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Race, Class, and Tracking: What Keeps African American Males from Pursuing College Degrees?

Sonja Renee Richardson-Shavers

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RACE, CLASS, AND TRACKING: WHAT KEEPS AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES
FROM PURSUING COLLEGE DEGREES?

by

SONJA RICHARDSON-SHAVERS

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

Using critical race theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1995, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998) as the theoretical framework and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as the research methodology, this study explored the stories of 4 African American males to discover how race, class, and tracking affected their higher education opportunities. Participants were selected based upon their “chosen” curriculum; 2 participants represented a college preparatory curriculum, and 2 represented a technical preparatory curriculum. Stories were collected via individual and focus group interviews in a predominantly Black high school in middle Georgia. Additional methods included school portraiture, participant profiles, and a researcher journal. Participants’ stories and counternarratives to the dominant metanarrative (i.e., the narrative that prescribes either failure or mere athletic success for this population) were explored for implications regarding the elimination of current tracking practices.

In addition to a discussion of the historical development of the critical race theory framework and the historical development of Black education, the literature review includes an overview of race, social class, and tracking issues that impact educational

opportunities. Informative research concerning middle school math as a predictor of university enrollment concludes the review of literature.

For parents of African American males, this study demonstrates the need to participate carefully in a child's educational curriculum, emphasizing that a college prep curriculum keeps children's options open and sets high expectations for them. The study helps teachers understand the need to be sensitive to these students. This research highlights the need for teachers to raise levels of expectations and educate themselves about the culture of their African American students. The importance of establishing a relationship with students is emphasized. The study also aimed to help administrators function more effectively in overseeing, guiding, and educating teachers who may be operating according to dominant metanarratives concerning African American males. Finally, policymakers benefit from this study by considering its discussion of the implications of removing the practice of tracking African American males from the curriculum (Siddle-Walker & Thompkins, 2004). Educational and social justice does not prevail when students are unfairly robbed of opportunities that could foster their success.

INDEX WORDS: Technical-Prep Curriculum, College-Preparatory Curriculum, Metanarrative, Counternarrative

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DEDICATION

To my sons, Brenton Jerel Richardson and Edenbur Jeron Richardson, for inspiring me to choose this study and for your patience, support and understanding.

To my husband and friend, Donald Shavers, for being there for me in every way and encouraging me throughout this entire process.

To my mother, Ms. Marie Stokling, who has been my lifetime supporter and the one who taught me that anything is possible with faith and hard work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Inequality in educational opportunities continues to be a problem in public schools. Despite the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which aimed to make public schools more equitable, race-related problems persist (Thompson, 2004). Tracking and labeling students of color are common practices in today's educational institutions. African American students are disproportionately represented in lower track and basic level classrooms; consequently, many African American students receive an education lacking in rigor and educational excellence. They are not expected to perform well academically, which leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy that matches the label inscribed on them.

This self-fulfilling prophecy occurs because of anxiety about conforming to a negative stereotype that actually causes them to "underperform." Steele and Aronson (1995) coined the term "stereotype threat" to describe how stereotypes affect individual performance. Through their investigations, they demonstrated that Black students test scores were significantly lower than White students whose qualifications were comparable to theirs. Yet, when the Black students were told that the same test was just a lab exercise instead of a test, the Black and White students scored equally well. This kind of data shows the pressure that African American students experience as they attempt to navigate the educational maze. Many proceed through middle school and secondary education without adequate preparation for college, forcing them into pursuing postsecondary educational preparation to qualify as college freshmen. Faced with such barriers, many students, particularly African American males, do not pursue higher

education and resign themselves to a life with limited opportunities and low socioeconomic status.

Dooly County High School's student enrollment for the 2005-2006 school year totaled 357 students in a district comprised of 1,417 students. For the same school year, there were 35 12th-grade students resulting from a 9th-grade grade class 4 years prior composed of 64 students. There was a total of 34 graduates and 41 total high school completers (including special education diplomas, certificates of attendance and other completers). Of the 34 graduates, 23 students (17 African American, 3 White, and 3 Hispanic) received diplomas with both college preparatory and technology preparatory seals. Fifty-two percent of students graduating with the dual seal were male. Forty-eight percent were female. There were 11 (all African American) graduates who received the technology-preparatory seal and none who received the college-preparatory seal exclusively. Fifty-four percent of technology preparatory graduates were male and 45% were female. A school portraiture is presented in chapter 3 featuring an overview of the district's population, demographics and student academic performance based on the Governor's Office of Student Achievement *2005-2006 K-12 Public Schools Annual Report Card*.

This study explored the high school experiences of 4 male African American students that led each to a decision regarding academic rigor, curriculum track, and higher education. It was important to discover why and how these students decided whether or not to pursue a curriculum that provided the rigor necessary for college preparation. The participants were selected based upon their "chosen" curriculum, with 2 representing the college-preparatory curriculum and 2 representing the technical-

preparatory curriculum. I selected 4 male African American seniors from Dooly County High School, each of whom scheduled to graduate Spring 2007.

Jim graduated from the college preparatory track. He was from a two-parent household. Jim's mother had 2 years of college. His father was a high school graduate. The family owned their home. Jody planned to graduate Spring 2007 from the technology preparatory track, but was unable to pass the science portion of the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT). He was from a single-parent household. His mother attained a limited number of college credits, but had not finished. His father had not attended college. Jaden was a college-preparatory student who graduated in May 2007. Both parents occupied the family home. His mother attended college and they were also home owners. Tae was a tech-prep student from a single-parent family. His parents had not attended college. Each of the 4 participants was born and raised in Dooly County.

This study had three purposes. The first was to explore the high school tracking system, which tended to sabotage the potential of male African American students. The second purpose was to make recommendations for change in the high school curriculum. The third purpose was to develop a curriculum for African American males that provides them equal opportunities to reach their highest potential and obtain success in education and in life.

Context of Study

It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the contemporary manifestations of the racialized obstacles faced by Black students today is the pervasive streaming of them into the basic and general levels of education—resulting in negative

consequences as these lower academic tracks and labels become self-fulfilling.
(Codjoe, 2001, p. 364)

Race and class issues are at the center of tracking practices, just as they were when tracking first began as a way to manage the immigrants who were supposedly less intelligent and, according to social Darwinism, not fit to survive (Oakes, 1985). Labeling and tracking students leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy and stifles potential. African American males and other students of color are in crisis, as indicated by the gaps in state and national test scores. African American students lag significantly behind White students on such tests. The statistics concerning their plight paint a bleak picture.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the nation's graduation rate for incoming ninth graders based on 2001-2002 data is 68%. The Georgia graduation rate is only 53%. Georgia high school graduates can earn a diploma seal from either the college preparatory or the technical preparatory curriculum track or they may take selected courses that allow them to earn both diploma seals. A special education diploma is awarded to special education graduates. The general education diploma used to be awarded but is no longer common. There is one other possibility for graduation in Georgia. Those students who reach age 21 without earning a diploma and those who have not passed the high school graduation test can graduate with a certificate of performance but have not earned a high school diploma. The data from table 1 (p. 6) shows that African American males are not prepared for college as well as other student groups.

In 2001, African American males represented 19.2% of all students enrolled in Georgia PreK-12 schools, but they represented only 14.7% of all graduates and 11.7% of all students with the college-prep diploma endorsement yet 37.2% of all students who had

earned special education diplomas. In 1997, there were 8,534 African American males who received a Georgia high school diploma. Of those graduates, 2,007 enrolled as first time University System of Georgia (USG) freshman during the same graduation year. In 2001, there were 9,549 African American males who received a Georgia high school diploma. Of those graduates, 1,987 enrolled as first time USG freshman during the same graduation year. Therefore, even though the number of high school graduates from 1997 to 2001 increased slightly, the college going rate decreased slightly.

Ladson-Billings (1994) says African American children are three times as likely to drop out of school and twice as likely to be suspended from school as White children. The dropout rate in inner cities where large numbers of African Americans live is near 50%. While African Americans make up 17% of the nation's public school population, they represent 41% of the special education population. The socioeconomic realities are equally disappointing when you consider that nearly 1 of every 2 African American children is poor. In fact, African American children are five times more likely than White children to be dependent on welfare and three times more likely to live in substandard housing. For the male African American student, the barriers to success are considerable. A young man in this country has a 1 in 20 chance of living some part of his life in jail unless he is Black; his chances then jump to 1 in 4 (Moses & Cobb, 2001).

Racism continues to exist in our public schools. The literature suggests that African American students are often tracked away from the college prep track because of their race, despite the good intentions of well-meaning educators (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Oakes, 1985; Thompson, 2004).

Table 1

*Percentage of Diplomas and Certificates Awarded to African-American Males***Percent of Diplomas and Certificates of Performance Awarded to African-American Males
Georgia Public High School Graduates, 1997-2001**

Academic Year	Percent of Diplomas to African-American Males by Type of Diploma				Percent of Diplomas to African-American Males*	Percent of Certificates of Performance, With No Diploma, to African-American Males
	CP Diplomas	CP+ Vocational Diplomas	Vocational Diplomas	Special Education Diplomas		
1997	11.2	7.1	15.2	34.2	14.5	25.7
1998	11.3	7.8	16.6	33.4	14.1	25.3
1999	12.0	8.8	19.1	34.0	14.3	25.9
2000	12.4	10.0	19.5	34.7	14.6	25.9
2001	11.7	10.6	19.9	37.2	14.7	25.9

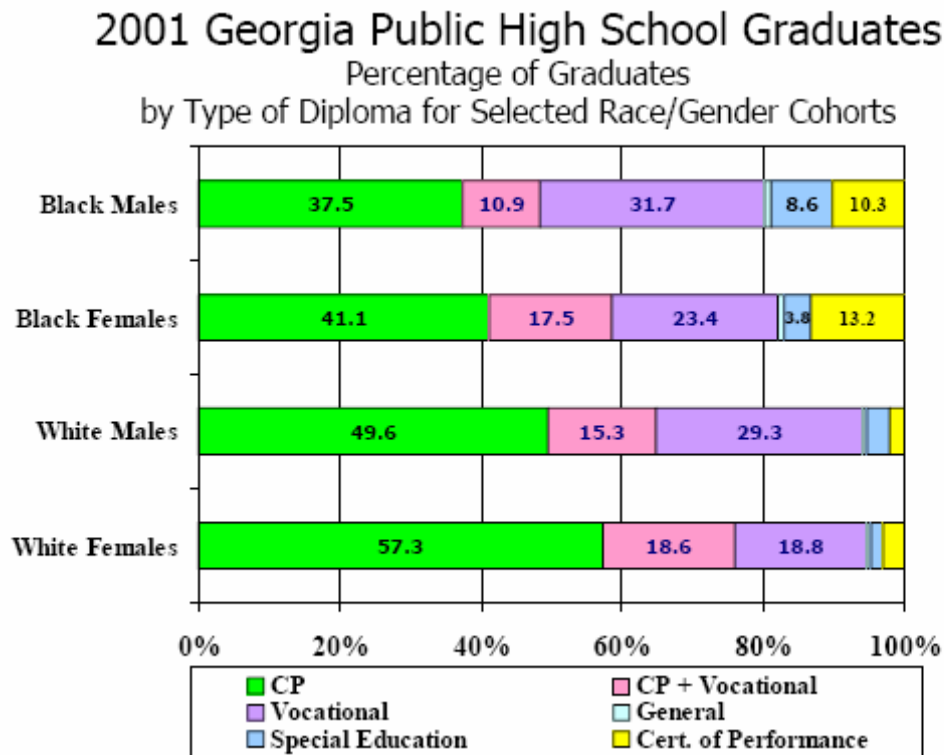
(http://www.usg.edu/aami/Research_and_Policy_Analysis_Subcommittee.pdf)

Theoretical Framework

African Americans have historically experienced a troubled and inconsistent relationship with the law. The law has been used as a tool of oppression, relegating Blacks to a subordinate position in American society, depriving them of basic human rights, and denying them access to economic resources (Nieman, 1994). It is no surprise, then, that the critical race theory (CRT) movement originated within the legal profession when lawyers and scholars began to analyze the law's relationship to race, racism, and social inequality (Bell, 1995c; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Table 2

2001 Georgia Public High School Graduates



http://www.usg.edu/aami/Research_and_Policy_Analysis_Subcommittee.pdf

One advantage of CRT is that its framework operates from an understanding that racism is a normal part of the society in which we live. This recognition of the normalcy of racist practices is necessary for social action because it is extremely difficult to reduce inequities if we allow the masking of racism (Bell, 1995a). Additionally, by CRT acknowledging that racism exists, it allows race and racism as possible explanations for unfair practices. Another advantage is that critical race theorists attempt to inject the cultural viewpoints of people of color, derived from a common history of oppression, into their efforts to reconstruct a society crumbling under the burden of racial hegemony” (Barnes, 1990). One way of accomplishing this is through the use of storytelling and

counter-storytelling. CRT places marginalized groups in the center where their stories may be told. This often results in clear opposition to the dominant society's perspectives, thereby giving voice to those groups who are traditionally silenced.

Furthermore, CRT challenges those hegemonic structures which currently exist that allow for the evils of injustice and inequity to remain. The goal is not to dismiss the Eurocentric views and perspectives, but to show that they are limited. CRT also challenges scholarship that dehumanizes marginalized scholars, allowing room for the very personal input of the researcher.

Finally, the activist component of CRT is also an advantage. Similar to the civil rights movement in its activism, CRT adds a new dimension to the fight for equality with its combination of legal determinacy, intersectionality, unique voice of color, and storytelling and counterstorytelling. These concepts are further explained in the CRT tenets section.

CRT places race at the very heart of American life. It allows us to see clearly that a relationship does in fact exist between race and social justice in our society. As a result, race can be considered as a possible explanation for the very depressing statistics concerning African American students in low ability level and basic courses, the percentage who receive a high school diploma, as well as the number who pursue college and find meaningful employment. Critical race inquiry also facilitates the understanding that race is not just an important matter in a few isolated cases; problems of racial injustice are deeply rooted in historical and systemic patterns. So many educators have allowed themselves to be comfortable with the justifications of tracking certain students in a particular direction, that it is just "normal."

It is necessary to at least mention that while Critical Race Theory adequately highlights the racial issues as primary for this particular study, there are other perspectives. Structuralists generally view the plight of the African American male population (lack of education, criminal records, unemployment) as social consequences of inequality. Yet, culturalists would suggest that culture explains the behavior which leads to the condition of this group and would argue that expanding opportunities and changing governmental policy does not bring about the cultural change necessary to address the issues of inequality. Since most of the African American population remains in the lower class socio-economically and many live in the culture of poverty, it becomes difficult to ignore the issue of class (Noguera, 2001).

After reviewing the historical aspects of tracking and reflecting on my professional and personal experiences, I wish to work toward lifting existing barriers to educational opportunities for male African American students, thereby increasing their chances for success.

Research Questions

The general question that guides this study is the following: What are the barriers preventing African American males from pursuing college degrees?

The specific questions are the following:

1. What are the race issues that prevent male African American students from pursuing college degrees?
2. What class issues become barriers to African American male students pursuing college degrees?

3. What tracking issues become barriers to African American male students pursuing college degrees?

Autobiographical Roots

My research interest in how African American males' high school experiences impact their higher education opportunities derives from several areas. As a parent of two African American males, I have struggled with and against this monster of institutional racism for several years. My sons began their educational careers in a small, private African American Christian school, but due to relocation, they eventually attended a predominantly White private Christian school where we began the long struggle with racism. Consequently, I made a number of choices to address this issue including a decision to home school both children for about 3 years. When they enrolled in a traditional public school, my family was reacquainted with racism once again. We have been dealing with the effects of racism in education ever since that time, and continue strategizing to lessen the impact.

I have seen firsthand how the tracking system undermines the future success of Black students. An attempt was made to guide my youngest son into the tech prep track by an educator who decided that it was the appropriate route for his course of study. A tracking form that had been sent home for a parent signature included the instruction that it be completed by the students and their parents based on the family's decision. In this case, my son's teacher had taken the liberty of checking the tech prep box—a decision that would have an enormous impact on my son's college plans—as his choice of curriculum track. It thoroughly upset my son, because he could not understand why the teacher made the assumption without even asking him, and my whole family was

likewise outraged. On what basis did the teacher make a tracking decision for my son, and why did he choose to complete the section of the form that was clearly intended for students and parents to complete? I of course contacted the teacher and resolved this issue. However, I suspect that there are thousands of other students whose parents are not aware of the “guidance” their children may be receiving. Also, there may be many parents who are not informed or do not understand the potential impact of these decisions.

Another reason for questioning the concept of tracking surfaced in my former work academically advising undergraduate students at a historically Black institution. It was amazing for me to discover that some of the students who were preparing to enter their senior year had begun college as much as years prior. Several were not prepared for college admission based on the course of study they “chose” to pursue in high school. Therefore, they were required to complete the college prep coursework they missed in high school. Students had to complete this process before they were eligible to proceed with freshman coursework. In my discussions with students, I found that many did not fully understand the consequences of choosing tech prep, especially as it related to applying for college. Some did understand later that they would have some additional coursework; however, once the choice is made, there is apparently very little opportunity to change tracks without delaying graduation.

As a result of both personal and professional experiences with race and tracking issues, this area of study has become my passion. These experiences have provided me a keen desire to create change, to become involved in work to lessen oppression, and to

assist in the development of a more equitable education for Black males and all other underserved students.

Challenges of the Study

In every study, challenges exist; this one is no exception. The first challenge to consider was the issue of gender. I, as the researcher, am female and all of the study participants are male. This study is particularly interested in the African American males' perceptions of their educational experiences, and there is some concern that the participants may feel that I cannot relate to their experiences. While I am hopeful that my former experiences with male and female high school students will allow for a trusting relationship to evolve, there are no guarantees.

Gender may also be considered a challenge in this study. The study includes 4 participants. My choice to focus the study on African American males is in no way intended to neglect the need for social and economic justice in creating equal educational opportunities for African American females. However, the fact that my children are African American males which places them in a group that is in trouble (Noguera, 2001), obviously contributed to my decision to focus on this particular population. African American males are documented as leaders in our society in homicides and have recently reached the point of now having the fastest growing rate for suicide. The rate of HIV and AIDS is extremely high for this population and African American males have peaked as the group with the highest incarceration, conviction, and arrest rates in most states. To add and further clarify the crisis of African American males, death is more likely to occur in their first year of life and their life expectancy is declining instead of increasing like other groups in the United States. Finally, Black males are more likely to be unemployed

and the least likely to be hired, a distinction held only by their group. For all of these reasons, my study is focused on the African American male population.

Another challenge involves sample size. By choosing only 4 participants, I had the opportunity to establish a relationship with all of them. On the other hand, 4 is a small sample size and therefore may not be representative of the perceptions and opinions of the larger male African American high school population. A larger sample may have offered more generalizability of the findings, but it would have come at the price of developing a more intimate relationship with the participants.

This study was concerned with the students' points of view. Educators were not included in this study, and therefore their voices are not presented. This may also be seen as a limitation.

One final challenge worth noting is the fact that I chose to study inequities in educational opportunities based on race and class with African American male high school participants. There is the risk that this study will be viewed negatively because it uses qualitative research methods with CRT as the framework. CRT has been criticized for its use of storytelling, for its relative merit, for its views on truth and objectivity, and on the matter of voice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In addition, qualitative research continues to be scrutinized according to traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting research, resulting in questions of legitimation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Significance of the Study

This research addressed institutional accountability for equality and equity in educating African American males. It further explored the concept of tracking or ability grouping and how this practice has resulted in the unfair and inequitable placement of

African American males in special education and vocational tracks, which often prevents them from pursuing higher education because they lack the necessary college preparation. This study is therefore significant to a number of different interest groups on several levels, including families of African American males, teachers of African American males, administrators at schools with African American males, and policy makers.

My own experience with a teacher who assumed that my youngest child should be placed in the technical prep track fueled this research interest over the past 3 years. As parents who value education, we had always discussed college with our son; he never considered any other option. My child might have been robbed of the college prep curriculum and consequently experienced a barrier to higher education, and other parents and families of African American males may find this study important because it highlights the potential for a problem they may not have anticipated. Traditionally many parents from the African American culture trust schools to make the best decisions for their children academically and view educators as experts (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 2004). A study such as this demonstrates the importance of participating carefully in children's educational curriculum. It further highlights the fact that parents or grandparents may need to ask questions about the curriculum, including, "Will my child be prepared to enter college as a freshman without any further college prep courses after high school graduation?" Most of all, this investigation helps parents understand that a college prep curriculum keeps their children's options open and sets high expectations for them.

This study raises awareness levels for teachers and administrators of how tracking impacts higher education opportunities for African American males. It increases

sensitivity to these students, raises levels of expectations, and underscores the need for education about the culture of these students. This study also highlights the benefits of establishing teacher-student relationships. Developing relationships with African American students allows teachers the opportunity to know them as individuals, each with talents and abilities. Consequently, teachers can develop and convey to students a belief in their own abilities. Administrators can function more effectively in their roles with the insight gained from this study by overseeing, guiding, and educating teachers who may be operating according to the dominant and harmful metanarratives in our society concerning African American males.

Finally, this study is significant to policy makers because its findings point toward the need for change. Policies are needed that counter and alleviate the practice of tracking African American males away from the college preparatory curriculum (Siddle-Walker & Thompkins, 2004). Educational and social justice does not prevail when students are unfairly robbed of opportunities that impact their success in life. Change must occur in these tracking policies.

This study is significant because it made clear the inequality of curriculum offerings to African American males and the consequences of this on future higher education opportunities. I used CRT as the framework and critical narrative inquiry as the methodology, to tell the stories of 4 African American male participants. Like the research of Phillion, He, and Connelly (2005), this work sought to address “structural inequalities in ways that bring life to issues that make them impossible to ignore” (p. 10). African American males, the educators who teach this underserved student population,

school administrators, community workers, and policy makers can benefit from the study, and with this knowledge promote corrective action.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

This dissertation used CRT to explore the potential barriers to higher education caused by the practice of tracking male African American students and to shows its correlation with race and class. Through a review of the literature, I defined CRT, explored its historical development, established the application of the CRT framework to the current unfair and inequitable practice of tracking, and addressed implications for change in the curriculum that cultivate more equitable educational opportunities for African American males and other underserved students.

CRT is an exciting, innovative scholarly movement that puts race at the center of its analysis. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), “the critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3). Although CRT is rooted in legal scholarship, this movement has spread far beyond the confines of law and is much broader in scope than this one discipline. The idea in CRT that each legal case may have a different outcome from any other was influenced by critical legal studies, while the relationship between power and the construction of social roles was borrowed from feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Harris, 1995). Similar to the civil rights movement in terms of issues, the CRT movement extends its perspective to include economics, history, social context, group- and self-interest, and feelings and the unconscious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theorists are unified by two major goals: to understand how an establishment of White supremacy and its subordination of

people of color has been created and maintained in America, and to change the bond that exists between law and racial power.

Ladson-Billings noted, “Critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (1998, p. 18). Consequently, multiple voices and perspectives are silenced while the voices of the dominant, primarily male, White upper class are legitimized as the standard body of knowledge students should be taught. Other views and perspectives are often omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. Subject matter that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, mastered, and then reshaped before it can become a part of the master script (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003).

Historical Development

CRT emerged quietly in the 1970s as a result of several scholars, including lawyers and activists, becoming frustrated over the sluggish progress of the civil rights movement. There was a growing concern that the progress made in the 1960s was beginning to erode. Early scholars in the movement include Derrick Bell (1995c), the late Alan Freeman (1995), Richard Delgado (1995), Kimberly Crenshaw (1995), and Patricia Williams (1991). The first organized conference was held in 1989 in Madison, Wisconsin (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Prior to the establishment of the CRT movement, CLS scholars interpreted legal doctrine to expose both its inconsistencies and revealed the ways that “legal ideology has helped create, support and legitimate America’s present class structure” (Crenshaw,

1988). CLS ideology originated from Gramsci's notion of hegemony to describe the continued legitimacy of oppression in American society. West (1993) asserted that although CLS scholars have exposed the dominant legal philosophy for its inconsistencies and silences, racism had not been included in the critiques. Therefore, legal scholars of color began the CRT movement as their discontent with CLS. Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman have been affirmed as the earliest scholars contributing to the development of CRT. Bell is noted as the father of this movement and as the most influential source of thought critical of traditional civil rights discourse (Tate, 1996). Bell is known for having consistently challenged both the dominant liberal and conservative positions on civil rights, race, and the law. According to Freeman (1995), Bell's writings declared that there is only one criterion for assessing the success or failure of civil rights law: *results*. Freeman explained, "Bell's approach to legal doctrine is unabashedly instrumental. The only important question is whether doctrinal developments have improved, worsened, or left unchanged the actual lives of American Blacks" (p. 573). Bell focused on the relationship between doctrine and concrete change.

Bell engaged three major arguments in his critique of racial issues in the law: constitutional contradiction (the framers of the constitution chose the rewards of property over justice), the interest convergence principle (Whites will promote racial advances for Blacks only when they also promote White self-interest), and the price of racial remedies (Whites will not support civil rights policies that may threaten White social status; Tate, 1996). Although CRT was originally applicable to the legal discipline, it is increasingly distinguished for its place in the educational arena. The use of CRT offers a way to understand how supposedly race-neutral structures in education such as knowledge, truth,

merit, objectivity, and the so-called “good education” are in fact ways of shaping and regulating the racial boundaries of White supremacy and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Freeman (1995) explained, “With respect to education, the issue for Bell is not desegregation, if that implies integration as the remedial goal, but how to obtain effective education for black children, with or without busing or racial balance” (p. 574).

I was intrigued with Bell’s explanation of the advances made during the civil rights era, such as the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. He was apparently the first to suggest that this victory for people of color had less to do with moral consciousness and empathy for Blacks and more to do with serving a political purpose for elite Whites. Although Bells’ written insight on this issue was greeted with outrage, he was later proven to be right as a result of research conducted by Mary Dudziak, a legal historian (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It seems that the United States was, in fact, interested in improving its image with the third world in 1954, at a time when the Korean War had ended and not long after the Second World War. Bell’s suspicion prompted his writing on this issue, as he wondered why suddenly there was a victory on a school court case concerning race when so many had failed previously. Prior to Dudziak’s work, many may have considered suggestions such as those offered by Bell as racial paranoia.

Crenshaw and Delgado are also prominent CRT theorists. Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, (1995) identified two distinct properties in anti-discrimination law: expansive and restrictive. Expansive properties see equality as outcomes relying on the courts to eliminate the effects of racism. Restrictive properties consider equality a process and therefore focus on the prevention of future wrongs. Crenshaw maintained that

properties coexist in anti-discrimination law. The implication of Crenshaw's argument is that the failure of the restrictive property laws to address the racial injustices of the past simply perpetuates the status quo. Mari Matsuda supported Crenshaw's perspective on the effect the legal system has on sustaining social power relations that result in the oppression of people of color, (Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

Delgado and Stefancic, referenced several times in this dissertation, argued that the stories of persons of color come from a different frame of reference. These voices, so different from those of the dominant culture, deserve to be shared and heard (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Tate, 1996). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) reminded their readers of the semantics of White and Black, the common binary related to race. White is related to purity while Black is associated with the demonic. Additionally, the media introduces villains with features and coloring similar to those of minorities. Could this offer a partial explanation of why students of color are disproportionately placed in lower tracks? Could it also explain why Black students are suspended and expelled at significantly higher rates than White students? Could this further explain why Black and Latino students are dropping out of school more often than those of dominant culture (Carger, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Delgado and Stefancic also edited *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (1995). This compilation of writings featured a work by Neil Gotanda entitled, "A Critique of 'Our Constitution is Color-Blind.'" Gotanda discussed the colorblind model, which argues that it is far superior to ignore the race of an individual when applying for a job, housing, or a loan than to follow such principles as those outlined in Affirmative Action. Gotanda in his opposition to this argued that it is impossible to ignore one's

psyche when coming into contact with an individual. In other words, to deny the influence of race on any decision is a suppression of the truth.

In the same vein, the entire notion of colorblindness can also be extremely harmful to African American children, as well as adults. Audrey Thompson (2004) argued that the tendency of the white culture to characterize childhood as a colorblind experience is “by no means incompatible with racism” (p. 24). Thompson explained that black children cannot afford the experience of an innocent childhood because it sets them up for a major fall when they ultimately encounter racism. She cited Martin Luther King, Jr.’s childhood experience of playing with a little White boy in his neighborhood without parental resistance. However, once King and his white playmate became school-aged, the parents barred him from contact with their son. The idea was that very young Black children are viewed by Whites as being harmless, but as the child becomes older he or she is seen as a threat. King’s own daughter was unable to visit an amusement park in her youth, and her father suffered the burden of explaining why her little White friend was able to go. How many times have we heard the statement “race was not a factor”? I am reminded of Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) discussions of interest convergence—people believe what benefits them. The danger of the colorblind approach is that it denies the truth: Based on the reality of the racist society in which we live, the Black child will eventually be forced to deal with the reality of color differences. Gotanda (1995) and Thompson illuminate the relevance of race to the point of making it difficult, if not impossible, to ignore.

bell hooks, a noteworthy African American feminist, has produced an extensive list of works, including *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* (1996) and *Ain’t I a Woman:*

Black Women and Feminism (1999). She uses her stories to introduce the reader to very important real life issues including family and family values, childhood development, religion, sexuality, social class, and racism. *Bone Black* draws the reader into hook's childhood experiences, including one about the appropriate dress for a child attending a funeral, which sparked her confusion over the thing called *race* (since those called "White" are really pink). This reading demonstrates the power of storytelling and how it can be an effective tool in modifying dominant perceptions.

To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin with the flaws of American society—flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes, as opposed to the problems of Black people (West, 1993, p. 6). Cornel West, professor at Princeton University, has written a number of important works, including *Race Matters* (1993), and offers his readers the opportunity to see clearly the role that society plays in the problems of black life. While he is careful not to omit the responsibility of Black individuals, he leaves little room for doubt that unfair treatment of Blacks through the years beginning with slavery and continuing to the present day severely and negatively impacts their lives. Racial profiling and drug convictions are given as visible examples of racism. West suggested considering some of the troubling statistics on racism, such as the following: Black people consume 12% of illegal drugs in America yet suffer nearly 70% of its convictions and death row executions (p. xv); about 1 in every 5 children in this country lives in poverty, but 1 of every 2 Black children and 2 of every 5 Hispanic children live in poverty (p. 12). West also explained the threat of nihilism as oppressed people are searching for identity, meaning, and self-worth. In our society, only a certain group of people can define what it means to be American. The rest

must simply “fit in.” Therefore, life without meaning, hope, and even love sets the stage for the development of a cold-hearted and mean-spirited outlook that destroys oneself and others. West argued that in the past, Black forefathers and foremothers nurtured with black traditions that assisted in warding off the evils of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness. There was a cohesive community bonded by the same cause, mobilized through religious and civic institutions with the promotion of love, service, and morals. With the growth of the Black middle class, the Black community became divided. West cited the fact that Blacks had the lowest suicide rate in the United States in the early 1970s, but now young Blacks lead the nation in the rate of increase in suicide.

I have been a personal witness to this change in the Black community. What caused this change? West argued that the most significant contributors are market forces that impact morality and a crisis in Black leadership (West, 1993). The market offers (in fact, floods) its consumers by way of radio, television, video, and music the opportunity to fulfill *pleasure*. Those who already lack a sense of identity and are without meaning in life become easy targets, as they are deficient in the tools necessary to ward off such seductive methods. As for black leadership, West convincingly suggested that there are no present-day Black leaders with the qualities exhibited by Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and others during that era. Present-day leaders lack boldness, anger, and humility. Painfully but honestly expressed, West stated that

Present day political leaders appear too hungry for status to be angry, too eager for acceptance to be bold, too self-invested in advancement to be defiant. And when they do drop their masks and try to get mad (usually in the presence of

black audiences), their bold rhetoric is more performance than personal, more play-acting than heartfelt. (p. 58)

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (usually called W. E. B. Du Bois) cannot be left out of any discussion concerning equality and the advancement of racial and social justice in America. Du Bois' diverse life experiences culminated in the powerful impact he made for people of color in his fight for equality and college preparatory education for Blacks (Sterne, 1971). Du Bois authored several books addressing the issues of racism, including, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/1953), *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), *The Negro* (1915), *Dark Water* (1920), *Gift of Black Folk* (1924), and *Dark Princess* (1928). Du Bois was 95 years-old at the time of his death in Africa on August 27, 1963, on the eve of the civil rights march on Washington (Sterne, 1971). His contributions throughout the course of his life greatly influenced the development of critical dialogue on race, class, and tracking in education, and he is considered one of the pioneers influencing the development of CRT. Bell (1995c) argued, "Du Bois spoke neither for the integrationist nor the separatist, but for poor Black parents unable to choose, as can the well-to-do of both races, which schools will educate their children" (p. 243).

Du Bois later became the first black to receive a PhD from Harvard University. Although Du Bois' educational successes are quite impressive, they were achieved despite barriers placed in his path that could only be attributed to race. Like many African American males today, Du Bois was repeatedly denied entry into majority educational institutions (Lacy, 1970).

Du Bois would eventually accept teaching appointments at various universities. In addition to his role as teacher, Du Bois was a sociologist, editor, writer, and journalist. In

1905, Du Bois founded the Niagara Movement, which demanded voting rights, free Black press, freedom of speech, the elimination of class differences based on race and color, equal employment opportunities, and the end of White supremacy. He was instrumental in the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Du Bois faced opposition from the dominant population and within his own race over his fight for college-bound education and academic excellence for Blacks. Du Bois was critical of Booker T. Washington, who was viewed as the undisputed leader for American negroes. Washington encouraged Blacks to choose a vocation requiring work with their hands, while Du Bois encouraged academics for Blacks. In order to fully appreciate the opposing perspectives of the two historical leaders, an understanding of how Washington's educational ideology was developed is required; the development of Washington's fight for vocational education is explored in depth later in this dissertation.

CRT Tenets

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) and Crenshaw et al. (1995) noted that critical race theorists generally recognize a set of specific tenets. As mentioned previously, the first tenet of CRT explains that racism is normal in American society; it is a common, everyday experience for people of color. A second tenet, originally proposed by Bell, is the concept of *interest convergence*, which maintains that racism serves both white elites and working-class Whites, the former in a material manner and the latter in a psychic manner. As a result, many individuals in the dominant society are not inclined to exert energy to decrease racism.

In an effort to bring equality for people of color, the civil rights movement has actually promoted practices that resulted in more benefits for Whites, such as Affirmative Action policies. For example, the rate of White women being hired has increased. Desegregation was supposed to allow children of color to attend school with White children so that all children could have access to the same resources, books, and equipment; instead, “White flight” resulted in schools continuing to be segregated. Marginalization of disadvantaged groups continues in the public schools as curriculum, instruction, and evaluation are established in a racist context under the façade of “equal treatment under the law.”

Social construction, a third tenet, maintains that race and races are merely concepts that do not correspond to any biological or genetic reality (Haney-Lopez, 1995). Haney-Lopez explained, “One’s race is not determined by a single gene or gene cluster, as is, for example, sickle cell anemia. Nor are races marked by important differences in gene frequencies, the rates of appearance of certain gene types” (p. 166).

Unique voice of color, a fourth tenet credited to Delgado and Stefancic, maintains that Black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that Whites are unlikely to know and understand, because of their different histories and experiences with oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This means giving voice to groups who are otherwise silent through various methods such as storytelling, parables, poetry, and other literary forms; it is the recognition of the power of discourse on racial justice. There is also the realization that our society lacks empathy. Yet, through the efforts of storytelling and counter-

storytelling, there is the opportunity to challenge and erode “embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41).

Finally, the tenet of *intersectionality* demands that all individuals are unique and without a single, definite, unitary identity. Critical writers in the legal and social science profession have increased awareness regarding methods used as dominant society racializes different marginalized populations at various times in response to changing needs (the labor market as an example; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Consider a White feminist, who may be Jewish, working-class, or a single mother; or consider a Latino who may also be a Black republican. Marable (1995) argued, “By dismantling the narrow politics of racial identity and selective self-interest, by going beyond ‘Black’ and ‘White,’ we may construct new values, new institutions, and new visions of an America beyond traditional racial categories and racial oppression” (p. 454).

Critical race theorists do not subscribe to a particular method but rather are interested in understanding the dominant culture and its tendency to oppress people of color. CRT also attempts to diminish the existing relationship between racial power and the law (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Given the goals of this dissertation, it is clear that the CRT framework offers a comprehensive and applicable structure from which to conduct my study.

History of Black Education in the South

Over the years, advances have been made in increasing the educational opportunities for underserved students. Yet, institutional structures remain in place that track and limit student opportunities regardless of teachers’ efforts (Deyhle, 2005; Oakes, 1985; Thompson, 2004; Walker, 2004). These barriers reflect the history and persistence

of racism in schools across the nation, particularly in the South. After having survived slavery, Blacks had a very strong desire to learn to read and write as well as a belief in the importance of education, which had been denied them. The educational movement for newly freed Blacks was set in a foundation of self-reliance and a profound desire to develop and sustain schools for themselves and their children:

Before northern benevolent societies entered the south in 1862, before President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and before Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedman and Abandoned Lands (Freedman's Bureau) in 1865, slaves and free persons of color had already begun to make plans for the systematic instruction of their illiterates. Early black schools were established and supported through the Afro Americans' own efforts.

(Anderson, 1988, p. 7)

The historical accounts of the development of Southern education vary and are often conflicting. Anderson (1988) expressed that "historians of the south have failed to grasp the fundamental ideological conflicts contained in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century southern educational movement" (p. 80). The relationship between political economy and universal education was a matter of conflict among White Southerners and philanthropic Northerners. Many in both camps perceived education as a worthwhile investment in social stability and economic prosperity. Their mutual conception of universal education was motivated by the intention for society to operate more efficiently. There was very little interest in the transformation of the social position and equal opportunity of the Black laborers. Yet, there was opposition from some wealthy Southern Whites who depended on the uneducated and abused laborers for their

increasing prosperity. On the one hand, the coalition of Northern philanthropists and Southern whites supported the education of Black Southerners for reasons of social control. On the other hand, a group of wealthy White Southerners opposed any education for Southern Blacks for fear of its negative impact on their use of cheap labor. Through the combined efforts of white northern philanthropy and Black southern contributions, qualified teachers and leaders survived for the Black race at the time of its greatest crises, despite unwavering attempts to restrain the effectiveness of Black public education and a constant and violent attack on higher education for Blacks (Du Bois, 1962).

Based on the social efficiency model, universal education was resisted on the premise that the laborers might develop a desire to participate politically and economically in society. The loss of good field hands was viewed as excessive.

The struggle over whether or not to educate Blacks continued as a new conflict developed over the type of education that should be offered. The compulsory school attendance bill concerning elementary and secondary education was not passed in Georgia until 1916. However, even with the attendance law in place, local school boards were still allowed to excuse Black children from the law (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967). In 1968, the Hampton model was underway as a full curriculum of special instruction for black post secondary students. Developed by Samuel Armstrong Chapman at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia, its goal was to avoid the prior and existing confrontations regarding social power as it related to Black education. Armstrong developed a pedagogy and ideology that would maintain within the South a social consensus that did not challenge traditional inequalities of wealth and power (Armstrong, 1904). The Hampton model showcased a curriculum that adapted

Black education to fit the needs and interests of the dominant-class whites in the South. The issue of the Hampton model of special industrial education for Blacks became the greatest source of controversy in Black education during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Anderson, 1988).

Booker T. Washington was a law school student at Hampton in 1872. He was chosen by Chapman to serve as principal at the new Tuskegee Normal School. Washington abandoned his legal career aspirations and accepted his post in Tuskegee, fully adopting the Hampton model as the educational ideology for Black students. Along with this model was a commitment to a subservient role for Blacks, a relinquishing of any will to become voting citizens, and an acceptance of unequal opportunities for education. Blacks would subscribe to the notion of racial progress that urged them to prosper in the South primarily in common agricultural and domestic labor.

In 1912, Julius Rosenwald donated funds toward the construction of small rural schools in Alabama under the management of Booker T. Washington. In 1917, the Rosenwald Fund was established and by 1928 one fifth of the rural schools for Black children and teachers were housed in one of these schools. At the end of the Rosenwald School Building Program, nearly 5,000 rural schools were built that served 664,000 students in 15 states (Anderson, 1988).

The Hampton model would not go unopposed as a group of Black leaders, including W. E. B. Du Bois, emerged in a fight for racial equality, political enfranchisement, equal civil rights, and higher education for black teachers and leaders. As a method of protest to Washington's policy of accommodation to White society,

Dubois and others organized the Niagra Movement in 1905, which aggressively demanded the civil rights and privileges for Blacks that other Americans received.

During this time of conflict over Black education ideology between the Hampton-Tuskegee model and opposing Black leaders, there was a shortage of black teachers. There were common schools that graduated students who received jobs as common school teachers, which was acceptable under the Hampton-Tuskegee industrial normal school model. However, during the early 20th century, states began to require higher academic and performance standards for training teachers. The normal schools were elevated to the college level of education. Teacher training programs for Black students in the South evolved slowly, primarily because the white school authorities were not willing to enforce equally high standards for Black schools.

Continuing in the efforts toward social and political justice, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909 by Black and White intellectuals. Led by Dubois, this civil rights organization served as the country's most influential African American movement for the next fifty years. During this time (early 1900s), private foundations such as the General Education Board (GEB) helped to fund Black education in the south and continued funding select programs until 1960 when their operations ended. Concerning northern philanthropy and southern black education, grant requests were repeatedly denied for autonomous Black organizations attempting to gain control over Black schools. The GEB began funding white supervisors as its major contribution to Black education. White male Negro School Agents were funded by the GEB in all of the former Confederate states by 1919. Yet, general funding for black education was reduced. Conversely, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. contributed

annually to the NAACP from 1928 to 1939 and John D. Rockefeller, 3rd, contributed in the mid thirties and early forties. Although the NAACP made a request to the GEB to assist with the legal battle against segregated schools, it was denied.

Many events occurred over the next decades involving the fight for equal rights. In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* declared that racial segregation in schools is unconstitutional. In 1955, Emmett Till, a teenager visiting family from the north, was brutally murdered for allegedly flirting with a White woman in Mississippi. An all white jury acquitted the two White men charged with the crime. Outrage over the outcome of this case helped to spark the civil rights movement. Later in 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in front of the section on the bus identified for coloreds. She remained in her seat in the “Whites only” section of the bus which resulted in her being jailed and eventually launched a bus boycott that lasted one year in Montgomery Alabama. Consequently, the buses were desegregated in December 1956.

There was evidence of limited gains toward equality, yet racial equality was still an uphill battle. In 1962, James Meredith became the first Black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi; a decision that caused riot to break out. In 1967, Stokely Carmichael, a leader of the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNICC), coined the phrase “Black power” and Thurgood Marshall was appointed to the Supreme Court, becoming the first Black Supreme Court Justice. In 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. One week after Kings death, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which prohibited discrimination of housing sale, rental, and financing.

The constitutionality of affirmative action was upheld in 1978 in the case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. Stipulations were added to protect the rights of the majority while supposedly providing greater opportunities for students of color. In 1992, after decades without riots, disturbances erupted in south-central Los Angeles after a jury acquits four White police officers for the beating of Rodney King, an African American. This beating was videotaped and shown through the national news media.

In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed reauthorizing certain federal programs aimed at improving the performance of U. S. primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts and schools. Under this recent legislation, parents are reported to have more flexibility in choosing the schools their children will attend. Outcomes based education is the thrust of this law. Testing and teacher qualifications are also central to the goals of NCLB. There is much controversy over this initiative and its impact on marginalized groups.

History of Black Education in Middle Georgia

In discussing the history of Black education in the South, it is important to explain the history of black education in middle Georgia, where this study will be conducted. This historical discussion provides insight into how current educational practices may have originated and illustrates the sacrifices and struggles our forefathers and foremothers experienced in their effort to offer quality education in middle Georgia.

In 1890, Ft. Valley High and Industrial School was started by John W. Davison, an Atlanta University graduate, in the center of the state of Georgia. It began as a private school and was chartered as a public normal and industrial school in 1895. Davison

struggled to maintain stable financing for the institution. Existing Black community contributions were inadequate to maintain the school. For this reason, he hired James H. Torbert, also a graduate of Atlanta University, as assistant principal and financial agent. Receiving no aid from the state of Georgia or the federal government, there was no money to erect new buildings, increase salaries, or hire additional staff. Consequently, Torbert, motivated by financial need, recruited Northern philanthropists on the school's board of trustees. This led to Ft. Valley School receiving the support of the General Education Board, which offered stabilization of finances. Despite their policy to allow institutions to operate independently and without pressure, the general education board was known for donating exclusively to schools willing to promote the Hampton-Tuskegee model of black industrial education. Davison had no intention of modeling the school after the Hampton-Tuskegee program but allowed his assistant to seek the funds anyway. His plan was to pursue the classical education curriculum similar to his alma mater, Atlanta University, a liberal arts institution.

The General Education Board investigated Ft. Valley School and found that Davison was offering the Black students a high quality liberal arts education. Over time, the board sought and received Davison's resignation after threatening to withdraw funding. Davison's replacement was carefully picked by only the White members of the board of trustees, even though the board included several active Black participants. There was a decisive effort to ensure that the school would in fact offer *only* industrial education courses, and financial incentives were made available toward that end. Teachers and any other staff who remotely supported Davison's plan were dismissed immediately, and for a time the school operated as a solely industrial education center. As

Anderson noted, “Whereas most organizations and individuals involved in black education viewed the preparation of teachers as primarily academic training, the philanthropists saw industrial training as the very foundation of teacher education” (1988, p. 132).

The methods practiced by the northern philanthropists serve as a concrete example of the general education board’s effort to control the Fort Valley’s school environment and their curriculum by structuring education so as to produce submissive workers who will fill various socially stratified occupations, thereby maintaining class-based inequities and benefiting the means of capitalist economic production and profit (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). In other words, despite the popular notion that public education serves as the great equalizer among unequal social classes in the United States, social and class-based inequities are in fact, reproduced through the public schooling process. In the case of the Fort Valley School, this particular population was tracked into a course of study that would secure their positions in society and maintain their lower class status. Bowles and Gintis (1976) elaborated,

The structure of social relations in education not only insures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. Specifically, the social relationships of education—the relationships between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, and students and students and students and their work—replicate the hierarchical divisions of labor. (p. 131)

Continuing in their efforts to control Black teacher-education programs through the use of limited curriculums that promoted industrial careers which supported the status quo, county training schools were developed. Again, there was a “suggested” curriculum to follow that lacked any classical education. These programs failed to control Black teacher preparation, since aspiring teachers chose to pursue training at Black colleges. Black colleges such as Jackson College in Mississippi, Alabama Baptist University, and Shaw University in North Carolina offered classical and higher literacy training for teacher preparation. In the long run, the philanthropists and Southern school reformers were unable to direct the course of Black teacher-preparatory programs along the lines of the Hampton-Tuskegee model of Black industrial education (Anderson, 1988). However, Davison and others like him suffered from unfair racist practices at the hands of elite Whites who resisted the idea of equal educational opportunities for Blacks.

As stated by DuBois, Black public schools and colleges may have prevented Blacks from an unimaginable return to slavery (1935). It is important for students, educators, parents, policy makers, and others to know this history of black education in middle Georgia. This knowledge can contribute to a sense of pride, positive identity (Carger, 1996), and appreciation of past educators’ sacrifices and accomplishments.

Tracking Issues Impacting Educational Opportunities

“Tracking” is a practice that assigns students in secondary school into college prep, general, or vocational programs (Wheelock, 1994). Based on achievement tests or other test scores, students may also be classified as fast, average, or slow learners and grouped with students who scored similarly (Oakes, 1985). Another common form of tracking is the evaluation and placement of students in special or exceptional education

programs. In many counties in Georgia, secondary school students are tracked into either college preparatory (college prep) or technology preparatory (tech prep) classes, and this decision is often made during the second semester of eighth grade. Many students are placed in special education programs during their primary grades. There are many reasons that educators track students, including the belief that it is easier to teach groups of similar students and that students learn better if they are grouped with other students with the same ability level as themselves. *However*, there are major concerns regarding the effects that the various forms of tracking have on students of color and those of low socioeconomic status. It is necessary to examine the historical roots of tracking in order to enhance understanding of current unfair tracking practices involving race and class.

Student enrollment increased dramatically from 1880 to 1918—from about 200,000 to over 1.5 million, representing an increase of 700% (Oakes, 1985). Not only was there a dramatic increase in the number of students attending public high schools, the kinds of students also changed profoundly. By 1909, 58% of the students in 37 of the nation's largest cities were of foreign-born parentage (Oakes, 1985).

Around 1890, educational and social influences on schools led to dramatic changes, which included tracking and ability grouping. Secondary schools had become extremely diverse. There was a growing concern regarding college entrance requirements being “inconsistent and arbitrary” (Oakes, 1985). There was also pressure for schools to develop a method to sort and select students who would be appropriate candidates for college.

In 1892, the Committee of Ten on Secondary Studies of the National Education Association, headed by Harvard University president Charles Eliot, began developing

recommendations for the standardization of college-prep curricula and college admission requirements, as well as recommendations for the reconstruction of school curriculum (Oakes, 1985). The committee maintained that Americans grossly underestimated the human potential for learning. Eliot in particular believed that most elementary school children are capable of ultimately succeeding in courses such as geometry, algebra, and foreign language. For this reason, the committee's recommendations were in direct opposition to creating curriculum that included a college prep track based on intellectual differences. Instead, the recommendation was for four courses of study, which included classical studies, Latin scientific studies, modern languages, and English, with each one acceptable for admission to college. The committee expressed clearly its opposition to the separation of students based on their plans to pursue a college education (Oakes, 1985).

Although Eliot's position was clear, Americans were dealing with a population explosion in the public high schools. Student enrollment increased by 700% from 1880 to 1918 (Oakes, 1985). The number of immigrants was increasing rapidly. This new wave of immigrants was different from the previous European immigrants because their skin was darker and they differed in language, religion, and traditions. They also had different cultural and social practices, attitudes, and manners. Consequently, there was a growing pressure to somehow address these differences and gain some type of social and academic order.

During this time (1890-1918), an influential theorist named Charles Darwin was growing in popularity with his notion of natural selection. Applying Darwin's biological theory to the social sciences, proponents of what came to be called social Darwinism theorized that ethnic minorities and the poor were responsible for their low

socioeconomic conditions because they were simply “less fit.” Their life conditions were viewed as evidence of their inferiority. As Oakes noted, “Social Darwinism had provided the ‘scientific justification’ for schools to treat various groups differently” (1985, p. 27).

There were others who influenced those making decisions for public education. G. Stanley Hall, a psychologist, described immigrant youth as culturally neglected and biologically inferior. Frederick Winslow Taylor, known for the Taylor System, developed the ideas of efficiency and productivity, and businessmen on school boards pushed for this system of efficiency to be adopted in public schools. Joseph Mayor Rice published a series of articles from 1895–1903 regarding his views on the inefficiency of schools. Rice’s report was based on testing results in math and spelling that he devised and administered to thousands of urban school children. He criticized the work being done in schools and rated it as “poor.” Leonard Ayers, another critic and educator, noted that most students dropped out of school before eighth grade and that schools were filled with retarded students. He suggested that schools were operating inefficiently by attempting to address the needs of the average or below average students. Ayers further indicated that money applied to less than the brightest students was wasted (Oakes, 1985, p. 29).

As a result of the growing number of publications addressing school inefficiency, the effectiveness of education was increasingly questioned by the public. In response, urban school administrators became more efficiency-minded. There was a growing perception that vocational programs were necessary in differentiating curriculums in the increasingly diverse rural and urban high schools. In particular, the focus on agriculture attracted students and parents in the rural schools. Ultimately, those in power bought into the notion that is today known as tracking. According to Oakes (1985),

This curricular differentiation was made possible only by the genuine belief—arising from social Darwinism—that children of various social classes, those from native-born and long-established families and those of recent immigrants, differed greatly in fundamental ways. Children of the affluent were considered by school people to be abstract thinkers, head minded, and oriented toward literacy. Those of the lower classes and the newly immigrated were considered laggards, ne'er-do-wells, hand minded, and socially inefficient, ignorant, prejudiced, and highly excitable. (p. 30)

Interestingly enough, when tracking was first implemented, students were placed into different programs according to their ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. However, due to the prevailing theme of the open and classless society at the end of World War I, this classification of children into various programs according to social class was questioned. Instead, IQ tests were used to establish classification: “The testing and measurement movement, too, using the psychology of individual differences, coincided with the wish to bring the division of labor, standardization, and specialization into the schools” (Oakes, 1985, p. 36). At last, there was a method for classifying students that was viewed as scientific in nature, efficient, and justifiable in its outcomes.

As tracking was being implemented, the school counseling movement simultaneously emerged in secondary schools. This movement led to the increased respectability of ability grouping. Students received appropriate counseling to guide their “choices” into the various tracks. Oakes (1985) pointed out that this counseling was based on the attitudes and beliefs of the counselor, as well as data that were perceived as objective, such as test results. Consequently, poor and ethnic minorities were guided

toward the vocational track, while wealthy White students were directed to choose the college bound course of study. Oakes explained,

[Many assume] that students learn better when they are grouped with other students who are considered to be like them academically—with those who know about the same things, who learn at the same rate, or who are expected to have similar futures. (p. 6)

Although most educators believe this and will cite it as one of the reasons to track students, the research does not support this conclusion.

In fact, research has shown that the achievement gap between students in college prep and tech prep courses is actually greater than the achievement gap between students who stay in school and those who drop out (Loveless, 1999). This seems to suggest that slower students who are tracked away from college bound curriculums have not learned as much at graduation as those students who did not finish school. In a study done by Braddock and Slavin (1993), high average and low achievers were compared separately in tracked schools to their counterparts in the untracked schools. The results show that the lower tracked performed significantly below the low achievers in the untracked schools on achievement tests. Also, the study found that eighth graders were much more likely to end up in noncollege preparatory programs in 10th grade than were untracked low achievers. Furthermore, most educators believe that slower students would feel better about themselves if grouped with similar students. However, a review of the literature consistently shows that the assumption is incorrect. Low track students in the longitudinal study displayed a lower sense of self esteem than the untracked low achievers. They were

also less likely to have positive perceptions of inter-group relations in their schools Braddock and Slavin (1993).

Slower students have been found to participate less in school activities and isolate themselves from the more high achieving students once they are tracked, which is not consistent with the expected behavior of a child with positive feelings about him- or herself. Indeed, “Rather than help students to feel more comfortable about themselves, the tracking process seems to foster lowered self esteem among these teenagers” (Oakes, 1985, p. 8).

Another belief commonly shared by educators is that high achieving students would be held back if they were in classes with students who are slower. However, contrary to popular belief, the studies vary in their size and in their methodology. Some are quite sophisticated, some rather crude. The results differ in certain specifics but one conclusion emerges clearly: no group of students has been found to benefit consistently from being in a homogeneous group (Oakes, 1985, p. 7).

Educators frequently assume that the student placement processes “accurately and fairly reflect [students’] past achievements and native abilities” (Oakes, 1985, p. 6). When students are placed in different tracks, the three types of information generally considered include standardized test scores, teacher/counselor recommendations (including grades), and students’ and parents’ choices. The input from this variety of sources may be biased or inaccurate.

Despite the fact that standardized testing has been the subject of much scrutiny, it continues to be used as an objective measure of student ability. A review of the literature on testing as well as my own experience in public education suggests that there are

serious problems of fairness when testing is used as an indicator of student ability. In addition, there are issues over whether test content is related to curricular objectives. George (1992) highlighted the difference that one point makes on the gifted program test in the state of Florida. A student being evaluated for gifted education must score 130 on an IQ test in order to qualify for the gifted program; a student who scores 129 is technically ineligible. The difference of one point in the test score has a profound effect on the educational opportunities available to a student. This example drives home the fact that separating students according to test scores may mean quite a difference in the quality of education a particular child receives, even if his or her scores are not drastically different from another student's who is placed in a different program. Additionally, in consideration of test content and administration, there are even more issues to be raised. Oakes (1985) stated,

Many researchers . . . have concluded that both the substance of most standardized tests and the procedures used to standardize and administer them are culturally biased. That is, white middle-class children are most likely to do well on them because of the compatibility of their language and content of test questions, with the group against which the tests were normed, with testing procedures, and with most of the adults doing the testing. (p. 11)

Although many educators are aware of the issues involved with testing and placement, the practice of tracking has become such a habitual practice that they turn their backs to obvious concerns.

Teacher and counselor recommendations are often viewed as expert opinions. Yet, when considering that counselors are responsible for as many as 500 students, it is

clear that they cannot know each child well enough to advise fairly. An average secondary education teacher may have approximately 150 students (Oakes, 1985). Oakes (1985) shed some light on this, noting that “in 1963, a study of counseling practices revealed that students were often placed into groups on the basis of counselors’ assessment of their language, dress, and behavior as well as their academic potential” (p. 12). While we would hope that such practices no longer exist, we know that subconsciously, placement decisions are influenced by race, class, speech, interactions with adults, and dress. The result of this is unfair placement practices that lead to more poor and minority students being placed in special education and tech prep curriculum while middle- and upper-class White students are placed in college-bound tracks.

Race Issues Affecting Educational Opportunities

Despite most teachers’ good intentions, there is evidence of a pervasive tendency to “pull back” or expect very little effort from African American students, which can lead to more problems for these students later. If teachers look at a student’s skin color (race) and quality of clothing (class) to decide if they are capable of performing at the appropriate level, then academic expectations are going to be low. I have come to understand that the source of these low expectations is a very basic belief that many teachers have concerning African American students. Ladson-Billings (1994, p. 130), citing research by Lipman (1993), concluded,

Despite the movement toward more localized and democratic administrations and greater material and personnel support, teachers’ ideologies about the likely academic success of African American students remains unchanged: Deep down

they do not believe that African American students can be successful academically.

Therefore, African American males are not likely to be encouraged to succeed and pursue academically rigorous college prep studies in high school.

As a result of Codjoe's (2001) concern that most of the research regarding Black students' education was centered on the issue of underachievement and failure, he was motivated to investigate and document issues related to the success of Black/African Canadian students, both academically and personally. He also wanted to emphasize the role that institutional racism plays in setting barriers to success for this particular group. Those barriers included anti-Black racism, negative racial stereotyping, racially biased curriculum and texts, low teacher expectations, and alienating school environments. Codjoe concluded that teachers often grossly underestimated the impact of psychological and emotional stress from racism on Black students. He argued that the approach of the dominant culture to attribute underachievement of Black students to cultural issues or genetics has been historically used to justify tracking students in vocational education at the expense of a quality education.

In this discussion of race issues impacting educational opportunities, it is enlightening to consider that the de facto form of racial segregation is among the most prevalent demonstrations of racism that many African American children experience (Comer & Poussaint, 1992). There are still a great number of public schools that are segregated even though segregation was outlawed more than fifty years ago. American schools display racism in several different ways, according to Nieto (2001). When minority schools filled with children of color end up with less funding than the majority

schools. Tracking is identified as another form of racism because it results in a disproportionate number of African Americans and other underrepresented students ending up with special education and lower track placements. (Hacker, 1992; Oakes, 1999).

The lack of qualified teachers (Wilson, 1996) and low teacher expectations for minority children are additional signs of racism (Au, 1993; Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Hare & Hare, 1991). Teachers who are not professionally qualified often are teaching outside their subject area of expertise. Low teacher expectations often leads to watered down curriculum lacking in academic rigor.

Class Issues Impacting Educational Opportunities

In discussing educational inequality, the role of poverty and the issue of class should be highlighted as contributing factors to educational injustices. Yet, the issue of race definitely intersects with class issues making it difficult to discuss one issue without the other. Regardless, there is evidence that low socio economics hugely impacts educational opportunities. The statistics on poverty indeed paint a very troubling picture:

Almost one in every five children (13.6 million) is now growing up in poverty and one in every twelve children is growing up in extreme poverty—that is, in families with incomes of less than half the federal poverty line, or about \$6,500 for a family of three. Whereas just over 17 percent of all children and youth six to seventeen years old are living in poverty, more than 20 percent of all children younger than six are poor. The rate of poverty for children of color (Black and Hispanic) is almost double the rate for white children. (Canella & Kincheloe, 2002, p. 22)

African American children face additional perils. In fact, “an African American boy who was born in California in 1988 is three times more likely to be murdered than to be admitted to the University of California” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 2). It is clear that a significant number of children, particularly children of color, come from families that lack financial and social resources. In fact, the number of children living in extreme poverty is alarming. It comes as no surprise that these children are not performing well on standardized tests and are not focused on academic activities: “Poverty is pervasive. It affects diet, nutrition, employment, housing, self concept, and the entire educational experience” (Ansalone, 2001, p. 33).

The impact of poverty causes ripple effects that negatively affect students of color. Citing a study by Graue and DiPerna (2000), Thompson (2003, p. 13) noted that “lower-socioeconomic-status boys from ethnic minority groups are disproportionately chosen for early retention.” In addition, retention decisions were highly impacted by teachers’ beliefs. Unfortunately, “teachers’ and administrators’ perspectives about retention often stem from racist, sexist, and classist beliefs” (p. 13). We should ask ourselves, how can African American males ultimately receive a quality education and choose a college prep track when teachers’ views of African American boys are rooted in racism and classism?

CRT has been criticized for neglecting class differences as a possible explanation for educational, political, and economic outcomes among certain groups of people. However, as argued by Siddle-Walker and Thompkins (2004), race is the primary characteristic used by the dominant group in classification—before gender and any other difference, including class. Nonetheless, it is difficult to dissect race and class with the

African American population because the majority of African Americans are represented in the lower socioeconomic segment of society. Although racial differences certainly leads to inequalities in education, the question remains as to whether it adequately addresses injustices without considering class differences and systemic factors. It is important to discuss class as it relates to White America, specifically the working class and their perceptions of racial and class differences.

As mentioned earlier in the discussion of CRT tenets, interest convergence offers insight into the intersection of race and class differences. Interest convergence explains that racism serves both elite Whites (in a material manner) and working-class Whites (in a psychic manner). Among White America, and the White working class in particular, an understanding of whiteness cannot be explained “without reference to blacks” (Weis, 2004, p. 7). Although the identity of working class Whites has undergone a transition with the changes in the labor market due to globally based economic restructuring, this population still clings to the construct of race, which positions them above Blacks in their minds and in the very real institutional structures that have serious educational, political, and economic consequences.

Weis (2004) conducted a longitudinal study in a particular rural town where a steel mill had been the primary employer for the working class. The participants in the study were in high school when they were initially interviewed in 1985. They were interviewed again in 2001, 16 years after the initial study. Although more than 50 students participated in the first study, only 10 of them were persons of color. Interestingly enough, when Weis returned in 2001 to continue his research, he had no problem finding the original White participants; they all kept in touch and were

interconnected through employment or social situations. However, none of the participants had any idea of the whereabouts of the students of color. They all discussed border patrol and immigration, expressing the need to protect their children, neighborhoods, and schools from the “other” (Blacks and Arabs). These sons and daughters of the proletariat did not interact with other races at work or in social circles, despite the fact that they attended high school with other races as a result of desegregation laws. Finally, it was interesting that despite the fact that industrial employment opportunities were less available to this generation than to prior generations, this group often protected their working class category by having its women enter the workforce and advance in employment status and pay. This caused the working class white male to participate in historically nontraditional roles, such as caregiver for the children. The White females benefited immensely from laws such as Affirmative Action that were primarily designed to improve the quality of life for marginalized populations. Consequently, the white males in the households also experienced benefits and were able to maintain their working class status and in some cases climb the social class ladder. The White women obviously welcomed their new opportunities and pressed forward in their educational and career opportunities with tenacity. Some of the women in this study and many across the nation pursued college and careers in the field of education, which led to white women representing the current majority of pre-service education majors.

Quality of Teachers

Ladson-Billings (1994) argued, “The pattern for some teachers is to endure a teaching assignment in an inner-city school until they can find a position in a more affluent district with fewer children of color” (p. 52). We know that the majority of

students graduating from education programs with a plan to teach are White females. Based on the literature and my own experience, they are well meaning and talented people. However, because of the trends in urban schools, many teachers have found themselves in over their heads, very frustrated that the experience of teaching is not what they imagined it would be. Teaching has become much more than having and imparting knowledge. Accountability measures dictated by the No Child Left Behind Act have added even more stress to the profession. Urban schools are filled with children of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds, which means that their level of exposure to violence is higher due to their living environments. The issues brought to schools by these students complicate the delivery of education.

To further complicate things, teachers are not prepared with the cultural knowledge to relate to these children as individuals, nor are they usually able to teach in a manner that is culturally relevant to students in order to “hook” them into learning. Teachers often fail to seek an understanding of the children’s cultural background. Without an understanding of who their students are, assumptions about the meaning of certain behaviors can lead to practices such as unfair tracking and ability grouping:

To provide schooling for everyone’s children that reflects liberal, middle-class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it. (Delpit, 1995, p. 28)

There is also often a lack of teacher understanding of the parents of these students. They are judged based on assumptions made by predominantly young White female teachers regarding whether or not the parents care about their children’s

education. When parents do not attend open houses and other school functions or do not appear to help their children with homework, teachers often judge them as uncaring and uninterested in their children's education. In fact, the very opposite is often true.

Thompson (2004) explained that caring is often manifested differently in low socioeconomic African American homes than in homes of White middle- and upper-class families. Thompson remembered that her mother worked a second job in order to put food on the table for the family and could not take time off to attend functions like Back to School Night or PTA meetings, nor was she available to help with homework.

However, it was clear that the older children in the family were expected to assist the younger ones with their homework. Yet, when a White middle-class student shows up at school with a project that was assisted or completely done by professional parents, it is often elevated and used as a judgment against the project that was at most assisted by an older sibling.

Teacher qualification is a serious issue that directly affects academic performance. Thompson (2004) revealed that 6% of teachers nationwide lack full certification. However, the number of uncertified teachers is higher in high poverty schools and particularly in fields like special education, math, and science. I previously served as a school social worker in a middle Georgia district. I visited a middle school with a predominantly African American student population from a low socioeconomic background and was informed that the counselor was leaving after this school term was over to go to another school with a more diverse student enrollment. I was later told that about 80% of the 8th-grade teachers were also leaving. This poverty stricken school would have the majority of its 8th-grade teachers coming in new to the school for the fall

semester. This lack of stability certainly impacts the quality of teacher–student relationships and must be addressed if we plan to raise the performance level of African American students.

A caring spirit is imperative to effectively teach students, particularly African American males. Those students who believe their teachers care perform better academically. In research performed by Nogeura (2001), there was consistent evidence that most Black students value education. In a survey that included 147 African American male respondents, nearly 90% responded "agree" or "strongly agree" to the questions, "I think education is important," and "I want to go to college." However, in response to the questions "I work hard to achieve good grades" and "My teachers treat me fairly," less than one fourth of the respondents, 22% and 18% respectively, responded positively. There is obviously an alarming inconsistency between what students say they feel about the importance of education, the effort they make, and the support they receive from teachers. In another survey, Nogeura (2001) found that African American males were least likely to indicate that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "My teachers support me and care about my success in their class." Only 8% of Black males versus 33% of White males responded "strongly agree".

Equality Through Research-Based Education With Math Implications

In 1995, Oakes published the article "Two Cities' Tracking and Within-school Segregation." The purpose of this study was to examine the placement process and outcomes of tracking students in two different cities in an effort to determine its level of effectiveness based on the stated benefits of such grouping. In her research of the two systems, Oakes conducted analysis about tracking using the following questions: If

tracking practices are used in this system, how so? Does the practice of tracking result in racially imbalanced classrooms? Are these placement practices the result of sound, consistent, and educationally valid considerations? Can the racial disproportionalities resulting from tracking be explained by valid educational considerations? What are the consequences of the tracking practices for the classroom instructional opportunities and educational outcomes of Latino children? Does the system have the necessary support and capacity to dismantle racially identifiable tracking and create heterogeneously grouped classrooms?

The general findings were that tracking does create racially imbalanced classrooms in two forms: In high-ability classes in all subject areas, White and Asian students were overrepresented, while African American and Latino students were underrepresented. In low-ability tracked classes, African American and Latino students were overrepresented while white and Asian students were underrepresented. There was also evidence that teachers and counselors honored parents' requests for students' track placement, but Latino and African American parents had less access to this information than parents from other racial groups. Amazingly, the research showed that the students were not actually tracked according to ability. The range in ability based on assessments and other measures documented as determinants of qualifications for placement in advanced courses clearly revealed heterogeneous grouping in all tracks. African American and Latino students whose assessment measures qualified them for advanced placement were likely to be overlooked and placed in basic classes. On the other hand, White students whose assessment measures indicated placement in the low-ability classes

were often found in the advanced track. In both systems, African American and Latino students suffered educationally with fewer educational opportunities (Oakes, 1995).

Oakes (1990) conducted an earlier study to determine the effects of race, class, and tracking on opportunities to learn math and science. The findings showed that math and science experiences for low income, African American and Hispanic students were significantly different among racial and class lines by the time students reached high school, despite the small differences experienced in elementary education.

In other literature, discoveries were made that could have great implications for change in tracking African American students. In a publication by Horn and Bobbitt (2000), first-generation college students (those college students whose parents did not attend college) were compared to their peers. The first generation students were less likely to choose the college prep track for ninth grade if they had not taken an algebra course in the eighth grade. Furthermore, “regardless of parents’ educational attainment, students’ achievement, and other related factors, students who completed mathematics programs beyond the level of algebra II substantially increased their chances of enrolling in a four year college” (p. 2). The inference is that there should be very persuasive efforts to recruit African American middle school students into advanced math courses that would lead to an algebra course in the eighth grade and communicate to the parents the importance of doing so. Secondly, these students and their parents should be counseled appropriately about college prep and tech prep tracks and encouraged to strongly consider the college prep track. Much support would be needed, especially if the parents are not sophisticated in this area.

Moses and Cobb (2001) tied the practice of tracking African American students away from college prep curriculums to the denial of Blacks the right to vote and viewed education in math as a tool of liberation. Moses used his own childhood experiences as a springboard for building an amazing program to guide middle school students toward advanced math and ultimately college preparation. This program, the Algebra Project, has proven to be extremely successful. He was motivated to begin this initiative as part of his work as a civil rights activist because he felt that math, particularly algebra, was not only a gateway to higher education but also a necessity to succeed in life in a technologically advanced society. Moses' dedication to this project stems from his strong commitment to activism for people of color, as evidenced by his words:

Today, I want to argue, the most urgent social issue affecting poor people and people of color is economic access. In today's world, economic access and full citizenship depends crucially on math and science literacy. I believe that the absence of math literacy in urban and rural communities throughout this country is an issue as urgent as the lack of registered Black voters in Mississippi was. . . . I believe we can get the same kind of consensus we had in the 1960s for the effort of repairing this. And I believe that solving the problem requires exactly the kind of community organizing that changed the South in the 1960's. This has been my work—and that of the Algebra Project—for the past twenty years. (p. 5)

With so much evidence that refutes the appropriateness of tracking, it is difficult to understand why tracking continues in schools today. Oakes (1985, 1995) insisted that tradition is what keeps tracking so prevalent in schools. She explained that tracking was the solution for educational and social problems at a specific time in history and has

continued as a matter of routine and “as a result, the practice has continued long after the original problems arose and long after the social context from which the solution emerged has changed considerably” (Oakes, 1985, p. 15).

Inequality in Education

There have been several attempts to eliminate tracking in public schools. However, opposition by those with status and power has countered such efforts. Wells and Serna (1996) offered the following:

Efforts to alter within-school segregation via detracking . . . are generally threatening to elites, in that they challenge their position at the top of the hierarchy. The perceived stakes, from an elite parent’s perspective, are quite high. They argue, for instance, that their children will not be well served in detracked classes. And while these stakes are most frequently discussed in academic terms—for example, the dumbing down of the curriculum for smart students—the real stakes, we argue, are generally not academic at all, but rather, status and power. For example, if a school does away with separate classes for students labeled “gifted” but teachers continue to challenge these students with the same curriculum in a detracked setting, the only “losses” the students will incur are the label and their separate and unequal status. (p. 95)

In an anonymous article from the *Education Digest* (2004), two high schools were featured for their efforts in detracking. Their school officials agreed with assistant education professor Kelvin G. Welner from the University of Colorado, Boulder that tracking stems from the factory model of schooling, which stresses efficiency, sorting, and standardization. Therefore, Southside High School in Rockville

Centre, New York, and Noble High School, in North Berwick, Maine both proceeded with detracking in their schools. They started detracking in middle schools, because it was felt that the placement or track established in the sixth grade ultimately sealed their fate. We knew we were closing doors for kids, starting age 11 and we wanted to stop. (p. 16)

The results were positive. The passing rate on the state's Regents Exam rose from 78% to 92%. Gains were also dramatic in the percentages of African American, Latino, and low-socioeconomic status students taking and passing advanced math courses. Another unanticipated benefit was an improved school climate. The schools reported a significant reduction in violent incidences and much less racial tension resulting from having students in more diverse classrooms.

Summary of Literature

The practice of tracking that results in the placement of students of color primarily from low socioeconomic backgrounds into low ability-level and special education academic tracks is a traditional but inequitable practice that continues today in primary and secondary education. Proponents of tracking see the practice from the perspective that it best serves students to learn in environments with other students who share the same ability level. However, advanced students are robbed of the opportunity of interacting with diverse populations, and lower performing students are impacted negatively academically as a result of ability grouping. The review of literature explained why tracking negatively impacts students, particularly those of color, and offers explanations as to why such an unfair practice continues despite the abundance of research against it. The literature also offers opportunities for more equitable educational

practices. The CRT framework supports the connection between race, class, and tracking practices demonstrated throughout the literature. Still, the practice of tracking continues to reduce the number of African American males who graduate high school adequately prepared for college.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

CRT is the theoretical framework chosen for this inquiry into African American male high school experiences as related to race, class, tracking, and higher education opportunities. The CRT tenets offer the most appropriate avenue to understanding the inequity of educational opportunities for underserved students in the current high school curriculum. The unique voice of color, storytelling, and counter-storytelling tenets stimulated my passion to cultivate an opportunity for African American males to tell their stories and share their experiences so that their voices concerning these injustices can be heard. Because the purpose of this study is to explore the thoughts, perceptions, opinions, and feelings of African American males regarding high school tracking experiences and issues of race, class, and higher education, the CRT storytelling framework is “helpful to expose racism and in the case of schooling, unequal educational opportunities” (Deyhle, 2005, p. 135). It establishes the fact that racism is a normal and everyday part of the educational environment. CRT also allows the freedom to discuss issues of race in a context that includes historic wrongs that may be contributing to current experiences. Since tracking is based on the premise that it benefits students when in fact it often presents a detriment, CRT is relevant because it reveals how some procedures and laws supposedly established for the benefit of marginalized groups in fact benefit the dominant society.

In explaining my reasons for choosing CRT as the framework for this study, I cannot express it any clearer than did Ladson-Billings (1998):

My decision to deploy a critical race theory framework in my scholarship is intimately linked to my understanding of the political and personal stake I have in the education of black children. All of my “selves” are invested in this work—the self that is a researcher, the self that is a parent, the self that is a community member, the self that is a black woman. No technical-rational approach to this work would yield the deeply textured, multifaceted work I attempt to do. Nor would a technical-rational approach allow for the archeology of knowledge that is necessary to challenge the inequitable social, economic, and political positions that exist between the mainstream and the margins. (p.14)

I feel strongly that I, too, have a stake in the education of African American children in general, even though the focus of this study concerns African American males in particular. I also feel that I must find ways to make a difference in the educational lives of these children, because if I do not, all that I have experienced with my own children and those in my community and the knowledge that I have acquired from my studies will be useless. Denzin and Lincoln argued that “in CRT, the researcher makes a deliberate appearance in his or her work” (2003, p. 424), and this will also be the case in the current study. My interest in this investigation is emotionally fueled from my experiences with tracking issues as a parent of African American males. My firsthand knowledge of what happens in the schools drives me toward further understanding and action.

Narrative Inquiry

I have chosen to use storytelling and narratives to critically examine how issues of race, class, and tracking impact African American males’ opportunities for higher

education. Critical narrative inquiry will serve as the methodological foundation for this research.

Narrative inquiry is defined as the study of experience and “reflects an exciting new wave of social science thinking about human experience” (Phillion, He, & Connelly, 2005, p. ix). Stories are collected and shared in an effort to make meaning out of one’s life experiences. African American males represent a segment of the nation’s population that is marginalized, and their voices and lived experiences are often left out of the mainstream. Narrative inquiry allows the participants to share their stories, which will address current misconceptions and stereotypes about their lived experiences. This approach is a meaningful and engaging way to help educators understand their diverse students’ backgrounds and provides a venue to give attention to often-silenced voices (Carger, 1996). It is a multidimensional research method that embraces the natural development of a caring relationship, including emotion, between researcher and student while remaining in the realm of respectable inquiry. It allows the researcher to be connected intimately to the participants and to the work. The most appropriate method of learning and understanding the particular historical and cultural experiences of this group of students is the use of their own voices.

Narrative inquiry is increasing in popularity as a form of research, and there are many proponents of this approach. Phillion et al. (2005) explained that “the special quality of this work that distinguishes it from other work in multicultural education is the emphasis on understanding experience and transforming this understanding into significant social and educational implications” (p. ix). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) maintained that life experience and education are intertwined and used Dewey’s (1938)

theory of experience as the basis of their explanation. According to Phillion et al. (2005), narrative inquiry is simply a study of life and the opportunity to temporarily join life's flow for inquiry purposes.

Meta Harris (2003) strongly supported the use of autobiography since Blacks have traditionally used this method to tell their stories: "It was originally a means of appealing to White society for acceptance as human beings" (p. 36). She explained that autobiography was used to demonstrate to Whites that slaves were human with all the same human qualities as White people. She further expressed that autobiography may be used to share history and culture with others. Participants also benefit from an in-depth examination of their prior "cultural and life experiences which impact who they are, how they perceive, react to, and interact with others" (p. 37). The process permits the participant to think deeply about his or her life and to develop a positive self-identity. Harris (2005) identified this process as a therapeutic one. Sometimes considered to be unreliable for research purposes, autobiography, which is based on memory and subjectivity, is still beneficial in learning about the participants' attitudes and beliefs and can provide pertinent information about his or her cultural history. Autobiography is a means that can be used for student and researcher to learn about each other.

Saundra Nettles (2005, p. 20), also a proponent of using narratives as a research method, stated, "researchers have used narratives to understand interactions between social contexts and individuals (Salzer, 1998) and to explore the role of narratives as resources for transformation at the person level (Franz & Stewart, 1994) and in environments such as schools." Nettles (2001) similarly used narrative expression to tell her story of physical and spiritual resilience and transformation in her recovery from the

surgical removal of a brain tumor in her book *Crazy Visitation: A Chronicle of Illness and Recovery*.

Carger (1996) used narrative inquiry to assist in understanding the lives of a Latina family whose adolescent son's decision to drop out of school propelled the parents to strengthen their own literacy education and pursue legal citizenship in order to serve as a model for their children, demonstrating that they valued education. Carger stated,

I also reflect upon the use of qualitative research to foster understandings of "others," particularly of students and their families who are typically and tragically marginalized in a nation whose teachers often do not share their ethnicity or their backgrounds of experience. My reflections propel me to a hope for responsive educational research that is linked to responsible social action. (p. 232)

Although narrative inquiry appropriately accommodates this qualitative investigation, it is a limited rather than comprehensive method because of the need to more critically examine issues of inequality and injustice. Storytelling will allow African American male students an opportunity to speak openly and honestly so that we as educators might gain understanding and insight from their own realities. Moreover, the counter-narratives are important in that readers will have an opportunity to experience an alternative to the traditional metanarrative, which suggests that African American males always fail academically or are only gifted in athletics. Furthermore, the critical lens not only allows for the critique of the current inequitable educational practices, but also offers opportunities for change (Carger, 1996; Dehyle, 2005; Harris, 2005; Phillion et al., 2005).

Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School of Social Science was the first to explain critical theory as a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory that only attempts to understand or explain it. Critical theory is a radical, emancipatory form of Marxian theory that integrates all of the major social science theories into a method for studying various dimensions of society, including economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and psychology (McCarthy, 1991).

John Dewey, a pioneer in the field of education and author of *Democracy and Education* (1916), was a great influence on the development of critical theory. Dewey opposed the social efficiency movement and promoted the provision of social services in the schools. Dewey initiated the first kindergarten in 1873, which was opened as a way of addressing the problems of urban poverty. Summer school and school showers were started under Dewey's direction. His movement encompassed the idea of social action to address social issues such as violence, hunger, inflation, inequality, and terrorism. These issues remain concerns today. Dewey's vision supports the need for a critical analysis of race, class, and tracking and its effects on African American males' opportunities for higher education.

Harold Rugg is also well known for his support of social reconstruction (Stanley, 1992). He is a great writer of social studies texts. He believed that society could no longer explain away poverty as the inevitable:

A central assumption held by Rugg and other reconstructionists was that we now have the productive capacity to provide all of our people with an adequate standard of living. In other words, poverty could no longer be rationalized as an

inevitable phenomenon, but must be understood instead as a direct consequence of current social and economic arrangements that we have the power to change.

(Stanley, p. 12)

Rugg also believed that “certain interest groups had gained unfair power and economic advantage” (Stanley, p. 13). He was an advocate of using the schools to help reconstruct society.

George Counts led the organization of the social studies movement. Although he was a social reconstructionist who had been influenced by Dewey’s Pragmatism, Counts criticized progressive educators in his speech “Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order” (cited by Stanley, 1992). Counts agreed with Rugg that society is able to produce goods and services in ample supply to meet society’s needs and “lack” cannot be used as an explanation of social ills.

Although this conception of critical theory originated with the Frankfurt school, it also prevails among some other recent social scientists. Some of the individuals associated with this position include the critical theorists Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire, and Maxine Greene. Michael Apple’s (1995b) goal was to build a democratic education system in the United States. Similar to others in this camp, he was concerned with class differences and the inequity of resources among marginalized populations. Henry Giroux, who emphasized compassion, empathy, and solidarity, viewed the school as a resource for the larger community. He agreed with the early social reconstructionists in that he saw the purpose of education as assisting students in comprehending concepts of rights and responsibilities as citizens. In one of his recent books, *Breaking into the Movies*, Giroux (2002) wrote,

Central to any pedagogical approach to race and the politics of “whiteness” is the recognition that race as a set of attitudes, values, lived experiences, and affective identifications has become a defining feature of American life. However arbitrary and mythic, dangerous and variable, the fact is that racial categories exist and shape the lives of people differently within existing inequalities of power and wealth. (p. 144).

Paulo Freire (2003) was one of Apple’s followers. He promoted a system of education that emphasized learning as an act of culture and freedom. Freire introduced the concept of conscientization, which is the process of the learner developing critical consciousness and awareness concerning oppression as related to power. Maxine Greene was a proponent of true identity, new pluralism, and diversity and cultural equity. She was concerned for marginalized groups. In her book, *Releasing the Imagination*, Greene (1995) stated,

There is no question but that some students face fearful obstacles due to inequities in this country. The facts of race, class, and ethnic membership need to be taken into account along with the necessity of extensive social and economic restructuring. (p. 19)

The critical theory perspective, which critiques general issues of inequality and social justice, coupled with narrative inquiry methods provides a solid methodological base for the proposed study. This combination allows for the stories of African American males to be told according to their own voices, without judgment, as a counter-story to the dominant metanarrative. Additionally, CRT opens the door for understanding race as a primary factor in the lives and educational experiences of these participants. Therefore,

the use of CRT and critical narrative inquiry for this study produces a realistic view of the inequities of African American males and demands systemic change in an effort to create equality.

The 4 African American male students shared their perspectives of tracking issues and how these issues may impact their future. I was interested in understanding the following: Is their race associated with their academic success or failure? Does their socioeconomic status impact their success or failure? What are the opportunities available to them in the future? Is college a realistic goal? Why or why not? What academic track are they completing? How do they apply this concept to their lives and what does it ultimately mean to them? Do they understand what tracking is, and when did they reach such understanding? How was the decision regarding which track they would pursue? Did they fully understand tracking at the time of their decision? Who or what was their source of information and/or advising? Are they satisfied with their choice? Was the chosen track their choice? The voices of African American male students will offer insight from their experiences that can be shown to have significant social and educational implications (Phillion et al., 2005).

It is important to find out if high school-aged African American males are encouraged to reach their highest potential or if they are guided toward society's social, political, educational, and economic status quo. If they are expected to perform well and are challenged academically, who is challenging them? Are their parents, teachers, counselors, and school administrators challenging them? Since it is clear that underrepresented student populations are often victims of lowered expectations (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 2004) and students who live in low socioeconomic conditions

lack the resources the dominant society considers normal, where would the expectation to pursue a rigorous curriculum in preparation for college entrance come from? It would be easy to suggest that a Black male student living in poverty should not stress himself with the demands of a rigorous curriculum, and this could easily be interpreted as a caring response. Yet, the reality is that this way of thinking is exactly what promotes inequality, injustice, and the status quo. The educational system must take responsibility for guiding each child to perform to their highest potential and to believe that they are capable of doing so.

The intended outcome of this study is the production of social and educational implications regarding the use (or misuse) of tracking African American males from low socioeconomic backgrounds and how to remove the barriers to higher education caused by tracking. My goal was to shine a bright light on the issue of tracking that adequately and persistently challenges the current practices and stimulates dialogue that dictates change.

Collecting Stories

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) decried, “Unfortunately, knowledge of and by people of color has been repressed, distorted, and denied by a Euro-American cultural logic that represents an ‘aggressive seizure of intellectual space’” (p. X). As demonstrated in the literature review, educators have made tracking decisions for students that too often have proven detrimental to students of color. Those same decisions have also been aggressively defended with ideas categorized by critical race theorists as interest convergence. Because of this observation, I am eager to seize the opportunity to fully expose the knowledge and perspectives of a population whose voices are usually silent.

The methods will allow for the uninhibited expression of thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the participants in a way that is racially and culturally affirming. Data has been gathered via school portraiture, participant profiles, individual interviews, a focus group interview, and researcher journaling.

School Portraiture

I have chosen Dooly County High School for the selection of participants for this study. It is the only high school in the Dooly County School District where I recently accepted the position of Project Director for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative. Located near the geographic center of the state, Dooly County, Georgia, is home to 11,525 individuals living in a geographic area of 393 square miles. According to the 2000 census, there were 2,767 families and 3,909 households. The City of Vienna, the county seat, has 2,973 residents. The vast majority of the remaining 8,758 residents live in unincorporated areas. Dooly County is composed of five additional cities and towns which include Unidilla, Byronville, Pinehurst, Lilly, and Dooling (ePodunk, n.d.).

Approximately 22% of Dooly County's residents are currently living in poverty. Moreover, the local median household income is currently \$27,980, but the state average is \$42,433. The general per capita income for Dooly County residents is \$13,628. While the per capita income for White residents is \$18,693, that of African American residents is \$9,175, which is significantly below the poverty level and below the state average of \$14,371 (ePodunk, n.d.). Poverty negatively impacts children in many ways. Compared to more affluent children, children experiencing deprivation have worse nutrition; more physical health problems; increased emotional, social, and behavioral problems; and lower average scores on measures of cognitive development (such as verbal ability,

reading readiness, and problem solving). These issues place children at greater risk for a variety of adverse consequences, including academic failure, juvenile delinquency, and teen pregnancy (Georgia Family Connection Partnership, 2003).

African Americans represent 49.5% of Dooly County residents, while 46% are White and 4.7% are Hispanic. The Dooly County school system has an enrollment of approximately 1,500 students. More than 80% of the student population is African American. This is compared to the statewide student population average of 37.3% African American, 57.0% White, and 3.7% Hispanic (Boatwright & Bachtel, 2004).

Dooly County High has an enrollment of 358. Since the number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch exceeds 85% (compared to the state average of 49.7%), all of the students in the county eat free. Furthermore, the students who graduate have lower average SAT and ACT scores than the state and national averages. Also, when comparing Dooly County high school students' results on the Georgia High School Graduation Test with the rest of the state, these students consistently score 100 points less than the state average, especially in math, science, and social studies (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).



Figure 1. Dooly County, Georgia

Table 3

2004–2005 Georgia High School Graduation Test: Dooly County 11th Grade First-Time Test Takers

Subject area	Dooly County				Georgia average			
	<u>Pass</u>		<u>Fail</u>		<u>Pass</u>		<u>Fail</u>	
	All	Blacks	All	Blacks	All	Blacks	All	Blacks
English/Lang. arts	82%	78%	18%	22%	93%	90%	7%	10%
Math	73%	71%	27%	30%	92%	85%	8%	15%
Social studies	67%	60%	33%	40%	82%	71%	18%	29%
Science	68%	22%	32%	78%	68%	50%	32%	50%

As illustrated in Table 3, Dooly High had a passing rate of 73% in math and 82% in Language Arts among its 11th grade first-time test takers (Great Schools, 2005). Dooly County High School's Black students passed math at a rate of 71% and English at 78%. The state's average passing rate for math was 92% and 93% for English. Dooly's rate of passing in science was overall 68%, with only 22% of Black students passing, while the state's rate of passing was 68% overall and 50% for Blacks. These figures illustrate that Dooly County High School's Black students lag significantly behind the state rate for Black students and the Georgia rate in general. Additional indicators shown in Table 2 further illustrate various other areas of educational challenges in Dooly County.

Table 4

Dooly County School System: 2004–2005 School Year

Selected indicators	Dooly County	Georgia average
Retained students (Grades K–12)*	17%	4.4%
Dropout rate (Grades 9–12)	8.3%	5.0%
Graduation rate	60%	69.4%
Average SAT score for high school seniors	842	989**
Average ACT score	18.2	20.0**
2005 graduates eligible for the HOPE scholarship	50%	61.1%

*85% of the total number of retained students were Black; 60% of retained students were males.

**National average SAT score was 1020 and average ACT score was 20.9.

The overall average total SAT score for high school seniors at Dooly High was 972; 862 was the average for Black students; 1027 was the average for Asian Americans; and 1067 was the average for Whites (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2004).

According to the Georgia Department of Education, the total teaching population for Dooly County is 104 for K- 12. The majority, 59, are White. Forty-six are African American and 1 is Hispanic. Forty-six teachers are prepared with a bachelor’s degree, 42 have a masters degree, 16 possess a specialist, and 1 is prepared with a doctorate degree. Eighty-two percent of the teachers are certified but 18% are not. There is a 14 to 1 student/staff ratio which includes certified and noncertified.

There are 27 teachers at Dooly High School. Again, most of them (18) are White, 10 are African American, and 1 is Hispanic. Eleven teachers at the high school have bachelors' degrees, 13 have masters, 3 have specialists, and 1 has a doctorate. Eighty-six percent of the teachers at the high school are certified. There is a 12 to 1 student/staff ratio including certified and noncertified.

Unfortunately, Dooly County residents rank high in poverty, and the students tend to perform at lower levels on state and national tests. Dooly High also has significantly more students than the district's average who receive free and reduced lunches.

Participant Profiles

All participants selected for this study are African American high school male seniors. At the time of this research inquiry, Jim was an 18 year-old graduating senior from the college prep track. He was the youngest of three male children and the only child in the home at this time. Jim was from a two-parent household. His mother had completed 2 years of college and is employed as a Licensed Practical Nurse in a neighboring county. His father was a high school graduate and has worked as a farm hand for more than 30 years. Neither of Jim's older brothers had attended college. The family's income was between \$40,000–\$50,000 per year, and the parents are homeowners. Jim had been accepted at Valdosta State University and Morehouse College in Atlanta. His plans to were major in Biology and eventually pursue a career in medicine.

Jody was a tech prep student who did not pass the science portion of the Georgia High School Graduation Test in order to qualify for spring graduation. He lives in a single-parent, female-headed household. Jody's mother was a high school graduate and was employed as a nursing assistant in a nearby town. The family income was reported

between \$20,000-30,000. His father lived in Jacksonville, but Jody only sees him occasionally. Jody suffered the death of one of his older brothers about one year ago. Jody's mentor is his maternal uncle, who owns a small trucking company. His uncle has been preparing him for a career in trucking should his academic plans fail.

Jaden is a college prep student scheduled to graduate this spring. He has completed the requirements for the Georgia High School Graduation Test and is definitely planning to go to college. He has been accepted at Fort Valley State University nearby. Jaden's mother is a college graduate who works at a local hospital in the Human Resources Department. His father is a high school graduate employed at a local particle plant. Family income was reported between \$30,000-40,000. Like Jim, Jaden has two older brothers who are currently living outside the home. The family owns its home.

Tae is an 18-year-old tech prep student who is also on schedule to graduate this spring. Tae lives in a single parent household. His mother reports completing one year of college and currently works as a production worker. She is also a homeowner. Tae has limited opportunities for visitation with his father since he lives in Florida. He plans to relocate to Atlanta following graduation to live with his uncle, who is hoping to help Tae find entry level employment with Georgia Power. Tae's uncle is an electrician for Georgia Power.

All participants are African American males who have lived in the same geographic area since birth. Two participants (college preparatory) were from two-parent homes and 2 (technology preparatory) were from single-female-headed households.

Personal Interviews

I chose to use a combination of structured and unstructured interview methods for this study. I began each personal interview with a short series of structured questions because I felt these matter-of-fact questions were nonthreatening and easy for the participants to address. The short answer questions also made it possible for the participant and researcher to establish a rhythm and seem to lead nicely into the open ended, more in depth questions. Although the structured questions provided good information necessary in understanding the participant, the unstructured questions provided the “greater breath of data” (Fontanna & Frey, 2003). As explained by Spradley (1979), I wanted to establish a human to human relationship with the participants. I listened intently because I also wanted to understand rather than explain, realizing that I am not the *expert* on their lives.

The personal interviews allowed the participants the opportunity to express themselves from a historical perspective and strengthen their positive self-identities. Similar to the effects of autobiography, this method also permitted the participants to deeply reflect on their past and perhaps increased self-awareness concerning who they are and how they perceive, react to, and interact with others (Harris, 2003). According to Harris, and I agree, this process would be “therapeutic” for the participants. During my initial informational group meeting with the participants prior to the interviews, I made efforts toward establishing a rapport with them by sharing my own story.

The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis allowing for a natural and interactive dialogue between researcher and student. During these interviews, each participant was given the opportunity to tell his life story. As the researcher, I shared my

own story and the stories of my sons, who are close in age to the participants. Sharing my own personal story served as a method of transparency that hopefully allowed the participants to feel at ease. I was mindful that the participants' neutrality is not necessary and I made efforts to allow negotiation throughout, which I believe generated results that are "contextually based" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I asked questions from a prepared list; however, flexibility allowed the conversation to sometimes steer away from the prepared list of questions. The questions (see appendices) offered an opportunity for the researcher to really get to know the participants.

My professional experience and my personal parenting experience with my own African American male sons enhanced my ability to establish a rapport and listen empathically. As an African American myself, I am culturally sensitive to this population and I approached the interview carefully and respectfully.

Focus Group Interview

In gathering data for this study, I also conducted a focus group interview. As suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2003), storytelling allows for multiple ways of explaining the same phenomenon, depending on who is telling the story. The participants were assembled together once for the focus group interview to answer specific questions (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956) and some open ended inquires about their educational and tracking experiences. They casually shared their stories in an open, honest fashion. After a brief period of chatting as the participants entered the room one by one, the focus of the group became their high school experiences related to tracking and future opportunities. The researcher asked the group to respond to a list of questions (see appendices) concerning academic rigor; pre-algebra and algebra; extracurricular

activities; curriculum track choice; parental, school personnel, and peer influence on curriculum choice; personal input on curriculum choice; the reason for their choice; how they feel about the choice; and so on.

Researcher Journaling/Researcher Role

Researcher journaling accompanied the previously mentioned methods of data gathering in an effort to self-reflect on issues observed and discovered during this process. The role of the researcher is to present the participants with an opportunity to share their lived experiences in their own way. As the researcher, I served as the facilitator who encouraged participants to be comfortable in sharing in an in-depth manner. I acknowledged and affirmed the participants' disclosures with head nodding and a constant awareness of my countenance. I took notes throughout the entire process of data gathering, some of which consisted of jotting down short keyword phrases that would clue me later when time was too short to detail notes. I was careful not to write while with the participants because I did not want them to be distracted by my writing for fear that they may become more conscious and limit their expressions. As a former social worker, I gained considerable experience interviewing clients and developing techniques of recalling details such as done in process recording. This experience along with regularly reviewing the transcripts assisted greatly in my ability to recall details of the interviews. All data has remained confidential, and permission was obtained from the students and their parents prior to any interviews.

Summary

After investigating my research options for this study on the practice of tracking African American male students from low socioeconomic backgrounds into lower level

curriculums, I chose to use CRT as a theoretical framework and critical narrative inquiry as a method. Consequently, race was examined as a major contributing factor to unfair tracking practices tied to issues of social justice, power, and oppression. The voices of 4 African American males were heard as they expressed their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and high school experiences regarding race, class, and tracking issues. As noted by Meloy (2002), it is very important that the researcher develops a clear understanding of the methodological framework from the problem-conception phase to the final presentation of the data in the development of qualitative research.

The particular methods of data collection used included school portraiture, participant profiles, autobiographical interviews, a focus group interview, and researcher journaling. This combination of methods allowed for rich descriptions of feelings, emotions, and experiences of the study participants, giving voice to this particular at-risk population.

CHAPTER 4

STORIES OF FOUR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the experiences of male African American high school students on their decisions regarding curriculum-track and higher education decisions. The study findings make an important contribution by highlighting the inequality in the curricula provided to African American males and the consequences of this inequality on their higher educational opportunities. African American males, the educators who teach this underserved population, school administrators, community workers, and policy makers can use the knowledge generated by this study to assist them in taking corrective action.

Since October 2006, I have been employed by the Dooly County School System as Project Director for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative. Prior to my full-time employment by the school system, I participated in a national conference in Washington, DC on behalf of Dooly County in September 2006. Before officially beginning my position, I remained in regular contact with the Dooly school administration in preparation for the initiative's development. After I was officially on board, I immediately sought and received approval to conduct this study from the district superintendent. I submitted my application for the IRB process for this study in early November 2006 and received final approval in mid-December. I received clearance from the Dooly High school principal in late January 2007 for the spring semester. I was delighted when the high school principal visited my office to grant me authorization to proceed with my study. His visit alleviated my concerns about any official reluctance to allow me to begin a study so early in my local career. It seemed that my willingness to

come on board early and my regular contact with the district prior to employment had assured the district of my good intentions.

Four students— Jaden, Jim, Jody, and Tae—contributed data to this study. The participants chose these names after I had explained to them that their original names would not be used. These students were selected with the assistance of the high school guidance counselor, who helped me identify 4 male seniors, 2 of whom were on the college-preparatory track and 2 on the technology-preparatory track, willing to participate in the study.

Dooly High School's administrator preferred to have the guidance counselor establish initial contact with the students' parents to explain the reasons for their children's participation in the study and obtain parental and student consent. As a former school social worker, I was prepared to make home visits to explain the study and gain parental consent, but followed the wishes of the administrator. Even though I had gained a significant amount of trust from the administration, I remained aware that I was still a relatively new employee in no position to challenge the plan proposed by the principal. The principal informed me that my contact for the study was the guidance counselor, who had been assigned the task of identifying the students for the study and obtaining parental consent, and gave me permission to contact her immediately.

Having been granted permission to proceed, I contacted the guidance counselor immediately by e-mail. She responded that I should provide her with the consent forms for the parents, who she would contact to obtain their permission. We made an appointment to meet to discuss the study and the process I had planned. I was pleased that she was receptive, eager to assist me, and very interested in my work. During our

follow-up meeting the next week, I inquired again about the possibility of personally obtaining the students' permission to participate in the study. I wanted to be the first official person to explain the study to them so that I could ensure that the study was presented accurately and that the students were fully aware that their continued participation would be completely voluntary, even after they signed the consent form. The counselor refused my request, explaining that she had received clear instructions to follow through on all permission forms and was not willing to initiate another discussion with her supervisor on this issue. I understood her concern, especially because I had just learned that she had only recently assumed her position. She had previously served as a teacher at another local school prior to becoming a counselor during the fall 2006 semester.

At the beginning of February 2007, I attempted to contact all of the parents prior to beginning the study. The guidance counselor provided me with the students' home telephone numbers and their mothers' work numbers. I was able to reach 3 of the 4 mothers, thanking them for allowing their children to assist me in this work and briefly summarizing the study purpose and process. When I called each student's home and asked to speak with his or her parents, only the student's mother came to the phone. I was unable to speak with the two fathers who lived in the home either at home or at work. I offered to answer any questions the mothers had at that time and stated that I was available to the fathers should they have any questions. One mother asked, "Do you work for the school?" and another asked, "Are you from around here?" They seemed satisfied with my answers.

I realized that speaking with the fathers would have been helpful in telling the stories of these students, and I hoped at that time that I would eventually have the opportunity to do so without being perceived as intrusive. I felt that the school administration was somewhat protective of the families and that the mothers were cooperative but not very open initially. Respecting the fact that I was a stranger to them, I attempted to be sensitive to what I perceived as guarded behavior appropriate to the situation.

After obtaining parental consent the first week in February, I held an initial meeting with the 4 male seniors to explain the purpose of the study. I shared my personal story of my own sons' struggle with educational tracking and higher educational opportunities (see chapter 1). I wanted the participants to relate to me in a familiar manner and understand my genuine concern for and interest in them. I made a point of thanking them for assisting in this work and explaining that their contributions would help me provide meaningful information to educators, parents, and others who make decisions regarding African American male students. I also explained how their participation could benefit them, such as increasing their self-awareness after they had reflected on their personal histories. They appeared happy to have been selected and even offered to use their real names. I explained that the next step would consist of meeting with them for individual interviews, which would be followed by a final interview with all the participants as a group.

The methods used to gather the participants' stories included personal interviews, a focus group interview, cumulative record reviews, parent contacts, and researcher journaling. The data from each interview were transcribed for analysis. The individual

interviews served as an opportunity for each participant to express himself from a historical perspective and strengthen his positive self-identity. By reflecting on their past, participants' self-awareness increased, enabling them to understand who they were in relation to their environment (Harris, 2005). It also provided an opportunity for me to get to know each participant as an individual. The focus group interview provided an opportunity for the participants to discuss their high school experiences with tracking and their plans and goals.

The interviews were conducted at Dooly County High School on four separate occasions over a period of 6 weeks. The first two individual interviews were held on February 22, 2007. It was initially planned that the counselor would schedule the interviews during the students' least demanding classes to prevent them from missing an important lesson. However, this plan did not prove feasible. The counselor first called for Jaden, who was taking several electives because as was his final semester, he had already taken his required classes. Later in the school day, I also interviewed Jim. The counselor had attempted to reach Tae prior to calling for Jim, but Tae did not appear at the office. The counselor stated although he had also completed all of his required classes, Jim was taking many Advanced Placement courses to assist him in gaining acceptance into Morehouse College. Since there was no convenient time to pull Jim from class, the counselor suggested that I complete his interview. I would have much rather interviewed the students on their own time in their own environment. I knew that visiting them at home would have provided me with much more information. However, I proceeded as requested by the administration.

Jody's interview was completed at the beginning of March. After Jody's interview, I remained at the school to review the students' records. I had another conversation with the counselor and a conversation with the career placement professional who knew Jody. The subject of the discussion was the death of Jody's older brother, who had graduated from the school 2 years ago. Tae's interview was completed in mid-March. I was finally able to sit down with Tae during a week of intercession. Although school was not technically in session during this week, tutorials and make up exams were offered to who were within 5 points of passing a course or needed to prepare for a particular section of the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT). The focus group interview was held after all of individual interviews had been completed. All of the interviews were held inside the guidance office in a small conference room with a conference table and chairs. Aside from containing boxes of what appeared to be educational and guidance materials, it was an appropriate and comfortable space for the interviews. The interview process was completed at the end of March.

The individual interviews, focus group interviews, cumulative file reviews, and parental contacts contributed to the stories of the participants. The narratives are arranged in alphabetical order according to the participants' assumed names. The responses from each participant addressed the same basic set of questions but several follow-up questions depended on individual responses. The individual interviews began with a structured format but evolved into a more unstructured process using open-ended questions that called for elaboration (Fontana & Frey, 2003). During the analysis, the themes of *family* (socioeconomic and educational background), *teacher-student relationships*, and *school*

guidance emerged. These broad themes emerged from the process of initial coding during which several themes were organized into three inclusive categories.

The following sections provide a comprehensive introduction to each participant, a description of the themes that emerged, and participant data in the form of quotations. The transcriptions represent the actual conversations, including sentence fragments and grammatical errors. The author's reflections are filtered throughout the narratives.

Cumulative File Reviews

Jaden

At the time of the interview, Jaden was an attractive, neatly dressed, self-confident 17-year-old student of medium height on the college-preparatory track scheduled to graduate in the spring of 2007. He had been born about seven miles south of Vienna, where his high school was located, and had lived in Dooly County all of his life. Jaden's immediate family and household consisted of both biological parents and himself. Jaden's two older brothers (then 21 and 26) were currently living outside the home and his younger brother was enrolled at Newport News Apprenticeship Academy in Virginia. His mother had completed 2 years of college and worked at a hospital in a neighboring county as a medical records receptionist. His father was a high school graduate employed as a supervisor at the local particleboard plant. The family owns its own home and had an annual income between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

It was a privilege to get to know Jaden. I found him to be a very thoughtful and respectful young man, sincere and very serious about certain things at certain times but fun loving at others. He truly made me feel proud to know him. At the time of the research, Jaden's file showed him to be a strong student with a grade point average

(GPA) of 93.99, up several points from his 9th-grade GPA of 91. He displayed a positive attitude toward school and general optimism, evidenced by his response to a question concerning his feelings about school:

Well, I feel like school is a good environment being, guess it's like as long as the school has the technology and everything the students need to learn and to have what they need because some, most likely all, of the students will go on to college, so I feel pretty good about school. They give us lotta opportunities to strive to be the best, best at what you want.

While listening to Jaden's comment, I thought about how I truly wished all students would go to college, as he had assumed they would. Jaden had completed the requirements for the GHSGT and was definitely planning to go to college. He had earned the plus distinction for language arts and math. Jaden had taken the ACT once at the end of his junior year, receiving a composite score of 16 but an 18 in math and science. His lower scores were in the areas of English (15) and Reading (12). Jaden repeated the SAT three times and improved his scores each time. During his third and final attempt as a junior, he achieved the following SAT scores:

Table 5

SAT Exam Scores: Jaden

Critical Reading	Math	Writing
400	590	410

He had been accepted at Fort Valley State University, a nearby historically Black institution. Jaden was the proud recipient of the Cooperative Developmental Energy

Program academic scholarship (CDEP). CDEP is dual-degree program for minority and female students who show promise in math and science in which they spend 3 years at FVSU and 2 years at one of several affiliated colleges to prepare them for careers in energy, earth science, aerospace, and biotechnology. This unique program provides a unique opportunity for a few fortunate few students.

Researching the school's progress on the Georgia Department of Education's Web site, I discovered that the average SAT score for high school seniors in Dooly County for the 2004-2005 school year was 842, compared to the Georgia state average of 989 and the national average of 1020. These scores did not include the writing section that is now required for the SAT. Therefore, I was quite pleased that Jaden's SAT scores, which totaled 990 for the reading and math sections, were right on target for the Georgia average (989) and not very far behind the national average (1020). In a district where test scores are low, Jaden had done quite well. I am proud of his accomplishments, including his passing of the GHSGT on his first attempt. Unfortunately, he was among the very few at Dooly County High School who had experienced this level of success.

Jim

When I interviewed him, Jim was an 18 year-old graduating senior on the college-preparatory track. Handsome and sporting a hefty build and constant smile, he was eager to participate in this study. He was the youngest of three male children and the only child living at home (his brothers were 26 and 30 at the time of the interview). The family had originally lived in Pinehurst (also in Dooly County) but eventually moved to Vienna, the county seat. Jim was from a two-parent household. His mother had completed 2 years of college and worked as a licensed practical nurse. His father was a high school graduate

who had worked as a farm hand for more than 30 years. Neither of Jim's older brothers had attended college. The family's annual income was between \$40,000 and \$50,000 per year and owned the home its members lived in.

Jim was friendly and easy to get to know. He surprised me with his accomplishments and willingness to offer insightful responses to some of the questions without much preparation. I quickly realized that he was very bright, which his academic file confirmed. Jim's academic file review showed impressive accomplishments. He passed all parts of the GHSGT on his first attempt with the following scores:

Table 6

Georgia High School Graduation Test: Jim

Language Arts	576 (plus distinction)
Math	545 (plus distinction)
Social Studies	532 (plus distinction)
Science	527

Jim took the SAT only once and received the following scores:

Table 7

SAT Scores: Jim

Critical Reading	Math	Writing
480	440	390

Jim's ACT scores were as follows:

Table 8

ACT Scores: Jim

English	Math	Reading	Science
18	19	20	23

Total Composite = 20

Jim's initial high school GPA was 94.25 in ninth grade and peaked in 11th grade at 96.08. After the first semester of his senior year, he maintained a 95.59 while taking challenging courses. According to the counselor, Jim was taking Advanced Placement courses instead of electives even though he had met all of the requirements for graduation, which was confirmed by data in his file. Jim had been accepted at Valdosta State University but was hoping to be accepted by the historically Black Morehouse College in Atlanta.

I was delighted by what Jim's academic file revealed. His SAT scores totaled 920 for the reading and math sections combined, which was lower than the Georgia and the national averages. However, he had only taken the SAT once and not repeated it for a better performance. However, his one attempt at the ACT yielded a composite score higher than the average of 18.2 for Dooly County, equal to the state average of 20, and just below the national average of 20.9. I also found his GPA of 95.59 very impressive, and was equally impressed by the fact that he was taking Advanced Placement courses during his last semester of high school after having already met graduation requirements.

Jim seemed as eager to begin his post-high school career as he did to participate in this study. When questioned about his feelings about school, he replied, "Presently I'm

tired, but not tired of education, but I mean it's been 4 years since I've been in high school and I'm just ready to move on to something new and exciting." I was encouraged that he realized that his tiredness was not of education itself but rather the status quo to which he had grown accustomed over 4 years of high school. Jim appeared to be motivated towards the future, which will serve him well during his college experience.

Jody

Jody was a tall, pleasant, slim young man with a warm personality. He struggled with articulation and did not appear to be very self-confident—at least not in comparison to the other students described—yet was very friendly. Also born in nearby Cordele, Georgia (Crisp County), he too had lived in Dooly County all of his life. Jody was from a single-parent household comprising himself, his mother, and two younger sisters, then 15 and 17 years old. In 2005, Jody had experienced the tragic loss of an older brother in an apparent drowning. His brother would have been 21 years old at the time of the interview. Jody's mother was a high school graduate who worked as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) in a nearby town. She reported that she was in the process of buying the family home and earned an annual income between \$10,000 and \$20,000. His father was a high school graduate who had successfully completed the job core program and lived in Jacksonville, Florida. Jody only saw him occasionally.

As a mother, I felt great sympathy for Jody. I was not prepared for his revelation about his older brother's death. As a researcher, I tried to keep a balance between offering caring words of support and maintaining the focus of the interview. I empathized with him concerning his socioeconomic level, academic future, and frustration concerning the GHS GT. I felt that he had not received the best guidance concerning his

academic plans. It was difficult to understand why no efforts had been made by the school counselor or his teachers to assist Jody with some form college preparation.

Jody had pursued the technical-preparatory program of study but still needed to pass the science portion of the GHSGT in order to graduate. On his first attempt at the GHSGT, Jody failed the language arts and science sections. He passed the language arts section on his second attempt but continued to fail the science section during four subsequent attempts. His cumulative academic file showed that Jody had never taken the SAT or the ACT. His GPA was 82.57 after the first semester of his senior year, showing a steady climb from his 9th-grade GPA of 76.125. Because he had a very strong desire to attend college, he was disappointed over the difficulty he was experiencing with the GHSGT.

Based on his response to the question concerning his feelings about school, it appears that school has been a challenge for Jody: "I feel like it's getting easier cause Imma [I'm a] senior and Imma pass everything, the graduation test, I feel like its coming to an end 'til I go to college." Jody was anticipating passing the science section of the GHSGT on March 26, 2007. I learned through a later conversation with the assistant principal that Jody had not passed, and therefore did not graduate.

Jody worked at the local Piggly Wiggly supermarket to help his mother financially. Jody's mentor was his maternal uncle, who owned a small trucking company. His uncle had been slowly preparing him for a career in trucking in case his academic plans were not realized. I found myself frustrated that Jody had not been advised well. I was uncertain whether he had been encouraged to attend tutorials to prepare for another attempt at the GHSGT. I believe that Jody and all high school students should be

encouraged to take the SAT and the ACT, particularly those who express a desire to go to college. Jody's GPA (82.57) was fairly good despite his low test scores. I am hopeful that Jody will continue to take and pass the science portion of the GHGST so he can graduate from high school. Overall, I felt that because high expectations had not been set for Jody, and he had been allowed or encouraged to forgo college preparation.

Tae

Tae was an attractive 18-year-old of medium height with a pleasant personality and happy demeanor. Like Jody, there were times when he struggled with articulation. Tae was not much of a conversationalist; he responded in short and matter-of-fact answers but still came across as self-assured. Although Tae had initially resided in Dooly County, he had lived in Cordele, in Crisp County since his 9th-grade year. He explained that the school was unaware of his actual residence because his records listed his uncle's home as his local residence. Tae also lived in a single-parent household. His mother was a high school graduate who worked as a production worker. She provided no other specifics about her job. She owned her home and had an annual income between \$20,000 and \$30,000. Tae had limited opportunities for visitation with his father. Tae and his mother (and sometimes his brother) composed the household. Tae worked at Burger King in Cordele.

I felt that Tae was the least transparent of all the participants. Perhaps I say this because of his short, quick responses, although there were times when he would elaborate. He appeared to be slightly more self-confident than Jody was but not as much as the 2 college-preparatory track students were. Like all the others, he was very likable. A review of Tae's academic file revealed that his GPA had risen each year. His GPA was

72.125 in ninth grade, 78.62 in 10th grade, 79.12 in 11th grade, and 79.89 after the first semester of 12th grade. Tae had taken neither the SAT nor ACT and had no plans to attend college. Tae failed the social studies and science portions of the GHGST on his first attempt but passed the science portion after his second attempt and the social studies portion after his third attempt in November 2006. He was on a technology-preparatory track and on schedule to graduate in the spring of 2007 because he had passed all the parts of the GHSGT. During our personal interview, he expressed a dislike for school rules but no other problems with school: "I don't like it; too many rules. Other than that, it's straight." Tae planned to relocate to Atlanta following graduation to live with his uncle, who was hoping to help him find entry-level employment with Georgia Power, where he worked as an electrician.

Both Jody and Tae had not taken the SAT or ACT as part of preparation for graduation. I found such lack of preparation troubling because many students are uncertain regarding what they plan to do upon graduation. Their options are particularly limited if they do not have the support of someone knowledgeable to guide them when they leave high school. Even though Tae seemed to have clear plans for his future, I have witnessed many young people who delay their college plans to accept a promising position who later encounter obstacles when they attempt to enter college a year later. This lack of preparation that keeps student options open is the primary source of my frustration.

I observed from this limited sample that the 2 students who were pursuing the technology-preparatory curriculum did not take the national tests required for admission to college, did not perform as well on the GHGST as did the college-preparatory track

students, and had lower GPAs than did the college-preparatory track students. I believe that their lower performance may have resulted from how they were advised based on their initial poor performance at the beginning of their high school career. However, I recall an acquaintance from elementary school who performed poorly but still earned a terminal degree and has a very successful professional position. Another neighbor from my high school is currently a practicing pediatrician who had barely graduated and become a teen mother prior to high school graduation. I believe that even low-performing high school students can eventually achieve greater academic and professional success if their schools encourage them to keep their options open for future possibilities.

Family Socioeconomics/Educational Background

Although the 4 participants had an African American racial identity in common, their family situations, which correlated with their chosen curriculum tracks, were very different. The 2 technology-preparatory students lived in single female-headed households and the 2 college-preparatory students lived in two-parent households with both biological parents. These and other data regarding the family situations for these students emerged from the individual interviews with each student and at least one telephone contact with each participant's mother during which the following questions were asked:

1. What is the number of family members in your household at the present time?
2. Would you describe your household as a two-parent or single-parent household?
3. What is your occupation?
4. What is your spouse's occupation (if applicable)?

5. What is your highest level of education or grade completed?
6. What is the highest level of education or grade completed of the student's father or stepfather?
7. Are you renting or buying your home?
8. What is your annual household income range?
 - (a) \$10,000 to \$20,000
 - (b) \$20,000 to \$30,000
 - (c) \$30,000 to \$40,000
 - (d) \$40,000 to \$50,000

I asked the mothers these questions to gain a more complete picture of their child and compare the information provided from the student individual interviews with that from the parent. I also attempted to confirm the correlations between family situation and student performance that had emerged in my earlier research. According to Ladson-Billing (1994), African American children are five times more likely than are White children to be dependent on welfare and three times more likely to live in substandard housing. Although none of the participants was independently wealthy, Jody's mother supported a household of four with an annual income between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Perhaps her low salary was the motivation for Jody to work at the local Piggly Wiggly supermarket. The literature on poverty explained that it should not be surprising that many African American children are neither performing well on standardized tests nor focused on academic activities. Ansalone (2001) suggested that poverty is so pervasive that it affects diet, nutrition, employment, housing, self-concept, and the entire educational experience.

As Project Director of the federal initiative Safe Schools/Healthy Students, which is managed through the Dooly County school system, I assist several local after-school

programs in obtaining funding for programs that encourage better outcomes for students, including better attendance, improved test scores, and decreased dropout rates. My office recently shared a funding award with a local church that is offering an afterschool/summer-enrichment program, tutoring, mentoring, and social-sufficiency services. The program serves hot meals to improve nutrition based on awareness of its effect on health and school performance and awareness of the high rate of local poverty. Jody stated that he participated in this program.

Tae's family income was not much higher than that of Jody's family. His mother indicated she supported herself and Tae with between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year. Tae shared that one of his older brothers sometimes returned to live in the home. Neither Tae's nor Jody's parents had attended college but all were high school graduates. Although Jody reported that his mother had attended some college courses, she stated that she had not. She is, however, a certified nurse's assistant, which had required her to take a specialized training class. In contrast, both of the college-preparatory participants' mothers had attended college for 2 years; neither of their fathers had attended college but both were high school graduates. These data on the 4 participants support the research findings of Horn, Nunez, and Bobbitt (2000) that potential first-generation college students whose parents did not attend college were less likely to choose the college-preparatory track for ninth grade if they had not taken an algebra course in eighth grade. Jody and Tae would have been first-generation college students, and neither had chosen the college-preparatory track in ninth grade nor taken algebra in eighth grade. Both Jaden's and Jim's mothers had attended college and both young men had chosen the college-preparatory curriculum even though they had not taken algebra in eighth grade.

Moses and Cobb's (2001) research also supported the need for students of color to take algebra in eighth grade; they found that 8th-grade algebra is not only a gateway to higher education but also a necessary subject for success in a technologically advanced society. It appears that taking Algebra I in eighth grade is a good predictor for a student being accepted by and attending a 4-year college program upon graduation from high school.

Family Relationships (Jaden)

Most of the literature suggests that family support is a factor in a child's success in school. Jaden described his relationship with his parents as respectful: "We have an understanding of respecting each other inside the household. I respect them more because they are the parents. I'm obedient to them; they still respect my wishes. We have a good relationship." Asked whether he spends more time with adults or peers, he said, "My parents."

As for his relationship with his father, Jaden said,

Well me and well, if me and my father could be brothers cause we have a tight knit bond like that. We spend a lot of time together . . . sit at home, watch TV, sports or something; just talk about things, like life, what's ahead, stuff like that.

I was delighted to listen to Jaden talk about his parents in such a respectful manner. I felt affirmed in my belief that strong parent-child relationships lead to better academic outcomes. His extremely close relationship with his father apparently propelled him toward high achievement. Although this family was obviously close, I am well aware that most of the children from this community and many others do not have this rich family life and support from both parents.

In addition to the strong relationship he had with his father, Jaden also shared that both his older brothers were his mentors. One brother was in college and the other was working for the local Tyson Chicken Plant, one of the better-paying employers in the area. Asked about his best childhood kindergarten memory, Jaden said, “One of my older brothers used to walk me to breakfast every morning at . . . inside . . . well, inside the ahmm building where we went to school at.” Jaden appeared to be a bit nervous at the time of this response, which was early in our individual interview. He seemed to have difficulty expressing himself initially but relaxed as we proceeded. I found it heartwarming that he thought of his walks to breakfast with his older brother as a special kindergarten memory, which was evidence of a healthy sibling relationship. Jaden enjoyed a family situation that has been shown to encourage success.

Concerning extended family, Jaden said that he was particularly close to two of his maternal aunts and several cousins. Regarding his middle school memories, he said that his middle-school age friends were his three cousins, “born the same month about the same time; very close to each other . . . best friends.” Asked about his happiest middle school memory, Jaden replied, “One aunt had one of her sons, yeah!” Jaden’s answer to this question could have easily reflected a memory from school or a situation with one of his peers. It is obvious Jaden truly loved his family. Much of Jaden’s family had attended college. In addition to his mother and older brother, “both of my aunts finished, my uncle finished. Well, it’s a lot of all of family members, mostly all of them”

During our telephone conversation, Jaden’s mother reiterated that her family included many college graduates and educators. She also discussed knowing that she should try to prepare her son early for college eligibility. She expressed her

understanding of the need to begin testing early for college admissions exams, particularly because she had experienced the same with Jaden's older brother. She expressed her desire to prepare her son in case he wanted to apply to a Division I school. She stated that she wanted Jaden to reach his highest potential and become all that he could. She had shared with her son her belief that there is a high correlation between higher education and income potential. Our conversation left me feeling that she was knowledgeable with strong educational values yet is easy going. I related to her as one parent relates to another.

It was important to determine what messages Jaden had received from his parents regarding the value of education. He stated that his parents had told him "that education is the key to basically the way people live these days. If you want to be able to do things like . . . [and not] living check-to-check in bills like that and having enough to be financially stable, you need to have your education."

Family Relationship (Jim)

Jim had a simple response to his description of his relationship with his parents: "It's a good relationship." Like Jaden, he spent more time with his parents than he did with other family or friends. He was slightly more expressive in describing his relationship with his father: "It's good; it's getting better and better as I get older." Jim had a cousin whom he considers a mentor: "She just graduated from college and about to attend law school, so she's been telling me about the steps I need to take to go to college and what I need to do to succeed." I felt this relationship was a factor in Jim's motivation to succeed and his self-confidence regarding his abilities. Within my own family, when one older cousin accomplishes something, his or her younger cousins believe they can

accomplish it as well. Jim's grandmother was also a vital part of Jim's life during his preschool years. He remembered, "Ummm, just spending time with my grandmother while my parents were at work." Jim was also close to an aunt and cousin.

When asked if he had any immediate family who had attended college, Jim replied, "Yes ma'm, that would be my mother, she went to postsecondary school." Jim also shared that he had aunts, uncles, and cousins who had attended college. In my telephone conversation with Jim's mother, she stated that raising him to have goals was easy. She explained that as Jim had always shown an interest in attending college and was the first of her three children to pursue admission to college, she had always tried to steer him in the right direction. Her messages to Jim regarding education related that was important to have an education because it would serve as the basis of all he would do. Jim's expression of parental messages regarding education was "that as long as you have an education, there's no limit to what you can do and where you can go."

Jim was not as detailed in his comments as was Jaden regarding his family relationships, yet what he shared led me to believe that Jim had very good support at home from both of his parents. His mother spoke about Jim with a sense of pride. I was excited that he had a cousin whom he considers a mentor. I believe that her success and pursuit of higher education (law school) will encourage him to realize his ambitions.

Family Relationships (Jody)

When asked how he would describe his relationships with his parents, Jody said, "Scrong, because when she's (mother) there, all we talk about is what go on in life and after high school. It's scrong." Without me asking him about his siblings, he proceeded, "And we, I try to get my sister dem to think about it; my next sista, she a junior, she'll be

in the same predicament next year. . . . Uh, huh, I got to show her the way.” Although Jody explained that his father lived in Jacksonville, Florida, there was a time when his father lived with him, which he disclosed during his individual interview when I asked him who had lived in his home when he was in kindergarten: “Mmm. My mom, my brother and my dad.” When asked to specifically describe his relationship with his father, Jody said, “Pssst, I don’t see him that much. It’s not dat scrong. I don’t see’em that much, but when I do see him, he show me, he show me love, when I do see ‘em.

I noticed the difference as Jody responded about his relationships with each of his parents. He spoke immediately concerning his relationship with his mother, but was slow to speak when discussing his father, which cued me that this father-son relationship might have been weak. I got the impression that Jody had also become somewhat of a father figure to his younger siblings. His words rang with a sense of responsibility and desire to serve as a role model. I also heard disappointment and perhaps rejection concerning his relationship with his father. My motherly instincts once again kicked in; I wanted to try to remedy what I perceived as hurt.

On the other hand, Jody seemed very happy to discuss his relationship with his uncle. When I asked him if he had a mentor or a brotherly relationship with anyone, he said,

Yes, my uncle. My uncle teach me e’erthang. When my uncle be at work, my uncle got his own big truck, he drive big truck when he be at work he show me the ropes. Like if I can’t make it in school, he can help me get my license to drive big trucks. He show me e’erthang.

I felt relief to hear Jody speak about his uncle in such a positive way. His face beamed, in contrast to the troubled expression he wore when discussing his father. It was obvious he had great affection for his mother and maternal uncle.

Jody further indicated affection for his family when he described how his grandfather had given him a nickname and his grandmother had given him words of wisdom to help him deal with conflict:

My mom and my granddaddy and everybody call me Bud and my granddaddy name me that 'cause when my mama was about to have me, he was drinking a Budweiser and then he said he asked my mama if she wanted something to drink then, she said, yeah, he said what a Bud? Every since then they been calling me Bud.

Jody elaborated that his grandmother liked to tell this story from time to time. He seemed delighted to share the story of his nickname with me and we laughed together about it. This is a good example of how self-awareness may be increased by reflecting on the past. Jody seemed to enjoy reliving this memory and appreciating the affection he had received from his grandfather, which may have been particularly helpful to him because his father was not in his life on a regular basis.

Jody's discussion concerning his grandmother was in reference to me asking about any particular childhood memories before kindergarten. He eventually shared the following story from when he was in Head Start:

Yes, ma'em, we, I always stayed in Vienna but I went to head start in Unadilla and like the people from Vienna they always wouldn't let us play on they playground cause we was from Vienna, so people from Vienna it wu' like two of

us we just go to the top of the slide and just sit there, 'til one day I got in a fight and I got beat up and I ain't gonna go home. I got home to my grandma house she told me umm if I can't fight 'em I betta bite 'em, like that every since then I got in a fight nobody an' mess wid me since then.

This brought another round of laughter between us and I was glad that he seemed to be enjoying sharing these memories with me.

Jody also spoke affectionately about an aunt who, although “mean,” was one of his favorite teachers during his elementary school years. When I paraphrased his comments that she was mean but also favorite teacher, Jody said,

She kept me, me, being her nephew I couldn't. . . . If I get in trouble cause I know what she would do to me. That why she was my favorite teacher. She was mean because if I did get in trouble she would probably whoop me or pinch me.

I thought that it was fairly insightful of Jody to understand and appreciate that his aunt/teacher wanted what was best for him—staying out of trouble. It sounded as though his aunt expected the best from him, which obviously resonated with him. If more teachers would expect more of students, I believe students would perform better in school. The teacher-student relationship is extremely important.

Despite the difficulties Jody has experienced, he responded positively concerning his happiest memory during his middle school years: “Mmmm, when we use to go to Florida. Walt Disney World, the best time.” When I asked him who had gone on the trip, he responded, “Me, my brother, my two sisters, my mama, one of my mama friends and my best friend and one of my brother's friends, cousins, almost a lotta people.” Thinking that accommodating so many people must have been expensive, I prompted him by

saying, “Oh a big group,” to which Jody replied, “A bus, a charter bus to go to Florida.” This chartered bus made more sense to me, and although I did not question him further, I wondered if the church that his family attended had arranged the trip. I know that some churches plan these trips and allow their members to pay for them over a period of time, making it possible for underprivileged children and families to attend. I enjoyed getting to know Jody very much and admired his courage and determination.

In my conversation with Jody’s mother, she confirmed that they comprised a single-female-headed family of four (herself, Jody, and her two younger daughters). She did not mention her deceased son, and I did not inquire about him. The counselor had told me that Jody’s brother was in Florida when he had died in 2005, where he had apparently gone to work with his father at some point after graduation. After Jody’s mother provided information on her education, occupation, and homeowner status, I decided not to prolong the conversation; at the beginning of the call, she had politely asked how long this call would take. I thanked her for her time and reminded her that she could call me if she had any further questions. I assumed that she was a busy single parent and probably did not have much time for this conversation. I was thankful that I had had a chance to speak with her but found myself wondering how well she had coped with her son’s death and her financial situation.

Jody apparently felt supported by his mother regarding his education. When I asked Jody if he had support at home and school, he replied,

Yes ma’am my mama make sure I get e’erythang right, she be checking on me she make sure I got all my classes, she love to say, “You got all your English?” I tell her all the time, “I got all my English. I’m taking my last one at school.”

Although his mother said little during her conversation with me, the dialog that Jody related that had occurred between him and his mother convinced me that she was concerned about his education. He also stated,

My mama probably say it's good because she had dropped out of college and she could've been making more money than she do now is she hada stayed in and graduated from nursing school. She tell me to stay in cause she don't want me to scruggle and make no loans.

This quote highlights the one discrepancy between Jody's comments regarding his mother's college experience and her report of no college attendance. I wonder if Joy considered the training class that she took to become a CNA a college course toward a nursing degree. I also realize that she might have attended college but did not report this fact because she did not graduate. Regardless, she was obviously concerned about her son's future and supported his educational endeavors. I also could not overlook the obvious difficulty Jody had with grammar. I believe that his struggle or lack of struggle was culturally related, as it was with the other participants. My impression was that Jody's dialect was the strongest of the 4 participants.

Family Relationships (Tae)

Tae appeared to be somewhat of an independent spirit. He did not elaborate at all when asked questions about his family. When asked to describe his relationship with his mother, he simply said, "Good." As for his relationship with his father, his response was "not good." The only other comments he made about his father was when he answered my question about how often he visits his father: "Nope, every now and then. He lives in Florida." I noted the sharp contrast between Tae and the other participants when

discussing family. However, I kept in mind that Jim was not expressive concerning his family either, although not nearly as unexpressive as was Tae. When I asked Tae who he spent the most time with, he said, “Um, um, nobody really ‘cause I be at work all the time.” I wondered if I was detecting some form of detachment, although I realized that he might just not have been in a mood to talk at the time of the interview.

Tae discussed his brother, who was 5 years older, in the context of his happiest memory during his middle school years: “Um, um hanging with my brother.” When I prompted him to elaborate he said, “Cause we don’t hang like that.” I thought that I heard regret regarding Tae’s current relationship with his brother. The only other relative that Tae talked about was the uncle in Vienna whose address is listed in Tae’s school records.

Tae simply answered “yes” to indicate that his family supported education, and then added that his mother’s message about education was “that you need it and that it’ll help you in life.” When asked if any other family member had attended college, he replied yes but did not offer any additional information. When I asked which relatives had attended college, he said, “Cousins.” It began to feel as though I were pulling teeth to get Tae to share information. I wished that he would have offered more of his story, but he did not. However, I did not feel that Tae was deliberately holding back but simply concluded that he was just not very open.

Although pleasant, Tae’s mother was not very talkative either when I called her. Although she answered the basic questions, like Tae, she did not elaborate. In response to my question concerning the number of people in the household, she said three. I assumed that the three included her, Tae, and the brother who he said sometimes lives with them. I was happy to learn from the counselor that Tae’s mother called frequently to check on his

progress. As did Jody's mother, Tae's mother obviously cared about her child's educational progress.

Tracking Issues

The data in this section were primarily gathered from the focus group interview after the participants were questioned about their education and the particular curriculum track they had chosen. Some of the data were taken from the individual interviews, particularly the discussions concerning the happiest elementary and middle school memories and personal values related to school and goals. I asked the participants to recall experiences from elementary and middle school to increase both my and their awareness of how they had reached their current school circumstances after making a decision to follow a particular curriculum track. One of the reasons I asked according to school levels was because I thought it would allow them to recall experiences more easily if they could associate the memories with a time and place. Additionally, I thought that it would increase their self-esteem to travel down memory lane and focus on some of the good times in their history. Some of these topics overlapped between the individual and focus group interviews, adding to the reliability of the data.

Jaden

When I asked Jaden to recall his best elementary school memory, he said it was recess, but that elementary school was overall a good experience for him because "I learned everything I needed and had fun doing it." He had a favorite teacher during these years and math was and continued to be his favorite subject in school. I later wished I had asked him what made the teacher he mentioned his favorite but was wary of asking for names. As mentioned earlier in the family section, Jaden's happiest middle school

memory had nothing to do with school or education but with family life—his aunt having a baby—which said much about what was important to him. I did not feel the need to push him to recall a school event.

When I asked Jaden if he attended school regularly, he said yes. When I asked him why, he answered,

Because aahm, I know what I want to do in life and to achieve what I want I need my education and I know I have to come to school to get my education so I'm just gonna keep striving to get what I want and be what I want to be.

I was very impressed with Jaden's response, which showed that he was very focused and self-directed and always thoughtful about his responses. He was slow in answering and obviously thinking through his words.

Jaden also suggested that he was an independent learner. When questioned whether the education he had received had helped him become a critical thinker, he said, "Well, some of it has help me to blossom, but most of it come from my own study that I do at home in my own time." He maintained that his favorite subject is math: "I also do well with numbers and mine is math, and I like to explore the different loopholes that have something to do with math and arithmetic." He brought up a brief change in his favorite subject at one point: "At one time it had been a time that science was [his favorite subject] because one of my teachers, but it still is math." I thought this statement was every important because it underlined how powerful a teacher is in determining whether a student likes a subject. Teacher quality is an important issue.

When it came to making the decision about curriculum track, Jaden explained,

Well, I had a lot of different influences, like family and friends, also people in the

school system telling me that if I wanted to go to college and the best thing to do was to be in college prep.

When I specifically asked the group when they had known what track they wanted to pursue, Jaden stated, “After talking to my counselor and my parents.” Regarding his parents, he stated, “Yes, they did have a lot of influence on the decision I made.” When I asked the participants whether they had plans to attend college, Jaden’s reply was, “Yes, I do plan on going to college and I want to major in engineering.”

Jim

Concerning his best memory from elementary school, Jim said it was “getting prepared for the test we had to pass to move on to the next grade. We got prizes for getting things right and all that was so neat.” He said that the reason his elementary experience was good was “because I was being surrounded by other kids, just getting to know other people. Just had a good time meeting each other and forming a friendship.” Jim had enjoyed test preparation and competing for prizes, and I wondered if this positive experience from elementary school set the tone for how he successfully prepared for tests now. Regardless, early childhood teachers are critical in forming a child’s attitude about school.

Jim had a favorite teacher and subject in elementary school: “Yes, umm it was math because it expanded your mind and made you think outside the box unlike other subjects when it’s straight out of the book.” Jim’s answer to the question during the focus group interview concerning his favorite subject was “math because it makes you think outside the box.” I remembered that he had elaborated more on his answer during the individual interview.

As for middle school, Jim could not pick a particular experience that was better than were others because “all of my experiences have been great.” He said that he still had the same friends that he had had in elementary school: “Unadilla was merging with us, so I was making new friends and keeping up with the old ones at the same time. So I just had a buncha friends at that time.” I believe that it must have been an advantage to go to school with the same group of friends throughout the K-12 experience. The county had merged, resulting in one school for each level so that all the students in the county attend the same elementary, middle, and high school.

Regarding whether his academic work had helped him develop as a critical thinker, Jim said, “Yes, it helped me to blossom a little bit.” As for extracurricular activities, Jim participated in various activities including Beta Jr. Beta club, and 4-H, and had participated in elementary school baseball and middle school football. He continued to be involved in Beta and other clubs. Although his favorite subject was math, he admitted that it had changed at one point: “Over time I think mine has kinda changed to literature, ahh, not because of the subject, because of the teachers we had for it. In lit the teachers were better.” I thought about the power of this statement. Perhaps Jim’s observation is relevant to Thompson’s (2002) findings from her study on teens’ schooling experience: “[The] best teachers were patient, made learning fun, challenged students, gave extra help, had positive attitudes, and appeared to genuinely care about students” (p. 99). We are in dire need of quality teachers for all subjects.

Jim initially stated that his guidance on the curriculum track choice came from his high school counselor, although he suggested that he had known that it would be college preparatory since eighth grade: “I think it was the umm school counselor at high school.

They came to talk to us about which path to follow.” Jim said his reason for his regular attendance in school was “because my parents wouldn’t go for just letting me be out [of school] just to be out.” Jim’s grades had always been very good, so choosing the college-preparatory track was probably an easy decision. It was evident that his parents’ rule about school attendance was a good one; although he was a good student, he might not have attended school regularly if his parents had not demanded it.

When asked specifically whether his parents had had any influence on his track decision, Jim said, “Yes, they did. I mean, I think it was my parents because I didn’t really know what was going on, so they kinda help me get into it. I just stuck with it.” Jim planned to attend college: “I plan to major in pre-med, biology, or something in that field.”

Jody

When asked to recall his best memory of elementary school, Jody discussed both elementary and middle school but said that middle school was an overall better experience:

Field day. Every day [year] that whole day for free, like track meet, water balloons, er’erthing, bicycles. . . . Elementary school was alright. Middle school was the best experience . . . because like we were learning but, we played while we learn and wasn’t helping me grow up and mature, like eighth grade we stop playing and learnt more mmmm and we matured.

It seemed as though Jody was speaking strictly from the point of view of academics. I wondered if the trouble he was having passing the GHSGT was making him believe that he might have been better prepared today if he had been made to focus more strongly on

academics. As mentioned earlier, Jody discussed a family trip to Disney World as his happiest middle school memory.

Jody said that he believed that his academic preparation had helped him to develop into a critical thinker: “Yes, it help me think critically, but yeah, yeah.” He had been involved in extracurricular activities, including 4-H, football, basketball, baseball, and track, but did not appear to be involved in any school activities at the time of our interview. When asked why he attended school regularly, Jody said, “I like school and it don’t be nuttin’ better to do. Go to school and then after school I just go to work. . . . Trying to get into college.” Jody never let an opportunity go by where he did not mention that his goal was college. I saw his hunger for it. Jody stated that his favorite subject was literature “because it allows you to speak the truth.” He spoke with conviction regarding his favorite subject with a big smile on his face. As for his curriculum track, he stated, “Umm, the counselor led me to which path to take and it was tech prep.” When I asked if he had had any idea about which track to choose before the counselor talked with him about it, he said,

I ain’t look, he just told me which one . . . I knew I wanted to go to college too, but my counselor also said if I get in tech prep, I can still go to college, so I chose tech.

Concerning parental input into his decision, Jody stated, “Yes, my mom did have a lot of influence on what decision I made just as long as I went to college. I do plan on going to college and I also would like to major in engineering.” At that point, I felt that Jody had not been advised very well. I realize that he could still attend college, but was uncertain

that he fully understood the obstacles that the technical-preparatory curriculum put in the way of attending college.

Tae

Regarding his elementary school experience, Tae stated, “Let’s see, um, going outside playing kickball. It was a good experience cause as we kept coming up and coming up, we kept learning more and learning more, so that’s how I got here.” I speculated that learning was a joy at that time and he agreed. When asked about a favorite teacher, Tae said, “Um, it’s hard to say, all ‘em good.” He did not hesitate when asked about his favorite subject: “Math, I can do it all; add, subtract, multiply, divide ... anything to do with numbers. Tae was most expressive when discussing his best memory of elementary school. I was surprised to find that his favorite subject was math, which is believed to be the gateway to college. However, Tae was a technology-preparatory student. I felt that not pursuing a college-preparatory track was a missed opportunity for Tae.

Tae did not say much about his middle school friends other than they were “people I went to school with” who were not from his neighborhood. As stated earlier, his happiest memory during his middle school years was his experience of spending time with his older brother, and indicated that he regretted that they no longer spent time together.

Tae apparently made his choice of curriculum track based on his counselor’s recommendation: “Ahh, I would go with the counselor ‘cause he’s the one that looked at our grades from that year and he talk to us to see which one we wanted to take, so I chose the tech prep way.” For clarification, I asked if Tae had known his desired track prior to

talking with his counselor, and he replied that he had not. When I asked him if talking to the counselor had helped him decide, he responded that it had. Asked how much input or influence his parents had had on his curriculum-track decision, Tae said, “No, not really.” Tae’s situation was another situation in which I felt that the counselor should have involved the parents in the child’s decision regarding academic track. Such a situation was familiar to me because of my own son’s experience (see chapter 1).

Summary

The individual interviews and focus group interview provided most of the data for this study. Each of the 4 students seemed honored to have been selected and all appeared to enjoy having the opportunity to tell their story. There were some basic differences between the 2 college-preparatory students’ responses and those of the 2 technology-preparatory students. For the most part, the 2 college-preparatory students seemed to express themselves more readily, although all of the students answered the questions. The 2 college-bound participants also appeared more excited and certain about the future. All of the participants were friendly and very respectful.

The focus group interview appeared to be enjoyable for all of the participants. Jaden appeared the most serious personality during the interview. I remember wondering how Jody and Tae felt as Jaden and Jim talked about their plans for college. Jody was certain that he would have liked to attend college whereas Tae was just as certain that he did not want to attend college. All of the students answered questions regarding their curriculum choice, source of guidance, and family support.

When focus group concluded, the participants seemed to celebrate having successfully completed the process. When I asked them if they would be willing to meet

one year from now to talk informally about their progress and life, they all agreed immediately. I felt that I had made a connection with these boys, and want so much for them to succeed in all of their endeavors.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the stories of African American high school males to discover how race, class, and tracking issues influence higher educational opportunities. Critical race theory was the theoretical framework chosen as the research method and critical narrative inquiry as the method for telling the stories of the participants. I began my research with deep concerns about my own African American sons and their futures after experiencing some questionable events regarding high school tracking. My interest in African American males broadened as I began listening to their friends' high school stories, and I developed a desire to further explore tracking among African American males. Realizing that much research exists on the plight of African American males, my aim was to explore how issues of race, class, and tracking are related to higher educational opportunities or lack of opportunities for African American males.

My research began with the goal of addressing the following overarching question: What are the barriers preventing African American males from pursuing college degrees? From this question, I developed the following subquestions:

1. What race issues prevent male African American male students from pursuing college degrees?
2. What class issues become barriers to African American male students pursuing college degrees?
3. What tracking issues become barriers to African American male students pursuing college degrees?

Although I started this study with a focus on race, class, and tracking issues, I found that family issues emerged as a prominent theme.

Four African American high school seniors were chosen to participate in the inquiry. The participants were selected based upon their chosen curriculum, with 2 participants pursuing the college-preparatory curriculum and 2 pursuing the technology-preparatory curriculum. For parents of African American males, this study demonstrated that participating in their children's education, setting high expectations, and maintaining strong family values contribute to the overall success of their children. This study aimed to help teachers and counselors understand the need to increase sensitivity toward African American males (and all students), raise student expectations, educate themselves about African American culture, and develop relationships with African American students. The study also aimed to help administrators oversee, guide, and educate teachers who may be operating according to dominant metanarratives concerning African American males. Furthermore, policymakers can benefit from this study by analyzing and improving current practices that limit higher educational opportunities for African American male students (Siddle-Walker, & Thompkins, 2004).

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of the history of Black education and the influence this history has had on the education of African American males and other underprivileged students in Dooly County. A discussion of findings related to class and tracking issues that prevent African American males from pursuing college degrees follows. Although gender was not originally selected as an issue to explore, it cannot be overlooked. The last section of the chapter discusses how African American family values relate to African American males' higher educational opportunities.

As I reexamined the narratives, the following five significant findings emerged from my analysis:

1. The historical significance of race, class, and academic tracking.
2. The impact of gender on student opportunities.
3. Teacher and counselor expectations.
4. Family values.
5. Equitable educational opportunities.

Finding 1: The History of Race, Class, and Academic Tracking

The issues of race, class, and academic tracking are so deeply intertwined that it is very difficult to discuss one issue without discussing the others. This study has demonstrated that the relationship among these factors is not easily unraveled. The history of race, class, and academic tracking remains significant to higher educational opportunities for African American students in Dooly County.

Much of the literature on the history of southern Black education explains that the dominant society historically resisted universal educational opportunities for Blacks. Believing that education might lead laborers to develop a desire to participate politically and economically, dominant society feared the loss of virtually free labor (Anderson, 1988; Dubois, 1962). Fighting this resistance through many sacrifices and much effort and determination, southern Blacks and White philanthropists increased Black educational opportunities throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The Hampton model of special industrial education for Blacks represented a monumental milestone in curriculum tracking in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and began the debate on tracking that continues today.

Race

After Black emancipation, there was disagreement regarding whether to educate them. After finally resolving that Blacks should be educated, there was dissent over the type of education that they should receive. With matching funds, Julius Rosenwald funded thousands of schools in the rural South to provide better opportunities for Blacks. Rosenwald's mission was truly a testimony of his commitment to social justice and equal opportunity for a population that had been overlooked by dominant society during a time of crisis. Vienna High and Industrial School in Dooly County, Georgia, which was built with matching funds from the Rosenwald Foundation, was part of this historic effort. After integration, the school was abandoned as an educational institution and converted into a cannery. The structure is now a newly renovated Family Resource Center still owned by the Dooly Board of Education and the location of my present office space. The building represents the struggle and determination of early pioneers to fight for educational equality for the present generation.

Researching the history of Black education in the South led me to recall many memories. I discovered that the Rosenwald schools were built according to detailed specifications that took several issues into consideration, including the provision of daylight and the position of the structure on the property. I also discovered a six-classroom school floor plan (blueprint) that matched the plan of the building I currently occupy. The experience of seeing the original floor plans and pictures of Rosenwald schools that so closely resembled the building I currently occupy was very encouraging. Although thousands of Rosenwald schools were built in the early 1900s, I discovered that the building that hosted my own early educational experiences in Ben Hill County,

Georgia was not a Rosenwald school. Still, the literature explained that Rosenwald schools became models and often served as blueprints for schools built without Rosenwald funds. Features like the cloakroom and the transom above the interior doors for lighting seemed familiar to me and took me back to a time when I attended a segregated school. Although the cloakroom was used to hang coats and store items, I remember that the space was also periodically used for students to bathe and groom if the teacher perceived it necessary.

Many of details of my past experiences have surfaced throughout this process. I do not think that my current office space assignment is by any means a coincidence. The space and timing truly coincided with the process of writing this dissertation. This inquiry led me to embark upon a very rewarding and emotional journey, which I have described throughout this dissertation by sharing my thoughts and feelings. The history of Black education in the South and in Dooly County is a story that should be shared with the students in the district. Under the best circumstances, a sense of pride may result in the students understanding their ancestors' fight for equitable educational opportunities for African Americans and other underserved students.

Class

Despite a policy of integration, educational equality is still far from being realized nationally and in Dooly County. Social and class-based inequities continue to be reflected throughout the public-schooling process (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Although the Dooly County School System is technically integrated, segregation is very much alive. Weis (2004) conducted a longitudinal investigation of 50 working-class students, 10 of whom were students of color. Weis first interviewed the students as high school

seniors and then 16 years later to assess their progress since high school. However, none of the students representing the dominant group knew how to locate the students of color from their class.

Similarly, racial divisions are evident in Dooly County. Private schools are thriving for dominant-group students, particularly for middle and high school students. The three public schools in Dooly County are predominately African American (more than 80%). Class issues are prevalent in determining the racial makeup of the schools. For the most part, families who can afford to send their children to private schools have apparently done just that. Many of those unable to afford the monthly tuition charged by private schools have chosen to transport their children to neighboring Crisp County Public Schools for a \$500 annual tuition fee.

The African American students in Dooly County have generally attended the Dooly County Schools for the duration of their K-12 education. The advantage of remaining in the same public school system was explained by Jim when he said about his middle school friends,

Umm, well, I still have my same friends from elementary. Unidilla [a small community in Dooly County] was merging with us so I was making new friends and keeping up with the old ones at the same time. So I just had a buncha friends at that time.

At one point, there was an elementary, middle, and high school within several of the five towns in the county. However, the schools merged into one school district in the early 1990s. Although the African American students have generally remained in the public schools, most of the students from the dominant social class have enrolled in private

schools. In general, public education is the method of education for African American families and others of low socioeconomic status, although there are some exceptions.

As explained in chapter 3, there is much poverty in Dooly County. The per capita income for White residents is \$18,693 whereas the per capita income for African American residents is \$9,175, which is significantly below the poverty level and state average of \$14,371 (ePodunk, n.d.). The incomes of the participants' families varied to some extent. Jody and Tae's families had lower annual incomes than did those of Jim and Jaden. As a technology-preparatory student from a single-female-headed household consisting of four members, Jody worked part time at the local supermarket to add to his mother's reported annual income of between \$10,000 and \$20,000. According to the school counselor, his family's financial situation compels Jody to work not for his benefit but rather to supplement the family's income.

Despite the fact that many Dooly County students live in poverty and must cope with the effects of deprivation on the "entire educational experience" (Ansalone, 2001, p. 33), they often find the motivation and determination to succeed. Jody showed an inner motivation to achieve, as indicated by his maintenance of an 82.6 GPA. Jody was the only participant who had not passed the science portion of the GHS GT at the time of the study. Although Jody was unable to graduate high school in spring 2006, I learned through additional contact with Jody's family that he had graduated high school in the summer of 2007. Again, Jody has shown great resilience and determination.

Tae's family income was reported to be between \$20,000 and \$30,000, slightly higher than Jody's family income. Tae also lived in a female-headed single-parent household and worked at a fast food restaurant. I do not know if Tae had assumed some

of the family expenses, but he seemed less concerned with financial burdens than was Jody. Although his time was consumed by work, Tae managed to graduate with his 2007 class, having passed the GHGST. Tae had the lowest grade point average of all the students in this study (79.89) but still well within the passing range and technically a low “B” average.

When I called Tae early in the fall 2007 semester to get an update on his status since high school graduation, he seemed excited to share with me his newly developed plans: “I got two jobs now. I work at Hibbet Sports and at Walmart. . . . I start at South Georgia Tech in January for the electrician class.” When questioned about his future plans, Tae said that after he completes his class at the technical college in seven weeks, he plans to relocate to Atlanta to work for Georgia Power. I commended Tae on his future plans and tried to encourage him. I also told him that I was proud of him for his accomplishments and motivation to pursue postsecondary education and gainful employment. I asked him how his mother felt about his plans to relocate. He said that she was “alright” and that “she drive a big truck now.” His mother’s new career in trucking may be a boost for the family financially.

Jaden was the college-preparatory student who earned the Cooperative Developmental Energy Program (CDEP) scholarship at Fort Valley State University, where he planed to major in engineering. Jaden’s mother reported the family’s income to be between \$30,000 and \$40,000. Jaden did not work while pursuing his high school diploma. His father lived at home and worked at a local plant as a supervisor and his mother worked as a medical records receptionist. Jaden did not appear to be concerned at all about his family’s finances; in fact, it appeared that Jaden’s family did quite well with

the income it earned. Jaden drove a very dependable car and seemed to be channeling his energies into preparing for college. In a lengthy conversation, his mother discussed her support for her son's education and desire to ensure that he was prepared for college. Although Jaden's family income was not very high on a state or national basis, they appeared to be one of the prominent families in the area.

In my recent follow-up telephone conversation with Jaden, he said that he was enjoying his time away at college and has made the adjustment from home to college life. When I asked Jaden what he felt had prepared him so well for the adjustment to college, he said it was "seeing people in college all the time, enjoying the experience and embracing it." He also said that another motivation was "my mother and father telling me the difference in life that pursuing college could make."

Jim's family income was reported to be between \$40,000 and \$50,000, the highest of all of the families in this study. Jim's mother worked as an licensed practical nurse and his father had worked as a farm hand for 30 years. Jim had maintained the highest GPA of all of the participants, and had been accepted by both Valdosta State University and Morehouse College. His SAT scores were lower than were Jaden's, who had the highest scores. However, Jaden had taken the SAT three times, whereas Jim had only taken it once. Jim's ACT scores (composite = 20) were higher than were Jaden's. Jim only took each of the national exams once and performed well enough to gain entry into two very popular local institutions. With both parents earning income for the family, Jim did not have any financial burdens placed on him. Consequently, his GPA and his test scores were high enough for him to gain entry into major colleges.

Jim's mother was very supportive, but said that he was primarily independently motivated and the first of his three siblings to pursue college. Jim did not appear to have any financial burdens. His summer job with the Board of Education was a privilege he earned based on his academic performance. Overall, his family appeared to be doing well economically and as an overall family unit.

In a recent call to Jim to check on his progress, I found that he had decided to attend Valdosta State University instead of the prestigious Morehouse College because of Morehouse's high tuition. He worked full time during the summer of 2007 for the Board of Education in a program for advanced students in the Information Technology Department. He started college at Valdosta State in August 2007 and reported that his adjustment "was better than I thought." Jim referred back to his middle school experience, when the schools merged in the county and suddenly there were children in his school who he did not know in addition to those with whom he had attended elementary school. Jim said that his middle school experience had helped prepare him for his experience in his new environment.

The GPAs for the 2 technology-preparatory students who had worked were at least 10 points lower than were those of the college-preparatory students. The technology-preparatory students had both worked to support themselves and/or their families.

Academic Tracking

Academic tracking, which has a long history in American education, continues today, as demonstrated by the educational experiences of the participants in this study. As discussed in the literature review, student enrollment increased by 700% from 1880 to

1918 due to immigration (Oakes, 1985). These immigrants were darker skinned and shared different languages, religions, traditions, cultural and social practices, attitudes, and manners than had previous European immigrants. National pressure arose to address these differences to gain some type of social and academic order. Because a primary concern was that college-entrance requirements were “inconsistent and arbitrary” (Oakes, 1985, p. 27), there was pressure for schools to develop a method to sort and select students who would be appropriate candidates for college. Unfortunately, “Social Darwinism had provided the ‘scientific justification’ for schools to treat various groups differently” (p. 27).

The school counseling movement, which simultaneously emerged with tracking in secondary schools, led to the increased respectability of ability grouping. Students received counseling to guide their “choices” into the various tracks. Oakes (1985) pointed out that the counseling was based on the attitudes and beliefs of the counselor as well as data that were perceived as objective, such as test results. Consequently, poor and ethnic minorities were guided toward the vocational track while wealthy White students were directed to choose the college-bound course of study.

The participants in this study had received counseling that had guided them toward different courses of study. Jody and Tae stated that their counselors strongly encouraged them to pursue the technical curriculum. According to Jody, “The counselor led me to which path to take and it was tech prep” despite his wish to attend college. Tae expressed that he had no desire to go to college. He demonstrated faith in the counselor’s method: “I would go with the counselor, cause he’s the one that looked at our grades from that year.” On the other hand, Jim and Jaden stated that their guidance came from

family and school counselors. Jaden specifically said that that his decision to pursue the college-preparatory track came “after talking to my counselor and my parents.”

Many educators and parents presume that students learn best when they are grouped with other students who are considered to be similar academically, learn at the same rate, or have similar futures. Although most educators believe that students who have similar abilities will perform better academically if grouped together, the research does not support such a conclusion. In fact, research has shown that the achievement gap between students in college-preparatory and technology-preparatory courses is actually greater than the achievement gap between students who stay in school and those who drop out (Loveless, 1999). The college-preparatory participants performed significantly better than did the technology-preparatory students on both the GHSGT and in their classes. However, it must be kept in mind that this investigation was a very limited study of 4 students who may not be representative of the larger population.

Oakes (1985) asserted, “Rather than help students to feel more comfortable about themselves, the tracking process seems to foster lowered self-esteem among these teenagers” (p. 8). Such conclusions led me to compare the research findings documented in the literature on the historical perspectives of tracking with the results of my limited study of African American male students at Dooly County High. Although it was difficult to identify any type of pattern from such a small study, I found it interesting that the 2 college-preparatory students had significantly higher GPAs than did the 2 technology-preparatory students. I also found that differences in the performance of the students on the GHSCCT—the college-preparatory students passed on the first attempt but the technology-preparatory students had to repeat certain sections—to be significant. In

addition, personal observation led me to believe that the level of confidence appeared to be higher among the college-preparatory students. However, I have no objective data to validate my subjective observation.

Finding 2: Gender Relevancy

Earlier in this dissertation, I discussed gender as a factor that must be considered when discussing the future opportunities of African American males. Although not part of the literature review, the issue of gender contributes to the complexity of the race, class, and tracking puzzle. The participants in this study were all a part of a particular population that faces many difficulties (Noguera, 2001). Their race, social class, and gender contribute to the sometimes self-imposed and stereotyped troubles that plague African American males. Racial profiling is prevalent among this group. According to West (2001),

The legacy of white supremacy lingers—often in the face of the very denials of its realities. The most visible examples are racial profiling, drug convictions (black people consume 12 percent of illegal drugs in America yet suffer nearly 70 percent of its convictions!), and death-row executions. And the less visible ones are unemployment levels, infant mortality rates, special education placements, and psychic treatments. (p. xv)

African American males have the highest homicide, incarceration, conviction, and arrest rates of all populations in most states (Noguera, 2001). They also have the fastest-growing rate of suicide as well as high rates of HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, they are more likely to die in their first year of life than all other populations, and rather than increasing in tandem with most other populations, their life expectancy is decreasing.

African American males are more likely to be unemployed and less likely to be hired than are members of other populations.

Not only are our male students faced with these dismal social realities but must also often overcome stereotypes and accusations of “acting White” (Steele & Aronson, 1995) without strong male role models to combat the media images constantly presented to them. Fortunately, all of the study participants had support from either their biological fathers living at home or uncles. Jaden spoke fondly of his father, saying, “Me and my father could be brothers ‘cause we have a tight nit bond.” Concerning both parents, Jaden said,

We have an understanding of respecting each other inside the household, but I respect them more because they are the parents and I’m obedient to them, and they still respect my wishes and everything so . . . and we have a good relationship.

Jaden was fortunate to have a good relationship with his father and mother.

Jim’s response concerning his relationship with his father was also positive: “It’s good; it’s getting better as I get older.” Jody expressed a degree of sadness in his response concerning the father-son relationship: “Psst, I don’t see him that much. It’s not dat scrong. I don’t see ‘em that much, but when I do see him, he show me love, when I do see ‘em.” It was difficult to hear what I perceived as hurt in Jody’s voice. However, Jody spoke very highly of his maternal uncle: “My uncle teach me e’rethang. When my uncle be at work, he show me the ropes. Like if I can’t make it in school, he can help me get my license to drive big trucks. He show me e’erthang.”

Tae spoke of his relationship with his father with what I perceived to be a lack of attachment, saying that the relationship was “not good.” Although I paused to allow him to elaborate, he did not do so. Regarding regular visitations with his father, Tae said, “Nope, every now and then.” Tae’s unattached manner while responding gave the impression that he was attempting to protect himself. When questioned about whether he had a mentoring relationship with anyone, Tae simply responded, “Yes . . . my uncle.” Through further questioning, Tae confirmed that his uncle lived in Vienna. Again, he did not elaborate or share any additional information on the subject.

Finding 3: Teacher/Counselor Expectations

As discussed in the literature review, sorting and selecting students to determine college candidacy began as far back as 1890, when schools began enrolling diverse populations due to immigration (Oakes, 1985). Despite the 1892 recommendations from the Committee of Ten on Secondary Studies of the National Education Association for the standardization of college-preparatory curricula and college-admission requirements, the practice of tracking continued. The committee opposed creating curricula that included a college-preparatory track based on intellectual differences because it had concluded that Americans grossly underestimated the human potential for learning.

The level of expectation from teachers and other educators strongly influences students’ perception of what they can accomplish (Oakes, 1985; Thompson, 2004). Regarding the influence of the counselor on his curriculum-track decision, Jody stated, “The counselor led me to which path to take and it was tech prep.” When I questioned whether Jody had had any idea of his intended path prior to meeting with the counselor,

he stated, “I a’int look, he just told me which one. . . . I knew I wanted to go to college, but my counselor also said if I get in tech prep I can still go to college, so I chose tech.”

Regarding the counselor’s advice, Tae said, “I would go with the counselor ‘cause he’s the one that looked at our grades from that year and he talked to us to see which one we wanted to take, so I chose the tech prep way.” Tae used the word “chose,” but in a follow-up question specifically asking Tae if he knew before talking to the counselor that he should pursue the technology-preparatory track, he answered, “No.” When I attempted to clarify his answer by asking, “So talking with the counselor helped you decide [on] tech prep?” Tae responded, “Yes” with no further comment. Despite my effort to allow Tae to express himself more fully, he continued giving brief responses. Tae confirmed that he had had no idea about the direction he would take before advisement from the counselor. From Jody’s and Tae’s words, it appears that the counselor’s expectations for these 2 students were low based in part on their grades. Jody was directed towards the technology-preparatory track despite his clear desire to attend college.

Issues relating to systemic inequalities may be as possible explanations for the counselor’s guidance. Oakes (1985) stated that in the past, students were often placed into different programs of study according to their ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. Those from affluent families were considered abstract thinkers and oriented to classes that improved their literacy skills. Immigrants and other economically disadvantaged students were considered “hand minded, socially inefficient, ignorant, prejudiced and highly excitable” (p. 30). Oakes wrote that when the counseling movement began, the advice given was based on the attitudes and beliefs of the counselor as well as data perceived as objective, such as test results and grades. However, when

questioning why the academic performance of African American students is lower than that of students from the dominant group, the “impact of systemic racism” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 9) or the possibility of “distinct cultural characteristics requiring some specific attention” (p. 9) has rarely been considered. Lipman (1993) concluded that teachers’ belief about the likely success of African American students have not changed from the historical perspective; they simply do not genuinely believe that African American students can succeed academically.

Teacher-student relationships are important for academic success. The students in this study alluded to the influence of their teachers on their choice of favorite subject. Jaden stated his favorite subject had always been math until he had a good science teacher. Jim supported the importance of teacher quality when he said, “Over time I think mine (favorite subject) has kinda changed to literature, ahh, not because of the subject, because of the teachers we had for it. In lit, the teachers were better.” When I asked the students at the end of the focus group interview whether their teachers’ skills had influenced their choice of favorite subject, they all said, “Yes.”

Several Dooly County educators have reported that it is a challenge to attract and retain qualified teachers within their school system. Because the county is very small and rural, it is often difficult for the teachers’ spouses who work in other fields to find work in the area. Therefore, many teachers teach for a year or 2 before moving to nearby Houston or Pulaski County, where there are more professional and personal opportunities. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), “The pattern for some teachers is to endure a teaching assignment in an inner-city school until they can find a position in a more affluent district with fewer children of color” (p. 52). In the case of Dooly County,

the pattern may be for teachers to endure the rural assignment until they can find a position in a more affluent district with fewer children of color and a lower rate of poverty. The teachers who are natives of the county and eager to work with a majority African American population are more likely to be content with their teaching assignments in this district. Poor children often end up with the more unqualified and ineffective teachers.

Jaden and Jim had received guidance from their school counselor, teachers, and parents. Jaden explained,

Well, I had a lot of different influences like, family and friends, also people in the school system telling me that if I wanted to go to college and the best thing to do was to be in college prep.

He elaborated that his primary influence toward preparing for college had come from his parents. Jim said that his counselor had guided him toward college preparation. Asked specifically about whether or not his parents had had any influence on his track decision, Jim said, “Yes, they did, I mean, I think it was my parents because I didn’t really know what was going on, so they kinda helped me get into it. I just stuck with it.”

Concerning curriculum guidance, Jody said,

Umm, the counselor led me to which path to take and it was tech prep I knew I wanted to go to college, too, but my counselor also said if I get in tech prep I can still go to college, so I chose tech.

Concerning parental input into his decision, Jody stated, “Yes, my mom did have a lot of influence on what decision I made just as long as I went to college.” It seemed that Jody’s mother had always wanted him to attend college, but a lack of communication between

home and school regarding Jody's educational plans had resulted in him being placed on the technology-preparatory track. Jody obviously perceived the counselor as the authority on the subject of curriculum tracks. Even though Jody had not been directed toward the college-preparatory curriculum, his mother put forth a gallant effort toward the goal of educating her son. When I asked Jody if he had support at home and school, he replied, "Yes ma'am my mama, my mamma make sure I get everything right, she be checking on me; she make sure I got all my classes. She love to say, 'You got all your English?'"

Tae reported that his guidance had come solely from the counselor: "Ahh, I would go with the counselor 'cause he's the one that looked at our grades from that year and he talk to us to see which one we wanted to take, so I chose the tech prep way." For clarification, I asked if Tae had known his desired track prior to his discussions with his counselor. He responded, "No." In a further attempt at confirmation, I asked Tae if talking to the counselor had helped him decide, and he responded, "Yes." Responding to the question concerning parental input or influence over his decision regarding curriculum track, Tae said that his parent(s) did not have input: "No, not really."

African American students are usually overrepresented in low-ability tracked classes (Ladson-Billing, 1994; Oakes, 1985). Although there is evidence that teachers and counselors tend to honor parents' requests for student track placement, African American parents often lack the cultural capital and access to information to make the appropriate decision. Oakes (1995) also observed that even when students are not tracked according to "ability," African American and Latino students still suffer educationally and are provided with fewer educational opportunities. In effect, marginalized groups are often tracked by race, not ability.

The practice of tracking has survived despite serious scrutiny. A particularly alarming study was a 1963 investigation of counseling practices that revealed that students were often placed into groups on the basis of counselors' assessment of their language, dress, and behavior, as well as their academic potential (Oakes, 1985).

Finding 4: Family Values

A positive relationship with parents and strong family values inarguably contribute to students' academic success. Thompson (2002) conducted a study that identified factors in success among African American college students according to traditional standards. Thompson found that most of the study participants had had positive role models during childhood and/or adolescence: "Parents were the most commonly cited group of role models, followed by another relative, and then thirdly, teachers" (p. 151).

The participants expressed varying degrees of positive relationships with their parents. Jaden described a great relationship with his father: "Me and my father could be brothers 'cause we have a tight nit bond." In response to questioning Jaden about how he spends time with his father, he said, "We might just sit at home if there's nothing to do, just sit at home, watch TV or sports or something; just talk about things, like life, what's ahead, stuff like that." Such simple moments of interaction had significant meaning for Jaden. In fact, he said that the person(s) he spent most of his time with were his parents. Jaden's observation of his relationship with his father supported research findings (Malone-Colon & Roberts, 2006) that African American boys living in intact homes are much more likely to report that their father is important to them. Mutual respect was

identified as a descriptor concerning Jaden's relationship with his parents. In describing his relationship with his parents, Jaden said,

Aahm, like we have an understanding of respecting each other inside the household, but I respect them more because they are the parents and I'm obedient to them and they still respect my wishes and everything so . . . and we have a good relationship.

Jaden's mother spoke very fondly of her son and was obviously very proud of him (contact could not be established with his father). Jaden also described a great relationship with both of his older brothers. When questioned whether he had mentors, Jaden replied, "Yes, I do; both of my brothers." Jaden had a large extended family that also lived in Dooly County. When asked about his best friends in middle school, he stated, "Like my cousins, 'cause it's three of us, we're the same age and we were born in the same month around the same time, so we are very close to each other." He shared that he was very close to two of his aunts and had three cousins his age that were his best friends. Family appeared to be an area of joy and strength for Jaden and was at the center of all of the favorite memories he shared.

Jim also stated that the person(s) he had spent most of his time with were his parents. Concerning his relationship with his father, Jim said, "It's good; it's getting better and better as I get older." In my conversation with Jim's mother, she spoke with pride about her son's accomplishments and shared that she and Jim's father had related the message that education is the "very foundation for everything else that he wants to do in life." Like Jaden, Jim had two older brothers who had not attended college. However,

as mentioned earlier, he had a close relationship with a cousin who had plans to attend law school.

Another source of strength for Jim was his pride in his early career as a student assistant in the Information Technology Department of the Dooly County Board of Education. His work with computer repair and software installation, which assisted in his development of a sense of responsibility and accomplishment, was supervised by the Information Technology Coordinator for the local school system and the Technology Specialist. His superiors served as important mentors for Jim. In a 1995 study, Floyd found that high school seniors from poor families who were academically successful had experienced either good parental relationships or positive relationships with other significant adults such as grandparents, church members, or school employees.

Jody did not have a strong relationship with his father but reported a very close relationship with his mother. Unlike Jaden and Jim, Jody expressed his mother's regrets about her lack of college education. Jody seemed disappointed about his lack of a positive relationship with his father, which may have been partly responsible for my perception that he lacked self-esteem. His uncle was a source of support and Jody was fortunate to have a strong relationship with him. Nevertheless, Jody showed some level of disappointment regarding the lack of time he spends with his father when he stated, "I don't see 'em that much, but when I do see him, he show me love, when I do see 'em."

Malone-Cohen and Roberts (2006) concluded that although extended family and other kin support can be helpful to single mothers, they typically do not "compensate for father absence" (p. 2). Nevertheless, there is evidence that many young males raised by single mothers can experience successful adult lives as productive citizens. Although

Jody did not have the benefit of his father's presence in the home throughout his high school years, he reported that his relationship with his mother was "strong [strong], because when she's there all we talk about is what go on in life and after high school. She tell me to stay in [school] 'cause she don't want me to struggle [struggle] and make no loans." Jody continually emphasized his mother's emphasis on education and her regret that she did not "graduate from nursing school."

Tae's situation was similar to Jody's concerning the absence of a father at home. Tae said that his relationship with his father was "not good" but described his relationship with his mother as "good." When I contacted him recently (fall of 2007) for an update, Tae seemed excited about his plans to pursue a local technical college certification as an electrician that would eventually allow him to relocate to Atlanta. When I asked how his mother would feel regarding his relocation when the time came, he said "alright," and proceeded to explain that his mother has a new trucking career of her own, which calls for her to travel away from the home. His uncle has also been a source of support. Malone-Colon and Roberts (2006) found that when African American males live in a two-parent home, particularly with their two married parents, they experience greater economic security and better parenting, health, academic performance, and self-esteem.

The presence of a father figure in the home appeared to be a contributing factor to the participants' success in school. The 2 students who had a father present experienced more academic success and had more self-confidence than the 2 who did not. Another interesting finding concerns the mentors of the participants. Jaden's mentors were his older brothers, the younger of whom was in college. Jim's mentor was a cousin who had completed college and was prepared to enter law school. Both Jaden and Jim appeared to

be following in the footsteps of their mentors. Jody appeared to be motivated to achieve more than had his uncle.

Fathers are important to sons in several ways. First, fathers serve as role models and play a crucial role in countering some of negative images of Black manhood displayed in the media (Malone-Colon & Roberts, 2006). Secondly, fathers are more likely to use strict and demanding parenting strategies than are mothers. Boys generally respond better to this strict style of discipline. Fathers are more likely to engage in roughhousing with boys that has been found to promote social competence, self-control, and empathy.

Finding 5: Rigorous and Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Educators must focus on developing a rigorous, culturally relevant, and responsive curriculum targeted to African American males. Such a curriculum would offer these students more equitable educational opportunities and better prepare them for entrance into a 4-year college or university. In order to ensure that African American males gain access to higher educational opportunities, the issues of academic rigor, cultural relevance, and teacher preparation must be kept in focus during continued discussions regarding educational policy and practice.

The public school system has been described by Kunjufu (1986) as the most blatant institution that contributes to the destruction of the African American boy. Kunjufu claimed that educational institutions have established countless policies and practices that unintentionally deny African American males equal access to high quality educational experiences. Legislation, tracking, special education, and standardized testing are examples of such policies and practices that may have been relevant in Jody's and

Tae's high school experiences. Although education is commonly viewed as the great equalizer, Bowles and Gintis (1976) found that schools attended by African American students have historically justified inequality to a greater degree than they have promoted true social mobility. Only 11% of the 2002 Dooly County High graduates went on to attend a Georgia public college for the 2002-2003 academic year, compared to a state rate of 39% for the same year.

The statistics consistently reveal that African American males are overrepresented in almost every indicator of school failure, including dropout, absenteeism, suspension, expulsion, and low achievement rates (Noguera, 2001; Way & Gordon, 1994). Higher rates of college entrance and degree completion will not be realized for the African American male population until the rates of these indicators decrease. Although Jody, Tae, Jaden, and Jim were all fortunate to have graduated from high school, only 2 of the 4 planned to attend 4-year universities. However, Tae was planning to pursue a technical certificate and Jody had a strong desire to attend college. I will make every attempt to follow Jody's path in the hope that he will realize his dream of achieving a college education.

In a study, Adelman (1999) found that academic curriculum is the most significant predictor of college success. Rigorous coursework, including advanced placement courses and mathematics classes beyond Algebra II, prepares students for the level of performance expected of them in higher educational institutions and increases their likelihood of completing college. Moses and Cobb (2001) confirmed that a rigorous curriculum is a predictor of college preparedness and success. Adelman's study also confirmed that curriculum is a better predictor of college completion than are GPA, class

rank, or test scores. Perhaps the more rigorous curriculum offered through the college-preparatory track might have made a difference in Jody's academic career.

Bachelor's degree completion is more strongly related to the combination of a student's academic background, coursework, class rank, and senior year test scores than it is socioeconomic status. Although academic preparation is the single strongest predictor of college attendance and completion, social support, access to information, parental involvement, and knowledge about college financial aid have also been found to be important predictors (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). It appears that access to information may have been a particularly strong barrier for Jody and Tae. Accessible, reliable information may have resulted in both students taking college-entry tests and pursuing more rigorous coursework, thereby increasing their options.

In addition to academic rigor, a culturally relevant curriculum that "educates and empowers students holistically" (Thompson, 2004, p. 206) is paramount to the success of African American males. Students must be empowered to think critically and understand their environment, including the structural inequities that continue to exist. Students must also be equipped to pursue creative options despite the obstacles placed before them.

Gay (2000) asserted that culturally relevant teaching should perform the following functions:

1. It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups.
2. It connects school and home experiences.
3. It uses different instructional strategies to address all learning styles.

4. It teaches students to value their own cultural heritage and that of others.
5. It incorporates multicultural materials into the curriculum. (p. 20)

Not only could the young males who participated in this study but all students benefit from culturally relevant teaching.

According to Kunjufu (2002), dominant society has methodically denied African American boys the fruits of their inheritance, culture and rites of passage by controlling the educational institutions. Therefore, we must begin to reconceptualize traditional methods of teaching to serve African American male students in a more appropriate manner. While doing so, we must consider the quality of our teachers. According to Kozol (1991), public education will remain unequal as long as the majority of African American students are taught by teachers who lack the experience, motivation, resources, and/or enthusiasm to engage students in the learning process. This learning process often takes place in school facilities that are both racially and economically isolated, resulting in more barriers to student engagement. As discussed in chapter 3, the Dooly County School System struggles with retaining teachers, particularly those who are not from the immediate and surrounding areas. Teacher certification in critical areas such as math and science has also been an issue that may contribute to inadequate preparation levels and ultimately become a barrier to college entrance for some groups of students.

Kunjufu (2002) explained that there is a difference between African and Negro history that students must be taught and understand. Understanding the historical significance of current educational practices concerning African American students would help students connect to their history and view their attainment of education and skills as a means to empower the community and not merely a means of personal

enhancement. I feel compelled to use my position and work to create opportunities for the students of Dooly County to learn their history and grow stronger in their mission to give back to the community. I remain aware that I have benefited tremendously from teachers who used purposeful and passionate teaching to ensure that I learned the necessary skills and kept my options open. On a daily basis, I find small ways that I hope will improve curricula and lead to a more culturally relevant pedagogy. During the 2006-2007 academic year, I was successful in gaining approval to develop a research-based social/emotional learning program that uses technology to explore student academic, social, and emotional issues that may interfere with academic success. Two separate age-targeted curricula use technology to offer teaching modules on every issue with which a child or adolescent may be experiencing difficulties. These research-based curricula are designed to teach tolerance of individual and group differences, critical thinking skills, effective management of emotions, and relationship-building skills. I experienced a major success when the superintendent agreed that every teacher in the district would be trained in the use of these curricula. I hope that this program will allow teachers and counselors to resolve their own issues before it is offered to students.

Another small step was obtaining funding for a summer-enrichment program that allowed a group of approximately 20 children to participate in a trip to Montgomery, Alabama to tour the Civil Rights Institute and other historically significant institutions. After witnessing the pride that such an experience created in our students, I determined to advocate that students participate in the annual conference for young people. Additionally, I have recently contracted with an educational consulting firm to conduct intensive casework among male students to empower them through helping them develop

their relationship-building and social skills. I am excited that there is a small team of professionals receptive to culturally relevant pedagogy whose goal is to expand the use of such pedagogy for the benefit of all the students in the district.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, AND READING

Minor's Assent Form

Hello,

My name is Sonja Shavers and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am doing a study entitled Race, Class & Tracking: What Keeps African American Males From Pursuing College Degrees?

You are being asked to participate in a research project that will help me learn about the barriers some African American male students experience in completing a college prep curriculum and entering college. During the first meeting, I will ask you questions that will allow you an opportunity to deeply reflect on your past that will increase self-awareness. The second interview will consist of you and three other students coming together once for a group discussion. The focus of the group will be your high school experiences related to race, class, tracking and opportunities/barriers to college education. The researcher will ask the group to respond to a list of prepared questions.

You do not have to help me with this project. You can stop helping me whenever you want to. If you do not want to answer some of the questions, it is ok. You can refuse to help me even if your parents have said yes.

Your name will not appear on any of these documents. I will ask you to select a name different than your birth name. You can select any name that you are comfortable using. None of the teachers or other people at your school will see the answers to the questions that I ask you. All of the answers that you give me will be kept in a locked cabinet in a room at Georgia Southern University. Only I and/or other people helping me will be able to know which answers are yours.

If you or your parent(s)/guardian(s) have any questions or concerns regarding this study at any time, please feel free to contact Sonja Shavers, Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading major, at 229-268-7751, or Dr. Ming Fang He, advisor, at 912-871-1546

If you understand the information above and want to help in the research project, please sign your name on the line below:

_____ Yes, I want to help in this project.

_____ No, I do not want to help in this project.

Child's Name _____

Investigator's Signature _____
 Date _____

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, AND READING

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Sonja Shavers and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am doing a study entitled Race, Class & Tracking: What Keeps African American Males From Pursuing College Degrees? The purpose of this study is to explore the high school experiences of African American male students that lead to a decision regarding curriculum track and higher education. It is important to discover why and how these students decide whether or not to pursue a curriculum that would provide the rigor necessary for college preparation.

Your student is being considered to participate in this research study. If you give permission, and your child is selected, the student will complete two interviews. The first interview will be an autobiographical interview which will allow the student the opportunity to deeply reflect on his past and increase self awareness concerning who he is, how he perceives, reacts to, and interact with others The second interview will consist of the four participants coming together once to casually share their stories in an open, honest fashion, from each one's own perspective. The focus of the group will be their high school experiences related to race, class, tracking and opportunities/barriers to college education. The researcher will ask the group to respond to a list of prepared questions.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. The risks from participating in this study are no more than would be encountered in everyday life; however, your child will be informed that he may stop participating at any time without any penalty. Your child may chose to not answer any question(s) he does not wish to for any reason. Your child may refuse to participate even if you agree to his participation.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the child, a name selected by the child other than the birth name and not the child's name will appear on all of the information recorded during the interviews. All information pertaining to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in an office at Georgia Southern University. No one at your child's school will see the information recorded about your child.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study at any time, please feel free to contact Sonja Shavers, Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading major, at 229-268-7751, extension 228, or Dr. Ming Fang He, advisor, at 912-871-1546.

If you are giving permission for your child to participate in this research project, please check accordingly and sign the form below and return it to your child's teacher as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your time.

Sonja Shavers, Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading major Dr. Ming Fang He, advisor

_____ Yes, I give my son permission to participate in the above study.

_____ No, I do not give my son permission to participate in the above study.

Investigator's Signature _____

Child's Name _____

Parent or Guardian's Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROMPTS

Individual Interview Questions

- 1) Name and age (How were you named?)
- 2) Where were you born?
- 3) Is there any particular memory you have about your life before kindergarten age?
- 4) Who lived in your house when you attended kindergarten?
- 5) How many siblings do you have?
- 6) How old are your siblings?
- 7) Is there a particular aunt, uncle, or cousin that you are close to?
- 8) Who do you spend most of your time with? (peer, adult)
- 9) Who lives in your house now?
- 10) What was the best time you had in elementary school?
- 11) Was elementary school a good experience? (yes/no/why?)
- 12) What was your favorite subject, teacher, why?
- 13) Who were your friends in middle school? Best friends?
- 14) Happiest memory in your family (Middle School)?
- 15) Do you attend school regularly now? (why/why not?)
- 16) How do you feel about school currently?
- 17) Do you have support at home and school?
- 18) What message has your parent(s)/guardian given you about the value of education?
- 19) Has anyone in your immediate family attended college? Extended family?
- 20) How would you describe your relationship with your parent(s)/guardian?

21) How would you describe your relationship with your father?

22) Do you have a mentor or big brother type relationship with anyone?

Focus Group Interview Questions

- 1) What is your chosen program of study (college prep, advanced placement, tech prep)?
- 2) In your opinion, has your academic coursework been challenging in preparation of development as a critical thinker?
- 3) As an 8th-grade student, what math did you take (pre algebra-algebra)?
- 4) Were you involved in extra curriculum activities in elementary, middle or high school?
- 5) What was your favorite subject in school? Why?
- 6) Has your favorite subject changed over time? Why or Why not?
- 7) Who advised you about your program of study?
- 8) Did your parent(s)/guardian have any input in to your choice?
- 9) Did your friends influence your choice for a program of study?
- 10) Do you plan to go to college? If not, what are your plans after high school graduation?
- 11) Will you graduate after four years of high school?
- 12) How do you feel about your education and curriculum track choice?