. However, the report-outs were digitally recorded to assure accuracy. In addition, the researcher utilized the flip charts the students used to record responses in the focus group for accuracy as well. The focus group process did not involve questions and answers. Rather, the student participants were introduced to generative themes derived from the research questions. In reporting this data, not all responses are given to eliminate repetition. Some of the report-outs by the student spokespersons for the groups were presented as a list of responses representing individual participant responses rather than a synthesis of these responses.
into an overall group statement. This was the choice of the students in the focus groups and their chosen note takers regarding how the focus group record would be generated and recorded. The results of the quantitative portion are triangulated with the qualitative data later in the chapter.

*Qualitative Analysis: Adult Interviews*

This section analyzes the interviews of two adult youth teachers in the church. Frances is female and Robert is male. Both had been youth teachers for many years and had extensive interactions with the youth at the church for a combined period of 20-25 years. Frances worked with girls ages 16-17 years along with a co-teacher. She worked with the girls on Wednesday night bible study and had done so for four years. She was requested by the youth minister to work with the girls.

Robert worked with boys ages 11-13 years and was the chairman of the manhood development program established to strengthen African American boys by helping them become more successful in school and in life. After reading reports that African American boys were failing as they reached the fourth grade, Robert reported he had been working with boys (various ages) for 22 years to change this phenomenon. In his interview, he stressed the importance of reaching out to young African American males early, before they were “turned” to a self-defeating lifestyle.

The interviews were prearranged and located at the church in an unused classroom at separate times. The interviews were digitally recorded for accuracy. Both
youth teachers were asked same questions. In the next section, the emergent themes from the adult interviews are analyzed.

**Adult Interviews: Emergent Themes**

The adult interviews were analyzed to uncover various themes relating to the research questions. Both youth teachers were asked the same questions. The themes that emerged from these interview responses included:

- the importance of parents and their influence on the development of youth;
- role of the church in assisting the family in developing youth through the youth development program;
- the general support needed from adults to help youth grow and develop;
- the vulnerability of the younger adolescents and the importance of reaching them early with positive supports; and
- the particular vulnerabilities and needs of the young male students.

**Data Analysis: Survey Data, Focus Group Data and Interview Data**

The focus group responses, interviews, and survey data were triangulated together for interpretation and understanding with respect to the research questions. The emergent themes from both sources are addressed together.

**Goals and Dreams**

Adolescence is a time for preparing for the future. When participants were asked about their future aspirations, all replied with college and career plans. These included
four-year or two-year colleges to become professionals and paraprofessionals in various fields.

(7-8 graders) We plan to graduate with masters to become veterinarians, pediatricians, lawyers, pro football and pro basketball players.

(9-10 graders) Most of us plan on attending college and striving for careers like beauticians, musicians, engineers or professional sports.

(11-12 graders) (First group) Photography business, lawyer, vet, a doctor and start own practice; become successful like Tyler Perry. Why? To prove to stereotypes that as African Americans we can become more than what is expected of us; to have my own sitcom/stand-up comedy!; to make someone laugh and turn the entertainment industry upside down!

(Second group) Complete a four year UN and something; ASU on a golf school graduate with PGM; complete high school and go to the military, move up in rank; Attend Clark-Atlanta and major in justice; go to college and study law UCLA”

The quantitative data on future aspirations indicated that 83.5% of the participants planned to attend four-year colleges, 2.9% planned to attend trade school, and 11.8% was unsure (see Table 4). According to the response from one of the adult interviewees, most participants attending college had parents who had gone to college. Frances said, “Young people that have parents who have gone to college and gone through the college experience know about filling out applications are critical. It’s also important that they see people who look like them, then they now it’s possible.” Both teachers agreed that parents who had gone to college realized the importance of education. When parents are not, for a variety of reasons, able to provide the encouragement and support to motivate youth toward college, then the church community, through its associations and interactions, provides the support needed to encourage college attendance.
Robert’s references to the manhood development program is an example of the church’s’ efforts to support the family while serving the needs of the youth, particularly the young males. Another anecdotal example included what happened every Sunday morning: the beginning of morning service is dedicated to recognizing the academic accomplishments, scholarships, awards, and study abroad opportunities, of all the youth (and adults) in elementary, middle, high school, and college, as well as their learning accomplishments in Bible studies. In addition, participants are sometimes reprimanded as well when they are not meeting expectations. In the public school system, the occurrence of African Americans being honored or recognized for anything beyond basketball, is rare if ever, but the failure, suspension, and dropout rates are well known.

This experience also speaks to the importance of students having role models with which they can identify to inspire and motivate them. Frances said, “They need to see role models reaping the benefits of higher education.” This becomes increasingly more difficult when the school system is comprised of 90% White middle class and female teachers. The quantitative data for parent education includes 76.5% of the parents attended some college to a bachelors’ degree and beyond. Table 1 illustrated that 32% of the parents have some college experience, 8.8% obtained an associate’s degree, 20.6% obtained a bachelor’s degree, and 14.7% earned a graduate degree and beyond.

When student participants were asked who were their supporters in realizing their dreams and goals, they all included the parents, family, friends, teachers, college mentor, and church family. But also included were God and Christ Jesus.
My parents constantly encouraging us, family, friends, college mentor, church family, volunteers that help you apply to schools, admission officers’ engineering teachers at school, A/V (church ministry) members at church, God, coach, Christ Jesus! Js up! ; Teachers give support speeches etc. tell you not to give up; God; church, counselors.

For these students, their church provides a support structure and critical social capital needed to transition from high school to college. A network of family, friends, and the church community provide the necessary support system needed especially if the home, for various reasons, is unable to provide enough of this support.

**Barriers to Dreams and Goals**

African American students face unique challenges in realizing their dreams and goals. Many of the barriers are associated with the stigma of negative stereotypes, being devalued in the school setting by peers and teachers, and treated unfairly with grades and discipline. When participants were asked to discuss the barriers they encountered toward reaching their dreams and goals, they responded:

(7-8 graders): Teachers failing you (racist), report cards; devil; drugs; bad people; Haters!

(9-10 graders): Most of our distractions are involving phone, friends, parties, people bringing us down; the way our family supports us, school drama, and boyfriend and girlfriend relationships.

(11-12 graders): (First group) Giving up on myself; procrastination; letting faith go; financially unstable.

(Second group): “Low self-esteem and family doesn’t want us to go; prices for college continue to rise; church personnel doesn’t support.”

When students are in uncaring and devalued environments, it affects their self-esteem and self-worth. When they perceive this unfair treatment because of their race, it
affects their developing identities and interferes with student performance. Many times these students disengage from the learning process or develop self-handicapping behavior to protect their mental and emotional well-being (Wakefield & Hudley, 2006b). In this study, 29.4% of the participants reported at least some degree of academic disengagement and 45.3% reported engaging in self-handicapping behavior. The quantitative data also indicated a statistically significant ($p=.042$) medium strength correlation (.351) between gender and self-handicapping behavior. This means girls are more resistant to engaging in self-handicapping behaviors and boys are more susceptible to engaging in self-handicapping and disengaging behavior.

According to the AEE (2010), a lack of student engagement is predictive of dropping out even after controlling for academic achievement and student background. However, students in this study identified participation in religious activities, their family, their friends, and God as sources for the support they needed to endure the hostility in their environment. During the adult interviews, the question was asked regarding the student participants’ success in their courses. Frances states that the youth teachers regularly discuss the students’ progress in their courses, events at school and ask who feels they need help? One girl responded,

How was your day? How was your week? How are things going? Is there anything in particular that you need to talk about. I have an exam coming up…I’m struggling with this particular course. I’m struggling in science and I really need prayer. I’m studying as hard as I can. I’m going to tutoring, I’m doing all these things but, I need some prayer because I need some help with it.
Participants’ academic identity involved performing class work, homework, asking questions in class, etc. Table 4 reported that 88.1% of the participants identified with academics on one measure of academic identity (doing well in class work) and 5.9% did not. The researcher suggests the majority of participants view academics as part of their identity. According to Steele and Aronson (1995), the participants were the most vulnerable to the effects of stereotype threat. Students who identified with academics viewed their accomplishment in their work as a part and reflection of themselves. As a result, when they perceived they were being treated unfairly and did not receive just feedback on the merits of their work because of their race, they began to disengage from the process, withdraw, and overtime were at-risk to dropout. The quantitative data analysis indicated a statistically significant (p=.03) medium correlation (.356) between stereotype threat and self-handicapping behavior and a statistically suggestive (.064) medium correlation between stereotype threat and disengagement. The researcher suggests the 11.8% of the participants in the study who did not identify with one measure on academic identity (not true or unsure about doing well in their class work) and the 8.8% who did not value school highly (not sure or not true that doing well in school is important), may have, to some degree, disengaged the school process, and may be the ones responding negatively to experiences of racism and discrimination; therefore, they were at risk. For these participants the church community can become even more important.
Robert, who worked with the boys, responded to this question stating that the lack of success students experienced in their courses stemmed from a lack of motivation. This lack of motivation came from a lack of purpose, which in turn came from not knowing who one was. He said the boys, in particular, needed to know who they were to know their purpose, which would motivate them to learn and learn well.

Well, because of my personal history and understanding, they don’t know who they are. They don’t know their history. I deal with mostly African Americans. I think it’s the parents don’t know their history.

Robert continued that some of the youth had young parents who simply did not have the knowledge of and understanding needed to develop the youth. This became a challenge to their school life.

A lot of them have young parents. The parenting is bad. Where they’re not developing them right, they way they need to be developed. When that happens now we have to try and correct and develop them. They get too old to go back and forth with developing them. In school when they are not developed they’re not focused. Only the exceptional (resilient) ones seem to get it. They’ll get through. If you are not exceptional, if you’re just average you have a lot of deterrent things… you have a lot of obstacles in that home. To me it begins at home. If they’re not motivating you to do well or to get an education or to explain to them what’s going to happen n the future, and get the mindset to want to do well, that’s got to happen in that family. Then when they get to school, that environment, there are too many things to pick up on. Only the exceptional ones will pick up and try to get out of this.

Robert insisted that parents were the key socializing agents for their children. Knowledge about themselves as members of a racial/ethnic group is critical to self identity. He pointed out that to be able to assist in the development of African American youth, parents must become students of their own heritage and learn their history. He believed that for youth to be able to successfully cope with the challenges particular to
them as a racial group, they must receive knowledge and the history of those who came before them and experienced these same challenges. In gaining self-knowledge, he said, students also gain purpose, which leads to motivation, which leads to positive educational outcomes.

*Self-identity/Self-worth*

Student identity development begins in early adolescence and continues through early adulthood. Significant in that development is racial identity. To better understand how the participants experienced being students of color in school, they were asked to describe their experiences as students of color. Their responses ranged from racial pride to experiencing racism and discrimination.

(7-8 graders): I feel good about being African American; I feel annoyed because teachers are racist; I feel judged because other races think African Americans are violent and rude, uneducated, and have no class.

(9-10 graders): For those of us attending (surrounding high school) that our African American peers make us look bad by fighting and violence, homosexuality, ghetto-ness and not trying to meet school standards. Some of the students are segregated within the school though it is diverse. For the most part teachers are not racist but students have noticed a lighter work load for classes full of African Americans.

(11-12 graders): (First group): It feels ok being African American; I’m comfortable; I feel proud; Sometimes affected by teachers; doesn’t matter because of diversity;

(Second group): doesn’t matter because it’s not diverse; segregated; picked first for basketball (stereotype); diverse, I feel uncomfortable; teachers are the minority; racist teachers and black kids, mainly with punishment, Black =mucho, white= little to none.
African American students who experience the stigma of stereotype threat (racism and discrimination) often develop low self-esteem and lack motivation. Both teachers agree that self-identity and self-worth are invaluable for youth. To build their self-identity and self-worth involves them knowing who they are and providing opportunities for them to grow. Frances (adult) stated that giving them the tools they need to cope with their experiences builds their self-worth:

What they’re learning and what we are teaching them in the Bible, they apply to their lives. When youth have the tools they need to address their everyday challenges it builds their confidence and self-worth. When that confidence comes from a source greater than them (God), they become even more empowered.

Robert (adult) stated knowing their history is important. In addition, connecting to who they are, particularly through the mentorship of role models is the key to their identity:

I personally feel Black African American boys can really be encouraged by Black African American men. I think the connection is important. That’s not to say that other people cannot encourage them, there is a connection there that helps them identify who they are. I think that the connection is important.

The curriculum throughout American history has never truly acknowledged other people’s contribution to America, especially African Americans’. The historical legacy of African Americans has never been positively taught in American schools, and as a people with a rich cultural heritage, African Americans continue to be exploited in the media through stereotypes and underserved in the public schools, contributing to a learning gap which limits opportunities to pursue goals and dreams.
Both youth leaders were asked how the youth seem to feel about themselves after making the transition to middle/high school. Robert responded that the boys were experiencing a sense of low self-esteem. He asserted the need to build their self-esteem so they could feel as though they can accomplish something.

I think it’s part of their self-esteem. It has to be someone to help build their self-esteem so they know they can do something. If they don’t get that, they don’t think much of themselves. I think its short-sightedness. They don’t see “I’m about to graduate from high school what am I going to do.” They don’t see… they are real immediate. They don’t get prepared. I think they don’t think a lot about the future…how they’re going to make it…what its’ going to take to make it. They don’t have the confidence to deal with whatever is going on because some people are not good in reading and math or those sorts of things. It’s like they haven’t taken those things seriously.

Frances (adult), on the other hand, felt the girls were confident because of their religious faith. Many of their teachings to build confidence come from the study of the Bible. The Bible is used to build a foundation for character that motivates youth and builds confidence.

I think it’s their faith. I honestly do. They know there is something more than just what other kids’ who don’t have hope in something higher, like a higher power. They know they have that. And I think they lean on that. We hear them when they use the scriptures to apply their situations. We hear them say “You know what, I was in this situation and a certain scripture came to me…” and it help me decide or make a decision about whether or not they are going to go along with the crowd or not.

**Challenges with Church and School Life**

In addition to dealing with the stigma of stereotypes, racism, and discrimination by peers and teachers, youth also face challenges incorporating their school life and their church life. Many times their involvement with extra-curriculum activities conflicts with
their church activities, which also happen after school. Youth are then faced with difficult decisions. Frances gave the example of a particular girl whose confrontation with such a challenge ultimately strengthened both her self-concept and her connection with her church:

Some of the kids have activities that happen on Wednesday night. So she had to make a choice because she was on the sports team. But because she took a stand with the coach and with the support of her parents, the coach agreed to allow her to miss practice on Wednesday to attend Bible study. She was later coined the “church girl”, a title she embraced. She began inviting her friends to Bible study.

Participants’ efforts to incorporate their church life and school life involved making choices. The quantitative data indicated a statistically significant (.026) medium correlation (.407) between one measure of academic identity (feeling just as smart as peers) and one measure of religious participation (engaging in extracurricular activities because of beliefs). This means the more the youth participate in religious activities, the more they develop an academic self-concept. Students who identify academically tend to do well in school. In addition, there is also a statistically significant (.024) medium strength correlation (.386) between one measure of academic engagement (trying hard in school work) and one measure of religious participation (frequency in participating in church activities). This indicates that the more participants engage in religious activities, the more effort they make in school work.

In addition to after school activities, another challenge included the conflict in ideology between the Bible teachings and the school. Frances stated “Because they actually come and tell us what they learned in school about Darwinism for example, they
ask “so how do I argue…” (Frances) “No you don’t argue. You know what you know and you stand on your faith.”

They also sought advice on how to handle various situations at school, such as when they were being treated unfairly by teachers or being judged by their peers. Frances said,

Sometimes they’ll share; they have a particular teacher who is not being fair or is not giving them the opportunity. And so they ask for advice on how to handle that and deal with that teacher, how to handle that counselor or principal or whoever.

Many times youth in their interactions with their peers encounter situations in which peer pressure can cause them to succumb to the situation at hand. Frances stated that one of the girls being coined as the “church girl” experienced peer pressure because being churchy is not cool. “By standing up for her convictions, she was coined the church girl among her team mates.” Feeling socially accepted is a measure of the extent to which youth feel good about themselves. Doing well in school involves, among other things, being socially accepted by teachers and peers. The quantitative data analysis indicated a statistically significant (.006) medium strength (.468) correlation between one measure of academic identity (feeling as smart as peers) and social acceptance (feeling socially accepted). Table 4 reported that 88.2% of the participants felt socially accepted while 8.8% did not. The researcher noted that inclusive within this 88.2% were the 5.9% who did not identify with academics, which could be related to the low placement of this 5.9% of student participants. In addition, this could also encompass the 2.9% of participants whose responses indicated they had academically disengaged from the school process.
The researcher acknowledges the various extent to which participants engage the school process is clearly affected by their academic identity and the support received from the family and church community as well as the opportunities for engagement presented to them by their school environment. The church community plays a significant role in helping these particular participants be successful in school, especially if the parents are not able to adequately perform this role,

*Church Youth Program*

A church with a strong youth program specifically designed to develop youth in all areas of growth is said to be critical, according to Frances:

I think it’s critical. And I say that, because they learn how to behave in a group setting, they learn how to treat each other, and they know the difference between right and wrong. And they know they need to take that same behavior to school. And when they have other students at school with them, they become accountable to each other for their behavior. A strong youth program is geared to give kids confidence. And give them knowledge of how to stand up on their own, on your righteousness…and to be ok with that. They have stories in the Bible of how people had to stand all alone and how they couldn’t depend on another individual. The only person…the only thing they could depend on is God. So they have that. They have that foundation and I think it helps them.

Robert made reference to the manhood development youth program in the church. The manhood development program was designed to nurture and develop African American boys because according to Robert:

With us trying to help develop them, because what really motivated me was the fact that, I read this book by Dr. Kunjufu that said that our boys; they don’t grow up to be men because they are destroyed when they are boys. When they got to be 9 years old, their aptitude before was on an upward scale. When they got to be 9, it dropped like a rock. So we know something before the 4th grade was going on. So we said ok, how do we get to them?
The youth teacher recognized that to be successful with these youth requires their needs to be addressed earlier in their lives. This is clear with the correlating quantitative data on age and academic engagement and age and student vulnerability to the negative experiences of stereotype threat. The quantitative data indicated a statistically significant (.023) medium strength correlation (-.402) on one measure of stereotype threat (teacher expectation of poor performance because of race) and age. This means the younger students have a greater sensitivity to racism. These youth are also more vulnerable to disengaging the learning process. There is a statistically suggestive (.052) medium negative correlation (-.341) on one measure of academic engagement (time spent on homework). This means that the younger the students, the more time they engage in doing homework.

By contrast, the data on academic identity indicated a suggestively significant (.074) medium correlation (.315) on one measure of academic identity (feeling pretty intelligent) and age. This means younger students are less confident in themselves versus the older students. Also relevant to age is social acceptance. The statistical analysis indicated a statistically suggestive (.08) medium correlation (.301) on one measure of social acceptance (feeling socially accepted) and age. This means younger students are less socially accepted and more uncomfortable in social situations. This could very well interfere in learning situations in which these students lack the social confidence to negotiate having their needs met.
Robert contends that the manhood development program serves to build character and self-esteem.

The youth development program called the manhood development where we develop character through Bible study and developing a relationship with Christ, through life skills workshops, and community service field trips, just basically trying to adjust their self-esteem, so that out there in school they should be able to have more confidence, more self-worth, and feeling that they can accomplish things. I think it’s sort of a family thing. It’s where people get nurturing from in order to be confident, in order to go to school and deal with their environment, meet challenges of school work, challenges of the people, relationships and the ups and downs. It begins at home and the church is there to help support.

Frances stated that having a strong youth program provides for the needs of the youth when schools cannot fulfill their need. The need to belong is so important for youth.

Sometimes when kids don’t click at school and they just don’t fit, when they come to church that’s the one place they fit. It’s a saving place, like a safe place for them. Because of that they are able to function in school. They look forward to Wednesday night. I think it’s the ability to express them…. and to be themselves. They don’t have to be something they are not naturally and that their faith and what they learn in church can be applied in their everyday life.”

The data analysis indicated that having a sense of being socially accepted by teachers and peers lends itself to having a sense of belonging, which is necessary for student learning. One measure of social acceptance (not hard to make friends) is statistically significant (.006) with a medium strength correlation (.468) to one measure of academic identity (feel just as smart as peers). This indicates that students who feel as smart as everyone else can also make friends.

_Schools Helping Students be Successful_

All students want to be valued and cared for by the adults in their environment. For African Americans being cared for at school is often not the case. The researcher
asked the adult teachers what schools should do to make students more successful.  
Frances thought teachers should value all students and not judge them based on stereotypes, socioeconomics, or anything else. “I think it’s just having teachers look at students not by their color or what they think their background is and treat them like other students. I think it’s sad that teachers and administrators stereotype students.”

The quantitative data speaks to the effect on students and their educational outcomes when teachers, administrators, and student engage in discriminatory practice. There is a statistically significant (.023) medium strength negative correlation (-.402) on one measure of stereotype threat (teacher expect poor performance on test because of race) and age. This indicates that younger students are more susceptible to experiences of discrimination. In addition, these students are also because of this sensitivity more likely to engage in self-handicapping or academically disengaging behavior overtime. Statistics show a suggestive (p=.064) medium negative correlation (-.321) on one measure of stereotype threat (teachers grading down because of race) and academic disengaging behavior. This means the more students experience racism, the less they resist engaging in academic disengaging behaviors. Robert felt schools should teach students their history. If African American youth knew their history, they would then have a purpose, which would motivate their learning.

I think history is a major player in a person being able to have purpose and direction in their life. Even Mexican American, if they knew their history they can attach purpose. I think one of the reasons our young boys are not really focused, a lot of them, too many of them are dropping out of school because they are not attached to a purpose. And that purpose is attached to their history. They don’t know their history and therefore, they don’t know why they should be
getting an education and why its’ important. Why…who am I in this? I mentioned earlier that the schools should teach them about whom they are and that would strengthen them in terms of being successful in school.

In addition, Frances points out the importance of parent involvement. She thinks parents should get involved with the schools and hold teachers and administrators accountable.

So, I think parents need to be there and be their number one advocate. They need to have a presence at the school. The teachers need to know that there is somebody watching them. And that there is somebody that is going to hold them accountable… if it’s not the principal, it’s the parents, it’s somebody. We have a pastor who is known to drive to the school, get out of his car, and visit the school. He been known to drive down the street, see kids that go to this church who are walking down the street at a time when they should be in school, and has been known to pick them up…call their parents… you see it’s that whole community that we lost.

Church Helping Students be More Successful

As noted above, the youth teachers interviewed for this study considered their church having a strong youth development program to be essential for the African American youth they were seeking to reach. African American youth are in a unique position. In addition to dealing with issues common to all adolescents (biological changes, social acceptance, etc.), they also have to contend with the stresses of racism and discrimination (stereotype threat) that affect their educational outcomes. Many families lack the additional resources to expose youth to environments that contribute to their development. For one thing, these stresses may still be recent memories for the parents they are continuing to have to deal with in their own lives. They may not feel highly confident about what advice they have to offer their own children in regard to
these stresses. In addition, few resources can be found in the mainstream that are comparable to the benefits received from the church.

The work of the youth teachers and the church community can be observed in the quantitative data analysis. The data indicate that the students have high aspirations and highly value learning. Students who value learning also have high aspirations. In response to the question asked regarding the value of learning, 91.2% of the participants indicated the importance of learning. Regarding the response to plans for the future, 88.2% of the participants planned to attend college or gain a trade. This indicates a diligence to continue moving forward in spite of the additional challenges these participants face as students of color in their school life. They continue to seek the support of the church community that is committed to being there for them.

Robert and Frances both agreed about the importance of a youth program that provides a nurturing environment where youth can go and have their needs met. Robert referenced the manhood development program as what the church can do to help youth become more successful at school and in life. “This program is designed to build self-esteem by providing opportunities for volunteerism, bringing Black men from the community to help them identify with them. The things I mentioned earlier about what we do as a church serve to develop and support them in society.” Frances, speaking on behalf of the girls with whom she worked, thought the church was doing all the right things for the most part. She thought the church should continue to do what it was doing and remain open to listening to youth.
I think the church can help by doing a lot of things, but needs to continue to be open and continue to listen to the youth. If it’s not going against the core values of the church, then loosen up and accommodate the youth needs. You know what I mean and not be restricted by tradition that means nothing. One of the things I would say, I can’t say how many years ago, but I’ve been going here since 2000 but it was sometimes after that where girls were not allowed to wear pants to Wednesday night Bible study. And they certainly could not wear jeans. Now they can and we’ve seen an increase in attendance. Because they wear jeans to school…so, that meant they had to go home, change clothes and whatever into their (quote on quote) “church clothes” and come. That was a definite deterrent, we know that. So we talked and did a whole strategic plan. And the youth spoke up about that. And the pastor opened his mind to that idea, allowed it and it was gigantic.

Afterwards both youth and teachers were given the opportunity to add any additional comments. The youth responded with the following:

(7-8 graders): We live in a different generation. Things have changed. There are different teaching styles.

(9-10 graders): I don’t like being touched; and times have changed. There is a lot of pressure. Not to make decisions for us or be pushing us.

(11-12 graders): (First group) Adults should understand we are not like them; times are different; It’s hard to be a teenager in 2010; classes and standards are higher than their times were, personalities are more florid.

(Second group) It’s hard to talk to adults because they don’t understand certain things we go through. All kids don’t do drugs, drink alcohol or have sex. Instead of always punishing us, talk to us and explain more; Based off their past is preventing them from connecting with us. They need to hear us out.

Many of the youth responses were comparable to what most youth think about older adults, parents, family, and friends. What was distinct in their responses, however, was their desire to be heard. As Frances reported, the pastor listened and heard them regarding the wearing of pants. Often in the schools, African American youth are voiceless. They are never asked regarding issues that really matter.
The adult teachers responded in this manner concerning additional comments. Frances stated:

I think it’s important that those people, who are working with the youth, be just parents with the kids and to be honest and to model the way and be encouraging to the kids instead of being ritualistic, traditional. You have to have rules and you have to have to have structure, that’s all great and wonderful. But it’s good for kids to see that you are saying and walking the walk. And the adults that are teaching them, that would go a long way. And if the church continues to seek out people who are good communicators and respect kids. I don’t mean let kids run all over you. I mean respect them as human beings, value them. Let them know that you value them and you value their opinion and ideas. And then help them communicate that and put that and line it up.

Robert responded,

Much of what I have already mentioned is pretty much what I think as a whole in regard to the influences on youth. Mainly, parents, adults at church and adults at school are the greatest influences with the exception of their faith in God being first.

Addressing the Research Question

In this section, the researcher examines the extent to which the qualitative data from the focus group interviews and the youth teacher’s interviews answered the research question:

Research Question #3: How does engagement with a predominantly African American church affect African American students’ racial identity, student achievement and response to stereotype threat?

The experiences of both the student participants and the adult participants support the contention that an African American church with a strong youth program can provide for African American youth the much-needed support in every aspect of their growth and
development. The challenges faced by students in school, according to the focus groups and interviews, include being segregated in the schools; experiencing racism by administrators, teachers, and peers; being judged by peers; receiving less rigorous school work as a group; and others displaying behavior offensive to the African American community as a whole. These experiences in school create a hostile environment for African American youth who find themselves without voice, uncared for, and devalued. They occupy a space racialized by the dominant culture in which they must negotiate their education on a daily basis.

Youth often respond to these negative environments with low self-esteem, loss of interest in learning at school, disengagement and self-handicapping behavior, and eventually dropping out of school. The national graduation rate for the class of 2007 was 69%. For Whites, it was 77% and for African Americans, it was 54%, according to “Diplomas Count 2010: Graduating by the Number: Putting Data to Work for Student Success” (Education Week, 2010). In California, over 199,400 students did not graduate from high school in 2010. The cost to California is $52 billion in lost lifetime earnings for that class of dropouts. The national college graduation rate for a four-year institution reported 56%. College graduation rate in the state of California for all students was 63%, while it was 67% for Whites and 46% for African Americans. For a two-year institution, college completion rates for Whites was 34% and 23% for African Americans. These statistics represent not only personal tragedies but a national crisis with huge financial and societal consequences.
But for youth in this study frequently attending religious activities and involved in a strong church youth program, these environmental hazards have been minimized and to a great degree overcome with positive educational outcomes: 91.2% valuing school, 88.2% identifying academically on one measure (doing well in their class work), 94.1% academically engaged on one measure (how often do you turn in homework), and 88.2% planning to attend college or gain a trade.

Both youth teachers agree on the role of the church to help support families in developing the youth. In addition, the student data from the survey and the focus group supports how youth participation in church activities provides for the varied needs of the youth through a strong youth development program, adult mentoring, and biblical teachings. This entails providing a nurturing environment, opportunities for growth, providing guidance in dealing with issues common and uncommon to most adolescents. Participation in a strong youth program for African American youth in an African American church builds on a cultural heritage, develops racial identity, provides role models that motivate and inspire youth to succeed and provides critical social capital on what it means to be African American and how to succeed in school and life. The church is a place where youth can be themselves and be accepted. When youth have this environment in which to exist, then school is no longer the only primary socializing institution outside of family. With the school no longer standing alone to fulfill the role of the primary socializing institution outside the family, negative educational outcomes, such as students feeling unaccepted at school (8.8% on one measure of social
(8.8% on one measure of academic identity); youth disengaging from the schooling process (2.9%); youth no longer valuing school (5.9%) and youth involving themselves in self-handicapping behaviors (35.4%), do not have to define the outcomes for these young people. Indeed, to a certain degree these youth participants remained 100% academically engaged (various levels) in the school process while most maintained high aspirations (college or trade school) for the future (88.2% for most youth and the other 11.8% unsure, which is within the norm for adolescents).

The researcher posits it is due to frequent participation in religious activities and a strong youth program providing a community of support to meet the needs of the participants and the extent to which these young people have maintained positive educational outcomes and GPAs even when their survey responses indicated that some experienced a lack of social acceptance at school, were fairly disengaged from the school process, and pursued self-handicapping behaviors. Thus, the church community is a vital source of community cultural and contributes to the critical social capital needed to sustain and maintain students to be successful in hostile and racialized (White dominated) environments.

Empowering youth by providing instruction on building character using the Bible as a curriculum source is a powerful motivator, particularly for African Americans whose culture and roots are deeply entrenched in their religious beliefs and traditions. Throughout the focus group and interviews, reference to the Bible and scriptures were
used as a refuge and source of strength and taught for application to life experiences to help youth endure the challenges they encounter at school, home, and society. Building character, confidence, faith, and relationship with God were repeatedly mentioned with respect to developing youth cultural pride, hope, and inspiration to endure middle school, high school, and beyond.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between racial identity, religious participation, and the effects of stereotype threat on African American students’ educational outcomes (academic engagement, student achievement, academic identification, withdrawal, and dropping out).

According to the report, *The Economic Benefits of Reducing the Dropout Rate Among Students of Color in the Nation's Forty-five Largest Metropolitan Areas* (AAE, 2010), students of color made up a sizable portion of the 600,000 students who dropped out of the class of 2008 in the nation’s 45 largest metropolitan areas. Of the students, 113,600 were African American, 200,000 were Latino, 30,800 were Asian American, and 3,750 were American Indian. The most recent estimates show high school graduation rates for African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians hover only slightly higher than 50%, which is more than 20 percentage points lower than their White peers. The present research represents a multifaceted study of the personal, educational, and church-based experiences of a group of 34 African American adolescents and the church-based youth teachers committed to working with them, as gained through the self-reported survey, focus group, and interviews. The researcher believes the insights gained from it can inform educational reform efforts toward achieving more positive educational and
interpersonal outcomes with African American students in the public schools and communities where they spend such a significant portion of their adolescent years.

The African American church constitutes an institutional presence in the lives of many African American youth, which can balance, to some extent, the experience of “otherness” they so often encounter in the other major community institution in their lives, the public school. After all, the statistical composition of the teaching force in the United States is startling: 90% of the K-12 teaching force is White (National Collaborative on Diversity of the Teaching Force, 2004); almost half the schools in the U.S. do not have a single teacher of color on staff. Therefore, many students will graduate from high school having been taught by only Whites (Jordan-Irvine, 2003). This is the case at the very time when racial and ethnic groups historically designated “minority” are building toward a majority of the residents of the United States – a new demography in which no one race or ethnicity possesses the numerical center of gravity, but in which African Americans continue to encounter their minority of power and, in terms of the authority figures they encounter in their daily lives, a minority of presence. When looking at the demographics of low achievement scores, the dropout rate and the demographics of the teaching force, these continuing patterns suggest unless something changes, the same results will continue to occur and a vital human resource will continue to be squandered.

The academic performance of African American children has been the subject of debate for decades. School reform efforts have focused on length of school days, more
rigorous standards, qualifications of teachers, and common standards for the nation schools (Park, 2001). Although these efforts are important, research suggests conditions outside of school may hold the key to more positive educational outcomes for African American students (Schickedanz, 1995). One of these outside factors is religious participation, particularly participation in an African American church situated and grounded in the very community in which the students live, share a family life, and develop their sense of who they are and where they are going.

Research shows that many African Americans, in particular, are very involved in religious activities (Taylor, 1988a; Taylor, Chatters, Jayakody, & Levin, 1996). African Americans participate more frequently in public and private religious behaviors, such as attending services, seeking spiritual comfort through prayer, and reading religious material, than do White Americans (Gallup, 1984; Taylor et. al., 1996). For most African Americans, religious participation occurs in the church. The African American church has not only served a spiritual purpose but has served a social support institution (McRae, Carey, & Anderson-Scott, 1998; Taylor, 1988b). Specifically, the church has helped African Americans by (a) being a meeting place, (b) providing guidance, (c) actively working for social progress for African Americans, (d) providing personal assistance, (e) having a strengthening and sustaining quality, (f) establishing guidelines for moral behavior, and (g) being a source of unity (Taylor, 1988b). Formal religious participation is related to higher family cohesion, lower levels of interpersonal conflict, stronger feelings of self-worth, and fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors among youth.
Many African Americans consider the church to be the second most important institution of their community, preceded only by the family (Moore, 1991).

The Black church has always been and continues to be a powerful religious, educational, and political base for the Black community. This suggests that the church has the potential for impacting academic success for African Americans today, as it did before *Brown v. Board of Education*. This does not imply African American students cannot learn from White teachers, or that the church membership is necessary for academic success, but rather that the educational needs and the motivation to learn for African American students go far beyond, yet encompass the ability to read and write effectively. The church serves as an important repository of community cultural wealth, affecting values, beliefs, identity, self-awareness, and a maturing vision of life’s path.

**Interpretation of Findings**

This study explored middle and high school students’ racial identity and participation in religious activities in an African American community church and how it affected their educational outcomes. In addition, the study examined the influence of racial identity and religious participation on students’ ability to cope with and transcend the limiting parameters projected by stereotype threat, that is, students’ perception of being treated differently because of their race (racism). To do this, the researcher conducted a study employing a mixed method research design consisting of a quantitative
self-reported survey of 36 questions and a qualitative portion consisting of a focus group activity and two adult interviews. The data results of the study were triangulated for interpretation and understanding relative to the research questions. The research questions this study sought to answer are as follows:

I. To what extent do racial identity, stereotype threat, and religious participation affect the educational outcomes of African American students in grades 7-12?

II. What are the factors associated with stereotype threat that affect student performance?

III. How does engagement with a church, particularly a church situated within the student’s home community and culturally associated with the students’ racial identity, affect African American students’ racial identity, student achievement, and the response to stereotype threat?

To determine the relationship between independent variables, racial identity, religious participation and stereotype threat and the dependent variables GPA and placement, a number of Pearson coefficient correlations were calculated among responses to the survey. In addition, correlations were conducted to determine the relationships between the main study variables and other school-related identities (academic identity, academic engagement, valuing school, future aspirations, academic disengagement, and self-handicapping) and non school-related identities (social acceptance). This analysis also included gender and age, although these variables had not originally been
highlighted in the research questions. Both variables determined to have important negative and positive influences on different variable correlations.

**GPA**

Among the study participants, there was a statistically suggestive (p=.09) correlation of .289 between GPA and racial identity. As can be seen, this is a small correlation and while it does not pass the test for statistical significance to a level of .05 or less, it is still statistically suggestive level of less than .10. Thus, a strong racial identity appears to bear at least some degree of correlation with higher achievement in school for these students.

**Gender**

There was a statistically significant and medium-sized correlation between gender and one measure of academic engagement – turning in homework assignments. Thus, the responses indicated the female students were more diligent in turning in their homework than their male counterparts, a behavior associated with academic success. However, there was a statistically suggestive negative low correlation between gender and another measure of academic engagement – the belief that success in high school is necessary for employment success later in life. Thus, the male students expressed a stronger conviction that doing well in school is important for their life chances, while they also admitted a greater tendency to not do the work required in a diligent manner. This pattern of engagement in behaviors contrary to one’s aspirations recurs in the male survey responses.
Age

In this study, there was a statistically significant (p=.035) and medium strength negative correlation (-.402) between age and one measure of stereotype threat – feeling teachers expected the student to perform poorly on tests because of his/her race. There was also a statistically suggestive (p=.062) medium strength negative correlation (-.329) between age and a similar measure of stereotype threat – feeling that teachers expected the student to answer incorrectly because of race. These responses indicate the younger students in this study were more sensitive to encounters with their teachers in which they felt put down in one way or another because of their race. This corresponds to the response by one of the youth teachers stating the need to reach the young males and provide additional support. This is in lieu of the younger males being “destroyed as boys and therefore never become men.” At the same time, there was a statistically suggestive (p=.074) medium strength positive correlation between age and one measure of academic identity – the belief that one is pretty intelligent, suggesting the older students in this study were more likely than the younger students to have faith in their own intelligence.

Racial Identity

There was a statistically significant (p=.024) medium strength correlation (.391) between racial identity and one measure of academic identity (feeling as smart as one’s peers). This suggests the students with a strong sense of their racial identity feel a sense of comfort in general with themselves, reflected in their greater identification with the belief that they were as smart as any of their peers. There was also a statistically
suggestive (p=.08) medium strength correlation (.304) between racial identity and one measure of social acceptance – feeling that one is socially accepted by others. It is notable that there was also a very similar level of correlation between age and this measure of social acceptance, suggesting that as the students mature, they become more at home with their racial identity and their social identity. Finally, there was a statistically suggestive (p=.076) medium strength correlation (.308) between racial identity and a measure of religious identity – extent of participation in church-based activities. At the least, those students who continue to move forward in their schooling and their positive social environment (in this case, the Black church) appear to grow in strength in these three identity measures.

Religious Participation

Two questions measured the degree of religious participation of the student participants in the survey. The first, which was more consistently answered by all the students, asked how frequently they participated in activities in their church. Frequency of participation in church activities showed a statistically significant (p=.02) medium strength correlation (.404) with one measure of academic identity – feeling one is just as smart as one’s peers. There was also, surprisingly, a statistically significant (p=.024) medium strength negative correlation (-.386) between frequency of participation in church activities and one measure of academic engagement – how hard one tries in performing class work, school work, and tests. It is not clear to the researcher what this correlation represents – whether for some reason students who are more involved in the
church are less engaged in their class work, which seems inconsistent with many other responses by the same students and their overall academic records, or, whether the students interpreted this question in a manner other than the researcher intended. They may have interpreted the question as asking about their level of struggle rather than their level of diligence.

The other question regarding religious participation asked students the extent to which they made choices about activities outside the church, participation in extracurricular activities, because of their religious beliefs. While not every student responded to this question, among the 30 students who did answer this question, there was a statistically significant (p=.026) medium strength correlation (.407) between participation in extracurricular activities because of one’s belief and one measure of academic identity – feeling as smart as one’s peers.

**Stereotype Threat**

This analysis has already noted the younger student participants showed greater awareness of and sensitivity to instances of stereotype threat, particularly in their interactions with their teachers and peers. The various measures of stereotype threat also showed a statistically significant (p=.039) medium strength negative correlation (-.356) with resilience in avoiding self-handicapping behavior and a statistically suggestive (p=.085) medium strength negative correlation to resilience in avoiding acts of academic disengagement. Put another way, there was a positive relationship between the negative experience of stereotype threat and the negative behaviors involved in self-handicapping
conduct and academic disengagement. That is, students in this study who reported higher levels of exposure to stereotype threat also reported a higher incidence of self-harming academic behavior. See Chapter 4 for more detailed discussion of data analysis.

Implications of the Study

The above results were evidenced in the educational outcomes of the students. All participants reported they had encountered incidences of racism and discrimination, or being treated differently because of race. Research indicated students most vulnerable to these negative experiences tended to be those who identified with academics, were academically engaged, and valued learning in school (Steele, 1995). Data reported on Table 4 indicated that 82.4% of the participants identified with one measure of academic identity (feeling just as smart as peers), 94% identified with one measure of academic engagement (how often do you turn in homework: 44.1% most of the time, and 50% all the time), and 91.1% valued learning in school (61.8% always true and 29.4% somewhat true). The researcher noted the participants’ responses to stereotype threat varied in its effect on their performance as reflected in the variations in grade distribution: 5.9% = D, 20.6% =C, 64.7% = B, and 8.8% = A. The positive correlation between GPA and racial identity indicated one mechanism through which participants mediated the effects of stereotype threat through building a strong racial identity. In addition, younger participants may have yet to develop stronger coping mechanisms, such a mature sense of racial pride and religious faith. This greater vulnerability was reflected in the negative
correlations between age and stereotype threat and the positive correlation between age and social acceptance. This is also reflected in the focus group responses and the interviews referencing students’ low self-esteem, lack of motivation, unfair grading by teachers, and lack of knowledge of cultural/racial identity, which are factors of stereotype threat, as well as future aspirations of going to college to enable the pursuit of professional careers.

Implications of Racial Identity

When the seventh and eighth graders, the youngest segment, responded to experiences of “otherness,” they were unsure of the correct language to describe the experience. For example, when asked about their experiences of being students of color at school, they responded with words such as “feels attractive; annoyed because teachers are racist.” The younger students were learning to develop the vocabulary to describe the particular discomfort they felt when they experienced racism and discrimination. Whereas when the older 11-12 graders were asked the same question, one of the responses included, “It doesn’t matter because it’s not diverse; the teachers are the minority” (a response from students who attended a high school which has an overwhelmingly African American student body with mostly white teachers). The students have a more developed consciousness about not only the meaning of being treated differently but also the context, and they demonstrate a more acute sense of awareness as to the need to have particular racial dynamics present to account for the
existence of feeling discriminated against. Even though it is not adult maturity thinking, it is more advanced than the younger group.

Research suggested adolescents pass through three stages as they move toward adulthood: unexamined racial (ethnic) identity, racial (ethnic) identity search, and achieved racial/ethnic identity (Wakefield & Hudley, 2006). Adolescents with an unexamined racial/ethnic identity may have yet to actively explore their racial/ethnic group membership and have little understanding of issues related to ethnicity (Wakefield & Hudley, 2005). The authors contended there is much debate as to what precipitates the developmental progress to the next stage of racial/ethnic search status. Experiences such as racism, prejudice, or discrimination mark the shift. Yet other researchers suggest that as adolescents mature cognitively and socially in a diverse society, they become more aware of racial/ethnic issues and desire to understand the relationship to their own identity (Wakefield & Hudley, 2005).

The researcher posits that in this study the difference in the responses from the various grade segments, 7-8, 9-10, and 11-12, evidence the level of maturity and stage of racial/ethnic identity search in their responses to their experiences of racism, prejudice and discrimination. The researcher suggests the seventh and eighth graders are in the exploratory or search stage in which they are just beginning to connect the dots. The older segment, 11th-12th graders had more encounters; therefore, their responses were more contextual. The highest stage is achieved racial/ethnic identity. Wakefield and Hudley (2005) asserted that in this stage, adolescents have a working knowledge of their
ethnic heritage, a clear idea of the meaning of their ethnic group membership, and a commitment to their racial/ethnicity and the role it plays in their lives. This is evident in the response of the older segment, 11\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} graders, “To prove to stereotypes that we can become more than what is expected of us” (student response).

This research indicated that students who have a strong racial identity, that is, identify and feel a strong personal connection to members of their race, tended to do well in school and social situations. The degree or extent to which they experienced this connection was reflected in both their responses to negative stereotyping and the effect on their performance in the grade distribution. In addition, students who participated in religious activities also tended to experience positive educational outcomes. The researcher suggests this can account for the surprisingly robust academic performance reported by most participants, including many within the 17.6% of participants who did not strongly academically identify, the 11.8% unsure of future aspirations, the 32.4% who reported having academically disengaged from the school process, the 11.8% whose responses did not demonstrate valuing education, and the 44.1% who did not feel social acceptance versus 55.9% that did. Despite these disturbingly high proportions of negative-sounding data results, 100% of the student subjects indicated they were academically engaged on one level or another with 88% reporting future aspirations to attend college or trade school (11.8% unsure) and 64.7% reporting a grade point average of B or higher.
**Implications of Religious Participation**

The research findings support the proposition that religious participation and involvement in a strong youth program at church provides young African American students with an important protective factor for them to continue to be successful in schooling. Indeed, for some of the student participants, their religious faith was not only expressed through participation in church-centered activities but, by their report, also played a role in the choices they made regarding extracurricular activities as well. The adherence to the religious teachings based on faith, belief in God, and personal commitment to Jesus provided a source of strength so the participants were not dependent solely on the school as the primary socializing institution outside their families.

The researcher proposed that this institutional connection with an African American Christian church, with the many dimensions included in that connection, may explain why some participants had yet to be able to experience positive educational outcomes, while by their own reports not necessarily engaged, identifying with or valuing school per se. Another contributing protective factor may be the participants’ fundamental Christian beliefs. Research studies suggest that religious people are more likely to have an internal locus of control (Jackson & Coursey, 1988; Shrauger & Silverman, 1971). Educational researchers have found a connection between internal loci of control and doing well in school (Garner & Cole, 1986; Johnson, 1992). Jeynes (2003) asserted that Christianity unlike other religions, teaches that God dwells within and that if one submits to the strength of God that lives within him/her, great feats can be
accomplished. The author states that, according to Christian teaching, the ability to submit to God and unleash the power of God rests within one’s own will. The researcher posits that this explains why the participants’ religious teachings and commitment require the participants to respond to the challenges they face in school and life with prayer. “I have an exam coming up. I’m really struggling with this particular course. I’m struggling in science and I really need prayer” (student response). Jeynes (2003) contended that the tendency for religiously committed people to have an internal locus of control logically follows.

Implications for Impact on Dropout Rate

This research indicates students who have strong racial identity and participate in religious activities do well in schooling and that racial pride and participation in church activities serve as protective factors against racism and discrimination in the form of microaggressions (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1977). Over time, students who experience microaggressions (subtle racist comments and behaviors) are vulnerable to disengage from the school process and eventually, drop out. In addition to the tragic consequences for the students themselves and their families, students who drop out of schools cost the state and nation billions of dollars in possible earnings, health care, national economy, and contribution of resources to their community.

The following are statistics from the AEE (2010): The class of 2010 cost the nation $337 billion in lost wages. The potential increase in personal income would add more than $310 billion to the U.S. economy. In California alone, 199,400 students did
not graduate in 2010; the lost lifetime earnings for that class of dropouts is $52 billion. California could save as much as $2.3 billion in healthcare costs over the lifetimes of each class of dropouts had they earned their diplomas. If California graduated all their students ready for college, the state could save as much as $688 million a year in community college remediation cost and lost earnings (AEE, 2010). According to the Justice Department Bureau of Statistics, young Black men who dropped out of high school are more likely to be incarcerated than employed. More than one in three Black men without a high school diploma is currently behind bars.

The young African American students who participated in this study from the stronghold of their Black community church are on a path to defeat the negative consequences that make up the discouraging statistics on dropouts. Their responses and the insights of their youth teachers show they are being supported and nurtured in choosing another path, one with a far more optimistic future for them and their society.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the body of research, which provides a possible explanation for the lack of positive educational outcomes for African American students and to an understanding of a critical element of community cultural wealth and critical social capital some young African Americans draw upon to survive. African American students with strong racial pride and racial identity tend to perform better academically, are better able to handle more social situations effectively, and are able to cope with the
stress of negative stereotype stigma. In addition, African American students who attend an African American community church also receive the much-needed support of a social institution other than the family that provides a nurturing and supportive environment. This environment creates a sense of belonging not found in the public school environment yet so vitally needed for healthy adolescent development. The public school environment represents for African Americans a racialized space (White-dominated ideology, power, and authority) in which they experience being devalued and treated unfairly by administrators, teachers, and peers often with no voice to express themselves.

Omi and Winant (1994) expressed that organizational space is not race neutral but, in fact, racial ideas are embedded in and define organizational spaces. The authors contend that racial meanings perceived by social actors as “common sense” racial meanings connect what race means in discursive practice and ways “social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized” (p. 55). According to the authors, the idea that space is racialized is about power and relationships. School organizational spaces tend to be owned by those who have White, middle-class power and who are likely to see their power as neutral and, therefore, limited (Barajas & Ronnkvist, 2007). Sue et al. (2007) defined this racialized space to include microaggressions. Microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental; indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 27). The term was coined by Chester M. Pierce in the 1970s.
Pierce contended, “The chief vehicle for proracist behaviors is microaggressions. These are subtle stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are put-downs of blacks by offenders” (Pierce et al., 1977, p. 65). This is the context in which African American adolescent students must negotiate their education on a daily bases. Both strong racial identity and religious participation serve as protective factors and provide the youth in this study with greater resilience as demonstrated in the data results and data interview responses. However, this study focused on a small sample of African American middle/high school students attending a local community Christian church who also are students attending public schools throughout Sacramento county. The results of the findings indicate factors affecting student educational outcomes for some African American youth may be found outside the school environment. The African American church, as a primary socializing institution for African American youth outside the family, serves to develop a strong racial identity and offers religious teachings and activities which provide the students in this study the support needed to perform well in school and endure the stress of racism and discrimination encountered in the schools and society.

Using the Mixed-method Approach

The researcher’s decision to utilize a mixed-method research design arose from the nature of the study. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between racial identity, religious participation, and the impact of the phenomenon of
stereotype threat on African American students at the middle school and high school levels. To do so required two types of data. Quantitative data was needed to obtain measurable and comparable categories of students’ reported experiences, behaviors, and outcomes so differences among respondents and relationships among variables could be analyzed statistically. Thus, inferences could be drawn about relationships and, if possible, causative or influencing factors on students’ educational outcomes. Qualitative data was needed to probe the richness and breadth of the experience as well as support the quantitative findings and tap the deep experience of the adults from the church who regularly interacted with and guide the young people.

The quantitative data consisted of a self-reported survey. The qualitative data consisted of a focus group activity and two interviews with youth teachers from the church. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated for interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon, stereotype threat, and its relationship to racially identified participants who engage in regular religious activities and membership and also to explore the role the Black community church and the students’ experience of religious faith played in mediating the experience of stereotype threat in the lives of the students. Utilizing one data source such as the survey (quantitative) would have been limiting in terms of understanding how the participants experienced the phenomenon, how participants experienced being a student of color, and the described effects of the religious participation experience as perceived both by the students and the adult youth teachers from the church.
The participants’ voices would not be heard using only the quantitative data. The voices of the student participants were vital to understanding their experience of stereotype threat in the school setting and generally. Likewise, the voices of the youth teacher participants were vital to exploring the on-the-ground experience of African American adults who have a deep experiential knowledge of the pressures the larger society brings to bear on African American young people and the resources the collective community can tap to support their children through the difficult transition of adolescence.

At the same time, had the qualitative data only been used then, some of the identifiable elements would have been lost. For example, the frequency of religious participation required measurable value to determine regular versus non regular participation; the relative impacts of various in-school and in-society experiences through which stereotype threat is experienced also might not have been so clearly identified nor the point of impact so clearly delineated. Thus, the quantitative analysis of survey responses allowed the researcher to obtain a more detailed understanding of the students’ experiences of racialization in their educational setting than qualitative data alone could have provided, given the limitations of the researcher’s access to the qualitative setting (focus group report-out was recorded, but not focus group dialog).

One of the intended outcomes of this study was to determine the extent to which racial identity, religious participation, and stereotype threat affect educational outcomes. The integration of the quantitative and qualitative data in a multimodal analysis has
identified future study areas for both research and action, which, if seriously addressed, can contribute to closing the achievement gap and to improving the experience of public school-based education for African American students. While the mixed-method approach poses more effort, the results are well worth the process.

Implications for Future Action

*Transformational Leadership*

The diversity found in the schools across the nation is due to increase by the year 2050 to a minority majority. This will have grave implications for schools’ struggles to close the achievement gap. According to critical race theory, institutional racism is a primary cause for the achievement gap, which is actually a reflection of students being underserved in the public schools (Ladson-Billings, 2007). The responsibility to correct this condition of failure resides with educational and political leaders who will define the agenda of the public schools in the 21st century. The most important characteristics for leaders for the 21st century who are called upon to create an equitable and excellent system of public education is that they develop a strong ethical or moral core focused on social justice, equity, and excellence as the only right choice for a democracy and that they believe in it as well (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This combination of ethical/moral core and strong beliefs must be characteristic of transformational leaders. As visionaries, transformational leaders must be willing to take risks to reassure and inspire others. Using this frame, creating a culture of equity and excellence requires honesty and
integrity (Bolman & Deal, 2008). It also requires transformational leaders with the courage to venture outside their own comfort zones, to seek out and engage with community elders like those found within the African American church who have their own wisdom and experience to contribute to the important task of educating the next generation.

To be able to improve the lives of underrepresented minorities, transformational leaders must improve the educational system, which has the greatest impact on the lives of the students they serve. To do so requires a change in teacher and administrator attitudes and expectations toward students of color, the desegregation of schools within schools, and the elimination of biased standardized testing. Also in question is inequitable school funding. The inability for African Americans to qualify for educational advancements, jobs, and mortgages creates a cycle of low educational achievement, underemployment and unemployment, and substandard housing (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Ladson-Billings continued stating that almost every state funds school based in large measure on property taxes. Those areas with property of greater wealth typically have better funded schools. Without a commitment to redesign funding formulas, one of the basic inequities of schooling will remain in place and virtually guarantee the reproduction of the status quo.

African American spirituality is an integral part of Black life in the U.S. It is the mechanism through which African Americans have shaped their consciousness and understanding of themselves as well as who they are in relationship to others (Dantley,
2003). Stewart (1999) contended that the spirit instills in African Americans a determination to survive,

   a desire to confront and surmount all threats to their being and existence while concurrently creating idioms of life and culture which provide them with adaptive mechanisms that reinforce their sanity, affirm their wholeness, and establish their spiritual and ontological location in society. (p. 3)

Transformational leaders who seek to address the underserved achievement of African American students must encompass a critical theorist perspective, a “critical spirituality” approach to leadership. Dantley (2003) suggested the element of critique and deconstruction of undemocratic power relations is blended with the spiritual reflection grounded in an African American sense of moralism, prophetic resistance, and hope to form the viscera of this hybrid theoretical construct called critical spirituality. The author contended that such a spirituality deals forthrightly with notions of what is moral, democratic, and equitable in places called schools. Greenfield (1993) argued four reasons why transformational leaders as moral agents must ground their decisions and professional behavior in intentional reflection of their moral consequences.

First, the school itself is a moral institution. School serves a moral socialization function in society. Second, the status of children as minors means they have little to no voice in determining the quality, quantity, and content of their school experiences. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the school administrator to facilitate a learning environment where the best interests of all children are served. This idea is also reflected in the youth teacher interview in which the youth teacher stated the need to educate all
students in their cultural heritage that serves to strengthen students’ identity and provide purpose for learning.

The third reason stated by Greenfield (1993) is the morality of the school administrator. He characterizes the morality of the school administrator as distinctly moral conduct, as being professional behavior where her or his actions and decisions are grounded in deliberate reflection upon and consideration of the moral consequences of her or his actions and the attendant policies, curriculum and associated practices (for which the school principal is responsible by virtue of the office held). (p. 269)

Fourth, because school leaders are responsible for the well being of all those in the learning community, their moral behavior is evidenced in their sensitivity to those who are the “other,” those who are not a part of the dominant culture. Dantley (2003) continued by stating there is a moral obligation to see to it that terrorist acts of discrimination that are either blatantly or systemically perpetuated in schools be exposed and engaged forthrightly by all those in the learning community. This approach deconstructs and reconstructs the language and theoretical frame of educational leadership. The addition of African American spirituality in particular, adds a totally different dimension to the discussion of educational leadership (Dantley, 2003).

Transformational leaders must engage the process of change in teacher attitudes and expectations, which may require more interaction with teachers of color as sources of knowledge who understand and are most familiar with the culture and traditions, as well as learning styles of the students of color. In addition, elimination of the practice of ability tracking inherent within schools is necessary to ensure equal access to resources as
well as exposure to creating cross cultural dialogue among students and staff, which goes beyond food fairs and multicultural assemblies. Transformational leaders must be able to support the development of a strong ethnic identity in students of color by providing exposure to cultural content, directly addressing stereotypes and prejudices, and by creating an environment in which those strong ethnic identities can flourish and be valued. They must also provide opportunities for forums and dialogues on intercultural communications to reduce misunderstandings based on racial or cultural stereotypes and miscommunication. This would go a long way toward creating and supporting cultural competence within the organization.

Transformational leaders must be willing to share the power of leadership with underrepresented minorities qualified to lead, with parents who are the primary teachers of the students and with the community representatives who also stand ready to serve as a viable resource. Particularly for African Americans, the Black church is an extremely valuable and viable institution, second only to the family in the lives of many African American young people. Transformational leaders must be willing to enter into dialog with these community leaders, without claiming any advantage of station or territory. They must be willing to let somebody else set the agenda and, most critically, show themselves willing to listen and to learn.

Policy and Informed Decision Making

In the mist of budget cuts and teacher layoffs, decisions on how to make education work with dwindling resources has become an almost insurmountable task. In
California, long-standing sports programs are being cut, class sizes increased, fine arts eliminated, and hundreds or thousands of teachers laid off. While decisions are being made about program cuts, underserved students continue to be underserved and budget cuts exacerbate their situation.

Given the discussion above relative to critical spirituality as an approach to transformational leadership for schools dominated by African Americans, the question of separation of church and state inevitably comes to the forefront. Policymakers, while recognizing and respecting the fundamental constitutional foundation upon which this separation rests, must explore the possibilities within the spaces already identified by courts, legislatures, and the larger society. These two powerful social institutions, state-supported school and private church, each occupy a legitimate position and both can, if they choose, work in concert to support the emerging generation of students of color.

Freedom of religion, expressed as a part of the African American cultural and religious heritage and identity, is a right African American young people, their families, and the communities seeking to sustain them enjoy under both state and federal constitutions. This freedom to define themselves in relation to their religious beliefs and religious practices needs to find an appropriate legitimizing place in the process of self-definition in which they are called upon to engage in their schooling. Surely, at the least, representatives of these two socializing institutions need to engage in a dialog which is non-hierarchical and open, and which draws upon the experiences of the church community to enhance the understanding within the public school community of the
consequences of stereotype threat for the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the students. Such an in-depth politicized discussion cannot take place in this writing; however, it is appropriate here to point to its potential toward the reconstruction of a new educational leadership paradigm. It is incumbent upon policymakers to create the space for the discussion and recognize its relativity to democracy, equality, and the pursuit of the American dream.

The policy implications require that policymakers, administrators, and teachers seriously address the need for more equitable and adequate distribution of resources across districts and schools. Opportunities need to be made available where community organizations and institutions involved in the development of youth can work respectfully together and make the best utilization of their limited resources for the academic success of all students living in the communities.

The Constitutionally mandated separation of state and church is, in fact, no impediment to educational leaders and church leaders working together in respectful collaboration to support the academic success and human development of youth within the African American community. Repeated court decisions and federal and state laws like the Equal Access Act and the Community Center Act stand as testimony to the legitimacy of this collaboration. Prior to Brown v. Board of Education, the church provided much of the education of African American students and they fared well. Out of those schools and informal learning communities came some of the greatest thinkers and inventors this nation has ever known.
Another area for policymakers, educators, and administrators to explore is a more robust incorporation into the curriculum of the history of all ethnic groups with the contributions they have made including, in particular reference to this study, African Americans, whose history and legacy is rich and intertwined with the whole of American history. Such curricular transformation would build self-esteem and create purpose and motivation toward learning for all students and convey the message that all have struggled, all have contributed, and all have survived. Students valued in this way respond by learning well.

Recommendation for Future Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of students participating in religious activity on a regular basis in response to racism and discrimination. In addition, the study sought to examine the extent to which students identified as African Americans and the effect it had on their educational outcomes. The researcher was able to answer the research questions. As a result, other questions arose such as the effect of sample size, application to other religious affiliations, and the role of gender and age. This study included a small sample of students attending a community Christian church. Future research could include a larger sampling as well as distinct religious affiliations, which may show some differences in significance in the findings. The qualitative portion of this study included interviews with a male and female who worked with teenage boys and girls, respectively. However, differences in strategies for engaging male and female
students of color in positive church community experiences could be the subject of further research.

Another area of future research would be to examine the dimension of spirituality and religious participation with respect to the development of a healthy racial identity and a resiliency in the face of stereotype threat. This study focused on church attendance even though there were aspects of spirituality involved. Future research could focus on spiritual commitment as an aspect of religious participation predicting educational outcomes. While this study focused attention on racial identity, ethnic identity should be explored referencing all racial/ethnic groups who also share these experiences.

Reflections of the Researcher

The researcher herself is the same ethnicity as the participants in the study. In her stance as educator and scholar, the researcher sought to situate herself apart from the similar experiences portrayed by the study participants, allowing for a more fluid an in-depth analysis of the participants’ responses of their experiences. The researcher’s shared ethnicity with the subjects of her research, while perhaps creating a more comfortable environment for the participants on the one hand, was also limited and conflicting in that the participants also responded to the researcher’s outsiderness as they encountered the researcher engaging in her practice as an outsider/investigator. This was evidenced in the comment made in the beginning of the study by the question “Should we be honest in our responses?” The researcher was also a new member of the church.
Therefore, the researcher was not familiar with the participants personally, but was able to observe from a certain degree of distance their interactions with other church members, the youth teachers, the pastor, and other ministers as well as interaction among themselves.

By attending morning services, the researcher was able to observe the pastor recognizing the youth for good academic performance, reprimanding the youth for inappropriate behavior, and giving kind and loving words of appreciation to nurture their souls. These opportunities were afforded to the researcher because of both her racial and church membership. Yet, it was internally important to the researcher to authentically participate as a practitioner in her religious participation within the church and authentically act as an education researcher in her study of the connection between youth religious participation and educational outcomes.

In addition, recognition of the significance of these action by the pastor and church community was facilitated by the cultural understanding of the researcher from her life experience of being African American, which would have been difficult to replicate by a researcher who lacked the depth of cultural experience and shared life history the researcher was able to bring to this task. The researcher also acknowledges the challenges faced because of the sameness in ethnicity. The researcher is well aware of the delicate balance between insider-outsider positionality in that at times there was a need to probe deeper for understanding. African Americans are accustomed to being probed to the point of invasion of personal space by outsiders. As a response to this
disrespectful intrusion, many African Americans (and other similarly invaded persons) have learned to escape by ending the conversation. Therefore, the researcher was sensitive to these boundaries and aware that to cross them could very well end the study or result in the participants’, although respectfully, discontinuing to actively invest in the remainder of the study. The participants, the youth teachers, and others helping to administer the surveys maintained a level of respect not typically found in the public schools. This was so much the case, that when the researcher asked the youth at the commencement of the focus group process what they thought adults in their world should know about them, all the adults present at the study, parents, and youth teachers, left the room quietly so the youth could feel comfortable to be honest in their responses.

Concluding Statement

In closing, African American students have long been underserved in the American public school system. Institutional racism, in the form of microagressions, structure, and bureaucracy creating obstacles and barriers to achieving academic success, has also prevented African American access to fundamental resources they need to successfully pursue their dream and goals. To offset and protect the effects of racism, the church has been and continues to be the surrogate family and bedrock community resource for many African Americans, providing for the spiritual, political, and social needs of the community.
The church, with its strong youth development program and Biblical teaching has afforded these youth who struggle in the public school a nurturing and supportive environment in which to grow and develop. In this study, the Black community church is where youth receive the critical cultural and social capital needed and the spiritual fortitude to successfully navigate the school system and society. Within the church is where youth learn who they are and whose they are. This gives rise to a strong racial and religious identity, a sense of purpose, and the motivation to learn, which serves as a protective factor against the effects of racism and discrimination.

Transformational leaders and policymakers, administrators, and educators must begin to address these issues, which prevent some students from succeeding and pursuing their dreams and goals. In addressing these issues, transformational leaders must be willing to step outside the boundaries of the school ground and ask for the assistance of the powerful resources that have developed within the African American community, including the Black church that continues to serve many African Americans as they have for generations.
APPENDIX A
Surveys and Framework

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ADULTS

1. Please tell me about your work with young people in this church? How long have you been involved in youth group activities?

2. What are some of the challenges that you see young people dealing with in their school life?
   What challenges do they face in terms of how they act?
   How successful they are in their courses?
   How they are treated by teachers, administrators and other students?
   How they seem to feel about themselves after they have gone to school long enough to enter high school?
   After they’ve been in high school for a while?

3. What are some of the influences that you think play a major role in determining whether a young person of color will complete high school and go on to college?

4. How do you think involvement in a church with a strong youth program can help young people feel more comfortable and more successful in their schooling?
   In their development of life skills?
   In their development of self-identity and self worth?

5. How do you feel that our schools could help students of color be more successful and more fulfilled in their school experience?
6 How do you feel that parents could help their students be more successful and more fulfilled in their school experience?

7. How do you feel that this church could help the students to be more successful and more fulfilled in their school experience?

8. Is there anything else you think it is important that I know about the many factors that influence young people in this church as they go through the public school experience and go on to their adult lives?

Thank you.
Student Survey/Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions by circling your response below. If at any time you feel any discomfort, you can skip any question or withdraw at anytime.

1. In what school district do you attend school?  _______________________________

2. What is your grade?
   a. 7th  b. 8th  c. 9th  d. 10th  e. 11th  f. 12th

3. How old are you?
   a. 13 or less  b. 14  c. 15  d. 16  e. 17  f. 18

4. What is your sex?
   a. Male  b. Female

5. Please choose a category that best indicates your race.
   a) Latino (specify country)  ____________________
   b) African American or Black
   c) Asian
   d) West Indian
   e) Asian Indian
   f) European American or White
   g) American Indian and Alaska Native
   h) Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander
   i) Other race  ________________________________

6. What occupation best describes either parent/guardian?
   a. Service and retail
   b. Technical, Sales and Administrative Support Occupations
   c. Managerial and Professional Specialty Occupations
   d. Construction, mechanic and Laborers
   e. Precision Production, Craft and Repair Occupations
   f. Unemployed
   g. Some other job  _______________________________

7. Who do you live with?
   a. Mother only
   b. Father only
   c. Mother and father
   d. Parent and stepparent
   e. Other relative/guardian
8. Indicate the highest level of education for either parent or guardian.
   a. Some high school
   b. High school graduate
   c. Some College
   d. College graduate (Associate degree)
   e. College graduate (Bachelors degree)
   f. Beyond college graduate

9. Your English class is
   a. Basic
   b. Standard
   c. Honors
   d. High Honors

10. This school year, how would you report your grades in the following subjects:

    Math?  1.) Mostly A’s  2) Mostly B’s  3) Mostly C’s  4) Mostly D’s  5) Mostly F’s
    English? 1.) Mostly A’s  2) Mostly B’s  3) Mostly C’s  4) Mostly D’s  5) Mostly F’s
    History? 1.) Mostly A’s  2) Mostly B’s  3) Mostly C’s  4) Mostly D’s  5) Mostly F’s
    Science? 1.) Mostly A’s  2) Mostly B’s  3) Mostly C’s  4) Mostly D’s  5) Mostly F’s

11. How often do you participate in church/religious activities?
    a. 1-2 times per week  b. 2-3 times per week  c. 1-2 times per month  e. Never

12. I sometimes participate in extra-curricular activities because of my religious beliefs.

13. How often do you ask questions in class?
    a) Never  b) Sometimes  c) Most of the time  d) All the time

14. How hard would you say that you try in class work, school work and tests?
    a) Not hard  b) somewhat hard  c) very hard  d) extremely hard
15. How often do you turn in your homework to your teachers?
   a. Never  b) Sometimes  c) Most of the time  d) All of the time

16. About how many hours do you spend on homework each night?
   a) 1 hour or less
   b) 2 hours
   c) 3 hours
   d) 4 hours or more

17. Do you think that you have to do well in high school to get a good job later on?
   a) No
   b) Sometimes
   c) Yes
   d) Unsure

18. Which of the following best describes your educational plans after high school?
   a. Full-time college
   b. Part-time college
   c. Trade school
   d. Do not plan to continue your education
   e. Unsure

19. Some teenagers have given up being involved in things at school.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me  c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

20. Some teenagers feel learning at school is important.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me  c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

21. Some teenagers feel that they are just as smart as others their age.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me  c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

22. Some teenagers are pretty slow at finishing their work.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me  c. Not true for me   d. Unsure
23. Some teenagers do very well in their class work.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me   c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

24. Some teenagers don’t work very hard at school so as to have an excuse not to do well.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me   c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

25. Some teenagers feel that they are pretty intelligent.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me   c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

26. Some teenagers find it hard to make friends.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me   c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

27. Some teenagers are kind of hard to like
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me   c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

28. Some teenagers feel they are socially accepted.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me   c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

29. Some teenagers wished that more people their age accepted them.
   a. Really true for me   b. Sort of true for me   c. Not true for me   d. Unsure

30. People often form opinions about me based upon my race.

31. I feel a personal connection to other members of my race.

32. Some teachers think that I am dumb because of my race.
33. When I am called on in class some teachers think that I will give the wrong answer because of my race.

34. Some teachers think I will do poorly on test because of my race.

35. Some of my teachers give me bad grades because of my race.

36. Some of my teachers don’t like me because of my race.
Focus Group Framework

The focus group will not involve questions and answers. Rather, the student participants will be introduced to generative themes derived from the responses received on the student survey. The students will be broken up into focus groups’, however the students themselves will participate with the researcher in assigning themselves to their groups, particularly if there is enough student participation to justify more than one group for middle school and one group for high school.

The focus group process will be explained to the students and they will be asked to choose a facilitator and a note taker from their group. At the end of the group process, each group will choose the student who will report out for their group. This may or may not be the facilitator or note taker, as the students choose.

Students will be asked to address themes involving their experiences as persons of color, as students, as church members and as young people in their world. While the exact language through which these themes are introduced to the students and their insights sought cannot be finally determined at this point, in the absence of the student survey responses, the researcher does intend that the themes will include

Your experiences as a student of color
You goals and dreams for yourself when you complete school
The extent and kind of support that you receive for realizing these goals and dreams
From teachers
From fellow-students
From parents
From church members
From other people you know

Any barriers that you experience to realizing your goals and dreams for yourself
From yourself
From teachers
From fellow-students
From parents
From church members
From other people you know
What do you think that the adults in your life, your teachers, parents, church leaders and other adults you know should understand about you and your world so they can help you realize your goals and dreams?

After the students have engaged with each other in their focus groups, their chosen spokespersons will report out to the researcher and other adult church representatives present. The focus group process will not be taped. However, the reports out will be tape recorded to assure accuracy. In addition, the researcher will gather and review the flip charts that the students use in the focus group process.
Dear Student,

My name is Francine Stevens. I am a doctoral student at California State University, Sacramento in the Educational Leadership Program. As part of my doctoral studies, I am asking you to participate in my research study. In particular, I invite you to take a survey which I have developed about student experiences and attitudes. This survey will ask questions regarding your experiences as a student and as a young member of our community and your feelings about these experiences.

By participating in this study, you will be helping me to learn about ways to make the teenage years more beneficial for young people like yourself. Also, as a participant in the survey you will be able to participate in a pizza party and a raffle for movie tickets, bowling passes and for McDonald’s gift certificates. Not everyone will win a prize, but everyone can have a chance.

Your part of this research involves two activities, an anonymous survey and a focus group activity which will be led by yourselves. The group reports that the students give from the focus group activity will be tape recorded to make sure that your group’s comments are accurately represented. However, the focus process will not be tape recorded.

You may choose to participate only in the first activity, the survey, or to participate in both the survey and the youth-led focus group activity. If you decide to participate in the survey, you will share in the raffle for McDonald’s gift certificates. If you agree to participate both in the survey and the focus group activity, you will also be able to participate in the raffle for movie tickets or bowling passes and more McDonald’s gift certificates. Both the survey and the focus group activity will include pizza and soft drinks.

All responses to the survey questions are confidential and no names will be used. If you feel uncomfortable about any question, you may choose not to answer it without any consequence. If you decide after you give your permission and before the pizza party that you do not want to participate in the survey at all, you may just tell me that fact and I will tear up your survey and not use your answers. If you decide after taking the survey that you no longer want to participate in the focus group activity, you may just tell me that this is your choice and your wish will be respected. It’s up to you.

The survey and the focus group activity will take place at the facilities of St. Paul Baptist Church at a time to be agreed upon with the church pastor. The survey will take less than half an hour; pizza may take longer. The focus group will take as long as you want, probably no more than an hour. The pizza and soft drinks will be available throughout.
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. I am asking for consent from your parents/guardians, but I also need your assent to make sure that you are willing to participate in this study. By signing below and returning this letter, you acknowledge that you have read this page and agree to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Francine Stevens
Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate
California State University, Sacrament

☐ I agree to participate in the survey for this research study.
☐ I agree to participate in the focus group and the survey for this study.

_______________________________________  _______________
(Print name)     (Date)

______________________________________  _______________
(Signature)      (Date)
Dear Colleague,

My name is Francine Stevens. I am a doctoral candidate at California State University, Sacramento in the Educational Leadership Program. As part of my doctoral studies, I am conducting research on student’s experiences, attitudes and perceptions in and outside the classroom. Student participants will be relating their experiences, attitudes and perceptions about their school experience, religious activity, and a number of matters affecting their personal life in and outside the classroom. I am requesting you to add to the background research for this study by participating in an interview. The interview will involve questions about your experiences as a youth group leader in this church community. You will have the opportunity to answer in your own words and express your own ideas. Your participation is entirely voluntary. In addition, you may choose to answer or not answer any question you are asked.

This study will contribute additional insight into the links between student attitudes, experiences and church involvement and student success. I hope that the results of my study will encourage and motivate changes toward positive educational outcomes for our students. Therefore, your participation will benefit all students.

All responses to the interview questions are confidential and no names will be used. Your responses will, be tape recorded to assure that your answers are accurately and fully represented. However, the research record will not personally identify any person interviewed. If for any reason, you do not wish to answer a particular question, you may skip that question. In addition, if at any time during the interview you decide that you do not want to participate in the interview, you may withdraw from the interview without consequence.

This research has been approved by the pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church after he reviewed the research plan. However, his approval merely allows the researcher to ask for your consent and there is no expectation from anyone regarding your choice.

If you have any questions about this research or about the survey questions to be asked, please let me know. You may contact me at [redacted] or by e-mail at frappbonics@aol.com. You may also contact my faculty sponsor, Dr. Rosemary Blanchard at blanchardr@csus.edu.
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. By signing below and returning this letter, you acknowledge that you have read this page and agree to participate in an interview.

Sincerely,

Francine Stevens

Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate
California State University, Sacramento

- I agree to participate in an interview for this study.

Please Print and sign below.

_______________________________________   ___________________
(Print name)     (Date)

_______________________________________   ___________________
(Signature)     (Date)
Dear Parent(s)/ Guardian,

My name is Francine Stevens. I am a doctoral candidate at California State University, Sacramento in the Educational Leadership Program. As part of my doctoral studies, I am conducting research on student’s experiences, attitudes and perceptions in and outside the classroom. Participants will be relating their experiences, attitudes and perceptions about their school experience, religious activity, and a number of matters affecting their personal life in and outside the classroom. I am requesting your permission for your student to participate in my research study. Participation by your student is entirely voluntary.

The research will consist of two parts, a survey and a focus group activity. You may choose for your student to participate in the survey without giving permission for your student to participate in the focus group activity or you may give consent for your student to participate in both activities. Students who do complete the survey will be invited to participate in a focus group activity. Students who participate in the survey can also participate in a raffle for McDonald’s gift certificates. Students who participate in the focus group as well can participate in a raffle for movie tickets and bowling passes and more McDonald’s gift certificates. In addition, a snack of pizza and soft drinks will be provided during both the survey and the focus group activity. No other personal benefits or rewards are associated with participation in this research.

This study will contribute additional insight into the links between student attitudes, experiences, church involvement and student success. I hope that the results of my study will encourage and motivate changes toward positive educational outcomes for our students. Therefore, you student’s participation will benefit all students.

All responses to the survey questions and student reports-out from their focus group activity are confidential and no names will be used. If your student feels at all uncomfortable about the survey, any question in the survey or the focus group, they may skip any question without affecting their responses to the other questions, they may withdraw from the survey, or they may withdraw from the focus group activity without consequence and with full respect for their privacy. In addition, the focus group activity will be student-centered and student-led and will not require any student to answer any particular question of divulge any specific information.

The survey will be given at the facilities of St. Paul Baptist Church. The survey will take less than half an hour to complete and will be accompanied by pizza, which may take longer.
In addition, at a later date to be chosen by the researcher, the students and the church leadership, those students who have parental consent and who themselves agree will be invited to participate in a focus group activity at the church facility where they will have the opportunity to talk among themselves and report as a group to the researcher their own experiences as students, church members and community members and what they have learned from these experiences. The group reports that the students give will be tape recorded to make sure that the student’s comments are accurately represented. However, the focus process will not be tape recorded. Again, a snack of pizza and soft drinks will be provided.

This research has been approved by the pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church after he reviewed the research plan. However, his approval merely allows the researcher to ask for your consent and your student’s assent and there is no expectation from anyone regarding your choice.

If you have any questions about this research or about the survey questions to be asked, please let me know. You may contact me at [redacted] or by e-mail at franphonics@aol.com. You may also contact my faculty sponsor, Dr. Rosemary Blanchard at blanchardr@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. By signing below and returning this letter, you acknowledge that you have read this page and agree allow your student to participate in either the survey portion of the research study or both the survey and the focus group activity.

Sincerely,
Francine Stevens

Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate
California State University, Sacramento
I agree to allow my student to participate in the survey.

I agree to allow my student to participate in the focus group activity and the survey.

Please Print and sign below.

_______________________________________ ___________________
(Print name)     (Date)

_______________________________________ ___________________
(Signature)     (Date)
Dear Student,

My name is Francine Stevens. I am a doctoral student at California State University, Sacramento in the Educational Leadership Program. As part of my doctoral studies, I am asking you to participate in my research study. In particular, I invite you to take a survey which I have developed about student experiences and attitudes. This survey will ask questions regarding your experiences as a student and as a young member of our community and your feelings about these experiences.

By participating in this study, you will be helping me to learn about ways to make the teenage years more beneficial for young people like yourself. Also, as a participant in the survey you will be able to participate in a pizza party and a raffle for movie tickets, bowling passes and for McDonald’s gift certificates. Not everyone will win a prize, but everyone can have a chance.

Your part of this research involves two activities, an anonymous survey and a focus group activity which will be led by yourselves. The group reports that the students give from the focus group activity will be tape recorded to make sure that your group’s comments are accurately represented. However, the focus process will not be tape recorded.

You may choose to participate only in the first activity, the survey, or to participate in both the survey and the youth-led focus group activity. If you decide to participate in the survey, you will share in the raffle for McDonald’s gift certificates. If you agree to participate both in the survey and the focus group activity, you will also be able to participate in the raffle for movie tickets or bowling passes and more McDonald’s gift certificates. Both the survey and the focus group activity will include pizza and soft drinks.

All responses to the survey questions are confidential and no names will be used. If you feel uncomfortable about any question, you may choose not to answer it without any consequence. If you decide after you give your permission and before the pizza party that you do not want to participate in the survey at all, you may just tell me that fact and I will tear up your survey and not use your answers. If you decide after taking the survey that you no longer want to participate in the focus group activity, you may just tell me that this is your choice and your wish will be respected. It’s up to you.

The survey and the focus group activity will take place at the facilities of St. Paul Baptist Church at a time to be agreed upon with the church pastor. The survey will take less than half an hour; pizza may take longer. The focus group will take as long as you want, probably no more than an hour. The pizza and soft drinks will be available throughout.
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. I am asking for consent from your parents/guardians, but I also need your assent to make sure that you are willing to participate in this study. By signing below and returning this letter, you acknowledge that you have read this page and agree to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Francine Stevens
Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate
California State University, Sacramento

- I agree to participate in the survey for this research study.
- I agree to participate in the focus group and the survey for this study.

_______________________________________  _______________
(Print name)      (Date)

______________________________________  _______________
(Signature)               (Date)
REFERENCES


Helms, J. E. (1992). A race is a nice thing to have: a guide to being a White person or understanding the White person in your life. Topeka, KS: Content Communications.


