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A Phenomenological Analysis of Social Justice/Injustice on the lives of African-American High School Males

Michael R. Harris
University of South Carolina

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A Phenomenological Analysis of Social Justice/Injustice on the lives of African-
American High School Males

by

Michael R. Harris

Bachelor of Social Work
North Carolina A&T State University, 1990

Master of Social Work
University of South Carolina, 1992

Master of Education
University of South Carolina, 2001

Educational Specialist
South Carolina State University, 2012

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University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

Rhonda B. Jeffries, Major Professor

Allison Anders, Committee Member

Daniella A. Cook, Committee Member

Tambra Jackson, Committee Member

Toni Williams, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Senior Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is first and foremost dedicated back to my Lord and my Savior, Jesus Christ. What I have, who I am, and all that I will become I owe it all to HIM. To GOD Be The Glory For the Things HE Has Done – and will do in my life!

A special dedication to my father, Mr. James Harris, my sisters, Ms. LaRita Harris and Ms. Karen Harris, and to my mother, the late Mrs. Clara Harris, who were all there in the beginning to witness and attest to all of my rough edges. Thank GOD for you and the many times you called my name in prayer!

A higher dedication is offered to my wife of more than twenty years, Dianne N. Harris. You have unarguably helped me become the man I am today. You never gave up on me – even when I thought I wanted to give up on myself. You pushed me and encouraged me and made me believe in this assignment again. I can never repay you for what you have done. My love always...

Finally, my highest dedication is extended to my greatest blessings, my two sons, Michael and Ryan. You guys are my motivation and inspiration. I pray that in some small way, your witness to the completion of this dissertation will inspire you to do even greater things in life. Believe and know that you are fully equipped for the journey – enjoy the ride!

“But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and HIS righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Matthew 6:33.

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Blessings Always...

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze what high school African-American males perceive as significant influences that directly impact their academic achievement while attending a predominantly White suburban high school. This qualitative research study will utilize semi-structured case interviews to collect and analyze data gathered from among a criteria-based subgroup of African-American high school males. An examination of archival data such as student course selections, a review of high school Carnegie units earned and attempted, the availability of support resources and interventions, as well discipline and attendance reports will each provide evidence of the probable obstacles impacting the achievement of African-American male students in their local high school. The study will identify factors that are feasible in ameliorating the influence and perception of social justice/injustice while enrolled in high school.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On April 16, 1963, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. penned in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, *“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”* While these words sought to sound an alarm toward the social injustices and inequities of the Civil Rights Movement, they continually ring true within the corridors and hallways of public and private high schools throughout America. As we ventured forward in this study, it was imperative that we remember that schools are made up of people (i.e. students) and that people (students) are diverse in several different facets. Consequently, a one size fits all approach is not an applicable condition and contingency of diversity. Similarly, Chapman and King (2012) indicate that “effective teachers know it is worth their time to gather as much information as possible about each student and not assume anything” (p. 39). More importantly however, it is useful for teachers to know their students and understand the ways in which the ‘system’ of schools works to label and identify a specific genre of student. Further, it is important for teachers to also know the ways in which students label and identify others as well as themselves. Hence, it is presumable that few schools (i.e. school systems) devote ample attention to the flagrant and frequent impact of social injustice in classrooms and in high schools. Consequently, at risk are the academic achievements of African-American male high school students in predominantly White suburban high schools.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Students' ability to succeed in school relies not only on quality teaching and academic resources but also on a supportive school environment that fosters their growth as individuals and affirms their worth as human beings within this social setting (McGillivray, 2000). Schools and classrooms play an integral role toward contributing to and/or detracting from the impact and influence of social injustice experienced by African-American high school males. One supporting school of thought is Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', which refers to an orientation or network of predispositions toward the social world and one's place in it, including a sense of one's resources and how they might be used (Bourdieu, 2010). According to Cornbleth (2010), "habitus emerges from one's social-structural location, initially one's primary socialization in family and community, and influences the actions one takes" (p. 283). Bourdieu (2010) suggested that 'habitus' is one's physical and psychological demeanor as a result of habits developed over a period of time. It develops a person's attitudes towards society and influences the way that an individual reacts to the world around them. Habitus is a structuring feature of life and is determined by a series of influences on the individual, such as one's socio-economic status, family, religion, education and ethnicity. That is, the attitudes, mannerisms, ideologies, actions and habits that a person has been subjected to in their life manifests to create the person that they are today.

For more than a generation, research documents the struggles of African American males in society and education (Bailey, 2001; Bass & Coleman, 1997; Chan, 2103; Lee, 1991; Young, Wright & Laster, 2005). The television and movie industry perpetuates negative stereotypes by portraying Black men, as usually dangerous men (pimps, thieves

or gangsters) to be feared (Chan, 2013; Dhaliwal, 2009). According to a Pew Center on the States 'Public Safety Performance Project study (2008), one in every nine black males between the ages of 20 and 34 was in jail, compared with 1 in 30 among all American men in the same age group. Darensbourg and Perez (2010) noted that African American males are overrepresented in exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. detention, out of school suspension, disciplinary alternative placements) which may contribute to their involvement in the criminal justice system as they enter adolescence and on to adulthood. The researchers reported, "The connection of exclusionary discipline with incarceration rates is termed the School to Prison Pipeline" (Darensbourg & Perez, 2010, p. 197). African American males connect to a negative schooling experience due to various factors, especially, high suspension/expulsion rates (Darensbourg & Perez, 2010; Smith, 2005), overrepresentation for identification of special education services (Conahan, Burggraf, Nelson, Bailey, & Ford, 2003, Harris, 2013; Thompson, 2014), and high failure/dropout rates (Dianda, 2008; Noguera, 2003). Harper (2006) writes that more than any other group in our society, Black males are perceived as lacking in intellectual skills. Fifty-percent of all African American high school males withdraw and do not graduate (Batten et al., 2010; Gewertz, 2007). A national report by The Council for the Great City Schools best sums up the discussion about African American males with its finding:

The nation's young Black males are in a state of crisis. They do not have the same opportunities as their male or female counterparts across the country. Their infant mortality rates are higher, and their access to health care is more limited. They are more likely to live in single-parent homes and less likely to participate in early childcare programs. They are less likely to be raised in a household with a

fully employed adult, and they are more likely to live in poverty. As adults, Black males are less likely than their peers to be employed. At almost every juncture, the odds are stacked against these young men in ways that result in too much unfulfilled potential and too many fractured lives. (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010, p. iii).

In this research study, the high school male students who meet the criteria for participation in the semi-structured case interviews were influenced by their respective communities, customs and cultures which were generally incongruent and incompatible with the norms, customs and practices of their White student counterparts.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to ascertain the perceptions and influences of social justice/injustice attitudes and behaviors that potentially impacted the social, emotional, psychological and academic well-being and achievement of African-American males in a predominantly White suburban high school.

1.3 Research Questions

Following a review of the literature, the research questions found below were used as a guide during semi-structured interviews with identified students meeting the selection criterion:

First Question: How have your perceptions of social justice/injustice at your high school influenced you as an African-American male student?

Second Question: How have educators (i.e. teachers, administrators, counselors and other staff) contributed to your perceptions of social justice/injustice in the classroom and/or school?

Third Question: How have your experiences attending a predominantly white suburban high school motivated or demotivated you as an African-American male student?

Examples of additional sub-questions included in the interviews include: How are African American males perceived in a predominantly White school environment? What are some of the factors that have contributed to the perceptions that exist among African American males? What role does social justice/injustice play in the development of the perceptions of African American males? How have social justice/injustice behaviors of students and teachers impacted your school attendance? How has social justice/injustice behaviors of students and teachers influenced your behavior/school discipline? How do you address social justice/injustice when it is directed toward you? Someone else?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study emanates from the perception of the role social justice/injustice has played on the achievement(s) of African-American high school males. Specifically, according to (Kelly, 2004), “Whites are about twice as likely as Blacks to be enrolled in advanced mathematics courses.” Course taking and placement in specific tracks is due also to family background. The correlation of race with family background increases the black-white course enrollment gap (Kelly 2004; Lucas, 1999). Research studies show that social-class inequality in course enrollment is caused by differentiated levels of parental involvement (Baker and Stevenson, 1986) or student expectations (Kelly, 2004). Research further shows that African American male students

who interact with African American role models have a better chance for success. Consequently, it is the duty of every professional school counselor, teacher and administrator to work toward providing real world models and examples with which African-American male students might identify. To do so will ensure to a greater extent that African-American high school males can and will strive to fulfill their greatest levels of academic achievement.

There is a tremendous discrepancy between the current state of affairs regarding enrollment and culturally relevant opportunities for learning and professional development at the high school under investigation. Consider that of the total number of enrolled students (1,159) during the 2014-2015 school year, approximately 4% of those students were African-American students. Additionally, another 6% of students were classified as Other and the larger percentage of students were White with a total of 90% enrollment. These considerations alone strongly indicate a lack of cultural relevance and awareness from the larger and predominant population of students and staff. This qualitative research case study identified the areas in the high school that were largely inconsistent with Critical Race Theory and were further potentially damaging to the academic achievement of African-American students in general and African-American male students in particular. Special attention was given to those African-American male students who met the criteria for this case study. Outcomes to this case study specifically included greater awareness of the difficulties African-American male students face in predominantly White suburban schools. These difficulties also included identifying hidden messages found in textbooks and other instructional materials that dishonor and disregard communities of color and their contributions to American society.

Identification of isolation methods, oppressive behaviors and overt discriminatory practices were also unveiled throughout the case study. Consequently, professional development opportunities were identified and later recommended to the school's administration.

1.5 Delimitations

Each of the qualifying students in this study ranged from grades nine to twelve. Of the participating students who met the criteria for selection, two were classified as graduating seniors; one classified as an eleventh grade student; one as a tenth grade student and the remaining four were classified as freshmen. The following delimitations were identified in the study:

1. The study is limited to one predominantly white suburban high school.
2. The data used in this study was acquired primarily through an introductory small group session, semi-structured student interviews, and Power School access (i.e. transcripts and grades, attendance, discipline, demographic information).
3. The access to students was limited by varying school schedules, student availability and responses to parental consent forms. As a result, limited interview opportunities were available for analysis and examination.

4. The results of the study cannot be generalized to other African-American male students in a suburban high school but are instead unique to each of the students interviewed.

I have a connection with the high school male students because I too am an African-American male. However, generationally there are several years that separate me from the eight qualifying students. It is my hope that I was seen as an observer/interviewer and not as a parent (considering I have two sons the same ages as the participants), nor seen as a school district administrator. Therefore, it was important that I heard the students for what they were willing to share, to be open to their comments and responses, understanding and accepting of their thoughts and opinions, as well as refraining from judgments and the appearance of criticism and/or advising.

1.6 Concepts and Definitions

For the purpose of this case study, the following operational terms were defined:

Ability Tracking - Refers to the many ways that schools try to tailor different learning experiences to children's varying levels of performance.

Achievement Gap – The disparity between white and minority students' state and national test scores, graduation rates, grade point averages, drop-out rates and college completion rates, (Sheets, 2006).

At-Risk – Students viewed as having a higher than normal probability of dropping out of high school, are often failing one or more courses, score below the state and national averages on standardized tests, are academically disengaged, often disproportionately disciplined by school officials.

Code-Switching - The act of effectively moving between desired Standard English and the often ridiculed language of Ebonics.

Critical Race Theory – An examination of society and culture as applicable to race, law, and power (often associated with equality regarding race and ethnicity).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy – Empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Curriculum Theory - The interdisciplinary study of educational experience; The academic discipline that is devoted to examining and shaping educational curricula and includes both an historical analysis of curriculum and ways of viewing current educational curriculum and policy decisions.

Discrimination - The act of denying an individual and/or group on the basis of their perceived class status, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

High Achieving – Students who possess a minimum of 3.0 on a 4.0 uniform grading scale; dynamic, ambitious and successful.

Low Achieving – Students who possess less than a 2.0 on a 4.0 uniform grading scale.

Parent – The primary guardian and custodian of a child(ren); this includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, other relatives and/or court appointed guardians.

Prejudice – The act of ‘prejudging’ an individual and/or group on the basis of their perceived class status, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

Racial Identity - The extent to which race influences a person’s self-concept and consequent behavior.

Social Imagery - The manner in which perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about certain groups shape peoples’ understanding of those groups.

Social Injustice – The process and practice of unfair and unequal distribution of resources and opportunities toward an individual or marginalized group of people.

Stereotype Lift - Research that examines the impact of racial stereotypes on non-historically marginalized groups, such as White males.

Stereotype Threats - A type of confirmation bias in which the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype.

1.7 Summary

This study analyzed, examined and later identified what African-American males perceived as social justice/injustice influences that directly impacted their academic performance while attending high school. This qualitative research study also utilized semi-structured case interviews to collect and analyze data gathered from among a criteria-based subgroup of African-American high school males. Following the completion of a series of open-ended questions, specific themes emerged that offered further clarity and explanation regarding socially unjust attitudes and behaviors. A review of available archival data was also utilized to assess and determine possible perceptions and influences that emerged from the behaviors of students and teachers. The scope of this study sought to address specific causal factors that potentially lead to social justice/injustice in a large predominantly White suburban high school.

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, a semi-exhaustive review of relevant literature was used to support and further qualify this study. While there is some indication that attitudes and behaviors toward African American males have evolved over time, there is much to be learned regarding the lingering perceptions and influences that prohibited the success of these students.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

As a researcher of secondary data, the primary goal of this case study's literature review was the collection of a representative set of relevant articles that pertained to the practice and perceptions of social just/injustice toward African American high school males. This collection of relevant articles began with an electronic search of academic databases, as well as an Internet search. Upon identification and review of all pertinent articles, a review of the article references was also conducted. This process was thoroughly repeated until an exhaustive search of relevant articles was performed. The final phase of the literature review included separating articles according to their practicality and usefulness to the research topic. A discussion of key themes, ideas and authors was also included in the literature review, as well as a discussion of the significance of this case study and its contribution to the field.

2.2 Organization of the Review

There is considerable literature that bespeaks the social injustice that befalls the African American male's matriculation while in high school. By way of example, Brown & Donner (2011) similarly stated, "One of the most dominant and persistent social narratives in the United States is that young African American males are in a perpetual

state of crisis. From the mainstream media's frequent portrayals of Black youth as criminals to education literature's regular reporting on the academic shortcomings of the nation's young Black men, such stories have increased the public's awareness of the disparities and inequalities this social group disproportionately endures (p. 17). As a result, this study organized and related the literature around a guiding concept of influences that socially unjust attitudes and behaviors have made on the lives of African American high school males. The discussion further addressed related literature according to the perceptions of language in the acquisition of academic success, Critical Race Theory and culturally relevant pedagogy. This discussion also further included the development of stereotypes and social imagery of the African American male, media depictions and the evolution of the black males' characterization. A final discussion pertaining to the historical construction of intellectual ability, tracking and academic under-achievement for African American male high school students was completed.

2.3 Relevance of Culture and Language

For the African American student in general, but the African American male in particular, there is an ever increasing need to bond with others, as well as share intimately with others who possess similar interests and who are (or have) experienced similar concerns. According to Ford (2011), group support represents a mechanism for cultural preservation and social identity (p. 6). However, the preservation of culture can be very challenging for some students who attend predominantly white schools and who are members of a minority population within that school. Culture then is defined as those

values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms unique to a group bound by race, gender, location, religion, or social class (Ford, 2011). Culture is the collective consciousness of a community with its own unique customs, rituals, communication style, coping patterns, social organization, and childbearing attitudes and patterns (Shade & Edwards, 1987). For many, the less cultural congruence between the home and school, the more difficult the cultural transition and the more negative will be students' educational outcomes (Ford, 2011). However, for the African American male in a predominantly white suburban high school, one method of addressing culture is through the acknowledgment and recognition of language differences. Educational communities in the United States have not done an adequate job of embracing the linguistic differences students of color bring to the classroom. Many teachers cling to the notion that Standard English is best served for all students and any deviation from its practice will lessen the life opportunities of students. The language of Ebonics originating in the early 1970's is a language commonly used by African-American students. This language is used in homes, Churches, barbershops and beauty salons and elsewhere throughout neighborhoods of color and is a dialectical way of thinking. To speak Ebonics is to assume the cultural legacy of U.S. slave descendants of African origin, Smitherman (2013). However in classrooms and educational communities, this language is met with frequent correction and ridicule by mainly white teachers who resist its usage. Delpit (2014) found that the younger the student, the greater the likelihood that he/she would exercise Standard English as prescribed by their teachers. However, as students grew older, there was an increased likelihood that the language of students moved toward the local dialect, one that consisted of a familiar language used by family, friends and

community. There is an obvious disconnect when AAL (African American Language) is used and evaluations are provided by teachers. In a large majority of cases, white teachers fail to recognize AAL as a language. Instead, Standard English is embraced and promoted as correct and acceptable language. In a collaborative article by Boutte and Johnson (2013), Boutte acknowledged that AAL is not ‘broken’ English or ‘slang’ (Boutte, 2007). Instead, “children who speak AAL and SE are developing dual language and literacy skills and thus can be considered biliterate and bidialectical” (p. 136). This is an important concept for teachers of African American males to recognize and understand while serving in traditionally white high schools. In another article, Jackson & Boutte (2009) indicated that “One of the functions and consequences of mainstream stories traditionally shared in school is to impose the will of the dominant culture” (p. 108). This will aided by the dominant culture saturates the educational system with literature, beliefs and values, practices and expectations for students and to adopt this trend as the norm. When this occurs, little (if any) attention is given to the culture, background, rituals and history of non-white students and their families. This is particularly striking and impacting as it pertains to critical literacy and linguistic diversity.

When African American male students attend school in predominant environments, honoring one’s language of choice can be difficult for this student of color to manage. As a result of not being able to bond and share with others who are of like cultural persuasions, the transition between Standard English and AAL is difficult at best and virtually non-existent in most cases. However, those African-American students who attend predominantly white high schools and experience academic success, have

embraced the skill of ‘code switching’ ... interchangeably alternating between Standard English and that of an Ebonics dialect. Interestingly however, Delpritt (2014) stated that “despite our necessary efforts to provide access to Standard English, such access will not make any of our students more intelligent. Access to the standard language may be necessary, but it is definitely not sufficient to produce intelligent, competent caretakers of the future” (p. 174). While gender, class and sexual orientation have very similar challenges within specific circles of our communities and schools, the issue of race/ethnicity is singularly the most challenging diversity issue at hand. Consequently, when language barriers exist for African American male students in predominantly white high schools, increased resistance and frustration emerge as the leading causes of negative behavior choices and rule violations that frequently result in disciplinary action. For many African American male students, this is the beginning of a downward spiral in school-related behaviors and motivation that often leads to academic failure and school dropout.

2.4 Critical Race Theory

The pervasive nature of negative attitudes and the denial of cultural values for the black male student are contributing factors in the continuation and deterioration of troubled school behaviors. In his book entitled ‘Miseducation of the Negro’, Carter G. Woodson asserts, “*The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by*

making him feel that his race does not amount to much and will never measure up to the standards of other peoples” (Woodson, 1933/2000, p. xiii). This excerpt is a critical emphasis on the positionality of many African American male students who are the minority in predominantly white high schools. The excerpt further supports the current need for implementation of critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy in schools. Dubbed as the academic discipline focused upon the application of critical theory through its examination of society and culture as applicable to race, law and power, CRT uses race as a heuristic for understanding persistent social, economic, political and cultural inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2008). In tandem with CRT is culturally relevant pedagogy which, “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). Included in this phenomenon identified by Ladson-Billings is culturally relevant teaching that identifies three major areas: 1) academic excellence - which refrains from cultural deficit models of school failure; 2) cultural competence - which locates excellence within the context of a student’s community and cultural identities; and 3) critical consciousness - which challenges inequitable school and societal structures. In her book, Just What is Critical Race Theory and What is it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education, Ladson-Billings (1998) further identifies three prominent and pertinent dimensions of teachers: 1) Their perceptions of themselves and others; 2) The way they structure classroom social interactions; and 3) Their perceptions of knowledge. Recognizing its attention and emphasis on white privilege and white dominance, both of which result in racial/ethnic power and control,

CRT attempts to deconstruct these power inequities by addressing the political, legal and educational systems that reproduce a hierarchy of social injustice.

Unfortunate to date are the few studies that have given attention to student perceptions and interpretations of their learning environment. African American males in particular benefit from a summative assessment and formal evaluation of their learning environment and the pedagogical practices implored by teachers. In a study of elementary African American male students who were interviewed regarding their perceptions of culturally relevant teachers within urban contexts, Howard (2001) stated, “understanding how students perceive and react to their learning environments may be more useful than the application and analysis of the quality by outsiders” (p. 133). Howard further determined that students preferred teachers who established community; teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes toward students; and teachers who made learning an entertaining and fun process. Each of these findings is characteristic of teachers who encourage and engage their students in an active learning process. These characteristics are applicable and transferrable to all students of varying backgrounds, cultures and ethnic identities. In a similar study Nieto (1994) stated, “Student voices sometimes reveal the great challenges and even the deep pain young people feel when schools are unresponsive, cold places.” Moreover she states that “those who spend the most time in schools and classrooms are often given the least opportunity to talk...students have important lessons to teach educators and we need to begin to listen to them more carefully” (p. 420). African American males in predominantly white high schools likely face socially unjust attitudes and behaviors from students and staff on a frequent basis. Much of this occurs in large part to the denial and exclusion of culturally relevant

conversations and learning opportunities in the classroom. The inclusion of relevant pedagogy that incorporates the voice, perspective and interpretations of African American males gives rise to greater academic achievement, fewer disciplinary concerns and the propensity to accept differences and the diversity of students in the classroom.

2.5 Historical Construction

The experience of African American males in America is unlike any experience other immigrants have faced (Douglas, 2007). These experiences translate into a historical construction of what it means to be Black and male in America. Howard, et al, (2012) infers that the experience of the African American male is guided by a less than flattering account of the academic potential, intellectual disposition and social and cultural capital possessed by black males. According to Brown & Donner (2011), “The notion of psychological damage has taken on different instantiations since the 1960s, which in some instances refers to Black males as powerless individuals who fall victim to self-fulfilling prophecies of defeat and failure to more recent analyses concerned with how racial stereotyping produces an internalized negative self-concept, or what Claude Steele (1997) refers to as stereotype threat”. Moreover, many African American males have internalized the negative stereotypes about themselves, their appearance, their abilities, the low expectations, and the social imagery extended to them by culprits in society. From a purely historical perspective, these negative beliefs by the predominant culture may have a deleterious and impeding effect on the academic potential of African American males (Douglas, Bell 2009). These internalized negative beliefs may also have

the propensity to detract from their overall ability to become successful in classrooms that offer positive learning environments for students. When students embrace learning and see themselves as equal and are successful entities within a classroom, this then is the beginning of where true learning takes place for both teachers and students. Classrooms that are highly energized and possess a positive class/school climate have a higher achievement ratio than classrooms or schools with negative and despondent environments. According to Joyce and Calhoun (2010), “a substantial portion of outstanding student achievement is associated with elevating beliefs and actions. The effect is sufficient to bring achievement by low socioeconomic status (SES) students to levels equal to or above the levels of higher SES populations.” Moreover, in a study conducted in schools in the state of Georgia, Joyce and Calhoun examined differences in staff development between high achieving schools to that of lower achieving schools. The results indicate that when positive class/school climates were embraced differences in SES did not explain differences in student achievement. The study concluded that “school and district culture trumped SES” (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010).

Accordingly, the notion of socio-economic status of the African American male student to that of his White counterpart is an important variable that potentially influences the perceptions of social justice/injustice while attending a predominantly White high school. The current research relative to this study strongly supports socio-economic status and race and ethnicity are each intertwined. The research would further validate that communities are often segregated by SES, race and ethnicity. In many instances, low SES communities share similar characteristics, such as low economic development, poor health conditions, and lower levels of educational attainment. Low

SES has consistently been deemed a risk factor for many problems plaguing communities of color. As stated by Costello, Keeler, & Angold (2001); National Center for Education Statistics (2007), African American children are three times more likely to live in poverty than Caucasian children. However, from a different vantage point, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian families are more likely than Caucasian and Asian families to live in poverty. Chow, et al (2003) stated that African Americans and Latinos in low poverty areas were more likely to be referred for commitment by a law enforcement official than any other racial group. Additionally, in terms of socioeconomic realities that may deprive students of valuable resources, Azzam (2008) posited that high achieving African American students may be exposed to less rigorous curriculums, attend schools with fewer resources, and have teachers who expect less of them academically than they expect of similarly situated Caucasian students. While this postulation by Azzam does not fully pertain to the high school in this case study, the assertions made in general have a higher probability of accuracy in most other suburban high schools in the local area.

The current literature is replete with evidence and documentation suggestive of the dehumanization and inferior treatment toward the African American male. Even today, individuals discriminate against African American males by assuming they possess less than acceptable qualities, such as being lazy and irresponsible (Swanson, Cunningham & Spencer, 2003). It comes as no surprise that in school, African American males bear the brunt of inadequate teaching practices through class assignments to inexperienced, younger, middle-class, white teachers, they are subjected to disproportionate disciplinary practices, victims of academic failure, are placed into special education programs more

frequently and have higher dropout rates. In high school, Black male youth are less likely to take advanced placement tests, graduate on time, or enroll in four-year universities relative to Black females, Latinos and Whites (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell & Horwitz, 2010). Holzman's (2010) research on national high school graduation rates reveals that only 47% of Black males earned a high school diploma in 2008 compared to 78% of White males. As such, any single item and/or the combination of two or more of the above referenced items translate into school failure and frustration on behalf of the African American male. The onset of these negative outcomes may exist at any time, in any school and for any student. Although the preponderance of evidence would validate the greater likelihood of one or more of the above referenced outcomes serves as the driving force behind the academic failures of African American males in predominantly white high schools. According to Ferguson (2000), "For many African American males, school simply becomes a pipeline into the prison complex."

Several additional studies have been conducted that pertain to the prevalence and practices of social injustice and its impact on African-American students (males in particular). Research findings suggest that tenants of social injustice exist during standardized testing of students, during course placement and tracking practices associated with ability levels of students. One such study that pertained to social injustice practices was discussed in a 1996 article entitled "*Blacked Out: Dilemmas of race, identity and success at Capital High*" by Signithia Fordham. An African American anthropologist, Fordham studied a Washington, DC high school and focused on how the 'hidden' and explicit curriculum shaped student aspirations and achievements, and how students of differing cultural, racial, and social backgrounds responded to the schooling

experience. Fordham collected data through the use of interviews, questionnaires, participant observations, and field notes. Fordham found that the most academically talented students faced significant ambivalence toward school and expressed frequent uncertainty that they would be successful while in high school. The study further found that the most prevailing attitude among African American students was the perception by many Whites that African American students were less capable and far less intelligent and that this was a daily occurrence in which they experienced. Fordham recorded three explanations for the achievement gap between White and African American students. First, were the student perceptions in the wider society and their perception of 'making it'. Second, was the lack of adequate educational opportunities within the system. Third, was the cumulative effects of living in a social world saturated with racist ideology and racist practices that too often are pervasive and unaddressed.

In 1899 John Dewey decried, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other idea for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy." Education can be one of the most vital forces in our nation, playing a potent and positive role in shaping the lives of youngsters. It can help us eliminate prejudice and form ethical attitudes toward each other (Green, 1973).

Moreover, establishing and maintaining a positive schooling experience for many African American males begins with the respect and the acceptance of their classroom contributions. Contrarily, Brown and Davis (2000) concluded in their research that schools are not meeting the social and developmental needs of African American males. As opposed to berating and exacerbating what may be relegated to minor classroom

behaviors, many of which are duplicate behaviors of their white male counterparts, educators have a penchant for embellishment and magnification of disciplinary issues committed by African American males. Consequential to these reactions is the distortion and the interference of an opportunity to create a positive school experience. The resistance theory as noted by McLaren and Kincheloe (2007) is a means to help African American males compensate for complex educational issues. This theory provides a mechanism for understanding how African American males react to school conditions and helps to make meaning of how this population responds to the school environment and policies (Noguera, 2001). However, there is a paucity of research that addresses how African American males ‘perceive’ and ‘feel’ about their experiences in school.

Through a similar lens, research conducted on the achievement gap that exists between African American students and their peers is pervasive and prevalent. While large numbers of students exit the nation’s schools annually with their diploma in hand, an increasingly disproportionate number of these students are students of color, who are unable to read fluently, write using correct grammar and Standard English protocols and are unable to complete simple math equations. Harold Berlak (2001) stated that “Even when parent’s income and wealth is comparable, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and immigrants for whom English is not a first language, lag behind English-speaking, native born, White students”. Further, perceptions and influences range from Arthur Jensen’s 1969 statistical analysis of I.Q. test that concluded African Americans were allegedly and genetically inferior to Whites to Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein’s 1994 *Bell Curve* test data suggestive of similar inferiority perceptions on the basis of race/ethnicity and biology. Current explanations may include the cultural

disparities that exist between communities of color and other communities, poverty, adequate housing, and lack of employment. Whatever the potential causes that influences the perceptions that pertain to African American males, unarguably the fact remains that the achievement gap continues to widen at very alarming rates. For the Black male, perceptions of disengagement and disinterest in school exacerbate negative experiences and outcomes and contribute to their inability to fulfill their role as capable and competent learners in school settings. Hence, to be Black and male in American schools places one at risk for a variety of negative consequences: school failure, special education assignment, suspensions, expulsions and violence (Ferguson, 2000).

To further give explanation to this phenomenon, two recent NCES reports (2007/2009) concluded that a majority of African American males in the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades do not reach grade-level proficiency in reading, mathematics, history and science. Fewer than 10% of African American males were at or above grade level in these same subject matter areas. Harry & Klinger (2006) noted that African American males currently make up approximately 8.1% of the nation's student population. Within this percentage includes 26% of African American males who comprise classifications of educable-mental retarded; a separate 34% who are diagnosed with serious emotional disorders; and approximately 33% of African American students nationwide are identified as trainable mentally retarded or developmentally delayed. These designations according to special education classifications perpetuate social injustice and the perception of low ability and intelligence levels of the African American male in predominantly white high schools. Added to this national trend and phenomena is ability tracking.

Ability tracking (often referred to as ability grouping) is one method by which educators differentiate instruction. The term differentiation refers to the many ways that schools try to tailor different learning experiences to children's varying levels of performance. It is identified and commonly based on a method of elementary and middle school students who are grouped into levels that are designated in what is presumed a certain skill set within a particular subject(s). Teachers, counselors, administrators and school systems at large guide students over the course of their formal school years pursuant to these designated subject areas. Of the many methods known within the system of efficient teaching and learning, ability tracking of students has risen to prominence. The case of ability tracking on minority academic performance has received high levels of scrutiny over the years. One case study focused its thematic organization upon minority v. white students' placement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses in high school. Commonly referred to as STEM classes, research has discovered that "whites are about twice as likely as blacks to be enrolled in advanced mathematics courses" (Kelly, 2004). The different course taking patterns are attributable to the prior school performances (Faitar & Faitar, 2013). Lower track placements among black students are due, to some extent, to lower achievement scores in previous years (Alexander and McDill, 1976; Heyn, 1974). Course taking and placement in specific tracks is also due to family background. The correlation of race and family background increases the black-white course taking gap (Kelly 2004; Lucas, 1999). Significant to this discussion is that in schools with a higher percentage of black students the probability of being placed in an upper track is higher (Lucas and Gamoran, 2002). This study concluded that the track placements are a function of both objective and subjective

criteria. For instance, student grades and test scores were identified as an objective measure, whereas a teacher's recommendations and the decisions of parents, counselors and the student were viewed as subjective factors in determining placement of a student in classes (Kelly, 2007). Research studies further show that social-class inequality in course taking is caused by differentiated levels of parental involvement (Baker and Stevenson, 1986) or student expectations (Kelly, 2004). In short, tracking ability levels and the achievement of minority students indicates that school tracking policies are responsible for negatively affecting student achievement by separating students and normalizing this separation. This separation characteristic of tracking is ending in the creation even more racial, social and educational disparities (Chambers, 2009).

2.6 Stereotypes and Social Imagery

The culture of learning in most schools has a readily identifiable expectation for behavior and academic success; specifically schools where African American males are in the minority. Common to these expectations is the significant variation of expectations that exist in the school versus that which exist in the home and community. In many instances, the conduct of these students is often misunderstood and miscalculated by teaching staff and results in the formation of lowered expectations and misguided stereotypes. These stereotypes and low expectations are the persistent and salient thought processes that form the opinions and social imagery of the African American male. According to Horsman (1981) and Spring (2006), "Social imagery, or the manner in which perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about certain groups shape people's

understanding of those groups, has served as a hallmark upon which social domination, economic exploitation, and political disenfranchisement have formed the experiences of diverse cultural groups in the US.” This is a key concept to understanding the impact social justice/injustice has on the matriculation of the African American high school male. This imagery has become an integral part of the population’s thinking, in that it has become institutionalized over decades and generations, and has further shaped people’s thinking about a particular reality or perceived reality (Howard, et al, 2012).

A large number of African American males are smitten by the historical and contemporary influences of social imagery. Many of today’s black males are victimized by the unfair and unwarranted character portrayal that the social, economic and political society has placed upon them. Consequently, a multitude of obstacles and challenges confront the African American male that emanate from prior generations. According to Howard, et al (2012), a number of scholars have described the evolution of the Black characterizations over the past several centuries. Early 17th and 18th century images typically cast Black men as physically strong, mentally inept, hyper-sexed brutes who were well suited for slavery, and deemed to be subhuman. Over time, the image became more entrenched of Black men being lazy, docile, and inhumane savages (p. 89). Similar research by Douglas; Anton (2009) purport that during slavery, African Americans were dehumanized and treated as inferior based solely on their skin color. Even in modern day 21st century, many individuals discriminate against African American males based on the perceptions that they possess less than acceptable qualities such as being irresponsible and the often quoted laziness characterization. The plights of the African American male

strongly suggest that ahead lay difficult days and ongoing struggles in the social, political and economic arena of society.

In his book The Trouble with Black Boys, Noguera (2003) surmises that the African American male leads the nation in homicides, both as victims and perpetrators and are now have the fastest growing rate of suicide. The rise in HIV and the AIDS epidemic have further exacerbated the ongoing issue relative to the black male. Today's growth in the incarceration rate, the severity of convictions and the preponderance of arrests can be further attributed to the struggles that lay ahead for the African American male. Research demonstrates that black males also have high rates of infant deaths within their first year of life and as they grow older, this population of African American males contrarily experiences a reduction in their life expectancy. During their course of life, black males are frequently unemployed, underemployed (even unemployable in many instances) due to no education or lack of education, few if any acquired skills and certifications in specialized areas, nor possess the knowledge, finesse or resources to pursue the labor market. Hallinan (2010) revealed that with "roots in history of slavery, civil war, and racial segregation, Black-White differences in social status and resources have been difficult to overcome" (p. 50).

Additionally, the depiction of African American males in the media solely as athletes, entertainers, or even sex-crazed villains, violent hustlers and law-breaking thugs does little to thwart the decline and degradation of this group. The overwhelming presentation regarding African American males in the media is distorted in several ways and is inconsistent with real-world facts. Many throughout our society would incorrectly conclude that black male illustrations in the media are relegated to TV shows, magazine

advertisement or video game portrayals. However, in a 2011 Report entitled *Media Representations and the Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys*, the facts suggest that these distorted views of the African American male are also represented in areas such as 1) the underrepresentation of black males as analyst in news reports, computer users in TV ads and commercials, users of luxury items or characters with well-developed personal lives in fiction shows and film; 2) as the negative and exaggerated associations criminality, unemployment, and the idle black male on the street corner of poverty in America; 3) as the positive associations that are relatively limited to sports, physical achievement, virility, and musicality; 4) as the segment of the population with intractable problems and problem behaviors; and 5) the ignored dimensions of historical antecedents of black economic disadvantage and persistent anti-black bias (p. 14). The real-world effects alluded to in the literature include everything from less attention from doctors to harsher sentencing by judges, lower likelihood of being hired for a job or admitted to school, lower odds of getting loans, and higher likelihood of being shot by police. African American males in predominantly white suburban high schools are too familiar with the exclusion of positive social imagery in the media and the over-representation of negative images throughout society.

2.7 Transition and Summary

The suggested examples of case study, research and review of relevant literature in this chapter are intended to support and validate the perceptions and influences that promulgate social justice among African American males in predominantly white

suburban high schools. To follow in the next chapter, Chapter Three will be a presentation of the Research Methods and Design of Study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discussed in detail methods used to conduct the research. The intent and purpose of this study was to analyze and examine the perceptions and influences of social justice/injustice on the lives of high school African-American males. Guided by a prescribed criterion, qualifying males were asked to participate in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the researcher. This study also contributed to the literature regarding stereotypes and the low achievement of African American males in predominantly White suburban high schools. Chapter Three addressed the design of the study, the role of the researcher, and introduce concepts and definitions appertaining to social injustice.

3.2 Design

The participating high school has a low enrollment and populace of African-American male students. The local high school enrolled approximately (1,159) students during the school year 2014-2015. Among the total number of students enrolled, approximately (51) students were classified as African-American; (1040) students were classified White; and (68) students were classified as Other during the same school year. Among the total number of students enrolled, approximately (26) were African-American males and the

remaining (25) were African-American female students. This study incorporated identified criteria for the selection of student participants. The criteria selected consists of the following: 1) participating students must be classified as an African-American high school male with college aspirations; 2) participating students must be regarded as 'high achieving' as evidenced by their enrollment in College Preparatory classes (or higher); and 3) participating students must qualify under the State Guidelines for Free/Reduced lunch assistance. Consequently, 100% of the eight students identified qualified under the criteria to participate in the student interview case study (Table 3.1).

3.3 Pilot Study

The selection and qualification of eight out of twenty-six total African American male high school students is significant to note for several reasons. On the one hand, these eight students were classified as 'high achieving' African American males who attend a very affluent, suburban high school in an economically advantaged school district and community and who also have aspirations of attending a four-year college. On the other hand, the selection of eight out of twenty-six African American male students was significant because the predominance of students (over 90% of the students enrolled are White), enjoy two parent households, have high expectations of attending college, are well-read and well-traveled, are accustomed to driving expensive vehicles as early as fifteen years old and are beneficiaries of life living on the lake.

Each of the qualifying students in this study ranged from grades nine through twelve. Of the eight students who qualified under the criteria for selection, two were classified as

graduating seniors; one classified as an eleventh grade student; one as a tenth grade student and the remaining four were classified as high school freshmen.

All of the African American males who meet the criterion were scheduled for a semi-structured interview at a disclosed location central to the location of the suburban high school. Pertinent and salient questions were developed to serve as prompts for student responses and engagement. Each participating students all met with the interviewer at school for a one-time orientation meeting and general overview. A parent letter was also discussed in detail and a copy was further provided to each of the identified male students along with a parent permission form and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Students were asked to share the written information with their parents and to return the signed parental permission to interview form as soon as possible. Interview schedules began upon receipt of the returned permission forms. Follow-up telephone calls were made to the individual parents after approximately three days of no reply. Parents were also informed that students were encouraged but not obligated to participate in the interviews and could request exemption at any time. To motivate and entice the high school students to participate in the interviews, a \$5.00 monetary incentive was provided per student, per hour required for interviews.

Throughout this qualitative study, a grounded theory approach was extensively used. This process of data collection and interviews with students majorly helped to determine the most appropriate theory to be used for analysis and examination of socially just and unjust influences and perceptions by African American males. The determination of causal factors was the collection of data following key descriptions of student experiences while enrolled in a suburban high school. The student interviews and their

descriptions of personal experiences were identified, coded, and analyzed to ascertain grounded theory and the need to balance the scales of justice among students.

Interpretations and reiterations later ensued as a result of personal student testimonials given by qualifying students.

Moreover, in the pursuit of all things being equal, an ideal world would suggest that more should be done in the local high school to balance the enrollment scales for students. Stated differently, the school (and school district) is better served by having as one of its major focuses the recruitment and retention of students of color into this historically and predominantly White high school. Such a focus included the various backgrounds of students from across the school district, diverse socio-economic status of students, and the inclusion of multi-tiered intelligence levels of students. Additional considerations that also played into the recruitment and retention of students of color in a predominantly White high school include teaching according to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory, which is also known as (CRT). Unique to the professional development opportunities for all staff at the high school is a very clear understanding of the implications of race and power and the impact both have on a community. Of particular interest are two of at least four basic tenants of Critical Race theory that warrant attention and bear mentioning in this discussion. First, in relationship to the topic of race and racism, Delgado & Stefancic (2012) stated that ‘racism’ is ordinary and not aberrational – it’s normal science – the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country (p. 7). In short, the concept of ordinariness means that racism is difficult to cure or address. In fact, racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working class people

(psychically), and the larger segment of our society have little interest or incentive to eradicate it. A second interesting tenant of Critical Race Theory is that ‘race’ and ‘races’, from a social construction perspective, are both products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The two tenants of CRT bear mentioning because they each pertain to the perceptions and influences of social justice/injustice and its impact on the emotional, psychological and academic lives of African American males who attend a predominantly White suburban high school. Critical Race Theory is more clearly defined through its involvement of race and ethnicity and the impact each has on race, law and power. Additional discussion would also include Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, as it provides a focus on honoring the vantage point and the viewpoint of diverse groups, rather than a singular promotion of learning through the lens of the dominant group. In the case of this study, optimal teaching involved the acknowledgement and awareness of diversity and the keen sense of the understanding required to honor all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, economic status, religion, orientation or other. On the contrary, Fuller (2000) stated, “multiculturalism implies that these cultures stand in certain relationships to each other and that they may change as those same relationships unfold in time and space.” As teachers and administrative staff learn more and share more among themselves, student-teacher relationships change over time in large part due to the recognition of obvious differences, which in turn increases the odds that students may be accepted and appreciated for the cultural and ethnic differences each brings to the classroom.

3.4 Role of the Researcher

In this study, the researcher was the sole and primary instrument for data collection, analysis and interpretation. The researcher made sufficient use of personal and one-on-one interviews, discussions that centered on the prescribed research questions that inquired of the socially just /unjust perceptions and influences.

The interview questions were developed by the researcher based on themes related to articles and other relevant literature. The overall purpose of the student interviews was to gather pertinent and meaningful insight and information to identify causes of low achievement among African American males.

3.5 Sample(s) and Sampling Plan

This case study had as its purpose ascertaining the perceptions and influence of social justice/injustice on the academic achievement of African-American males in a predominantly White suburban high school. The study sample later incorporated identified criteria for the selection of student participants. Students were individually vetted from among the pool of (26) African American male students currently attending the suburban high school. The list of participants all met the following requirements in order to be selected to participate in the case study. The selection criteria consisted of: 1) participating students must be classified as an African-American high school male with college aspirations; 2) participating students must be regarded as ‘high achieving’ as evidenced by their enrollment in College Preparatory classes (or higher); and 3) participating students must qualify under the State Guidelines for Free/Reduced lunch assistance. Consequently, 100% of the students identified all met the criteria to

participate in the student interview study. Following an initial one-time orientation meeting and general overview, a parent letter (Appendix A) was discussed in detail and provided to each of the identified male students along with a parent permission form (Appendix B) and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Students were then asked to share the written information with their parents and to return the signed parent form as soon as possible. Interviews were then scheduled upon receipt of the returned permission forms. For students who did not readily return permission forms, a follow-up telephone call was made to the individual parents after approximately three days of no reply. Parents were informed that students were encouraged but not obligated to participate in the interviews and could request exemption at any time. To provide an incentive for students to participate, a \$5.00 monetary stipend was provided for each hour the interviews were held. All interviews were audio tape recorded with analysis and coding taking place throughout the study.

3.6 Collection of Evidence

Two forms of data were collected to address the study's research questions: 1) Archival records/documents and 2) narrative interviews. Archival records and documents were derived from the local school district's Power School data system. Here, all pertinent student information, such as course schedules, school attendance, behavior/discipline infractions, transcripts of courses taken and high school credits earned, parent contact information and other pertinent demographic information emerged from this Power School source. The sample of participating students was in fact the same body of students who were screened and selected according to the criteria set forth by the

researcher. This data allowed the discovery of potential patterns of tracking, such as class assignments on the basis of perceived ability levels. Each of the eight qualifying students each received a letter addressed to the individual parent(s) highlighting the case study process and the request for their son's participation in a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interviews are also commonly referred to as 'shorter case study interviews'. In this instance, shorter case study interviews are more focused and only take about 1 hour or so. These interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but will likely follow the case study protocol more closely (Yin, 2014). A small stipend further accompanied each student who interviewed. In addition to the parent letter that addresses the case study process, a student permission form accompanied the letter seeking parent's signature of approval/agreement (Appendix A and Appendix B).

Beginning the 2015-2016 school year, the researcher intensely began the process of selecting student participants based on the prescribed criteria. Following the identification of student participants, the researcher met with the eight qualifying students in a one-time group meeting to introduce himself, as well as offer some explanation and description of the case study. Upon agreement by the eight African-American male students and receipt of signed parent permission forms, the researcher then began to schedule the shorter case study interviews with each student in a location convenient for the parent and student. During the small group meeting and description of the process, the researcher repeatedly emphasized that students would not have interviews scheduled during class/school hours. Instead, all interviews were to take place afterschool and on-campus, if needed, but preferably at an agreed upon location in proximity of the high

school but also within the community of the student's residence. Such suggestions were the Hardee's and/or Bojangles Restaurant, the Wired Goat Café or the China Wok Restaurant which are all located in the community of the school. These in-depth interviews were each audio recorded and transcribed and each analysis remained open for adjustment and revision throughout the study.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher remained cognizant that interviewee's responses are subject to common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation (Yin, 2014). Every effort was made by the researcher to corroborate interviewee data and information with other sources that may be available.

3.7 Analysis

The intent of the researcher was to determine any plausible and potentially related factors that may impact and influence perceptions of social injustice toward African American male students in the suburban high school. Using a grounded theory approach, the researcher methodically identified the perceptions that impaired the academic achievement of these high school students. In large measure, this grounded theory emanated from the analysis and interpretations of student perceptions of social injustice in a predominantly White suburban high school.

Further, the identification of theoretical propositions was utilized to explore further hypotheses and presumptions pertaining to socially unjust attitudes and behaviors of students and staff. These hypotheses were in large part the driving force behind the research questions and ongoing literature review conducted by the researcher. Pattern matching techniques were also exercised in this case study. According to Yin (2014),

pattern matching is the comparison of one empirically based pattern from the case study with a predicted pattern before the data is collected (p. 142). These efforts proved to strengthen and ensure the internal validity of this case study.

3.8 Summary

This proposal willfully described the case study process and protocol to be used in the identification and selection of African American males enrolled in a predominantly White suburban high school. A selection criterion was established and was later used as a guide in the selection process. Following the selection of qualifying male students, each were assembled together in group form and presented an overview of the case study and interview process. Following the discussion of the process, each student then received a parent permission form and description of the research study to be shared with parents and/or legal guardians. Upon return of the parent permission forms, an in-depth interview was later scheduled. Interviews were slated for approximately 1-hour each and qualifying students were to receive a monetary stipend for their participation. Interviews were recorded and provided valuable insight and information into the perceptions and potential influences social justice/injustice had made on the achievements of these males. In addition to scheduled interviews, archival data such as school attendance records, school schedules, transcripts, grades and Carnegie units earned, parent information and other pertinent demographic information were provided by the Power School tool and resource.

Table 3.1 Eligible Students

Student Reference ID	Grade	Age	Academic Track	GPA	YTD Absences	YTD Discipline	Parent	Siblings	Lunch Status
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Dexter	9 th	15	CP	2.875	2	2	Father/ Mother	2 Brothers 2 Sisters	F/R
Eric	9 th	14	CP	1.375	7	2	Father/ Mother	2 Brothers 3 Sisters	F/R
Tywon	9 th	14	HONORS	3.125	2	0	Mother	1 Brother 2 Sisters	F/R
Anthony	9 th	14	CP	2.687	1	0	Mother	N/A	F/R
Andre	10 th	15	CP	1.991	4	1	Father/ Mother	1 Brother 1 Sister	F/R
Robert	11 th	16	CP	2.070	4	1	Mother	1 Brother 2 Sisters	F/R
Justin	12 th	18	CP	2.075	9	0	Mother	1 Sister	F/R
Joseph	12 th	18	CP	2.112	7	1	Father/ Mother	2 Brothers 3 Sisters	F/R

*All subjects above are African American males who attend the same suburban school and have met the selection criteria for interview analysis and examination.

CP – College Prep

GPA – Grade Point Average

F/R – Free and Reduced

YTD – Year to Date

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to ascertain factors that influence the perceptions of social justice/injustice on the lives of eight qualifying African American high school males. The primary and essential tools used for data collection were qualitative methods of case study and archival student data from the local school district's Power School system. Individual and semi-structured interviews were held in order to provide an analysis and examination of perceived attitudes and behaviors of students and staff.

This study additionally analyzed the first coding process through *In Vivo* coding. This type of coding was chosen to highlight the terms, thoughts and phrases used by student participants themselves. *In Vivo* coding is often referred to as 'verbatim coding' or 'literal coding' as it captures the participant's voice for deeper clarity, greater understanding, and in their own words. The second level of coding chosen was *Emotion* coding. This type of coding is important because it captures the emotion of the student participant and relates it to a current incident or past experience. Finally, to conclude a triangulation of patterns and themes, *Versus* coding was used in order to capture the variations and differences that African American high school male students have identified as they compare themselves to their White counterparts. This triangulation created new levels of understanding the existing knowledge by reviewing the interviews in a comparative analysis with the previous two levels of coding (Saldana, 2009). The

data that will be shared throughout this chapter will further emphasize the emerging themes of expectations, loneliness and isolation, and relationships. The emerging themes were derived as a result of the analytical coding of the qualitative data.

4.2 Participants

Following the demographic data collection process which included the extrapolation of twenty-six African American males from a student population of 1,159, a total of eight African American males were selected as participants of the research study. Coinciding with the demographic data collection process was the development of a selection criterion. This selection criterion included three detail specific requirements that were essential to understanding the perceptions and influences that impact the social, emotional, psychological and academic well-being of African American high school males. This criterion required the following: 1) participants must be classified as an African American high school male; 2) participants must be considered 'high achieving' by virtue of their enrollment in College Preparatory (or higher) courses of study; (Note: in this case study, 'high achieving' is tantamount to being on-track for high school graduation and college bound); and 3) participants must qualify under the State Guidelines for Free/Reduced lunch assistance. All of the qualifying students attended the Overview/Orientation to the study and were referred to by pseudo-names as opposed to their given names. Students who qualified were: Dexter, Eric, Tywon, Anthony, Andre, Robert, Justin and Joseph. Each individual student was additionally provided a parent letter detailing the research study and further provided contact information for any questions/concerns that parents may have. A parent permission form was also included in

an effort to have on file written parental support of their son's participation and agreement to the \$5.00 remuneration provided following semi-structured interviews. Approximately 100% of the eight students identified further qualified under the selection criteria developed for this research study. However, much to the chagrin of the researcher, the sample population did change from its original intent. Regrettably, following three weeks of anticipation and waiting for a parental reply, after leaving several follow-up telephone calls and voice messages, providing direct contact information for any concerns, specific questions or other, and providing a self-addressed stamped envelope for possible reply, four of the eight students regrettably 'opted out' of the research case study. Consequently, the remaining four qualifying participants (Dexter, Eric, Anthony and Joseph) chose to proceed with their individual interviews and information was gleaned from their perspectives, perceptions and influences while attending the suburban high school. (See Table 4.1)

All four participating students returned the signed parent permission form to the prescribed Post Office Box using the self-addressed stamped envelope. Upon receipt of permission forms, scheduled interviews were arranged with each participant in a publicly open, neutral location within the vicinity and boundaries of the high school. Subsequently, all four interviews were held at a nearby Hardee's Restaurant in the heart of the small town located approximately one mile from the suburban high school. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed to begin the cycle(s) of coding and analyzation. Prior to the start of each interview, participating students signed under their parents' signature to signify receipt of their \$5.00 remuneration for not more than a one-hour interview. (See Table 5.1).

Table 4.1 Participating Students

Student Reference ID	Grade	Age	Academic Track	GPA	YTD Absences	YTD Discipline	Parent	Siblings	Lunch Status
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Dexter	9 th	15	CP	2.875	2	2	Father/ Mother	2 Brothers 2 Sisters	F/R
Eric	9 th	14	CP	1.375	7	2	Father/ Mother	2 Brothers 3 Sisters	F/R
Tywon	9 th	14	HONORS	3.125	2	0	Mother	1 Brother 2 Sisters	F/R
Anthony	9 th	14	CP	2.687	1	0	Mother	N/A	F/R
Andre	10 th	15	CP	1.991	4	1	Father/ Mother	1 Brother 1 Sister	F/R
Robert	11 th	16	CP	2.070	4	1	Mother	1 Brother 2 Sisters	F/R
Justin	12 th	18	CP	2.075	9	0	Mother	1 Sister	F/R
Joseph	12 th	18	CP	2.112	7	1	Father/ Mother	2 Brothers 3 Sisters	F/R

Note: Students highlighted in ‘RED’ proceeded with semi-structured interviews as previously scheduled.

- Dexter
- Eric
- Anthony
- Joseph

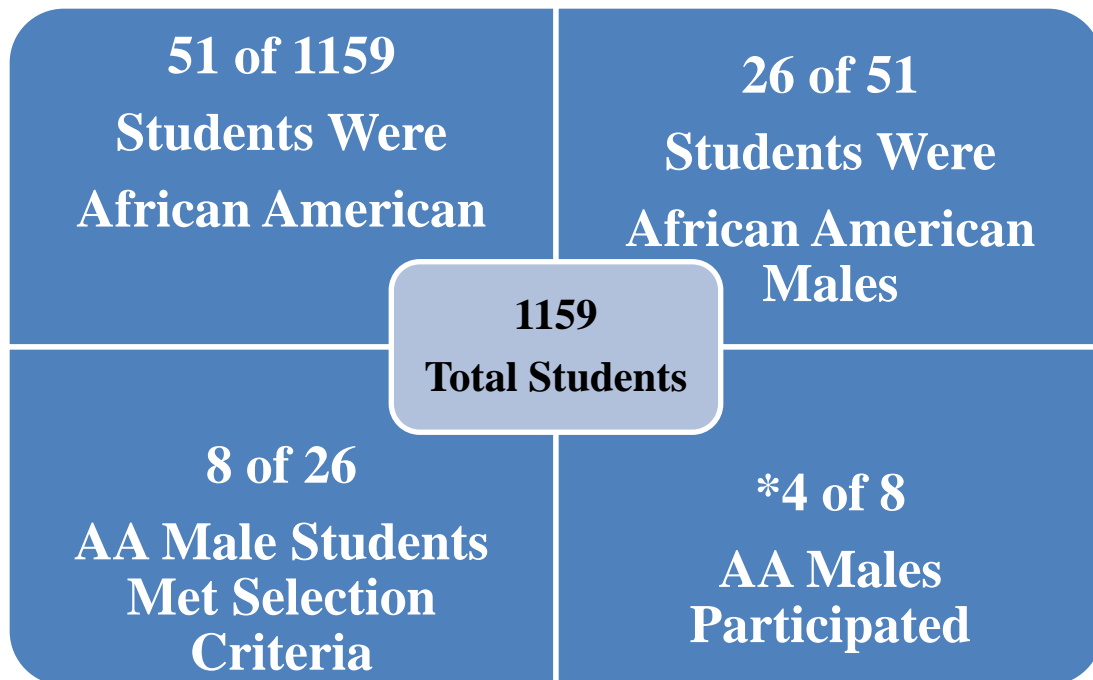


Figure 4.1 Enrollment Data

4.3 Environment

The town in which the suburban high school is located rests approximately twenty miles northwest of the capital city in South Carolina. The town embraces both the amenities of capital city life, as well as life of rural tranquility. As a family oriented town, the aging and affluent residents maintain high expectations of academic excellence in the neighborhood schools.

The local high school which serves as the unit of analysis in this case study has been named Palmetto Gold or Silver Award Winner for the past eight years. Additionally, US News and World Report listed this high school as a Silver Medal School in its 2009 and 2012 Best High School Search. This school was also previously designated a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 1994-1996 and once again in 2009. The school has additionally been named a Red Carpet School by the S.C. Department of Education for its welcoming, community friendly environment. At the

conclusion of the 2014-2015 school year, the designation of Palmetto's Finest was bestowed upon this high school. A four-year comprehensive public school serving grades nine through twelve, this school is content in serving its nearly 1200 students who attend the school.

The graduating class of 2015 awarded diplomas to 299 seniors. Of these seniors, 24 were Palmetto Fellows, 184 received Life Scholarships, 58% enrolled in a four-year college or university, 31% enrolled in a Technical College; 3% joined the Military and 6% entered the work force. Nearly \$30 million dollars in college scholarships were awarded to the graduates of the class of 2015.

4.4 Expectations

While the schools' accolades are exceptional and the community has embraced a long tradition of excellence in educational well-being of students who have attended, the majority of interviews suggested that not everyone relished in the success of the school. Such was the issue with Joseph during his initial interview. I began with Joseph because he was the only senior within the group of four remaining participants. This student was eighteen years old and on track for high school graduation. During the onset of the interview, Joseph shared that he was the middle child of six children and was the oldest son in the family. He has attended several different schools in South Carolina as well as schools outside the State of South Carolina since elementary school. Joseph shared that his family moved around a lot in his earlier years in school because his father was previously military. This student was a student-athlete for his high school, playing defensive end for the football team. To date, there were no prospects of college

scholarship offers as he helped to contribute to his college bound ambitions by working part-time at the local McDonald's Restaurant.

I inquired of Joseph regarding his perceptions of social justice/injustice at his school. I further requested of him to provide a detailed example and to communicate his perception of the message(s) that was being communicated by either student or staff member:

Q: Can you think of areas where social injustice may have occurred at () High School?

How does it may you feel?

A: For lack of a better word – pressure – in class- they expect you to distract the class and not do your work.

They always have an eye on you; they watch what you're doing and the second you slip up, they catch you and call your parents or something and try to exploit you as much as they can. They have unfair expectations.

Joseph stated that he often felt the pressure of being under the scrutiny and review by students and staff at his school. On most days he felt like teachers always had their eyes on him, as if watching and waiting for him to perform or respond in accordance to the perceptions of many African American high school males. He insisted that there were unfair expectations in the classroom and school and this caused him to feel the pressure to act and behave similarly to that of his White male counterparts. Joseph was asked how he manages and responds to the pressure that he has alluded to while at school. He responded by providing his assessment of the Town and the White residents who make up the majority population.

Q: What do you perceive is the message when you have these experiences?

A: What I get is they are, their world is only what they've been shown or told to them – they expect we are there because of our location – like we had to come to that school –

like they expect us to not do our work or cause trouble. All they know is what is in their town or local area and not see the good side of African Americans.

Q: How do you handle it?

A: I handle it differently depending on the circumstances.

Q: Give me an example?

A: If I'm in the hall or something, I can be myself - I can voice my opinion and come at you. But if you talk about me or my race, I'll express myself but not in the classroom...cause you know, as the saying goes "As in Rome, do as the Romans." I mean, I do what I have to do to get through the day and when I have that moment in time I will express myself. I don't have to do it often, I feel like if you tell them once and you tell them the right way, you don't have to tell them again. Sometimes I don't say anything at all and because I know that they don't know as much as they think they know! I take it as a special case – like they are not well educated about African Americans and I just go on about my day – I just let it slide.

As a former military child who moved around a lot, I gathered that Joseph had the experiences of different groups of people unlike the other participants. His age and maturity level suggested that he has learned how to accommodate his surroundings and the people who make up those surroundings. He stated that his high school appears to be made up of people who only know what they have been told through the years and have only experienced life in the context of the town in which they live in. As a result, Joseph indicated that many students and specific staff do not see the good side of African Americans because all they know about the world is the town in which they live. Consequently, Joseph has made the decision to make his own adjustments in order to blend in with the rest of the school. He stated that 'As in Rome, do as the Romans' was a philosophy in which he implored. This saying was utilized in his efforts to 'do what I

have to do to get through the day'. This was suggestive of an attempt to conform to his surroundings as opposed to retaliating and fighting against his surroundings.

When Joseph was asked if he had witnessed unfair expectations directed toward other students of color at his school, he shared an experience in P.E. class with several of his White classmates.

A: I see other African Americans like in gym class, like most of the times we play basketball like most teenagers do and they just expect us to turn into MJ or LeBron or somebody – and when we don't they like "Oh, man!" This like just goes to being at the top of their expectations straight to the bottom if you like miss one open shot, or if you can't dunk yet, or like if we run in gym – they think you supposed to always come in first and fast.

This response was a very real and common occurrence related to young African American males. Many persons within our society have a very traditional view and imagination when it comes to the African American male. Those who fall into this category consider that the African American male is often the most athletic, the most agile, the fastest and the strongest among other males in a group. This perception of athleticism for Joseph is demonstrated in his experience in P.E. class. He indicates that White students have unfair expectations that the African American males in his P.E. class are naturally gifted in sports like basketball. The perceptions are that these males are able to slam dunk a basketball goal like MJ (i.e. reference to retired NBA superstar Michael Jordan, formerly of the Chicago Bulls) or like LeBron (i.e. reference to LeBron James - NBA superstar with the Cleveland Cavaliers, or these African American males should be able to run faster than all others in the class. Joseph indicated that these and athletic traits are at the top of the list of expectations for White students in the P.E. class.

While Joseph has made personal adjustments to himself and has further managed to blend in with his school environment, he continues to view his school life as if always under a microscope. He reiterated several times that what he sees as unfair expectations from students and staff is the cause of a lot of pressure he experiences on a daily basis.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: Makes me feel the pressure! Like I'm always under a microscope!

Similarly, I interviewed Anthony who also shared his perspective on the high school, the community and the expectations he has experienced. Anthony is a transplant from Kansas City, Missouri and is in his first year as a ninth grade student. He is an only child who resides in South Carolina with his mother. The eighth grade was his first year in South Carolina and he attended a middle school in Charleston (C. E. Williams Middle School). Anthony does have an aunt and uncle who reside in Charleston, but his remaining family members, to include his father, maternal and paternal grandparents, cousins and friends continue to reside in Missouri. This student expressed his desire to return to Missouri on several different occasions during the interview.

When asked about his transition into a new high school in suburban South Carolina, he commented on previous conversations held with other students in the neighborhood.

A: Well, some of my African American friends tell me about their experience and the thing about it is when I first got to school. I kinda had a feeling there was going to be a lot of racist people because there are a high percentage of white people, so I prepared myself.

Anthony indicated that he expected he would be in the minority student population in his new high school. He had discussed with other students of color their perception of the school in which he was to attend, and these conversations led him to prepare himself

for a larger number of White students in the school. This was a new experience, one in which he was unaccustomed to in other schools he had attended. In all of his previous schools, both in Kansas City, Missouri and in Charleston, South Carolina, Anthony indicated he had attended predominantly Black schools that enrolled fewer White students. Now that he has transitioned to a new suburban high school, his experience is now the reverse of more White students and fewer Black students.

Q: How is your high school different from the school you went to in Missouri or in Charleston?

A: More white people! This is a new experience for me!

Q: What was your reaction when you first started at () High School?

A: I knew some black people from the neighborhood. You don't see black people until lunch though.

Q: Now what makes those schools different?

A: More black people. I feel comfortable with both, but you bond better with people from your own race!

In his first semester as a ninth grade student, Anthony noted a different set of expectations by teachers when student misbehaviors occurred. He described that some of his White teachers did not address student concerns when it was reported by African American students. Instead, teachers presumably brushed it off and seemingly disregarded the concern presented by the student.

A:...but you would tell the administrator or the teacher who are mostly white, and they won't do nothing about it – but if it was a white person they would do something.

A: Sometimes the teachers really don't listen when students try to tell the teacher. I have seen this – they will say it's not a big deal or you're going to be fine and stuff like that.

Interestingly, both Anthony and Joseph have lived in other states outside of South Carolina, have attended other schools and have experienced both a predominantly black school environment as well as a predominantly white school environment throughout their matriculation through school. In both case studies, the two students noted the major differences and perspectives attending high school in a suburban community.

According to Boutte (2008), when examining the ethos in most schools, the valuation of diversity is not readily apparent in teacher attitudes, instructional practices, curricula, and school policies. Although rapidly changing demographics and accompanying negative performance trends of students from non-mainstream backgrounds implore educators to consider issues of diversity and equity, teachers give little or no substantive attention to sociocultural and sociopolitical issues that mediate teaching and learning in an increasingly diverse world (p. 165). Through these lenses, both students Anthony and Joseph communicate that the environment in the high school leaves much to be desired when it came to embracing all students.

The third of the four students who chose to participate in the research study was Eric. Eric was also a first time ninth grade student. He was coincidentally the younger brother of Joseph who was the sole senior of the group. Eric came from the same former military family but did not experience the frequent relocations from one to school to the next. He has attended different schools throughout his school career, one elementary school in Georgia, a second elementary school in Virginia and seventh grade in a different middle school within the same current school district in South Carolina. During his eighth grade

year, Eric attended the feeder middle school for the high school he currently attends. Eric does not currently participate on any athletic team at school, nor is he actively involved in any extra-curricular activities at school.

When asked about any unfair expectations or perceptions he may have experienced while attending the suburban high school, Eric discussed his IBA (Introduction to Business Applications) class.

A: The teacher in IBA doesn't do anything in that class to the white students, they can bring drinks and stuff (and you know you are not supposed to have drinks in the computer labs), but they get to do it. The teacher is always on my case cause I type slow; me and this white boy in my class type slower than the rest of the class. But she never gets on his case even when he types slower than me.

His perception in the IBA class is that the White teacher issues unfair treatment toward him and not the same treatment toward the White students in the class. He discussed his perceptions of differences in the classroom rules, as well as his perceived ideas of unfair treatment of the teacher toward him. Eric strongly suggested that he is unfairly expected to type faster and abide by the classroom rules, whereas the White students in the class are permitted to type slower and allowed to violate classroom rules by eating and/or drinking in class. Similar to first time ninth grader Anthony, the current high school is a new and different experience for Eric. This high school experience is the first predominantly White school he has attended while enrolled in public school.

Q: Have you had similar experiences in other places?

A: I never experienced this in other schools until () – there are more white people. In other places where I lived it was more equal - not like ().

This researcher concluded that there are likely instances of different classroom and school expectations manifesting by and between African American students and White

students. However, it is further very likely that both students (Eric and Anthony) continue to adjust to high school and the increased expectations teachers and staff have of all students.

The fourth and final student interviewed was also in his first year as a ninth grade student. However, significantly different from the other three students (the other two ninth grade students in particular), Dexter was a product of the suburban town where he previously attended all schools in the attendance area. These schools would include the feeder elementary, feeder middle and now current high school. Dexter was the second to the youngest child in his family. He was a school athlete, where he plays B-Team football and is a wrestler in the 132 lb. weight class. Unlike the other students interviewed for this research study, Dexter desired the military as a career as opposed to attaining a college degree immediately after high school. Dexter was also the only student of the four participants who did not have any formal predominantly Black experiences.

When asked about any unfair expectations or perceptions of unjust attitudes and behaviors by students and staff in the high school, Dexter expressed that he had not had these experiences directly. .

A: Teachers like me, they always making sure I'm okay. Sometimes I come in kind of quiet and they like (Dexter), "Are you okay?" "Do you need to go to the nurse?" Or something like that. I just say, No, I'm good – just tired.

However, he was a witness to an experience that occurred in middle school (i.e. 7th grade) that he felt may qualify under this topic.

Q: Can you give me an example of an injustice that you may have experienced or seen someone else experience in your school?

A: Well, I was in middle school and it was Valentine's Day, and a white boy just like knocked this black guy's stuff down and the black guy told him he should apologize and the white said he didn't have to. The teacher saw it and so she jumped in. I was like, "Is this what () is now?" This is not the () I know – I mean, if they don't want to be bothered I let them go and be by myself.

In the case described above by Dexter, he acknowledged the expectations he had of student behaviors in his middle school. As a witness to the incident and the verbal exchange between the African American student and the White male student, he asked himself the question, "Is this what () is now?" To Dexter, these behaviors and responses were uncharacteristic and unrepresentative of the students whom he attended school with. Consequently, he declared that based on these recent experiences, "This was not the () I know!" Here, Dexter seems to suggest that all students were capable and expected to get along one with the other and would avoid disruption and disagreement at all costs. Dexter questioned his own relationships with other students in his school when he thought to himself, "I thought I should just avoid the White kids." Instead, Dexter rationalized the situation and gave the benefit of doubt to the students when he determined..."But I thought maybe that is just one white kid; maybe he was having a bad day and wasn't feeling like himself – it's not all the White kids."

A: After that incident, I thought I should just avoid the white kids. But I thought maybe that is just one white kid; maybe he was having a bad day and wasn't feeling like himself – it's not all the white kids.

4.5 Loneliness and Isolation

One of the staple responses and outcomes of attending a predominantly White suburban high school is the African American male often experiences loneliness and

isolation. According to Rothstein (2014), “The racial segregation of schools has been intensifying because the segregation of neighborhoods has been intensifying”. The suburban high school in which the eight African American males attend was divided almost exclusively according to social economic status. The lion’s share of White students reside in two parent, middle to upper middle class homes that have a family history of attending school in this community. This town was by far a community town that comprises several generations of family history, each either currently living or has lived in the town and previously attended the suburban high school. While on the other hand, many of the African American students are considered poor to middle class residents who may also have a history of living in the town and attending the local high school. However, one major factor separating the African American students from the White students who attend this high school was the large gap in socio economic status of the families. The SES of the students and families was a significant variable and a contributing factor to the experiences of loneliness and isolation referenced by African American male students.

During the initial interview, Anthony discussed what he perceived as loneliness and isolation as a student transplant from another state and now attending a new school. He referred to his experiences of feeling like no one seemed to care about what was happening to him (often situations that were precipitated by his White classmates). In those instances, Anthony commented that his teachers did not take an interest in his complaints pertaining to other students. In many instances, Anthony was told that his situations were ‘no big deal’ or was told by teachers ‘you’re going to be fine’. These responses led to his feelings as though he were an outsider and further exacerbated his

feelings of isolation and not having anyone to listen or talk to. He would ultimately conclude that there was no point in sharing these attitudes and behaviors by fellow students with his teachers. Consequently, when things occurred, he would just ‘do nothing’ - ‘accept it’ and ‘just move on’.

A: Sometimes the teachers really don’t listen when students try to tell the teacher. I have seen this – they will say it’s not a big deal or you’re going to be fine and stuff like that.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: It makes me feel like I don’t have anyone to talk to if something like this happens to me – like I don’t know how to find a teacher that understands what I’m talking about.

Q: When you feel there’s no one you can talk to who understands, how does that make you feel?

A: It makes me feel...not discourage me, like there’s no point in telling anyone about it – it’s not like I will handle it myself, just that I can’t really talk about it.

Q: Finish this sentence: Since there is no one I feel I can talk to who understands, I do what?

A: As a result..... “I do nothing, I accept it and move on.”

Most concerning regarding Anthony was his approach and responses to his academics when experiencing attitudes and behaviors by students and staff that contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Like many students in very similar situations, Anthony retreated and faltered in the classroom causing undue stress resulting in academic failure. He very candidly admitted that he surrendered and was uncommitted to his assignments.

A: It does not cause me to study more but less – you just move that class to the side and not really try when it seems the teacher don’t care about you – makes you not want to do anything or work hard in that class.

According to the data found in Power School, Anthony had a pattern of failing in his classes during the first semester of the school year. His core classes were extremely low academically. In particular was his English I, Algebra I, and World Geography classes where his average grade was below 60. This academic failure was further demonstrated in his Spanish I class where semester grades also ranked below a grade of 60. We can safely surmise that Anthony may have experienced difficulty in his transition to high school. Although his school discipline record provided no evidence of problematic behavior of any kind, it was likely that Anthony was victimized by a culture shock experience while attending the predominantly White high school.

In an interestingly similar interview, Eric shared his experience of feeling lonely and isolated while in school. He was also in a transitional phase as a first-time ninth grade student. He too experienced his grades begin to slip in his core classes, particularly English I where he had an average grade of below 60. However, in other core content and elective classes, Eric was more inconsistent than in his work habits than he was failing. Records show that this student was academically successful and passing in the majority of his classes, averaging grades in the low 70 range during one quarter and as high as mid-90 range during other quarters. As a former military family, it was likely that Eric has broader experiences with different classes and genres of people than that of Anthony. Eric has lived in states like Georgia and Virginia, as well as other areas within South Carolina. Yet racial isolation played a major role in his transition and adjustment to a predominantly White high school. When asked about his experiences as a ninth grade African American student and how these experiences made him feel, Eric indicated that he did not like his new found experiences at all. In fact, he stated that being in the

minority population in a predominantly White high school ‘makes him (me) feel very alone’.

Q: Are there any classes where you are the only African American student?

A: I am the only African American in every class except PE.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: I don’t like it at all; it makes me feel very alone.

Dexter was the last student on the schedule to be interviewed. For several days, his mother and I scheduled and re-scheduled the interview time and location. In the end, we committed to a late Sunday afternoon at the same location as the other student interviews. Although Dexter expressed that he had not experienced any perceptions of socially unjust attitudes and behaviors by other students and staff at his school, he did discuss his experiences of isolating himself from the mainstream student population. More specifically, Dexter isolated himself from other African American students in his school whom he perceived as causing trouble or were frequently in trouble. He communicated an urgent need to separate and refrain from other African American students that he viewed as disruptive.

A: Half the reason why black kids are getting written up is cause they don’t know how to keep their mouths shut! That’s why white kids think like they do about black kids. I just stay to myself - I can keep myself out of trouble and instead of trying to help others, then we both get into trouble. I don’t want that, I just want to be known as a good kid.

This response is also very suggestive of Dexter’s attempt to adopt the culture and characteristics of the predominant student population in his high school. Of the students who qualified under the selection criteria, as well as those students who ultimately chose to participate in a series of interviews, Dexter did not have any notable experience

outside of the suburban town, nor did he have any formal experiences with a predominantly African American community. He has attended every year of his schooling in the local town, and considers himself a 'strong Christian' and a very sociable person. He viewed the behaviors of African American students as symptomatic of the views, opinions, attitudes and perceptions of the White students in the school. In the above response, Dexter adamantly expressed his discontent with the behaviors of Black kids and further indicates "That's why white kids think like they do about black kids." As a student, Dexter has maintained passing grades ranging from the mid-70's to the upper 90's. However, while not being classified as having a problem with his behavior, Dexter has at least two discipline referrals, one for disrespect and a second for inappropriate behaviors.

4.6 Relationships

One of the more important factors associated with students of color attending predominantly White schools and whether or not they experience perceptions of social justice/injustice or not, was their ability to build and cultivate meaning relationships with other students and their teachers. Several of the research questions pertained to the opportunity and/or ability of African American high school males to establish relationships in their school. In the overwhelming majority of interviews, these students had difficulty establishing wholesome relationships with teachers in particular and some students in general. For example, Joseph expressed his dismay with teachers whom he felt did not support him (or other students of color). Instead, Joseph commented that

teachers contribute to the social injustice of African American males on a daily basis. He alludes to teachers who accept what other teachers have encouraged, and that teachers never raise question about the position or decisions of their colleagues.

Q: How have educators contributed to social injustice at your school?

A: They contribute every day. They try to be accepted by the other teachers – they don't question another teacher – they will just accept and agree with it...

In other instances, Joseph was challenged on occasion with maintaining positive relationships with students in his class. As a high school senior, Joseph had several experiences of being the only student of color in his classes. Even when asked whether other students of color were in any of his classes, Joseph provided a noticeably cynical look toward the interviewer, as if to communicate that being the only African American male student in a class is commonplace. He stated that with the exception of PE class, he did not currently have any other classes with a student of color.

Q: Are there any classes where you are the only African American student?

A: I'm the only African American student in class, except for PE class.

Although Joseph has attended several different schools throughout his school years, he continued to struggle with his relationships with several of his White student classmates. These struggles have begun to make an impact on his attendance during the school year after accumulating seven days of unexcused absences. When asked about his days of unexcused absences, Joseph was very vague in his rationale and reason for his non-attendance. However, he did indicate that if given the opportunity or choice to stay at home and not attend school, he indicated, "I'm going to take it!" Unfortunately, his unexcused absences have begun to take a toll on his grades and grade point average for

the year. At the time the grades were reviewed, Joseph had a 2.112 grade point average, as well as a low English IV and Probability & Statistics grade, both of which he would require for high school graduation. As a senior, Joseph was assigned to an abbreviated schedule of only six classes. This schedule allowed him to have a late start in the morning or an early release in the afternoon. As a fill in to no classes, Joseph was assigned a study hall that provided him ample time to seek additional assistance or leave the campus at the completion of his class. On the majority of days, Joseph took advantage of coming to school late or leaving school earlier. Joseph considered staying at home on a normal school day a reward and this further prevented contact with students whom he does not have a good relationship.

Q: How have your experiences affected your attendance?

A: If I get a chance where I don't have to go to school that day – I'm going to take it!

There are some days I know I have to deal with these people, so I'm like I'll just stay home – you just don't feel like messing with that person that day.

Interestingly during his interview, Anthony acknowledged that he has witnessed and/or experienced issues of unjust behavior and attitudes from a few students and staff in his school. Being new and a recent transplant into the area, he had expressed a very sincere desire to return to Kansas City, Missouri. However, he admitted that overall it has been easy making friends in the suburban high school. He considered himself a very sociable 'people kind of person'. He asserted that he has made a lot of friends and most of them are White and these friends (whom he emphasizes are not racists) understand and 'know the deal' about people of color.

A: There were a lot more things to do in Kansas City. We went to the movies a lot, Six Flags, we went swimming. I had a lot of family close by. In SC, I listen to music a lot.

I want to go back to Missouri. I have my grandmother, my grandpa, my dad, auntie – my dad’s sister, my other grandmother and my other grandpa (my dad’s dad), a lot of cousins are there, and a lot of my friends. I have a lot of friends in () too. I have no problems making friends – I’m a people kind of person.

Additional questions during the interview with a similar and related response(s):

Q: Do some white teachers and students understand what you are experiencing?

A: I have mostly white friends and they are not racists at all, they kinda know what the deal is.

Q: How do you know that they are not? What makes them different?

A: The way they look at black people – the way they act and how they treat them – they don’t look at them like they’re crazy or anything, but like a regular person – everybody is the same – I don’t really know if my teachers are like this.

Anthony was very open and noticeably comfortable talking about his experiences and perceptions of social justice /injustice in his high school. He was eager to talk and appeared to be relieved that someone would ask about his journey from Kansas City, Missouri to South Carolina. On several occasions Anthony would refer to particular students or staff as racists, or would categorize a certain behavior as racists. He was witness to the ‘N’ word being used in class and in the school hallways on several different occasions by White students. He attributed much of these conversations to being the only African American student, or one of a couple of African American students in a class and that he was confident these conversations were generally referencing him in some way. On two distinctly separate instances during the interview, Anthony indicated that he was advised by Black friends in the neighborhood about his nearly all White new high school. However, he hardly saw these same neighborhood

friends in school; only during lunch and dismissal. Anthony advised that the school's administration could help with the relationships between African American students and teachers. He indicated that the one thing that would help with the relationship between students and staff is for teachers to 'treat them (students of color) better'. Although, in his opinion, teachers would only act like they were interested and would soon return to what they have always done. He expressed little confidence that improved relationships would serve as an end result in his high school.

Q: How is your high school different from the school you went to in Missouri or in Charleston?

A: More white people! This is a new experience for me!

Q: What was your reaction when you first started at () High School?

A: I knew some black people from the neighborhood. You don't see black people until lunch though.

Q: What do you think needs to happen from the school or school district to help African American students in a predominately white high school?

A: I would say 'treat them better'.

Q: Do you think talking about it in the open with all the student together help?

A: They'll just act like their interested and go back to doing what they do.

Eric also had the experience of being the only African American in all of his classes; except for PE. He too had witnessed comments being made and names being called in class and in the hallways about African Americans. He was most confident that the names and comments were referencing him in some way. These acts he classified as racism and the people who made the comments or called the names he considered them to be racist as well. Once he overheard a classmate refer to 'a fried piece of toast'. Initially

Eric admitted he thought of striking the person while in class. However, his conscious overrode his emotions and he determined that striking the student ‘wouldn’t be a GODLY thing to do’. Therefore, he strived to ignore some of the behaviors and comments made by the students in his classes.

A: Honestly. I don’t respond to it – I try not to do anything. Sometimes we joke around in class, cause like one day, this white boy said something about “Fried piece of toast”. I don’t know where that came from - but I wanted to hit him (but I didn’t because it wouldn’t be a GODLY thing to do) I definitely don’t want to get into trouble. I try not to respond to them being racist.

Eric admitted that he had made new friends in his transition to a new high school. He continued to wrestle with being the only student of color in his classes, much unlike his previous school in another cluster of the same school district. There, he admitted, it was more equal; not like at (). Nonetheless, he continued to build relationships even though he feels alone and at times while in school.

Q: Are there any classes where you are the only African American student?

A: I am the only African American in every class except PE.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: I don’t like it at all, it makes me feel very alone, but I have friends – some white friends.

As challenging as it has been for several of the male students to build and maintain healthy relationships with other students and teachers in the class and school, Dexter admitted that he had good relationships with both students and teachers alike. He unlike the other interviewees attended school with the larger majority of students who currently attend the suburban high school. Dexter was a product of the town and had matriculated

through the system as one of a few students of color since elementary school. He admitted that he had had few, if any real experiences with social injustice or negative attitudes and behaviors by others. He considered himself one of the lucky ones because he had not had a negative experience nor had an impartial perception regarding a White student or teacher. This positionality was very uncommon for most African American males who attend predominantly White high schools. However, the experience of Dexter made for an interesting case study of its own, particularly ascertaining how and why his experiences were uniquely different from so many other male students of color. It perhaps can be argued that his quest to be recognized as a State Championship wrestler and plans of becoming a future Marine serve as inspirations to him while in high school.

A: One time I had a new friend who was an African American male that moved in. He had a concern for being beaten up by the white kids. I said “Is that what people really think about () High School. If so, I was like one of the lucky ones...I never had to experience that kind of stuff.

A: I take pride that I don’t get involved with drugs, or shooting. I mean I’m taking advantage of living in a safe country, a safe state and school – I want to do something with my life – I want to be better than those people, I want to be known as (Dexter), the 15 year old State Champion Wrestler who will go into the military (maybe the Marine’s).

One other possible solution to Dexter experiencing such positive relationships with other students and staff may be his connection to athletics, in particular the football team.

Dexter was enamored by the show of kindness and generosity shown to him as a member of the B-Team Football Program. He remarked how teammates would make offers and share their resources with him at will. Dexter regarded the football team as a ‘brotherhood’.

Q: How about with football? How has that worked for you?

A: *The football team treats me like a brother.* *I mean, if I need something, like a ride, they be like you need a ride home, and I'm like No, I'm good - and they say you sure? I say, yeah, I'm good. It's like a brother hood.*

Regarding separate questions with related responses:

Q: *Do you feel your teachers and guidance counselors are supportive of you?*

A: *Teachers like me, they always making sure I'm okay. Sometimes I come in kind of quiet and they like (Dexter), "Are you okay?" "Do you need to go to the nurse?" Or something like that. I just say, No, I'm good – just tired.*

Q: What would you tell other students who don't have good relationships with the students or teachers at your school?

A: Get your act together! This is your life! If you don't succeed in high school, then you can't succeed in life. I would tell them to just pray! GOD will always help you out of something.

Q: Have you experienced any teacher that has had a negative or skewed opinion of African American males?

A: People like me cause I'm a social person!
I keep up with my academics. I am a strong Christian.

Q: What happens when the jokes are against African Americans?

A: Teachers are not racial towards me. Sometimes I hear the white students crack jokes sometimes. And it's like, when the black boys say something racial, everything is okay, but when a white person says something, it's like the reverse and everything changes.

Q: What about when white students make jokes against African Americans?

A: It's not my problem or my business. I'm not saying I wouldn't care if something happened to another African American. I'm just saying that I would let them handle it because it's not my business.

4.7 Patterns

Reviewing the patterns of behavior, thought processes, perceptions and responses of the students who qualified under the selection criteria and were subsequently interviewed proved to be an enlightening activity. In a large majority of instances, the African American male high school students responded similarly to the questions asked and further revealed very common experiences with socially unjust attitudes and behaviors of their White student classmates and their teachers. Notable similarities among all of the students included class assignment into predominantly College Preparatory classes. Only one of the students who qualified under the selection criteria was placed in Honors courses. However, he too was one of the four male students that declined to participate in the follow-up interviews by the researcher. Subsequently, all of the students that did participate were actively enrolled in College Preparatory courses. Consistently the African American males defied the perceptions and demonstrated few behavior concerns. No one student accrued more than two disciplinary referrals. According to the discipline ledger, only two students were assigned two discipline referrals; three students received one discipline referral and three students did not have any discipline referrals. Of the students who participated in follow-up interviews, mixed reviews of referrals were meted out. Specifically, two students were assigned two referrals; one student assigned one referral and one student did not have any assigned referrals. Special interest was given to participating students family dynamics. Half of the students who qualified lived with both mother and father and a second group of students lived with a single parent (namely an identified mother). Those students who resided with both parents consistently had

siblings of both genders in the home. Most common was two sisters and at least one but mostly two brothers. The single mother households ranged from either no sibling in the home to a mixed array of siblings. All of the students, as per one of the qualifying criteria, qualified under the State Guidelines for Free/Reduced lunch assistance.

Other very significant patterns that were common across all identified and/or participating students was the lack of fairness and equity from teachers and administrators and the lack of confidence that teachers and administrators would handle perceived and unjust behaviors as they are reported. African American male students were the targets of name calling and racially motivated conversations in the classrooms and hallways that demeaned students of color. As a result, several of the students frequently resorted to isolation and in some instances verbal retaliation toward their student classmates. These behaviors occurred most frequently with the younger participants who were new to high school and experienced perceptions that their safety was in jeopardy or made determinations that the expectations of other students and teachers were grossly unfair. When these unjust attitudes and behaviors were perceived to occur, the African American male students admittedly experienced academic difficulty in their classes and grades began to drop.

In general, the African American high school male students viewed themselves as very sociable, successful at making friends with White students in their school and able to conform to their school environment. Approximately two of the students were athletes, both football players and one of the two was on the wrestling team. Approximately half of the participating expressed a deep affinity toward Christian values and beliefs. The individual students as well as his family are active Church-goers and

participants in their places of regular worship. A consistent and noteworthy concern for oneself was an emerging pattern among all of the male participants. This pattern of behavior was a dominant trait in the character of each of the male students.

4.8 Outliers

This researcher discovered that there were more common patterns among the qualifying and participating African American high school male students than there were differences in perception and experiences. Starkly different in most every facet, Dexter presented the greatest difference of positionality and opinion than did the remaining students. Dexter was the only male student that lived and regularly attended every school in the suburban town from elementary through high school. He admitted to not having any prior experiences with negative attitudes, perceptions or influences associated with social injustice. On the contrary, Dexter believed very passionately that “everyone likes me” and “we’re all the same”. His epistemological orientation throughout the scheduled interviews maintained that the teachers helped him frequently and that the outcomes and disciplinary sanctions meted out against African American students was done to themselves and by themselves. Dexter acknowledged that he is a ‘strong Christian’, ‘very sociable’ and is unaware of the prejudices and biases that may occur in the suburban high school. Though he admitted he has not been exposed to any formal or informal experience that was predominantly comprised of people of color, he lavished in the thought that “I was one of the lucky ones; I have not had to experience stuff like that”.

One of the most interesting facets of the interviews was hearing the positioning of Dexter against the positioning of the remaining students. Dexter was also the only student expressing an interest in a military career as opposed to pursuing his college education immediately upon high school graduation.

4.9 Summary

The purpose of this study was to ascertain factors that influence the perceptions of social justice/injustice on the lives of eight qualifying African American high school males. Individual and semi-structured interviews were held in order to provide an analysis and examination of perceived attitudes and behaviors of students and staff. The emerging themes of expectations, loneliness and isolation, and relationships were derived as a result of first and second coding cycles for qualitative data.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

“When they approach me they see...everything and anything except me... [this] invisibility...occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes...”

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

In the above phrase from the book *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison seems to suggest that when society looks upon a certain individual or group (presumably the African American male), it sees all of the pathological identities unjustly assigned to him by past and present society. In many instances, this (our) society clings to those beliefs which people have confidently and consistently held over generations and thus continues to live by everyday throughout their lives. That social imagery was reflective of the perceptions and influences that significantly impair the social, emotional, psychological and in this case study the academic well-being of many African American males. Social imagery or the manner in which perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about certain groups shapes people's understanding of those groups, has served as a hallmark upon which disenfranchisement have formed the experiences of diverse cultural groups in the U.S. (Horsman, 1981; Spring, 2006). This disenfranchisement has wreaked havoc over the use of tools, language, forms of media, constructed knowledge and perceived experiences that pertain to the African American male. As for this research case study, I quote

(Howard, 2008; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011), “It is the hope that these new approaches to studying Black males may play an important role in creating useful research, theory, and practices that will help to improve the schooling experiences and educational outcomes for Black males, who consistently find themselves at the bottom of most academic indices”.

The subsequent pages will further provide a review of the purpose of this research study, offer conclusions to the research study and further provide implications and recommendations for future study on the topic related to perceptions of social justice/injustice on the lives of African American high school males.

5.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze what high school African-American males perceived as major and significant influences that directly impacted their academic achievement while attending a predominantly White suburban high school. The study also identified factors that were feasible in ameliorating the influence and perception of social justice/injustice while enrolled in high school.

5.3 Addressing the Research Questions

The primary research questions for this study were: 1) How have your perceptions of social justice/injustice at your school influenced your academic achievement(s) as an African American male high school student? 2) How have educators (i.e. teachers, administrators, counselors and other staff) contributed to social justice/injustice in the

classroom and/or school? 3) How have your experiences with social justice/injustice made you feel as an African American male student? The preponderance of information available in current literature strongly suggests that African American males (as compared to African American females and all other students of different ethnic groups) experience far more incidents of social injustice from classmates and teachers when attending a predominantly White high school.

Gleaned from responses to Question One, the literature was consistent that African-American male students experience greater and significant rates of social injustice in schools. The perceptions developed by this group over varied periods of time implied that the academic prowess of African American male students was reduced to diminishing returns as a result of attitudes and behaviors shown toward them. In a predominantly White school environment, it was a well-established expectation that students in the minority will adapt to the values, practices and beliefs of the school, or risk victimization by the repercussions of choosing to do otherwise.

The establishment of community within the classroom and the school was essential to the adaptation and assimilation of African American male students. While loneliness and isolation continue to persist, hints of inclusion and acceptance go a long way toward the acknowledgment of one's sense of connectivity and belonging. Consistent with several research studies, students of color have higher academic performances when teachers (and students) demonstrate a caring bond and attitude toward them while in school. When African American male students have voice and the opportunity to be heard, as well as the freedom to express themselves, their school performances, behaviors and attitudes show marked distinctions of improvement as opposed to when these same

opportunities are not provided. Contrarily, when opportunities for inclusion are denied, African American male student's risk increased behavioral concerns and a decline in their academic performances. In this research case study, several of the participating students regressed academically in their classes. Student discipline was not a major issue for any of the students, but grades began to fail due to increased lack of effort and commitment to coursework. More than half of the African American male students indicated that when they felt isolated and excluded from the mainstream class, they chose to avoid completing their assignments and withdrew from participation in their classes. Fortunate for these same students, attendance did not emerge as a significant issue as their attendance remained consistently good.

Barring the exception of one outlier participant, the remaining participants experienced unjust behaviors and prejudiced attitudes directed toward them while in school. Much of this I anticipate stems from preconceived and exaggerated historical constructions of the African American male's social imagery and his preconceived inability to achieve at a higher level.

Question Two offered additional insight into how and why African American students have difficulty excelling in predominantly White high schools. When asked, "How do teachers, administrators and counselors contribute to socially unjust behaviors in the class and school", it became very evident that high school staffs are guided by a hands-off approach to the issues and experiences of students of color. Only one student interviewed communicated that he felt his issues and concerns were being heard by school staff. On the contrary, other African American male students felt ignored and 'blown off' by staff, as if they were not being heard nor listened to by the adults. These

events created feelings of insecurity, isolation and loneliness in a class(es) of all White students. These actions were a direct correlation to the position taken by Brown and Davis (2000), who indicated that the social and developmental needs of the African American male are generally not being met by schools. Hence, school staff presumably encourages the stereotype threats that lead to negative perceptions and self-concepts of this identified group of students. The realities of disengagement and disinterest in school exacerbate the negative experiences and outcomes and further contribute to the inability of the African American male to fulfill his role as a capable and competent learner in a traditional school setting.

Question Three focused on how prejudice and social injustice in school made the African American male feel about himself and his surroundings. While there was a paucity of research that delved into the thoughts, opinions and feelings of African American high school male students on this subject, this case study revealed uniqueness about the feelings of this group. In most cases, participating students felt a sense of pressure to perform and to further meet the expectations of their White peers and teachers. These expectations were viewed as grossly unfair and exceptionally unrealistic and were largely stereotypical of society's depiction of African American males. The social imagery that African American males endure continues to be a huge obstacle to overcome in most school environments. This imagery has become entrenched and engrained in the thinking of society and has further continued to prevail over decades and generations. The prevalence and practice of incorporating tenants of Critical Race Theory is increasingly needed and will provide an awareness and sensitivity to the plight of African American male students.

Lastly, resulting from the coding of data in this research study, four factors were perceived as having an influence on the social, emotional, psychological, and academic well-being of the African American high school male. These factors included the environment, expectations, loneliness and isolation, and relationships of the participating African American males.

The environment was a contributing factor in the exploration of social justice/injustice on African American males. The town in which the suburban high school is located is comprised of several generations of families. This town has a large population of aged and affluent residents who maintain high expectations of academic excellence in all of the neighborhood schools.

The second factor explored in this study was the perceived expectations of African American males by their White student classmates, teachers and administrators. The larger majority of participating students readily acknowledged that unfair and unrealistic expectations were imposed upon them. Very common were the racial remarks and gestures that strongly suggested the African American male is bigger, stronger, and faster than most other students and that these same students possess the innate ability to slam dunk a basketball like MJ or LeBron James. As a result of their experiences, the African American male students have assimilated and adapted several of the cultural and behavioral expectations of their predominantly White school environment. Each learned the trait of code switching, wherein they intentionally vacillated from character components consistent with their White counterparts to character components more in line with their own community. These character components were inclusive of several different facets of student life and were contingent upon their surroundings. As such,

African American male students resorted to the adoption of the adage, 'As in Rome, do as the Romans', which has paid huge dividends toward few behavior concerns and good school attendance. To date, the outcome for adapting the behavioral positionality of the predominant culture has proven to benefit the African American male students.

The third factor explored in this study was loneliness and isolation of the African American male while attending a predominant and super-majority high school. Whether self-imposed or deliberate and calculating by other students and teachers, loneliness and isolation were a too familiar occurrence for participating male students. The African American male students were conscientious and concerted about isolating themselves from others in order to avoid the potential troubles that often occur in classrooms and hallways of the school. Male students also shared that when the inappropriate N-word is used by White students in classrooms, it generates feelings of anger and hostility. Choices had to be made in an effort to avoid negative interactions with their White peers. Comments and behaviors such as this were disheartening to African American male students and were equally disheartening when no recourse was available through teachers and administrative staff.

The fourth factor explored in this study was the relationships (or lack of relationships) established with students, teachers and administrators. At different intervals of the school year, fear and anxiety emerge causing paranoia and a heightened concern for their individual safety and civility at school. These male students demonstrated and communicated a preference for a mixed student population in school as opposed to a majority White student population.

5.4 Implications and Recommendations

This section of Chapter Five explored the implications of this case study research and provided recommendations for future study appertaining to African American male students attending predominantly White suburban high schools. Much of the discussion specifically centered on the importance and imperative need for schools and school districts to provide professional development opportunities for all staff. Additional recommendations that were also suggested were more conversations needed to be held regarding multiculturalism and the curriculum. The awareness and understanding of differences is the hallmark of effective teaching strategies and interventions for both White and students of color.

The purpose of providing staff/professional development training on the topic of social justice/injustice is to improve teacher practice regarding diversity in education. As professionals in the educational arena, we know for certain that diversity extends well beyond the more recognizable issues such as race, ethnicity, gender and native language. Diversity has a much broader perspective and includes differences such as social class, religion, sexual orientation, ability and other areas (Nieto, 2013). However, from the perspective of African American high school males, these individuals are victimized repeatedly due to the historical and contemporary constructs in our society. Hence, there is a greater level of responsibility innately placed on the shoulders of educators to provide every individual (i.e. every student) an equal opportunity to a free and appropriate education. This education should be afforded to all students and their families without restrictions, fear of reprisals and retribution. Therefore, professional development

initiatives should seek to establish and maintain a system of consciousness regarding social justice within schools.

According to Nieto (2013), social justice in educational terms is” a set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to teaching, learning and students that form the foundation of one’s pedagogy.” This perspective further includes four significant components which include: 1) a disruption of misconceptions, untruths and stereotypes that promote inequality and discrimination; 2) a provision for materials that students will need to learn at their full potential; 3) a draw on student talents and strengths; and 4) the creation of a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports social change.

The anticipated end result of professional development initiatives focused on social justice/injustice is the acknowledgment and awareness by teaching staff and the implementation of new and different ways to include African American males into the culture of a school. More importantly however, professional development initiatives on social justice are designed for all teachers to fully recognize that students who are of color are not educationally handicapped, inept or inadequate in any way. Instead, students of color are deserving of the same rights to an equal opportunity and to receive a quality education as does any other student enrolled in a school. Consequently, if teachers who participate in professional development initiatives maintain an open mind that remains focused on diversity and the educational disproportionality experienced by many African American male students, then classrooms will be transformed into learning centers where the culture in the classroom is seen as ‘action chains’ of behaviors. According to Joseph (2000), these actions chains or patterns of daily behaviors translate into “...a fairly

predictable series of actions, one followed by another, take place and thus “common understandings emerge.”

When African American male students who attend a predominantly White high school embrace learning and see themselves as equals and are successful entities within a classroom, unimaginable learning opportunities are revealed for both teachers and students. Classrooms that are highly energized and possess a positive class/school climate have a higher achievement ratio than classrooms or schools with negative and despondent environments. According to Joyce and Calhoun (2010), “a substantial portion of outstanding student achievement is associated with elevating beliefs and actions. The effect is sufficient to bring achievement by low socioeconomic status (SES) students to levels equal to or above the levels of higher SES populations.”

Professional development initiatives such as this are designed to provide staff in traditional high schools with a basic understanding and awareness of the social, emotional, psychological and academic challenges faced by African American males in predominantly populated learning environments. These initiatives and awareness efforts have implications for other professional organizations ability to address the diverse needs of students and the achievement of an environment where social justice reigns. To do so, staffs must begin with an acknowledgement and acceptance of the various forms of diversity and oppression that continue to exist in our schools, districts and communities. According to Young (2000), “while acknowledging differences of intensity and degree...all forms of oppression are equally important, that they interact with each other in the lives of individuals and groups in complex ways, and that a fair and just society requires an end to all forms of oppression. The term oppression is referenced by Pincus

(2000) as “systemic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant.”

As we further consider the need for a multicultural curriculum and its impact on students and the classroom, the individual student's ability to learn, their opportunities to embrace higher order thinking skills and the achievement of a myriad of students at every level, it is important to discuss why theory, practice and/or policy are best used to promote, enhance and maintain positive work in the field of curriculum and diversity.

The overall purpose of theory with respect to diversity and curriculum is to provide a framework that serves as a guide and focal point to conversations, discussions and lectures that are interrelated to the topic of multiculturalism. Theory seeks to prompt the learner to probe and raise questions regarding the current literature review and to grapple with existing bodies of research that may cause the learner to draw his/her own independent conclusions relative to what is being studied. Theory in essence is the starting point to new and unknown discoveries related to diversity and curriculum in schools.

Contrarily, the purpose of practice in the field of diversity and curriculum is viewed as both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The learner (or researcher) who practices does so with the express intent of validating and verifying information and/or refuting and rebutting existing research. Following these efforts is the researcher's own replacement of antiquated and outdated information with new findings, new outcomes and new solutions that best addresses the teaching and sharing of diversity and curriculum related topics in the classroom. To raise questions and to perform qualitative and quantitative research is wise and appropriate and is consistent with Platt (2002) as he stated, “One of

the most striking shifts in university education during the last two decades has been the increased commitment to teaching diversity and multiculturalism.” This demonstrates the need and great desire by many in the field to teach and share accurate information with those who occupy seats in the classroom and lecture halls. The end result is a policy(s) that is written and enforced in agencies and schools across the country encouraging greater diversity and multicultural awareness.

In this research study, practice was considered as the vehicle that promotes, enhances and maintains positive and productive work in the field of curriculum and diversity. Practice in relation to this study establishes an awareness and opportunity to monitor programs and staff for effectiveness. According to McCarthy & Dimitriadis (2000), "Practices of ethnocentric consolidation and cultural exceptionalism are evident on a global scale and now characterize much of the tug-of-war over educational reform and multiculturalism." Much has been addressed on behalf of diversity and multiculturalism in the curriculum but the need to broaden and expand what is taught in the classroom remains a paramount issue. Through everyday occurrences and the practice of teaching and delivering multicultural instruction to students in the classroom, ideas for policy development and implementation are formed. Therefore, it is by and through practice that educators are able to positively influence each other with new and different ways of teaching students. Additionally, practice provides the necessary evidence and ammunition needed to make school climate and cultural changes within schools. Moreover, practice may also spark an interest to participate intimately in curriculum development and policy decisions that need to be made on behalf of schools, districts, state departments of education and federal mandates.

A standard for optimal use of practice can be found in the acknowledgement and awareness of diversity and the keen sense of the understanding required honoring all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, economic status, religion and orientation, or other. We have further come to know that multiculturalism is far more than recognition of differences. Instead, according to Fuller (2000), “it (multiculturalism) implies that these cultures stand in certain relationships to each other that may change as those same relationships unfold in time and space.” As teachers learn more and share more among themselves, student-teacher relationships change over time in large part due to the recognition of obvious differences, which in turn increases the odds that students may be accepted and appreciated for the cultural and ethnic differences each brings to the classroom.

The implication for curriculum diversity inclusion into the public education arena is difficult and necessary work. However, I surmise that the outcomes and levels of achievement of students far outweigh any investment of time and energy initially put toward its implementation. According to Joyce & Calhoun (2010), “Knowing you are in charge of thinking about your knowledge and skill and taking steps to augment them generate a sense of personal expertness and pride.” In other words, the benefits of implementing diversity into the curriculum are as substantial as the investments made into the curriculum. Moreover, researchers Joyce & Calhoun have conducted a series of studies of educators and professionals who have invested in themselves, hence, in the education of students and have determined that there exists “states of growth” among people. These states of growth refer to the interaction of people with their environments from the perspective of how they use their environments as sources of support and

development (2010). One of the primary outcomes of diversity inclusion is the changing of culture. According to Tylor (1967), Anthropologists describe culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by {a human} as a member of society.” Within this complex whole are shared ways in which people perceive, learn, categorize, prize, employ language, think about reality or common sense, show emotion, utilize time and space, work, play, and deal with each other (Geertz, 1983; Hall, 1959/1981; Hall, 1997). These perceptions addressed above lead to formation of social systems within classrooms, schools and school districts. These social systems have a positive and direct impact on the well-being and the success of students in the classroom.

5.5 Conclusions

In her national bestseller, “Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?”, Beverly Daniels-Tatum indicates “there is still a great deal of social segregation in our communities. Consequently, most of the early information we receive about “others” – people racially, religiously, or socioeconomically different from ourselves – does not come as a result of firsthand experience. The secondhand information we do receive has often been distorted, shaped by cultural stereotypes, and left incomplete” (1997). In Joseph, et al (2000) we read that “individuals learn their culture and internalize its complex system of values and behaviors throughout infancy, childhood, and adolescence”.

According to Wilkinson & Pearson (2009), “Schools are the environments in which youth struggle to define themselves in relation to others.” Students’ ability to succeed in

school relies not only on quality teaching and academic resources but also on a supportive school environment that fosters their growth as individuals and affirms their worth as human beings within this social setting (Payne & Smith, 2010). These social settings are invaluable to the growth and development of students in the classroom. Consequently, students are the major beneficiaries of the investments made by teachers and school administrators to improve the culture and climate in the classroom. In addition, teachers also benefit by learning new and different information that pertains to the students whom they teach. This two-way exchange of learning opportunities translates into future generations of students who will learn to be accepting of others, will embrace differences, and will become the policy makers and change agents at the local, state and federal levels.

In the real world, there are potential barriers to the success of student achievement and the promotion of diversity in the curriculum. According to Nieto (2013), “There is no question that teachers and students are influenced, positively and negatively, by societal, educational, and ideological contexts. These contexts include insufficient resources, punitive school policies, and unquestioned negative ideologies about the abilities of students and teachers alike.” What Nieto chooses to further discuss is the notion of expectations, or the lack of expectations that are so often placed upon students of color. The ‘expectations gap’ of students of some backgrounds certainly has a negative impact on whether or not students of color thrive in school. At the same time, the ‘expectations gap’ of teachers held by many in our society has an impact on whether or not teachers can be effective, competent, and caring”, (Nieto, 2013). In these instances, no one

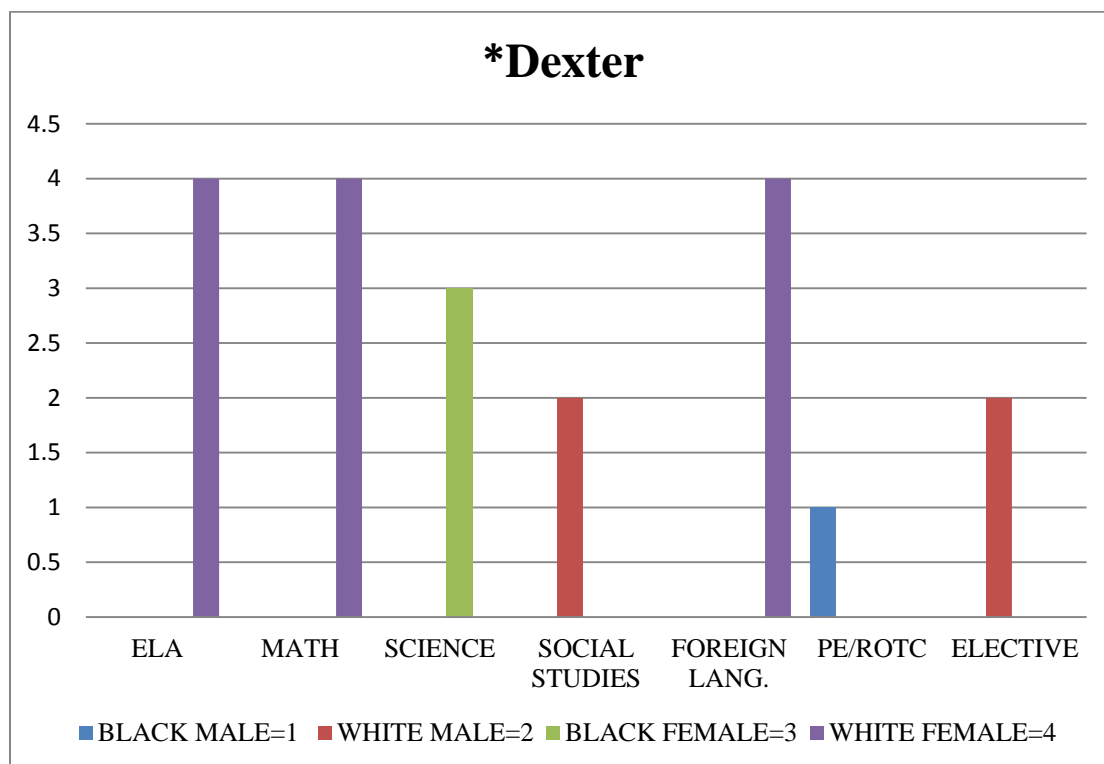
benefits (students nor teachers) due to low expectations which may result in a self-fulfilling prophecy of low performance.

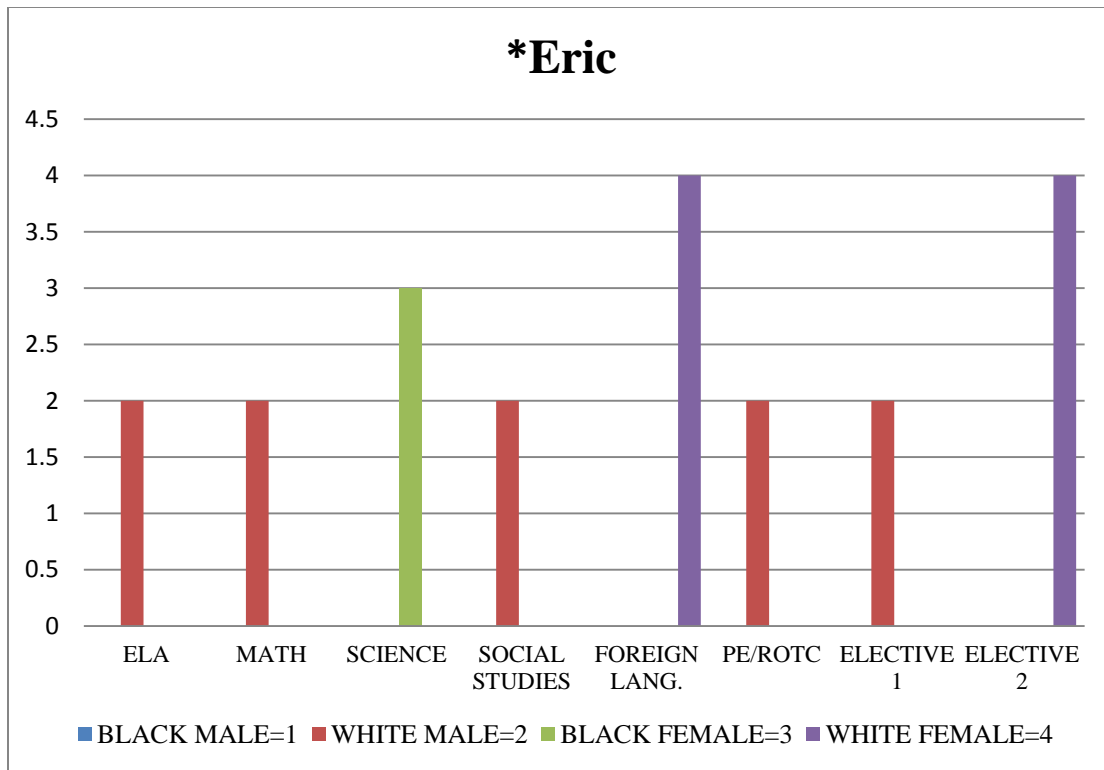
An additional potential barrier to the success of students and the implementation of diversity into the curriculum is the relationship(s) teachers have with their students. Research shows that the level of care and concern that a teacher has (or chooses not to have) has a direct impact on the potential for success or failure of students. According to Nieto (2013), “Caring goes beyond superficial acts of charity. It is a genuine love for students that entails recognizing their talents, their identities, and their needs.” The inclusion of student family members, the communities in which they live, special activities that students choose to participate in are all categories of interest that teachers who care about their students are knowledgeable about. However, low expectations and the levels of care and concern expressed to students and their families are not the only relevant issues known to have an impact on the success of students. Nieto (2013) suggests that “there are other factors besides care or lack of care – poverty, limited curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, poor health care and nutrition, stressors in the home, the nature of the community, among others – that also influence how students relate to school, but the research on teachers’ relationships with students make it clear that care matters a great deal.” Stated differently, ‘Even for teachers with the will to teach more responsively, at least four key barriers to effective differentiation exist: a lack of reflection on students as individuals; lack of clarity about what students should know, understand and be able to do as the result of a segment of learning; inadequate repertoires of instructional approaches that invite student-centeredness and flexibility;

and lack of skills to manage and facilitate flexible instruction” (Brighton, Hertberg, Moon, Tomlinson & Callahan, in press).

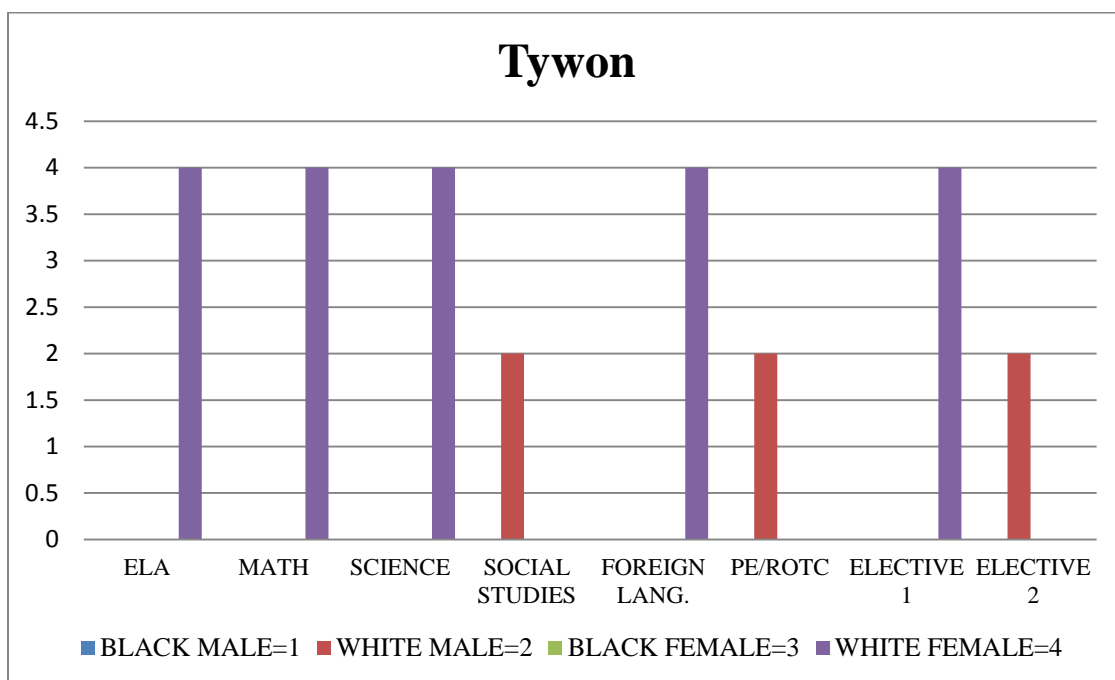
These very real conversations about diversity and inclusion are necessary in our efforts to balance the scales in the classroom. According to Ladson-Billings (2003), “Diversity is always a value added phenomenon. It is a linchpin of democracy, for without diversity there is no need for democracy. If we are all the same – we look, think, act, and believe the same things – we can be governed by consensus or acclamation. But democracy insists on different ideas, dissent, and failure to acquiesce to majority power” (p. 5). In the same manner, diversity in the classroom has similar tenants of democracy. Both seek to include the original thoughts, opinions and perspectives of others and in so doing, these variations create learning opportunities for all.

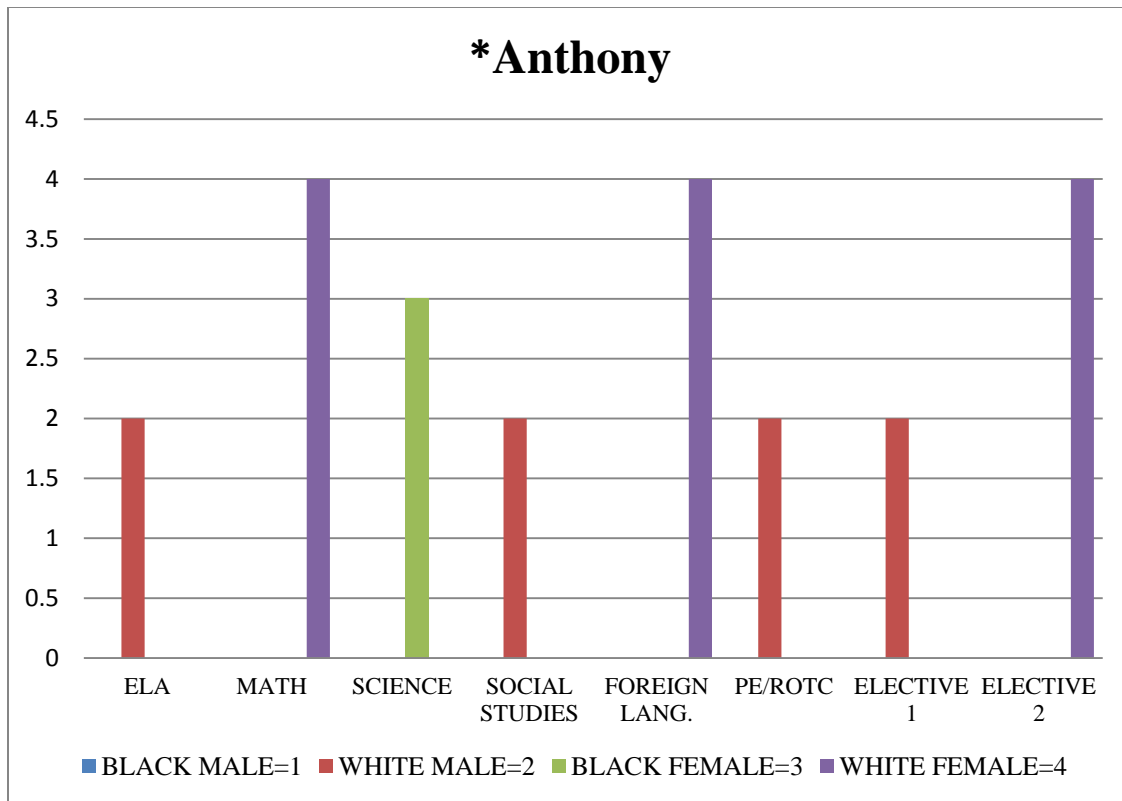
Table 5.1 Course/Teacher Data



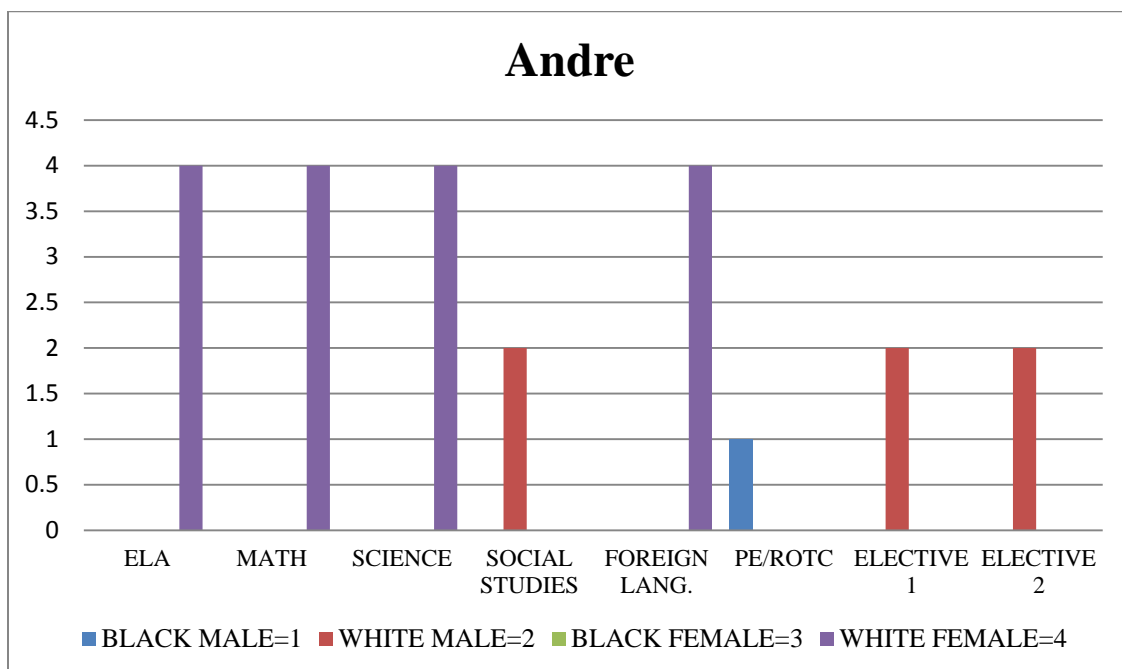


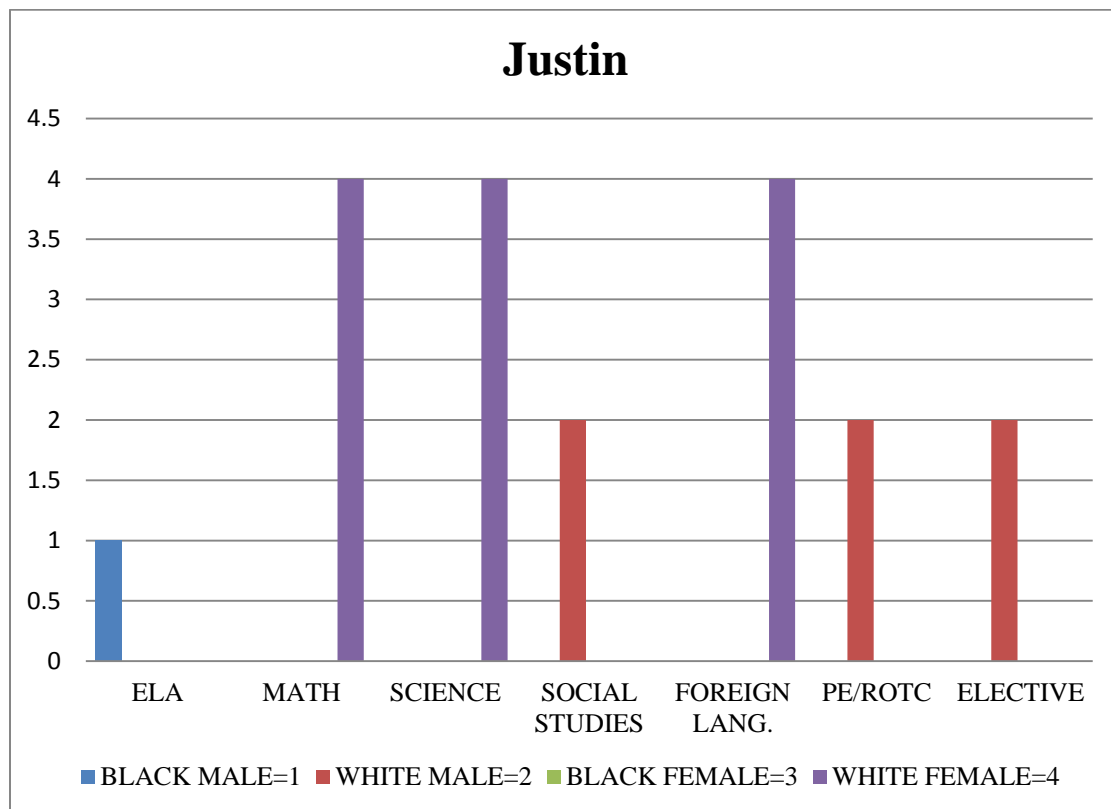
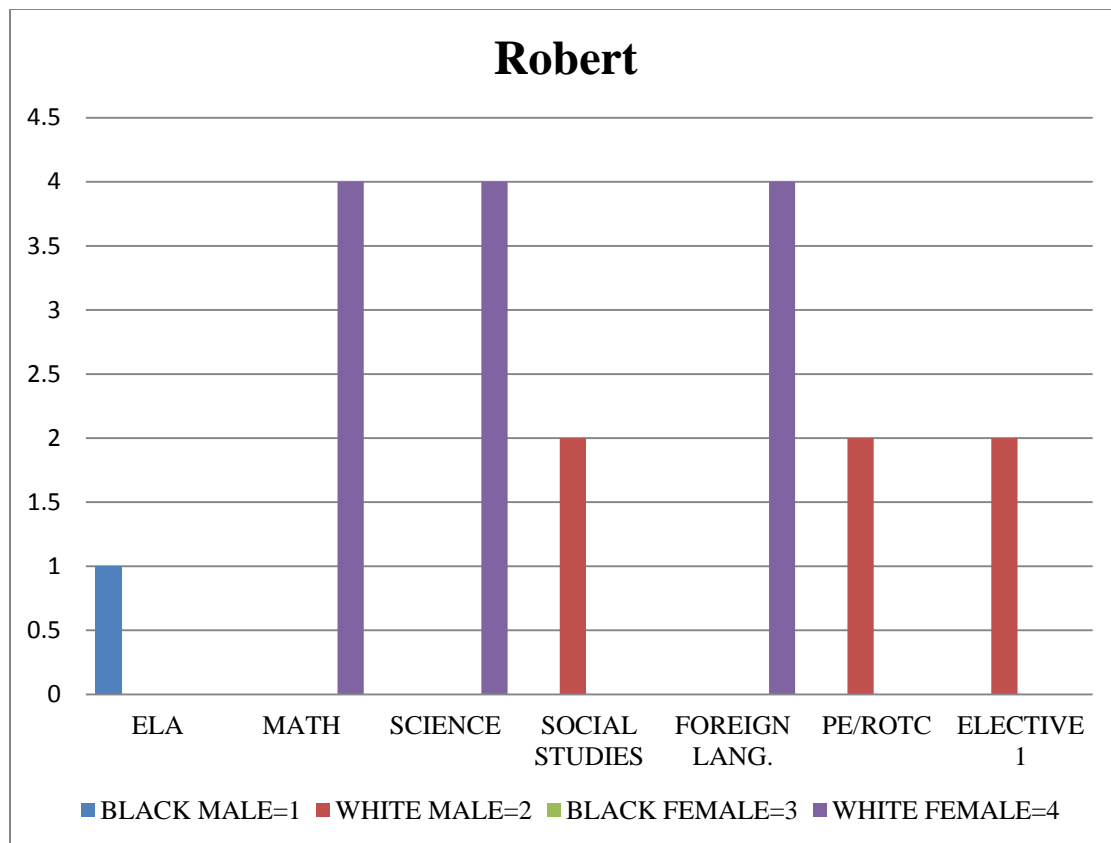
*Indicates Participating Student

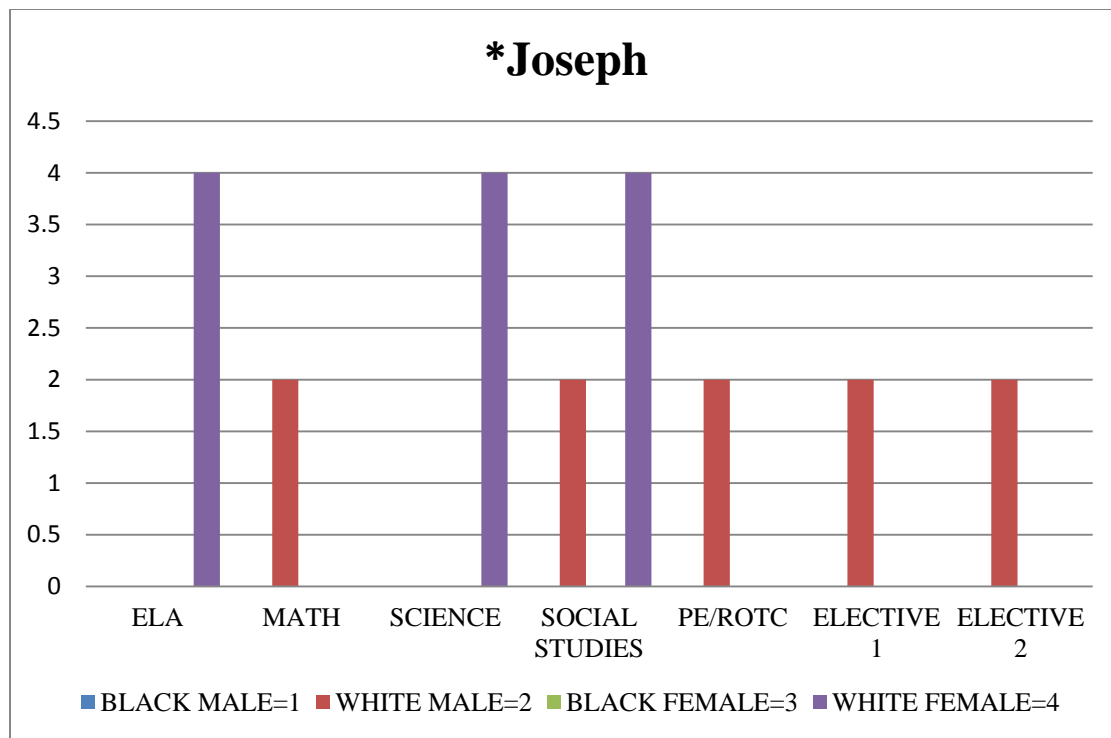




*Indicates Participating Student







*Indicates Participating Student

ELECTIVE COURSES

Computer Science and Software Engineering

Design Foundations I, II

Forensics

Freshman Success

Integrated Business Applications

Introduction to Engineering

Journalism I

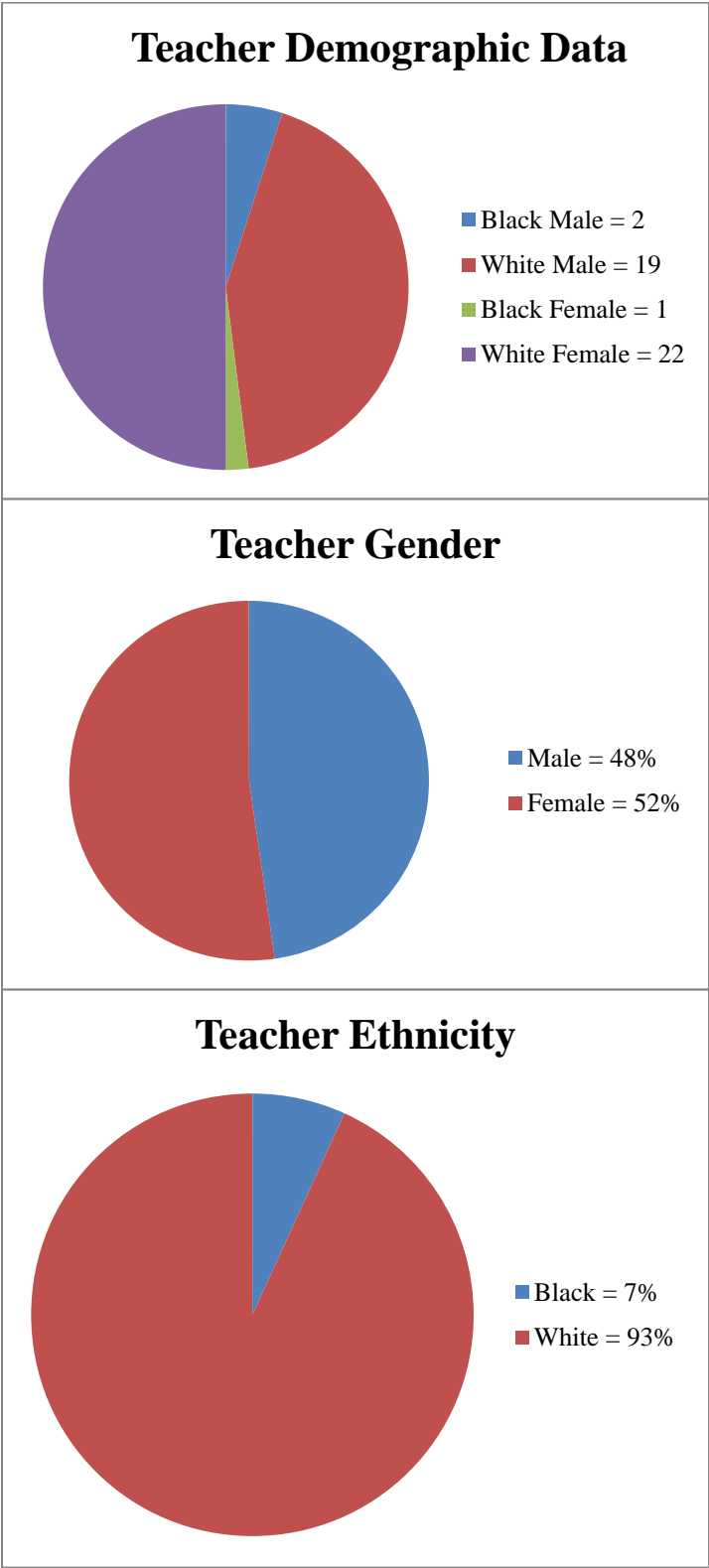
Law Enforcement Service 2

Law Related Education

Welding Technology I

2-D Design I

Table 6.1 Teacher Demographic Data



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APPENDIX A

PARENT NOTIFICATION LETTER

November 2015

Dear Parent / Legal Guardian:

Following the development of a selection criterion used to identify African American male students in your local high school, your son qualified and was selected to participate in a voluntary research case study. The purpose of this study is to analyze what high school African American males perceive as significant influences that directly impact their academic achievement while attending a predominantly White suburban high school.

The selection process referenced above required that each student meet the following three criteria: 1) the student must be classified as an African American male; 2) the student must be considered 'high achieving' as evidenced by his enrollment in a minimum of College Preparatory classes; and 3) the student must qualify under the State Guidelines for Free/Reduced lunch assistance. This case study will involve an Orientation meeting with all qualifying students and at least one but not more than two one-on-one interviews.

Please be aware that your son will not be removed from class in order to participate in the Orientation or interview(s). Also, all participating students will be referred to by a pseudo-name only. No student will be referred to by his birth name, nor will any information be provided to a third party. Additionally, each student will receive \$5.00 per interview for his participation. Interviews will last not more than 1-hour during a time and location convenient for the student and/or family.

Please sign and return this document in the self-addressed envelope acknowledging your consent for your sons' participation and \$5.00 payment.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your son's participation, please feel free to contact me at (803) 609-9561.

Thank you in advance for your support!

Michael R. Harris

Research Topic:

“A Phenomenological Analysis of Social Justice/Injustice on the lives of African-American High School Males”

My signature below indicates I have read the above information that pertains to my son's requested participation in the above referenced research study. I further give my consent for my son to participate in the research Orientation and selected one-on-one interviews. I agree and acknowledge that my son will receive \$5.00 for his participation in the interview process and I am further aware that questions will only pertain to his perceptions as an African American high school student.

Student Name

Date

Parent Signature

Date

*Please return this document in the self-addressed stamped envelope.

THANK YOU.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- When media portrays a particular image of African Americans, is it from a positive or negative perspective? What do you think when you see African Americans in the media?
- How do those images of African American males portrayed by the media make you feel as an African American male?
- Can you give me an example of an injustice that you have experienced or seen someone else experience in your school?
- Was there a particular message in that experience when it occurred? What message did you receive?
- How have your experiences shaped or impacted your academics?
- How are your teachers and counselors supportive of you?
- Have you experienced any teacher that has a negative or skewed opinion of African American?
- How do students address socially unjust attitudes or behaviors when it occurs at your school?
- When you feel that there is no one to talk to at your school, how does that make you feel?
- Finish this sentence...Since there is no one I feel I can talk to who understands, ...I (do what?)
- How have experiences of social injustice impacted your behavior (attendance) at school?

- What do you think needs to happen from the school or school district to help African American students in predominantly white high schools?
- Do you envision yourself graduating from () High School?
- Are African American males helping themselves or hindering themselves due to their experiences of social injustice in school?