

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT RECOVERY:

A CRITICAL RACE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

by

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B.A., Wichita State University, 1993
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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum & Instruction
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

African American males have the second highest dropout rate in this Midwest state's largest public school district. Often, African American male students take an abundance of elective classes but do not complete core classes that guarantee a diploma. This study documented and analyzed the experiences of African American male students who completed or attempted to complete their high school diplomas in an alternative setting. The study is significant because it reveals the importance of how time is structured in an alternative educational setting; it discloses the pervasiveness of racism in public education, and it exposes the widespread stereotyping of African American males by teachers and other authority figures. African American male students who have attended both traditional and alternative public schools have been overlooked in previous research. Self-ethnography comprised the methodology. The intersectionality of gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships formed a crucial paradigm of this investigation. Research findings include: (a) the major difference between traditional public and alternative schools is how time is structured, (b) African American males believe that they often are stereotyped, (c) high school athletes receive special privileges that they see later as obstacles, (d) African American males sometimes deliberately assume a pleasing demeanor toward teachers, (e) African American male students respond positively to teachers who conduct themselves with clear purpose, (f) African American males returning to school for high school credit recovery demonstrate tenacity and resist stereotypes. The cornerstone tenets of CRT—racism is the norm, interest convergence, and the need for social justice for oppressed groups—were evident in the findings of the frequency of stereotyping and treatment of African American male high school athletes. In the interest of social justice for African American male students, it is recommended that teachers are provided with the following information: (a) how to avoid consciously stereotyping; (b) that African American males make conscious efforts to be

approachable; (c) how to make necessary changes involving their authority. Recommended future research for African American males includes: (a) how the construction of time in traditional public schools affects their credit acquisition; (b) communication between the counseling and athletic departments; (c) the impact of athletic involvement on academics.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

High School: Dropouts and Graduates

The purpose of this research is to obtain insight into the educational experiences of African American male students in public high school credit recovery. Existing research largely represents African American male students in traditional public schools and programs (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003; Chapman, 2007a; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Fordham, 1985; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Ottley, 2007). The rationale for choosing African American male students who first attended traditional public schools and then entered credit recovery includes three main reasons. First, with the exception of White-Johnson's (2001) work, there is little research on the specific population of African American males in credit recovery. Secondly, although the specific group is not represented widely in educational research, it is well documented that future and current teachers struggle to reach African American males satisfactorily and effectively (Chapman, 2007b; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007b; Monroe, 2005; Picower, 2004; Solarzano & Yosso, 2001b; Strayhorn, 2008; Vann Lynch, 2006). Thirdly, as an urban educator, I recognize the frustrations and challenges of the students as well as future and current teachers. This research fills a void in the research and offers insights to teachers with the potential to increase effectiveness in their teaching of African American male students in particular. The multifaceted role of teacher, colleague, and doctoral student facilitates my ability to conduct credit recovery research.

At the national, state, and district level, African American males graduate at a lower rate than European American males and females, Asian American males and females, African

American females, and Hispanic females (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2006; Kansas State Department of Education, 2009; Wichita Public Schools, 2008a).

High school dropouts consistently have a lower quality of life than high school graduates. The dire economic consequences of dropping out have been well established and reported (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Balfanz, 2009; Center for Public Education, 2009; *Education Week*, 2007; Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009). The students who dropout and then choose to enter credit recovery and earn their high school diploma are better off than the dropouts who remain without their diplomas. The benefits of late graduation include an increased likelihood of further education and degrees, better jobs, and a healthier lifestyle. The Center for Public Education (2009) reports that late graduates are more likely to:

- go on to obtain either an associate's or a bachelor's degree,
- be employed, and more likely to have fulltime employment than GED recipients and dropouts,
- be significantly better off in terms of job benefits,
- vote in elections,
- be non-smokers and exercise more.

In other words, it is better late than never to graduate from high school. Credit recovery in alternative public schools provides the opportunity to achieve a high school diploma. Albeit late, the act of graduating from high school still provides an improved life for the individual student. As a whole, society also benefits from increasing the number of high school graduates (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Bridgeland et al., 2009; Center for Public Education, 2009; *Education Week*, 2007; Sum et al., 2009).

The broad background of the public school experience for African American males contains a lower graduation rate for the group; in addition to this finding, African American males have higher suspension and expulsion rates, more discipline referrals, and are referred for remedial classes more often than their European American, Asian American, and Hispanic male peers (Duncan, 2002; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Sloan, 2007; Tatum, 1992; Townsend, 2000; Yosso, 2005).

The six participants of the study, chosen for their personal experiences in both traditional and alternative public schools, provide authentic insights. Their voices contribute to a holistic portrayal of their experiences that considers gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships. The intersection of these factors is considered using Critical Race Theory (CRT) for analysis and interpretation. The first three tenets of CRT are especially germane to this study:

1. Racism is the norm, not the exception.
2. Gains for minorities are often more beneficial to the dominant culture (i.e., interest convergence).
3. Counterstories are important (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995).

In addition to the three tenets listed above, CRT maintains that colorblindness is a myth; multiple factors and contexts must be considered; social justice should be pursued constantly (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

This research examines the intersection of gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with law enforcement, and relationships under a Critical Race Theory lens. Multiple factors converge and influence the educational experiences of African American males. Other

researchers who focus on African American students have found that the consideration of several factors—how they cross, overlap, and influence one another—is optimal for producing a holistic representation (Dunbar, 1999; Duncan, 2002; Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Picower, 2004; Strayhorn, 2008; Thomas, 2000; White-Johnson, 2001). Dunbar (1999) examined the exclusion of African American males in the public school system. While doing so, he looked at the intersection of school policies regarding alternative schools, parents’ perspectives, racial isolation, and social trends. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define intersectionality as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (p. 51). Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) explanation of intersectionality refers to cultural identity and overlapping factors. When applied to educational research, intersectionality considers how several items or aspects influence a given topic or person’s experience. The opposite of isolation, intersectionality embraces, blends, and appreciates context. Following are several examples of educational research that use intersectionality in their approach.

Dunbar (1999) urges educational researchers to acknowledge the involvement of multiple factors—“middle class flight from urban neighborhoods, flight of industry and jobs, bank redlining practices in inner cities, lack of investment in infrastructure, and infusion of drugs” (p. 244) — when looking at African American males. Whereas Dunbar’s (1999) focus was on alternative schools, Duncan’s (2002) research took place in a large, traditional, public high school. Duncan (2002) sought and shared the authentic voices of African American male students who attended a predominantly white high school. To supplement their stories, Duncan (2002) also considered school demographics, standardized test scores, attendance records,

graduation rates, and “documents related to the historical, ideological, and programmatic features of the school” (p. 134).

Howard’s (2008) work is set in PreK-12 schools; he urges other educational researchers to “place race, class, and gender at the center of their analysis” (p. 955). Howard uses CRT to examine the “disenfranchisement” of African American males (p. 954); he insists that racism must be acknowledged and considered when conducting educational research on African American males as well as race, class, and gender. “The race and gender nexus is important because individuals wear multiple identities that are typically shaped by both race and gender in all of their manifestations” (Howard, 2008, p. 966).

Noguera (2003) concentrates on African American males and promotes the consideration of youth culture and identities in addition to race, class, and gender. Strayhorn (2008) focuses on teachers’ expectations for African American males and how those expectations intersect with gender, race, and the geographical location (or “urbanicity”) of a school. Urbanicity “reflects the school’s metropolitan status” (Strayhorn, 2008, para. 3).

Thomas (2000) studies mathematics and African American high school students. He examines the intersectionality of motivation and attitude, quantity of mathematics instruction, quality of instruction, home environment, classroom environment, anti-academic peer pressure, and use of after-school time. Thomas (2000) promotes the consideration of multiple factors when conducting educational research. He goes a step further and recommends that ethnic groups should be studied independently as it may provide meaningful information regarding the influence of the productivity factors on achievement and attitude outcomes among different ethnic groups. Thus, future research studies may explore the differential impact and interrelationships of multiple variables on ethnic groups independently (Thomas, 2000, p. 182).

A year after Thomas’s (2000) research, White-Johnson (2001) also looked at African American males and considered several factors. White-Johnson’s (2001) setting is an alternative school; she considers the intersection of societal factors, male students’ beliefs about their teachers’ perceptions, school environment, home life, and family structure. White-Johnson (2001) recommends future dialogue based on “a marriage between sociological and psychological theoretical constructs” (p. 372). Table 1.1 is a brief summary of existing educational research that features African American students.

Table 1.1 Intersectionality in Educational Research

Intersectionality in Educational Research				
Researcher(s)	Topic	Components	Year	Summary of Findings
Dunbar	Alternative Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School policies regarding alternative schools • Parents’ perspectives • Racial isolation • Social trends 	1999	In some districts, alternative schools are alternative in name only. African American males often are assigned to them as a punitive measure or holding place.
Duncan	Academic and social experiences of African American male students that attend a predominantly white, elite high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers’ attitudes • Administrators’ attitudes • Graduation rates • Standardized test scores 	2002	An effective strategy for mitigating the harm of negative stereotypes is to allow, encourage, and listen to the personal experiences (stories) of African American males.
Noguera	Academic performance of African American males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental forces • Cultural forces • Race, class, and gender 	2003	For the most part, African American males are underserved consistently in K-12 public schools and lag behind in academic achievement. African American males do excel, however, in schools that consider and understand the forces of youth culture.

Intersectionality in Educational Research

Researcher(s)	Topic	Components	Year	Summary of Findings
Picower	European American teachers working with African American students and veteran teachers in a predominantly African American school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally relevant pedagogy • Established and neophyte teachers working together • Staff development • Racial Identity 	2004	Effective, veteran teachers of African American students cultivate interpersonal relationships.
Strayhorn	Teachers' expectations and African American males success in school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' expectations • Gender, class, • race • School's metropolitan status 	2008	Teachers have lower expectations for African American males than for European American males and females.
Thomas	Influences on African American high school students' math scores compared to peer groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation and attitude of math teachers • Quantity and quality of mathematics instruction • Use of before/after-school time • School socioeconomic status • Anti-academic peer pressure 	2000	To varying degrees, several factors influenced mathematical achievement of African American high school math students but ethnicity was not significantly related to achievement.
White-Johnson	African American male students who decide to leave high school early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male students' beliefs about their teachers' perceptions • School environment • Home life • Family structure 	2001	African American males often subdue or abandon their own cultural influences in order to be successful in school.

Intersectionality facilitates broad and thoughtful insights; it highlights relevant connections and raises important questions. Several researchers maintain that looking at multiple factors—their intersections, their patterns, and their borders—provide meaningful and holistic depictions of the educational experiences of African American students (Dunbar, 1999; Duncan, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Picower, 2004; Strayhorn, 2008; Thomas, 2000; White-Johnson, 2001).

National, State, and District High School Dropout Rates

Graduating from high school is an established tradition in the United States. “What year did you graduate?” is akin to “Do you have any children?” or “What do you do?” in the field of introductory social pleasantries. For those who dropped out, there is the inevitable disappointment of not measuring up to the status quo. Kemp (2006) examined dropout trends for high school students in both regular public education and special education. The student participants were “with and without disabilities,” but were not distinguished by ethnicity or gender (Kemp, 2006, p. 236). The list of dropout predictors includes 13 factors:

- lack of academic success,
- past absenteeism,
- lack of involvement in school activities,
- retention at one or more grade levels,
- involvement with the legal/judicial system,
- family concerns,
- relevance of curriculum,
- disciplinary action by school officials,
- inability to achieve educational objectives,

- lack of vocational training opportunities,
- pursuit of full-time employment,
- prolonged illness and
- pregnancy (Kemp, 2006, p. 242).

My experience as an urban educator leads me to concur with Kemp's (2006) predictors. I teach at an alternative public high school diploma completion program; part of my teaching duties includes speaking to students who have dropped out of high school and want to enroll in the alternative school. My experience has informed me that African American and European American males quit attending high school for any number of reasons including, but not limited to:

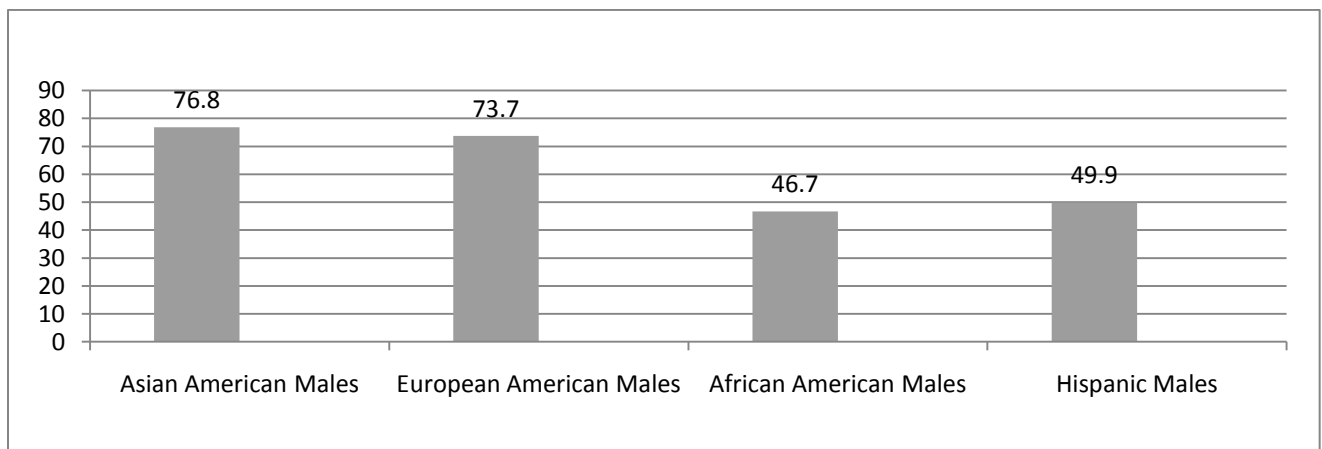
- expulsion due to zero tolerance policies,
- being dropped by the school for lack of attendance,
- impending fatherhood,
- pressure from family to get a job and contribute to the household, and
- parents or guardians sign a waiver of compulsory attendance, weary of handling phone calls and letters from school about their son's failings.

Those who do not complete the high school graduation rite of passage quickly become the "have-nots" in a country of "haves." The possible personal consequences include [being] "unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from high school themselves" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. i). In addition to the costs of the individual of dropping out of high school, there also are enormous costs to society in "the loss of productive workers and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care and social services" (Bridgeland et al.,

2006, p. i). The American tradition of donning gowns and mortarboards with dangling tassels is more likely to take place in the lives of European American students than in any other ethnic group (Bridgeland et al., 2006; *Education Week*, 2007; Greene & Winters, 2006). The commencement exercise represents the successful completion of all required credits for a high school diploma. Traditionally, after marching to “Pomp and Circumstance” (Elgar, 1901), newly graduated students are recognized for their achievement.

However, this American tradition does not take place on an equal basis among high school students of different races. In 2007, the national overall graduation rate for males was reported as 66% (*Education Week*, 2007). However, the graduation rates for male minority students (other than Asian American) are dismal in comparison to graduation rates for male white students. Table 1.2 shows the nationwide graduation rates of males by ethnicity: (a) Asian American males, 76.8%; (b) European American males, 73.7%; (c) African American males, 46.7%; and (d) Hispanic males, 49.9% (*Education Week*, 2007).

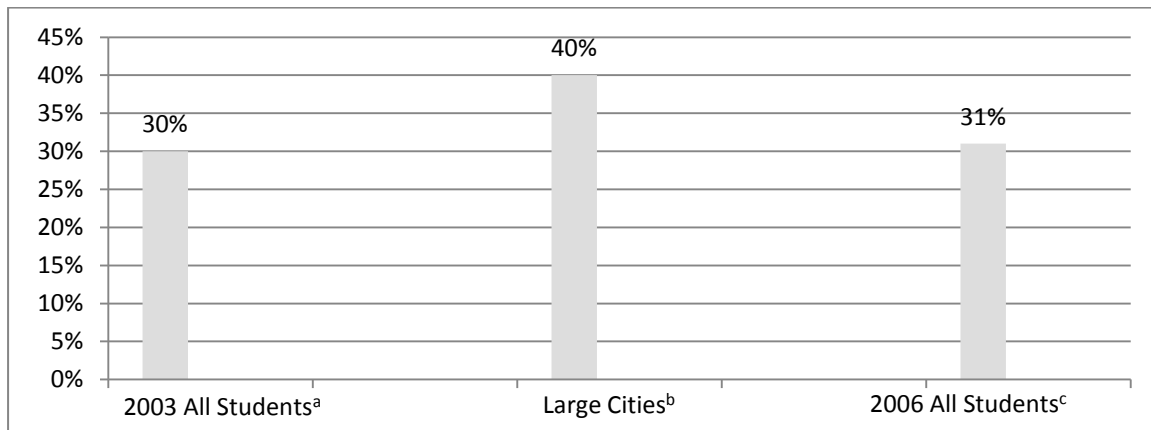
Table 1.2 National Graduation Rates of Males by Ethnicity in 2007



All States Graduation Rates, from *Education Week*. Copyright 2007 by the Editorial Projects in Education.

As depicted in Table 1.3, the nationwide overall dropout rate was reported as 30% in 2003 (Greene & Winters, 2006), more than 40% for all students in large cities in 2003 (Bridgeland et al., 2006), and 31% overall in 2006 (*Education Week*, 2007). The national and state trends approximate one another with similar figures. In the study’s featured state, 24.6% of all students dropped out of high school in 2006 (*Education Week*, 2007).

Table 1.3 National Dropout Rates: All Students

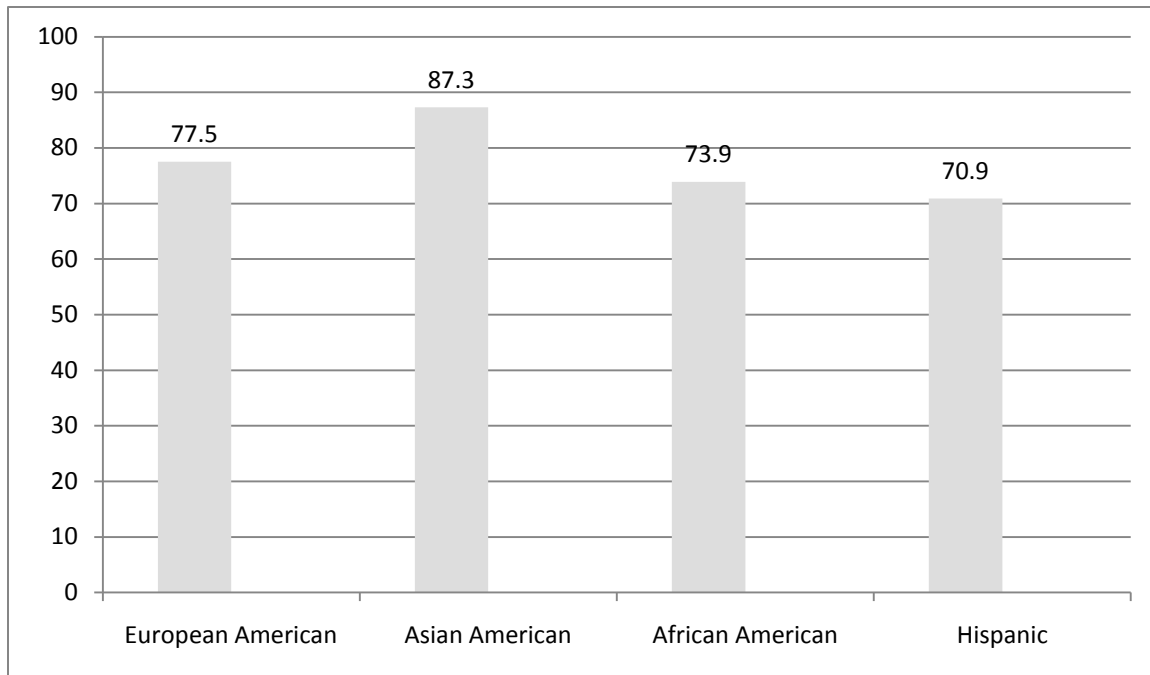


^aLeaving Boys Behind (Greene & Winters, 2006). ^bThe Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts (Bridgeland et al., 2006). ^cAll States Graduation Rates (*Education Week*, 2007).

When comparing national rates by ethnic groups to those of this state’s dropout rates, the same pattern appears. African American males drop out from high school at a higher rate than European American and Asian American males. The discrepancy between dropout rates also exists in the district where this research took place. On the district tier with over 48,000 students, African American males comprised 10.9% of the student population in the 2008-2009 school year. Disproportionately, African American males make up 13.5% of the dropouts in the district in the same school year. The only group with a higher dropout rate is Hispanic males (Wichita Public Schools, 2009a).

African American males graduate at a lower rate than European American and Asian American males in the featured district. Table 1.4 displays the 2007–2008 district graduation rates for male students by ethnicity.

Table 1.4 District Graduation Rates: Males by Ethnicity 2007-2008



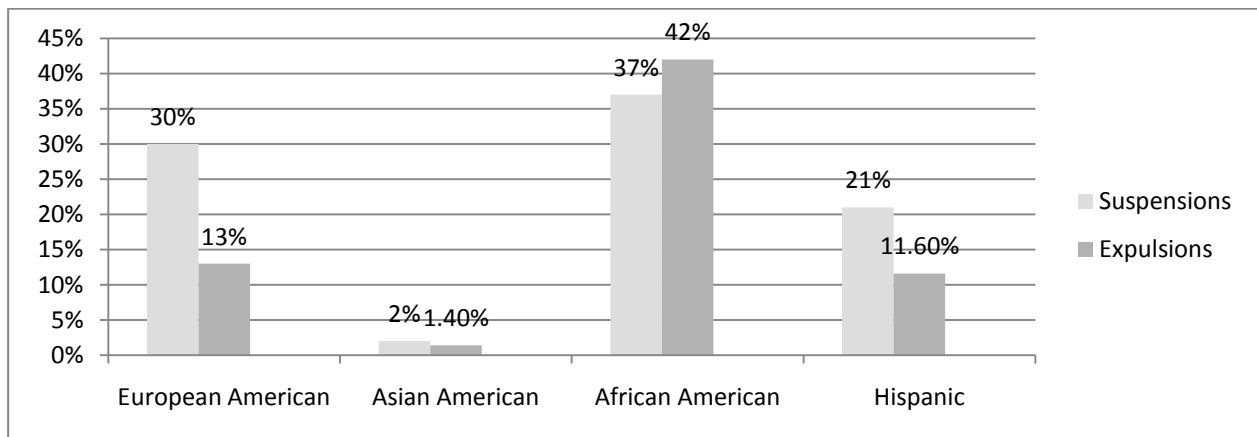
USD 259 Dropouts by grade, race, and gender, 2008-09. Copyright 2009 by Kansas State Department of Education.

African American males are more likely to dropout than African American females. This holds true at both the national and district tiers. On the national level, the Manhattan Institute reports “while 59% of African American females graduated, only 48% of African American males earned a diploma” (Greene & Winters, 2006, para. 37). The school district featured in this study had a similar discrepancy between the graduation rates of African American males (73.9%) and females (81.8%) (Wichita Public Schools, 2009).

In addition to dropping out at a higher rate than other groups, African American males are suspended, expelled, and referred for discipline matters more often than any other ethnic group on a national level (Arrington, et al., 2003; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Blanchett, 2006;

DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Krezmien et al., 2006; Monroe, 2005; Ottley, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; Townsend, 2000). The inordinate amount of suspensions, expulsions, and discipline referrals for African American males also exist in this state’s largest district (Wichita Public Schools, 2008c). In the featured district, during the 2006-2007 school year (most recent data available), African American males made up 42% of expulsions; this is significantly more than the 13% of white males, 12% of Hispanic males, and 3% of Asian American males that were expelled (Wichita Public Schools, 2008b). A similar pattern exists for all male suspensions in the district during the same school year: (a) European American males, 30%, (b) Asian American males, 2%, (c) African American males, 37%, and (d) Hispanic males, 21% (Wichita Public Schools, 2008c). Table 1.5 is a graphic illustration of suspension and expulsion rates for male students in the featured district.

Table 1.5 District Suspensions/Expulsions: Males by Ethnicity 2006-2007



USD 259 Suspensions by grade, race, and gender, 2006-07. Copyright 2009 by Kansas State Department of Education. USD 259 Expulsions by grade, race, and gender, 2006-2007. Copyright 2009 by Kansas State Department of Education.

African American males are dropping out, being suspended, and being expelled more frequently than their European American, Hispanic, and Asian American peers. They are graduating less

frequently than their European American and Asian American peers. In the next section, the long-term consequences of dropping out are discussed.

Social Ramifications

In 2006, the *New York Times* reported that “Black men in the United States face a far more dire situation than is portrayed by common employment and education statistics” (Eckholm, 2006, para. 1). The enormity of the plight for Black men obviously deepens from 2000 to 2004. In 2000, 65% of Black male high school dropouts in their 20s were jobless due to inability to find work, failure to seek it, or incarceration. By 2004, the share had grown to 72%, compared with 34% of white and 19% of Hispanic dropouts (Eckholm, 2006).

While the scope of the problem is reflected in the dropout rate, the sequence of the problem is equally disturbing. A high school dropout is three times more likely to be unemployed than a college graduate. Over their lifetimes, a high school dropout will make about \$1 million less than a college graduate. High school dropouts also make about \$9,200 less annually than high school graduates. After dropping out of high school, young adults are “eight times as likely to be in jail or prison as a person with at least a high school diploma” (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 2).

In scope and sequence, the African American male dropout rate impacts society seriously. “It is important for policymakers and the public to understand that only about 70% of all students and a little more than half of Hispanic and African American students graduate from high school . . . there is a graduation problem that needs to be addressed” (Greene & Winters, 2006, p. 10). The social ramifications of being a high school dropout especially devastate African American males.

These social and incarceration problems of young dropouts are quite severe among all gender and race-ethnic groups but are frequently more severe among men and Blacks. For many dropouts, these labor market and earnings problems will persist over their entire working lives, and for men they have intensified over the past few decades, with steep declines in their lifetime earnings and incomes and attendant adverse consequences on their marriage behavior. (Sum et al., 2009, p. 14)

Clearly, dropouts put themselves at a significant and long-term disadvantage compared to those who achieve a high school diploma; and the damaging effects may be even more pronounced for African American males.

Learning Centers: An Alternative to Dropping Out

In Kirby, some of the students who drop out of traditional public high schools choose to complete their diploma requirements later at Learning Centers or Education Resource Centers (Wichita Public Schools, 2009b). The nontraditional centers give students the opportunity to graduate from a fully accredited high school and to celebrate a commencement exercise.

I am an instructional facilitator who teaches year-round; I divide my time between two learning centers in Kirby, both part of the district. The majority of my eleven-month long school year is spent in an inner-city location that has a 98% African American population. The remaining three months are spent at a learning center located in downtown Kirby. Both locations feature exactly the same curriculum (computer-based) and allow students to work on whatever high school credits they lack. Because the students in learning centers have dropped out of regular high school, their obtainment of required credits is delayed; in other words, they lose time (semesters) and class standing (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior). Students who drop out often lament to me that they will not “graduate on time” and/or “walk with their friends

at graduation.” Despite these two inevitably disappointing circumstances, the learning centers still provide the invaluable service of providing high school diplomas in a nontraditional setting.

My eighteen-year long teaching career has been spent in the urban, inner-city environment as a middle and high school classroom teacher. In addition to teaching adolescent students, I also have facilitated university classes for (a) future secondary teachers, (b) tenured teachers working towards masters degrees, and (c) secondary administrators. When working with adult educators (especially white females) I often hear remarks and field questions about African American male students, specifically:

“Why do they refuse to speak Standard English?”

“I try to be nice, but then they just run all over me.”

“I know the family that he comes from, and he will not last long before he’s taken to expulsion hearing.”

“How can I better relate to the Black students?”

“Is it possible to make English as interesting as basketball? They only seem to care about sports.”

The comments range from the sincere to the absurd, but they nevertheless reveal that white teachers often are stymied by the African American males in their classes. Some white teachers admit willingly that they do not believe themselves to be effective with their African American male students, while other teachers are offended when their effectiveness with certain groups of students is questioned. Milner (2007b) stated that in his teacher education classes “many of the students appeared resistant, reluctant—even skeptical—about the seriousness, relevance, and applicability of race and racism in curriculum, teaching, and learning” (p. 599). Some teachers may even claim to be colorblind, or insist that racism no longer exists in public schools today.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), the theoretical framework for this study, rejects the idea that schools have eliminated racism. In fact, the major tenet of CRT states that racism is still practiced on an everyday basis. Along with maintaining that racism is the status quo, CRT emphasizes the importance of individual stories; it challenges the concept of colorblindness; and it is dedicated to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Duncan, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, 1998). Critical Race Theory, including its beginnings, tenets, and how it has been used in educational research is featured in Chapter 2.

Because of my teaching experience, my commitment to serving the underserved students in public education, and the perplexity expressed by my colleagues, I chose to use the lens of CRT and focused my research on African American male students who begin their high school years in traditional, comprehensive public high schools and ultimately land in alternative learning centers.

Statement of the Research Problem

This study examined the experiences of six African American adolescent males in a credit recovery program offered by the largest public school district in this Midwest state in order to learn the participants' perspectives as to hindrances or support towards their high school diploma completion. The experiences of the young men feature the combined and intersecting effects of gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships. The experiences of this population are significant because African American males have the second lowest graduation rate of all students in this district, and the learning center setting serves as an alternative to dropping out. Credit recovery in the learning center setting provides public school students with the opportunity to acquire a high school diploma through nontraditional means in an alternative setting.

Purpose of the Study

According to the featured state's Department of Education, 94.8% of teachers are white (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009). Shealey (2006) stated that teacher education programs often have a "monocultural approach" (p. 9). The potential for a white-majority approach to teaching is not exclusive to new teachers. Experienced teachers, too, need to know how to serve their students from backgrounds other than their own.

The cultural mismatch or disconnection that occurs in urban schools where the majority of students are ethnically diverse and most teachers are European American and female is directly related to the inability of many teachers to provide instruction that is compatible with the learning styles and patterns of their students. (Au & Kawakami, 1994, p. 12)

The purpose of this study is to offer insightful findings—gleaned from the intersecting facets of gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships—into the educational experiences of African American males in credit recovery. This potentially could help ameliorate some of the comments and questions noted earlier and repeated below:

"Why do they refuse to speak Standard English?"

"I try to be nice, but then they just run all over me."

"I know the family that he comes from, and he will not last long before he's taken to expulsion hearing."

"How can I better relate to the Black students?"

"Is it possible to make English as interesting as basketball? They only seem to care about sports."

This research has the potential to inform high school teachers (particularly white females) about their African American male students (who account for a disproportionate number of drop

outs). All students need supportive teachers but African American students especially benefit from teacher encouragement. Eifler (2002) found that positive interactions between African American male public high school students and pre-service teachers enhanced the atmosphere at both the high school and college campuses. On the high school campus, pre-service teachers were welcomed and recognized by the high school students that they tutored. On the college campus, the high school students were given “full access to the computer labs, library and sports facilities” (Eifler, 2002, p. 5). Before participating in a tutoring program that paired African American male public high school students with European American pre-service teachers, the pre-service teachers perceived the students as threatening and challenging. The two groups met together in a common place for the purpose of using the library, working on homework, filling out college applications, and other school-related tasks. After participating in the tutoring program, the pre-service teachers made “measureable gains in both their intercultural awareness and intercultural communication skills” and reported being “much less apprehensive about teaching African American students” (Eifler, 2002, p. 6).

Other researchers have examined the impact of supportive teachers on African American students’ school experiences and found it significant. Young, Wright, and Laster (2005) maintain that African American students benefit from European American teachers who are willing to become familiar with their learning styles and instruct them accordingly. Booker (2006) discovered that “when belonging involves student perceptions of teacher support, encouragement, and warmth, achievement is directly and significantly [positively] related” (p. 2). Noguera (2003) examined the influences of school environments and teacher attitudes on African American males. He found that African American males may experience a “leveling of aspirations” and if they “do not believe that their teachers care about them and are actively

concerned about their academic performance, the likelihood that they will succeed is greatly reduced” (p. 449). Furthermore, Noguera (2003) elaborates:

If the nature of interactions between many Black male students and their teachers tend to be negative, it is unlikely that it will be possible to elevate their achievement without changing the ways in which they are treated by teachers and the ways in which they respond to those who try to help them. (p. 449)

It is noteworthy that Noguera points out the dual responsibilities of teachers and students; ideally teachers treat students equitably, and students respond accordingly. Once again, intersectionality emerges.

Picower’s (2004) educational research considered culturally relevant pedagogy, established and neophyte teachers working together, staff development, and racial identity. Picower (2004) describes the relationships that several effective “gap-closing” teachers have with their students (p. 13). The teachers with “deep and long standing relationships with students and students’ families” are “able to move students who usually perform poorly into highest quartiles on standardized tests” (p. 13).

This research considers the significance of race, gender, racism, and relationships because they inevitably connect and intersect. This study contributes to the body of educational research literature about African American male high school students by focusing attention on a previously overlooked population: those who left one type of public school (traditional) and enrolled in another (alternative) to pursue a high school diploma. Because of its unique participants, alternative setting, and multiple perspectives, this study adds an important dimension to the existing research.

Research Questions

Driving questions for this study constituted a starting point for this research. However, the questions are considered to be part of a living document (subject to change). In his description of qualitative doctoral proposals, Kilbourn (2006) pointed out that “aside from giving specific examples, it is difficult to say about the questions that a qualitative study might address because those questions emerge from the particulars of human situations” (p. 552). All of the research questions were not known until the study was in progress. Not only are the questions subject to broadening or narrowing, but the ethnographer also is transformable. As Woods (1986) explains: “In a curious way one learns how to do ethnography as the work proceeds, making it a personal quest in method as well as substance, although all one is doing in effect, is refining one’s major research instrument [self]” (p. 8). Due to the variety of factors being explored—gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships—the questions evolved and matured as the study progressed. That being said, it is still necessary and prudent to identify a starting point. Three research questions directed this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants while in the alternative school?
2. How do the participants’ experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?
3. How do the participants compare their traditional public school experience to their learning center experience?

These three questions were the starting point for my research. Woods (1996) believes that teaching “requires ends to be created in process” (p. 24). Educational research, like teaching, occurs in the “course of interaction with students rather than [being] preconceived and efficiently attained” (Eisner as cited in Woods, 1996, p. 24).

Methodology

This research was conducted using self-ethnography and qualitative emerging thematic analysis methodologies. Critical Race Theory served as the theoretical lens for analysis and interpretation. The hallmark of CRT is the belief that racism is the norm, not an anomaly. In addition to naming racism as the status quo, CRT values the individual stories of the disenfranchised, is interdisciplinary, and promotes social justice (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Denzin, 2003; Duncan, 2005; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a; Vann Lynch, 2006).

This study employed self-ethnography because it complemented the CRT framework. Self-ethnographers “engage first person voice” (Hughes, 2008, p. 128) and accept that they are “deeply involved in their studies personally and profoundly” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 13). In self-ethnography, the hierarchal nature of researcher and participant become the more equitable roles of co-participants (Alvesson, 2003; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Chapman, 2007b; Gordon, 2000; Hughes, 2008; Luttrell, 2000). Self-ethnographers “name the tensions, contradictions, and power imbalances that they encounter in their work, rather than attempting to eliminate them” (Luttrell, 2000, p. 499). Like CRT, self-ethnography lends itself to exploring the intersections, not the isolation, of various factors (Alvesson, 2003; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Chapman, 2007b; Denzin, 2003; Hughes, 2008; Luttrell, 2000). Self-ethnography was selected and implemented for its use of first-person voice, its compatibility with CRT, and its balance of power paradigm.

The framework of CRT and the design of self-ethnography were executed with three standard qualitative research techniques:

1. Interviews (Creswell, 2007),
2. Coding Procedure (Luttrell, 2000),
3. Constant Comparative Analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This research includes the components of qualitative research: (a) researcher as the key instrument, (b) a theoretical lens, (c) participants' meanings, (d) multiple forms of data, (e) real-world situations, (f) a holistic perspective, and (g) sensitivity to context (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).

After receiving permission from Kansas State University's Institutional Review Board, the researcher first conducted and transcribed interviews and then had each participant conduct a member check. Luttrell's (2000) 3-step procedure was used to code data. It consists of three phases:

1. Identify recurring images, words, phrases, and metaphors while asking "What sort of person did the interviewee wish to present?"
2. Focus on all passages referring to school and educational views/values;
3. Look for and focus on patterns, not individuals (Luttrell, 2000, p. 504).

Luttrell (2000) studied individuals (female only) in pursuit of high school diplomas and then wrote about being reflexive during the research process. Like this study, Luttrell's (2000) self-ethnography focused on nontraditional students who had tried, failed, and tried again to graduate from high school school. Luttrell's (2000) work provided a coding system template that could be applied effectively to the credit recovery study.

Constant comparative analysis was the third practice utilized in the research. Constant comparative analysis, a staple of qualitative research, uses inductive reasoning and facilitates the establishment and refinement of categories using the coded data (Creswell, 2007; Glaser &

Straus, 1976; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Early in the research the following incidents were compared among participants:

- number of credits acquired in traditional public school/alternative school,
- specifics of exiting traditional public school and entering alternative school ,
- presence/absence of supportive adults, and
- other components affecting the participants' day-to-day educational experience.

Complete details of the methods used in the research are discussed in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

Big Brothers/Big Sisters: The nation's "Oldest and largest youth mentoring organization;" boys and girls who are considered to be "at-risk" and mostly from single-parent homes are paired with adult volunteers who commit to a long-term relationship and help them "achieve their full potential" (Kansas Big Brothers/Big Sisters, 2010, <http://www.kansasbigs.org/AboutUs.aspx>).

Core Class: Required for high school graduation; subjects include English, social studies, mathematics, and science. Core classes make up the bulk (68%) of classes necessary for obtaining a high school diploma (Wichita Public Schools, 2010).

Counterstories: "Stories that aim to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144).

Credit: Unit of measure used by the featured school district; 22 total credits are required for graduation. Each semester-long class is worth .5 credit (Wichita Public Schools, 2010).

Deficit perspective: A deficit perspective fails to consider that racism and other factors contribute to educational inequities for minority students; instead, it sees the minority students' culture as inferior to the dominant culture (Blanchett, 2006; Castro, 2010). "Supporters of this

philosophy propose that African Americans continue to fail academically because of innate qualities that are beyond the control of teachers and schools” (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008, p. 144).

Early Leavers: Students who have not been successful in a traditional public school and drop out before their scheduled graduation date (White-Johnson, 2001).

Elective Class: Classes in the following subjects: art, business, family and consumer science, foreign languages, and physical education. In the context of this study, elective classes refer almost exclusively to those in the physical education department: team sports, and weight training (Wichita Public Schools, 2010).

Ethnography: A qualitative methodology to educational research that has roots in anthropology and sociology, describes a culture, and uses description to portray a holistic portrait (Creswell, 2007).

Hall sweep: A practice in traditional public schools wherein all students who remain in the hallway after the final bell are escorted to the auditorium or cafeteria and made to wait until the next class period to begin. It is an effort to deter tardies.

In situ: Natural or existing place or position (Woods, 1986).

Intersectionality: Relevant to this study, the combined and overlapping effects of gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships. In a broader context, intersectionality posits that “individuals and classes often have shared or overlapping interests or traits” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 149).

Learning Center: A diploma completion program for students returning to public high school; the alternative setting offers flexible hours, online curriculum, and certified teachers.

There are four different learning centers in the school district; two are located in large shopping malls, one in the city's business district, and one in the inner city (Kirby Public Schools, 2009b).

Monocultural Approach: In teaching, a monocultural approach means to relate content only to the dominant culture (European American), ignoring the perspective and influence of other cultural groups (Shealey, 2006).

Racial Micro Aggressions: Subtle insults that can be verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual, directed toward people, often unconsciously (Solorzano, 2000).

Self-Ethnography: A form of ethnography wherein the researcher and the participants are on a nearly equal level; it is conducted in a setting that accommodates interaction between researcher and participants (Alvesson, 2003).

Wife Beater: A slang term used to describe the men's standard, cotton, ribbed, white, undershirt.

Limitations

The research site, an alternative learning center, constitutes a limitation because of its small size and because it represents a small portion of alternative settings. My gender (female) and ethnicity (Mexican American/Irish) also could be considered limitations in a study dealing with African American males. My male students often have told me that I am "like a mom" to them. For the most part, sons do not want to reveal "bad" things to their mothers. As a surrogate mother, the participants could, therefore, limit what they reveal to me if they suspect that it would displease me.

The high mobility of the participants could limit my access to them. Learning Center students tend to be frequent movers. They often have housing, phone service, and transportation interruptions. This could limit or delay my access to the participants, which, in turn, would

hinder follow-up interviews and member checking of transcripts. Limitations include the size of the site, my own ethnicity and gender, my maternal persona, and participants' high mobility.

Delimitations

Delimitations include the small number of participants and the corresponding amounts of data, the number of observations, and the frequency of interviews. The design of self-ethnography, another delimitation, may cause other researchers to speculate on the study's generalizability. Readers who prefer numerical data may not view this study's descriptive data as effective or may not be able to relate to the practice of reflection on the researcher's part. The choice to interview only one ethnicity (African American) and one gender (male) may limit the number of interested parties. Educators who prefer to read about more ethnicities, or both genders, or who do not teach in an urban setting with a significant African American male population may assume that the study does not apply to their vocations.

The basic premise of CRT holds that racism is the norm in public education and other settings (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; King, 1991). Sleeter (as cited in Castro, 2010) found that preservice teachers did not acknowledge the widespread status of racial inequity, held deficit views of students of color, adopted a colorblind approach to teaching, and assumed that their "own cultural lenses represent the norm for all other students" (p. 198). These beliefs and mindsets all contradict the tenets of CRT. Educators who believe that racism is the exception may disagree with CRT and consequently dismiss this research. Delimitations include the number of participants, the learning center setting, the design of self-ethnography, the theoretical framework of CRT, and the selected topic of racism regarding African American males.

Significance of the Study

African American males have been the focus of many educational studies, grouped into three main research areas:

- African American students who attend majority European American schools (Arrington et al., 2003; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Duncan & McCoy, 2007; Fordham, 1985; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Ottley, 2007; Tatum, 1997),
- Teachers in the field and future teachers' beliefs about African American students (Chapman, 2007b; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007b; Solarzano & Yosso, 2001b; Strayhorn, 2008; Vann Lynch, 2006), and
- African American students analyzed and interpreted from a deficit paradigm (Duncan, 2002; Krezmien et al., 2006; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Sloan, 2007; Tatum, 1992; Townsend, 2000; Yosso, 2005).

The present study provided critical insight into another aspect of African American males' educational experiences. This study addressed African American males in a public school learning center not because they are the minority or because they are "at-risk" in traditional public schools; rather this study revealed and analyzed the experiences of African American males who have completed or are attempting to complete their high school diploma requirements at an alternative public high school. The young men attend the center for some of the following reasons:

- personal choice,
- court order,
- to avoid being incarcerated,

- expulsion from traditional public school for disciplinary reasons, or
- forced to withdraw from a traditional public school due to lack of attendance.

Regardless of how the young men came to enroll in the learning center, they now share the common purpose of making up failed classes with the ultimate goal of graduating from high school.

The district featured in this research requires 22 credits for a high school diploma. The 22 credits consist of both “core” and “elective” classes. Core classes are English, math, science, social studies, and physical education. Elective classes include, but are not limited to: team sports, office assistant, web page design, journalism, parenting, and weight lifting. Whatever their reason for attending, it is not unusual for a student to need only three or four more credits in order to graduate. To some people, attaining only three or four out of 22 credits sounds like an easy task to complete. However, the missing classes are often, inevitably, core classes of English and math. The student has earned a large number of “fun” elective credits, but still needs the basic core of English and math classes. Often, these classes prove to be the most difficult and time-consuming for students to complete. The learning center provides the opportunity for students to make-up any necessary high school credits.

The largest public school district in this state has 11 high schools throughout Kirby. “Seven of those are traditional, public, comprehensive high schools; three are alternative high schools which provide a smaller learning environment for students; and one provides intensive focus on visual arts, science and law” (Wichita Public Schools, 2009b). The traditional public schools are known widely throughout the city. They have basketball, soccer, track, and football teams. Each school is related closely to its neighborhood. Mild-mannered rivalries are manifested in yearly pranks such as the campus trees being draped with rolls of toilet paper, or

campus statues being decorated with shaving cream. In contrast, the learning center is relatively unknown—even amongst district employees—and is not included in the community’s recognition of secondary education. The learning center is classified as a program, not a school. Two other entities, the local juvenile correctional facilities, share the “program” label from the district.

The most common myth about the learning center is that it awards only a General Education Degree (GED). The largely unknown result of graduating from a learning center is a fully accredited high school diploma identical to that earned from a traditional public high school. Current educational research on African American males reflects the dominance of traditional public schools and the relative invisibility of credit recovery programs. Much of the existing research concentrates on the achievement gap between African American males and other students from traditional public high schools where standardized tests are administered on a regular basis. The learning center’s designation as a program exempts it from the administration of standardized tests. The research holds significance because it encompasses not only gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships, but also a non-traditional setting, and an underserved population. More importantly, the research offers significant and meaningful information for teachers about teaching African American males effectively.

Researcher Perspective

My past and ongoing roles include teacher and parent; both of these identities affect my perspective as a researcher. Additional factors influencing my perspective are my lower-middle class social economic status, my gender, and my Mexican American ethnicity. The teacher identity includes the experiences and mindset of (a) traditional Language Arts classroom teacher,

(b) university classroom teacher, and (c) alternative classroom teacher. Traditional classroom teaching fostered my school-wide perspective including working with teachers from science, social studies, math, and fine arts. Teaching in a traditional classroom also involved being familiar with school policies and abiding by administrative directives. Whereas the traditional classroom teaching experience introduced me to public school protocol, teaching in the university classroom made me acutely aware of future teachers' power to influence students positively or negatively. The university classroom also solidified my already intact belief that the best teachers have student-centered perspectives. The final teaching venue, the alternative classroom, added renewed commitments to my perspective. The commitments are to social justice, student advocacy, and equity in public education. First and foremost, being a classroom teacher in three different settings influenced my perspective as a researcher.

In my life, the role of teacher is enmeshed with the role of parent. I have three birth children who are now adults. When they were ages 9, 6, and 3-years-old, I became their sole support and single involved parent. Several years later, when my daughter had already gone away for college and my own sons were 18 and 15-years-old, I adopted one of their friends. He was born to an Italian woman and an African American man. His father's family resented his Italian heritage and taunted him for "not being black enough." His mother sent him to his father's family when he was 3-years-old, promising but failing to come back for him. From age 3 to 15-years-old, he lived with his paternal grandparents. The members of his immediate household continuously ebbed and flowed to include various aunts, uncles, and cousins. His life included periodic hunger, occasional physical abuse, exposure to weapons and drug use, and street gang membership. My birth sons met and befriended him at the traditional high school they attended. He needed medical care, dental care, and clothing. By adopting him, I was able to

provide a home with the essentials. Because of my adopted son, I became personally aware of the African American male in need of high school credit recovery scenario. When I was a parent of high-school age children, I assumed that all of the school personnel from teachers to counselors to administrators were working in tandem with me to meet and exceed their educational needs. Whether or not they would graduate from high school and attend college was not a question; the central question was what college their futures include? Becoming the adoptive parent of an African American adolescent male not only changed my perspective it toppled my educational paradigms. I discovered that some students are valued far less than others, some educators possess a disregard bordering on contempt for the less-valued students, and graduating from high school is not a given.

Personal and researchers' perspectives can and do change. On the other hand, every individual researcher has a personal core that shapes his/her point-of-view. My personal core, that which cannot be divorced from my perspective, includes being a mother and a teacher. Less influential than being a parent and a teacher but nonetheless important in shaping my perspective are SES, gender, and ethnicity. My middle-class mentality cannot comprehend easily the barrenness of poverty or the excessiveness of wealth. As a female, I often wondered what to do with my sons' issues. Interactions with my only daughter flowed easily and satisfactorily but interactions with my sons left me with the need for parental guidance. I read purposefully about adolescent males—how best to have meaningful conversations with them, how to be a supportive parent, and how to facilitate their development into men—and applied the knowledge in day-to-day life. So, although I am female and therefore have a female perspective, I also have a greater than average understanding and appreciation of the adolescent male mindset. As for ethnicity, my mother is Mexican and my father is European American. With the exceptions of occasional

extended family dinners, I always was surrounded by European Americans. I attended school, went to church, and lived around European Americans. In other words, I was raised in a white world with all of its accompanying privileges. However, my white world was fused with generous exposure to the ideals of social justice. My parents were known in the neighborhood for supporting school bussing to achieve equity, for welcoming African Americans into the neighborhood, and for grieving after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. My parents differed from my classmates' and neighbors' parents. They supported bussing, welcomed integration, and believed that civil rights were long overdue. The mosaic of my perspective contains pieces of teacher, mother, female, and social justice.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provided an overview of dropout causes and rates for all ethnic groups and the social ramifications, discussed the specific dynamics of relationships between white female teachers and African American male students, and stated the purpose of the study. Research questions were listed, limitations and delimitations were acknowledged, and the role of the researcher was defined. Looking forward, the contents of Chapter 2 include the literature review encompassing (a) K-12 educational research related to African American males in various settings, and (b) the theoretical perspective of CRT. Chapter 3 is devoted to qualitative methodology, specifically self-ethnography and why it is best for this research. Also included in Chapter 3 are data analysis, modifications made to the generally recognized methodology, role of the researcher, and research design specifics. Finally, Chapter 3 addresses trustworthiness of the research through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The next chapter, Chapter 4, contains the results of the study and the analysis and interpretation of those results.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, contains the discussion of the findings, conclusions, summary, and recommendations.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Overview of Critical Race Theory and Existing Research

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of Critical Race Theory, the theoretical framework for the research, including its tenets and examples of its application in existing education research. Following the CRT sections is a broad overview of existing educational research concerning African American students. The research is divided into three general categories: African American students as the minority in predominantly European American schools; beliefs and attitudes of preservice and inservice teachers regarding African American students; and African American students as the disadvantaged. A narrowed focus follows the three major areas and concentrates on two different and more specific topics: alternative education and African American males.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

As a high school junior in 1977, I witnessed race riots and de facto segregation, as well as more subtle forms of racism such as the exclusion of African American students from coveted office proctor positions, honors classes, orchestra, and band. As a high school teacher three decades later, I still observe racism in public schools. My personal observations include:

- African American students are treated more harshly than their European American peers.
- Teachers often scrutinize African American students more closely and diligently than European American students.
- Some teachers dread contacting African American parents but do not hesitate to call European American parents.

- A disproportionate number of African American males are labeled “behavior problems.”

Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers comprehensive coverage of the many facets of racism and forms the theoretical framework for this study. Critical Race Theory consists of six basic tenets:

1. Racism is the norm,
2. Interest convergence,
3. Stories are valuable,
4. Colorblindness is a myth,
5. Intersectionality, not isolation,
6. Pursuit of social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

A future section is devoted to more in-depth detail about CRT. Critical Race Theory is the research’s most appropriate theoretical framework because:

1. Critical Race Theory already is used extensively and successfully in educational research (Chapman, 2007a; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2005; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b).
2. Critical Race Theory is not known widely in the school district where the research took place. Introducing CRT to local educators in my district could lead potentially to better practices concerning African American male students.
3. Race and racism are provocative subjects—not just for the general public, but also for the public school community of educators—and, therefore, meaningful

dialogue is challenging to conduct. Critical Race Theory can lead to epiphanies about race and racism, and was used as the theoretical framework for analysis and interpretation in this research.

I chose CRT as the means from which to view this study because it informs the research problem and questions. Boote (2008) writes that one of the main purposes of educational research “is to seek means of representing educational phenomena in ways that increase our individual and collective understanding of those phenomena” (p. 310). Because of its tenets, history, academic freshness, and potential positive impact, CRT served as the research’s analytic and interpretive lens. Critical Race Theory—its beginnings, tenets, and how it has been applied to educational research—is covered in the following sections.

Beginnings of Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory insists that racism remains intact in American society. It is a system of beliefs that, first and foremost, acknowledges the unremitting status of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a; Vann Lynch, 2006). The origins of CRT are in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), a group that questioned the objectivity of law and adjudication in the United States in the early to mid 1980s (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Duncan, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). A majority of the students in this research setting are “in the system,” meaning that they are on parole, have a pending court date, or wear an electronic monitoring ankle bracelet. Obviously, the origins of CRT are particularly germane to this study. The discipline of CLS, explains Lynn and Parker (2006) “criticized the way in which the real effects of the law served to privilege the wealthy and powerful in the U.S. while ignoring the rights of the poor to use the courts as a means of redress” (p. 259). Similarly, a group of scholars began to examine the

persistent effects of racism beyond the law. The body of scholarship that made up CLS branched into white feminist studies before becoming CRT. Delgado (as cited in Lynn & Parker, 2006) claims that CRT expanded and began examining the “materialist conditions of racism and its legal, socioeconomic and political impact on Blacks and other minority groups” (p. 261). Eventually, scholars linked CRT to educational research.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) wrote what is considered the defining work of CRT in regards to education (Chapman, 2007a; Duncan, 2005; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Powers, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b; Vann Lynch, 2006). In this monumental work, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) criticized a “racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (p. 47). Using Wellmans’s definition of racism, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) pleaded with educators to confront “culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities” (p. 55). The authors outlined three precepts that have served as the theoretical foundation for applying CRT to educational research: (a) race remains a substantial contributor to school inequality; (b) society is based on many forms of property; and (c) it is possible to analyze school inequities using the intersection of race and property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Since Ladson-Billings and Tate first called for CRT to be applied to education, other theorists have called for the “authentic voices of people of color” and raised “critical questions about educational research” (Taylor, 1998, p. 123).

Tenets of Critical Race Theory

1. Racism remains the status quo. In the previous section, the origins of CRT were detailed. Next, the six basic tenets of CRT are discussed. Since Ladson-Billings and Tate’s

(1995) defining piece, scholars in the early to mid-2000s have expanded the tenets of CRT. Some scholars (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) list six tenets of CRT, while others (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a) list five tenets of CRT. Edwards and Schmidt (2006) wrote about four tenets of CRT; the following year Milner (2007a) featured three tenets of CRT. Scholars vary in their delineation of CRT, but all agree on the first tenet: Racism is the status quo in the United States.

Vann Lynch (2006) describes racism as “normative” in American society (p. 55). Going beyond “normal,” Delgado and Stefancic (2001) describe racism as “ordinary” and “not aberrational” (p. 7). Furthermore, racism is “the usual way society does business, the common everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Solorzano and Yosso (2001b) concur with Vann Lynch about the stubborn presence of racism in American society and further elaborate on racism’s mark on public education: “A CRT of education recognizes the central role racism has played in the structuring of schools and schooling practices, and that racism intersects with other forms of subordination including sexism and classism” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b, p. 2). In accordance with Vann Lynch (2006) and Solorzano and Yosso (2001b), Edwards and Schmidt (2006) list the assiduous and continuing status of racism as the number one CRT tenet. Milner (2007a) agrees with the aforementioned writers and adds that racism is “endemic, pervasive, widespread, and ingrained in society and thus in education” (p. 390). Rather than the often heard, “There is no more racism; that’s all been changed for years,” the Critical Race theorist believes that racism has become less obvious, but no less proliferate. As Broido and Manning (2002) write, “Critical race theorists are less surprised by the actual presence of racism as by the rare instances of its absence or decreased influence” (p. 440).

2. Interest convergence. In addition to the first tenet of CRT that racism is normal, CRT also embraces the idea of interest convergence. Delgado and Stefanic (2001) define interest convergence as “the thesis pioneered by Derrick Bell that the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so” (p. 149). Rather than true progress and change, CRT contends interest convergence often is responsible for what seems like progress in matters of race. “The concept of interest convergence has its roots in the Marxist theory that the bourgeoisie will tolerate advances for the proletariat only if these advances benefit the bourgeoisie even more” (Taylor, 2000, p. 542). Interest convergence does not lack controversy and debate. Conservatives are “unwilling to admit naked self-interest” while civil rights activists want progress to be recognized (Taylor, 2000, p. 548). Milner (2007a) explains interest convergence in terms of power:

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

I taught formerly in an inner city middle school that was overwhelmingly Hispanic in ethnic make-up. The next largest group was European American students, followed closely by African American students. Many of the European American parents wanted their children to have “multicultural” and “diverse” experiences. Some of the European American parents even claimed to have purchased homes in the neighborhood just so their children would attend school with “all kinds of kids.” The European American parents attended school functions without fail and eagerly purchased homemade tamales at Christmas and the Multicultural Fair. However, when it came time to choose classes, these same parents wanted their children to be in “good”

English, math, and science classes. “Good” was explained variously as comprising “you know students from nice families,” or “honors classes, or classes where no one speaks Spanish.” The parents conceded that it would be acceptable for their children to be in gym class with any combination of students, and perhaps even vocal music, but they remained adamant about the “good” make-up of their children’s core classes. In other words, the parents were interested in claiming that their children attended a “multicultural” school and were supportive of a diverse student body as long as their children did not have to share the “good” classes with the “other” (meaning nonwhite) students. The parents expressed wishes exemplify interest convergence. They want all of the benefits of diversity for their children while retaining sole claim to vestiges of privilege and dominance.

3. Stories must be told and valued. My favorite teachers were always the ones with the best stories—their own stories or library book stories—because the best stories contain the messages that listeners cannot help but internalize. Remembering the stories made me into a more caring and curious student. In sixth grade, Mr. Subera read my class the story of Albert Schweitzer. Every day, after afternoon recess, Mr. Subera would set up his microphone, perch on the front table, cross his legs at the ankles, dangle his right loafer from his big toe, and read dramatically about Dr. Schweitzer and his philanthropy. More than three decades later, I cannot recall the details of Schweitzer’s life, but I do know that the story piqued my curiosity about humanitarianism, Africa, and the jungle. Other things were just as intriguing to learn: Mr. Subera was German, with the first name of Calvin. (“Imagine!” I thought at age 11, “a teacher with a first name!”). He obviously was vested in the book, and even the most defiant sixth graders felt compelled to listen. Mr. Subera did not tolerate any sixth grader making fun of Schweitzer’s last name, mocking German accents, or telling jungle (savage) jokes. The book was sufficiently

challenging to force our careful attention, but not so incomprehensible that we were likely to ignore Mr. Subera's amplified voice.

As any parent or teacher knows, innumerable benefits result from a story well told. Likewise, Critical Race theorists value the practice of storytelling. One way to realize that racism does, in fact, still maintain a position in public education is to listen and relate to the truth in students' real life stories. Counterstories are true but not known widely and not celebrated often. Traditional public high schools are to majoritarian stories as learning centers are to counterstories. Learning centers are no less "real" than traditional public high schools, but the centers contradict the widely accepted norms of society. Likewise, counterstories are real and true; they do not lack value, they lack exposure.

One of the roles of storytelling in CRT is to increase the majority's understanding of the minority's experience. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) remind us that "We each occupy a normative universe . . . from which we are not easily dislodged" (p. 41). Stories, then, are used to "dislodge" the majority's perspective on racial issues. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also credit counterstorytelling with being able to shift commonly and long-held beliefs about race. "Stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) contend that "A majoritarian story is one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference" (p. 28). Often, members of the majority group remain unaware of racism because they themselves do not experience its ramifications. They are not cognizant of the privileges that membership in the majority inevitably brings. Jensen (1998) explains that is the "ultimate white privilege" (para. 2). Robert Jensen (1998), a University of

Texas professor, once asked a young, male student if he had ever benefited from “being white in a world run mostly by white people?” The conservative young man agreed that he had been the recipient of unearned privileges. However, the college student denied that his privilege in any way affected a “level playing field” (para. 2). Jensen (1998) labels this as the ultimate white privilege: “The privilege to acknowledge that you have unearned privilege but to ignore what it means” (para. 2).

In the world of public education, European American females form the majority of teachers. According to the featured state’s Department of Education, 74.3 % of teachers are female; 25.7% are male; 94.8 % of teachers are European American, 1.7 % are African American, 1.7 % are Hispanic, 1.0% are Native American/Alaskan Native, and 0.5 % are Asian/Pacific Island (Kansas State Department of Education, 2009). However, for the students in the state’s largest school district, the racial make-up is 41% Caucasian; 22% Hispanic; 21% African American; 8% multi-racial, 5% Asian American, and 3% American Indian, with 66% of the students from low-income families (Wichita Public Schools USD 259, 2009b). Teachers serve a population that comes, for the most part, from an ethnic and experiential background different from their own. Hearing the stories of their students will equip them better to teach with meaningful results. Noddings (2005) writes “Good teachers do not reject what students see and feel but, rather, work with what is presently seen and felt to build a stronger position for each student” (p. 107).

Educators need to hear the stories of urban students. Teachers who do not know the human stories of urban students are likely to form distorted and false beliefs. On behalf of CRT, Solorzano and Yosso (2001b) write: “CRT challenges us [teachers] to look for the many strengths within students and communities of color in order to combat and eliminate negative

racial stereotypes” (p. 7). The strengths can be found in the educational and life stories of students. Edwards and Schmidt (2006) expound on the value of storytelling in the following:

Teachers do not want to be judged as a group, so we the reviewers wonder why some teachers tend to do this to students. Critical Race Theory is about learning to listen to other people’s counterstories and finding ways *to incorporate these stories to improve the educational experiences of students of color* [italics added]. (p. 409)

Critical Race Theory uses three main genres of stories: personal narratives, other people’s stories or narratives, and composite stories or narratives. These stories provide details that create “aha” moments of understanding. Motive, background, relationships, and consequences are revealed.

As Taylor (1998) writes, storytelling in CRT “makes use of the experiences of people negatively affected by racism as a primary means to confront the beliefs held about them by whites” (p. 122). In the context of public education, teachers who learn their students’ stories are more able to care about their students, and their students are more able to learn. Rogers and Freiberg (1994) maintain that an “empathic understanding” is essential for teachers: “When the teacher has the ability to understand the student’s reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then again the likelihood of significant learning is increased” (p. 157).

In Critical Race Theory, counterstories serve as a rebuttal to fears and stereotypes; they also can be used to analyze conditions in public education. Solorzano and Yosso (as cited in Chapman, 2007a) offer this description: “Counter story is both a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power, . . . whose story is an ordinary part of the dominant discourse—the majoritarian story” (p. 160). Chapman (2007a) explains that

counterstories are “means to examine elements of strength and possibilities for success in various educational settings” (p. 160). They do not “exclude the negative realities of urban classrooms but *instead demonstrate the complexity of people’s lived experiences*” [italics added] (Chapman, 2007, p. 160).

Counterstories, then, aid the analysis of racial conditions by revealing the complex and multi-layered contexts in which people of color live. Counterstories reveal the intersectionality of race, gender, relationships, racism, class, and social status. Calmore (as cited in Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b) points out that the “experiential knowledge of women and men of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, practicing, and teaching about racial subordination” (p. 3).

My sixth grade teacher provided me with the opportunity to empathize with Germans. I had thought them to be heartless villains who hated Jewish people especially and all non-white people generally. By introducing me to the compassionate actions of one German doctor, he made me question the brutal stereotype that I embraced willingly. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define counterstorytelling as “writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144). The story of the kind doctor who chose to join the inhabitants of the jungle also dashed my simple, cartoonish image of the bone-in-nose black savage. Instead, I began to hold more authentic ideas, to look at people’s situations as more complex, and to question whether my own “truth” was really truth at all. Duncan (2005) explains that by using counterstories, Critical Race theorists “encourage an ethics in scholarship that prompts a kind of multiple consciousnesses” (p. 106).

4. Critical Race Theory challenges colorblindness and liberalism. The critique of liberalism and colorblindness is identified often as the fourth of six CRT tenets. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explain what is wrong with being colorblind:

Critical race theorists hold that color blindness will allow us to redress only extremely egregious racial harms, ones that everyone would notice and condemn. But if racism is embedded in our thought processes and social structures as deeply as many critics believe, then the ‘ordinary business’ of society—the routines, practices, and institutions that we rely on to effect the world’s work—will keep minorities in subordinate positions. (p. 22)

Public school teachers sometimes describe themselves as colorblind in reference to how they see students of color. However, students possess many subtle characteristics that the astute educator notices and acts upon. If, in fact, a teacher is colorblind, then she surely would not notice an awkward pencil hold that could hinder a student’s ability to write cursive or the squinting eyes of a student who needs glasses to see the board, or fingertip bruises on arms that may indicate physical abuse, or looks of boredom that indicate the need for accelerated challenges, or looks of complete bewilderment that beg for further explanation, or test answers written on the inside of a ball cap bill of a cheating student. No, the colorblind stance claimed by some educators lacks genuine merit. If, in fact, a teacher truly was colorblind, then she also would have to be learning disability-blind, behavior-disorder blind, dress-code-infractions-blind, and teacher-lounge-has-treats-today-blind. Solorzano and Yosso (2001a) argue that “These traditional claims [of color blindness] act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in US society” (p. 472).

Instead of accepting colorblindness as an equalizer, Guinier and Torres (as cited in Powers, 2007) maintain that “color-blindness is a fiction that is maintained by first noticing race

and then denying that it exists” (p. 158). Gotanda (as cited in Powers, 2007) writes “Color-blindness fosters the systematic denial of racial subordination and the psychological repression of an individual’s recognition of that subordination, thereby allowing that subordination to continue” (p. 158).

In addition to challenging colorblindness, CRT challenges liberalism. Consider what Ladson-Billings (2004) writes about liberalism: “Critical Race Theory argues that racism requires sweeping changes, but liberalism has no mechanism for such change. Rather, liberal legal practices support the painstakingly slow process of arguing legal precedence to gain citizen rights for people of color” (p. 12). Critical Race Theory pushes for radical rather than incremental change in regards to equity. Incremental change comes “at a slow pace that is palatable for those in power” (Decuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29). Just as colorblindness does not acknowledge past or prevent future racism, slow and gradual changes in policy do not “dismantle...the processes, structures, and ideologies that justify inequity” (Decuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29).

5. Critical Race Theory is interdisciplinary. The origin of CRT is accepted widely as Critical Legal Studies (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Duncan, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b; Taylor, 1998). Beginning with Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), CRT analyzed significant court cases regarding race (Brown), civil rights legislation, and political and moral scholarship. However, CRT also draws from sociology, theology, political science, economics, and education (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Solorzano and Yosso (2001a) label CRT as “transdisciplinary [interdisciplinary]” (p. 473) and credit it with using “ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, law, and other fields to guide research that better understands the effects of racism, sexism, and classism in education”

(p. 473). Critical Race Theory has grown over the years and added the “racialized experiences of women, Latinas/os, Native Americans and Asian Americans . . . Women of Color have also challenged CRT to address feminist critiques of racism and classism through FemCrit theory” (Yosso, 2005, p. 72).

The intersectionality of race, gender, and economic standing is paramount to understanding and analyzing the plight of young African American males. Critical Race Theory is suited powerfully for addressing educational issues because it does not look at things in isolation. The participants in this study did not find themselves in credit recovery because of a single or a simply identifiable cause. Rather, each young man faces a plethora of possible influences. In fact, a wide-ranging and layered set of circumstances surround African American males: “lack of access to health care, adequate nutrition, and decent housing, growing up poor and in a single-parent household, being exposed to substance abuse at a young age, and living in a crime-ridden neighborhood” (Earls, as cited in Noguera, 2003, p. 438). The intersection of African American males and education becomes even more congested when other researched factors are entered: “identity construction,” (Noguera, 2003, p. 442) and “oppositional” identities (Tatum, 1992, p. 331). The manner in which race, gender, poverty, and other factors are intertwined necessitates viewing them through a lens that recognizes the reality of intersectionality.

6. Critical Race Theory is dedicated to social justice. Critical Race theorists employ a multifaceted approach to racial issues; its ultimate goal is ending oppression. “Critical Race Theory is conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b, p. 3). Critical Race theorists concern themselves with all types of oppression, including racial,

gender, and class oppression. Matsuda (as cited in Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) claims that CRT “offers a liberatory or transformative response that leads to the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty, and the empowering of subordinated minority groups” (p. 26). Critical Race theorists believe that it is impossible to obtain “justice for the oppressed while simultaneously permitting the hegemonic rule of the oppressor” (Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62). In a quest to end oppression, CRT researchers “focus their analysis on direct, positive social change” (Ladson-Billings as cited in Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 440).

Following is a brief restatement of the six tenets of Critical Race Theory that were addressed:

1. Racism still exists as a viable institution in public education and other parts of society.
2. “Progress” in racial matters often benefits the majority more than the minority it professes to champion.
3. Counterstories are important because they represent the voices and experiences of those who have been overlooked traditionally.
4. The colorblindness paradigm is a misleading strategy for handling matters of race and equality; liberalism is inefficiently slow and compromising.
5. Critical Race Theory is interdisciplinary; it draws from sociology, history, law, and other fields.
6. Ending oppression and achieving social justice are goals of CRT.

As mentioned in the earlier “Tenets of Critical Race Theory” section, the order and number of tenets varies from scholar-to-scholar and year-to-year. The aforementioned four tenets of CRT (racism as the norm, interest convergence, storytelling, and critique of

colorblindness and liberalism) occur in writings more prominently and frequently than the fifth and sixth tenets. The fifth tenet states CRT has an interdisciplinary outlook; Critical Race theorists consider legal, moral, political contexts and more. The sixth tenet, CRT's commitment to achieving social justice and ending oppression of all types, often is attached to the fifth rather than standing alone.

Critical Race Theory in Educational Research

In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate argued that race had not been theorized in educational research. Since that time, CRT has been applied to a plethora of educational topics: “racialized, gendered, and classed structures, processes, and discourses in the field of education” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, p. 474). The collection of wide-ranging topics examined with a CRT lens include: racial stereotypes in film, television, and print media, racial stereotypes in professional settings, street murals, teaching, teacher education, bilingual education, critiques of multiculturalism, curriculum and instruction issues, higher education, K-12 education, the French law forbidding Muslim girls from wearing headscarves, education policy trends in England, teachers' attitudes towards students of color, African American students in majority white schools, critiques of diversity, achievement gap, history of race-conscious policy (Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Powers, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b).

Existing research. A significant amount of research exists concerning African American students in educational contexts, which can be grouped into three broad categories:

- African American students who attend majority European American public schools,
- the beliefs and attitudes of preservice teachers and inservice teachers about African American students,
- and African American students as the disadvantaged.

Chapter 2 also features a review of educational research conducted in alternative education settings, then research specific to African American males.

African American students who attend European American schools. What is it like to be the only African American kid in school? How does the majority European American teacher population perceive the “minority” public school population? What about the achievement gap between African American students and students of other ethnicities? These broad questions serve as a catalyst for much of the existing educational research.

Beginning with African Americans as few among many, European Americans send the overarching message that African Americans are expected to feel grateful and to accept without questioning the white world’s norms (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Duncan, 2002; Fordham, 1985; McGill, 2003; Ottley, 2007).

Fordham (1985) writes about African American students’ minority status in elite settings; he elaborates on the pressure that African American students feel to acquiesce their identity, instead adhering to the white school culture. Ottley (2007) describes the outsider status of African American students who attend majority European American independent schools. Ottley (2007) found African American students feeling isolated while at school and feeling as if they had to develop two personas, one to function at school and one to live at home. Racial microaggressions (subtle insults) were “a constant reminder for African American students that they are on the fringes of the social landscape at an independent school” (Ottley, 2007, p. 118). In addition to Fordham and Ottley, several other researchers also concentrate on African American students as a minority population in a majority-white setting. The consensus of the research is that the African American students are expected to adapt to the majority, rather than asking the majority to question the status quo (Arrington et al., 2003; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007;

Duncan, 2002; Fordham, 1985; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; McGill, 2003; White-Johnson, 2001). DeCuir-Gunby's (2007) and Duncan's (2002) findings also support the idea that the responsibility to fit in falls squarely on the African American students. Present-day research often seeks to "determine effective ways to integrate them [African American males] into institutions or to devise compensatory programs to support them in attaining some measure of success within these social structures" (Duncan, 2002, p. 132).

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about African American students. Because of my dual employment with the local state university and the school district, I have regular contact with both preservice teachers and inservice classroom teachers. Beginning with preservice teachers, the following section describes a sample of their expressed attitudes and beliefs from my own experience as well as citations of existing research; it is followed by the same for inservice teachers.

Preservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs about African American students. In my role as an adjunct college instructor in the College of Education, I teach a class about diversity (Introduction to Diversity: Cultural Issues). It is a required class for all college students seeking teaching certification. Many times, the students in the class are not conscious of their own status as cultural beings, or white privilege in their own lives. They certainly have not encountered any scholarly articles on white privilege. As one would expect from a Midwestern state university, the student population in the College of Education is predominantly European American. Many of the students are from small, rural towns and have encountered African American males only via MTV, rap, and other outlets that depict the stereotypical gangster persona.

Semester after semester, I find that the preservice teachers mostly “see themselves as raceless. They are the norms against which everyone else is ‘other.’ They can allow their ethnicity to disappear because it is not a determinant of their life chances” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009, p. 61). The preservice teachers sometimes assume that “everyone” had slumber parties, took swimming lessons, went to the library weekly, and belonged to Girl Scouts (or its equivalent). Ladson-Billings (2006) writes about teacher education and explains how prospective teachers see themselves:

They describe themselves as having ‘no culture’ or being ‘just regular or ‘just normal.’

When I point out the semantic challenge with their characterizations—by default people unlike them are ‘irregular’ or ‘abnormal’—they fumble to correct that impression (my students are nothing if not polite). (p. 107)

The mostly young, mostly European American, and mostly female students in my undergraduate class often express a desire to be an urban educator and to teach in an inner-city setting. They are earnest and sincere in their ambition to be good teachers. However, if they are someday to be an urban teacher, they need to unlearn some long-held beliefs such as “their social and economic conditions are based totally on their own individual achievement, not assisted by their race” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009, p. 61). Another deeply entrenched view of European American preservice teachers that needs to be challenged is that the students’ African American culture is “pathological and insufficient” (Lewis et al., 2008, p. 139). Rarely do I see preservice teachers who realize that urban students “live complex lives that challenge teachers’ best intentions” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 131).

For an entire semester undergraduate students meet weekly to learn about diversity and cultural issues. “Diversity” and “cultural issues” are in the course description and title. The class

enrollment averages 30 per semester. For the students, the “diversity” they encounter takes place during field experience requirements in public schools. The preservice teachers encounter diversity in urban learners, urban teachers, and urban schools. Public high schools serve as the setting for their foray into a world beyond rural America. Their high school graduating classes often had fewer students total than one single class period in a comprehensive public high school. The students that they observe, encounter, and eventually present lessons and lectures to usually have attended several middle and high schools. This is in stark contrast to the preservice teachers who usually have attended only three different schools in their K-12 experience: elementary, middle, and high school.

The “cultural issues” are interactions frequently between the college students and African American middle and high school male students. The educational neophytes often are confounded by African American male students and their “inappropriate behavior.” Sadly, the consternation felt by my students towards African American male students is widespread and well-documented (Duncan, 2002; King, 1991; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Snipes & Walter, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b; White-Johnson, 2001).

Following are actual comments from the college students’ reflective journals:

- “It seems to me like the black kids [in high school] try to be intimidating.”—22-year-old European American female
- “When the sophomores were playing a game of pick-up basketball, the black guys stuck together and protested every call.”—23-year-old European American male
- “I’m not used to being around black people; the black students [in middle school] could tell and they didn’t do anything to make it easier for me. I felt like they were showing off.”—21-year-old European American female

- “No matter how nicely I asked them to do the simplest tasks, the black kids [in elementary school] challenged me.”—22-year-old European American female
- “I don’t think it’s right that a black kid who goes to a white hangout [in high school] is not in danger of being beat up but if a white kid were to go to a black area he would be at least threatened if not hit.”—20-year-old European American male

The above entries, from the fall semester of 2009, reflect the frustration and unease of the undergraduates as they encounter African American students. These examples are not meant to dismiss any inappropriate behavior on the students’ part, or to say that inappropriate behavior should not be addressed. However, the ultimate responsibility for interactions between college students and elementary, middle, or high school students belongs to the former. Clearly, there is a genuine need for improved relationships and increased understanding between the adults and the students.

Inservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about African American students. Preservice teachers share the struggle of working with African American males with inservice teachers. Monroe (2005) demonstrated that European American teachers often misinterpret the behavior of African American males. The misunderstood behaviors include “viewing overlapping speech as disrespect, play fighting as authentic aggression, and ritualized humor as valid insults” (p. 47). We [teachers] are not to blame; it’s them [African American students]. This belief and its variations have been noted by many scholars (Castro, 2010; Chapman, 2007b; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Snipes & Walter, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008; White-Johnson, 2001; Wright, 2009). Teachers who place the responsibility for educational success solely on their students are committing an injustice against their students. Taylor (2009) writes, “Poor children are especially the most susceptible to

alienating classroom environments. Too many teachers, the force of which is predominantly White, are not well-informed about issues addressing poverty or culturally responsive teaching.”

Strayhorn (2008) examined teacher expectations for African American males in urban settings; he found evidence suggesting that “teachers have lower expectations for Black men when compared to their White male and Black female counterparts” (para.4). I contend that teachers’ expectations and attitudes towards African American males feasibly can be altered to match their expectations and attitudes towards other groups.

In her research on teachers’ attitudes, White-Johnson (2001) writes, “All of the teachers stressed that they were not active participants in the promotion of racial inequities at the high school and perceived that they held no decision-making powers to affect changes at the administrative level” (White-Johnson, 2001, p. 362). Throughout my years of teaching, I have observed the same “it’s not me or the school to blame for the minority students’ plight” attitude in the majority of my colleagues. Like White-Johnson (2001), I have observed and been told that teachers “believed that the primary reason for the inability [of African American males] to achieve academically lay in the lack of motivation and negative attitudes by the males about their educational processes” (White-Johnson, 2001, p. 362).

Whereas White-Johnson (2001) concentrates on the perceptions and narratives of the teachers who serve African American males, I am committed to giving current and future teachers more information about African American males in public schools—their school experiences, their life stories, and how teachers impact their success positively or negatively—and I have the appropriate venue in which to act.

I propose that many typical, middle-class, white teachers who have vastly different life experiences than their urban students want to serve all of their students but often, simply because

of lack of exposure to their students' day-to-day realities, lack the affinity for "different" students that they automatically and easily display for "same" students. King's (1991) findings hold true for my experience with both preservice and inservice teachers; most "from economically privileged, culturally homogeneous backgrounds are generally unaware of their intellectual biases and monocultural encapsulation" (p. 142). This research provides valuable insights for teachers, and can potentially help them "see" their African American male students with less skepticism and more familiarity. King (1991) coined the term "dysconscious racism" to define "the limited and distorted understanding my students have about inequity and cultural diversity—understandings that make it difficult for them to act in favor of truly equitable education" (p. 134). Dysconscious racism is present in the previous journal entries. For example, one preservice teacher wrote "The black guys stuck together" (23-year-old European American male). He obviously was troubled by a group of African American males; it is doubtful that he would experience the same trepidation about a group of European American males. Another preservice teacher evidently expected her African American students to accommodate her comfort zone and past experiences rather than attempting understanding of her students. "I'm not used to being around black people; the black students [in middle school] could tell and they didn't do anything to make it easier for me. I felt like they were showing off" (21-year-old European American female). Ideally, after becoming acquainted with the research, teachers may view and value African American males with a more judicious and balanced lens. Enhanced by a more informed and realistic vision, teachers would be better equipped to see African American male students as more than gangsters, athletes, rappers, or musicians. This research study reveals the real life educational experiences of six young men who are representative of the African American male population in urban schools. European American, middle-class, female,

preservice and current teachers may begin to know African American male students and recognize them as deserving, cooperative, and eager students rather than problems to be feared and controlled.

African American students as the disadvantaged: A deficit perspective. So far, I have covered two broad topics of education research relating to African American students in general: the few among many theme and teacher attitudes towards African Americans. The third topic covered widely in regards to African American students is the deficit perspective. It is a point of view that gives preference and respect to the dominant European American culture and views the non-dominant (African American and other minorities) cultures as inferior. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2001b), the deficit perspective assigns the following values to minority cultures:

1. Present time orientation is emphasized over future time orientation
2. Immediate gratification is sought over delayed gratification
3. Cooperation is valued over competition
4. Education and upward mobility are somewhat important

Educators who adopt a deficit perspective use European American mainstream values of efficient time management, competition, and personal ambition as desirable targets for all students despite their cultural background.

The deficit perspective influences teachers' first impressions negatively of their African American students and may contribute to an increase in special education referrals (Blanchet, 2006; Shealey, 2006). In contrast to the deficit perspective, teachers employing a culturally responsible viewpoint "use a student's culture to empower him or her intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically" (Shealey, 2006, p. 14). The deficit perspective portrays the minority

student's culture as inferior and, therefore, academic failure is a given; effective teachers do not dismiss a student's potential or lower academic expectations. In short, culturally responsible teachers do not "equate difference with deviance" (Shealey, 2006, p. 14).

Snipes and Walter (2005) reported on deficits in the mathematics education of African American males and the emphasis on sports. The following comes from a former state mathematics consultant from North Carolina:

We didn't do as good a job of recruiting black kids into academics as we did in sports. The high school football or basketball coach doesn't know if you can bounce a ball and chew gum at the same time or not, but he'll say come on out and I'll work with you. Do we do that in math? No. We say this course is too hard for you. You should be in General Math. We are disinviting in math....We're intimidating and steer the kids away . . . instead of saying this course is hard, but I'm going to work with you to see that you pass it. (Snipes & Walter, 2005, pp. 116-117)

African American males traditionally participate heavily in sports (Arrington et al., 2003; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003); they also are over-represented in expulsions and suspensions (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; McCready, 2002; Strayhorn, 2008; Townsend, 2000).

Disproportionate numbers of African American males being expelled, suspended, and disciplined have been examined (Krezmien et al., 2006; McCready, 2002; Strayhorn, 2008; Townsend, 2000). Blanchett (2006) looked at the roles of white privilege and racism in elevated special education placements for African American male students. Blanchett (2006) concluded: "Additional research is needed to clearly document the ways in which White privilege and racism create and maintain disproportionality at all levels . . . and in a variety of settings" (p. 27).

In accord with Blanchett's recommendation, this study contributes to the assortment of research settings.

Assuming a deficit perspective, teachers deflect the responsibility of educational success on to the African American students. "The deficit paradigm creates, justifies, and maintains unequal education experiences of African American learners by blaming students, not schools or the society, for the Black-White achievement gap" (Lewis et al., p. 141). The deficit perspective maintains that the dominant, European American expectation that African American students will assimilate to the school culture rather than the school culture embracing or even accommodating them (Broido & Manning, 2002; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Duncan, 2002; Fordham, 1985; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lewis et al., 2008; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Taylor, 2009; White-Johnson, 2001). In addition to a "blame the victim" mentality, and the expectation that African Americans must acquiesce to the mainstream, the deficit perspective views African American students' culture as "pathological and insufficient" (Lewis et al., 2008, p. 139).

African American male students who do not graduate "on time" or "with their class" have not been researched extensively. The existing research concentrates on the:

- daily experiences of African American males in private school settings (Arrington et al., 2003; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Fordham, 1985; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Ottley, 2007).
- beliefs and attitudes of preservice teachers and classroom teachers about African American male students (Chapman, 2007b; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007b; Solarzano & Yosso, 2001b; Strayhorn, 2008; Vann Lynch, 2006).

- deficit circumstances of African American students (Blanchett, 2006; Chapman, 2007b; Duncan, 2002; Duncan & McCoy, 2007; Kilgore & Meade, 2004; Monroe, 2005; Sloan, 2007; Tatum, 1997; Tatum, 1992).

This study does not use a deficit perspective for African American males. In contrast, it represents the constructive efforts of young men in pursuit of their overdue diplomas.

Alternative settings. Various forms and aspects of alternative education have been examined in educational research:

- Self-esteem and high-risk behavior in alternative schools (Connor et al., 2004);
- Inclusive atmosphere and individual attention claimed to be in alternative schools is sometimes a disguise for placing troublesome students away from the mainstream (Dunbar, 1999);
- An agriculture-science program employing field trips, mentors, and nontraditional instructional methods (Gill, 1995);
- An alternative high school for Native Americans that is “nonpunitive” (Jeffries, Hollowell, & Powell, 2004)
- Albeit a caring environment, an alternative school that did not manifest in educational equality (Kim & Taylor, 2008);
- The transformation of a barely functioning alternative school to a vibrant learning community (Noguera, 1996);
- Perceptions of European American and African American teachers, students, and parents regarding alternative education (White-Johnson, 2001).

With few exceptions (Gill, 1995; Jeffries, Hollowell, & Powell, 2004) the research reveals the general public’s and the educators’ disdain for alternative high schools. Kim and

Taylor (2008) found “public alternative schools presently run by school districts struggle with negative stigmas as dumping grounds or warehouses for at-risk students who are falling behind, have behavioral problems, or are juvenile delinquents” (p. 207). As an alternative educator, I can attest personally to the negative connotations assigned to alternative schools. Many district employees do not realize that the Learning Centers are officially part of the state’s largest school district. Colleagues from my previous schools frequently asked me, “Why did you leave the district?” When assured that I was still a district employee, they expressed surprise. Kim and Taylor (2008) report a similar situation:

The alternative school teachers felt that they were treated as second-class citizens....During teachers’ district meetings, alternative school teachers felt like outsiders. Alternative school teachers had little involvement with regular teachers except when the regular school sent a problematic student to the alternative school. (p. 215)

Both inside and outside of the educational realm, alternative schools are perceived to be “a euphemism for warehousing students whose behavior is deemed inappropriate for mainstream alternative schools” (Dunbar, 1999, p. 242). Put even more colorfully, Noguera (1996) describes an alternative school: “Tucked away at the margins of this community and school district, East Side [alternative school] was a bit like the mad uncle confined by other family members lest his crazy antics embarrass and bring dishonor upon them” (p. 227). In addition to the revelation that alternative schools suffer from a poor public image, researchers largely agreed that the voices of alternative students need to be heard and stereotypes need to be examined (Connor et al., 2004; Dunbar, 1999; Gill, 1995; Kim & Taylor, 2008; White-Johnson, 2001).

The alternative education setting has been examined in educational research (Connor et al., 2004; Gill, 1995; Jeffries, Hollowell, & Powell, 2004; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Mickelson &

Heath, 1999; Noguera, 1996). Although the specific population of African American males in alternative settings has not been covered extensively, there is one notable exception. White-Johnson (2001) looked at African American males who were “early leavers” (White-Johnson, 2001, p. 343). Early leavers are students who have not been successful in a traditional school and drop out before their scheduled graduation date. There are similarities between White-Johnson’s research and my research; both feature African American males, alternative education settings, and students who did not graduate with their high school class. Whereas my study is viewed and then analyzed from a Critical Race Theory stance, White-Johnson explored “the students’ narrated perceptions of schooling experiences that led to their drop-out status or academic success” (White-Johnson, 2001, p. 344). In addition to the students, she also interviewed teachers and parents.

Although similar in some aspects to White-Johnson’s (2001) research, this research differed from much of the existing research. Rather than concentrating on African American male students as the minority trying to find their way in the massive institutions of traditional schools, this study featured African American males in the student population of a small learning environment. Unlike traditional public schools, the learning centers do not foster a sense of competition between students for the highest grades, or for being the most accomplished athletes, or for acquiring wide-spread popularity among students. The alternative students are not assigned grades in the mastery-based curriculum; this alleviates the quest for the highest GPA. No sports or physical activities are offered, and since students set their own schedules, there is no such thing as “second hour” or “teams.” Students may or may not be at school with the same group of peers on any given day.

Contribution of the Study

Existing educational research on African American males in public schools can be categorized into three general areas:

- African American students who attend majority European American schools (Arrington et al., 2003; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Duncan & McCoy, 2007; Fordham, 1985; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Ottley, 2007; Tatum, 1997)
- Inservice and preservice teachers' beliefs about African American students (Chapman, 2007b; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007b; Solarzano & Yosso, 2001b; Strayhorn, 2008; Vann Lynch, 2006); and
- African American students analyzed and interpreted from a deficit paradigm (Duncan, 2002; Krezmien et al., 2006; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Sloan, 2007; Tatum, 1992; Townsend, 2000; Yosso, 2005).

This study contributes another setting—an alternative high school completion program—to the educational research. Alternative schools have been featured in other research (Dunbar, 1999; Gill, 1995; Kim & Taylor, 2008). However, with the exception of White-Johnson (2001), the participants represent both genders and multiple ethnicities. This study answers a call for more ethnic and gender specific research (Dunbar, 1999; Duncan, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Thomas, 2000).

In addition to filling an educational research gap with the alternative school setting and the African American male participants, this study reveals the transitions that students make when leaving a traditional public high school and entering an alternative program. The participants share the similarities and differences of the two different educational settings.

Finally, the research contributes a unique perspective because it considers the multiple factors of gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships under a Critical Race Theory lens.

Summary

Following is a summary of Chapter 2's major points and a synthesis of the reviewed literature, with applications to my own research. Existing educational research on African American students covers African Americans as the pronounced minority in traditional public and private high schools. The findings reveal African Americans are expected to embrace the dominant European American culture of the featured schools. To some extent, African American students even are expected to be grateful for the opportunity to attend school with European Americans. The responsibility to make whatever adjustments are necessary to fit in at school is assigned to the students; adult educators often fail to see the pressure and isolation felt by African American students (Arrington et al., 2003; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Fordham, 1985; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Ottley, 2007).

Preservice and inservice teachers' attitudes towards African American male students represent a substantial amount of research. African American males' everyday behavior is misinterpreted often by preservice and current teachers as being unacceptable for school. When African American male students fail to succeed in school, educators tend to blame the students for lack of drive rather than reflectively questioning their own practices (Chapman, 2007b; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007b; Solarzano & Yosso, 2001b; Strayhorn, 2008; Vann Lynch, 2006).

The deficit perspective occupies much of the educational research regarding African American male students. Educators tend to view other cultures as inferior to the dominant,

European American culture when they hold a deficit perspective. Rather than using the culture of all students to facilitate learning, deficit thinkers blame the culture for minority students' struggles. The deficit perspective allows educators to view minority cultures as disadvantaged; it labels and disregards students who are not European American (Blanchett, 2006; Chapman, 2007b; Duncan, 2002; Duncan & McCoy, 2007; Kilgore & Meade, 2004; Monroe, 2005; Sloan, 2007; Tatum, 1997; Tatum, 1992). Duncan (2002) points out that "the prevailing wisdom in society suggests that the exclusion and marginalization of black males [in schools] . . . is a normal, albeit problematic aspect of the education of this population of students" (p. 132).

Chapter 3--Methodology

Impetus for the Study

Shortly after I began teaching at an alternative high school, I noticed a persistent pattern in African American male students. Beginning in middle school, they were often stars of the school's basketball team, well liked by peers, often enlisted as proctors to the coach, and extremely popular. Middle school—consisting of sixth, seventh, and eighth grades—represented a carefree and extremely social three years for the students. Years later, when being interviewed for the alternative high school, the students laughed and smiled when recounting their middle school successes.

After middle school, the students faced a new high-stakes grading system and high school graduation requirements that included three years of math and four years of English. Several African American male students were enrolled in and received credit for an abundance of elective classes but lacked the core academic classes. Being eligible to play sports was often the objective of the easy schedules, rather than the acquisition of required credits.

The athletes were not the only African American males who landed in credit recovery eventually at the alternative high school. Students who had been expelled, withdrawn for lack of attendance, or adjudicated also enrolled in the alternative high school. These students shared the common experiences of: altercations with teachers, excessive absences and truancy, and a lack of adult support.

The problem as I first saw it was the failure of African American male students to graduate from traditional public high school. Then I began to see the problem in a multifaceted way. It was not the students who were failing; it was a number of intersecting factors that, when combined, were hindering the students from passing classes and leading them eventually to

alternative education. The factors that appeared frequently by self-report in students' application interviews included:

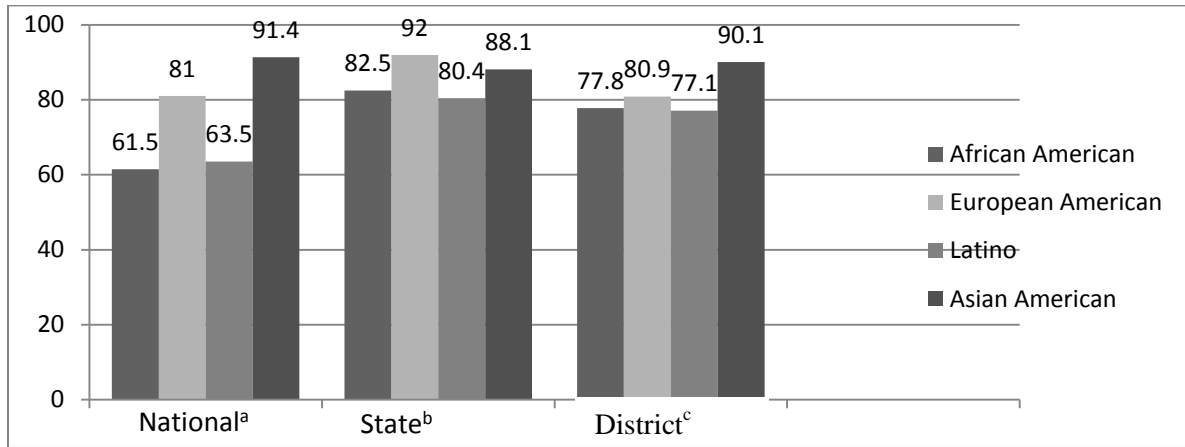
- low and failing grades,
- influences of racism,
- playing sports,
- involvement with the law,
- relationships with adults.

By August of 2005, I had taught at the alternative high school for two extended school years and began my terminal degree pursuit. I sought to find out how the above-listed factors interacted, why African American males were not experiencing the same success as European American and Asian American males, and what could improve teachers' effectiveness with African American male students.

Suitability of the Study for Qualitative Design

When choosing a suitable design for the credit recovery study, I considered both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The pool of relevant statistics is deep and wide; compared to their peers, African American males are disciplined, suspended, and expelled more frequently. In addition to statistics that illustrate the disparity between discipline, suspension, and expulsion rates, there also is an abundance of data related to graduation rates. Table 3.1 illustrates that African American males have the lowest graduation rate on the national tier and the second lowest graduation rate on the state and district tiers. There is an obvious pattern that warrants attention.

Table 3.1 Graduation Rate for Males/Females: 2007-2008 School Year



^aRampell, C. (2010, June 2). Graduation rates by state and race. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com..> ^bKansas 2007-2008 State Graduation Rate NCES Formula Public Schools retrieved from <http://www.ksde.org>.

^cGraduation rate: District cohort data, 2007-2008, Kansas State Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://svapp/5586.ksde.org/k12/Countystatics.apx>.

Quantitative approaches use numerical and other quantifiable data to “test hypothetical-deductive generalizations” (Patton, 1990, p. 37). Statistics show that fewer African American males graduate from high school than European Americans males and Asian American males, but they do not demonstrate *why* such a variation in graduation rates exists. In order to address aptly the multiple factors of gender, race, grades, racism, sports, law, and relationships, I chose a qualitative design for the credit recovery study. Qualitative design emphasizes context, inductive reasoning, and a holistic perspective (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Woods, 1986). Qualitative methodology is the fitting choice for three main reasons:

1. Context is inseparable from content; the Learning Center settings are crucial to the study.

2. Inductive reasoning allows for new, emerging ideas; it is well suited for interviews and observations.
3. A holistic perspective facilitates the integration of gender, race, grades, racism, sports, law, and relationships.

Woods (1986) described the qualitative approach: “There are no ‘truths’ to be discovered or ‘proofs’ to be made; rather the aim is greater understanding of the social action in the situation under study” (p. 49). A qualitative approach, with its flexibility, rigor, and creativity, is the appropriate complement to the study’s CRT theoretical framework and research questions.

What is Ethnography?

Ethnography constitutes an enormous label for several different variations of a qualitative methodology. The subsets of ethnography include, but are not limited to: historical ethnography, critical ethnography, institutional ethnography, and self-ethnography. In this section, I first give brief descriptors of historical, critical, and institutional ethnography. Then, I narrow the focus to self-ethnography. Finally, in this section, I elaborate on why self-ethnography is the best choice “for answering the questions that the inquiry has posed” (Kilbourn, 2006. p. 558).

Woods (1996) explains that historical ethnography is to explore past events and “to recreate cultures and context in the evocative manner of ethnography” (p. 120). The second type of ethnography listed is critical ethnography. Chapman (2007b) says that critical ethnography strives to document how racism and oppression are manifested historically and currently in classroom settings. In other words, critical ethnography “redefines the relationship between school and social context” (Chang, 2005, p. 173). Another form of ethnography, institutional ethnography, has the goal “to understand the social and cultural knowledge of an institution, as it is practiced in everyday lives of those who are members of that institution (Smith, as cited in

Kilgore & Meade, 2004, p. 171). When studying a boot camp for juvenile offenders in Iowa, Kilgore and Meade (2004) utilized institutional ethnography. They followed 17 adolescent males throughout the 90-day boot camp program. A combination of one-on-one interviews (both life history and exit interviews), focus groups, and reviewing state regulations made up the institutional ethnography. Guajardo, Guajardo, and Casaperalta (2008) used oral histories as part of their “hybrid” historical ethnography on an education nonprofit organization; they describe the “sociopolitical and historical forces that impacted a particular rural community and its schools” (p. 5).

Historical, critical, and institutional ethnography share the common elements of emphasizing context and valuing many voices. All three varieties employ the standard ethnographic methods of participant observation (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), face-to-face interviews, and thick description (Woods, 1996). Context is essential to ethnography because “Complexity belies simple causal explanations. What ‘works’ in education is a rather barren matter if it is stripped from social context, as meaning ascribed to data occur within social contexts” (Reilly, 2008, p. 100).

Self-Ethnography. Another form of ethnography sometimes is referred to as auto-ethnography, which is similar, but not identical to self-ethnography. Auto-ethnographers write about their own experiences and make connections to the culture being studied. Denzin (2003) claims that auto-ethnography is a “way of being moral and political in the world” (p. 258). McLaren (as cited in Denzin, 2003) adds that auto-ethnography “involves a rejection of the historical and cultural logics and narratives that exclude those who have been previously marginalized” (p. 268). The major difference between auto-ethnography and self-ethnography is that self-ethnography takes place on the researcher’s “home base” or a location to which the

researcher has “natural access,” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 174) but conventional auto-ethnography involves the researcher entering a different culture. Traditionally, ethnography has meant that the researcher “tries to get close to the community being studied . . . relies on their accounts as well as on observations of a rich variety of naturally occurring events . . . and has an interest in cultural issues” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 171). Self-ethnography uses a “social setting with which one directly interacts . . . as a productive terrain for ethnographic work” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 177). Auto-ethnography puts the researcher in the center of the study, while self-ethnography pays attention to “one’s own cultural context, what goes on around oneself rather than putting oneself and one’s experiences in the center” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 175).

Self-ethnography must contain reflexive elements (Alvesson, 2003; Woods, 1996). Woods (1996) defines reflexivity as “the need to consider how one’s own part in the research affects it” (p. 51). In order to consider one’s part, Woods (1996) explains that being reflexive is “an essential requirement” (p. 51). Likewise, Alvesson calls for the self-ethnographer to be reflexive and reflective. Calling a reflexive approach “crucial,” Alvesson (2003) writes that self-ethnography “calls for a more reflective approach in which data management matters less than a revealing, insightful account and interpretation” (p. 184).

Gordon (2000) conducts a form of self-ethnography. She requires graduate education students to “encounter the stories of the individuals with whom they work” in a quest to identify “preconceptions of who is at risk” (p. 15). Even though the participants were experienced teachers already, they reported that “knowledge of their students and their communities in which they live gave them a strength and confidence they previously were unaware they could attain” (Gordon, 2000, p. 22). Gordon (2000) explains that her methodology “embraces engagement and accepts subjectivity. Interviewer and informant move together in a reflective and reflexive

dance” (p. 16). In other words, the researcher is of the same or nearly the same status as the participants. The student researchers ultimately experienced a transformation of the way “they view the community and students with whom they work but also, the way these educators situate themselves within the larger context of at-riskness” (Gordon, 2000, p. 15).

Self-ethnographers have natural access to their research setting, are active participants in the culture being studied, and are “more or less on equal terms with other participants” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 174). The self-ethnographer conducts research within “the setting of which one is a part” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 175). This differs significantly from conventional ethnography wherein active participation “[is used] for an instrumental purpose—the ethnographer working as a lumberjack does so in order to be able to produce research about lumberjacks, not because of an inner urge to cut down trees” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 175). The self-ethnographer depends on personal knowledge of the setting “as an empirical starting point” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 177). Familiarity is relied upon as the self-ethnographer attempts to accomplish “description and insightful, theoretical relevant ideas and comments out of the material” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 177). Self-ethnography has the potential to produce great descriptions of various educational phenomena. Peshkin (1993) writes about the importance of description in “The Goodness of Qualitative Research”:

I want to emphasize the importance of what traditionally is condemned as the lowliest expression of research [description]. When description is so viewed, we fail to appreciate the foundational character of good description for all research, as well as for its often slighted academic companion—prescription. (p. 24)

Chapman (2007b) conducted an ethnography about multicultural education in a school where she taught formerly and with which she still had connections. Although labeled a

“critical” rather than a “self” ethnography, her work nevertheless contains some self-ethnography features. For example, her status “functioned as an advantage because the teachers spoke freely with me in the workroom . . . and I gained intimate knowledge of the teachers’ backgrounds and ideologies that might not have been shared with a complete outside researcher” (Chapman, 2007b, p. 301). In addition to featuring her insider status, Chapman’s work also shares another characteristic of self-ethnography; she “promoted a dialogue across groups that allowed the students to learn from each other and form alliances or new friendships” (Chapman, 2007b, p. 302). In other words, she valued equally many voices and included several perspectives of school life.

Smith (2004) provides another example of educational research with self-ethnography traits; her work features researcher and participants writing technology autobiographies in “created classroom communities” (Smith, 2004, p. 56). True to self-ethnographic custom, the participants (who were college writing students) and the researcher (a college professor) held more or less equal status as they endeavored “to map and reconstruct our personal relationships with the technologies we use” (Smith, 2004, p. 56). In the traditional teacher-student self-ethnography, a different paradigm of teacher and student exists. Rather than being teacher and student, the couple is more like a pair of co-learners, or colleagues, or collaborators. Imagine a writing workshop where every individual is an author. The teacher acts as a facilitator and everyone takes a turn in the writer’s chair. Self-ethnography is more like a writers’ workshop and less like a traditional classroom. Rather than a hierarchy of power, or a chain of command, self-ethnography promotes equal status between researcher and participant.

Ethnography in Education

Ethnography has been used to study topics ranging from educational policies involving the relationship between critical pedagogy and queer issues (Chang, 2005) to high-stakes accountability (Sloan, 2007). The educational research conducted with ethnography is an eclectic list including, but not limited to

- racial identity (Parsons, 2004);
- transformative education (Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2008);
- democracy in instrumental music education (Allsup, 2003);
- teachers and problem-solving curriculum (Coe & Nastasi, 2006);
- media images of inner-city youth (Kelly, 2006);
- discontinuities between home and school cultures (Eisenhart, 2001);
- queer learners in the adult classroom (Toynton, 2006);
- audio-visual stimuli from the Rorschach (inkblot) projective technique (Spindler, 2008);
- “language use, peer group dynamics, school social organization” and how they “influence the meaning of school work and affect school achievement” (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 19);
- intensive beginners’ classes in second language acquisition (Spielmann & Rodnofsky, 2001).

Woods (1986) points out “certain parallels between ethnography and teaching that makes them eminently suitable co-enterprises” (p. 6). Education and ethnography both embrace stories and storytelling, and, like education, ethnography is both scientific and artistic (Woods, 1986). The ethnography in educational research listed above gives a small sampling of the uses of

ethnography. A search conducted in Education Full Text resulted in over 119 results employing ethnography since 2004, giving witness to Alvesson's (2003) claim that "its [ethnography] positive aura seems to attract many people with diverse orientations" (p. 171).

As mentioned earlier, educational researchers have chosen the venue of ethnography to cover several different aspects of accountability. Pennington (2004) examined how teachers are held accountable by educational policies and standardized testing in a long-term ethnographic project. This long-term qualitative study took place in an urban elementary school in a Latino community. Pennington (2004) concluded that standardized testing discourages "teachers' knowledge of more complex, culturally responsive views of literacy" (p. 46). McNeil (2000) followed both urban and suburban teachers in a qualitative study that concentrated primarily on the teachers' personal stories. Through the teachers' voices, McNeil (2000) composed a holistic picture of professionalism and accountability. Smith (1991) conducted a qualitative study on teachers and high-stakes testing. Teachers were observed and interviewed at their own school for the purpose of understanding how mandated student assessments influenced teachers' morale and professionalism. Ethnography, a form of qualitative research used frequently in education, is known for collecting data mainly through interviews and observations (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2007; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). Interviews and observations, the hallmarks of ethnography, are supplemented sometimes with quantitative methods. Valenzuela (1999) used both qualitative (interviews and observations) with quantitative (questionnaires and analysis of school records) in a mixed-methods ethnographic investigation. Wakefield and Hudley (2005) combined the theoretical (Phinney's model of ethnic identity) and empirical (statistical analysis) to examine African American males' responses to discrimination.

Self-Ethnography and Critical Race Theory. The union of self-ethnography and CRT creates a rigorous and powerful coupling for this study on African American males in credit recovery. Educational research has become more controlled and restricted since passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 (Barone, 2007; Denzin, 2003; Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque, & Crump, 2008; Gordon, 2007; Viadero, 2009). Denzin (2003) dates the favoring of quantitative over qualitative methods even earlier than “before 9/11/01” (p. 257). Educational researchers who denounce the emphasis on control over creativity include Boote (2008), Chapman (2007a), Denzin (2003), Duncan (2002), Parsons (2004), and Reilly (2008). Scholars who choose to be self-ethnographers believe that “there are multiple realities constructed by different individuals” and are likely to ask “broad, holistic, and interpretive” research questions (Leedy & Ormrod as cited in Mertler, 2009, p. 73). When using the methodology of self-ethnography, “latitude and flexibility [are] permitted—indeed required” (Woods, 1986, p. 9). Likewise, CRT shares a penchant for multiple perspectives. “Critical Race Theory emphasize(s) the need to seek ways of empowering people of color and depicting their experiences in multifaceted and complex ways” (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Sleeter & Bernal, as cited in Chapman, 2007b, p. 299). Critical Race Theory and self-ethnography are both well-suited for demonstrating the complexities and nuances of interesting conditions. Self-ethnography engages in “advocating for the oppressed” (Trueba, 1999, p. 593). Likewise, CRT focuses on “those who experience the brunt of educational injustice” (Duncan, 2005, p. 110). Both approaches document the nature of oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Trueba, 1999) and strive for “the process of empowerment—a journey away from oppression” (Trueba, 1999, p. 593). Context and creativity enhance the study of an *alternative* high school setting. Boote (2008) explains, “Research is necessarily improvisational activity in which researchers must use and

adapt the knowledge and skills learned in earlier contexts for new contexts” (p. 308). Unlike more traditional methodologies that apply prescribed methods “without regard to contextual contingencies,” self-ethnography allows a more “naturalistic, descriptive and interpretive” type of educational research (Boote, 2008, p. 308). In complement to self-ethnography, CRT, built on the belief that it is impossible to separate content from context, “allow[s] us to rethink and reconstruct traditional school policy and practices” (Duncan, 2005, p. 110).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to offer insights—from the intersecting effects of gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships—into the educational experiences of African American males in two different learning centers that are alternative high school diploma completion programs.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study focused on distinguishing the participants’ traditional from alternative public school experiences.

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants while in the alternative school?
2. How do the participants’ experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?
3. How do the participants compare their traditional public school experience to their learning center experience?

Research Design of the Study and Rationale—Self-Ethnography

Motivated in part by the “polygot nature of the research community,” The American Educational Research Association (AERA) designated a Self-Study Special Interest Group (SIG) in 1992 for self-ethnography (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). Self-ethnography, the specific

methodology employed by the research, is an ideal fit. The following sections detail the specific features of self-ethnography and how they facilitate the research.

Multiple roles. My identity consists of many roles:

- English and math teacher for alternative high school students,
- College instructor in diversity and cultural issues for undergraduates (preservice teachers)
- College instructor in Curriculum & Instruction for established teachers pursuing masters degrees
- Colleague to district and university faculty.

Because I function in a variety of settings, self-ethnography is the appropriate choice for my research. Alvesson (2003) maintains that having different educational roles, longevity in a teaching position, and “being active in other spheres of the working and public life” (p. 187) may enhance one’s ability to do self-ethnography successfully.

In addition to self-ethnography being a good fit for me as an individual, it also complements CRT, the theoretical lens for the study, and the subject of racism. Denzin (2003) writes: “Critical race scholars use...autoethnographic methods to uncover the ways in which racism operates in daily life” (p. 271). Critical Race Theory emphasizes context and maintains that racism is the norm (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Relaxed borders. The border between participant and researcher is relaxed in self-ethnography; in more traditional research a certain distance is maintained. Self-ethnography, however, encourages closeness between the researcher and the participants. I had frequent Monday through Friday contact with each participant at different times when school was in

session. During one-on-one sessions, each participant and I worked together; these sessions were not scheduled officially but they involved critical thinking, problem solving, and interpersonal communication. The students and I were invested personally in the same goal: the obtainment of their high school diplomas. Interpersonal relationships and common goals are complementary to self-ethnography (Alvesson, 2003; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Toynton, 2006).

First-person voice. Self-ethnography is defined by the use of first person voice (Chapman, 2003; Denzin, 2003; Hughes, 2008; Luttrell, 2000; Toynton, 2006). I maintain (at the risk of sounding narcissistic) that first person voice—personal, involved, engaged—is the most effective approach to this study. As both a teacher of high school students and a teacher of teachers, I have observed personally that first person voice almost always garners interest from others. At the end of each semester, when my college students submit their written evaluations of me as an instructor, they often comment on my ability to make class content “real,” or “meaningful;” I attribute these positive remarks largely to the use of first person voice when sharing true stories about teaching experiences. Students make positive comments regularly about the stories that I share in class. Chapman (2003) writes that readers of self-study “can find connections, resonances, commonalities with his/her own schooling, and educational practices” (p. 38). Likewise, stories told in the first person voice deliver effective, memorable, and powerful messages.

Reflexive and reflective. Reflexivity and reflection are both important elements of self-ethnography (Alvesson, 2003; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Chapman, 2003; Denzin, 2003; Hughes, 2008; Parsons, 2004; Toynton, 2006). The reflexive self-ethnographer considers how she affects the setting, the participants, and the results. Luttrell (2000) writes “our [self-ethnographer’s] role in shaping the ethnographic encounter is huge” (p. 499). Denzin (2003)

describes reflexivity in even stronger language: “The reflexive ethnographer becomes the guiding presence in the ethnographic text” (p. 259).

Because of the relaxed borders discussed earlier, the practice of reflexivity is imperative. Although the participants and researcher are of nearly equal status; there still exists a slight imbalance of power (Alvesson, 2003; Gordon, 2000). Unlike teachers in a traditional public school, I do not assign grades or determine when a student may proceed. Nevertheless, I do have more power in the relationship because of my position of teacher. The relational power that I possess is small compared to the imbalance between student and expulsion hearing officer, or student and assistant principal, but it merits mention. Reflexivity acknowledges and challenges the power of the researcher over the research.

Reflexivity provides a platform for examining multiple roles; different roles or selves are integrated into the study rather than intentionally kept separate. “It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183).

Self-ethnography is dependent on reflection. “Interpretations made of self-study data should not only reveal but also interrogate the relationships, contradictions, and limits of the views presented” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). Reflection includes considering future implications and context; it involves contemplating near, far, surface, and deep elements of situations.

Cooper (2010) explains reflection as having three levels; he promotes the analogy of mirror, microscope, and binocular. The first level (mirror) calls for a clear reflection of self. The second level (microscope) features detailed description and makes the small experience large. The third level in Cooper’s model (binoculars) examines the larger political and social sphere.

Written reflection and reflexivity, a style of writing that I practice regularly, are integral to self-ethnography and fitting to the credit recovery study. Self-ethnography has traits that make it an appropriate methodology for revealing the educational experiences of African American males. It is both reflexive and reflective, interpersonal and intrapersonal, and unites intuition with rigor (Alvesson, 2003; Denzin, 2003; Hughes, 2003; Luttrell, 2000).

Pilot Study and Protocol Development

In 2007, I conducted a pilot study that evolved into the current research. The central question of the pilot study was: “What is the culture of an alternative high school diploma completion program?” The sub-questions included:

- What are the norms for classroom behavior in an alternative high school?
- How do alternative high schools differ from traditional public high schools?

I gathered data primarily through longitudinal participant observations with alternative high school students from 2003 until 2007. The students were mostly African American males and females who had attended previously a traditional, comprehensive, public high school before transferring to the alternative high school. My student contacts grew to include 60 students, all living in the Kirby area. My interaction with the group members occurred at school in various formats: regular school days, official enrollment day every September (2003-2007), Thanksgiving and Christmas school-wide dinners, and five formal graduation ceremonies.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted unstructured, in-depth interviews with four graduates who had differing levels of credits upon their enrollment in the alternative high school program. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and then shared with the participants. Line-by-line coding of the interviews led to the development of the themes in the alternative school’s culture:

- The opportunity to self-pace contributed greatly to the alternative students' success.
- The frequent occurrence of one-on-one teacher to student assistance was a key difference between the alternative setting and the students' previous traditional public school experiences.
- The smaller alternative setting enhanced the students' ability to develop effective and supportive interpersonal relationships.

The pilot study, which concentrated on the overall culture of the alternative setting, also brought to light other issues surrounding alternative schools and credit recovery. For example, through my participant observations and interaction with students, I learned that African American males often came to the alternative school as a last resort to earn their diplomas; they had been expelled from traditional public high schools. In addition to the many African American male students who self-reported "always being in trouble," there seemed to be some connection between being a high school varsity athlete and earning a larger than normal number of elective credits. Why, I wondered, did so many former, varsity, high school athletes eventually need to recover credits (high school classes)? Furthermore, why were the lacking credits frequently core classes? Discovering the differences between traditional public and alternative high schools motivated the pilot study. The pilot study convinced me that participant observation and in-depth interviews were effective means of gathering data. The pilot study's topic was broadened for the actual research to include the intersectionality of gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships. References to the seven listed components peppered the interviews during the pilot study and were, therefore, deemed worthy of a broader and deeper look. A need for further research appeared, manifested in the educational experiences of African American males.

Selection of Participants

Before selecting participants, I reflected on the many African American male students that I encountered before and during my involvement with alternative public education. Prior to teaching in an alternative program, I was a drug and violence prevention teaching specialist, responsible for supporting four different middle-school campuses. The services that the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools offered to the middle school teachers were plentiful—anti-bullying programs, drug prevention and detection presentations, crisis training, anti-smoking presentations (complete with real pigs’ lungs), and alcohol prevention (including goggles that made the wearer feel impaired)—but they were requested rarely. The middle school teachers did not want the listed services but they certainly wanted “help with the African American boys’ behavior.” According to the teachers, problem behaviors took place in the classroom, the hallways, the cafeteria, and during assemblies. Inevitably, the teachers’ complaints centered around volume (too loud) and activity (“they just won’t sit still”). I noticed that teachers from the pre-International Baccalaureate (a rigorous honors program) middle school seemed to “express concern” about African American males’ behavior more frequently than teachers from the other three traditional public middle schools. Despite having the smallest percentage of African American male students at the pre-International Baccalaureate middle school, the collective disapproval and consternation of the adults seemed to be the greatest. Over the five semesters that I served in the middle school specialist capacity, I also observed that African American males were often basketball and/or track stars, extremely popular among their peers, and rarely in honors or advanced placement classes.

After teaching in the middle school Language Arts classroom for eight years and serving as a drug and violence prevention teaching specialist for two and a half years, I entered

alternative education. My recollections of African American males' middle school experiences were confirmed again and again as I interviewed applicants for the high school diploma completion program. The applicants, who were typically between 17 and 26-years-old, would make statements like the following:

“I loved middle school; I played basketball and everybody loved me.”

“I got into a lot of trouble but I still passed.”

“I didn't take any honors classes [in middle school] but I still did all right in school.”

“I didn't start flunkin' classes until high school.”

“Middle school was fun; it was like play time.”

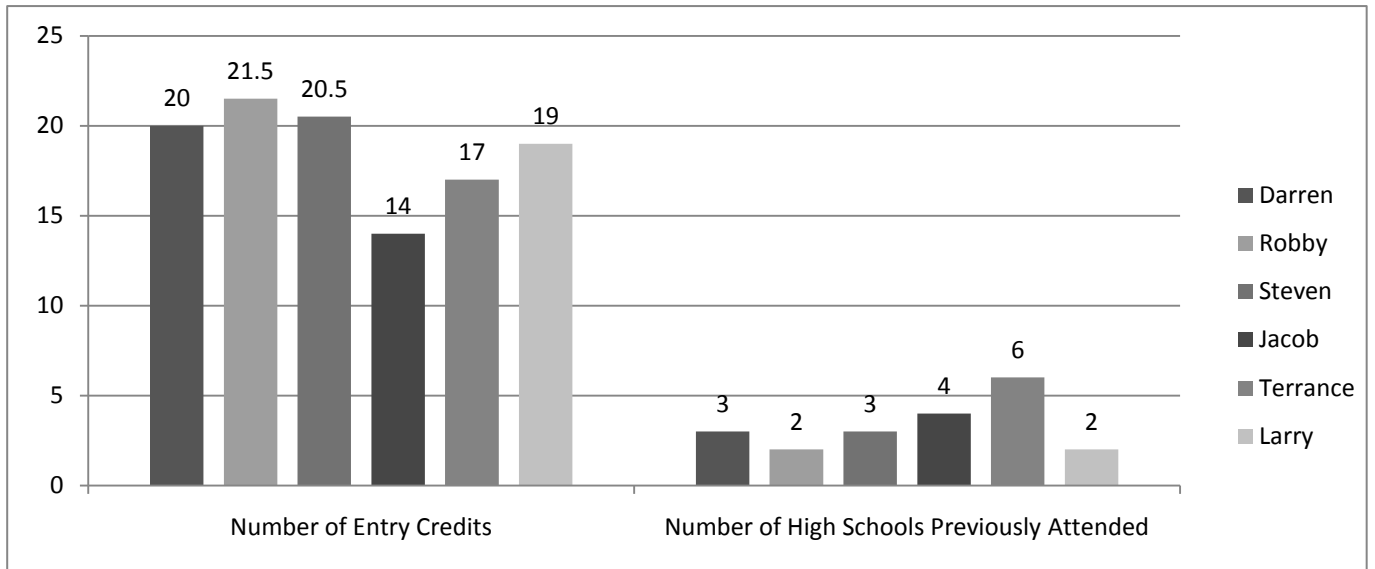
For the applicants, the trend of being successful in middle school did not extend to high school. They began to fail classes and, therefore, not acquire the necessary credits to be considered sophomores, then juniors, and, ultimately, to graduate.

I purposefully selected six participants that met the following criteria:

- They were between 18 and 29-years-old.
- They had attended both traditional public and alternative schools.
- They were African American males.
- They were former students of the featured district.
- They lived in the largest city in the featured state.

The participants entered credit recovery with varying amounts of credit, and had attended at least two different traditional public high schools before enrolling in the alternative school. Table 3.2 illustrates the number of entry credits and number of high schools attended previously by participant.

Table 3.2 School Information at time of Credit Recovery Entry



Research Site

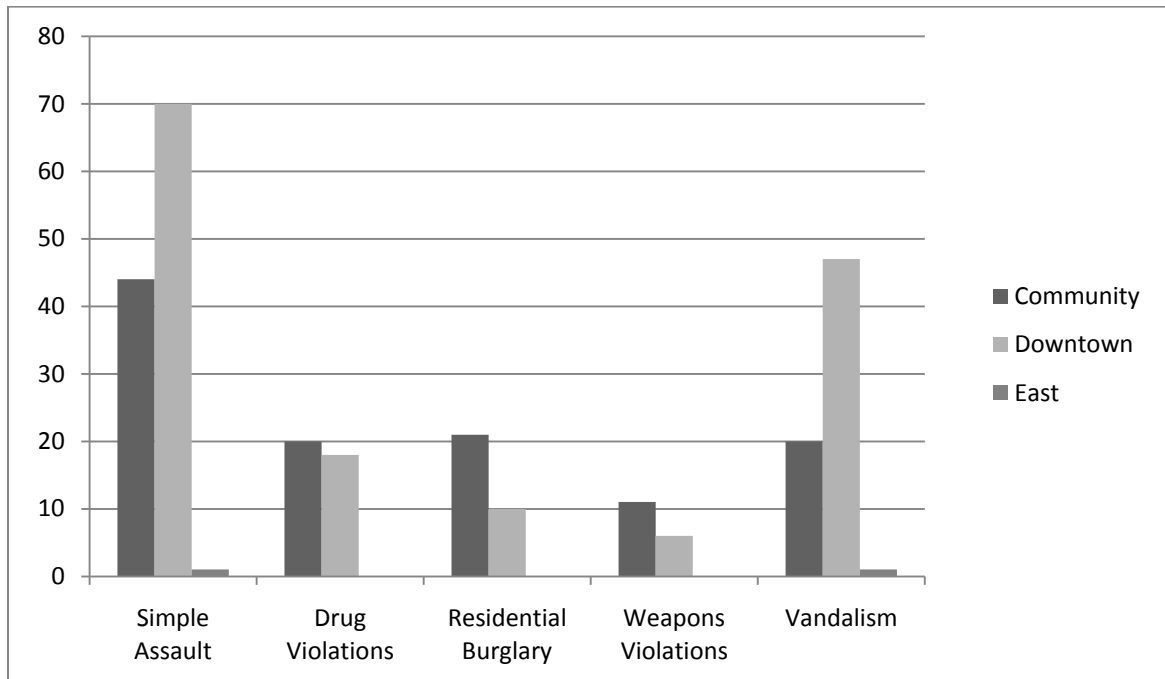
This study addresses the problem of high school credit recovery for African American adolescent males. The location is the largest city (population 360,000) in a predominantly (89.1%) white Midwestern state. Pseudonyms were used by the participants to insure anonymity. According to the city’s official website, it is the most diverse in the state. The population of Kirby is 360,000 with approximately 75% Caucasian, 11.4% African American, 9.6% Hispanic, and 4% Asian American. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the five largest ethnic groups in the state are: Caucasian (89.1%), Hispanic (8.6%), African American (6.0%), Asian American (2.2%), and American Indian (1.0%). The city of Arlington, TX is comparable in both population size and ethnicity makeup to Kirby, whereas the population of the featured state (almost 2,700,000,000) can be compared in size of population (but not ethnicity) to Mississippi (almost 2,850,000,000).

The study was inspired by the researcher’s position as a teacher in two different alternative settings: the Community Learning Center and the Downtown Learning Center. Both

learning centers are programs within the largest school district in the state. The Community Learning Center is located in an inner-city, residential neighborhood with some of the city's highest crime rates.

The Downtown Learning Center is located in the business district and also has high crime rates. It is in the basement of a 3-story office building. The Downtown Learning Center's neighborhood has a higher incidence of simple assaults and vandalism, while the Community Learning Center's neighborhood has more drug violations, residential burglaries, and weapons violations. Below, Table 3.3 shows a comparison among index crimes in three areas: (a) Community Learning Center; (b) Downtown Learning Center; (c) East Kirby (a more affluent part of the city).

Table 3.3 Index Crimes by Reporting Area



Index Crimes by Reporting Area, 2009, City of Wichita. Retrieved from <http://www.wichita.gov/>

Description of Downtown Learning Center. According to its website, the Downtown Learning Center features:

1. Extended counseling for school, career and family services
2. Availability of wrap-around services relating to work and family
3. Two-way referrals to and from the center from Work Force Alliance Partners and Kirby Public Schools
4. Interactive web-based curriculum with English/Spanish audio support focusing on real-world application and projects
5. Tutor support for struggling students
6. Availability of bilingual teachers. (Wichita Public Schools, 2009c)

All of these traits aside, the school also is unique because it is located in the basement of a massive structure that was home to a huge, multi-level bank in the late 1980s. The bank

furnishings were sold along with the building. Several conference rooms are located on the third floor and all are outfitted with heavy, wooden conference tables and executive chairs circa 1980.

There is a quaint and old-fashioned looking snack shop on the ground entrance of the building. Shuttered Dutch doors are opened every weekday from 11 AM until 1 PM. Patrons can then witness their sandwiches being constructed, and choose from an assortment of chips, drinks, and cookies. Dining-in is not an option at the snack shop; the register, grill, and a few customers take up all of the available area. Located beyond the snack shop is a flight of stairs. Positioned adjacent to the staircase is an escalator with black rubber mats and an oily smell.

The downtown building houses an array of city and county agencies. A partial list of agencies includes: Job Corp, Social and Rehabilitation Services, Career Counseling, Center for Laid-off Aircraft Workers, Labor Market Consultants, and Veteran Services. The structure houses many entities all of which are service-oriented and networked with other agencies.

Entrance to the school can take place via escalator, stairs, or elevator. Students pass first through a lobby with a central desk and a receptionist. The basement also contains a plethora of cubicles, offices with heavy wooden doors, four conference rooms, and a lounge complete with refrigerator, sink, tables, and chairs. The geographical location of the school—a basement—could arguably be symbolic of the hierarchy in education. Alternative schools tend to be regarded with skepticism and lower on the hierarchy than traditional schools (Connor et al., 2004; Dunbar, 1999; Gill, 1995; Kim & Taylor, 2008; White-Johnson, 2001). The basement setting of the Downtown Learning Center, home for the alternative students and alternative teachers, is not an unpleasant environment but it is tucked away from public view and not easily accessed by students. Taylor and Kim (2008) described alternative settings as “representing relationships of domination and subordination” for students and teachers (p. 216).

The actual classroom for this research is reached only after traveling through a labyrinth of halls and doors. Motivational posters dot the walls. There are two tall book shelves with offerings ranging from textbooks to Stephen King novels. Laptop computers are on several more modern tables. It is a long room, with identical furnishings at each end: one traditional teacher's desk and one tall file cabinet. There also is a small couch, coffee table, and laptop cart. The school's hours are from 8 AM until 5 PM, Monday through Friday, closed on major holidays (just like the "regular" schools).

Description of Community Learning Center. A barbeque shack, a liquor store, a juke joint, and a dance club once marked the intersection of 9th and Grove in Kirby. Neighborhood lore is memory rich with scrumptious ribs, liquid spirits, and soulful dance. The corner also is known as the site of shootings, drug deals, and prostitution pick-ups. In 1980, the area's most infamous crime occurred in the liquor store parking lot. A young police officer was killed by a man who walked up to his patrol car and delivered a shotgun blast through the driver's window (Kansas State Historical Society, 2010). The proliferation of drive-by shootings started in the mid 1990s. The surrounding neighborhood is known for crack houses, dirty cops, unscrupulous bail bondsmen, and discarded refuse. By 2008, boarded-up windows and doors marked approximately every fourth house.

The juke joint, liquor store, and dance club have long since been razed; the only original structure remaining is the liquor store. Locals claim to know that the proprietor of the liquor store keeps two handguns and a shotgun behind his register. He has twice shot armed robbers, once fatally. Both shootings were followed by acquittals. While conducting his daily business transactions, the owner stands behind a floor-to-ceiling shield of bullet-proof glass, sliding liquor purchases and customers' change through the same hollowed-out space on the wooden counter.

On the northeast corner, formerly occupied by the juke joint, now sits a beige, one-story building occupied by the Community Center of Kansas on one side and the Community Alternative High School on the other. It is an unpretentious building; many who drive by have no idea that it houses a community organization and a fully accredited high school. A sign, shaped like a rectangular prism with rounded corners, sits in front of the building: “Community Learning Center.” In a unique arrangement, the largest school district in the state rents space from a community organization. The mission of the Community Center is to “empower those who are striving toward the mainstream to secure economic self-reliance” (Urban League of Kansas, 2006). The high school, or Learning Center, provides the opportunity for students who are at least 17-years-old to earn a fully accredited high school diploma. The Learning Center also is available for nontraditional students such as displaced aeronautics workers, homemakers who are reentering the work force after several years, and other adults who did not graduate from high school for various reasons. Most of the students are parents of at least one child, and many have two or more children under the age of five.

The Community Center classroom is 50’ by 52’—about two and a half times the size of a regular classroom—all four walls are lined with computer-topped tables and fabric office chairs. There are eight computer-free tables in the center of the room, a teacher’s desk at each end, and a smattering of metal file cabinets and book shelves—all in all a bland and orderly environment. The adjacent hallway holds the coordinator’s office, the school office, and a conference room.

Role of the Researcher in Qualitative Research

In qualitative educational research, the researcher can be thought of as the “key instrument” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38) of the study.

The qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. They may use a protocol—an instrument for collecting data—but the researchers are the ones who actually gather the information. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers. (Creswell, 2007, p. 38)

The qualitative researcher, and specifically the self-ethnographer, depends on self to gather and interpret data. The qualitative researcher is involved with the participants, immersed in the topic, and always reflective (Alvesson, 2003; Hughes, 2008; Toynton, 2006). Researcher as participant-observant is considered a staple of qualitative educational research (Alvesson, 2003; Eisenhart, 2001; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). However, in self-ethnography, Alvesson argues that the label of participant-observant is not exactly accurate. “Participant observation is thus not a good label in this case, observing participant is better. Participation comes first and is only occasionally complemented with observation in a research-focused sense” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 174).

I saw my role in the research as four-fold: selector, interpreter, narrator, and presenter. I selected the topic of African American males in high school credit recovery because I saw firsthand its powerful effects. When selecting topics, the effective self-ethnographer chooses “engaging issues we recognize as central to teaching and teacher education” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 17). Choosing to research African American male students was natural and effortless to me; it allowed me to give voice to an overlooked group and to be reflective. The self-ethnographer has a responsibility to realize that not only is a topic important to education being studied but also being studied is “self-in-relation to other” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 14).

In the next dimension of my role as a qualitative researcher, I served as an interpreter of data. It was my responsibility to detect key themes, to note patterns, to showcase significant findings and to do so within the framework of CRT. I was obligated to interpret—discern, recognize, digest, and analyze—the data and how it related to CRT’s tenets. Creswell (2007) describes interpreting data within a theoretical framework: “The researcher draws inferences from the data or turns to theory to provide structure for his or her interpretations. The researcher also personalizes the interpretations” (p. 162).

The third and fourth facets of my qualitative researcher role were narrator and presenter. I embraced self-ethnography for several reasons but the most compelling one was the opportunity to use first-person voice. Hughes (2008) writes “rather than seeking to escape subjectivity, authors considering autoethnographic techniques should do so precisely because of the qualitative genre’s capacity to engage first person voice” (p. 128). First person voice is the perfect venue for delivering stories—especially counterstories—in qualitative educational research. My role of researcher involved selecting topics, interpreting data, narrating stories, and presenting findings. By interfacing these four functions, I attempted to achieve what Denzin (1997) describes as the goal of ethnographers: “to move from the inside of the author to outside expression while working to take the readers inside themselves and ultimately out again” (p. 208).

Researcher Assumptions and Biases. Every researcher enters a study with assumptions and biases. In this section, I “come clean” by describing my biases and assumptions. In cases involving authority figures and minority students (especially African American males), I am more likely to suspect immediately the authority figure of racism and/or wrongdoing than the student. My inclination to suspect racism is not unwarranted. Professionally and personally I

have found racism to be the norm. This also forms the first tenet of CRT: racism still exists (Chapman, 2007b; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Duncan, 2002; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ottley, 2007; Tatum, 1997). However, my bias is tempered by an equally strong discipline to be reflective. The practice of reflection, along with intense data gathering and analysis, keeps my “is it racism *again?*” inclination in check.

In addition to having a positive bias towards African American male students, I possess a favorable bias for research that embraces multiple perspectives, storytelling, and the life experiences of participants. When writing about urban schools and urban teaching, Shealey (2006) explains that there is not a lack of research but rather a shortage of research that “places an emphasis on participant voice, storytelling, and *a commitment to understanding the experiences of participants*” [italics added] (p. 7). To explain further my perspective, I disclose that I am a former language arts teacher who unwaveringly believes in the power of storytelling. I think that Delgado (1989) explains the importance of storytelling best: “Stories are the oldest, most primordial meeting ground in human experience. Their allure will often provide the most effective means of overcoming otherness, of forming a new collectivity based on the shared story” (p. 2438).

Another caveat merits mention in this section. I hold a bias for educators who believe and act as if teaching is more than a job, or a career, or even a profession. I am biased favorably to the educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) who view education as a vocation and view themselves as providing an immeasurably important service. This vocation mindset is the opposite of the “I’m a teacher because I get three months off every year” mentality.

Researchers inevitably have assumptions that color their perspective. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) identify assumptions as “epistemological and political baggage they

[researchers] bring with them to the research site” (p. 292). My first assumption pertains to alternative education and its students. I assume that students who enroll in an alternative program do so because of ongoing struggles and failures that are not necessarily of their own creation. I assume that at some time during their high school experience they were not served adequately and/or advocated for by the responsible adults in their home and/or school lives. Teachers and principals tend to agree that “leaving high school early is not a decision that students make on any given morning, but reflects a slow process of disengagement that produces warning signs along the way” (Bridgeland et al., 2009, p. 15). My second assumption is that the students who, for various reasons, become alternative education students deserve and are entitled to graduate from high school. Thirdly, I assume that most if not all white, female teachers want to have effective relationships with all students but often experience unnecessary conflict and strife when interacting with African American males.

Summarizing my assumptions and biases, I possess an affinity for African American male students, a preference for storytelling, and a feeling of solidarity with colleagues who also see teaching as a vocation. This does not mean, however, that the study will not be credible or contribute positively to the existing research. By acknowledging my “worldly affiliations” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 288) I bring further credibility to the study. Researchers should “not shed worldly affiliations but they should identify those affiliations and understand their impacts on the ways the researchers approach social and education phenomena” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 288). My positive bias towards African American males and storytelling, and my assumptions about students’ impetus for entering alternative education inevitably influence my perspective. This could influence the study’s potential findings but is less likely to do so now that my assumptions and biases been examined and revealed.

Establishing Rapport. The participants were all familiar with me for several months (and in Robby's case years) before being interviewed. A positive rapport existed between the participants and me before the credit recovery research began. They saw me throughout the extended school year and we engaged often in one-on-one homework sessions. As a classroom teacher, I interacted regularly with all but one of the participants. My regular habits include hand delivering a sharpened pencil, graph paper, calculator, ruler, or any other classroom staple that will facilitate a math student. I choose to respond to the students' immediate situation instead of making comments such as, "You knew you were coming to school. Why didn't you bring a pencil?" In fact, I try to anticipate their needs for supplies and deliver them cheerfully to the work site. It always surprises and, in a way, saddens me when a student says, "I've never had a teacher loan me a pencil without being mad about it." My task as a researcher was not to establish rapport; it was to redefine the existing rapport. I already knew my participants as students; they already identified me as teacher. The roles of students and teacher took on new dimensions. The participants/students became storytellers and I became both their audience and, in some regards, their voice. We did not disregard or forget our previous knowledge of one another's personalities; we simply moved our knowledge into a new arena. As Boote (2008) writes, "Research is necessarily improvisational activity in which researchers must use and adapt the knowledge and skills learned in earlier contexts for new contexts" (p. 308). I thanked the participants repeatedly and earnestly; I shared with them the importance of African American male voices being added to the existing educational research. I emphasized how important their individual stories were for preservice and inservice teachers to hear because they were personal and true. I explained in laymen's terms "that for public theory to influence educational practice it

must be translated through the personal” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). The participants reviewed their contributions and were given the chance to add, take away, or clarify content.

Ethics. Peshkin (1993) refers to qualitative methods as having an “open, opportunistic nature” (p. 23). Despite its open nature, ethnography potentially contains some limitations. Ethnography—especially self-ethnography—has potential “blind spots” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 181). Potential for bias always exists. Because self-ethnography takes place on the researcher’s home turf, “the problems of blind spots and of missing or omitting some ‘dark’ or ‘tabooed’ aspect of the home culture must be taken very seriously” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 181). Woods (1986) also warns of the danger of being “in situ” (p. 22). Woods goes on to write “there may still be some surprises for them [researchers] on the other side of their routine realities” (Woods, 1986, p. 22). So, on the one hand, self-ethnography provides the potential for exciting creativity on the researcher’s part. On the other hand, self-ethnography provides the temptation to gloss over troublesome happenings. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) point out the “schizophrenic task” of balancing the outsider role of the self-ethnographer with the insider role of the self-ethnographer (p. 97). In addition to the perils of omission and role confusion, self-ethnographers also face issues of responsibility and loyalty “made especially crucial by the personal, face-to-face nature of much qualitative research” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 109). Eisenhart (2001) refers to the loyalty dilemma as a “muddle” (p. 18). She explains the muddle thusly:

The tension between protecting those studied and reporting details in ways that compel deeper understanding has been a persistent one. The tension is exacerbated when multiple and diverse perspectives (or ‘voices’) must be represented. What if, in protecting some participants, the writer exposes or privileges others? What if revealing one voice implicates or disparages others? (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 18)

To counteract the inherent dilemmas in self-ethnography, Woods (1986) proposes that self-ethnographers “ensure that our methods are as rigorous as we can make them” (p. 9). This will better equip researchers to “take both an optimistic and a realistic stance” (Woods, 1986, p. 9). In concurrence with Woods (1986), Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) also promote rigor in self-ethnography. “Self-study invites the reader into the research process by asking that interpretations be checked, that themes be critically scrutinized, and that the ‘so what’ question be vigorously pressed” (p. 20). Integrity must be maintained as the data are interpreted. Physical security of the data must be maintained as it is processed. All collected data: observation notes, interview transcripts, student transcripts, interview tapes, consent forms, and any other information pertinent to the research was stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home office. The electronic information was kept on a password-protected computer. All information will remain stored securely for three years after the research is complete. After three years, all of the data that could be used to possibly personally identify the participants will be destroyed (shredded and/or deleted).

The main contents of Chapter 2—CRT (Racism is the status quo) and educational research (context is everything)—are not usually casual topics of conversation at social events. Actually, the topics *do* arise but are not named “CRT” or “ethnography,” or “educational research.” However, when attending everything from funerals to weddings, if one is identified as a teacher, the line of questioning from fellow guests goes inevitably something like this:

“Oh, you’re a teacher, aren’t you?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Now where do you teach?”

“I teach at the Downtown Learning Center.”

“What?”

“It’s a high school diploma completion program.”

“Downtown, huh? Well, I don’t know how exactly to say this, but isn’t that for subpar kids? Mostly minorities? The ones who have all kinds of problems and don’t know how to behave?”

“Well, not exactly, no, it’s for students who, for a variety of reasons, haven’t been successful in traditional schools.”

“That’s good, that’s good, everybody—even those kids—deserves a chance to be educated.”

The preceding conversation actually took place (at a funeral) between an elderly European American gentleman and me. He did not know that he was demonstrating the first tenet of CRT: racism is the status quo.

Later during the same gathering, I chatted with an orthodontist who wondered why I wanted to work with “damaged goods.” He explained to me that if my black students were “any good,” then they would be attending a regular high school and “helping out the basketball team.” Interest convergence, the second tenet of CRT, says that the majority wants the minority to be successful only if said success is beneficial to the former. In this orthodontist’s perception, the “success” of the African American student could contribute to the “success” of the basketball team.

After speaking with the first and second guests, I found myself in conversation with a financial planner. He asked me if I ever worried about “getting mugged in the parking lot?” He asked me how I could relate to “poor, black, fatherless, gang members, juvenile delinquents, and thugs?” Without going into a lecture on intersectionality, poverty, and context, I responded.

“Kids do not choose to be poor or fatherless, or have neighbors and relatives in gangs. For some kids, it is their reality. For other kids, their lot is to be born rich and to two married parents.” The orthodontist gave me a tentative nod. He seemed to agree.

“Everything is connected and you have to consider context,” I continued. The orthodontist’s eyes narrowed just a tad but I went on. “Who needs a good teacher more? A kid who receives every possible enrichment just by virtue of birth? Or a kid who already knows what it is like to struggle on a daily basis?”

“All I know,” responded my conversation partner “is that I’m glad it’s you and not me dealing with those kids.”

“I’m glad it’s me and not you, too,” I thought.

Unfortunately, the orthodontist is not alone in his “bad schools for bad kids” thinking. Kim & Taylor (2008) found “public alternative schools presently run by school districts struggle with negative stigmas as dumping grounds or warehouses for at-risk students who are falling behind, have behavioral problems, or are juvenile delinquents” (p. 207). This opinion of alternative schools resonates true with what I have experienced when discussing my place of employment with members of the public as well as with my educational colleagues. Other teachers, especially those from traditional public schools, display a negative perception of alternative schools. Dunbar (1999) maintains that the alternative school label “too often becomes a euphemism for warehousing students whose behavior is deemed inappropriate for mainstream schools” (p. 241).

Position of the Researcher. In self-ethnography, the role of the participants and the researcher are more or less equitable (Alvesson, 2003; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Chapman, 2007b; Gordon, 2000; Hughes, 2008; Luttrell, 2000). The participants and I attended school

together, we knew each other well, and we both worked towards the goal of achieving their high school diplomas. Alternative schools differ from traditional schools; the distinctions between student and teacher are less pronounced and the classroom is less formal (Connor et al., 2004; Jeffries et al., 2004; Kim & Taylor, 2008; White-Johnson, 2001).

Data Collection

Protection of Human Subjects. As per protocol, the Kansas State University for Research Involving Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) was petitioned for permission to conduct the credit recovery research. All data (observation notes, interview transcripts, student transcripts, and interview tapes) was stored securely in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computer. The interviews were audio-taped with a digital recorder, identified, dated, transcribed, and catalogued. Participants selected a pseudonym to protect their identities and maintain anonymity. Permission was received for the IRB in July of 2009.

Timeline. The research became possible when I began my new career as an alternative high school teacher. In my new role, I met, interviewed, and interacted with over 300 alternative students. I never ceased to be intrigued by my students' stories, especially the stories of African American males who had been athletes while in traditional public high school. I began graduate studies in 2005 and a year later was introduced to Critical Race Theory. As stated above, permission from IRB was obtained in July of 2009. Figure 3.1 illustrates graphically the genesis and progression of the credit recovery study.

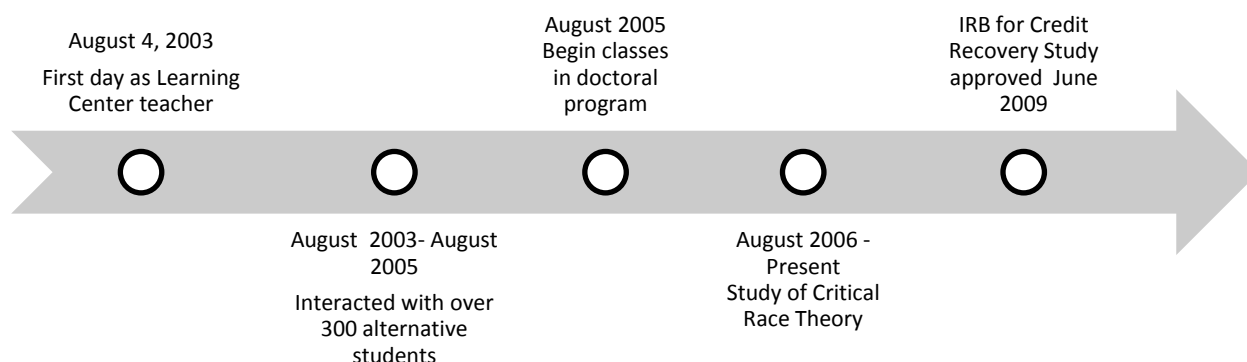


Figure 3.1 Timeline of Credit Recovery Research

Pre-data collecting. The informal beginning of the credit recovery study emerged from speaking to student applicants in my alternative school teacher role. After students completed the application process and were admitted to the Learning Center, the nature and content of my interactions evolved into frequent one-on-one contact. According to my official district job description, I was their instructor and they were my students. This teaching role, however, was radically different from my previous middle and high school teaching assignments. Rather than delivering information while facing an entire class, I was now sitting side-by-side with individual students. Functioning as a couple of learners rather than teacher/student, we faced a common computer monitor. Successfully mastering the online curriculum served as our motivation.

Solving math problems was interspersed with personal conversation. Revelations from the students about past school experiences added depth to the information I already possessed from the interviews. Students shared details of their past educational experiences with me, including:

- reasons for leaving traditional public high school
- struggles of teenage parenthood
- incidents they perceived as racist

- examples of effective and ineffective teachers
- anecdotes of involvement in the legal system.

As the school years progressed, I heard more and more about the lives of alternative high school students who had attended previously traditional public high schools. I began my doctoral program in the summer of 2005 and was introduced to CRT in 2006; the connection between my job, CRT, and the need for research solidified.

Beginning of credit recovery research. The formal beginning of the credit recovery consisted of obtaining permission from Kansas State University's Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB). Information covered in the IRB includes but is not limited to details on how consent was obtained, how data was secured, and how confidentiality was maintained (see Appendix A). Two versions of the consent form were used: a traditional format (see Appendix B), and a modified "student-friendly" version (see Appendix C).

Data were collected from three main sources: in-depth interviews, frequent and prolonged interactions in the field, and school transcripts. The next sections are devoted to the details of data collection; first and second rounds of in-depth interviews, prolonged interaction in the field, and school transcripts.

First-round interviews. Each participant was approached individually and consent was obtained in the following order: Darren, Robby, Steven, Jacob, Terrance, and Larry. I interviewed each participant twice over the span of a year. The first interviews were conducted during the months of June, September, October, and November of 2009; they took place in the conference room of the Community Learning Center. The first location was chosen by the researcher and agreed to by the participants. It contained a large wooden table used for various community meetings, office chairs, book shelves, and a counter with three desktop computers.

All of the participants were familiar with the room because of their association with the Learning Center; Darren, Robby, and Jacob actually had made presentations in the room themselves as students.

During the first interviews, I asked each participant about several broad topics:

1. Departure from traditional public high school
2. Home life and family
3. Participation in sports
4. Relationships with adults
5. Priorities and values
6. Being adjudicated
7. Gender and ethnicity

Subtopics included number of high school credits earned in traditional public high school, a typical day, favorite subjects, and children. Interview Protocol is in Appendix D and interview questions are in Appendix E.

Before each interview, I showed the participant my small, digital recorder and demonstrated how, if they so desired, I could cease and resume recording at the touch of a button. I offered to record the participant's voice and play it back to him as a sample before we started the official interview but all declined. Finally, before the actual interview began, I assured the participant of confidentiality, the right to stop the interview at any time, the right to refuse to answer any question, and the right to listen to the final audio tape. For approximately 90 to 120 minutes, the interviewee and I sat across from one another at the conference table and talked.

Within an hour after each of the first interviews, I took time to write down my reactions to participants in my methodological journal and what they had revealed. After recording

personal reactions, I identified the topics mentioned and elaborated on most frequently by the participants. I reflected on their links to CRT tenets. My next step consisted of transcribing the entire interview; the average length was 17-pages, double-spaced per interview. After typing and printing the interview, I casually read the entire document; I resisted taking notes in the margin or stopping to delve more deeply into my own or the participants' statements. Luttrell (2000) uses a like tactic; "I read through each woman's set of transcripts and looked for an overall point, the gist of her life story" (p. 504).

Member checks were conducted after each transcript was ready. I contacted each participant and we met together to ensure that what was written was what they intended to communicate and to determine if there was anything of importance missing. The participants were surprised that the interviews "took up so many typed pages;" they asked, "Do you really think teachers want to know this stuff?" Without exception, the participants approved the transcripts and seemed pleased that they were included. Figure 3.2 chronicles the steps of the first interviews.

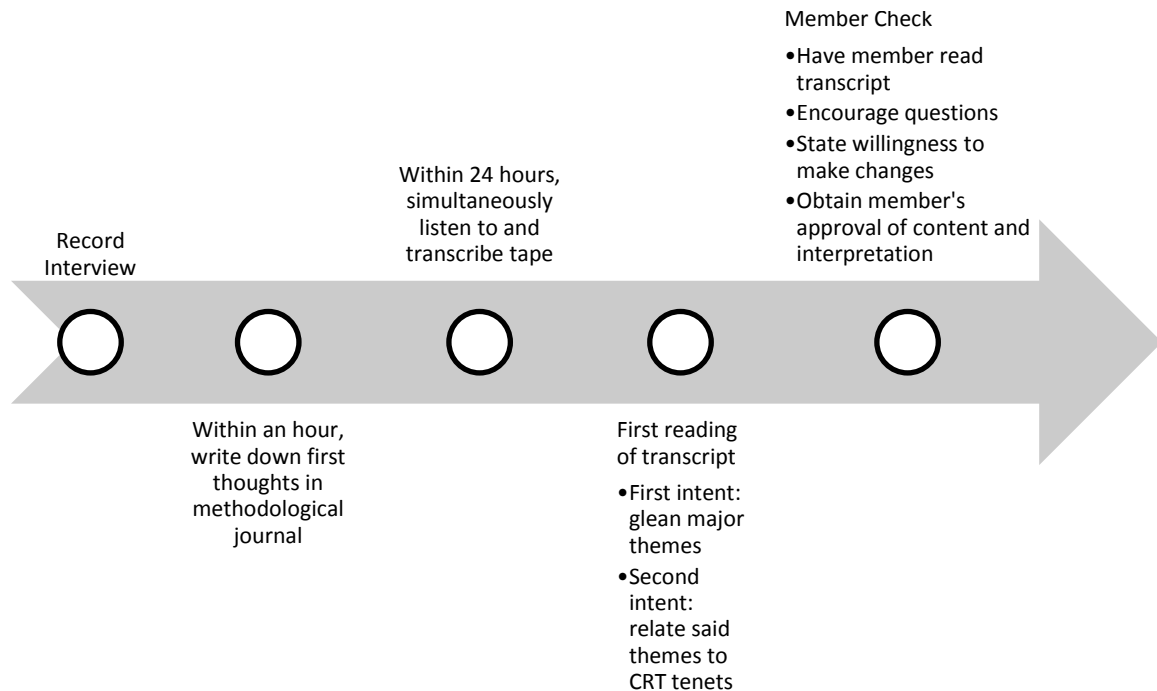


Figure 3.2 Steps of First Interview

Overlapping of listening and reading. After reflecting, typing, reading, and gaining each of the participants’ permission to proceed, I began the audio phase of data analysis. Playing the interviews on my MP3 player, I listened to them repeatedly. The first couple of times I multitasked as I listened to the exchanges between the participants and me; I listened while I exercised on the treadmill and while I drove. By the third or fourth time that I listened to the recording, it was while sitting still and focusing intently on the voices. By then, I was familiar enough with the recording to anticipate and take notes on particularly interesting tidbits of information. Spaced between the listening sessions, I returned to reading the transcripts to identify “recurring images, words, phrases, and metaphors” (Luttrell, 2000, p. 504). The combination of visual and audio repetition allowed me to become familiar with the data, to see connections with CRT tenets, and to account for the intersectionality of race, gender, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships.

Second round interviews. The second round of interviews took place during February, March, April, May, and June of 2010. The settings for the second interviews were various restaurants: Panera, McDonald's, and Jimmie's Diner. Two participants were interviewed at each food venue. All of the locations for the second interviews were suggested and chosen by the participants. The amount of traffic at each venue was weighed against the need for semi-privacy and a quality tape recording. Further considerations were comfort of surroundings, convenience of location, and whether or not the participant had his own transportation or would need a ride from me. We avoided peak business hours and started the interviews at 2 PM; length varied from 105 to 170 minutes.

Modifications to coding procedure. Concentrating first on recurring images and words, next on passages in relation to CRT, and finally on patterns, I prepared for the second round of interviews. Luttrell (2000) recommends a 3-step process for coding data:

1. Identify recurring images, words, phrases, and metaphors while asking "What sort of person did the interviewee wish to present?"
2. Focus on all passages referring to school and educational views/values;
3. Look for and focus on patterns, not individuals (Luttrell, 2000, p. 504).

Luttrell's (2000) 3-step approach (slightly modified) was adopted for the credit recovery research. In the first phase, Luttrell hopes to identify "what sort of person did the interviewee wish to present?" Her choice is understandable because one of her objectives was to make comparisons between the self-assigned identities of American working class women. For the credit recovery study, "What sort of person did the interviewee wish to present?" is replaced with "What topics were mentioned repeatedly by the participants?" The latter question is a better fit

when looking at multiple factors: gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships.

Similarly, the wording of the second step was changed from “referring to school and educational views/values” to “as related to CRT tenets.” The tenets of CRT, especially the first three, framed the credit recovery study: racism is the norm, interest convergence, and stories are important (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Denzin, 2003; Duncan, 2005; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a; Vann Lynch, 2006). While Luttrell (2000) and I both chose ethnography for our studies’ methodology, our lenses differ. Luttrell looks from a self-reflexive position; I look from a CRT perspective. The difference in lenses justifies the substitution of CRT tenets for educational views/values. The third step, looking for patterns, remained identical in the credit recovery study.

Following is a 3-point recap of modifications; changes are noted in brackets:

1. Identify recurring images, words, phrases, and metaphors [while asking “What topics were mentioned repeatedly by the participants?”].
2. Focus on all passages referring to school and educational views/values [as related to CRT tenets]
3. Look for and focus on patterns, not individuals [no change] (Luttrell, 2000, p. 504).

The modifications to Luttrell’s (2000) system strengthened two strands that help to generally define qualitative research: (a) use of a theoretical lens, and (b) holistic perspective. Being acquainted personally with the participants and sharing a common setting reinforced two more strands: (a) researcher as the key instrument, and (b) sensitivity to context (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).

Second-round interview questions. First round interviews provided the foundation for second round interviews. During second round interviews, I shared with each participant the unanimous points from the first interviews; we then discussed them in more depth. Participant-specific questions accompanied the three main talking points. Conducting one-on-one interviews with the participants allowed the acquisition of information and, in a more personal sense, the telling of life stories. Interviews provided a forum for two widely-recognized attributes of qualitative research: (a) the participants' own meanings and (b) in real-world situations (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). The use of interviews counter acted "...explanations of their [African American males] behavior that are rooted in European-centered models—as if the actions of these males needed this type of clarification" (White-Johnson, 2001, p. 370).

Frequent and prolonged interactions in the field. Interacting frequently and for long periods of time with participants contrasts with the classic sense of naturalistic observation that "does not interfere with the people or activities under observation" (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000, p. 674). However, frequent and prolonged interactions in the field resulted in its own wealth of data points. For example, I accompanied participants to meetings with other adults. Visits to the counselor were necessary every time another class was completed. In the visits, the participants' class preferences were discussed, tentative timelines were proposed, contact information was verified, and official transcripts were reviewed for accuracy.

Meetings with Learning Center's administrators revealed different details about the participants. If the visit involved a disciplinary matter, past incidents from past schools often were referenced. The past was not discussed for punitive measures; the students, prompted by the

administrator, were given the opportunity to reflect on past consequences and be reminded of positive alternatives.

Throughout the school weeks, I also noted the participants' physical appearances, moods, work and study habits, and interactions with peers in the classroom. Outside of the classroom, the parking lot of the Community Learning Center and the lobby of the Downtown Learning Center supplied more scenes of the participants' school days.

Administrators, counselors, fellow teachers, and I noted relevant incidents in the participants' school folders. In addition to the school-related written notes, Robby corresponded with me throughout his incarceration. Prior to the official beginning of the credit recovery study, Robby was often in my home where he visited my sons and received tutoring.

Trustworthiness

As described in Chapter 2, past and current literature regarding African American males provided mainly examples of African Americans as the minority in elite European American schools (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Duncan, 2002; Fordham, 1985; McGill, 2003; Ottley, 2007); teachers' perceptions of African American males (Duncan, 2002; King, 1991; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; White-Johnson, 2001); and African American students according to the deficit perspective (Broido & Manning, 2002; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Duncan, 2002; Fordham, 1985; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lewis, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003). Absent from the literature, with the exception of White-Johnson (2001), is the African American male population that attends alternative programs in public schools. The credit recovery study fills a gap in the existing research by applying a CRT lens and looking at the intersectionality of gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships. Critical Race Theory appears frequently in educational research (Edwards &

Schmidt, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Powers, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b). Applying CRT to African American males attempting to graduate late from high school, and considering multiple factors while doing so, addresses a need in the body of literature.

Inviting the participants to read the interview transcripts and encouraging them to add or delete content as desired (i.e., member checks), increased the trustworthiness of the credit recovery study. Howe and Eisenhardt (as cited in Creswell, 2007) explain that in order to be considered trustworthy research must inform and improve practice; furthermore the “confidentiality, privacy, and truth telling of participants...” must be preserved (p. 212). The credit recovery study informs educators of a previously overlooked population and promotes the improvement of practice. Participants were considered thoughtfully and purposefully chosen to share their truthful stories.

Interviews, interactions, and transcripts provided a triangle of data points. The multiple data sources fortified trustworthiness. Comments made in interviews can be verified by transcripts. Interactions with the participants supplied insights into both interview revelations and transcripts. Cross referencing between interview transcripts, school notes, and official transcripts occurred continuously throughout the study. (Appendix F contains the Audit Trail.)

Credibility. Second interviews served to clarify what was said in the first interviews; more importantly, second interviews supplied a greater depth of understanding due to the expansion of first interview topics. White-Johnson (2001) also studied African American males in an alternative setting. Her comments referencing credibility also apply to the credit recovery study: “A reduction in the threat to internal generalizability occurred because the interviews took place in a nonthreatening environment and the authenticity of the narrated perceptions was ensured” (p. 348).

Validity and reliability are terms associated with quantitative research. In qualitative research, validity means that the analysis, interpretations, and conclusions of a study are credible.

Ellis and Beckner (2000) elaborate on the definition of validity in self-ethnography:

To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You might also judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own. (p. 751)

When applied to the credit recovery study, Ellis and Beckner's definition of validity offers participants (African American males) and readers (researchers, future and classroom teachers) improved educational experiences and effective practices, respectively.

Transferability. Transferability, known as external validity in the quantitative realm, refers to results rooted in data in the qualitative realm. When exploring the future of qualitative research, Gergen and Gergen (2000) point out the "crisis of validity" (p. 1026). Reflexivity, multiple voices, and literary styling are listed as possible future tools for identifying validity. McTaggart (1997) suggests that validity (transferability) be "reconceptualized in terms of the efficacy of research in changing relevant social practices" (p. 17). Ellis and Becknew (2000) link the idea of improvement to possible criteria for credibility; likewise, McTaggart associates efficacy with transferability. The credit recovery study could result potentially in improving teacher practice as well as future research in this area. The credit recovery study acknowledged intersection, not isolation, of elements; it conceivably could, as McTaggart (1997) suggests: change "relevant social practices" (p. 17).

Dependability. Ongoing triangulation of data took place during the study. For example, a participant reported:

- attending two different schools prior to enrolling in the Learning Center;
- failing English in his sophomore year;
- never passing a math class in a traditional public school;
- being withdrawn from a traditional public school; and
- other past educational details.

The above information was then verified by examining his official school transcript, and/or notes pertaining to his term in alternative education.

The participants and I shared trust and rapport, making "...the researcher better able to capture the nuances and meanings of each participant's life from the participant's point of view (Janesick, 2000, p. 384). The participants were interested in what each other said during individual interviews. I shared the repeated words and images from the first interviews with all of the participants during second interviews. After second interviews, I again jotted down my initial reactions to the revealed contents. I compared the notes to the ones taken after the first interviews, referenced the official transcripts, and then looked at school notes. The cycle of interview transcripts, post-interview notes, school transcripts, recollections of one-on-one interactions, and audio recordings of the interviews repeated in different sequences and configurations until the organization of data resonated with inductively developed themes.

Confirmability. Self-ethnography's detractors criticize the methodology with varying degrees of harshness and disapproval. One particularly harsh description comes from Gergen and Gergen (2000); they share an unflattering assessment of self-ethnography and similar endeavors: "epithets of excess—narcissistic, navel gazing" (p. 1030). The ferocity of the disapproval fueled

my desire to conduct a study with the hallmarks of trustworthiness; this section features confirmability.

In order to maintain confirmability, I regularly considered how my gender, my ethnicity, my voice, my vocabulary, my role as a mother, my age, my voice, and my vocabulary influenced what the participants did in front of me and shared with me. When I first asked the participants to allow me to interview them, I brought up my gender and reassured them that at any time they felt uncomfortable answering “a woman’s questions” that they could decline to answer. Interestingly, without fail, the participants said that they preferred talking (at length) to females over males. I also said jokingly to each participant, “I’m not African American.” One of the participants replied, “You are too black, Miss Cindy,” at which we both laughed. A couple of the participants asked me, “What are you? You kind of look Italian?” I informed them that my mother is Mexican and my father is Irish to which one replied, “I knew you wasn’t white.”

We also discussed the fact that I am a mother in “real life,” as well as “like a mom” to them. I pointed out that young men didn’t want to tell their moms things she might see as “bad” or “dangerous;” and that I wanted them to “be real with me” but again repeated that they did not *have to* tell me anything that made them uncomfortable. I pointed out to five participants that I was older than their mothers by approximately five to ten years; one participant quickly replied, “Age aint nothin’ but a number.” The next responded with, “Maybe you’ll see things more like my grandma, huh?” The others had a “so what” kind of reaction.

When listening to the audio tapes, I noticed that my voice often would tighten and take on a persnickety tone at the end of my sentences. To counteract the annoying tone, I said the same sentences while being mindful of my delivery. I recorded the sentences and played them

back to make sure my tone conveyed approachability. Other details that caused me to engage in self-reflexivity were the fact that we shared a school setting and that I had been their teacher,

Data Analysis

Participants' experiences in traditional public and alternative schools were given consideration, compared, and examined for patterns. These experiences included the following components:

- Reason(s) for leaving traditional public school
- Number of credits at time of exit
- Length of time elapsed between traditional public and alternative enrollment
- Method of assigning classes
- Degree of confidence in graduating
- Presence/absence of key adult figures
- Helpful and hurtful teacher actions
- Contact with law enforcement

The consideration and comparison of the above factors helped develop comprehensive responses to the research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants while in the alternative school?
2. How do the participants' experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?
3. How do the participants compare their traditional public school experience to their learning center experience?

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection (constant comparative method). “This process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories is called the constant comparative method of data analysis” (Creswell, 2007, p. 64).

Organization of the data to produce meaningful information occurred in repeated and overlapping steps. The three major forms of data were in-depth interviews, frequent and prolonged interactions in the field, and school transcripts. Three different colors of sticky notes placed on the interview transcripts distinguished:

1. Recurring images, words, and phrases labeled (green)
2. Data relevant to CRT tenets marked (yellow)
3. Differences in traditional public and alternative schools (blue)

The green items consisted of the participants’ own words and were common among the six young men. The yellow items reflected the tenets of CRT, and the blue items—more specific to each participant—emerged from the interviews. After color-coding the above broad categories, I created a series of documents while “moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (Creswell, 2007, p. 150). The first document contained a list of recurring images: young African American males in handcuffs, a generic assistant principal’s office from a traditional public school, a sea of high school seniors throwing their mortar boards into the air, a weight room, a traditional classroom with students in desks facing a teacher, a football field, a basketball court, a track, and a Learning Center classroom with computers on the wall and a circulating teacher. The exercise of listing recurring images complimented reading the written transcripts and listening to the digital audio recordings.

I read through and listened to the first and second interview transcripts many times. While reading, I recalled the facial expressions, demeanor, and attitude of the participants.

Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral lists procedures for analyzing data. The procedures include reading, visualizing, describing, classifying, and interpreting (p. 151). I practiced reading and visualizing simultaneously. Creating the image category facilitated my entry into the data; it helped me land on the first loop of the spiral. Next, I approached CRT's tenets and asked, "Does the data speak to CRT's tenets?" Creswell (2007) describes how qualitative researchers [ethnographers] interpret data based on "hunches, insights, and intuition" (p. 154). I added the construct of CRT to intuition and continued the process of data analysis with CRT in focus.

I revisited the interview transcripts pondering the first tenet of CRT—racism is the norm—and began listing examples on a word document titled "Racism is the Norm." Stereotyping was the topic mentioned most frequently; each participant mentioned stereotyping. In fact, stereotyping was so common that the participants seemed to accept it as an inevitable, daily, and never-ending practice. Rapper, basketball player, and gang member were the most prolific stereotypes according to the participants. Sterotyping was not limited to African American males; this was also noted on my "Racism is the Norm" word document. The participants reported that Asian American and Hispanic students also were stereotyped by teachers.

Between multiple readings through the interview transcripts for all references to stereotyping (racism), the next CRT tenet—interest convergence—was investigated thoroughly. Interest convergence was the most obvious when mining the three athletes' interview transcripts. Darren, Robby, and Steven shared several anecdotes that reeked of interest convergence: being allowed to go to the gym at any time during the school day, "helping" the coach, having easy classes picked for them, and being immersed in sports-related classes at the expense of earning academic credit. Post-interviews and post-reading of transcripts is the time period that scholars

recommend be used for seeking out patterns (Alvesson, 2003; Carspecken, 1996; Eisenhart, 2001; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Luttrell, 2000).

Figure 3.3 below is a visual of the analysis and interpretive process; it portrays the correlation of CRT tenets with the data obtained from in-depth interviews and school transcripts.

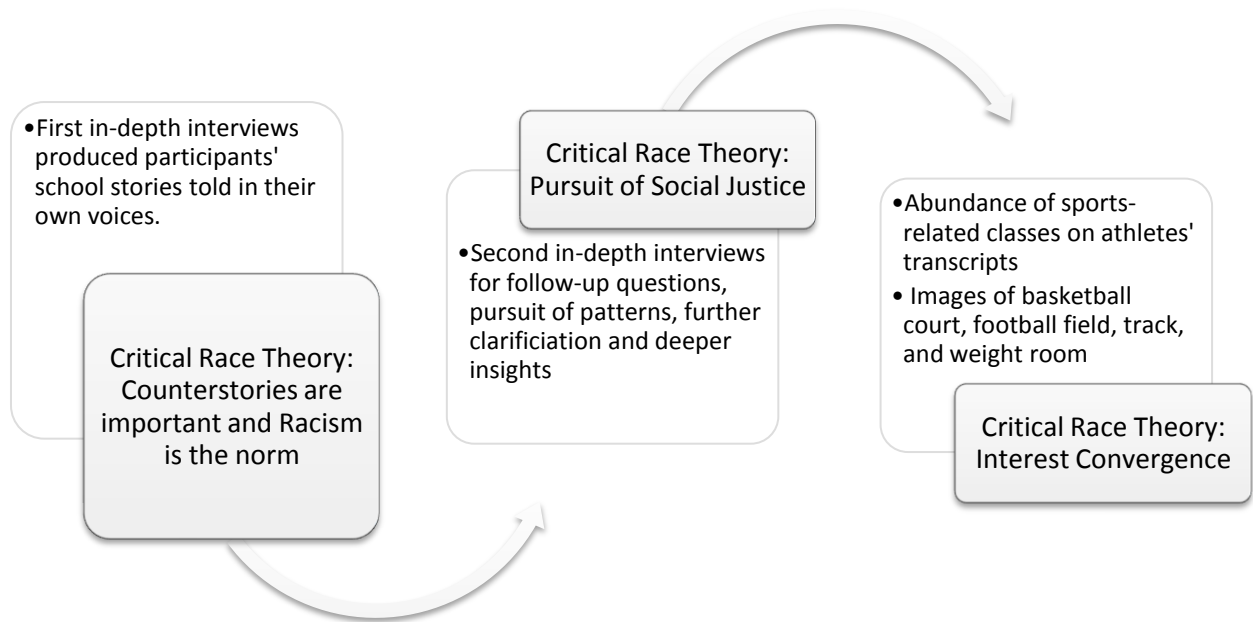


Figure 3.3 Correlation of Critical Race Theory Tenets with Data

When the data were examined category by category for patterns, it became apparent quickly that the neatly colored categories were anything but divided neatly. There were, of course, commonalities as well as differences between the contents of the participants' first and second in-depth interview transcripts. Before I began to write, I examined thoroughly the similarities, the differences, and the patterns of the data. As I worked in the analyzing and interpreting phases, I continued to interact with the participants, to journal, to teach in an alternative setting, and to gain insight into the plight of African American males in high school credit recovery. Denzin (2003) describes the self-ethnographer's labor: "The ethnographer works

back and forth between the contexts and situations of lived experience and the representations of those experiences” (p. 266). Eventually, I began to write—to produce the narrative—striving to assemble the data in a meaningful and powerful manner.

Summary

My personal involvement with African American male urban students who failed to graduate from high school as scheduled provided the impetus for this research. The research was held in two different alternative high schools. The purpose of this research is to offer insights—from the intersecting effects of gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships—into the educational experiences of African American males in credit recovery. Self-ethnography, a qualitative methodology, was used because of its compatibility with a researcher who has multiple roles (Alvesson, 2003). Self-ethnography embraces relaxed borders and use of first-person voice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Critical Race Theory promotes the importance of counterstories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The combination of self-ethnography and CRT facilitates both the researcher and participants because it allows both freedom (relaxed borders) and meaningful structure (CRT tenets). The participants' past associations with the researcher as well as their current living conditions were examined in Chapter 3. At some point in time, all of the participants except Robby had been my students during my employment as an alternative high school teacher. Robby and I knew one another before he entered alternative education and remain in contact to this day.

Permission from IRB was received in June of 2009 for the credit recovery study. Participants were interviewed twice, the researcher had frequent and prolonged contact with them in the field, and official school transcripts were dissected for data. Data was collected and analyzed simultaneously. Trustworthiness was bolstered by identifying patterns in existing research concerning African American males, triangulation of sources, and member checks.

In Chapter 4, information that resulted from data collection and analysis is presented. Specifically, incidents of racism, examples of interest convergence, and the participants' stories

are shared. Inductively developed thematic categories are expounded on in Chapter 4. These include:

- Teacher authority as defined by African American males
- Stereotyping of students by teachers
- Administrative treatment of students
- Treatment of African American male student athletes by teachers/coaches/administrators
- The role of time differs from traditional public to alternative school.

Chapter 4 also contains findings organized around the research questions.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, contains a discussion of the research, findings, interpretation of the data and conclusions drawn from the information. Recommendations for practice and applications of the research are featured as well as areas for future research.

Chapter 4 - Findings

Overview

Chapter 4 provides the details and rich, thick description of the research findings. The research was inspired by three major influences: alternative school teaching, knowledge of CRT, and involvement in teacher education. Following the overview section are six accounts detailing the participants' exits from or supplements to traditional public school and entrances into alternative school. The next three topics feature key adults, the number of sports-related and non-sports-related classes, and the number of credits above the required. Next, the six major inductively developed themes are presented; they are supported by the participants' counterstories. The themes are featured in the following order:

1. There are several differences between traditional public and alternative schools; the overarching difference is the role of time.
2. African American males believe that they are stereotyped often by teachers and other adults.
3. High school athletes receive significant favoritism over non-athletes.
4. African American males sometimes deliberately assume a demeanor that they perceive will be pleasing to the white majority.
5. African American male students respond positively to teachers who conduct themselves with clear purpose but do not flaunt their authority.
6. African American males returning to a school setting for high school credit recovery demonstrate tenacity and resist stereotypes.

The purpose of this qualitative research was to obtain insight into the educational experiences of African American male students in public high school credit recovery. The desire

to look into the educational experiences of African American males first began with my alternative school teaching career, was next bolstered by my introduction to CRT, and then solidified by my adjunct university faculty role.

As an alternative school teacher, I participated in hundreds of conversations with African American male students regarding their past educational experiences in traditional public high schools. These experiences were rarely positive, and I heard different versions of the same story over and over from African American male students. The basic plot begins as follows: boy experiences academic and social success in middle school. Markers include being on the honor roll, being known widely throughout the middle school because of his athletic prowess and being equally well-liked by fellow students and teachers. As middle school unfolds into high school, however, his experience begins to change. The boy no longer soars through classes. After two or three semesters, he often is behind his classmates in required credits and overloaded with elective credits. If he is an athlete, his schedule may have been filled purposefully by his coach with less demanding courses in order to ensure eligibility. The student is soon in real danger of not graduating as scheduled and must enter some sort of credit recovery. This was the common vignette of the African American male student; seeing it repeated in the educational lives of student after student piqued my curiosity and led to the research.

My students' stories compelled me to respond with empathy; CRT compelled me to respond intellectually. According to CRT, those who are not members of the dominant culture are more likely to experience racism than equity on an everyday basis. In fact, CRT maintains that being subjected to racism is the norm for African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and all others who do not belong to the European American mainstream (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; King, 1991; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Solorzano &

Yosso, 2001a; Vann Lynch, 2006). In public education—at district, state, and national levels—African American and Hispanic males graduate from high school at a lower rate than male and female European American and Asian Americans (Bridgeland et al., 2006; *Education Week*, 2007; Greene & Winters, 2006). On a national level, African American males are disciplined, suspended, and expelled more often than any other group (Arrington, et al., 2003; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Blanchett, 2006; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Krezmien et al., 2006; Monroe, 2005; Ottley, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; Townsend, 2000). Although it would be hyperbole to identify racism as the sole cause contributing to discrepancies in lower graduation rates and higher suspension rates, it would be irresponsible to deny completely the presence and influence of racism.

Working as an adjunct university faculty member in the Curriculum and Instruction department served as another catalyst for the research. Interacting on a semester-by-semester basis with inservice and preservice teachers allowed me to witness two distinct trends concerning the teachers' self-perceived efficacy and African American male students. The first trend consisted of raw frustration on the teachers' part. The second trend, equally if not more powerful, was the teachers' desire to improve relationships with their African American male students. I wanted to combine three main influences: urban teaching, CRT, and teachers' efficacy with African American male students.

Knowledge about African American males in credit recovery is significant for future and current teachers; it can better equip teachers to interact successfully with their African American male students. The application of CRT to the participants' interview contents and official school transcripts facilitates relevant and meaningful findings. Finally, considering the intersectionality

of gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships provides a holistic picture of African American males in credit recovery.

Now that I have reviewed the beginning of the research and the potential significance of the findings, I return to the original research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants while in the alternative school?
2. How do the participants' experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?
3. How do the participants compare their traditional public school experience to their learning center experience?

The research questions, in tandem with the interview questions, served as a catalyst for the eventual emergence of themes. First and foremost, the participants shared that how time was structured in the Learning Center contributed to their ability to individualize and be successful in their alternative education experience. Following the importance of the alternative setting time model was the theme of African American males being stereotyped. Critical Race Theory tenets—especially racism is the norm, interest convergence, and counterstories are important—were reflected in the participants' input. Table 4.1 is a visual representation of the connection between the themes, research questions, CRT tenets, interview questions, and the respondents' revelations.

Table 4.1 Connections: Themes, research questions, CRT tenets, interview questions, participants' revelation

Theme	Research Question	CRT Tenet	Interview Question	Participants' Revelations
<p>The overarching difference between traditional public and alternative school is the role of time.</p>	<p>How do the participants compare their traditional public school high school experience to their learning center experience?</p>	<p>Pursuit of social justice for the oppressed</p> <p>Time concessions in alternative settings contributed greatly to the returning students' achievement of a high school diploma</p>	<p>What is a typical day (school day) like for you? Do you have other obligations and responsibilities besides attending school? If so, please describe.</p> <p>What kind of obstacles, if any, did you face in a regular school?</p>	<p>Traditional school:</p> <p>Constant struggle to arrive to school on time</p> <p>Consequence for being tardy was missing more class time</p> <p>Challenge to receive individual help from teachers due to fast pace of class and limited time between classes</p> <p>Alternative school:</p> <p>Ability to set own school schedule around other obligations</p> <p>Self-paced progress through curriculum</p> <p>Teachers available for one-on-one tutoring</p>
<p>African American males believe that they are stereotyped often by teachers and other adults</p>	<p>How do the participants' experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?</p>	<p>Racism is the norm</p>	<p>To what extent, if any, do you believe that being an African American affected your education?</p>	<p>African American males reprimanded more severely than European American students for same offense</p> <p>African American males perceived as defiant and/or inattentive when asking teaching for clarification and/or assistance</p>

Theme	Research Question	CRT Tenet	Interview Question	Participants' Revelations
High school athletes receive significant favoritism over non-athletes	How do the participants compare their traditional public high school experience to their learning center experience?	Counterstories are important Participants' stories reveal circumstances that would otherwise remain unknown to educators Interest convergence	Were you an athlete in high school? Varsity? Football? Basketball? Track? Were you always, usually, or rarely eligible to play (GPA)?	Allowed to go to class tardy without consequence Given special cafeteria privileges and food coupons Forgiven parking tickets issued by the school district (See Figure 4.4 for complete list)
African American males sometimes deliberately assume a demeanor that they perceive will be pleasing to the white majority	How do the participants' experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?	Racism is the norm. Participants realized that as African American males they were perceived as intimidating Participants exerted effort intentionally to be pleasant and nonthreatening	What kind of relationships did you have with adults while you were in a traditional public school? Adults in authority positions? Teachers? Administrators? Coaches? What about other adults such as secretaries or custodians?	Ever-mindful of displaying good manners "Yes, Ma'am," as opposed to "Yeah" when responding to female teachers "Please" and "thank you" used consistently Monitored volume and tone of own voice to be soft and with less bass
African American male students respond positively to teachers who conduct themselves with clear purpose but do not flaunt their authority	What are the lived experiences of the participants while in the alternative school? How do the participants compare their traditional public high school experience to their learning center experience?	Counterstories are important	What else would you like to tell me about (past and current) school experiences?	They praised teachers who insisted on their best efforts. They appreciated teachers who refused to accept substandard assignments. They formed meaningful relationships with teachers who made inquiries into their past and current academic performances.

Theme	Research Question	CRT Tenet	Interview Question	Participants' Revelations
African American males returning to a school setting for high school credit recovery demonstrate tenacity and resist stereotypes	How do the participants' experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?	<p>Racism is the norm.</p> <p>Participants returned to school despite past negative experiences influenced by racism</p> <p>Counterstories are important</p> <p>Educators aware of counterstories are equipped to serve their students better and with more compassion</p> <p>Pursuit of social justice for the disenfranchised</p> <p>Obtaining a high school diploma improves one's overall quality of life</p>	<p>Did you ever witness what you thought to be racism, or racist practices, while in a traditional public high school? How about in the Learning Center? Please explain in detail</p> <p>What is your current age? What age did you leave high school? What age do you anticipate being when you earn your diploma?</p>	<p>Challenge to integrate school time with job, family, and other responsibilities</p> <p>Made the decision to return to school for credit in (among other subjects) math and English despite previous failures</p> <p>Persevered in online curriculum until all requirements met (5 of 6 participants)</p>

The next section provides background information and explains the nature of my relationship with each of the participants.

Background on Participants: Relationship with Researcher

Darren. The first time I met Darren, he was wearing brown work gloves with the fingertips cut off, khaki pants that sagged well below his waist, a black belt decorated with his name in Old English style letters, and a spotless white T-shirt over a wife-beater. He enrolled in the Learning Center at the age of 24 and graduated two years later after completing all of his required math classes. I was Darren's math teacher during his entire enrollment; for the first six

months, I heard his voice rarely or worked one-on-one with him. He was extremely quiet and was older than most of the students at the time. Occasionally, he socialized during a cigarette break but, for the most part, he deliberately chose a computer station as far away from others as possible.

Gradually, I increased my proximity to Darren. I always greeted him by name upon his arrival, whether I was sitting at my desk or working with a student. I walked around and looked over Darren's shoulder as he worked on the computer, slowly increasing the time I lingered in his area. For quite some time, Darren told me, "I'm OK, Miss Cindy, I don't need any help;" he said this despite failing the online mastery tests. I always responded with a comment which acknowledged his ability, such as, "Oh, I know you're OK; I just want to see what you're working on."

Our interactions progressed from my being a casual yet interested observer to Darren approaching me for help with specific math problems. Darren came to me for an explanation and then returned to his seat. This pattern continued for at least the first six months of his time at the Learning Center.

When Darren's son was born, there was a noticeable change in Darren. He attended school more regularly, had an obvious desire to finish his classes so he could graduate, and he became comfortable sitting beside me as we faced the computer monitor and its math together. Darren regularly brought pictures of his son to school and took his new role of fatherhood seriously. He provided financially for and participated in the daily care of his son.

Darren needed all of the required math classes to graduate because he had never passed a math class while enrolled in traditional public high school. I was the only math instructor at the Learning Center, so Darren and I spent many hours together. Even after spending so much time

with him, I did not know about his high school years and what a gifted athlete he had been.

Darren always was focused on school and nothing else when he was at school; he was not one to engage in small talk.

Darren liked to read African American works and was especially fond of Malcolm X. He always had a copy of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Haley & X, 1964) with him; sometimes he pushed his chair back, away from the computer monitor, and read for awhile until he was ready to tackle the math again. He was raised Baptist but was very curious about Islam; he could converse intelligently about the different leadership styles of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X; he favored and could recite from memory Malcolm X's philosophy: "I firmly believe that Negroes have the right to fight against these racists, by any means that are necessary" (Haley & X, 1964, p. 374).

Possibly because I had worked with him so much one-or-one, or because he thought of me "like a second mom," Darren shared his story with me after he graduated. After hearing from Darren why he failed to graduate from a traditional public high school, and understanding that he excelled at three different varsity sports, I knew that his was a story worth revealing. When I asked him, Darren agreed readily to be interviewed.

Robby. All six of the participants knew me, but in different degrees of familiarity and context. The strongest bond existed between me and Robby, the second participant, because we were together in various contexts for the past seven years. He was one of my sons' classmates, and a regular visitor to my home. I also tutored him throughout his high school years. In addition, I taught several of his cousins when I was a middle school teacher and I knew his mother. After he graduated from college and attended community college, I remained in contact with Robby by phone and by letter throughout his incarceration. Robby was well aware of my

own educational pursuits and was interested keenly when I left my district job to enter alternative education.

Robby and I had many kitchen table conversations about relationships, school, sports, racism, and white privilege. An ever-changing combination of individuals joined us at various times: my sons, other high school athletes that I tutored, their friends. Inevitably, the topic of racism in public schools emerged. We discussed the reality of racism; agreeing that it was less obvious but still ubiquitous. We also discussed the disparity between the consequences assigned to African American and European American students for identical infractions such as talking during class, not bringing supplies, or being in the hallway without written permission. African American students were far more likely to be sent to an administrator while European American students were treated more leniently with only a warning. And, since the kitchen table conversations usually included athletes from basketball, football, wrestling, and baseball, we definitely discussed sports.

The young men were open to and fascinated by the bits and pieces of CRT that I shared with them. They wholeheartedly agreed with the first tenet: racism is the norm (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). They understood the concept of interest convergence—that those who are dominant allow the less-powerful privileges only when it reciprocally benefits the majority (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, the young men did not see how it could apply to their status as elite athletes who were receiving less than elite educations.

It is important to note that none of the officially interviewed or other athletes believed that they were being used or treated badly while they were playing high school sports actively. However, as two to five years passed after their departure or graduation from high school, they

complained about not being pushed or challenged academically and feeling unprepared for the “real” world of work. This is discussed in more detail in this chapter and in Chapter 5.

Steven. Although I actually spent the least amount of time with Steven, his outgoing and accessible personality made building a teacher/student relationship easy and delightful. He only needed two English classes to fulfill his graduation requirements and attended a traditional public school near the Learning Center. Steven was a senior and got out of school at 1 PM rather than the traditional dismissal time of 3 PM. When he left the regular high school, he came to the Learning Center for the duration of the afternoon; he was enrolled concurrently in both schools.

Steven adjusted quickly and easily to whatever surroundings he found himself in; he was well-liked by his peers, teachers, and coaches. He interacted with people from all walks of life with an easy, inviting grace. Despite having a large spot on the left side of his face that was missing pigment, a condition that might have been socially crippling to other adolescents, Steven exuded confidence and good cheer. When called “Spot,” or “Blotchy,” Steven responded with hearty laughter and said (good-naturedly): “I know, right? But I still look better on my worst day than a lot of people do on their best day!”

Steven was not the typical Learning Center student. He had two parents in the home, no involvement with the law, high standardized test scores, no children or children on the way, and enjoyed a large support system that included church, community, and school. Academically, Steven functioned significantly above average; his only hindrance was his inability to focus on his studies due to his preoccupation with being social. In short, Steven talked too much. He talked to his classmates. He talked to his teachers. He talked to any individual who entered the room: electrician, fire inspector, secretary, etc. Compounding his habit of constant chattering was

his laxness in turning in assigned work. The combination of these two resulted in two failed semesters of English in the traditional public high school.

Jacob. Jacob was in and out of the Learning Center. He needed several English and social studies classes. Although he loved to read, and was by far the most well read of all the participants, he despised English class and had a strong aversion to writing. This voracious reader and lover of history, I believe, would have excelled in school if he had been allowed to choose his own reading material and help design the curriculum. Jacob had a tendency to become frustrated at his rate of progress at the alternative school; he would drop out and go get a job. After a few weeks or months of working a dead end job, he would reenroll in credit recovery. This cycle continued for two entire school years; sometimes Jacob decided to pursue a General Education Degree (GED) and “hurry up and get it [graduation] done.” Something about the GED possibility nagged at him, though, and he admitted that the GED felt less legitimate than a high school diploma. He hated “settling,” so he abandoned the GED idea and returned to the Learning Center.

With each transition, I came to know more about Jacob. Throughout his active and inactive status as a student, I was a constant at the Learning Center. When he returned each time, it was with added zeal and determination. He was a no-nonsense young man who made remarks like, “I am going straight to you with my questions because you’ve been here the longest.”

Jacob was knowledgeable about local politics, watched five different news programs, followed current events closely, and was familiar with both CRT and the idea of white privilege. He had a disdain for pop culture. His serious demeanor and disregard for trends in music and clothing made him seem older than his years.

Terrance. Of the six participants, Terrance was enrolled in the Learning Center for the least amount of time and number of classes. Therefore, I did not know him as well as the other five participants. Terrance's enrollment in the Learning Center was mandated by law. He was living in a residential correctional facility and obtaining his high school diploma was one of the terms of his release. During the first week of his attendance, Terrance complained long and hard. He wanted an education, but he was perfectly content with simply taking the GED and skipping the high school diploma. He reasoned that he could easily pass the GED; he could then use his day time seeking employment (another condition of his release). Despite his appeals and arguments, Terrance's supervisor refused to compromise and approve the GED; he insisted that Terrance earn a fully accredited high school diploma.

Terrance did not require nor want any assistance with his coursework. Like Jacob, Terrance was an excellent reader; unlike Jacob, he was able to engage in the online curriculum and (as he put it) "jump through whatever hoops they [correctional officials] want to put in front of me." Having begun credit recovery in mid-April 2009, Terrance was not able to finish in time to be eligible to "walk" in May 2009. To "walk" means to participate in the formal commencement exercise. The students who finish all required course work by a set date, which always falls in the last week of May, are then eligible and encouraged to participate in the early June graduation ceremony. The students are provided with announcements, gowns, mortar boards, tassels, and diploma covers.

If the May deadline is missed, the students still have an opportunity to be counted as a member of that year's class if they complete the required course work by June. The Learning Center stays open several weeks longer than regular schools. The students who miss the May deadline but are close to finishing their classes may continue to come to school. Then, their

target date becomes the end of June and one teacher (me) is there to help them complete graduation requirements. This is the situation that Terrance found himself in; he was almost done but still needed one more English class. Terrance claimed that being able to participate in graduation was of no concern to him; he was motivated to graduate by his legal situation. Also, he was quick to point out, it was better to go to school than to pound the pavement looking for a job or to stay at the residential facility, and those were his only other options.

The Learning Center—air-conditioned, with Internet access, quiet, only a few students present—was a far more attractive option than the hot, loud, and crowded residential facility where he was an inmate. At the time, Terrance was being held in a minimum security, residential facility. He was free to leave during the day to job hunt and/or attend school. In regard to job hunting, Terrance reasoned correctly that having a high school diploma would enable him to get a job that was better and higher-paying than those jobs available to dropouts.

Larry. Larry's family is well known in the local community. His paternal grandparents had 13 children; seven sons and six daughters all grew up to participate in the family's musical and business ventures. At different times the family has been known for operating a successful soul food restaurant, performing as a rhythm and blues band locally and beyond, and being a dynasty in local high school basketball. One of Larry's uncles in particular reached an impressive status in the world of rhythm and blues; at the pinnacle of his career he toured with an American band famous for its psychedelic music. After the mid-sixties, Larry's uncle continued to perform but in smaller and smaller venues.

"They loved hard, worked hard, and played hard," Larry's father often said about his parents. The family was not without controversy; they were suspected of drug abuse and association with racketeers. His mother infamously cut his father with a knife during one of their

legendary arguments. As most lifelong citizens of the featured city did, I knew of Larry's family but was personally acquainted with only one member; Larry's uncle and I were employed by the same school district and had occasional professional contact with one another.

Descriptions of Participants

Participant 1: Darren. Darren, 28-years-old, was a star athlete in high school. He participated in four different varsity sports: track, wrestling, basketball, football. He was raised by a single mother and has a younger brother. His mother received public assistance throughout his childhood and teen years; the family often struggled to pay rent and purchase adequate groceries. When Darren was 26-years-old, his son was born. Darren believes that becoming a father was a turning point for him; he stopped "partying" and "got serious about school." Although he no longer has an intimate relationship with his son's mother, they have remained friendly co-parents. Darren, who at times sold marijuana to make money, now works at a parts manufacturing plant. He also is attending community college where he is training to become a fire fighter.

Darren is 6'3" tall with a muscular frame and a fast gait. He is a quiet, reserved man who speaks softly but with purpose and intensity. Darren has a dark brown complexion, closely shaved black hair, and black eyes. He is a cigarette smoker and is trying to quit because he dislikes his "decreased lung capacity" and does not want his son "to be around that nasty, second-hand smoke."

Darren thinks of himself as more than a brother to his younger sibling. Four years older than his brother, Darren always has been compelled to help support his family financially. He gives his mother and brother money from every payroll check. Darren regrets that he was not

always the best example for his little brother and is pained that “my little bro is runnin’ with the wrong crowd and I’m afraid he’s gonna get caught up in the streets.”

Participant 2: Robby. Robby is a charismatic, 26-year-old man who was an athletic superstar in high school. When he played for Northwest, the newest and most elite of the public high schools, his football game performances often made the 10 o’clock news’ sports highlights. He broke school records in the 800 meter run, the 4 x 400 meter relay, and the 1600 meter run. Robby also played basketball but was much more of a standout in football and track. Partly due to his mother’s drug use, he was born 4-weeks early, and weighed only four pounds at birth. Robby remained small for his size throughout childhood and adolescence. He eventually grew to 5’9”. In his junior year, he was homecoming king and enjoyed enormous popularity throughout his four years of high school.

Robby had a reputation as a smooth-talking ladies’ man; this status would later color and complicate his life. After high school graduation, Robby attended a local community college on a football scholarship until he moved to Oklahoma to be with his father. Robby became caught up in his father’s illegal business and was arrested for transporting minors across state lines and forcing them to become truck-stop prostitutes. He pleaded guilty to sex-trafficking and was sentenced to five years in federal prison. Robby refused to “snitch” on his father and decided to accept a plea bargain; it was a decision that he later regretted deeply. Prosecutors told Robby that they would take every opportunity to paint him as a manipulative pimp who used women for profit. They told him that they would focus on his colorful reputation, emphasizing how charismatic he was, and a conviction was inevitable.

The fallout from Robby’s arrest was enormous; the local news featured video clips of his football feats, his “Big Brother” (a mentor provided by Big Brothers/Big Sisters Organization)

was bombarded with requests for interviews, and the local newspaper featured the story on its front page. The charges were filed in another state, but the publicity about Robby's arrest was extensive in his hometown.

Robby did not meet his father until he was 8-years-old and only saw him a few times between the ages of 8-years-old and 18-years-old. Then, at age 18, Robby left his mother in Kansas and moved to Oklahoma to live with his father. Robby chose to leave Kansas despite his mother's objections. His father's promises of money and time spent together on a farm were too alluring for Robby to resist. He was raised by a single mother, who served prison time for possession of crack cocaine, and various other relatives. He did not attend school on a regular basis until middle school and struggled with reading.

Robby joined the Big Brothers Big Sisters, a youth mentoring program, when he was 6-years-old and was assigned a "big brother." James, 24-years-old at the time, quickly became a major presence in Robby's life. He hired tutors for Robby, took him to basketball and football games, took him out to eat, and let him tour the local television station where he worked. Robby described James' influence: "Basically, he did everything for me and with me that any father would do with a son." James is still in contact with Robby and has stood by him throughout all of his legal troubles and incarceration.

Robby was released from custody in 2009 after serving five years in prison, transitioning to a halfway house, then house arrest, and then probation. All together, his time in custody totaled 82 months. Since leaving prison, Robby has obtained a full time job at a major grocery store chain. He progressed quickly from sacker to checker to fuel station attendant and now manages the frozen foods department. He owns a vehicle, lives with his mom and her husband,

attends church on a regular basis, and vows never to let anyone “bring him down to the lowest level” again.

Participant 3: Steven. Steven is a self-proclaimed “PK” (preacher’s kid). He has an irrepressible sense of humor, laughs frequently, and exudes confidence. At 23-years-old, he is engaged to his girlfriend of four years and working at the local state university as a youth counselor. Steven plays bass guitar, sings, and regularly performs in the city’s trendy Old Town district. His band has regular weekend engagements at a cigar bar and a wine bar; the band also has performed in wider venues and has a solid following. Steven is a well-rounded and versatile young man. He formerly worked at a high end men’s clothing store; his wardrobe is classic and his appearance is impeccable.

Steven played basketball and football in high school; in his senior year he was one of the city’s top football players. After high school graduation, he played football for Oklahoma State University. Steven attended three different kinds of public high schools: comprehensive, arts and science magnet, and a learning center.

“Not your typical black man” is how Steven describes himself. “I have a French last name, can speak ebonics or the king’s English, and play everything from jazz to rock ‘n roll.” He is extremely close to his father (a well-known and highly respected member of both the black church community and county government) and his mother (an accountant). Steven credits his father for showing him “how to be a godly man,” and how to “get along with everyone, no matter what race or color they are.” Steven’s complexion has a mahogany tone; he has a full, thick beard, is 6’2” and has a solid, muscular build. Because of his beard, and his size, people often think that he is “more like 27 or 28 than 23.”

Steven likes to defy being categorized so he is amused by others' reactions to his French last name ("I'm not a Tyrone Johnson!"), his older appearance, his fondness for wearing "skateboard clothes," and his command of several vernaculars. "I talk one way at church, another way at home, a third way in the club, and a fourth way at work! And I can make up a fifth, sixth, and seventh way for any other situation."

Soon, Steven will be employed as a math paraprofessional in a local middle school. He is excited about working with young people, the opportunity to emphasize the importance of education, and the schedule that will allow him to continue to pursue his musical ventures.

Participant 4: Jacob. Jacob is the son of a Nigerian man and an African American woman. His parents divorced when Jacob was 4-years-old; Jacob's father moved to another state. For all practical purposes, Jacob was a fatherless child. Between the ages of 4 and 10, he rarely saw his father. When Jacob was in the fifth grade, his father died in a car accident. Jacob is the youngest of four sons; Jacob's closest brother is ten years his senior; at the time of their father's death, Jacob was the only son still in the home. The other three brothers already had their own children, homes, and jobs. Although they interacted occasionally with Jacob, and appeared in his life periodically, they also emphasized that they were his brothers, not his father. Jacob remembers his oldest brother telling him, "I'm not your daddy, I don't want to be your daddy, you're going to have to figure life out just like I did—on my own."

Jacob's mother attended college and became a social worker. She is a quiet and passive woman who discovered after her husband's death that he had two other families aside from the sons he had fathered with her. Jacob and his mother had a serious parting of the ways when he was 17-years-old. He says that his mother kicked him out of her home, but "doesn't choose to remember it that way now." Their relationship became so strained that Jacob says, "When I was

17-years-old, I remember thinking that if my mother died, I wouldn't even go to her funeral.” Jacob spent a semester of his junior year, for all practical purposes, homeless. He drifted from friends' to relatives' couches but did not have a home of his own. He played football briefly but “got into it with the coach and quit.” Throughout his freshman, sophomore, and part of his junior year, Jacob was enrolled in advanced placement math and science classes but struggled with English. Eventually, he left the traditional public high school that he attended and enrolled in a learning center. That was two years ago and he has yet to finish his diploma.

Jacob is living with his mother again and has decided to pursue a General Education Degree (GED) rather than an accredited high school diploma. He is now 20-years-old and has been speaking to Army and Air Force recruiters about joining the military.

Participant 5: Terrance. When pressed, 23-year-old Terrance admits that he is an inactive gang member. He served jail time for possession with intent to distribute marijuana. Prior to his confinement, he was an active gang member who attended a comprehensive public high school where he sold marijuana. He was raised mostly by his single mom but also had several adults—friends of his mother and father—that contributed to his upbringing. His childhood and teenage years were chaotic as his mother and father cycled in and out of jail. Terrance lived periodically with the various men and women that he called his “aunts and uncles.”

Terrance dresses in the stereotypical rapper style: sagging (but sharply creased) jeans, expensive athletic shoes, numerous large gold medallions, chunky rings, and diamond earrings. His jeans are belted tightly, not at his waist but below his buttocks. Underneath and above the jeans several layers are visible: two pairs of mesh basketball shorts and two pairs of plaid boxers. His torso is covered first by an athletic shirt known as a wife beater, then a t-shirt emblazoned

with a holographic image of Tupac, and topped off with a button-down Polo dress shirt. All of his clothing items look fresh, clean, heavily starched, and pressed. His wallet hangs by a chain from a belt loop into his back pocket. Since his pants are so low, his wallet hangs just above the back of his knees.

When he was a freshman, Terrance wanted to play high school football; the coaches were interested in Terrance for his size and speed. But, Terrance changed schools as a freshman because he moved frequently. His sophomore, junior, and senior years were less nomadic but by then his gang affiliation had usurped his desire to play sports.

He is a Hollywood-handsome young man, who was adored by the high school girls and envied by the boys. By his own admission, Terrance went to school mostly to socialize. He did not care about his attendance because he suffered no consequences for truancy. He did not complete homework but made sure he was in class on test days. Terrance describes his testing ability as “great on all kinds of tests; I always got a really high score.”

Obtaining his high school diploma, not a GED, was a condition for Terrance’s release from a residential custodial facility. Terrance had signed up to take the GED because in the state of his residence, the GED is a multiple choice test over five different subjects: math, reading, writing, social studies, and science. He felt confident that he could pass the GED based on his past testing experiences. The court would not concede to a GED so Terrance enrolled in a learning center to finish his last three required high school classes.

Terrance continues to live under several restrictions because he is in the local police department’s database of gang members. He cannot wear orange or blue because they are associated with his street gang. There are certain areas of the city, predominantly African American, that he is not allowed to enter and a long list of former associates that he cannot see.

He cannot go to the city's biggest mall because it has been the site of previous gang conflicts, and he is forbidden from going to several convenience stores throughout the city for the same reason. The conditions of his parole allow him to attend the local 4-year university and to live with his mother. Terrance is now a fulltime college student taking his general education requirements. He wants to go into property development or real estate but is aware that his felon status will make it more difficult for him to get a well-paying job.

Participant 6: Larry. Larry dropped out of high school in his senior year at 17-years-old and went to work at the Wichita Greyhound Park. He stayed at the dog-racing venue for seven years; his responsibilities included everything from track maintenance to transporting and training the greyhounds. Larry lost the job that he loved when a proposal to add slot machines to the track was defeated by voters and the track closed. The married father of three young children, Larry could not find a job. He did not have a high school diploma or a GED and his job at the track was his only work experience. Larry enrolled in the Community Learning Center to finish his high school course work.

Buoyed by the support of his wife, who worked fulltime, Larry became the primary caretaker of their two sons (ages 6 and 7) and their 2-year-old daughter. Larry, whose parents are both African American, and his wife, whose father is African American and mother is Hispanic, were both raised Catholic. They are parishioners of a local Catholic parish that is known for its majority African American population. Their two oldest children attend the parish school and Larry was asked to work in the latch key program. While still attending the Learning Center, he became the assistant director of the before and after school latch key program. He remained in the position until after graduation when he became employed at a veterinarian hospital. Larry is outgoing and cheerful; teachers and classmates alike looked forward to his arrival at school. He

provided transportation and encouragement for two of his long-time friends, did much of his schoolwork at home so that he could maximize class time for computer work, and earned credits in record time.

Before he found his niche at the track, Larry had a lackadaisical attitude towards school. “For me,” he says, “it was just a place to go and see my friends.” He did not get into trouble because he “was hardly ever in school.” He has a large family on his father’s side—six uncles and six aunts—but he lived mostly with his maternal grandmother as a child and teen. Larry has one sister who lived with his paternal grandmother for most of their youth. Now, his parents are a settled and responsible couple but that was not always the case. When Larry and his sister were elementary and middle school ages, their mother and father were “busy drinking, drugging, and going to the club.”

Larry was the students’ and teachers’ unanimous choice for commencement speaker. He still is employed fulltime as a veterinary technician in a small animal hospital. In August of 2010, Larry began his pre-vet studies at a local four-year university.

The next section is devoted to the participants’ accounts of leaving or supplementing traditional public school with the alternative setting of a Learning Center. The participants are featured in the same order as they were interviewed.

Leaving Traditional Public High School: Six Different Perspectives

Young people drop out of high school for a plethora of reasons: pregnancy, motherhood, fatherhood, financial obligations to family, the necessity of becoming employed, repeated failure to earn credits and progress toward graduation, boredom, health issues that require long term hospitalization, mental health issues that require treatment, chronic lack of transportation, and

many more (Bridgeland et. al., 2006; Center for Public Education, 2010; *Education Week*, 2007; Kemp, 2006). The six participants in this study also had varying reasons.

Darren: Turned away at commencement. Darren, the first participant, never intended to leave traditional public high school. In fact, he believed up to and on the day of the graduation ceremony that he would be a full participant in commencement exercises. He anticipated marching in with his class, walking across the stage as his name was read, shaking the hands of various dignitaries, receiving his diploma, and being photographed in his cap and gown.

Three weeks before graduation, Darren's mom rode the city bus to his high school to make sure that he was, in fact, going to graduate. She met with his academic counselor who assured her that even if he failed his current math class he would still be allowed to walk at the commencement exercise but then would have to attend summer school. The counselor was mistaken; Darren actually needed several math classes; therefore, he could not receive administrative permission to participate in graduation. But, based on the word of Darren's assigned counselor, she began to tell her extended family, neighbors, and friends that Darren was going to graduate from high school. No one in his immediate or extended family had ever graduated from high school before so the news that he was graduating was a source of great pride and joy.

Despite great financial difficulty, his mother managed to purchase the formal cap, gown, and tassel; the 8x10 graduation photograph that would be taken as he stepped off of the stage, and semi-formal clothes to wear to commencement. For a woman who depended on public assistance and a minimum wage job for her family's sustenance, this purchase required a tremendous sacrifice. She was able to outfit Darren but not herself or his two younger brothers. Darren rode the city bus, by himself, for a distance of 11 miles and for over two hours to reach

the local convention center where the commencement exercises were held. His mom and two brothers, against Darren's expressed wishes, chose to stay home rather than attend graduation in their shabby clothes. His mother's main concern was that Darren not be embarrassed by his family's appearance. She knew that their clothing would be in stark contrast to the trendy and new clothing of the other graduates' families.

He arrived at the convention center early, wearing his new slacks, shirt, shoes, and tie; he carried his gown in a plastic garment bag. Darren walked around the convention center, a circular building, and waited for his classmates to appear and for the instructions to line up for the procession. He had attended rehearsal earlier in the week, chosen one of his female friends to be his walking partner, and designated a spot in the lobby to meet his group. Instead, Darren was approached by two district security guards and two city police officers.

"Is this him?" asked one of the city police officers.

The district security guard looked at an 8 ½ x 11 piece of white paper in his hand; it had Darren's yearbook photo in the center.

"Yeah, that's him. We don't want any trouble."

An alarmed Darren asked, "What's goin' on? Why are the police here?"

"Look," the older of the two city police officers started, "you know that you're not supposed to be here tonight. We're asking you to leave without making a scene."

"What? Not supposed to be here?" Darren was incredulous.

"You didn't pass all of your classes, Hunter; you know that you can't walk. You know it and your mom knows it; there was no reason for you to come here tonight other than to make a disturbance," the second district security guard said impatiently.

“Awww no, aww hell no, “Darren began to protest. “You best ask Mr. Lemmings.” (Mr. Lemmings was the academic counselor.) “He just told my mom that I *could* walk.”

“Now listen here, we’ve got strict and clear instructions from the high school administration that we are to remove you from the grounds,” said the younger city officer.

Darren, who repeatedly asked to see an administrator, was told that if he didn’t “calm down” and “leave the premises” that he would be “arrested for disorderly conduct.” Darren tried to contain his rapidly escalating temper. “Please,” he begged, “my mom spent so much money on my new clothes, and I promise you that I have permission to walk, I’m not here to cause trouble, I just want to walk with my class.”

The four officers moved in closer to Darren. “We’re ordering you to leave, Hunter, you’re just a kid who didn’t want to do his own work,” the senior district officer stated.

“At least let me get my picture taken with my friends!” By this time, Darren’s friends had arrived, were watching the officers speaking to Darren and could sense escalating tension. One of his male friends approached and asked, “Darren, hey man, what’s goin’ on?”

“Man, they sayin’ I can’t walk; that I aint even supposed to be here,” Darren replied.

“What?” His friends looked at the officers, “Don’t you know who this is? Darren? Darren Hunter? He lettered in track, football, and basketball.”

“I know his name,” said the officer.

“He broke state records; he carried the basketball team through city league! How can you say he doesn’t belong here?”

The district officer replied, “This does not concern you. You need to step away.”

Darren became louder and insisted that he was going to walk and that he had every right to walk. The officers moved in closer to Darren and insisted that he lower his voice and “just leave.” The two city officers positioned themselves—one on his right side and one on his left side—they grabbed Darren’s arms, placed them behind his back and cuffed him. Darren was humiliated; he was angry, confused, and shocked.

The city officers then escorted him to the convention center doors; as they walked they explained that they really “didn’t want to arrest” Darren but they would if he did not leave. If he tried to “make a scene,” they promised to arrest him and take him to jail. The law enforcement officers told him that if he went to jail he would be there for at least 48 hours unless someone could “afford to bail his ass out.”

Darren left the public venue. He started walking home; there were no more busses running at this time in the evening. The center was eleven miles away from his home; he walked all of the way home, tore off his new tie and threw it in the street. It was raining; he tore his tassel apart and discarded it, lump by lump of string, on the wet pavement. He launched his mortar board like a Frisbee into the dripping trees, removed his stiff new dress shoes and threw them over the telephone wires, and ripped open his dress shirt without unbuttoning it. By the time he arrived home, his feet were blistered, his composure was shattered, and his mood was foul. His mother and two little brothers were in bed when he arrived home. Darren left his traditional public high school without a diploma, lacking several math classes, and disgraced at what should have been one of the happiest and proudest days of his young life.

Five years later, Darren reflected on the graduation night incident:

They cuffed me and took me out. They kept sayin’ that I wasn’t gonna sabotage their night. All the sports, and all the stuff that I ever did for that school—I made a lot of

money for that school—and all for nothin’. I broke a lot of records and I set a lot of records for that school. My name is all over that gym, and my jersey was retired, I have records for freshman/sophomore qualifying for state. But they just showed me no love. They just used me. I don’t know how you can use a high school student, but high school athletes do get used. They really thought that I was there to sabotage they graduation. They really did. Four police officers escorted me out. Four. And I did get mad. I at least wanted to take a picture with my class. I had new clothes on, cap and gown, and they wouldn’t even let me get in a picture. Nothin’. They was mad. They was scared of me. I don’t know why, but they were.

Darren partly attributes his generally negative view of law enforcement officers and other authority figures to the incident related above. He has no doubt that the after-effects of being cuffed and escorted out contributed greatly to his years-long delay in returning to high school.

Robby: Concurrent enrollment in traditional public and alternative schools. Robby was enrolled concurrently in credit recovery and traditional public high school. As a junior, he was told that he needed to complete two semesters of English III in order to graduate on time. Robby’s academic counselor informed him of his missing credits in May of his junior year.

During his senior year, Robby finished his high school classes at noon. He attended the Community Learning Center in the afternoons. Robby was one of two participants who attended credit recovery and high school classes simultaneously. When Robby was a junior, there were three Learning Centers in the district; one was located in a shopping mall less than three miles from the high school; one was located across town in another shopping mall; the third Learning Center was the Community Learning Center located in the predominantly African American, lowest SES area of the city. Robby was not given the usual three choices of Center West, Center

East (the shopping centers), or the Community Learning Center. This merits mention because Center West was the district's officially designated Learning Center for students from Robby's high school. European American students were sent to Center West for credit recovery by default; the high school teachers communicated with the Learning Center staff. No such arrangement existed between the Community Learning Center and the high school. However, he was told by his counselor that it had already been arranged for him to go to the Community Learning Center and complete his English classes. Unaware of any other choice, and knowing that several of his teammates (also African American) already had attended the Community Learning Center, Robby followed his counselor's instructions and entered credit recovery while still attending traditional public high school Monday through Friday mornings. Robby graduated "on time" and participated in commencement exercises.

Steven: English credit recovery. Steven, the irrepressible preacher's kid, was the other participant who attended traditional public high school and credit recovery at the same time. He, too, needed to make up both semesters of English III—the class usually taken during eleventh grade—but a counselor did not catch the lacking English classes in Steven's case. Steven's father, a part time minister and full time county official took it upon himself to research the district's graduation requirements and his son's transcripts. This required knowledge of the district's website, transportation to the pupil accounting department located in the downtown area, and the ability to communicate successfully with the registrar's office, high school administration, coaches, and high school teachers. Many students in the district who find themselves in need of credit recovery do not have a personal advocate like Steven's father.

Unlike Robby, who received official notification in his junior year that he needed to make up English, Steven would not have known had it not been for his father's diligence. Not

only did Steven's father discover the missing English credits on his own son's transcripts but he also researched the various options for credit recovery and found the three possible locations himself. After careful consideration, Steven's father decided that the Learning Centers in the malls may be too tempting of an environment for his hyper-social son. He suspected that Steven would spend his time window shopping, trolling for female companionship, and occupying the food court. For these reasons, and because it was geographically closer to both Steven's home and his high school, Steven's father chose to enroll him in the Community Learning Center. Rarely does an enrollment into credit recovery take place in this fashion; the usual procedure is for the academic counselor to notify the high school administration who then contacts the designated Learning Center administration to receive permission to apply to credit recovery. Steven's father was not deterred in the enrollment process and persevered until his son was enrolled officially in credit recovery as well as a student in good standing at his regular high school. Steven graduated on time and participated in commencement exercises.

Jacob: Urged to leave traditional public school when he fell behind in credits.

"There's no way you're going to graduate on time; you might as well withdraw from school." Jacob's academic counselor delivered this message to him in August before his senior year. Other than withdrawal, Jacob was not offered any options. He knew other students who had remained enrolled in traditional public high school while attending classes in credit recovery at the Community Learning Center but when he asked about it, Jacob was told that he was "too far behind." Jacob then asked if he could "double up" on English classes. Students were encouraged strongly not to take more than one level of English in the same school year but sometimes exceptions were made. Jacob was told that he would not be allowed to take English III and English IV because "his reading scores were not strong enough to support that arrangement and,

again, he was too far behind.” An European American student with an equal number of credits was not allowed to withdraw from the regular high school; his schedule was modified so that he could take English III and English IV simultaneously at the regular school.

At the beginning of my senior year, the counselor told me that I would not have enough credits to graduate and honestly I feel like it was a bad situation because I know of other students who the counselor and the administrators worked with—like let them make up credits in the summer, and/or let them walk with their class but then later make up what they needed—but nothing like that was offered to me. I didn’t even get told that option. I was just told that I would not graduate on time. (Jacob)

At the beginning of his senior year, Jacob was living with his mother again after a long period of estrangement. She was disappointed when Jacob told her that he was being told to withdraw from school but did not visit the school administrators on Jacob’s behalf or intervene in any other way. Jacob’s mother was not willing to contact district officials, or investigate credit recovery, or determine exactly what graduation requirements he was lacking. Jacob believes that his mother did not advocate for him for two main reasons; first, she is by nature an extremely passive and timid woman. Second, his mother was overwhelmed with her own student loan payments, the monthly mortgage, a car payment, insurance, and all of the other expenses that daily living entails. She needed the regular income that Jacob could contribute if he obtained a job. Jacob felt obligated to “willingly” withdraw from school and get a job.

He did not graduate on time; he entered credit recovery eventually but quickly established a pattern of exiting and reentering credit recovery. As of October 2010, he was again enrolled in the Community Learning Center and had 17 of the required 22 credits to graduate. If he remains enrolled and maintains the pace of credit acquisition he began in August of 2010, he

should graduate in approximately ten months. He vows not to participate in the Learning Centers' commencement exercises and instead wants to "enlist in the Army."

Terrance: High school diploma mandated over GED. Terrance attended several different high schools; he attended more high schools than any other participant. His frequent moves within the district were administrative transfers; he was never at one school for very long before being identified correctly as having some sort of gang affiliation. While attending his last traditional public high school, he was stopped as he left campus for lunch. He was an upperclassman, and had his own car, so he could leave campus legitimately but the other students in the car included freshmen. Freshmen were not allowed to leave the campus for lunch so the officer had every right to stop Terrance's car. The district officer stopped him and was joined quickly by a city police officer in a cruiser. Terrance and the five other students were ordered out of his '91 Crown Victoria. During the course of searching his car, the city police officer found a laptop computer. The district officer suspected that Terrance had stolen the laptop from the school's computer lab and he confiscated it. Terrance insisted that he had not stolen the laptop. The younger students were allowed to return to the school building and Terrance was instructed to park his car and return to the building.

The city officers escorted Terrance to one of the assistant principals' offices while the district officer checked on the status of the laptop computer. It was, in fact, stolen—not from the school's computer lab and not by Terrance—but from a Rent-A-Center in a nearby city. Terrance had received the laptop as a birthday gift from his uncle. Once security informed the administration that the laptop was not stolen from the school, but was indeed stolen, Terrance was told that he would not be receiving the computer back. This infuriated Terrance who became verbally abusive towards the security guard. He threatened the guard and the guard's family

before spitting on the door of the security office. He then stormed out of the school, kicking at various doors along the way, and roared off in his car.

Amazingly, even after this display of temper including threats and vandalism, Terrance was not expelled from school. The school had one of the first site-based computer labs featuring the same curriculum as the Learning Centers. Terrance was allowed to come to school in late afternoon periods when no other students were in the library and work on the online curriculum. He only had 1.5 credits, or 3 classes, to complete and his graduation requirements would be fulfilled. He was told that since he already had attended all of the district's comprehensive high schools, and that the laptop had not been stolen from the school, he would be allowed to continue attending under certain conditions. Aside from the limited hours, he was not allowed to be in the hallways during regular passing periods, and he was not to interact with the other students. Terrance agreed to the conditions; he was already on probation from an earlier drug charge and it would be revoked if he was not enrolled actively. The arrangement worked for several weeks and Terrance made significant progress towards finishing his needed classes.

One day, Terrance made a pencil drawing of a machine gun surrounded by gang graffiti; after adding what he deemed to be sufficient details, he signed the drawing first with his real name and then, in another corner, with his street moniker. When his allotted time for online curriculum work was over for the day, he discarded the drawing. Before he threw it away, he tore the drawing into several pieces. The drawing was on a standard piece of wide-lined notebook paper.

Several weeks later, Terrance was called to the assistant principal's office as soon as he arrived for his afternoon lessons. The assistant principal showed Terrance a corner of notebook paper with his signature on it and asked him to confirm that it was indeed his signature. Terrance

acknowledged that it was his signature. The assistant principal then produced the entire drawing—pieced and taped together—and told Terrance that he would be going to an expulsion hearing unless Terrance withdrew himself voluntarily from school. Terrance agreed to withdraw; the next day he enrolled in the Towne East Learning Center. Before he completed his required classes, his probation was revoked; he was arrested and taken into custody. More than two years later, Terrance graduated from the Work Force Learning Center.

Larry: Returned to high school in his late 20s. Larry never withdrew officially from his traditional public high school; he stopped going after an altercation with a school resource officer. He rode the bus to school every day but then left campus with his friends to “mess around and do stuff I shouldn’t oughta been doin’.” His nicotine addiction often prompted him to leave school so that he could smoke cigarettes. Larry left any semblance of desire to achieve academic success behind when he exited eighth grade and entered high school. To Larry, traditional public high school was first and foremost a social outing. He attended parochial school until eighth grade. Entering a traditional public high school was a significant paradigm shift. Not only was the traditional public high school much bigger, but it also had a different pace and climate. The parochial school was small, tightly knit, and faith based. His maternal grandmother was the school secretary and he was extremely close to the male principal. Prior to entering high school, Larry felt connected to the adults in his school environment and wanted to please them.

But in high school, Larry recalls feeling rushed, disconnected, and crowded. He resisted the regimented daily schedule and failed to adjust to the packed hallways during passing periods or the loud bells signifying class changes. Despite receiving specific attention from the high school coaches because he “looked like he would be a good basketball player,” he missed

receiving individual attention and being under the watchful eye of his principal. He had no interest in playing any kind of sports; he was, however, keenly interested in animals.

Larry returned to the high school campus after one of his unauthorized smoke breaks and was approached by the school resource officer. He was given a ticket for minor in possession of tobacco and suspended for five days. Larry made half-hearted and lackadaisical attempts to go to class and “do better in school” but for the most part his truancy continued. After the initial receipt of the minor in possession ticket, Larry received two more tickets in the space of three months. The situations that resulted in the issuance of a ticket all involved truancy and an attempt on Larry’s part to return to campus.

On the third occasion, the resource officer told Larry that he “no longer attended the school.” If the officer ever saw him on campus again, he promised, he would be arrested and taken to jail. On the other two occasions, Larry had paid his ticket, stayed out of school for five days, and then resumed his school schedule. Although he did not enter the school building for the five days of suspension, he did board the bus in the morning and again in the afternoon. Larry alternately moved from his maternal grandmother’s home to his paternal grandmother’s home and sometimes lived with various aunts and uncles. All of his family members lived in close enough proximity for him to board the same school bus without raising anyone’s suspicions.

Believing that the officer’s vow to arrest him was an idle threat from an exasperated adult, Larry again returned to school after his third ticketed violation. Classes had not yet begun for the day and the hallways were crowded with visiting students; teachers stood at their open classroom doors as locker doors slammed and book bags positioned on shoulders. The officer spotted Larry and approached him. “Didn’t I tell you not to come back here?”

Larry replied, “My five days are up; I served my suspension.”

“You are no longer a student here,” the officer said in a louder voice.

“How come I’m not?” responded Larry.

“I told you I would arrest you and that’s what I’m going to do.”

“But how can you arrest me for coming back to school? I don’t have any cigarettes on me. I haven’t been expelled,” Larry matched the officer’s volume.

“You’re under arrest,” the officer said, and reached for his handcuffs.

“No, you don’t have to arrest me, I’ll just leave,” Larry said and headed for the exit.

The packed hallway was still crowded and tension was building as the students realized that the officer and Larry were in some sort of conflict.

Larry picked up his pace and walked briskly to the door that led into the parking lot. His intention was to leave campus and come back in time to board the bus. Since it was the beginning of the school day, before the final bell, there also were a large number of students in the parking lot. Larry was almost out of the parking lot when he realized that the officer was right behind him on foot, ordering him to stop. The officer grabbed Larry, cuffed him, and made him walk back through the parking lot, through the school hallways, and into the main office.

Larry remained cuffed even though he was showing no signs of resistance. The officer instructed Larry to wait in the office. The officer entered an inner office only to emerge some 40 minutes later during the school’s first passing period. He led Larry through the once again crowded hallway, out the door, and to his waiting police car. He told the 6’4” Larry to “duck” as he placed him in the back seat. The officer then delivered Larry to the local juvenile intake center. Larry never returned to a traditional public high school. He eventually graduated from the Urban League Learning Center at the age of 27.

Reasons for Entering Credit Recovery

The six participants entered credit recovery based on three categories:

1. Attended Learning Center and traditional public high school simultaneously
2. Forced to withdraw because of a lack of credits
3. Unofficially expelled for disciplinary reasons

Figure 4.1 is a visual representation of the three different categories that caused the participants to leave or supplement traditional public school and enroll in a Learning Center.

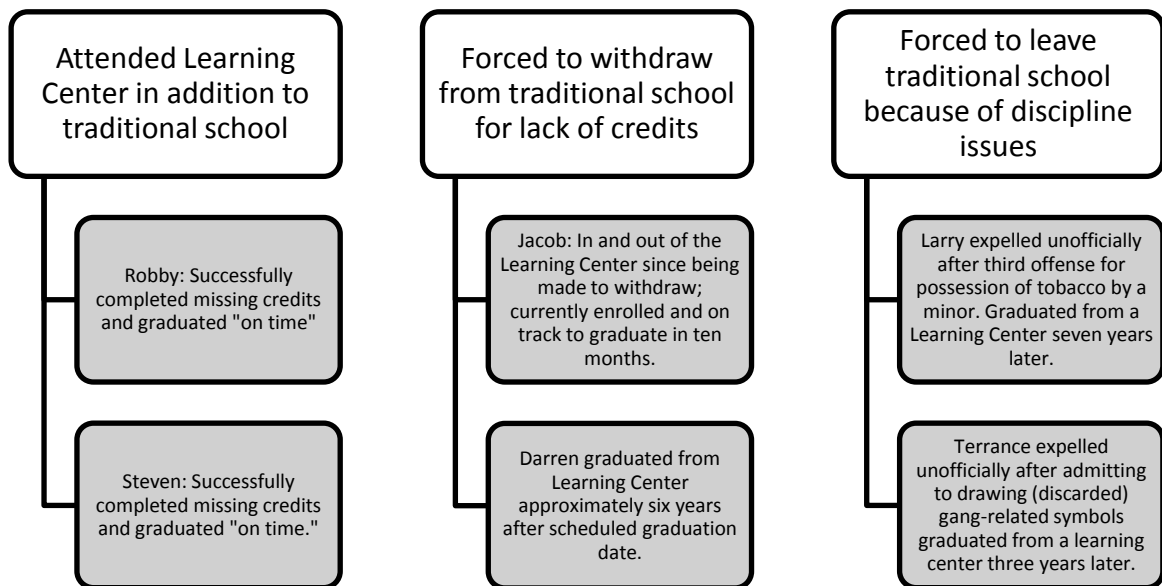


Figure 4.1 Reasons for Entering Credit Recovery

Robby and Steven are the only two participants who graduated “on time.” They also are the only two who simultaneously attended traditional public and alternative high school. Both young men needed to earn English credits.

It should be noted that both Robby and Steven earned letter grades of D in various math classes while attending traditional public high school. Also, they both were given math credit for courses without “algebra” in the title; and both graduated with less than six math classes (the equivalent of three math credits). The graduation requirements have been altered since Robby and Steven were high school students. No credit is given for Ds in algebra, geometry, intermediate algebra, and beyond. The other change is that basic math classes now count as elective, rather than core credit. The graduation requirements were changed during Robby’s senior and Steven’s junior year (2004-2005); the new requirements were applied to freshman and sophomores. Juniors and seniors were given the privilege of a “grandfather clause” under the former graduation requirements. If Robby and Steven had been upper-classmen one year earlier, they would have had a much larger number of credits to recover and a much smaller chance of actually graduating.

The participants were asked who helped them determine what high school classes to enroll in while attending a traditional building. Two participants identified coaches, one participant reported parents; the other three participants named school guidance counselors. Figure 4.2 identifies the adult responsible for schedules by the participants.

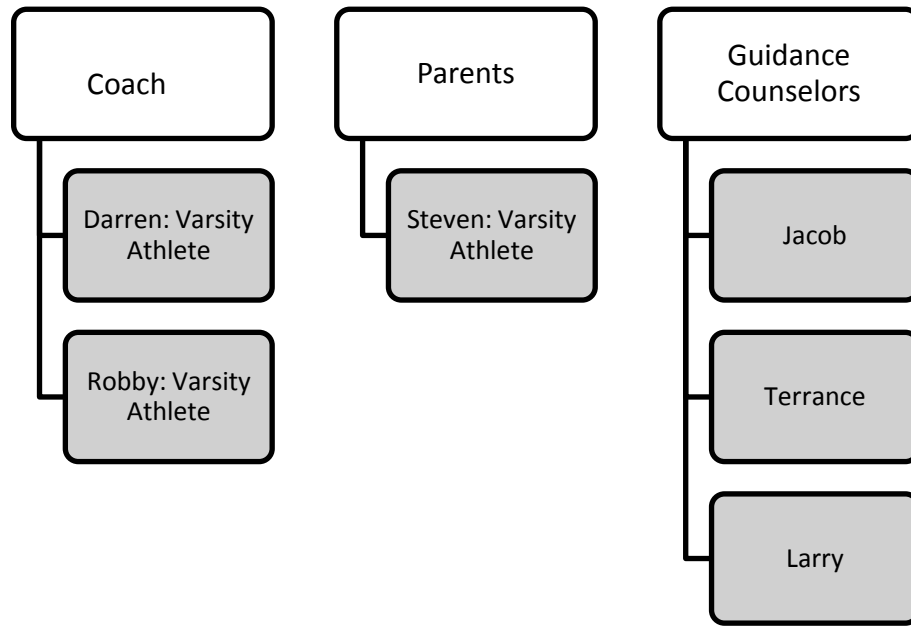
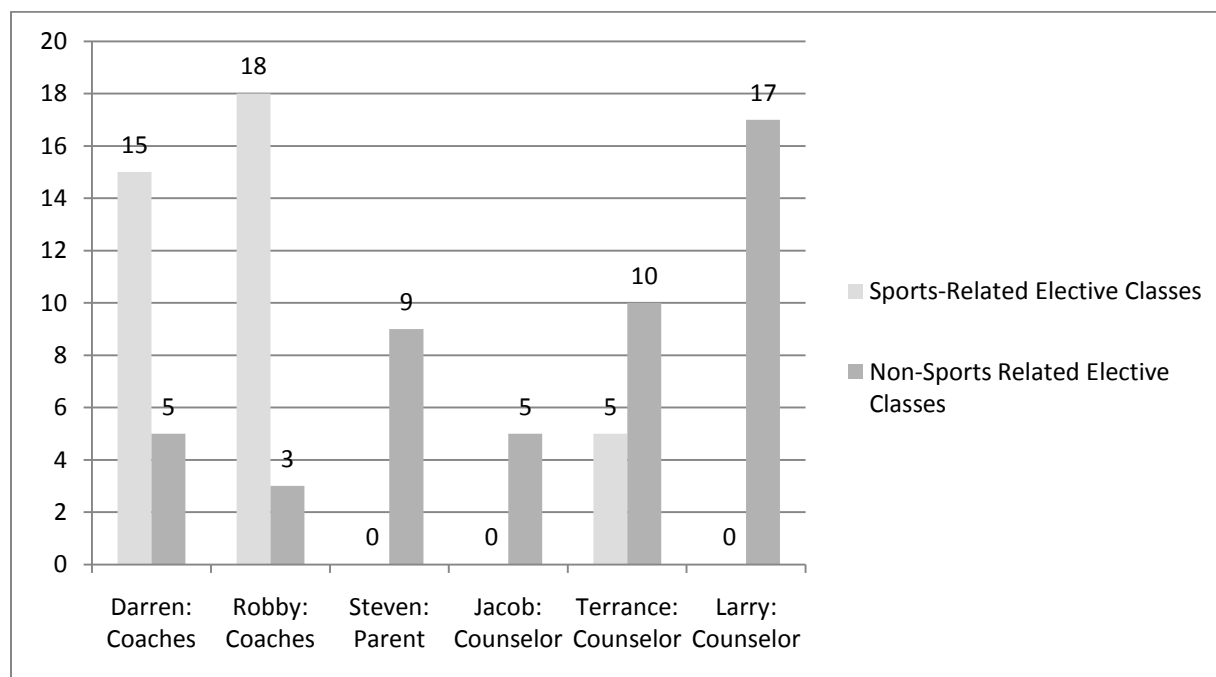


Figure 4.2 Adults Responsible for Choosing Classes

In addition to identifying the key adults who helped make scheduling decisions, the interview questions also addressed the number of elective credits and core credits. The two participants whose schedules were influenced by coaches had far more sports-related credits than those whose schedules were influenced by parents or guidance counselors. Table 4.2 depicts the number of sports-related elective classes compared to the number of non-sports-related elective classes by participants. For ease of comparison, Table 4.2 again names the adults responsible for the participants' schedules.

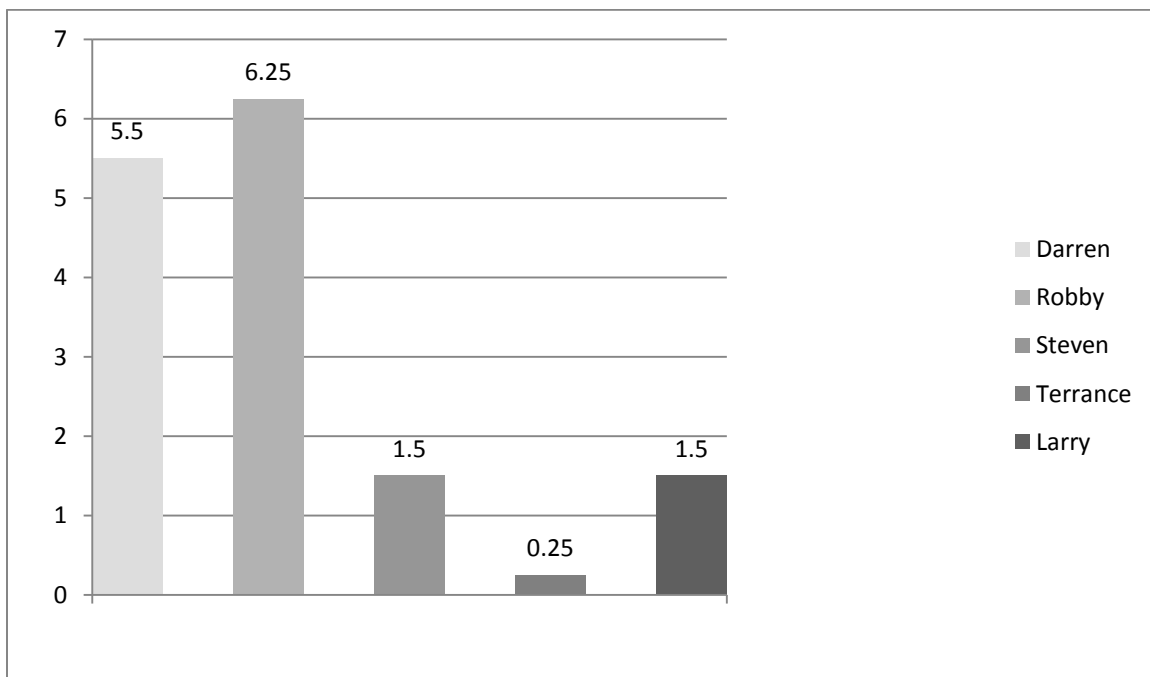
Table 4.2 Sports-related and Non-sports-Related Elective Classes



A high school diploma from the featured district requires 22 credits. At the time of the research, the credits had to include four English, three social studies, two math, three science, one physical education, and nine elective credits. Each credit is the equivalent of two classes; in a traditional public school the classes begin and end with each semester. In a Learning Center, the classes begin when the students enroll in them and end when the student completes the course work.

The five participants who are graduates of the Learning Center all had more than the required number of credits; Jacob is not included in this table because he has not yet graduated. Darren and Robby had the largest number of credits above the required 22; Steven and Larry both had 1.5 excess credits while Terrance had the fewest with .25. Table 4.3 is a visual display of the participants' credits beyond graduation requirements.

Table 4.3 Earned Credits beyond Requirements



In summary, coaches, parents, or guidance counselors helped the participants enroll in classes. The number of sports-related elective classes and non-sports-related elective classes varied from participant to participant. All of the participants who have already graduated possessed more than the required number of 22 credits.

Table 4.4 displays a breakdown for each participant. Information includes sports involvement while in traditional public high school, number of sports-related classes taken while in traditional public high school, number and type(s) of classes taken in the Learning Center, age when finished traditional or alternative high school, and living arrangements. The possible ramifications of this information and who helps students choose their school schedules are discussed in detail in the final chapter. After Table 4.4, the four major inductively developed themes are described.

Table 4.4 Participants' Demographics

Name	Sports Involvement	Title and number of Sports-Related Classes while in traditional public high school	Title and number of classes earned in alternative setting	Age when finished traditional or alternative high school	Family & Home Resources
Darren	Varsity Athlete 4 years Played 3 sports: Basketball Track Football	Weight Training (6) Team Sports (6) Coach's Assistant (3)	Algebra I (2) Intermediate Algebra (1) Geometry (1) * *Total number of math classes needed for graduation	26 (alternative high school)	Lived with mom and younger brother Received public assistance Struggled financially
Steven	Varsity Athlete 4 years Played 2 sports: Basketball Football	None	English (2)	18 (traditional high school)	Lived with both mother and father
Robby	Varsity Athlete 4 years Played 3 sports: Basketball Track Football	Weight Training (7) Team Sports (5) Coach's Assistant (4)	English (1)	18 (traditional high school)	Lived with various relatives until age 8 Lived with single mom from 8 - 18 Had a "big brother" from Big Brothers
Jacob	None	None	Elective (2)* *Partial English Credit/Partial math credit moved to elective status because not officially completed	N/A	Lived with mom Intermittently dependent on friends for shelter Had several older brothers but did not live with them

Name	Sports Involvement	Title and number of Sports-Related Classes while in traditional public high school	Title and number of classes earned in alternative setting	Age when finished traditional or alternative high school	Family & Home Resources
Terrance	None	Team Sports (6) Weight Training & Conditioning (2)	English (2) Government (1) US History II (1)	21 (alternative high school)	Lived with single mom until 17 Age 17 to 21 intermittent incarceration
Larry	None	None	English (6) US History (1) Biology (2) Government (1) Modified PE (1) Earth Space Science (1) Work Experience (2)	27 (alternative high school)	Married with 3 children

Differences between Traditional and Alternative Settings

One of the original research questions asked the participants to compare their traditional public school experiences to their alternative setting experiences. The participants responded quickly with observations about building size, demeanors of teachers, the absence of sports at Learning Centers, and other distinguishing features of traditional and alternative settings. Table 4.5 contains the perceptions of students who attended both a Learning Center and a traditional public high school.

Table 4.5 Student Perceptions: Traditional & Alternative Schools

Perceptions of Students who attended both a Learning Center and a traditional public high school	
Alternative Setting of Learning Centers	Traditional High Schools
Students usually receive one-on-one help, with little or no delay, from a teacher when requested.	When students request help from the teacher, they often are told to “wait” and/or to “stay after class;” eventually the teacher may or may not reach the student.
Students are not required to report at scheduled times.	Students are required to report at scheduled times; failure to do so results in consequences.
Students are self-paced.	Students are expected to keep up with the pace of the class.
Students are enrolled in the classes that they need to fulfill graduation requirements.	Students are enrolled in a variety of classes; some classes are required and other classes are electives.
Students have fewer peers and fewer opportunities to socialize.	Students number in the hundreds and there are many opportunities to socialize and interact.
Two teachers share all of the courses; teachers teach across disciplines.	Teachers usually teach only one subject.
The curriculum is set and largely computer-based.	The curriculum is delivered in a variety of venues: books, technology, presentations, etc.
Students do not have the opportunity to play sports.	There is opportunity to participate in several different sports.
Teachers are seen as more “laid-back.”	Teachers are seen as enforcers of school rules.
Students earn credit as soon as they complete a class.	Students earn credit at semester.
Curriculum is mastery-based; students do not proceed without achieving 80% accuracy.	Students earn letter grades ranging from A to F.
Teachers talk to students and urge them to refocus when they “are in trouble.”	Teachers “write-up” students and send them to the office when they are “in trouble.”

Perceptions of Students who attended both a Learning Center and a traditional public high school

Alternative Setting of Learning Centers	Traditional High Schools
<p>“In trouble” includes but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate use of the Internet • Failure to progress in on-line curriculum over a month’s time • Using others’ computer sign-ins 	<p>“In trouble” includes but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive talking and/or profanity in class • Being tardy • Being truant
<p>Students who smoke are allowed to leave campus for cigarette breaks.</p>	<p>Students who smoke are not allowed to leave campus for cigarette breaks. If students violate this rule, they are issued a ticket from the city.</p>
<p>Students refer to teachers by their first names, usually preceded by but not required “Miss” or “Mister.”</p>	<p>Students refer to teachers by their last names, preceded by Mr. or Ms.</p>

Time: The Overarching Difference between Traditional and Alternative Schools

Inevitably, the participants placed emphasis on some aspect of time; the following comments pertain to a traditional public school setting:

I was always gettin’ into trouble for being late. Then I’d get into a ‘hall sweep,’ then I’d go to the auditorium for the rest of the class period ‘cause they wouldn’t let nobody go to class after the bell rang. I’d just say, ‘forget it, I might as well not go if all I’m gonna do is be held in the auditorium. (Jacob)

Everything seemed like rush, rush, rush to me. I would finally think I understood the problem [referring to being in math class] and then the bell would ring and my thoughts would just ‘Poof!’ go with the bell. It was hella frustratin’. (Larry)

I just wasn't comfortable. I wasn't comfortable with everyone there. It was too fast, and there were so many deadlines, and it just wasn't for me. (Larry)

The overarching difference between the alternative setting and traditional public high schools is the role of time. On a very basic level, students in alternative settings are not required to be to school at any certain time; but the role of time goes beyond school beginning and dismissal times. In the Learning Center setting, students are not bound to the time constraints of grading periods and semesters. They self-pace from the beginning to the conclusion of each course; when the course requirements are fulfilled at a mastery (80%) level, they earn the credit. In contrast, the regular schools are operated on a time schedule of two semesters each consisting of two nine-week grading periods. Students are enrolled in and must complete classes within the prescribed timeframe.

Students begin regular high school as freshmen and as time (in the form of school years) passes, they become sophomores, juniors, and finally seniors. There are no such distinctions in class years at the Learning Centers. The elimination of freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior labels in the alternative setting was, for the most part, appreciated by the participants with one notable exception: all of the participants wanted to be designated as seniors when they perceived themselves to be near graduation. By the time a student was only one, two, or even three classes away from becoming a high school graduate, he frequently stressed his "senior" status to classmates. The "I am a senior" proclamation was not observed being delivered in a competitive manner; it was offered as an encouragement to students who were not as close to graduating (i.e., "If I can do it, you can too").

When entering a regular high school, students realize that they are going to be in high school for a time span of four years. When enrolling in the Learning Center, students are told

that their work ethic, skill level, and attendance will determine the amount of time or “how long” it will take to graduate. In traditional public high schools, the day is divided into periods, usually about 40-minutes long; each period or “hour” is devoted to a single subject. Classes begin and end with bells and have hall passing periods in between. In contrast, the Learning Centers do not have bells or passing periods. The students choose what subject to study; all of their options are on the computer and do not require walking from class to class at designated times.

Time also is structured differently for Learning Center teachers. The two teachers report and leave at staggered times; between the hours of 8 AM and 4:30 PM there are four hours when only one teacher is present in the classroom. The four hours consist of the first hour of the school day, the last hour of the school day, and two lunch hours in the middle of the school day. Since each teacher facilitates several different classes, the teachers’ schedules are important for the students to know and understand. For example, one teacher is responsible for all of the social studies and science classes while the other teacher is responsible for all of the English and math classes. In order to receive attention from the designated teacher, students need to know when a particular teacher arrives, goes to lunch, and departs. In a regular school, the student’s schedule dictates when it is time to study English, math, social studies and science. In the alternative setting, students choose which subject to work on at any given time; however, they are somewhat constrained by the availability of the teacher.

The participants preferred the flexible schedule of the Learning Centers over the traditional public school schedule.

If you’re only two minutes late in a regular school, they’ll make you miss the whole class and send you to detention. But here [Learning Center] you come in on your own time—

you can come in and can stay 4 or 5, at least 2 or 3 hours a day and get a lot done.

(Darren)

I don't know how I would have made up my English classes if the Learning Centers had a set schedule; I worked my recovery credits in between regular school, work, and football. Being able to come and go based on my needs rather than trying to beat the bell like I always was at regular school made it possible for me to make up those classes.

(Steven)

The Learning Center was real copasetic, it flow real smooth, people comin' and goin' all day but they was here to work and learn. (Darren)

The ramifications of how time is structured in the traditional public school versus an alternative school will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Stereotyping

African American male students report being stereotyped by teachers and administrators in the traditional public school setting. Because of little or no real-life interactions with African Americans, many teachers see African Americans as future rappers, gangsters, musicians, prisoners, or athletes. Participants noticed that other African American students were stereotyped by teachers:

There was this one dude in my history class but he wasn't there for long. Nobody knew who his daddy was, his momma never came up to the school, he looked poor, he wearin' a red flag flyin outta his left pocket, saggin', and lookin' mean. The teacher didn't take the time to find out what this dude's story was—personally I think he was jus' *portraying* a certain kind of character—but the teacher didn't know and wouldn't ask or take the

time to get to know him. I could tell she was relieved when he quit coming to class.

(Robby)

Stereotyping of African American students was seen by the participants as justification for disparate treatment:

There was this hallway [in traditional school] and it was called the 'Go Zone.' It was a zone in the hallway where the teachers weren't supposed to allow students to chill and post up in between classes. Or anything like that. All the African Americans would chill on one side of the hall, and all of the whites and Asians would chill on the other side of the hall. Like every day they would come to the African Americans and tell us to move but never would say anything to the white kids. The black people would be louder and more outspoken. But I was always the one student who would say, 'If you're going to tell us to move, you gotta tell them to move,' but they still wouldn't tell anyone but the black kids to move. They [teachers] seemed scared—they didn't want to see anything happen—always thinkin' the black kids was bad and gonna start trouble—always stereotyping. I thought it was bad. Really bad. (Darren)

Participants perceived stereotyping as contributing to decreasing future opportunities for African American males.

Well, they [teachers/administrators] say, it don't matter [what ethnicity you are] and that everybody got the same chances as everybody else but at times you really don't 'cause of stereotyping...everybody thinkin' you ought to be an athlete, or a music player...and they just kind of write you off, you know? Instead of tellin' you that you can really be somethin' out here they [teachers] just sweep the ones they don't want under the rug...they didn't come right out and say you aint gonna be nothin' no way but it was

obvious how they felt...you could see it in their demeanor, their attitude, their face.

(Larry)

I remember that the teachers were always telling me that I was no good... I had teachers tell me on a regular basis [assumes a mean, growly voice] "By the time you're 16, 17 you're gonna be locked up and by the time you're 18 you're gonna be dead! Blah, blah, blah. (Jacob)

Furthermore, participants believe that stereotyping results in decreased academic opportunities for African American males:

All of the teachers except for the coaches—they didn't really want to have anything to do with the black kids who were lacking in school skills. The teachers would find a reason to label them a troublemaker or say they weren't paying attention when they really just didn't have any understanding of the work. Black males got stereotyped in certain areas, for, y'know, being' a slacker in certain areas, they [teachers] would look down on you when you couldn't answer questions, when you couldn't keep up with the rest of the class. (Darren)

The tendency for European American teachers to stereotype students, the participants maintain, may be due to their limited interactions with other ethnicities.

I feel like the teachers haven't had enough experience with other races, like, whatever it may be, African American, Asian, Spanish, they haven't had enough experience or they might have had a bad experience with a black guy or a black girl, and that bad experience makes them look at all black students differently. (Robby)

The above statement by Robby also was expressed by the parents of African American male students interviewed by White-Johnson (2001): "This lack of understanding was primarily one of

cultural ignorance, the inability to understand the culture of another person because you have not learned about that other culture and/or intolerance” (p. 355).

It seems like teachers just immediately stereotype them as knuckleheads but if teachers take the time to get to know them [African American males] as individuals instead of you know getting to know their clothes then you can really teach—you can see what you need to do because you know the *individual*. (Darren)

I always had teachers that I felt didn't like me, and I know that they would deny it, but to this day I will stick to that—because there were only two teachers in my whole schooling who acted as if I could be something, that I could succeed—the other teachers didn't come right out and say that I was 'bad' but that was definitely the message that I got.

(Jacob)

Well some teachers thought that all black kids were being abused and hungry—when in fact I was getting' abused a lot more at school than I was at home—and they would take 'troubled kids' to Chucky Cheese—but not really see the heart of the problem—like puttin' a Band-Aid on a bullet wound—it might look good for a minute until it gets soaked in blood and falls off. (Jacob)

Some teachers didn't like me, but they weren't teachers that I had, they were teachers who didn't know me, teachers just in the school—they didn't like me because of stuff I did or they *thought* I did—and, of course, also because I'm black. (Terrance)

Although not mentioned specifically in the research or the interview questions, stereotyping was nevertheless a major theme that emerged from the interviews. Every single participant mentioned stereotyping—some more emphatically and frequently than others—as a

hindrance to their success in school. The participants' stories of being painfully aware of stereotyping echo Noguera's (2003) findings:

For African American males, who are more likely than any other group to be subjected to negative forms of treatment in school, the message is clear: Individuals of their race and gender may excel in sports, but not in math or history. The location of Black males within school, in remedial classes or waiting for punishment outside the principal's office, and the roles they perform within school suggest that they are good at playing basketball or rapping, but debating, writing for the school newspaper, or participating in the science club are strictly out of bounds. (p. 445)

Although the participants did not label it as such themselves, the stereotyping that they experienced and witnessed personally is racist in nature. Stereotyping of African American males has been noted by other researchers (Castro, 2010; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dunbar, 1999; Duncan, 2002; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003). In addition to stereotyping, racism takes the form of low teacher expectations (Duncan, 2002; Snipes, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008; White-Johnson, 2001).

Athletes Receive Social Favors

All three of the varsity athletes—Darren, Robby, and Steven—agreed strongly that high school athletes receive social favors. These included favorable attention and name recognition from teachers, custodians, and cafeteria servers. Because of their high visibility in sports, other aspects of their day-to-day school experience were enhanced. The favors included a wide assortment of niceties: extra cookies from the a la carte menu, coupons for free food, passes to go to the gym during core classes, forgiven parking tickets (district issued) in the school parking lot, help from individual tutors, deadline extensions, miscellaneous school supplies (pens,

pencils, paper, tri-fold boards for presentations) as well as more expensive school supplies including scientific calculators. Participants' descriptions of specific favors follow:

I'll just be blunt about it. Athletes get the best treatment. They get the most respect in the whole school—from teachers, and other students, and other schools, and administrators, even the janitors; everybody respects athletes and gives them special treatment. (Steven)

I had an administrator, if I was late, all I had to do was go to his office and he would give me an excused pass, even if it was my own fault that I was late. If you didn't have any tardies, or if you had an A you didn't have to take the final. He wanted to make sure that I didn't have to take finals to keep my grades up. And the teachers knew that I was really late, but the administrator was over their heads, and they wasn't going' to challenge his pass. He would say, 'Here's a pass. I'm not gonna ask [why he was late] and your teachers aren't gonna ask—just come talk to me later.' I didn't take advantage of it—but I wasn't shy about goin' in and askin' for one, neither. (Robby)

I didn't have to pay for food. I could go get pizza passes, there was a pizza place across the street, and I could get a pizza slip any time I wanted one. I never had to pay in the cafeteria. I just go in to the front of the line and one of the cafeteria ladies would say, 'Oh, here' [he gestures as if handing someone a plate. Everybody in line would be like [friendly]: 'What's up?'](Robby)

If I didn't want to go to class, I'd just go to her [English teacher's] class. She'd let me use her proctor pass. (Darren)

When asked about the social life of an athlete, the participants agreed that athletes were admired by other students and teachers.

Oh, social life, [he says this with great relish], well you know, bein' an athlete, and bein' known—you don't even have to be a good athlete—but wearin' the jersey and the letter jacket—got all the little ladies who want to be with you all the time—like you see in the movies. Teachers speak to you. They know you by name because most of the teachers do come to the game. (Robby)

I was a proctor for the office. I was a proctor for PE. I showed some students who had never picked up a basketball how to actually dribble. I helped the teacher out. (Robby)

All of the participants—the half who were and the half who were not athletes—acknowledged that athletes are favored, popular, and are not treated the same as non-athletes. Like the reoccurring topic of stereotyping, the participants talked about favoritism shown to athletes frequently and with great conviction.

Favoritism shown to High School Athletes later perceived as Obstacles

When in high school, the student athletes perceived their special treatment as beneficial and desirable. They all enjoyed the extra attention from fellow students, teachers, administrators, and other adults. They were consumed by sports and appreciated the easy classes so that they could achieve the GPA required for eligibility to play without having to study intensively. With the exception of Steven, whose father often questioned whether his academic schedule was rigorous enough, the other two athletes did not question the abundance of sports-related classes. Darren and Robby shared that it was not until much later—when they enrolled in community college—that they realized their easy schedules had not included adequate academic preparation.

Robby loved being a proctor in high school, but later questioned if it had really been his best use of time. Likewise, Darren looked back on his game preparations and questioned whether he should have been studying core subjects instead.

I was a proctor for the office. I was a proctor for PE. I showed some students who had never picked up a basketball how to actually dribble. I helped the teacher out. (Robby)

I wouldn't even be in class a lot of the time because my coaches would come and get me out of class. I'd be in another classroom watching the game tapes, and watching all of the plays, and getting ready for next week's game when I was supposed to be studying, you know, my school work, not the game tapes. (Darren)

My basketball coach taught Special Ed and I would be in his classroom, watchin' game tapes, or workin' out some play for him, and he would tell me to think of ways to make us all gel as a team, and I'd be doin' sports while the kids watched cartoons. All of the time that I was in regular high school, I didn't do very much school work, I just ran, and played ball, and everything was related to sports. (Darren)

Darren explains that because he did not receive consequences in the form of failing grades that he came to believe he would graduate from high school no matter what academic effort he put forth.

They [classroom teachers] wouldn't do nothin' to me [for falling asleep in class] because my coaches told 'em to pass me anyway, to be lenient on me. It made me dependent. It made me depend—made me think that everything was going to be all right—made me think that I was still going to graduate from high school no matter what I did—they did all stars like that—star athletes—I know plenty of stars who couldn't even write a paragraph but they still graduated. (Darren)

Robby expresses similar thoughts regarding school schedules revolving around sports: The coaches just picked my classes for me. They would just put me in all of the easy classes. And my assistant coaches would pick classes for me. (Robby)

Physical education was a big part of my schedule. Weight training. Team sports. Proctor for weight training. Proctor for team sports. And the only reason I had so many of them classes was because they wanted me to stay around sports. (Robby)

Darren's coach tried to control who Darren associated with at school. When Darren was seen with other students from his own neighborhood, the coach made him run laps and told him that he needed to associate with other athletes.

There were a lot of white boys on the team and he [coach] wanted me to be friends with the white boys. He was mad that I didn't hang out with the white boys, or you know, the so-called high class black people who went to South High and were drivin' those beemers and stuff. That way that I used to hang out with people in my neighborhood, he [coach] didn't like that, and yeah, some of them was in gangs but we was all in school, you know, we were trying to get our education. (Darren)

Steven's schedule contained no sports-related elective classes for a couple of reasons. The first and foremost reason being his father's firm belief that the time spent in practice and games was sufficient and that other time needed to be devoted to academics. Another explanation for the absence of sports-related elective classes is Steven's participation in a "pre-law academy." It was similar to a school within a school. Students who chose to be in the program were very limited on what type of elective classes they were allowed to take. The program did not mandate but strongly encouraged elective choices to include classes in citizenship, public law, forensics, practical law, and issues seminar. Steven enrolled in the program's recommended electives.

However, even following the recommendations of his father and the academy, Steven did not qualify for a Division I college. His academic record did not meet the Division I schools'

requirements due to the absence of more rigorous course work such as chemistry, two years of foreign language, and calculus. Steven was recruited by Division I coaches but ended up attending a community college for four semesters before transferring to a Division I school.

Steven recommends strongly that athletes be monitored by guidance counselors who are knowledgeable in Board of Regents requirements. He notes that none of the guidance counselors at his school guided him in making an acceptable selection of classes for someone entering a Division I college. He compares himself and other athletes to pieces of meat who are used for others' benefit but do not have their own interests and futures considered.

You're [athletes] treated like a cut of meat. The better athlete you are, the better cut of meat you represent. But, when you're used up, and the meat is gone, you're just a bone that is thrown to the dogs. (Steven)

Steven believes that because he was an athlete, the counselors assumed that the coaches were "taking care" of him. While the counselors were assuming the coaches were handling his high school classes appropriately, the coaches assumed that the counselors were doing the same thing. Steven understands why the counselors would have that impression because "the coaches did everything else for me. Why wouldn't they take care of my graduation requirements and know my future school plans, too?"

African American Males purposefully assume a Pleasing Demeanor

As a diversity instructor for future teachers, my undergraduate students (European American females) sometimes admit their discomfort and uncertainty when interacting with African American male students. "I don't want to sound rude, but it seems to me that they [African American males] just try to be especially intimidating. I don't know how to handle that" is an often expressed sentiment. The participants know that African American males are often

perceived as intimidating. During the course of the interviews, the participants described trying to make themselves seem as unthreatening as possible.

When I'm here [at school], I'm gonna work. I'm not gonna act out. I got a lot of uncles and my dad and they don't go for any kind of bad attitude or talkin' back to no woman or talkin' back to an authority figure—no they aint gonna tolerate that—from me—they believed that white teachers were intimidated enough just by having black kids in they classes. I was told to be mild, polite, and made to be respectful so that I didn't get labeled as a 'bad black kid.' (Larry)

Robby described his public demeanor:

I like it when an old white couple come to my store [speaker works at a grocery store] and talk to me and get to know me, and I love that, and I think that it's a beautiful thing because they did live through bad times when blacks were hated. I actually get more out of it if a Hispanic or a white elderly person talks to me than my own race because I feel like they're seeing me for a person, not a color, and I want white people to know that black people are just people, too, and they [whites] shouldn't be scared [of blacks].

(Robby)

I had to pick up some mail at the post office and there was a white male and a black lady who was workin' there—and the white male got someone in his line so I ended up in the black lady's line and the black lady was askin' me my name, and why I was up there. I was sayin' 'Yes, Ma'am,' and 'No, Ma'am,' you know, just showing' respect—and the white male [Robby sounds very surprised] he was the one that said somethin'; He said 'it's a beautiful thing that we have youth and they have respect and manners.' I heard him as I was leavin' and maybe when I first came in there he thought, 'Well, I see all these

knuckleheads come in here with these drug deals or whatever.’ He was talkin’ to the lady that was helpin’ me and the next lady in his line—I don’t think he would have said anything positive if I was white. With me being black and him seeing so much negative young black men up there, it touched him to the point of making him speak. (Robby)

Terrance describes how his size affects teachers:

I go out of my way to be polite. I’m not tryin’ to scare any teachers. I know that my size and deep voice are enough to make me seem mean or somethin’, so I make sure that I show my good manners. (Terrance)

Steven chooses his speech according to his surroundings:

I like to think of myself as a Renaissance man; I know when to speak the King’s English and when to break out the ebonics. White teachers love the King’s English but they’re threatened by ebonics. My dad made sure that I knew how to talk to teachers to put them at ease. He told me that I would have to be extra polite because sometimes teachers already have their minds made up and I need to change their minds about black males. (Steven)

Darren strives to show that he has been brought up properly:

My answers to female teachers were always followed by “yes, ma’am,” or “no, ma’am.” I would smile on purpose even if it felt goofy and I didn’t feel like smilin’. I heard male white kids say, “Yeah, this,” and “yeah, that” to they teachers, or they [white students] would look real irritated at a teacher and ask, “What do you want?” [He mimics an annoyed European American female.] Man, I wouldn’t never talk to no teacher that way; I got better home trainin’ that that but yet I sensed that the teachers were scared of me. (Darren)

The participants admitted that they would “act hard” in certain situations but they were not school related. For example, the participants mentioned the following specific situations: on a basketball court at the local gym, or while waiting for the bus, or when accompanying a female family member to pay bills.

Authority of Teachers

Participants unanimously praised teachers who carry themselves with purpose, make their expectations known, and speak respectfully to students. Likewise, they unanimously criticized teachers who “let power go to their heads.” Table 4.5 describes the participants’ views on teachers who act with authority as opposed to teachers who abuse their power.

All six of the participants insisted that effective teachers acted with clear purpose and authority. They explained that teachers were authority figures and that they had been taught and were still expected to obey authority figures. The balance between “acting with authority” and “letting power go to their heads” is elusive; Table 4.6 features the subtle distinctions in the participants’ own words.

Table 4.6 Participants’ Perceptions of Using v. Abusing Authority

“Acting with authority”	“Letting power go to your head”
“Don’t ask me to please sit down when I’m done talking to my neighbor; tell me to get in my own seat (<i>like I know I should be</i>) when the bell rings.”	“Don’t point at me and shake your fingers in my face.”
“If you’re scared, wait until you get home to cry; stand up straight and speak with authority.”	“Don’t call me ‘boy,’ or ‘buddy,’ or ‘pal;’ I’m not your friend.”
“Talk to me like my momma would talk to me—matter of fact and to the point.”	“Don’t grab me or act like a bully; it makes me want to fight.”

“Acting with authority”	“Letting power go to your head”
“Don’t let me slide; be forceful with me and find out why I missed this test question, or what I don’t understand.”	“Don’t threaten me with consequences that you can’t deliver.”
“I’m not the kind of teacher that will give you a ‘D’ just so you can play. You’ve actually got to earn and learn; and I’ll help you.”	“I can talk to coach and make sure you don’t play in Friday’s game.”
“Be consistent, not moody. Talk to me when I come into your room.”	“Don’t get all mad over something that didn’t bug you at all yesterday.”

The participants all reported that they had been taught to respect authority. They also expressed frustration when they perceived teachers as unfairly distributing their authority. Some teachers, they insisted, over reacted to African American male students’ behavior.

Teacher come down hard on you [African American male]. You might get suspended, you might get sent to the isolation room—and then a little girl next to you or a white kid—mighta even been who you [African American male] was talkin’ to—instead of them [teachers] tellin’ them [girl or white kid] to be quiet, they send you [African American male] out of the room. (Darren)

It is this type of incident, the participants report, that makes African American males suspicious of adults in authority.

They [African American males] always feel like somebody pickin’ on ‘em so they get into an automatic defense mode—thinkin’ everybody is out to get ‘em—so they tend to be a lot more defensive when authority figures come at ‘em. (Steven)

African American males self report that they are not predisposed to aggressiveness or to displaying intimidating behaviors. They want to respect their teachers and do so when teachers

act with reasonable and tempered authority. When teachers misuse their power, African American males become defensive and suspicious.

Returning to School Demonstrates Tenacity and Resists Negative Stereotypes

By choosing to return to a school setting and pursue high school credit, the participants demonstrated tenacity and resisted stereotypes. Darren entered the alternative school setting after a traditional school experience including substandard academics, being controlled by coaches, and enduring public humiliation at commencement. Robby supplemented traditional high attendance with learning center enrollment. While in a traditional high school, he was consumed by varsity sports and all of sports' trappings. Not a strong reader or writer, Robby attended the Learning Center in pursuit of English credit. Steven, like Robby, attended traditional school and the learning center. Steven added credit recovery to his traditional school schedule so that he could graduate on schedule. Darren, Robby and Steven succeeded in resisting the negative stereotype of African American athletes excelling in sports but lacking in academics. Although not a graduate, Jacob also demonstrated tenacity and resisted stereotypes by returning to a school setting after being told by traditional school officials that he might as well withdraw because he was not going to graduate. Terrance was living in a residential correctional facility at the time of his Learning Center enrollment; he was court-ordered to go to school and look for employment. Even though he was court-ordered to go to school, he could have easily chosen to not attend the Learning Center. Terrance was not under intense scrutiny from the residential facility. After an initial period of resistance to earning his high school diploma rather than a GED, Terrance demonstrated academic effort and attended school regularly. Larry, the oldest participant, arguably demonstrated the most tenacity of all the young men. He returned to school despite his lackluster performance while in traditional high school. He pursued the elusive high school

diploma while working full time and raising three young children. His memories of school included uncaring teachers, feelings of being rushed and judged, and overall frustration. In spite of past challenges and bad memories, all of the participants decided to reverse engineer their lives and return to school.

The major findings of the credit recovery research are ensconced easily in the tenets of CRT. For example, the finding that African American males believe that they are often stereotyped negatively by teachers and other adults fits under CRT's guiding principle of racism as normal not exceptional (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Denzin, 2003; Duncan, 2005; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a; Vann Lynch, 2006).

African American high school athletes receive privileges that may, eventually, be seen by them as obstacles resounds with CRT's second tenet of interest convergence (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Denzin, 2003; Duncan, 2005; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a; Vann Lynch, 2006).

Figure 4.3 displays the perks given to African American male athletes. The special treatment and favors bestowed on the athletes appealed to their adolescent mindset and values. Years later, however, it was clear to the young men that their presence and talents had served the institution's athletic department but they, in turn, had been at the least underserved, if not blatantly used.

Allowed to go to class tardy without consequence.	Able to go to the gym to shoot baskets during core class time.	Asked to "help" coach by designing team-building activities.	Given special cafeteria privileges and food coupons.
Pulled from core class to watch game tapes.	Led to believe that graduation is a given, not a remote possibility.	Allowed not to engage in core class (sleep) without fear of teacher intervention.	Even when in core class, student athlete status emphasized over student scholar status.
Regularly given deadline extensions on assignments and excused from taking final exams.	Well-known and liked by: secretarial and custodial staff, faculty, counselors, and administration	Forgiven parking tickets issued by the school district.	Provided with basic school supplies as well as more expensive scientific calculators.

Figure 4.3 Athletes' Perks: Examples of Interest Convergence

In addition to the findings of stereotyping (racism is the norm) and special treatment afforded athletes (interest convergence), the credit recovery research disclosed that the structure of time is a major difference between traditional public schools and alternative settings. The participants mentioned several facets of time: no formal beginning or end to the school day, classes not scheduled by subject or hour, no mandatory attendance requirements, and being able to come and go throughout the school day. These were helpful circumstances in the alternative setting; while in traditional schools the participants battled tardiness and other time constraints. Mackey (2010) lists several benefits of the Wichita Public Schools' Learning Centers: "self paced, flexible schedule, wide array of courses available, mastery-based curriculum and instant feedback for teachers and students" (p. 4). Notice that the first two attributes—self pacing and flexible schedules—are both components of time and both mentioned frequently by all of the participants.

Critical Race Theory promotes listening to the stories of those who are not in the dominant culture. The counterstories of the participants exposed the harmful power of time constraints on their educational experiences in traditional schools. Likewise, the participants' personal narratives disclosed that they respond positively to teachers who conduct themselves with clear purpose but do not flaunt their authority. Table 4.7 features the connections between research questions, themes, CRT tenets, and the research findings.

Table 4.7 Connections: Themes, CRT Tenets, & Findings

Questions	Themes	CRT Tenet	Findings
How do the participants compare their traditional public high school experience to their learning center experience?	<p>The Role of Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formal beginning or end time to school day • Classes not scheduled by subject or hour • No mandatory attendance requirements • Able to come and go throughout the day 	<p>Counterstories are important</p> <p>By listening to the participants describe traditional high school v. Learning Center, it became clear that time constraints were a major impediment to academic success.</p>	<p>The main difference between traditional high schools and alternative Learning Centers is the role of time.</p>
How do the participants compare their traditional public school high school experience to their learning center experience?	<p>Athletes treated differently</p> <p>Athletes' classes chosen by coaches</p> <p>Sports-related classes prevailed over academics</p>	<p>Interest Convergence</p> <p>Robby and Darren's abundance of sports-related classes essentially guaranteed their eligibility to play sports. They did not, however, pass core classes required for graduation.</p>	<p>High school athletes receive special privileges that may, eventually, be seen by them as obstacles.</p>

Questions	Themes	CRT Tenet	Findings
What are the lived experiences of the participants while in the alternative school?	<p>Academic Credit Obtainable</p> <p>Participants felt successful as they were able to complete classes and earn credit in the alternative setting</p>	<p>Pursuit of Social Justice</p> <p>Graduating from high school is a rite of passage that guarantees a higher quality of life. Those who do not graduate from high school are destined to struggle financially, emotionally, and physically.</p>	<p>Five of the six participants graduated from high school; they would not have done so without the opportunity to attend the Learning Center.</p> <p>African American males returning to a school setting demonstrate tenacity and resist stereotypes</p>
How do the participants' experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?	<p>Prevalence of stereotyping</p> <p>Participants reported being stereotyped frequently and consistently by teachers in traditional high schools</p>	<p>Racism is the norm.</p>	<p>African American males believe that they often are stereotyped negatively by teachers and other adults</p> <p>African American males returning to a school setting demonstrate tenacity and resist stereotypes</p>
How do the participants compare their traditional public school high school experience to their learning center experience?	<p>Purposeful Authority</p> <p>See Table 4.5</p>	<p>Counterstories are important</p> <p>Listening to the participants' stories about teachers produced a template of purposeful authority v. abuse of authority.</p>	<p>African American males respond positively to teachers who conduct themselves with clear purpose.</p>

Summary

In summary, the credit recovery research concentrated on six African American males who attended both traditional public and alternative public schools. It revealed that African American males who transition from traditional public schools to alternative settings are motivated by a need to supplement their regular school schedules, or are forced to withdraw because of a lack of credits, or are expelled unofficially for discipline reasons. While in regular high school, the students' schedules were influenced heavily by coaches, parents, or guidance counselors. It is not uncommon for African American male students to graduate with more than the required 22 credits. The major difference between traditional public schools and Learning Centers is the role and management of time. African American males believe that they often are stereotyped negatively by teachers and other adults. High school athletes receive special privileges that may, eventually, be seen as obstacles. In an effort not to appear intimidating, African American males purposefully assume a socially pleasing demeanor. Effective teachers, as portrayed by the participants, act with purpose but do not flaunt or abuse their authority. African American males returning to a school setting for high school credit recovery demonstrate tenacity and resist stereotypes.

Looking ahead to the final chapter, findings are discussed, data are interpreted via a CRT lens, and conclusions are drawn. Ramifications of the findings are discussed and recommendations are made. How to apply the findings to the classroom is explored as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Overview of the Study

Chapter 5 contains a review of the entire study, particularly a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4, their analysis and interpretation through a CRT lens, and related to the initial research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants while in the alternative school?
2. How do the participants' experiences relate to the tenets of Critical Race Theory?
3. How do the participants compare their traditional public school experience to their learning center experience?

Critical Race Theory serves as the theoretical framework, and self-ethnography comprises the methodology. The combined effects of gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships form a crucial paradigm of this investigation. Looking at several factors and how they intersect contributes to rich findings (Dunbar, 1999; Duncan, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Shealey, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008; Thomas, 2000; White-Johnson, 2001). Strayhorn (2008) writes that “unlike the 1950s when race was the single most important predictor of educational disparities, most contemporary scholars agree that it is a convergence of multiple factors that shapes the circumstances in which America’s neediest students exist” (para. 1).

Conclusions from the data are presented in Chapter 5; implications and recommendations for practice are considered. Chapter 5 closes with the identification of needs for future research, ideas for new research questions, and potential methodologies.

Review of Research

This research examined African American males in high school credit recovery approached from a CRT perspective. Four tenets of CRT are especially applicable to the

research: (a) racism is the norm, (b) members of the dominant culture benefit from “progress” made by minorities, (c) counterstories are important, (d) social justice for oppressed groups is lacking and should be pursued (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Denzin, 2003; Duncan, 2005; Edwards & Schmidt, 2006; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a; Vann Lynch, 2006).

The participants included six African American males who all attended both traditional public and alternative high schools, were at least 18-years-old, and had been enrolled in credit recovery. Data was collected via frequent and prolonged interactions in the field, interviews, and official school transcripts.

The research revealed the following major findings:

1. The major difference between traditional public schools and Learning Centers is the role and management of time.
2. African American males believe that they often are stereotyped negatively by teachers and other adults.
3. High school athletes receive special privileges that may, eventually, be seen by them as obstacles.
4. African American males sometimes deliberately assume a demeanor that they perceive will be pleasing to the white majority.
5. African American male students respond positively to teachers who conduct themselves with clear purpose but do not flaunt their authority.
6. African American males returning to a school setting for high school credit recovery demonstrate tenacity and resist stereotypes.

The overall meaning of the research is construed from the findings. The findings will be addressed and interpreted in the order listed above.

Structure of Time Differs from Traditional to Alternative Settings

Corresponding Critical Race Theory Tenet: Counterstories are Important.

Participants were asked to elaborate on the similarities and differences of their alternative school and traditional public school experiences. Time is structured differently in alternative schools and traditional public schools. Time—the enforcement of beginnings, periods, and endings—was mentioned more frequently by the participants than any other distinctions between the two types of schools. When asked to compare the two experiences, participants mentioned the “trouble” that “being late” had caused them. Traditional public schools (by necessity) have schedules and bells that must be maintained. School begins and ends at specified times; there are Spring breaks and Winter breaks and inservice days when school is closed. State assessments, all school assemblies, or parent-student-teacher conferences—all of these and many more events call for schedule modifications in traditional public schools. There are block schedules, test schedules, game schedules, and heat-contingency schedules. Every minute in a traditional public school day is used strategically; lunch times and prime planning periods are important and coveted.

In contrast, other than hours of operation, there are no schedules at the Learning Centers. The centers open at 8 AM and close at 4:30 PM; students come and go on their own accord and without having to check out in the office. When students arrive, they clock in at the time clock (actually a laptop computer on a cart); and when students leave they are asked to clock out. There is no need for passing periods or dismissal bells as each student is working at his/her own pace and computer. Students may stay for a few minutes or several hours; there are no penalties

for lack of attendance. This is not to say that there are no consequences for lack of progress in the online curriculum but that is different than penalties for lack of attendance.

Traditional public schools have enforced attendance requirements and tardy policies. All but one of the participants expressed “getting into trouble for being late all of the time.” The lone participant who did not have “tardy trouble” was Robby; all he had to do was get a pass from his administrator. Had it not been for that arrangement, Robby also would have fallen prey to hall sweeps and detentions.

Students in a Learning Center do not have scheduled classes. Likewise, teachers in a Learning Center are not bound to a schedule organized by subjects. Learning Center teachers must be able and willing to transition from first semester Algebra to second semester English IV in a matter of seconds. Each Learning Center student may be working on a different subject at the same time and in the same room; the teacher, therefore, must be adept at transitioning rapidly from a student figuring the slope of perpendicular lines to a student writing a personal narrative. Alternative teaching in the Learning Centers is sharply different from traditional teaching in a traditional school. The four main core areas—math, English, social studies, and science—are divided between two teachers. Each teacher is responsible for no less than 20 classes; teachers who want to know exactly what topic they will be covering on any certain day would not be comfortable in a Learning Center. English has 16 different levels with two classes on each level; the curriculum for all of the English classes is similar but not identical. Learning Center teachers work without schedules and bells to mark transitions between activities. But the paradigm of alternative school time management goes even deeper than being comfortable without a set schedule; it calls for a mindset of flexibility and service. Say, for example, a Learning Center student is taking algebra and is stuck frustratingly on factoring polynomials. The teacher who is

responsible for the math classes needs to facilitate this student's algebra progress. In order for the student and teacher's schedules to mesh, the teacher needs to be willing to disclose his/her arrival, break, lunch, and departure times. The alternative setting has no room for the attitude of "I'm an adult and it's none of the students' business when I go to lunch or take a break." It is the students' business to acquire credit and it is their right to have adult assistance. Teachers in Learning Centers must release their expectations of time and rethink how to best serve the credit-seeking students. The traditional time model has not worked and the student requires a different approach to the school day. Teachers should increase their accessibility to students by posting their email addresses and phone numbers.

The absence of schedules in the Learning Center means that students who are enrolled in more than one class can choose what subject to pursue. Ideally, the student should be enrolled in two classes with two different teachers. If this is the case, even if one teacher is not in the room, the student will still be able to get help. For example, one teacher is responsible for all of the science and all of the social studies classes while the other teacher is responsible for all of the English and all of the math classes. So, rather than putting a student in a science and a social studies class, it is more efficient to assign a science and an English class, or a social studies and a math class. This arrangement maximizes the student's time and helps insure that a helpful adult will be present as needed.

Learning Center teachers are responsible for communicating the different possibilities of course work to students. For example, "Darren, since Mr. Mac will be here at 1 PM, and it is 11 AM now, how would you like to work on math? I can help you with math and then you can switch to science when he gets here." This suggestion, though it sounds simple and obvious, is not simple or obvious to students who have not experienced success in traditional schools. They

are not accustomed to having unscheduled blocks of time and need to be informed of their choices. It is the teachers' duty to suggest (not demand) effective time management strategies and to offer help to the students *before* being asked by the students. Removing the by-subject scheduled class periods liberates the alternative school students and teachers. The students are free to begin and stay with a chosen subject; the teachers are free to customize instruction and offer timely support.

Darren, the first participant, took all math classes while in the Learning Center. He yearned for independence—choosing corner seats purposefully and positioning his backpack in a nearby chair to discourage anyone from sitting in close proximity to him—and, in the beginning, only attempted to make eye contact with me or get my attention when he absolutely could not comprehend the lesson as presented on the computer. On the rare occasion that he left his chair and approached me, he brought only one piece of paper containing one math problem and a pencil with him. Darren remained standing, placed the paper on whatever flat surface was nearby, and said, “Miss Cindy, I just need you to show me how to work this one problem and then I can finish this lesson by myself.” I celebrated inwardly when Darren brought math problems and specific requests to me because I wanted him to trust me and to know that I was there to serve him. It was not Darren's responsibility to conform to my schedule; it was my responsibility to provide instruction and encouragement to him on his time and based on his needs.

“You're so lucky to not have to listen to all those bells and remember whether it's an A or a B day,” my colleagues from traditional public schools tell me. I agree, I am fortunate to teach in an alternative setting—but the absence of bells does not indicate an absence of

responsibility on my part. No *official* hourly schedule means that in order to serve my students best, I (not the school clock) am responsible for regulating the best use of time.

Critical Race Theory defines counterstories as “stories that aim to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). When embarking on the credit recovery research, I knew that the absence of schedules likely in alternative settings was considered by students to be a benefit, but I underestimated greatly the power and importance of time. Only by soliciting and listening to the counterstories of the participants did I realize that time—how it is structured (schedules), counted (credits), and distributed (class periods)—is one of the major factors in determining success or failure of African American male students. Critical Race Theory values counterstories because they give voice to those who are disenfranchised. All of the participants emphasized the difference in the way traditional public high schools and the alternative setting constructed time. To the participants, traditional public high schools demonstrated rigidity while the Learning Centers offered flexibility. Larry described one of his classes in a traditional public high school:

...it was like when you [student] asked for help he would say [assumes male teacher voice] ‘Well, I just explained it to the whole class!’ You weren’t paying attention!’ [Back to his own voice] ‘But I *was* payin’ attention!’ And then the teacher would tell me that I would just have to wait, and, maybe, if he had time, he would explain it to me later if he had time...he would say he would sit down with me but he didn’t and then after class he would say, [irritated teacher’s voice] ‘Well I can’t help you now, I have to get ready for my next class! You’ll have to wait until my next class period!’ Well, by next class period, I would have done said, ‘Forget it!’ And that was the end of it. I quit goin’ to his class because I wasn’t gettin’ no help...

Doing away with class periods and official start times allows the Learning Centers to accommodate the students' lifestyles. Typically, African American males are expected to adjust to fit into their schools rather than school accommodating them (Arrington et al., 2003; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Duncan, 2002; Fordham, 1985; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; McGill, 2003; Noguera, 2003; White-Johnson, 2001). Noguera (2003) and White-Johnson (2001) both found that African American male students must downplay their racial and gender identities in order to increase their chances of academic success. White-Johnson (2001) researched African American males who chose to leave traditional public schools. The students reported "that support from the school was not offered to them. These males seemed to recognize that the expectation was one of change on their part" (p. 355). Similarly, the participants in this study believed that being successful in a traditional public school meant being able to fit into existing and unalterable structures, and to be approachable and pleasant.

In the Learning Center, the ability to finish a class and thereby earn credit is not restricted to grading periods or semesters. The participants noted that finishing a Learning Center class on their own and not a school schedule motivated them to begin the next needed class; this process repeated itself until graduation requirements were complete. Darren, Terrance, and Larry described themselves as feeling powerful and "unstoppable" after finishing classes successfully in the Learning Center; this is in stark contrast to the frustration and lack of connectedness they experienced in traditional public schools. Darren described his "high point" in the Learning Center:

When I first figured out that I could do this math. When I realized that I could learn. That was a high point for me. When I really understood. When I got help. Then I felt like there was no stoppin' me and no time limits on me. I had help when I called for it. I had patient

teachers. They patiently helped me and I didn't have to worry about class ending. And my understanding increased. And my need for help ceased little by little because I really didn't need it as much. And before you know it, that's when I just felt untouchable.

Untouchable.

Mackey's (2010) case study echoes what the credit recovery study participants professed:

Students have opportunities to experience success more frequently in computer-based courses than in traditional classes where they must wait for teachers to correct their work, which, depending on the teacher, could take days or even weeks. Teachers also walk around the room at least every half hour to answer student questions and to make sure students are staying on task. For the students, such frequent and targeted interactions with their teachers helps them stay motivated and focused. (p. 15)

Self-pacing, open arrival and departure times, and the freedom to work on any school subject at any given time facilitated the students' success and made credit acquisition viable. As indicated by one of the original research questions, participants were asked to compare their traditional public high school experience with the alternative setting. The participants all rated self-pacing in the curriculum higher than teacher-directed curriculum. When discussing the ability to earn credits in an alternative setting, the participants were upbeat and confident. The counterstories of the credit recovery participants give educators valuable insight into how edifying or crippling the structure of school-time can be on students' success.

It was disquieting for me to hear some of the participants' commentaries on teachers' behaviors but I pursued their stories vigorously and purposefully. I realize that educators who do not solicit the stories likely will experience some distress at the content. Teachers who are able to suppress their professional pride and contain their egos will have a much easier conversion to a

mindset of service than those who perceive their professionalism as being challenged and allow their feelings to be hurt. Determined teachers will move beyond their initial discomfort at hearing about racism and stereotyping to a renewed commitment of service to African American male students.

Teachers who hear the stories should be compelled to examine their own attitudes towards African American males. When equipped with the real stories, teachers' abilities and willingness to discern stereotypes from individuals may be enhanced. Listening to the students' stories may be uncomfortable initially for teachers because "insider perspectives may provide different and often more condemning accounts about the schooling process than mainstream versions" (Howard, 2008, p. 972). The participants' and other students' stories are important and valuable—*especially* counterstories—because they have the power to enlighten European American teachers of their African American male students' daily realities. Strayhorn (2008) recommends that teachers hear about "interpersonal interactions that trouble one's previously held beliefs" (para. 33).

African American Males Believe they are Stereotyped Negatively by Teachers

Corresponding Critical Race Theory Tenet: Racism is the norm.

The participants mentioned unanimously and frequently being stereotyped by teachers. My first notations after interviewing Darren included my surprise at the numerous times he mentioned stereotyping. He often referenced stereotyping as a destructive teacher practice and claimed that African American males were thought of merely as "gangsters" or "athletes." Darren professed a love for sports yet bristled at being stereotyped as only an athlete. Robby echoed Darren's sentiments and added that "teachers at my high school knew that a black kid, male or female, was an athlete because that was the only reason black kids got to go to that high

school.” Robby explained the small number of African American and other minority students at his elite public high school:

There were a selective few black—and by black I mean African American and Spanish kids that *didn't* play sports. If you were black, or Spanish, and you went to Northwest, nine times out of ten you were there because you were a talented athlete. Like, I can't really even think of too many that didn't play sports when I was there—especially knowing that that's not their district—[he is referring to students who receive special transfers to attend Northwest instead of their neighborhood schools]—so either they was academic wise, I don't know, not very many if any there for academics, everyone I knew was there for sports or cheerleading.

Robby's personal and casual observation that African American males who attend European American schools are often there because of athletic talent has been observed and recorded in past educational research (Duncan, 2002; Ottley, 2007; White-Johnson, 2001). Robby's observation that if a minority student attends an elite, predominantly European American school it is most likely due to athletics is similar to the CRT tenet that racism (stereotyping) is the norm, rather than the exception. Duncan (2002) reports that students, teachers, and administrators often believe that unless a school has a strong athletic department, African American male students will be left out or of “marginal status” (p. 136).

The stereotype of African American male as athlete is a widespread and persuasive force but it is not the only stereotype assigned to African American males. Howard (2008) traces stereotyping back 400 years to “a highly problematic depiction ranging from the docile or bewildered slave, to the hyper-sexed brute, to the gregarious Sambo, the exploitative pimp or slickster, to the super athlete and entertainer” (p. 966). The stereotypes mentioned most

frequently by the participants included “dumb athlete,” “troublemaker,” “drug dealer,” and “gangster.” According to the participants, teachers also stereotyped other groups but not as much as they stereotyped African Americans. Asian Americans were “egg heads” (highly intelligent); European Americans were “good kids;” Hispanic students were “slow.” When ranking the various groups in order of teachers’ preference, the participants placed African American males at the bottom of the list. They perceived that teachers wanted to work with and have students in their classes in this order:

1. Asian American males or females
2. European American females
3. European American males
4. Hispanic females
5. Hispanic males
6. African American females
7. African American males

Teachers undoubtedly would protest this list and profess to want to teach all students—and many would be telling the truth—but that does not void this list of value. African American males in this study believe that they are the least desirable group of students, and that teachers would rather deal with any students instead of them. The participants said that teachers dreaded their arrival, seemed uneasy, and “didn’t know what to do with us [African American males]” (Jacob). The tendency for European American female teachers to engage cautiously with African American male students has been noted by other educational researchers (Duncan, 2002; Dunbar, 1999; Strayhorn, 2008; White-Johnson 2001). The participants agreed unanimously that African American males were teachers’ least favorite students. This conclusion resonates with Howard’s

(2008) research on African American males in PreK-12 schools: “While there is extensive research that examines the social, emotional, and educational challenges that males of all ethnic groups face in schools, there is a *clear racial hierarchy* amongst those groups that requires examining [italics added]” (Howard, 2008, p. 966). African American male students report more self-identities than athlete, rapper, and gangster; however, some teachers remain more familiar with the stereotypes than the real life stories. Although the participants are limited to six, their revelations of being stereotyped by teachers are significant nevertheless (Howard, 2008; White-Johnson, 2001). Howard (2008) encourages educators to listen to African American male students:

Researchers should be careful to not underestimate the ability of African American males or any other group of students, to name their experiences or question the veracity of their accounts, or to dismiss their notions of how their schooling experiences can be improved.
(p. 975)

Likewise, White-Johnson (2001) explains that a small number of participants does not limit the “implications of the [participants’] perspectives” (p. 348).

Robby, the second participant, relished the label of athlete for himself but noted that other students were restricted by stereotypes. He embraced his athlete status perhaps because he possesses a true love for sports and a passion for competition. Other African American male students—those who were not athletes—did not fare nearly as well as Robby did with teachers and administrators. He describes one such young man below:

There was this one dude in my history class but he wasn’t there for long. Nobody knew who his daddy was, his momma never came up to the school, he looked poor, he wearin’ a red flag flyin outta his left pocket, saggin’, and lookin’ mean. The teacher didn’t take

the time to find out what this dude's story was—personally I think he was jus' *portraying* a certain kind of character—but the teacher didn't know and wouldn't ask or take the time to get to know him. I could tell she was relieved when he quit coming to class.

(Robby)

Robby distinguishes between actually being and “portraying a certain kind of character” and this distinction is central to whether a label is damaging or not. Robby was an athlete, loved being an athlete, and wanted to be an athlete in the future. While Darren and Steven (the other two athletes) did not feel restricted necessarily by their athlete-only labels, they insisted that there was more to their characters than their athleticism. Robby wore his athlete label loudly and proudly but saw injustice in the way other students were typed.

In English, I want to be the person that no one knows nothin' about or barely has a part.

But in sports, I want to be the leader. I want to be the captain. I want to be the person that everyone gathers around. (Robby)

In our first interview, Robby pointed out that educators will not like the information that he revealed about the African American male high school experience:

But like I was sayin' earlier about teachers and race, most teachers don't have experience so they only go off of what they see on TV. And I feel like a teacher, they wouldn't admit it, and whoever listens to this tape [meaning this interview] won't want to admit it either, but I believe that the teacher would report that student [the young man described in Robby's previous narrative] to the principal and say, 'Get him out of my class.' I don't feel like too many teachers bein' a white lady, or a white male is going to confront an African American, a Vietnamese, a Spanish, or any other student unless they are also

white. I don't feel like they will confront a person head-on sayin', 'You can't come to my class like that.'

Robby believed that teachers saw African American males differently from other students—as stereotypes from television—thereby treating them differently than other students. Larry also mentioned the prevalence of African American male stereotypes from television:

A lot of it is TV; they [high school students] just want to dress like gangstas, and talk all tough, and act like they don't care about school because they see it on TV. That's all that is...it's a fad and they think they wanna be what they see...and a lot of teachers just immediately stereotype them as knuckleheads but if teachers take the time to get to know them as individuals instead of you know getting to know their clothes then you can really teach...you can see what you need to do because you know the individual.

The revelations of students being stereotyped may surprise inservice teachers who believed previously that racism was a thing of the past and all students are now treated equally. Unless teachers learn or are told otherwise, they will continue to believe that all is well for African American male students. In other words, their “perceptions are crystallized into virtual realities” (Strayhorn, 2008, para. 33).

High School Athletes Receive Special Privileges that are later seen by them as Obstacles.

Corresponding Critical Race Theory Tenet: Interest Convergence.

The three participants who performed as varsity athletes admitted readily that many perks came with their status. Darren, Robby, and Steven all played sports in high school and were friends with dozens of other young men who played sports in other high schools. To this day, Darren does not know exactly why his teachers adopted a hands-off policy towards him but is convinced that they were told to “let him slide.” He often slept in class and turned in

assignments rarely. Yet, with the exception of his math classes, he always managed to pass and earn credit. When I interviewed Darren, he shared with me that he often wondered how the other African American male students felt when he was allowed to sleep through class while they were reprimanded by the teacher and/or sent to the office for doing the same thing. When he was in high school, it bothered him that he could “get by” with sleeping in class but other students received consequences.

I would stand up for kids that was from the same neighborhood as me, kids that I grew up with being treated bad, and treated unfairly, and they were from the same neighborhood that I was...I went to elementary and middle school with them...when I saw them get mistreated, I would stick up for them. Like uh...let’s say I would do something like fall asleep in class, and nothing would happen to me because I was such an athlete for the school. A lot of people liked me, and a lot of teachers had been told to you know, put up with it from me, but if another kid did the same thing, he would be in trouble. I couldn’t learn when I was asleep, but they let me sleep, and if another kid was having any kind of trouble with learning, like not understanding, they would get written up, sent to the assistant principal’s office, sent to in-school suspensioin, and as far as me...they wouldn’t do nothin’ to me because my coaches told ‘em to pass me anyway, or somethin’ like that, to be lenient on me.

He knew “it wasn’t right or fair” but he also knew that come game day, “I’d be doin’ my thing.” Darren played varsity fall and spring sports—football, basketball, and track—and believed that his coaches “protected him from failing” throughout the entire school year.

Robby, another athletic standout, talks about the special privileges and also has some reservations about how his status took away from the other students:

Every game day there were special privileges...let's see, umm, well, we always have to get out early because if it wasn't a home game, we had to leave early. The teachers knew that you wasn't goin' be focused on game days. In fact, some of the class topics would be football, like 'You guys need to take care of business and win for us,' I mean even though that's showin' school spirit, that's not fair to the student who is not there for sports and is trying to focus on grades.

Larry (not a high school athlete) also observed how athletes were treated in traditional public high school:

Well, they [school officials] might of said there wasn't no difference [between athletes and non-athletes] but you could see that it was different for the simple fact that he [a popular athlete] wasn't never there—and he was still passin' [incredulously] or he's crackin' up in class, talkin' back, comin' in late with no excuse and the teacher might say, [teacher's voice now] 'OK, we're going to talk to Coach' [Back to his own voice] Discipline him like you would everybody else! That's what I think should be done...and the few students who got that treatment was because they could perform and do something for the school...they play basketball for the school, or football, and some of them do both...but they shouldn't have been gettin' no special treatment—and you could just see the difference—they in class cuttin' up, talkin', not doin' they work, and they still playin' and they still passin' and they ain't at school no more than I am and I wasn't never there.

Robby, like Darren, knew that his coaches "had my back." His classes were chosen by his coaches. Robby's schedule consisted of "easy-A" classes like weight training and conditioning (repeated for seven consecutive semesters); team sports (repeated for four consecutive

semesters); proctor for the athletic department (repeated for three consecutive semesters). During his junior and senior years, it was common for Robby to be in the gym for three or more class periods. His schedule officially contained three sports-related classes; in addition he would “get a pass” from his core classes to “work out, go over plays, and talk to the coaches.” Robby remembers being pulled from his core classes to watch game films, to develop new plays, and to “think of ways to motivate the team” with the coaches.

Looking back on his high school schedule, Darren now believes that his best academic interests were slighted so that he would remain eligible to participate in varsity football, basketball, and track. Critical Race Theory’s second tenet, interest convergence, is applicable to Darren’s high school experience. In its broadest sense, the concept of interest convergence means that society’s dominant group allows progress for the minority groups if and when the progress also benefits the majority (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In Darren’s case, the school’s athletic interests converged with Darren’s developmental level (adolescent) and mindset (sports and more sports). The easy classes Darren took were appealing to his adolescent mindset; the lack of academic responsibility allowed him to meet athletic demands. The school sports program and coaches benefitted from Darren’s athletic ability and performances while Darren remained pleased with his easy schedule. “Don’t worry about your math,” he was told by coaches, “you can make that up later.” Darren’s contribution to high school sports and the images of the coaches were being protected. Darren was not a cherished or looked-after individual; he was the means to an end. In exchange for the “gift” of an easy schedule, he was a treasure trove for high school sports.

While Darren coasted through six consecutive semesters of weight training and conditioning, he failed six consecutive semesters of math. During back-to-back semesters of

team sports Darren earned six As; he concurrently earned English grades of D, C, B, and B. During his sophomore year, Darren spent at least three class periods a day in the gym—coach’s assistant, team sports, weight training and conditioning—and the other class periods in core classes of English, math, social studies, and science. However, he remembers frequently leaving his core classes at the coaches’ bidding to tend to more sports-related activities. As a sophomore, he earned Ds in history, Fs in math and Cs in biology.

Robby knew that his reading was below grade level in high school and questions whether his own easy schedule was the best long term choice. He now wishes that he would have been pushed harder academically:

Well, say, like we in class and we have to read, I will count up to my part and make sure that I know all the words. I aint payin’ no attention to anything that’s goin’ on, I’m just looking ahead in the reading to make sure I know *all* the words. If we have 20 students in the class, and I know I have to be the 10th person, I will count up to my section to where I know the words. It blended in with everybody else because I didn’t want to be soundin’ like, oh I’m stumblin’ over this word because I aint never seen it. And with reading, that was a lot of my problem. I didn’t practice. I didn’t just sit down and read a novel. Sports clippings is about all I read and they aren’t hard. That’s a paragraph at most. Your vocabulary don’t have to be too high to know what the writer is saying.

Robby remembers one teacher in particular because she refused to “give” him a sports-eligible grade. This is how he described her:

She had actually put forth the effort to find out my grades in my other classes, and they were good, so she really wanted to know what was going on in her English class. I wasn’t up to par, so we started to talk, and that’s another reason why it was such a blessing that I

had her all four years because she knew me, and that's beautiful because she could come to me [approach me] a little differently than a teacher who didn't know me as well, or only had me say one semester. Like I told her, No one actually never just pushed me or had the faith in me my freshman year in the classroom—just in sports—and she told me straight up, 'You're not going to be able to play sports because I'm not the kind of teacher that will give you a D just so you can play. You gotta actually learn how to do it. And I'll help you.' And that's what kind of teachers we need.

Robby describes having the same teacher for more than one year as “beautiful” and attributes his academic progress to her tenacity and compassion. The other participants also noted at least one and sometimes two teachers from their past who influenced them positively and contributed to whatever success they may have had while in traditional public schools. The value of caring teachers is well documented in educational research. Picower's (2004) research took place in a California public school that was known for its caring teachers, culturally relevant pedagogy, and Afrocentric environment:

It was expected that teachers would stay with their students for more than one grade.

They believed that the splitting up of children and teachers every year mirrored the practice of splitting up African American families under slavery and therefore they made every attempt to keep classes together for as long as possible. (p. 13)

The importance of nurturing and attentive teachers to all students' academic success is well-established; it is especially vital to African American male students (Booker, 2006; Eifler, 2002; Glarabaghi, 2008; Picower, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Young, Wright, & Lester, 2005). Glarabaghi (2008) found that youth who had survived chaotic and otherwise troubled school lives also remembered caring adults with fondness:

The most valuable memory they carry with them, the thing worth smiling about in their recollection and retelling of their often horrifying experiences, is their relationship with a particular care giver, a staff member in a group home, a worker who helped them through a tough scenario. (p. 31)

The participants' testimonies regarding memorable teachers from their past illustrated the importance of caring teachers.

The participants spoke highly of involved teachers who refused to accept substandard work or flimsy excuses from them. In contrast to these teachers, the participants described lenient teachers who accepted mediocrity in school work and effort on a regular basis. The easy teachers were not remembered with high praise and fondness. In retrospect, Robby realizes that his easy classes did not challenge him or make him stretch and reach a higher learning potential:

Yeah there really is bad things too [referring to an easy schedule]—and by me bein' older now, I really wish that the teachers would have been harder on me. I wish that the teachers wouldn't think that just because a kid is an athlete, or a star, or whatever it may be, that they are going to let them slide to where like they don't be that...let me see...forceful...or making students do certain things—I would actually want and choose the 'mean' teacher as students would say—or I would want the one that's wantin' to know why I didn't get this point or this percentage on the test—what didn't I understand? Because that's what actually helps you, makes you learn.

Darren said that he thought he would graduate from high school “no matter what I did” because “they did all the stars like that—star athletes.” He now resents that he was allowed to continue semester after semester without passing math but he realizes that his situation is not unique.

I know plenty of stars who couldn't even write a paragraph but they still graduated. I know plenty of stars who couldn't even pass the ACT, but they would get so much help, and so many passes, and so many chances, and so much more than the other students got—much better help. And I didn't think it was right. And it was a lot of sports—basketball, swimming, wrestling.

Darren definitely felt shortchanged by his less than rigorous academic schedule:

I was takin' little freshmen classes that I really shouldn't have been takin' when I was a junior, and a senior. They [counselors] didn't tell me about no math, and how you had to have so many math credits to graduate, I never passed a math class in high school—never. Basically, I was just being used to play sports but there wasn't really no careness put into my grades because they [coaches] was more interested in me getting' stuff done on the field, on the track, and on the basketball court. Like I said, I wouldn't even be in class a lot of the time because my coaches would come and get me out of class. I'd be in another classroom watching the game tapes, and watching all of the plays, and getting ready for next week's game when I was supposed to be studying, y'know, my school work, not the game tapes.

Darren and Robby report spending nearly equal time in the gym as the classroom and coaches having more of an influence in their lives than teachers. The gym was their classroom and the coaches were their teachers. Darren now believes that he was taken advantage of for the sake of the school's sports program:

All the sports, and all the stuff that I ever did for that school, all for nothin'. I broke a lot of records and I set a lot of records for that school. My name is...I had records in basketball...I had records for, y'know, being' a freshman and goin' to state in track...I

have records for freshman and sophomore years qualifying for state. But they just showed me no love. They just used me. I don't know how you can use a high school student, but I was used. I got down on myself. I got mad at the school system. And I let it take my focus away from really coming here [Learning Center] and finishing my diploma like I was supposed to [referring to a period of time when he was enrolled but not yet attending regularly at the Learning Center].

Darren's experience of being a high school athletic star who then failed to graduate is an example of interest convergence. Darren was allowed to enroll in sports-related classes that guaranteed his eligibility to play. The school benefitted from his athleticism; he contributed record-breaking performances in track and football to the school's athletic legacy. As a high school student, Darren enjoyed his indulgent schedule and his time on the field and in the arena. However, the ultimate result was that the school won titles while Darren's academic coursework was neglected.

Robby's reflections about high school are less accusatory towards the coaches and the school. Darren believes that he was hoodwinked and sports were used as a gimmick. The difference in intensity between Darren's and Robby's recollections may be attributed to the number of recovery credits needed and the opportunity to participate in commencement. Robby needed two out of eight English classes; Darren needed to make up six of six math classes. Robby walked with his class in the traditional commencement exercise; Darren was arrested and thrown out of his class's commencement. However, both young men agree wholeheartedly that their high school academic requirements were overshadowed by athletic demands.

In contrast, Steven's class schedule was not heavy with sports-related classes; his father insisted that he enroll in such classes as citizenship law, art survey, Spanish, forensics, and

economics. Steven's father monitored his schedule proactively and excluded sports-related classes purposefully in favor of college preparatory classes. Like Darren, Steven remembers seeing his African American male peers who did not play sports being treated harshly for minor infractions such as sleeping in class, having side conversations in class, being tardy, or not having a pen or pencil. At the time, he accepted preferential treatment of athletes as the status quo. When I interviewed him and he reflected back on the situation, he was a little embarrassed for being "so self-centered and all-important," and regretted not "saying something to stick up for my classmates 'cause that wasn't right for them to get in trouble and me to get a pass."

The participants' preference in teacher-style mirrors what other research has found. For example, the participants reported that the few teachers who did not label them or stereotype them along the way were cherished. Shealey (2006) writes:

Highly qualified urban teachers are committed to enhancing not only their students' academic development but also their *emotional, social, and personal development* [italics added]. Additionally, these teachers recognize the role of contextual factors inherent in urban settings and the implications of these factors on student performance. (p. 10)

The participants unanimously favored teachers who took a personal interest in their academic struggles. Noguera (2003) writes about effective teachers and schools for African American male students. He stresses the importance of "supportive relationships that exist between teachers and students and the ethos of caring and *accountability* [italics added]" (Noguera, 2003, p. 450).

African American Males deliberately Assume a Pleasing Demeanor.

Corresponding Critical Race Theory Tenet: Racism is the norm.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, preservice teachers have some reservations when interacting with African American students. The entries from preservice teachers' reflective journals are repeated here:

- “It seems to me like the black kids [in high school] try to be intimidating.”—22-year-old European American female
- “When the sophomores were playing a game of pick-up basketball, the black guys stuck together and protested every call.”—23-year-old European American male
- “I’m not used to being around black people; the black students [in middle school] could tell and they didn’t do anything to make it easier for me. I felt like they were showing off.”—21-year-old European American female
- “No matter how nicely I asked them to do the simplest tasks, the black kids [in elementary school] challenged me.”—22-year-old European American female
- “I don’t think it’s right that a black kid who goes to a white hangout [in high school] is not in danger of being beat up but if a white kid were to go to a black area he would be at least threatened if not hit.”—20-year-old European American male

The participants’ perceptions of how they presented and carried themselves were in sharp contrast to the perceptions of the preservice teachers. The participants shared how diligently they tried not to be intimidating:

When asked if he ever intentionally tried to be intimidating, Jacob shared the following: No, I try to be as jolly as I can! Jolly, jolly! I feel like an Uncle Tom sometimes all the bo-janglin’ and dancin’ I felt like I had to do [laughing]. Honestly, I feel like bein’ a

black man—that if you’re to the point, forward, that you’re perceived as aggressive and intimidating—even though that’s not the case—so I try extra hard to be pleasant.

The other five participants had similar stories of trying to be “nice.” Terrance knew that his big size was intimidating and, therefore, tried to have a gentle demeanor. Steven, a powerful and effective communicator, purposefully chose to use the “King’s English” when speaking to authority figures. Darren was conscious of “good manners” and wanted to show that he had “proper home training.” Larry was raised by several strong uncles who demanded that he be respectful to authority figures. Identical sentiments are echoed in Howard’s (2008) research:

One of the central themes to emerge across each of the stories offered by the young men was their keen awareness of negative racial stereotypes about African American men.

Critical to each of these young men, were explicit attempts to not reinforce widely held beliefs and stereotypes about African American males. (Howard, 2008, p. 969)

Robby attempted to explain why the teachers may have misinterpreted African American students:

I feel like the teachers haven’t had enough experience with other races, like, whatever it may be, African American, Asian, Spanish, they haven’t had enough experiences with different sorts of those races, or they might have had a bad experience with a black guy or a black girl, and that bad experience makes them look at all black students differently, and maybe wonder [he now assumes a teacher’s voice] ‘Maybe they’re all like that.’ [Now back to his own voice] Because they didn’t really know, because everybody’s different.

Darren also attributes European American teachers' perceptions of intimidating African American male students to their lack of experience with other races and also points out the shortage of African American teachers:

The teachers who seemed afraid were all Caucasian. White. I didn't have not one black teacher my whole years in high school. Not one. I don't think that matters—I mean black kids don't have to have black teachers—but the white teachers seemed scared by the black and the brown in the school, especially the ones [students] who needed a kick in the butt, you know what I'm saying? They [teachers] just couldn't reach 'em [students] so they wanted to, and they would, just get rid of them.

Preservice teachers often express their frustration at what they perceive to be African American male students' uncooperative demeanor. Conversely, African American male students offer their own criticism of how teachers handle their authority. In the next section, the difference between teachers acting with authority and letting authority “go to their heads” is discussed.

African American Male Students Respond Positively to Purposeful Authority

Corresponding Critical Race Theory Tenet: Pursuit of Social Justice.

In an affront to social justice, African American males are suspended, expelled, and referred for discipline matters more often than any other ethnic group on a national level (Arrington et al., 2003; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Blanchett, 2006; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Krezmien et al., 2006; Monroe, 2005; Ottley, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; Townsend, 2000). Higher suspension rates, expulsion rates, and referrals for discipline for African American males compared to other ethnic groups exist also on the district level (Wichita Public Schools, 2008b; Wichita Public Schools, 2008c).

The connection between appropriate use of teacher authority and social justice may not seem readily apparent but nevertheless the two are linked. All of the participants shared anecdotes of being treated harshly and handled aggressively by the very adults who were in charge of their safety. They shared stories of being in situations with authority figures that escalated rapidly and ended badly. Albeit a small group, it is still telling that five of them had experienced similar scenarios culminating in being handcuffed. The prevalence of the “cuffed and stuffed” stories indicates the absence of social justice. The participants recognized the improper use of teacher authority; they called this “when teachers let power go to their heads.” But, when further pressed to define the best use of authority, the young men all struggled to capture its essence. I share their angst in explaining the conundrum of how and when teachers should exert their authority. The participants struggled with defining appropriate use of teacher authority and so do teachers. Every fall semester, I teach a diversity class to preservice teachers. The class is taken before they begin their fulltime student teaching semester. During the class

sessions, the topic of authority inevitably comes up and needs to be addressed. According to their reflective journals, preservice teachers often wonder how and when to act as if they are “in charge” of a class and of students.

A typical class of preservice teachers consists of 27 students, all European American, 24 females, 3 males, 15 city residents, 12 from small town rural areas, age 22 to 23-years-old with a peppering of older, nontraditional students. Before the preservice teachers are immersed in the fulltime student teaching semester, they spend a considerable amount of time in the schools. Although they are not charged officially with providing direct instruction to an entire class, they have many opportunities for small group activities, to make observations, and to help supervise before and after school activities. Once the preservice teachers venture out into the public schools, they either write about some aspect of authority in their reflective journals or, more frequently, bring up a specific incident in a class discussion. The preservice teachers are prompted to take special note of the inservice teachers that they observe who seem to monitor, correct, and praise student behavior seamlessly.

The participants agreed on some behaviors that teachers should not exhibit. The number one taboo is finger-pointing while correcting a student’s behavior. The young men were offended unanimously by pointed (or worse yet wagging) fingers “in the face.” The proximity of the finger-pointing is the issue, not the act of finger-pointing itself. The participants did not mind if a teacher pointed at them during a class discussion, or pointed at them across the room to get their attention. But, when the physical distance between teacher and student decreased and the tone of the exchange became more serious, the finger-pointing then became a catalyst for serious conflict. The dynamic described here is no different than any other interpersonal relationship; it

seems obvious. However, due to the frequency with which all of the participants mentioned authority and (finger-pointing) teachers it bears mentioning.

Participants disliked being called “buddy” or “pal” or similar monikers by their teachers. They crave the empathy and the support of a friend from their teachers but make a distinction between “being my friend” and “being an understanding teacher.”

After finger-pointing and calling students “buddy,” the next complaint was being touched by teachers in an aggressive manner. The fact that it was ranked third instead of first was surprising to me and, I would venture to say, to many other veteran educators. Before interviewing these young men, I would have ranked a grab as much higher on the abuse of authority continuum than finger-pointing. Perhaps the participants mentioned finger-pointing and the use of “buddy” as most offensive because those two behaviors occur more frequently than physical contact between teacher and student. It is probably safe to say that some teachers habitually point fingers and use what they consider to be terms of endearment towards their students. It is certainly true that the participants found said behaviors to be habitually offensive.

The perfect authority seems to be a blend of two icons: coach and mother. The coach provides the matter-of-fact instruction while the mother provides the empathy. The participants praised direct statements. Steven explained the best approach for teachers: “Don’t ask me to please sit down when I’m done talking to my neighbor, tell me to get in my own seat (*like I know I should be*) when the bell rings.” Larry recommended that teachers “talk to me like my momma would talk to me—matter of fact and to the point.” Steven expressed a preference for a teacher’s directive over a polite request. Larry wanted the teachers to act with authority. African American males appreciate and respect teachers who exercise purposeful authority (Glarabaghi, 2008; Monroe, 2005; Ottley, 2007; Picower, 2004; White-Johnson, 2001). Jacob pointed out that

sometimes teachers made ineffective threats. “Don’t threaten me with consequences that you can’t deliver.”

Larry shared that teachers seem reluctant to correct or discipline African American males:

The teachers is timid because of what they’ve seen on TV of African Americans and they believe the stereotype...[now he begins to address teachers] don’t be timid...speak up...say what you need to say...because a lot of ‘em it’s just smoke and mirror on the students’ part...nothin’ but smoke and mirrors...they’re not tough, that’s what they seen on TV so they think they want to be like that...but if you [teachers] assert your dominance and say, ‘Hey! This is what we gonna do and this is how we gonna do it...’ then they [students] gonna respect you.

Larry’s comments point out the power of stereotypes as well as the need for teachers to be inclusive—“this is what *we* gonna do”—in matters of authority.

After conducting each interview, I listed mental images and reviewed the previous interviews. One of the images that surfaced and repeated was that of a young African American man in handcuffs. The image began with Darren, who was cuffed at his traditional public high school’s commencement exercise, and continued through each and every story. Robby was handcuffed when he attempted to leave campus legitimately for lunch. In an obvious abuse of power, the school resource officer resorted to cuffing Robby only to release him.

He [school resource officer] tried to use his authority whatever the situation was, don’t want to look into it, don’t want to investigate nothin’, this is what this kid said, this is what that kid said. [Robby is describing how the officer handled investigations.] One year, my junior year, y’know, I was an upper classman. Well, he didn’t feel like I was an

upper classman, which is crazy, because I had it on my badge, and he knew who I was, he had been there ever since my freshman year. I was tryin' to leave for lunch and get pizza...and he said I couldn't leave for lunch. But you can leave for lunch if you're an upperclassman, and he knew that. Plus, he knew that I had a car and very, very few black kids had cars and drove to school. He said that I wasn't going to get to leave, and I told him that I was, that I was going to go eat, and that he could follow me if he wanted to but I was going to go across the street and get some pizza...and if he would have came at me like 'Hey, man, let me see your ID so that I know you're an upperclassman,' I wouldn't have had a problem *even though* he knew I was an upperclassman and he knew I had a vehicle, he seen me park in the parking lot, he just try to make it harder than it had to be. The situation got real ugly...he actually put hand cuffs on me. It was pointless. No charges. He actually got to put handcuffs on me which is what he wanted to do. I don't remember where he took me after that but I do know and I do remember those handcuffs. Racist stuff like this happens all day long...and that's why African Americans or whatever race it may be that feel like they in the minority...they choose to have attitudes towards certain people because now they feel like they are profiled, they are targeted, so they are not going to let anyone get the upperhand on them—so there's a lot of tension—the minority feel like they being judged. (Robby)

The third participant, Steven, also was handcuffed when attending a traditional public school. What made this image even more disturbing to me was the fact that he was handcuffed when in middle school, not high school. He was 12-years-old, weighed 100 lbs. and stood 5' tall; his stature did not seem to warrant the application of handcuffs. Before the police arrived, he willingly and without protest waited in a chair in the school office. According to Steven, the

incident began in a classroom when a male teacher became angry and pushed him. Steven admits being in the wrong and says that the teacher intervened because Steven was attempting to hit another student. When the teacher pushed Steven, he fell back into the pencil sharpener. The impact broke Steven's skin and a small amount of blood appeared on Steven's new white shirt. Steven became furious that his shirt was stained and lunged towards the teacher with fists flying. The teacher was able to subdue him and escort him to the office. Steven assumed that his father was being called and that he would be suspended. He sat in the office chair as told and began to cry. He knew that his father would be disappointed bitterly in his behavior. Steven waited through one class period and then another. To his surprise, the city police appeared and asked, "Are you Steven Brady?" When he answered affirmatively, he was tossed to the ground, told to put his hands behind his back, and cuffed. He was taken by police car ("stuffed and cuffed") to the juvenile intake assessment center. His father was not notified by the school; his father was notified by the juvenile authorities after Steven was in custody.

Jacob, the fourth participant, was handcuffed both in and outside of school. One day, he was accused of leaving campus to make a drug deal. In fact, he had relatives who lived nearby the school and had gone to their house for lunch, as he often did. Upon his return to campus, he was detained and cuffed by school security until his mother was contacted at her job and confirmed Jacob's claim of nearby relatives. Outside of school, he was detained and cuffed several times but never arrested officially. Once, while riding in a car with his brother and two friends, Jacob asked the driver to stop at a grocery store so that he could use the public restroom. When he returned to the car, there was a police cruiser with "blazing cherries;" his brother and two friends were cuffed. Incredulous that this could happen in the short time that it took him to use the facilities, Jacob asked, "What's going on?" He, too, was then cuffed by one of the

officers. The officers eventually explained to the group that “they were making the customers inside nervous” and “they looked like some other black guys who had been causing trouble.”

Terrance, the fifth participant, was handcuffed many times and, by his own admission, rightfully so. He undoubtedly broke the law and was restrained, detained, and arrested appropriately. Larry, the final participant, was handcuffed on what turned out to be his last day in a traditional public high school. His story was told in Chapter 4. He was detained and handcuffed when he returned to school after a suspension. Larry was held in the office until passing period when he was escorted out of the school building, through the school parking lot, and into a police cruiser.

Five of the six young men had been handcuffed on the basis of suspicion and allegations; only one deserved absolutely to be treated like a lawbreaker. Perhaps the experiences of being handcuffed by law enforcement and stereotyped by teachers contribute to African American males’ distaste of finger-pointing, authoritarian teachers.

Implications

As I delved deeper and deeper into the interview data, it became apparent to me that the participants identified stereotyping as an oppressive and hurtful practice but they did not necessarily equate it with racism. They made note of the differences in which European American females and African American males were spoken to and treated yet did not claim racism as a probable cause. They ranked students confidently from most to least desirable in teachers’ eyes (European American females to African American males) and said the list was “just the way it is.” The subtleties of racism were attributed to the status quo and racism was identified as the use of “nigger.” White-Johnson (2001) also found that African American male

students were able to describe mistreatment at the hands of teachers and other wrongs but did not label such as “racism.”

These students spent a great deal of time describing individual experiences that suggested their rights to quality schooling had been compromised by school officials. Rarely if ever were the actions of teachers or administrators attributed to conscious racism or the structural conditions of the community. (p. 352)

With the exception of Darren, who mentioned stereotyping and racism frequently in tandem, the participants rarely labeled specific incidents or practices as racist. For example, Steven, Terrance, and Larry all spoke about African American students receiving harsher reprimands from teachers than European American students yet they did not mention racism specifically. Robby said, “I don’t think I ever had racist comments directed at me.” The participants’ experiences reinforce Noguera’s (2003) findings. “Consistently, schools that serve Black males fail to nurture, support, or protect them” (Noguera, 2003, p. 436).

Duncan (2002) found that African American male students “believe their peers regularly ignore them, and their teachers constantly mistreat them” (p. 135). Yet, like the participants in this study, they did not label the practices “racist.” Dunbar (1999) reported that African American males were more likely to consider their educational predicaments as personal failures and not recognize the “linkages between larger historical and social forces” (p. 243). The relative absence of the mention of racism on the participants’ part reflects CRT’s first tenet—racism is the norm (Bell, 2004; Chapman, 2007a; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; King, 1991).

The study considered the intersectionality of seven components—gender, race, grades, racism, sports, involvement with the law, and relationships—and how they influenced the

educational experiences of African American males in credit recovery. Gender, race, sports, and racism rose to the top of influential forces while the effects of grades, involvement with the law, and relationships remained more oblique. Robby and Terrance were the two participants who actually “served time.” Robby’s legal troubles occurred after he graduated from high school; Terrance was arrested when he was a junior in high school for selling drugs. The ramifications of being adjudicated were enormous for Robby; he served time in federal prison. Terrance was mandated to obtain a high school diploma instead of a GED. But, in regards to the study, gender, race, sports, and racism emerged as more powerful markers than involvement with the law.

When comparing traditional public schools to alternative schools, the role of time emerged as the most influential difference. Students who failed classes in traditional public schools were able to pass classes in Learning Centers. This could imply several different things. Perhaps the schedules, bells, and semesters of traditional public schools are too restrictive for some students. The removal of passing periods and by-subject classes allows students to engage and flow with the curriculum. The ability to finish a class before semester’s end and then be able to move on to the next required class is motivating.

Recommendations for Preservice and Inservice Teachers’ Practice

Inservice teachers would benefit from knowing the following:

- African American males believe they are stereotyped frequently by teachers.
- African American males assume a pleasing demeanor.
- African American males respond positively to tempered and consistent authority.

Inservice teachers are the logical recipients for this information; they have daily contact and interaction with African American male students throughout the school week. European American female teachers sometimes express consternation about how to interact effectively

with their African American male students (Chapman, 2007b; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007b; Monroe, 2005; Solarzano & Yosso, 2001b; Strayhorn, 2008; Vann Lynch, 2006). Preservice teachers likely are exposed to diversity issues through a number of venues: their own urban educational experience, their undergraduate college work, or district mandated training upon being hired. Inservice teachers may have been teaching since before any such requirements were in place; they deserve and need to know that African American males feel stereotyped yet continue to assume a pleasant manner. The inservice teachers also would benefit from knowing what specific behaviors promote cooperation with versus rebellion against authority.

The challenge is how to present this information without making the transmission another dreaded inservice day, or a required book to read, or an optional study group attended by only the most zealous and energetic teachers. Inservice teachers are saturated with administrative and parental expectations, mandatory reports, and numerous other job-related responsibilities. Perhaps an even bigger challenge than the logistics is overcoming the resistance of inservice teachers to receive the findings. Veteran teachers may take offense at the recommendation to hear and respond to African American male concerns. They may regard the findings as an affront to their professionalism and ability to be effective teachers.

Because of these two challenges—time and attitude—a creative attempt at communication is imperative. To help overcome the potential resentment of teachers having “yet another thing to do or attend,” I recommend that the message be taken to the teachers in small group settings. Imagine an inservice teacher who is well-respected by colleagues and an advocate for African American male students; now pair that teacher with an African American male student who is willing to talk to a small group of teachers. Sending the teacher and student as a

couple stresses the importance of the findings and provides mutual moral support. The small group setting is conducive to questions and answers and meaningful dialogue. What begins with one traveling teacher and one student ambassador would grow easily into several mobile pairs; the capacity for reaching inservice teachers would increase steadily. It would not be an easy process and it would consist of several phases. Principal permission would have to be obtained. The appropriate teacher and student pair would need to be identified as well as times for the small group meetings. Follow-up would include revisiting the small groups and asking for feedback throughout the school year. The potential pitfall of creating stereotypes (e.g., all African American males are alike) must be avoided in the implementation of any program design. This is only one suggested venue for delivering the findings; there are sure to be numerous variations in design. Strayhorn (2008) also recommends that teachers learn more about African American male students; he writes that “without interpersonal interactions that trouble one’s previously held beliefs, perceptions are crystallized into virtual realities. Thus, teachers are encouraged to examine their assumptions and beliefs about Black men” (para. 28). White-Johnson (2001) further supports the idea that teachers of African American males need to be aware of their school experiences in order to be effective facilitators. It is necessary to understand “the root problem of a tumultuous student/teacher relationship” (p. 370). Duncan (2002) reports “listening to what they [African American male students] have to say about their academic and social experiences in schools” is the “first step toward changing the conditions that undermine the achievement of black male students” (p. 141). No matter the format, the recommendations for preservice as well as inservice teachers are:

1. Be made aware of their African American male students’ daily educational experience.

2. Consciously avoid any future stereotyping and racism.
3. Recognize that African American male students are making a conscious effort to be approachable, not intimidating.
4. Make any necessary changes in scenarios involving their authority and African American males.

Future Research

Future research is needed regarding African American high school male student athletes. More information is needed about how their classes are selected, how the counseling department interacts with the athletic department, and if the athletes are being provided an academic foundation as well as the opportunity to play sports. The scope of coaches' influences on African American high school male athletes needs to be examined. Additional research gauging the intersectionality of classes chosen for athletes, the acquisition of core credits essential for graduation, and athletes' relationships with coaches, teachers, counselors, and administrators is warranted.

Educational research addressing traditional public high school scheduling and how it affects African American male students' credit acquisition is needed. The management of time includes hourly schedules, semesters, beginning and end times, passing periods, and other predetermined units. Conversely, more research is needed on how alternative high school time management affects African American male students' credit acquisition. This includes the absence of semesters, a "come and go as you please" type of flow, and the absence of bells. Comparative research focusing on African American male and African American female athletes is needed. Additionally, comparative research between African American male athletes and European American athletes as well as other ethnicities is needed.

Participants in this research self-reported that attending the Learning Center was beneficial to them in a variety of ways. All of the Learning Center graduates acknowledged that they would not have earned a high school diploma if they had not attended the Learning Center. More research is needed into the benefits of alternative settings. Mackey (2010) suggests “a longitudinal study that tracked all of the students in the dropout-recovery centers” (p. 19). The longitudinal study is needed, Mackey (2010) writes, to “understand if and how their [Learning Center students] job prospects and earnings changed over time...compared to similar groups of students without access to this type of program” (p. 19).

Possible Research Questions

Possible future research questions include:

- How are classes selected for African American male athletes? Is there a need for high school counselors who specialize in working with athletes?
- Are athletes over-served in athletics but under-served in academics? How can counselors and coaches best work together for the good of African American high school athletes?
- What repercussions or actions should there be for coaches and/or counselors when student athletes fail to obtain core credits?
- Are the parents of African American male athletes involved in their sons' class selection? If not, why not? If so, how effective is their involvement?
- What do African American high school athletes know about the requirements for their chosen future college plans?
- How is the system providing a set of checks and balances among coaches, athletes, teachers, and academic requirements?

Potential Methodologies

Research on African American male students should continue to be conducted with the theoretical framework of CRT because African American males “more than any other student population in the United States, may be most negatively affected by distorted constructions of race and gender” (Howard, 2008, p. 962).

Beginning with racism as a norm and fortified with the potency of counterstories, future research could take place in the form of counterstories that provide rich description of educational experiences. Another effective methodology for future research is ethnography. Patterns could be identified and sense made of the “social settings, actors, and events” (Creswell, 2007, p. 156). Finally, the methodology of case study could provide detailed and in-depth information about the educational experiences of African American males.

Conclusions

A significant amount of research has been conducted on African American males in the K-12 public school setting (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003; Chapman, 2007a; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Fordham, 1985; Hall & Stevenson, 2007; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Ottley, 2007). This credit study contributes to the existing body of research because it highlights the previously slighted population of African American males who have attended both traditional public schools and been in an alternative setting for credit recovery. The study illuminates the experience of African American males in credit recovery through a CRT perspective. Critical Race Theory maintains that racism is the norm, interest convergence exists and is practiced, counterstories are important, and social justice should be actively pursued (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995). The credit study contributes further

to the existing research because of its multifaceted perspective; it looked at the intersectionality of gender, race, grades, racism, athletic involvement, law, and relationships.

The study is significant because African American males are failing to graduate from high school at an alarming rate. In the featured state's largest school district, African American males graduate from high school at a lesser rate than all other ethnic groups except for Hispanic males (Wichita Public Schools, 2008a). Not only do they graduate less frequently than all other groups other than Hispanic males at the district level, African American males experience the same dismal ranking in state and national high school graduation rates (Bridgeland et. al., 2006; Kansas State Department of Education, 2009).

The credit study culminated with six major findings that are connected closely to the tenets of CRT. First of all, the major difference between traditional public schools and alternative schools is how time is structured. The importance of time was revealed in the counterstories of the participants. The participants, and other students of marginal status, possess little-known but important stories. By listening to and heeding their stories, educators' assumptions about students are replaced with actionable truths. As mentioned in Chapter 2, "We each occupy a normative universe...from which we are not easily dislodged" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41). Counterstories are the perfect venue for dislodging educators from their majoritarian views and practices.

The next major finding is that African American males believe that they are often stereotyped. Racism is the norm, according to CRT, and this research certainly exposed racism's vitality. The participants were accustomed to racism and lived with the reality that racism is "endemic, pervasive, widespread, and ingrained in society and thus in education" (Milner, 2007a, p. 390).

Thirdly, high school athletes receive special privileges that often are seen later as obstacles. The niceties of being a high school athlete—food passes, hall passes, final passes—were actually not passes at all. They were more like tickets to be paid at a later date. The African American athletes were left lacking academically. The athletic departments of their traditional high schools used them for their own gain and left them spent, (i.e., interest convergence).

Fourthly, African American males sometimes assume a pleasing demeanor deliberately. The participants were conscious of their personas and how easily they could be misunderstood or feared. Preservice and inservice teachers claiming “it’s not me or my attitude that’s a problem, it’s them” are contradicted by the participants’ efforts to be pleasing (Castro, 2010; Duncan, 2002; White-Johnson, 2001). The fact that the African American male students did not feel that they were acceptable “as is” can be attributed to the specter of racism. There is a discrepancy between what the students claim (“We try to be nice!”) and what the teachers claim (“They are intentionally intimidating!”). Interpersonal interactions between preservice and inservice teachers and African American male students should not elicit fear on one side and forced niceness on the other. By listening to the counterstories of underserved students, educators become aware of racism and its ramifications. Rather than fear African American male students or dread their arrival, teachers may begin to respect their (adult-like) ability of maintaining a pleasant and approachable demeanor. As mentioned earlier, “Counter story is both a method of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power, . . . whose story is an ordinary part of the dominant discourse—the majoritarian story” (Solarzano & Yossao as cited in Chapman, 2007a, p. 160).

Fifthly, African American male students respond positively to teachers who conduct themselves with clear purpose but do not flaunt their authority. African American male students seek teachers who conduct themselves appropriately, consistently, purposefully, and confidently. Hopefully, teachers acknowledge and appreciate African American male students who conduct themselves appropriately, consistently, purposefully, and confidently. This code of conduct embraces mutual respect but rejects threats, finger-wagging, and name-calling. African American male students may have had past experiences with authority figures similar to the one Darren shared in Chapter 4. He was escorted away from his high school commencement exercises by four police officers. “They really thought that I was there to sabotage they [sic] graduation. They really did. Four police officers escorted me out. Four. And I did get mad. I at least wanted to take a picture with my class.” Robby also experienced a run-in with an authority figure.

The situation got real ugly...he actually put hand cuffs on me. It was pointless. No charges. He actually got to put handcuffs on me which is what he wanted to do. I don't remember where he took me after that but I do know and I do remember those handcuffs. Racist stuff like this happens all day long...and that's why African Americans or whatever race it may be that feel like they in the minority...they choose to have attitudes towards certain people because now they feel like they are profiled, they are targeted, so they are not going to let anyone get the upperhand on them—so there's a lot of tension—the minority feel like they [sic] being judged. (Robby)

The young men featured in this research shared incidents from their own pasts involving authority figures but they also acknowledged that teachers are bombarded with “knuckleheads who don't know how to act in school.” The subtleties of acting with authority as opposed to

“letting power go to your [teacher’s] head” are numerous and confounding. However, there are some assumptions in matters of teacher authority that should always be honored: no threats, no name-calling, and no finger-wagging.

Finally, by returning to a school setting or supplementing an existing school setting with credit recovery, the participants demonstrated tenacity and resisted stereotypes. They chose to attend alternative schools despite their past school experiences that included being subjected to indifference, racism, stereotyping, and overly zealous authority figures. Two of the participants (Robby and Steven) attended the Learning Center so that they could graduate on schedule and participate in their base school’s commencement exercises. Four of the participants (Jacob, Terrance, Darren, and Larry) returned to a school setting after failing to graduate from a traditional school. Jacob, Darren, and Larry fit under the umbrella of Mackey’s (2010) description of Learning Center students who “had been in the workforce for a few years before enrolling in the program and had witnessed how crucial it was to have a diploma” (p. 21). Whether the objective was to graduate “on time” or just to graduate, the participants chose to try school again; this choice took courage and determination.

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Appendix A



University Research
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785-532-3224
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<http://urco.ksu.edu>

TO: Kay Ann Taylor
Secondary Education
323 Bluemont

Proposal Number: 5124

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair 
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: July 2, 2009

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "African-American Males in High School Credit Recovery: A Critical Race Theory Perspective."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for one year from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: July 2, 2009

EXPIRATION DATE: July 2, 2010

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated "**continuing review**" of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is not granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
 There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Appendix B

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**KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT**

PROJECT TITLE: African American Males in High School Credit Recovery: A Critical Race Theory Perspective

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Kay Ann Taylor, PhD

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Cindy Cisneros McGilvrey, MEd

CONTACT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:

Kay Ann Taylor, PhD, ktaylor@ksu.edu, 785-532-6974

Cindy Cisneros McGilvrey, MEd, cmack@ksu.edu, 316-680-6585

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION:

Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: I am a doctoral candidate at Kansas State University. My doctoral dissertation is based on this research. The results of this research may be published in a professional journal, or shared in a professional setting. At all times, the anonymity of the subjects will be maintained. The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the educational experiences of a certain population (African American males, 18-years-old or older, currently enrolled in high school credit recovery). If you are being asked to participate in this research, it is because you match the above descriptors and, sometime in the past, attended a traditional public high school but did not graduate “on time” or “with your class.” Several factors will be considered throughout this study. These factors include race, gender, athletic involvement, past school attendance, relationships, adjudication, racism, and age. African American males have the second-highest dropout rate in the largest school district in Kansas. The objective of this research is to study African American males who choose to enroll in an alternative setting and attempt to earn their high school diplomas.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: I request your participation in this study, which involves at least two interviews with you approximately 90-minutes in length at the WorkForce Learning Center. The interviews will take place in June, July, and August of 2009, with additional interviews to be scheduled as needed. The interviews will be audio-taped, identified, dated, transcribed, and catalogued. You will select a pseudonym to protect your

identity and maintain anonymity. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the study and all identifiers destroyed. Also, I will be observing your classroom experiences during the months of June and July, 2009. Observations will take place from 3:30 PM until 5:30 PM on eighteen occasions in June and July. You will not necessarily be present for every observation. There is no monetary or other form of compensation for participating in this study. Permission to quote you as anonymous is requested. Data will be analyzed from the researcher's perspective using critical race theory.

LENGTH OF STUDY: Subjects will participate for approximately three months in 2009: June, July, and August.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts from the study.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Participants may benefit from being interviewed. As participants answer questions about their past and present educational experiences, they may gain valuable intra-personal insights as well as increased motivation to earn a high school diploma. Society as a whole could benefit if the research identifies deterrents to dropping out of high school. Teachers in the school district could benefit by learning more about African American male students and how best to reach them.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: All participants will be asked to choose a pseudonym. All collected data: observation notes, interview transcripts, student transcripts, interview tapes, and any other information will be stored in a locked file cabinet. The electronic information will be on a password-protected computer. All information will be securely stored for three years after the research is complete. After three years, all of the data that could be used to possibly personally identify the participants will be destroyed (shredded and/or deleted).

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT: You are entitled to review the results and conclusions of this study. You may request this information by contacting me, Cindy Cisneros McGilvrey, by telephone (316-680-6585), by email (cmack@ksu.edu) or by postal mail (1050 N. Denmark, Wichita, KS, 67212).

You have a personal choice in how the information will be shared. I will provide a summary of the information to you in writing, or in a telephone conversation, or in a personal meeting.

If you do not contact me at the conclusion of the study, I will make every effort to locate you and offer to share the study's information. You are entitled to read your interview transcripts, review any observation notes, and/or read the final draft of the study.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Participant Name:	_____	_____
		Date
Participant		
Signature:	_____	_____
		Date
Kay Ann Taylor, PhD:	_____	_____
	Principal Investigator	Date
Cindy Cisneros McGilvrey, ME:	_____	_____
		Date

Appendix C

Student Friendly Consent

Page 1 of 3

June 12, 2009

Dear Dunbar Learning Center Student,

Subject: Informed Consent Letter for a Study on African American Males in High School
Credit Recovery: A Critical Race Theory Perspective

I am an English and math teacher who is working on my PhD degree. For my dissertation (final exam), I am conducting a research study. My entire teaching career has been spent in the urban environment, the last five years at an alternative high school which is 97% African American, the Langston Hughes Learning Center.

African American males drop out of high school in greater numbers than any other ethnic group other than Hispanic males. During my years of teaching, I have come across many young men who were high school athletes but did not graduate on time (or “with their class”) because they did not have the required classes. At the beginning of the school year, when the Langston Hughes Learning Center holds open enrollment, many African American male students bring their transcripts in and want to know what it will take for them to graduate. It is not unusual for them to have team sports, weight training, physical education—and other classes that concentrate on physical rather than academic development—but to not have enough English, math, or science credits.

The purpose of my research is to look into the educational experiences of young men who used to attend traditional public high school and are now in credit recovery. Extensive research has been done on the “achievement gap” (African American students scoring lower on standardized tests than European-American students, for example) and on African American students in predominantly white settings. My study is different because it takes place in an alternative

Student Friendly Consent

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setting and looks at several factors including race, grades, law, relationships, racism, athletic involvement, and age.

I would like to interview you at least twice during the months of June, July, and August 2009. The interviews will last about 90-minutes. I would also like to observe you while you are at school.

In order to get as much meaningful information as possible, I am asking for permission to look at your transcripts and your FileMaker profile. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you refuse to participate, there is no penalty. It does not affect your status as a Dunbar Learning Center student in any way. You will not be paid for your participation.

Your privacy will be protected. All data will be kept confidential. You will choose a pseudonym (fake name) and all information will be coded to guarantee your anonymity (no one will know who you are). While the study is taking place and when the study is complete, you have the right to review any and all interview notes, observation notes, and/or to read the entire report. I will provide any information in which you are interested by phone, email, or in person.

A possible benefit for you is that after being interviewed about your past and current educational experiences, you might have some “a-ha” moments about your own and others’ past patterns, behaviors, and habits. Also, I hope that teachers who read the study will better understand how to effectively teach African American males.

If you have any questions about your rights, and/or the research, you may contact Mr. Rick Scheidt at 785-523-3224. He is the chairperson of this type of research at Kansas State University. You may also contact Dr. Kay Ann Taylor (my teacher) at 785-523-6974. And, of

Student Friendly Consent

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course, you may also contact me, Cindy Cisneros McGilvrey, at 316-680-6585, or email me at cmack@ksu.com.

In signing this form, you indicate that you have read this informational letter of consent and are willing to participate in the research project described above. Your signature indicates consent to participate in the interviews and to let this material be used in the dissertation and potential journal publications, subject to the restrictions, if any, noted by you below. You may refuse to answer any questions or discontinue the interview process at any time. You may withdraw your consent to participate without any repercussions.

Thank you for your time. When you sign this letter, you indicate that you have read the information and are willing to participate in the research as described above.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about this work and I will be happy to respond.

Sincerely,

Cindy Cisneros McGilvrey, MEd

By signing below, I indicate my consent to participate in the above-described research project.

Signature of Participant

Kay Ann Taylor, PhD, Principal Investigator

Cindy Cisneros McGilvrey, MEd, Co-Principal Investigator

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Tell me what traditional public high school was like for you.
2. Why did you leave traditional public high school? Was it a single incident or a combination of things? Please explain the circumstances surrounding your departure.
3. How close were you to graduating when you left high school? How many credits did you have? Were those core credits or elective credits? When you chose classes, what did you base your decisions on?
4. Tell me what the learning center is like for you. What classes are you currently taking? How many credits have you been able to earn since you enrolled at the learning center?
5. Compare the traditional public high school to the learning center—tell me about the pros and cons of both schools.
6. What kind of obstacles, if any, did you face in a regular school? In the learning center? If so, please describe them.
7. Personally, how confident do you feel about completing your diploma? What, if anything, would keep you from graduating? What, if anything, would help you graduate?
8. What is a typical day (school day) like for you? Do you have other obligations and responsibilities besides attending school? If so, please describe.
9. What kind of relationships did you have with adults while you were in a traditional public high school? Adults in authority positions? Teachers? Administrators? Coaches? What about other adults such as secretaries or custodians?
10. What kind of relationships do you have with adults now that you attend a learning center?
11. To what extent, if any, do you believe that being an African American affected your education—first in a traditional public high school and then in a learning center? Please explain in detail.
12. Now add “male” to “African American” and share any additional details, please.
13. Did you ever witness what you thought to be racism, or racist practices while in a traditional public high school? How about in the learning center? If so, please tell me about the incidents.
14. Were you an athlete in high school? Varsity? Football? Basketball? Track? Were you always/usually/rarely eligible to play (GPA)?
15. Are you now or have you ever been in “trouble with the law?” If you are currently in the legal system, explain what your current status is—awaiting trial, on probation, recently released, probation requirements already fulfilled—and how it affects your daily life.
16. What is your current age? What age did you leave high school? What age do you anticipate being when you earn your diploma?
17. What else would you like to tell me about (past and current) school experiences?

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

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Interview Protocol		African American Males in High School Credit Recovery: A Critical Race Theory Perspective
Time of Interview Begin: End: Total:	Date:	Interviewee:
Place:		Interviewer: Cindy Cisneros McGilvrey
Tell me what traditional public high school was like for you.		
Why did you leave traditional public high school? Was it a single incident or a combination of things?		

Interview Protocol	African American Males in High School Credit Recovery: A Critical Race Theory Perspective
Tell me what the Learning Center is like for you. What classes are you taking?	
How many credits have you been able to earn since you enrolled at the Learning Center?	
Compare the traditional public high school to the Learning Center—tell me about the pros and cons of both schools:	
Pros	Cons
What kind of obstacles, if any, did you face in the regular school? In the Learning Center?	
Obstacles Regular School	Obstacles Learning Center

Interview Protocol	African American Males in High School Credit Recovery: A Critical Race Theory Perspective		
Personally, how confident do you feel about completing your diploma? What, if anything, would keep you from graduating? What, if anything, would help you graduate?			
Keep from graduating		Help graduating	
What kind of relationships did you have with adults while you were in a traditional public high school?			
Adults in Authority	Coaches	Teachers	Administrators
To what extent, if any, do you believe that being an African American affected our education? First in a traditional public high school and then in a learning center? Please explain in detail. (Followed by “now add male”)			

Appendix F

Audit Trail

