The Impact of Racial Socialization on Racial Identity of At-Risk African American Female Eighth Grade Students in Middle School

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how the racial socialization process of at-risk African American female eighth grade students and their parents/guardians influences their racial identity and middle school experiences. During the stage of identity formation, adolescents seek independence from their parents and desire acceptance from their peers. A basic qualitative interpretive approach was utilized for this research design with racial socialization and critical race feminism as the theoretical frameworks. Four at-risk African American female eighth grade students and four African American parents/guardians were interviewed, to understand how racial socialization of parents influenced students' identity formation and academic achievement. Documents such as report cards and disciplinary referrals were reviewed to confirm or refute the data obtained through the interviews. Data analysis utilizing memos, categorizing, and document analysis, produced five themes: Cultural Preparation for School, Advocating and Developing Racial Identity, Importance of Self-Awareness, Middle School Life, and Adolescent Black Identity Development. The findings of this study suggest that at-risk African American female eighth grade students' greatest challenge racially will come from their efforts to acculturate to the White Euro-American school culture and the influence of popular culture. In addition, they should be ready for challenges related to strained relationships with middle school teachers and administrators.

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of Aunt Daisy Baldwin and
Aunt Lorraine Grover-McCants.

This work is dedicated to:

Mrs. Leola R. Grover, my grandmother, who
taught me to be compassionate and resilient.

Isaiah 40:31
"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength.
They shall mount up with wings like eagles;
They shall run and not be weary,
They will walk and not faint."

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Identity formation is a critical aspect of adolescent development. According to Erikson (1963, 1968), adolescence is the time when children navigate through learning their identity and experience role confusion. This is particularly important when coupled with the concepts of race and gender in adolescent development. Several researchers have investigated how identity impacts African American adolescents (Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Mandara, Gaylord-Harden, Richards, & Ragsdale, 2009; Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez, & Sellers, 2012; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). Studies suggest that African American female adolescents feel they are treated differently from students of other races (Hall & Smith, 2012; Morris, 2007; Thomas, Hoxha, & Hacker, 2013), as well as being treated differently from their African American male counterparts (Koonce, 2012; Morris, 2007). The sensitivities of educators might increase if they have a better understanding of the identity formation of at-risk African American female adolescents who struggle with adjusting their manners and behaviors taught in the home environment to the middle school setting.

Background of the Study

Middle schools have been a part of the American educational landscape since the 1960s (George, 2009) to suit the needs of young adolescents ranging from ages 10–14 (Lounsbury, 2009). From the onset, the reconfiguration of grades K–12 appeared to be motivated more by politics and demographics rather than the unique educational needs of

adolescent students (George, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2007). During the 1980s educators and policymakers began realizing that students in grades sixth to eighth needed a more developmentally appropriate educational experience that was sensitive to their particular adolescent stage. According to George (2009), the need for a "middle school concept" became more apparent because educators realized that "the transition from childhood to adolescence was longer and more complicated than had been previously realized" (p. 6). Akos and Ellis (2008) explained that the "middle school format configures grades, classes, and learning opportunities to help facilitate development" (p. 26). To address specific challenges of younger adolescents, educators and policymakers began implementing recommendations from developmental psychologists to improve the fit of students' social and emotional needs to the curriculum design (Erikson, 1968; George, 2009; Steinberg & McCray, 2012).

Erikson (1968) a developmental psychologist, whose theory was instrumental in understanding challenges of adolescents, theorized that human development was a by-product of eight psychosocial developmental stages that spanned a person's life from birth to late adulthood. Erikson's theory differed from Freud in that Erikson saw conflict and crises as necessary for growth and that developmental stages were dependent upon a person's social environment. Erikson identified the crisis in adolescence as the quest to achieve identity. The conflict occurred as the young person struggled with trying to accept an identity prescribed by parents and society. There are four identity statuses that a person navigates: foreclosure, role diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement. In the beginning an individual will reject any identity goals or values (role diffusion). Later, the individual prematurely accepts an identity (referred to as foreclosure), or declares a

"moratorium" on identity formation. Lastly, the individual would experiment with alternative identities (Erikson, 1968).

Adolescence is a challenging developmental period where children must navigate through issues such as puberty, identity formation, cognitive maturation, and role negotiation (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Thomas, Davidson, & McAdoo, 2008). French, Seidman, Allen, and Lawrence (2006) stated ethnic identity occurs during adolescence and is a salient factor in minority children's lives. African American female students are faced with the main contextual stressors: gender and racial injustices (Sue & Sue, 2003; Thomas et al., 2008). It is imperative for African American female students to have a strong and positive social support system that includes their parents, teachers, and peers (Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Hurd, Sánchez, Zimmerman & Caldwell, 2012). Empirical studies from research suggest that when African American female students have a strong racial identity and have received positive messages through their racial socialization process, they are better engaged in school (Bennett, 2006; Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008; Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Thomas et al., 2008).

Racial socialization plays an important role in the development of African American female students in middle school. Parents and close community members assist children with attaining the ability to "negotiate contexts characterized by high racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity" (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006, p. 747). The concept of racial socialization lays a foundation for values and morals that influence African Americans to be successful in society. It is necessary for African American adolescent females to be taught the importance of self-worth, self-confidence,

and self-awareness of being an African American woman (Sanders & Bradley, 2005). The concept of racial identity is needed for African American adolescent females to be able to identify within their race as well as share racial heritage, culture, and physical attributes. The goal of this qualitative study was to explore and examine how racial socialization messages from parents/guardians influence at-risk African American female eighth grade students' perceptions of their racial identity. In addition, this research study will expand the current literature by sharing the experiences of middle school voiced by at-risk African American female eighth grade students.

Several quantitative studies have been conducted on the racial identity of African American students (Oney, Cole, & Sellers, 2011; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & L'Heureux-Lewis, 2006; Somers, Owen, & Piliawsky, 2008). However, only a few qualitative research studies have been conducted on racial socialization with African American females (Neblett et al., 2009; Sanders & Bradley, 2005). There are studies that support the need to explore the concept of how racial socialization impacts African American students in middle school (Woods, 2006) and how racial socialization affects African American females (Thomas, 2006). There is a clear gap in the existing literature, which solicits for more qualitative studies to explore how the racial socialization process influences at-risk African American female adolescents' racial identities and school experiences (Adams, 2010; Chavous et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2013).

Problem Statement

There is a significant lack of research in existence which identifies the common racial socialization messages and processes that influence at-risk African American

female eighth grade students' racial identity and consequently their middle school experiences. Identity is commonly referred to as how an individual views oneself. A person's identity is created through his/her personality, belief system, personal experience, and other aspects. Establishing an identity is a critical task for middle school students (Erikson, 1968). Tatum (1997) noted that many African American children persistently question their racial identity and what it means to be African American. Sanders and Bradley (2005) suggested that identity formation might be a particularly critical aspect of adolescent development for African American females. The researchers indicate that during identity formation African American females are challenged to fit the European American femininity mold while trying to discover their true self-concept. Morris (2007) implied that African American females are being left behind academically and their school experiences are not recognized. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) suggested that the needs of African American females are being overlooked because more attention has been focused on the academic and behavioral needs of African American males and the educational needs of European American females.

This study investigated pervasive problems pertaining to race (Thomas et al., 2013), contextual stressors e.g. puberty, identity formation, cognitive maturation, and role negotiation (Thomas et al., 2008), and the possible impacts those problems may be causing in the lives of at-risk African American female eighth grade students. Understanding their realities is a pressing issue for educators. African American adolescent females are still a student population who are very vulnerable in the school system (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Some problems or vulnerabilities of African American females include but are not limited to depression, eating disorders, sexual risk,

developing negative self-concepts, and displaying inappropriate situational behaviors (Grimes, Haizlip, Rogers, & Brown, 2013; Powell, 2004; Street et al., 2009; Townsend et al., 2010). In order for this sub-population of students to exit middle school with healthy self-esteem as African American girls, it is imperative that classroom teachers embrace their role and create positive teacher-student relationships that will serve as an additional support system during this tumultuous time (Adams, 2010; Berry, 2010). This study employed a basic interpretive qualitative research approach to explore the racial socialization messages that at-risk African American female eighth grade students receive from their parents/guardians and how those messages influence their racial identities. The study also explored how students interpreted and applied those messages from home to their middle school experiences through interviews, observations, and document analysis. This study is significant as it adds new knowledge to the existing body of literature of the impact of racial socialization on the racial identity of at-risk African Americans females in middle school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich descriptive analysis of how the racial socialization process influences at-risk African American female eighth students' racial identity and consequently their middle school experiences. Overwhelming amounts of evidence exist on racial identity with African Americans in general (Atschul, Oyserman, Bybee, 2006; Bennett, 2006; Duncan, 2005; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & L'Heurex-Lewis, 2006; Street, Hart-Britt, & Walker-Barnes, 2009), yet the impacts of racial socialization in African American adolescent females remain a nearly untouched area of inquiry (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004; Hughes & Chen, 1997;

Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009). The current literature review in this study provides a framework of how racial socialization influences the racial identity of African American female adolescents in middle school. The literature highlights racial identity, racial socialization, the middle school concept, parental views on education, and racial identity theories used to understand the relationship between racial identity and contextual stressors in middle school.

Research Questions

The goal of this research was to understand how the process of racial socialization influenced at-risk African American female eighth grade students' racial identity. By using a basic interpretive qualitative approach, I investigated how those individuals interpreted racial socialization messages from their home environments and how those interpretations influenced their racial identity and middle school experiences in an urban county in the state of Georgia. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What racial socialization messages do at-risk African American female eighth grade students receive from their parents/guardians?

RQ2: How do at-risk African American female eighth grade students interpret racial socialization messages received from their parents/guardians in the context of middle school?

RQ3: How do the racial socialization messages received by at-risk African American female eighth grade students influence the development of their racial identity?

Theoretical Framework

The overarching theoretical lens for this study was critical race feminism. Critical race feminism was a resourceful framework that helped explain the experiences of the

African American female participants (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Wing (2003) stated that critical race feminism was developed at the end of the twentieth century, and it provided a voice for women who were labeled 'colored,' oppressed, and disproportionately poor. According to Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010), critical race feminism would provide an avenue to investigate educational and social issues pertaining to African American females. For the purpose of this study, critical race feminism focused on the academic and social needs of at-risk African American female students and encourages them to share their school experiences (Berry, 2010).

Racial socialization typically stems from African American parents who have open discussions about various subjects that include race, racism, beauty, and history of African Americans (Bennett, 2006; Cooper & McLoyd, 2011). Sanders and Bradley (2005) stated racial socialization is most effective when conducted in a sensible discussion between African American parents and their children. The main purpose of racial socialization is to instill confidence and build self-esteem in children as individuals and members of an ethnic group (Coard et al., 2004). Cooper and McLoyd (2011) found in their study that racial socialization for African American adolescent females is important for their psychological wellbeing. Without racial socialization, African American females are lost without guidance on how to love themselves as individuals, as women, and as African Americans. This study utilized critical race feminism and racial socialization to explore and examine the development of racial identity in at-risk African American female eighth grade students.

Nature of the Study

This basic interpretive qualitative study explored the racial socialization messages parents/guardians shared with their at-risk African American eighth grade girls. The individual interviews provided parents/guardians an opportunity to describe how they racially socialize their children, i.e., prepare them to survive in different cultural environments such as schools. The individual student interviews allowed for the participants to describe how they interpreted and applied their parents'/guardians' racial socialization messages. Additional data was collected from observations and document analysis. Study themes emerged organically from the data. Findings from this study provided valuable knowledge about the views of racial identity from the perspectives of at-risk African American female eighth grade students in middle school. The data provided insight into their transition to the racially mixed middle school culture from their home environment.

Definitions

The following terms were defined within the context of this study:

Adolescent. A child going through the transitional stage of physical and psychological human development, which occurs during the period of puberty to adulthood (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010).

At-Risk. A child who is experiencing poor academic performance, truancy, impulsive behavior, and lacks interpersonal skills (Donnelly, 1987).

Culture. A set of patterns and beliefs of a society or organization, which make it unique (Patton, 2002).

Femininity. The concept focuses on being a woman; distinguishing characteristics that describe a woman (Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Thomas et al., 2013).

Identity. A phenomenological awareness of being able to understand his or herself (Thomas et al., 2011).

Middle School Concept. An environment for fourth through eighth grade students who range from 10 to 14 years old (George, 2009; Lounsberg, 2009).

Middle School Experience. The daily activities that take place in the fourth through the eighth grade setting.

*Racial Identity. "*A schema or mental representation of the racial aspects of the self, including perceiving attributes and the feelings associated with them" (McAdoo, 2002, p. 74).

Racial Socialization. When African American parents and community members teach African American children how language, customs, and cultural practices affect their experiences as an African American in a society defined by race (Sanders & Bradley, 2005).

Subjectivity. The reflection portion of the researcher; these include his/her assumptions and biases (Peshkin, 1991).

Assumptions

The following assumptions served as a foundation when gathering and analyzing data for this research study. The first assumption was at-risk African American female eighth grade students and their parents/guardians were the best data source for this study. Next was having the expectation that all students and parents'/guardians provide insightful answers that are reflective of their racial socialization process. It was assumed

that the African American parents/guardians participants would share and explain the racial socialization process with their daughters. Lastly, it was assumed that at-risk African American female eighth grade student participants would share their interpretation of their parents'/guardians' racial socialization messages.

Delimitations

When conducting research, there are usually delimitations that focus on internal and external validity issues. The following were delimitations to this research study: this is an in-depth study of four at-risk African American female eighth grade students from a middle school in Marshall County School district in the state of Georgia. Findings from the study may only be transferable to other at-risk African American female eighth grade students from a similar middle school context. A qualitative study was used to gain information from student participants in order to allow them to describe and elaborate on their experiences. Only at-risk African American female eighth grade students at Lakewood Middle School were asked to participant in this study. I examined how racial socialization messages from parents/guardians influenced their children's perceptions of being African American and female in middle school.

Limitations

This section discusses the limitations encountered during the study. As an African American female and the research instrument, my challenge was to maintain objectivity during the investigation. To minimize subjectivity in this study, the participants' qualities and characteristics were embraced. In addition, it was important to be empathetic to each participant's unique circumstances and trust that student and parent/guardian participants were being honest about their experiences.

This study was limited to a purposeful sample of at-risk African American female eighth grade students and their parents/guardians in central Georgia. This selection procedure prohibits generalization of my results. Also, there is a strong possibility that participants may not represent other African American females and parents/guardians who live in other different demographic areas of Georgia. In addition, this study may not represent any other minority females in middle schools around the United States.

Significance

The study is significant as it identified the common racial socialization messages between parents/guardians and children. With the identification of these common messages, analysis revealed the aspects of the home and school environments that impacted the racial identity of at-risk African American female eighth grade students. Understanding the concepts of racial socialization, racial identity development, and the role of femininity can empower schools to meet the personal and social needs of these individuals. Ultimately new findings and factors were unveiled in order to shine light on strategies and interventions that can help African American adolescent girls be successful academically, behaviorally, and socially. Thomas et al. (2013) suggested that it is necessary "to examine the interplay of contextual influences on African American female adolescents' lives as they develop a sense of gendered racial identity, the intersection of racial gender identity" (p. 89). This research study will heighten the awareness of educators and other school personnel to the racial socialization messages that are being taught at home to African American adolescent girls and comprehend how those messages impact their experiences in middle school. In the future, this exploration may

empower educators and other school personnel with a better understanding of how to assist African American female adolescent students with poor academic achievement performance and elevated school disciplinary problems.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 provided a brief overview of the purpose, rationale, and the conceptual framework of the middle school concept, adolescent development, racial identity development, and struggles of African American female students in middle school. At-risk African American female students often struggle to make smooth transitions from their home environment to the school setting. They are faced with challenges of being "different" due to their interpretations of racial socialization messages from their parents/guardians. The research questions, assumptions, and delimitations served as a guide and boundary lines for the direction of the study. Trustworthiness was necessary for this study because it deals with open-ended data (Merriam, 1998). The issues of trustworthiness were addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through triangulation, member checks, saturation, and peer review. Transferability was established by providing profile narratives on the student and parent/guardian participants. Dependability was seen by the findings being consistent among the participants to ensure the quality of the data. Lastly, confirmability was established to ensure the findings of the study were shaped by the respondents and not the qualitative investigator's bias, motivation, or interest.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Middle school years are often characterized as a time of great change. Because of the many challenges relevant to this stage of life, McCotter and Cohen (2013) recommended that middle school students get support in their "physical development, cognitive-intellectual development, moral development, psychological development, and social-emotional development" (p. 6). Since the middle school years have also been identified as a period of time when adolescents wrestle with the conflict of forming their own identity, while at the same time wanting to feel connected to their environment, Hurd, Sellers, Cogburn, Butler-Barnes, and Zimmerman (2013) have pointed out that non-parental adults are very instrumental in helping these students develop socially and emotionally. Particularly, middle school educators have been identified as a group of adults critical to creating supportive environments for adolescents (Lachuk-Johnson & Gomez, 2011).

Dunkel and Sefcek (2009) identified Erikson's theory of psychosocial crises as one of the most significant theories in the study of human development. According to Erikson, a developmental psychologist, middle school years are marked by the adolescent's quest to develop his or her own identity. Erikson's (1963, 1968) theory suggested that adolescents are in conflict because they are wrestling with the identity they

feel their family, culture, and society have imposed upon them and to the identity they want to form of themselves independently.

French et al. (2006) stated the ability to develop a positive sense of identity is essential to overall mental health. These researchers have also pointed out that racial or ethnic identity is just as critical to adolescent development. French et al. (2006) suggested that it is vitally important to investigate how people of color feel about being a part of a racial group, and how they identify their role within the racial group.

Sue and Sue (2003) emphasized, when African Americans understand and embrace their racial identity they began to feel a sense of belonging in a group. In reference to the academic setting, Somers et al. (2008) recognized school, parents, peers, and neighborhood as four influential factors that contribute to African American adolescents being academically successful. School engagement and socio-cultural factors are important variables to look into when observing challenges faced by African American female adolescents in middle school. Dotterer, McHale, and Crofter (2009) defined school engagement as how a student feels, behaves, and thinks about their school experiences. Delpit (2012) paralleled the idea of school engagement as being important for all students because they developed self-worth, self-esteem, and confidence in themselves and among their peers. These characteristics are important during the adolescent stage with African American adolescent females to help with identity formation.

The literature review for this study is divided into four sections. The first section discusses issues middle school students face. The next section describes research conducted on identity development. The third section focuses on the development of

ethnic/racial identity. The final section describes identity issues and challenges specific to African-American female adolescents.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich descriptive analysis of how the racial socialization process influences at-risk African American female eighth grade students' racial identity and consequently their middle school experiences. Each framework was essential to understanding the psychological mindset of the African American female. First, the core ideals of critical race feminism are outlined. This theoretical framework is centered on the needs and betterment of women, colored individuals, and those who are disproportionately poor. Next the concept of racial socialization will discuss to understand the types of messages that influence minority children's racial identity.

Critical Race Feminism

Critical race feminism stemmed from Critical Race Theory, CRT, which was developed by Derrick Bell and critical legal studies (Berry, 2010; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). In the 1970s, CRT concentrated on racial issues and strategized new approaches to deal with racism and discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). There are several principles of CRT, however only three are appropriate when discussing critical race feminism.

The first principle of CRT stated "racism is normal and ordinary in American society" (Wing & Willis, 1999, p. 3). Berry (2010) stated critical race feminism does not marginalize women of color; yet it emphasizes for them to be the center of discussion, debate research, and praxis of their lives as they co-exist in the dominant culture. The

second principle of CRT employed using narrative analysis and storytelling as counterstories, which will create alternative social realities. Women of color need to have a voice to elaborate on the different experiences they have from those of the dominant culture. Lastly, the dominant culture will tolerate or encourage the racial progress of minorities as long as white interests are advanced (Wing & Willis, 1999).

There are five essential tenets of critical race feminism that lead in investigating and theorizing on educational issues impacting African American adolescent females. Primarily, the experiences of women of color are not the same as those of men of color or those of White women, thus critical race feminism signifies this movement. African American females' behaviors have been compared to those of European Americans in several studies (Belgrave, Nguyen, Johnson, & Hood, 2011; Morris, 2007; Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2003). The "perfect girl" image was described as being "White, good, and quiet" and it was derived from the European American version of femininity in the 1800s (Sanders & Bradley, 2005, p. 301).

Secondly, critical race feminism focuses on the lives of women of color who encounter multiple forms of discrimination within a system of European American male patriarchy. The intersections of race, class, and gender are the center of analysis to address discrimination and oppression that occur in African American females' lives. The importance of storytelling is highlighted in critical race feminism because these stories and experiences give women of color an illustration of their realities. The stories do not marginalize African American females, but put these individuals as the focal point. Berry (2010) noted when teachers listen to minority students' stories they are able to learn and

understand the student as an individual person. Knowledge is obtained on the influences on what students' learn and how they learn.

The third tenet of critical race feminism emphasizes the anti-essentialist premise of the multiple identities and consciousness of women of color. Basically, critical race feminism addresses the femininity issues in regards to African American women. Sanders and Bradley (2005) explained femininity has focused on the life experiences of European American women and attributed to them as females and their personal wealth. This myth was coined around the 1800s and unfortunately African American women's life experiences were not included in this description. Furthermore, it should be understood that women of color are not simply white women with the added feature of race or are they men of color with the additional feature of gender (Collins 1986, 1990).

The fourth tenet of critical race feminism is being multidisciplinary in scope and extensiveness (Wing, 2003). Critical race feminists synthesize and utilize bodies of knowledge from a wide variety of legal and non-legal fields to create comprehensive and practical strategies (Wing & Willis, 1999). Education is a non-legal field to which critical race feminism can aid in addressing the adolescent developmental issues for minority women of color.

Finally, critical race feminism focuses on theories as well as practices. In order to combat gender and racial oppression, critical race feminists focus on the actual concerns of the community and emphasize practical applications (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Wing & Willis, 1999). Racial socialization is a concept that has been considered an essential task of African American parents because it prepares African American children

psychologically, mentally, and emotionally (McAdoo, 2002; Owens, Stewart, & Bryant, 2011).

In today's society, African American females are compared to a contemporary version of the "perfect girl" (Sanders & Bradley, 2005, p. 301). Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) implied African American females identities tend to shift between personalized identities, which are shaped in the home environment through being socialized from their parents, and the perspectives of the dominant culture of the middle class administrators and teachers.

Racial Socialization

Personalized identities are shaped in the home environment by immediate family and neighborhood influences. Racial socialization is often utilized by parents to prepare their children for the public education system that is based on White, middle-class, male norms. In addition, the primary focus for adolescent female development derived from the experiences and perspectives of White middle-class females (Owens et al., 2011). African American parents want their children to succeed in the dominant cultural norms while maintaining their bond and practicing African American social norms. Cooper and McLoyd (2011) stated in order to fit in a predominantly White, affluent school, African American female adolescents would oftentimes "make others feel comfortable around them, change their dialect, and display the norms of the school" (p. 35).

Racial socialization occurs between parents and children and the concept focuses on the details of their race or ethnicity (Bennett, 2006; Dotterer et al., 2009). Neblett et al. (2009) defined racial socialization as "the transmission of parents' world views about race and ethnicity to children by way of subtle, overt, deliberate and unintended

mechanisms" (p. 189). Oral communication, modeling, role-playing and exposure are methods and techniques parents utilize to deliver race-related messages (Coard et al., 2004). These messages are delivered in forms of practices and/or messages that are to promote racial identity and prepare African American children for racism in society. The themes of the messages and/or practices are racial pride, racial barrier messages, egalitarianism messages, self-worth messages, negative messages, and socialization behaviors (Neblett et al., 2009).

Racial pride socialization messages focus primarily on African American cultural heritage, ancestry, and history (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Parents want to promote cultural customs and traditions and instill cultural and racial pride to their children living in a predominately White cultured world. Many young females have impressionable minds and think that European women set the standard of beauty. Racial barrier socialization messages and practices are centered on promoting children's awareness of and ability to cope effectively with racial discrimination (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Sue and Sue (2003) noted from research, African American adolescent females struggle most with defining themselves in terms of racial identity than with gender identity.

Egalitarian socialization messages focus on explaining the notion that all people are created equal and should be treated the same (Hughes & Chen, 1997). The concept of being thin, White skin, with long straight hair is desirable. African American females will try their best to alter their physical appearance to "fit in" with their European counterparts or fair skinned African American peers (Sanders & Bradley, 2005). Being an African American girl with curves, kinky short hair, and dark skin is frowned upon. Self-worth messages encompass discussions on increasing self-esteem and confidence in context of

their race (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Neblett et al., 2009). Hughes and Chen (1997) explained that conversations with African American adolescent females would encompass the importance of self-worth, intelligence, and beauty. Consequently, Sanders and Bradley (2005) suggested these conversations do not appear to be happening with African American females because they continue to compare their self-image to females seen on television and in magazines. Negative messages reinforce negative societal stereotypes about African Americans (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Often times, African American females are misguided by negative images that are portrayed through the media. Sanders and Bradley (2005) stated the negative messages are harmful to the development of self-concept and of racial identity.

Identity Formation during Adolescence

Adolescence is a distinctive developmental period during a child's life (Erikson, 1968; Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010). Several physical, psychological, and social changes begin to occur with adolescents. Adolescents began to progress through Kohlberg's theory of examining universal values and morals (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010). During this time adolescents' cognitive skills began to develop more and they become more sophisticated in problem solving (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010). Lastly, adolescents go through the identity-formation process, which entails them to seeking for a sense of well-being (Erikson, 1968).

Hamman and Hendricks (2005) noted adolescents as "autonomous agents" (p. 72). The child has an urge to gain independence from their parents along with having the approval from their peers (Christenson, Eisenberg, Hall-Lande, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Hamman & Hendricks, 2005). In addition, adolescents deal with self-esteem, body

image, and peer pressure during puberty. Kail and Cavanaugh (2010) stated females were more particular about the way their bodies developed than boys. Females are more susceptible to compare their physical appearance to their female peers and possibly will be unsatisfied with the outcome. They truly desire to be in sync with their peers and fear being teased if they are different. Akos and Ellis (2008) conducted a case study with an African American girl who struggled with being teased in middle school by peers of the same race. Though her parents told her to ignore the behavior of those students, she was confused. She did not understand why choosing her friends based on the content of their character and not the color of their skin color was a reason to be teased.

Erikson (1968) theorized eight psychosocial tasks or crises that humans maturate through their life span. The fifth stage of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is identity versus role confusion. Dunkel and Sefcek (2009) stated this to be the most significant stage because adolescents begin to develop a sense of self-continuity. It is also not an easy task to achieve (Hamman & Hendricks, 2005). However, once achieved, adolescents are able to establish and share healthy positive interpersonal relationships (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010). The foundation of Erikson's theory (1968) lay in the achievement of an ego identity and the exploration of identity issues in adolescence. Kroger (2007) identified ego identity as the conscious sense of individual distinctiveness and the unconscious striving for stability of experience. African American adolescents are often conflicted with mixed messages on how they should think, feel, and behave in Western society in order to be successful (Gullan, Hoffman, & Leff, 2011; Hall & Smith, 2012).

During the adolescent developmental stage, Hamman and Hendricks (2005) acknowledged specific tasks for adolescents: identifying, evaluating, and selecting values and roles for their adult life. Christenson et al. (2007) investigated the relationships among social isolation, psychological health, and protective factors with 4,746 adolescents in middle and high school. The researchers hypothesized higher levels of peer acceptance, increased social competence, higher levels of motivation, and the desire to participate in school stems from adolescents establishing close and supportive friendships. Christenson et al. (2007) found when adolescents isolated themselves from their peers, their self-worth and self-confidence were diminished and there were higher levels of behavioral problems and poor school performance. When students had family support and were socially adjusted in school, their risks for suicide and depression were lessened. Lannegrand-Willemns and Bosma (2006) stated "today, adolescence is characterized by uncertainty and indecision; that is why the adolescent identity crisis constitutes a modern problem" (p. 107). Gorvine, Karam, and Eovaldi (2008) developed a program with seventh graders in a middle school in Illinois. The program was geared toward issues such as identity development, group formation and dynamics, team building, and leadership. The participants were placed in small groups and participated in six sessions over a six-week period of time. Out of the six sessions, the first session was instrumental in creating a group identity. According to Gorvine et al. (2008), being able to define a person's self within a group as well as individually are important aspects for identity development. The focus of the first session was to encourage participants to create the norms and rules for the group atmosphere. During the initial session, it was vital for participants to feel comfortable in the environment and take ownership during

sessions since they had contributed to creating the positive norms and behaviors for the sessions. Gullan et al. (2011) expressed "those who effectively develop their identity demonstrate commitment to societal standards and those who do not are likely to reject mainstream values and beliefs, potentially leading to destructive behaviors or negative affiliations" (p. 29).

When adolescent students enter middle school, they are interested in figuring out who they are and what group can they belong to. Akos and Ellis (2008) stated upon entering the adolescent stage African American students face additional challenges that are centered on race and ethnicity. African American adolescents need to have positive support systems to motivate and encourage them to embrace their racial identity.

Middle School Challenges

An abundance of research exists on the critical interval of time in the lives of students during their middle school years (George, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2007; Lounsbury, 2009; Steinberg & McCray, 2012). Many researchers discussed that this is the phase in which students begin to explore themselves physically, emotionally, and psychologically. In addition to these changes, middle school students also have to navigate the educational changes caused by the transition from elementary school to middle school. McCotter and Cohen (2013) suggested that the needs that exist during early adolescence are focused in the areas of physical development, cognitive-intellectual development, moral development, psychological development, and social-emotional development.

There is a need to separate students during their early adolescence (Akos & Ellis, 2008; Lounsbury, 2009). The "middle school concept" was formulated in early 1960s (George, 2009). The children considered it the "middle school concept" ranging from

grades fourth through eighth. These students are between the ages of 10 to 15 years old attending public or private school (Lounsbury, 2009; McCotter & Cohen, 2013). Lounsbury (2009) stated the prime foundations of the middle school concept are for young adolescents' environment and their needs.

According to Hill and Tyson (2007), many changes occur when entering middle school. The overpowering mental perspective includes middle school students being introduced to new situations such as changing clothes in public for physical education and developing the use and responsibility of having a locker. Other mental aspects for new middle school students are being nervous about entering middle school, meeting new school personnel and peers, and the instruction and assessment aspect. Akos and Ellis (2008) stated when students are actively discovering or have realized their identity they are more engaged in critical and abstract thinking and moral reasoning.

The expected and unexpected changes throughout adolescence intersect with education because they can affect students' academic performance in a positive or negative manner (Christenson et al., 2007; Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011). Steinberg and McCray (2012) conducted a qualitative study with fifteen middle school students in a Southeast region of the United States. They suggested it was important to inquire about how young adolescents learn best in middle school and what activities keep them engaged. Three themes derived from the focus interviews. The first theme that emerged was students tend to like or want teachers who care about them. Steinberg and McCray (2012) noted that students in middle school are very aware of how they want to be treated and the types of relationships they desire to have with their peers and teachers. The second theme was that students enjoyed having an active classroom. Student participants

commented on being more engaged with their academic subjects when the classroom was student-centered. In addition, the participants felt working in groups was beneficial because they were able to express their thoughts and concerns with their peers on new concepts learned. The third theme focused on how students' technology use impacts attitudes towards learning. Integrating technology into academics is an integral part of the 21st century classrooms to help students become more engaged. Participants expressed that technology was the positive connection they have between home and school. They will be more likely to read and research on the computer using the internet for homework, class assignments, and for leisure activities.

Along with academic change, students must adjust to changes within the scope of psychological and emotional as well. Kingery et al. (2011) investigated the changes adolescents went through during their middle school years. This study consisted of 365 students who were transitioning from fifth grade to sixth grade. The following variables were assessed with various questionnaires: peer acceptance, number of friends, the quality of a specific mutual friendship, loneliness, depression, self-esteem, and involvement in school. After conducting two quantitative analyses, regression analyses and repeated measures MANOVOs, the researcher concluded that peer acceptance and academic achievement were major factors that impacted students' adjustment in school. Their research suggested that the students who demonstrated better academic performance were those who felt socially adequate with peers and felt a sense of belonging in the class.

In the midst of transitioning to middle school, students begin to develop and foster relationships (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Kingery et al., 2011). Often times, it is difficult

for adolescents to form a significant relationship with an adult outside of their parents because middle school teachers are responsible for many more students rather than the twenty or so that elementary teachers are responsible for (Steinberg & McCray, 2012). In the public middle school setting, the ratio of students and teachers is increased from the elementary school setting. Middle school students are taught departmentalized, meaning students have a multitude of teachers during the day rather than solely a homeroom teacher (Steinberg & McCray, 2012). When teaching African American students, it is important for educators, administrators, and other school personnel to understand the norms of their environment and behaviors.

African American Parent/Guardian Views on Education

Research has shown that African-American students scored lower than their European American, Asian-American, and Hispanic counterparts in reading, writing, and math at grades 4, 8, and 12 (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). This could be due to factors such as poverty, lack of access to technological resources, low teacher expectations, and unjust disciplinary referrals. According to Koonce and Harper, Jr. (2005), some parents' past schooling experiences have resulted in how they prepare their child for school. Many parents had negative experiences in terms of not getting along with their teachers. During the duration of the parents' educational journal, they struggled academically and rarely experienced egalitarian relationships between themselves and their teachers. Thus began a lack of trust in the school system and school personnel.

Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012) and Hill and Tyson (2007) suggested that in addition to African Americans parents' challenging school experience, there are some who are raising their children in single-parent households. As a single parent,

individuals are faced with overwhelming job demands and responsibilities. In turn, there is often a lower level of parental involvement in their child's schooling experience due to being the sole provider of the household and being obligated to work. Even though African American parents may face adversity, they want to be given alternative opportunities to be able to interact with their child's teachers and be actively involved in their child's schooling experience (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012).

Parents'/Guardians' life experiences reflect how they racially socialize and prepare their children for the school environment. Howard (2010) defined cultural competence as "a set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency…to allow for effective work in cross-cultural situations" (p. 112). Usually teachers do not understand the background history of their minority students and are unable to foster a relationship with the student (Delpit, 2012). Sue and Sue (2003) described African American students' communication style as "animated, persuasive, and confrontational" in an educational setting (p. 229). They suggested that conflict may arise between the student and teacher in a typical American classroom because the environment usually portrays "conformity, quietness, and with teacher-focused activities" (Sue & Sue, 2003, p. 299). With the different dynamics clashing, African American students may feel uncomfortable and disengaged in the learning process (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011).

George (2009) expressed there is a possible high risk that young adolescents do not reach their potential if their specific needs are not met. Therefore, there is heightened need to identify sources of support for young adolescents, especially at-risk African

Americans. It is important to provide interventions to assist incoming students in order to adjust to the new middle school environment.

Racial/Ethnic Identity Development in African Americans

Kenneth and Mamie Clark were African American psychologists who conducted the infamous "Doll Study" in the 1940s. Their research on the topic of racial preference was the gateway to address the topics of racial awareness and racial self-identification (Clark & Clark, 1939). This study was used in the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* case to provide insight to how African-American children and European-American children were affected by racial segregation (Schimmel, Fischer, Stellman, 2008). Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) implied other studies, similar to the Clarks, revealed that European American children identified with their skin tone more often than African American children. It was noted that children associated the white doll as representing pretty and good while the black doll represented ugly and bad. The Doll Study addressed the need for positive conversations about racial identity through racial socialization with African American children at a young age.

Race was a term coined by society to discuss physical appearances, such as skin color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Phinney, 1990). Often times, researchers created and developed various definitions for ethnic and racial identity to fit their studies, however, the general idea is expounding on an individual's identity. Bennett (2006) stated ethnic identity is an important characteristic derived from racial socialization. The term ethnicity refers to a person's heritage and culture. For minority children, their recognition of their ethnic identity begins during childhood. As these individuals progress through the

adolescence and young adulthood stages, they learn specific characteristics of their ethnic identification as an individual and in a group. (Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Racial identity was formed because African Americans stopped allowing European Americans to define their culture, individuality, and language. Racial identity becomes increasingly significant during adolescence with African American children who are trying to form their identity (Bennett, 2006; Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Chavous et al, 2008). Racial identity is seen as a protective and compensating factor for African American students (Chavous et al., 2008). Conversely, when Chavous, et al. (2008) observed African American boys and girls in the eighth and eleventh grade it was concluded that racial identity might not have served as the same protective factor for African-American girls and boys. Throughout the review of literature, the term ethnic identity and racial identity are used interchangeably.

Racial/Ethnic Identity Theories

Yip, Seaton, and Sellers (2006) posed the idea that the efficacy of the identity status model is a framework for yielding ethnic identity development. Minority adolescents transition through identity formation the same as European adolescents; however they must evolve through an additional stage of development. Several theories have been created for understanding how racial identity affected African Americans in a society that is dominated by European Americans (Cross, 1978; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Sellers et al., 2006). Nevertheless there are limited studies discussing African American adolescents' transition through the identity development process. Occasionally African Americans are confused on their cultural identity because the dominant culture often defames and devalues their unique "way of being." Racial

identity gives African Americans the opportunity to redefine their image, recover their history, and show confidence and pride in being African American.

William Cross (1978, 1995) is a prominent researcher in psychology and developed a five stage model of identity development for African Americans which he referred to as Nigrescence. The five stages are: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. The first stage of the Nigrescence model, pre-encounter, focuses on the person having no idea about his/her ethnicity. The individual will express self-hatred through issues such as low salience attitudes towards being African American and demonstrates pro-white/ anti-Black attitudes. For this stage becoming a part of the dominant Western society is acceptable. Miseducation, race image anxiety, and assimilation-integration are other factors that influence people during the pre-encounter stage (Cross, 1995). An example of the pre-encounter stage is an African American female who has a negative self-concept of her appearance because she does not like her Afrocentric physical characteristics (i.e., dark skin, kinky hair).

The second stage, encounter, is where a person has an experience that diminishes their current identity. Thoughts begin to form internally about why he/she is mistreated. Cross (1995) proposed the individual feels "confusion, alarm, anomie, and depression." Guilt, shame, anxiety, and depression are normal feelings of adolescents but it is vital to know if African American adolescents are expressing those feelings due to racism or discrimination. For an adolescent it is possible for him/her to experience racial discrimination at school or in public. Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin, and Wilson

(1998) stated the individual's attitude of anti-Black began to shift toward having pro-Black attitude.

Immersion-emersion is the third stage and occurs in two phases. The first phase immersion, happens when the person immerses himself/herself in an "all-consuming engagement in the Black experience" (Constantine et al., 1998). Cross (1978) stated the individual will began to want to be submersed in the African American culture and want to explore what it is to be Black. During the second phase emersion, the individual regains control and seeks a positive role model. The purpose of the positive role model is to emulate a calm demeanor, have authority over his/her self-identity, and exemplify ways to improve the present conditions of African Americans (Constantine et al., 1998). Often African American adolescents reach this stage and seek a role model who embraced his/her Blackness and functions with confidence society.

The fourth stage, internalization, is geared toward "shifting" old feelings to new-refreshed feelings of his/her identity. The shift transforms the negative emotions and feeling into positive emotions and feelings. Cross (1978) implied individuals at the internalization stage will move from uncontrolled fury toward their European counterparts to controlled anger toward oppressive institutions; from insecure, harsh, inferiority feelings to Black pride, self-love, and a deep sense of Black communalism. This stage characterizes the place where African American adolescents are willing to have relationships with their European counterparts without feeling contempt towards them.

Internalization-commitment is the final stage and is usually achieved in late adulthood. This stage focused on developing a long-term obligation to be an advocate for

African Americans. He/She will advocate for improving their ethnic group as well as the human race.

Marcia (1966) expressed that crisis and commitment were the variables used to establish identity status. Marcia (1966, 1980) advanced the study on personal identity in two processes: exploration of identity issues and commitment in pertinent identity areas. These two processes are divided into four separate identity statuses: identity diffusion, identity foreclosures, moratorium, and achievement. Identity diffusion is the initial status and there is a lack of commitment on the individual's behalf. Marcia (1980) stated the individual may or may not have experienced a crisis period. The identity foreclosure status is when an individual has experienced a crisis, however he/she is expressing a commitment. When an individual is actively exploring and struggling to make a commitment in the crisis period, he/she is understood to be in the moratorium status. The final stage, identity achievement, is ideally accomplished by adulthood where the individual has explored significant identity issues and has a firm commitment to his/her identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Though Marcia (1980) focused on personal identity in selecting occupations, religion, and political ideology, and not ethnic identity, ethnic identity still plays a vital role in understanding identity formation.

Robert Sellers and his colleagues designed the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity model, MMRI, based on African American adults' historical and contemporary experiences (Oney et al., 2011; Rivas-Drake et al., 2009). Neblett et al. (2009) stated the MMRI model has been the latest conceptual framework for progressing the study on African American racial identity. Sellers et al. (1998) stated the MMRI model attempts to address "How important is race in the individual's perception of self?" and "What does it

mean to be a member of this racial group?" The model recommended four dimensions, which include salience, centrality, regard, and ideology. Racial salience is the first dimension and it refers to the extent where one's race is a relevant part of one's self-concept at a particular moment or in a particular situation. Sellers et al. (1998) claimed racial salience as the interceding process between the more established characteristics of identity and the way individuals interpret and behave in specific situations. In addition, salience yields as a function to situational cues and personal factors.

The second dimension, centrality, refers to the level an individual defines himself or herself concerning his or her ethnicity. Neblett et al. (2009) emphasized this is where the discovery of why race is a core part of his/her self-concept is really revealed. Sellers et al. (1998) proposed "the concept of centrality is at the core of many of the existing research models of group, social, racial and ethnic identity" (p. 25).

Racial regard is the third dimension and entails a person's affective and evaluative judgment of his/her race (Sellers et al., 1998). Private regard refers to the personal effect of an individual toward their ethnic group, whether positive or negative. Public regard comprises the individual's perceptions of society's actions and behaviors toward their ethnic group. Rivas-Drake et al. (2009) asserted the racial regard dimension as being important when it comes to evaluate how esteemed adolescents perceive their group to be in the eyes of others. Rivas-Drake et al. (2009) found that children of color had higher levels of ethnic centrality and private regard than European American children. The researchers noted it was imperative to understand that non-minority administrators, teachers, and other school personnel perceive 'ethnicity' differently than minority parents and students.

The final dimension is ideology, and is comprised of the individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes in regards to the way members of their race should operate. Also, the individual develops a philosophy on how African Americans should live and interact with society. Four ideological philosophies Sellers et al. (1998) proposed are a *nationalist* philosophy, an *oppressed minority* philosophy, an *assimilation* philosophy, and a *humanist* philosophy.

Sellers et al. (2006) explained that centrality and racial regard are dimensions used to help understand African American adolescents. Byrd and Chavous (2011) surveyed 359 African American eleventh graders with a shortened version of the Multi-dimensional Inventory of Black Identity. Racial centrality and racial regard were the dimensions assessed. They hypothesized if an African American student was confident with his racial identity in a school with a fair and respectful racial climate, he would be able to fit in comfortably and would be motivated to attend school. The quantitative results presented a low correlation between racial identity beliefs and school intrinsic motivation. However, the concept of racial identity-context congruence did relate to motivation. In regard to predicting the intrinsic variable, racial centrality or public regard were not direct or interactive connectors with school racial climate.

There have been various studies reporting racial identity as being a significant factor to African American students' academic success (Chavous et al., 2008; Harper, 2007; Somers et al., 2008). Bennett (2006) conducted a quantitative study with 131 African American students ranging from eighth to twelfth grade. The purpose of the study was to observe the influences of racial socialization and ethnic identity on school engagement using several instruments that were analyzed through exploratory factor

analysis and the structural equation modeling (SEM). The results concluded ethnic identity did promote school engagement. However, racial socialization did not promote school engagement. Consequently a study conducted by Dotterer et al. (2009) concluded racial socialization, ethnic identity, and discrimination were not correlated to school grades. Continuous research has been done to show a relationship between racial socialization and ethnic identity in relation to academic motivation and school engagement.

Researchers have expressed a continuum of examining the relative importance of ethnic- racial socialization and discrimination and how they interact with adolescents' ethnic identity. Sellers et al. (2006) utilized two instruments in a quantitative study with 358 African American children in seventh through eleventh grades in a public school from the Midwestern area of the United States. The Racial Socialization Questionnaire-Teen was used to assess the racial socialization process and the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) -teen was used to assess racial identity. The results support the notion that racial socialization plays a role in molding African American adolescent racial identity. However, there is limited research on how racial identity models apply to minority development, especially for African American female adolescents.

Challenges for African American Females

Most African American females have to deal with racism and sexism (Sue & Sue, 2003). They fear achieving their fullest academic ability due to the fear of being labeled "acting White" (Ogbu & Simon, 1998). Collins (1986, 1990) suggested that the dominant voice has been a White female, thus has made it difficult for African American females to

be heard. The concept of double-consciousness can be applied to African American females. Du Bois (1994) referred to a state of double-consciousness as "looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (p. 2). This concept may explain the complexities African Americans females have while discovering their identity as a female and an African American. The concepts of European American femininity, societal perceptions, racial socialization messages, and purposeful interventions are aspects to consider when discussing identity development with African American female adolescents.

Sanders and Bradley (2005) noted African American females have an uphill battle with identifying themselves racially, especially if their environment is predominantly European American. They tend to be conflicted with deciding whether to mimic European/white standards and views or follow their African American culture. General knowledge of race is the main reason this can be difficult to prove. One can never truly represent their heritage if they are never taught. Thomas et al. (2011) utilized a phenomenological perspective of African American females to explore themes on gendered, racial identity, early awareness of racism, beauty standards, and self-determination. The results from Thomas et al. (2011) study stated that African American females understood in order to defeat the odds against them as African American and female, they must be strong, independent, and determined. Also, it was reported that standards of beauty were important to the females' perceptions of themselves.

There are several educational perceptions and obstacles African American females face throughout school. In an educational setting, Morris (2007) noted that often times African American females were pegged as being loud, aggressive, and even

confrontational. Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012) agreed that they are also stereotyped as troublemakers rather than leaders. In additional research on African American females' social behaviors, Koonce (2012) used a phenomenological study to investigate the experiences of two adolescent African American females "talking with an attitude" around their high school teachers. "Talking with an attitude" was described as "an African American woman's speech practice that is used to show confidence or resistance in oppressive situations" (Koonce, 2012, p. 28). Therefore, Koonce (2012) concluded the school personnel often viewed African Americans females as loud. Research suggests that African American females are praised more when they demonstrate "acceptable" social behaviors rather than their academic success. The females from Morris' (2007) study shared that their peers, European American females, African American males, Latina females and males, were disciplined differently and the teacher-student interaction was not the same as their peers. Morris (2007) hypothesized that these behaviors were seen as a self-affirming technique to deal with sexism and racism. Societal perceptions have an impact and influence female African American students' school experience.

Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein's (2012) study highlighted that African American female high school participants valued education, were steadfast in working hard, willing to make sacrifices in their personal lives in order to be successful, had a strong sense of self, and had goals to improve their current socioeconomic status. Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012) reported one participant said "As an African American female, I know I have to work two, three, four times harder than the average White female to do well, so I am working hard now"(p. 213). Despite being high-

achieving students they felt unhappy about the school policies and practices at the high school, felt the school personnel typically stereotyped them based on negative perceptions of African Americans in the media, and reported not having teachers show evidence of caring and being concerned for their academic success. From a middle school perspective, Mandera et al. (2009) observed the effects of racial identity and self-esteem of African American adolescents as they transitioned from the seventh grade to the eighth grade. Results indicated that female African American students experienced both high levels of self-esteem and depressive symptoms. Mandera et al. (2009) reported the family role of African American female adolescents—having more household chores or assisting in caring for her siblings—could be the rationale for increasing sense of self and responsibility. It is important to understand how racial socialization messages from parents/guardians impact female African American adolescents' racial identity.

To date researchers have suggested the concept of racial identity is important for African Americans females' psychological factors such as self-esteem and self-worth (Akos & Ellis, 2008; Oney et al., 2011; Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). The concept of how racial socialization messages impact African American female adolescents' racial identity is desperately needed in order to prepare and defeat racial injustices that happen in school (Hall & Smith, 2012; Morris, 2007). Researchers have continued to conduct studies that look into ways to help African American females face gender and racial injustices. Dotterer et al. (2009) found when females had a lower recognition of their ethnic identity and experienced discrimination, they were less connected to their school, teachers, and peers. Social workers, school counselors, educators, and parents can use the results of this study to better understand and support the actions and behaviors exhibited by African

American females. If the only representation of African American culture comes from entertainment and media, their views will remain limited and skewed. It is more likely adolescent African American females would rather demonstrate behaviors portrayed in the media because today's society now glorifies bad behavior and those that are positive are less desirable and boring and eventually removed. Thomas et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study to identify the contextual factors and socialization experiences that were more significant to the identity development of African American females. The results rendered that racial socialization is highly important to help positively shape the females.

Studies on how African American female adolescents perceive themselves in a dominant White culture are scant and more need to be investigated (Hall & Smith, 2012, Koonce, 2012, Morris, 2007). Sue and Sue (2003) highlighted African American females in comparison to European American adolescent females showed higher self-confidence, lower levels of substance use, and more positive body images. Hall and Smith (2012) conducted a study with three African American female high school students to obtain their perception of themselves and hear how their thoughts about the media portrayed African American women in music videos, magazines, and radio. The findings from the case study stated all of the females displayed a strong sense of self and desired to be successful. Furthermore they felt music videos devalued the image of African American females. From prior research studies, it is apparent to bring awareness to the academic and social needs of African American females especially in middle and high school.

Establishing individual and group interventions are beneficial to learn how to psychologically disengage African American females' self-esteem from the negative

images and stereotypes in society. Thomas et al. (2008) examined the Young Empowered Sisters (YES!) program, which was a culturally relevant school-based intervention, geared to promote ethnic identity, collectivist orientation, racism awareness, and youth activism to African American high school females. The overall results showed the females who participated in the program had a stronger ethnic identity, stronger sense of collectivism, increased awareness of racism and intended to participate in youth activism. According to Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010), researchers have looked at social behaviors such as sexuality and early pregnancies, school dropout, drug use and abuse, and aggression as focal issues for African American females. Hurd et al., (2012) study on African American students having natural mentors supported the notion of creating relationships with people within the same racial identity to increase positive images of African Americans. African American females desire to be treated impartially; they do not want to be prejudged based on what society has stated about them prior to seeking help for academics or personal issues. Moreover, Owens et al. (2011) reported African American females would like to see more school counseling services that were geared specifically towards their needs and interests if they did not anticipate being prejudged. There is a need for support groups and interventions for African American to assist with transitioning through their crucial adolescent stage (Hurd et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2011). This research study will provide more understanding of how racial socialization messages influence at-risk African American female students' racial identity while in middle school. In turn school personnel can assist them with their transitioning between home and school environments.

Chapter Summary

While framing this study, the importance of racial socialization and racial identity offered several insights. Identity formation was essential when discussing the development of adolescents; however racial identity should not go unrecognized for African American female adolescents. Racial and ethnic identity theories provided critical insight into the development of minority adolescents, especially African Americans. Analysis of identity formation and racial/ethnic identity assisted in understanding how African American female students feel about their race in middle school as individuals and a group.

Markstrom and Hunter (1999) agreed with Erikson (1968) on the notion of when an individual successfully accomplishes the task of identity versus role confusion he/she will be secure and have a sense of self. Several studies have focused on the development of European Americans, yet Duncan and McCoy (2007) suggested that understanding ethnic identity with African Americans to pinpoint personal and social problems is a growing concern to investigate. When issues such as identity formation and ethnic identity are addressed, empowered African American adolescents emerge as successful students and confident individuals in a Western society.

Providing for the needs of at-risk African American female students in middle school is critical for schools. Assisting these individuals in transitioning through adolescence is highly important for their personal and social development. The focus of this study investigated the prevalence of identity problems and what were possible impacts of these problems in the lives of at-risk African American female eighth grade

students in middle school. This study sought to add to the knowledge of how African American female adolescents perceive their racial identity in middle school.

The sole purpose of this study was to explore how racial socialization messages impact the racial identity of at-risk African American female eighth grade students. The knowledge and understanding gained through such a study might assist teachers, administrators, school counselors, and other groups a part of the educational field interested in how African American female adolescents feel about their ethnic identity. The paucity of research on the middle school level, coupled with that of African Americans identity formation, provided the rationale for examining the perceptions of African American female adolescents.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 2 set the stage for this research study by reviewing identity formation, the middle school concept, African American parental views on education, racial/ethnic theories and models, and the challenges African Americans girls face in school. The current literature on the experiences of African American female students was reviewed, and the limitations in the current research were revealed.

This chapter details the approach and methodology of this qualitative research study that was aimed at extending and filling the gaps in the current literature on the racial socialization process and identity development of at-risk African American female adolescents. In addition, this study will assist these individuals who struggle with the transition from their home environment to school environments. This chapter will also include the role of researcher, sample selection, setting, data collection, data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness of ethical procedures.

Research Questions

This study was based on three research questions aimed at providing greater understanding of how racial socialization messages at-risk African American female eighth grade students receive from their parents/guardians influence their racial identity. In addition, the research addressed the experiences and issues at-risk African American female adolescents encounter in middle school.

RQ1: What racial socialization messages do at-risk African American female eighth grade students receive from their parents/guardians?

RQ2: How do at-risk African American female eighth grade students interpret racial socialization messages received from their parents/guardians in the context of middle school?

RQ3: How do the racial socialization messages received by at-risk African American female eighth grade students influence the development of their racial identity?

Approach to the Study

This qualitative research study explored how racial socialization messages received by at-risk African American female eighth grade students from their parents/guardians influenced their racial identity. According to Patton (2002), qualitative research is one of the constructivist paradigms which views the world constructed by social, political, and psychological aspects of the world. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated the goal of constructivism as "understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve" (p. 113). Based on the constructivist paradigm, there are multiple realities and interpretations of racial socialization; for that reason my goal was to seek understanding of at-risk African American female students' perceptions of their racial identity and their middle school experience (Creswell, 2009).

The basic interpretive approach in qualitative research allows for a great deal of flexibility in how subjects are approached and ultimately in how the data are interpreted. Therefore, this research design was selected to make meaning of at-risk African

American female students' perceptions on their racial identity and middle school experience. When conducting qualitative research, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated "If you want to understand the way people think about their world and how those definitions are formed you need to get close to them, to hear them talk and observe them in their day to day lives" (p. 31). Standard means of data collection in the basic interpretive qualitative approach include interviews, observations, and document analysis. Merriam (2002) stated these data are "inductively analyzed to identify the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data" (p. 6).

According to Creswell (2009), the natural setting allows the researcher to collect data at the site where participants experience the phenomenon. Therefore, parent/guardian participants were interviewed in their homes in which racial socialization would occur. Student participants were interviewed in a neutral setting, a local library. Research supports that racial identity development is complex and unique for minority students (Akos & Ellis, 2008; Mandera et al., 2009), but understanding how racial socialization influences at-risk African American females in middle school is currently unknown. This qualitative study offers a human understanding of experiences and thinking of the student and parent/guardian participants.

Role of the Researcher

It was important to explain my bias and personal experience in this research study. Creswell (2009) argued "inquirers explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal background…that may shape their interpretations formed during a study" (p. 177). I identify as an African American female who as a young girl was curious about my racial identity. I was intrigued by the struggles that some African

American female students experience as they traverse the divide between the home and school cultural environments.

I believe that racial socialization played an intricate role in the development of my racial identity. I recall racial socialization messages that nurtured my racial identity. My family promoted racial pride through celebrating Kwanzaa and attending and participating in Black History programs. Racial barrier, self-worth, and egalitarian messages were important for me because I attended a predominantly European Baptist private school during primary grades. My parents instilled in me that I was beautiful and intelligent as an African American girl. They taught me to treat people with respect regardless of race and gender and the same should be returned to me. However, my mother stated, "There will be people who are mean and disrespectful, but remember as a Christian we must love all of God's people and do what is right." Church played an integral part in my racial socialization process, relaying messages on the topics of racial pride, self-worth, and egalitarianism.

Dubois (1994) stated the "talented tenth" concept focused on emphasizing the necessity for higher education to develop the leadership capacity to inspire and lead other African Americans to be successful. My parents instilled in me to do my best and always exceed in class regardless of the race of my teachers. As a child, my parents taught me it was important to excel in my academic courses, avoid disciplinary problems, and engage in extracurricular activities. Following the advice of my parents made me a well-rounded student in school. My teachers recognized my scholastic efforts and often complimented me on my behavior of "being a good girl." The majority of my teachers in my primary and secondary schooling were European Americans, and I noticed they appreciated a girl,

especially African American, who was intelligent, polite, and compliant. On the contrary, they displayed disdain to some of my African American female peers who were loud, playful, and non-engaged in class. I observed the preferential treatment divide between us that led me to believe in order to "fit in" with the dominant culture I had to execute behaviors that European Americans preferred (Delpit, 2012). From my own experience, I found it challenging to be confident and secure living in a world dominated by the European American culture. Additionally, it is difficult being bombarded with negative images that stereotype African American females in the media.

My interest to understand the racial identity development of African American female adolescents began to deepen upon beginning my teaching career. In my seven years in the education field, I noticed that several African American female students would get in trouble because of their boisterous energy in class and observed how that behavior affected their academics. Teachers would refer to disciplining the students quicker than taking time to explore why the child was acting out in class or requesting the school counselor to intervene and mediate the situation. I realized the importance of positive influences and strong guidance in the lives of African American females. They want to "fit in" yet maintain their own individualities of being African American and female. Research has found when African American adolescent girls are surrounded by family members and community providers that care and display concern they tend to realize their potential and be successful and less likely to be deemed as "at risk" (Hall & Smith, 2012; Morris, 2007; Owen et al., 2011).

In relation to the participants, I was employed at the school in which the research was conducted and I had interaction with some of the student and parent/guardian

participants prior to the research study. As a researcher, it was my responsibility to understand and embrace the qualities and characteristics of my participants' culture (Patton, 2002). I was empathetic to each participant's unique culture and trusted they were honest about their experiences. Another challenge was having the students trust me in order for them to be honest with their thoughts and feelings on their experiences in middle school. At first, I thought some parent/guardian participants would be hesitant to share how they raised their daughter with fear of being judged and may have shared false information. However, these participants were open and shared racial socialization messages they shared with their daughters. Student participants were forthcoming on their middle school experiences, the relationship with their parents/guardians, and how they felt about being an African American female.

As the researcher, I played the role of a non-participant observer. Maxwell (2005) implied the researcher serves as the primary data collector and suggested "the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done" (p. 83). Data was collected by way of observing behaviors, interviewing participants, and reviewing documents. It was highly important to monitor subjectivity when conducting qualitative research. The participants' culture and understanding the concept of subjectivity were very important to this research. Safeguards, such as an external auditor and member checking, were put in place in order to remain objective to participants' responses.

Sample Selection

Context of the Study. The targeted population for this study was students in a medium-sized, traditional, comprehensive middle school in an urban setting. The school was located in one of the fastest growing communities in the state with a population

percent change of 5.7% from 2010 to 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014) and was located approximately 100 miles south of Atlanta. Statistics indicate the estimated 2013 county population was over 72,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). According to U.S. Census Bureau (2014) the persons below poverty level were 20.4% from 2009-2013 and the median household income in the county was $44,964. The state's largest industrial complex with over 25,000 civilian, contractors, and military personnel (Robins AFB Public Website, 2014) is located in the area, providing the study school with a highly transitory, middle class student population.

Selection of Participants. Purposeful convenient sampling was used to collect data for the study. A goal of purposeful sampling is to achieve "representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 89). For purposeful sampling to be effective, a pool of participants was identified based on characteristics they possessed related to the study. In determining the sample for this study, participants were selected based on the following criteria. All participants, students and parents/guardians, were identified as African American and female. Students ranged in age from 13 to 14 years old in the eighth grade and were attending a public middle school. Two sources of data were also used to select the student participants. These sources included: report cards and disciplinary reports dated from the sixth to the eighth grade. This information notated if the student failed classes in the sixth through the eighth grade and had been placed in in-school suspension (ISS) or suspended from school (OSS). After evaluating school records, a pool of eligible student participants was created. From the list, five individual students were contacted to participate in the study. From the five participants, four agreed to participate. The student who opted to not

participate is the twin sister of one of the agreeing participants. The female parent/guardian of each participant was asked to participate and each agreed.

A small sample was used to preserve the depth of the data collected. The total sample size for this research study included eight participants: four students and four parents/guardians. The participants in this research study provided detailed information of their perceptions of how racial socialization messages influenced the students' racial identity. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms for the parents/guardians, students, the school name, and county name.

Data Collection

Following the protocol described by Maxwell (2005), the researcher served as the primary research instrument, observed the participants, described the setting, and interpreted information. Five sources of data were utilized to capture the responses of the participants: interviews, observations, a researcher journal, Multidimensional Inventory Black Identity (MIBI)-teen instrument, and document analysis. These sources enhanced the validity of the findings for this research study and are described in detail below.

Timeline. The following is a basic timeline that was developed to guide the study from beginning to completion. All dates are approximate.

05-01-2014	08-01-2014	Develop interview questions and processes, complete and submit university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) paperwork, obtain permission from Marshall County Board of Education, and prepare for data collection
08-01-2014	09-01-2014	Identify and orient participants
09-01-2014	11-01-2014	Collect data from participants through interviews

11-01-2014	1-01-2015	Analyze data and begin writing
01-01-2015	03-01-2015	Edit and revise writing

Upon Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix A) from the university, documentation was submitted to the board of education to be granted permission to collect data for this study (Appendix B). Upon approval from the superintendent, the principal of the middle school was sent a permission request to recruit at-risk African American female eighth grade students (Appendix C). The selected student participants and their parent/guardian were asked to attend a meeting in which the research study was explained and their participation was requested. Upon verbally agreeing to participate, each participant signed a consent form. The consent form explained the guidelines for participation. Students signed a minor assent form (Appendix D). The parent/guardian signed a permission form for their child and signed a consent form for her participation (Appendices E & F). Students were informed that their information would not be shared among other teachers and would not affect their treatment or evaluation in class. In the event a participant decided to withdraw, they were informed that there would be no consequences. All participants were notified pseudonyms would be given in order to maintain confidentiality.

Interviews. Interviews are a common strategy used for data collection (Maxwell, 2005; Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). A semi-structured interview guide was used to allow the participants to respond to the central focus of the study and explore new ideas on topic (Merriam, 2002). Interview questions were grounded in themes from the concept of racial socialization (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Neblett et al., 2009) and the theory of critical race feminism (Berry, 2010; Wing, 2003). By using a semi-structured interview

format, some pre-determined questions were used. Moreover, unexpected leads arose during the interview and were used as exploring questions. There were specific interview guides created for the students and parents/guardians in this research study (see Appendices I & J) to enhance the quality of the interviews (Seidman, 2006).

While collecting data, a digital voice recorder was used to record the responses of each participant. It was important to capture the accuracy of each participant's response; therefore, each interview was recorded separately. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in an informal conversational style using open-ended questions. Each student met with me two times at a nearby library in the community. The rationale for meeting in the library was to have a neutral place where we had private conversations. The students were interviewed two times during a one month period. The parents/guardians were interviewed once in their homes. The rationale for conducting the interview in the parents'/guardians' home environment was to make them feel comfortable and to have the opportunity to observe them in their home environment. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a few of the participants to clarify information in their transcripts.

A modified version of the Three Interview Approach was used to assist with guiding student interviews and collect rich data (Seidman, 2006). The framework for *Interview One,* was to establish the student participants' experience. It was important for them to reflect on racial socialization messages and practices they had been introduced to by their parents/guardians at home.

In *Interview Two* the student participants were asked to reconstruct concrete details of their present lived experiences in middle school. For example, the girls were

encouraged to describe stories on how they interacted with their peers and teachers, their involvement in school activities, their mannerisms in class, and how they used their parental advice to function in school. At the end of *Interview Two* the student participants were asked questions that reflected the meaning of their experiences. Seidman (2006) stated the final interview "addresses the intellectual and emotional connections" of the interpretation of racial socialization messages that the girls received from homes (p. 18). In order for student participants to process the meaning of their experiences, they were required to look at their racial socialization process and aspects from middle school years. Lastly, it was necessary for the students to look at their existing experience in detail to be able to view their racial identity development (Seidman, 2006).

Observations and Memoing. In qualitative studies, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated field notes are compiled into written form from "what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data" (p. 110-111). The purpose of field notes was to document "the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site" (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). Field notes were recorded using an observational protocol throughout the duration of the study. It was vital to document the behavior and activities of the participants of the research study (Creswell, 2009). The observational protocol consisted of descriptive and reflective notes. The descriptive notes included the following: physical setting, description of participants, description of activities, description of individuals engaged in activity, sequence of activity over time, interactions, unplanned events, and participants' comments (Creswell, 2009). The reflective notes included questions posed by myself, observations of nonverbal behaviors,

and interpretations by me (Creswell, 2009). These field notes were compared to the transcripts for clarity and accuracy.

Document Analysis. Students were asked to keep reflective journals and write their thoughts, questions, and feelings down after each interview. Each student participant was provided with a composition notebook. Nicole and Jessica felt comfortable journaling and shared different aspects of their life story. Writing in a journal allowed Miracle to share experiences dealing with race and discrimination that she uncomfortable expressing during the interview. Bianca wrote a total of eight sentences in her journal; she wrote in her journal the least. All student journals were collected for review and analysis at the end of data collection.

The student participants were administered the MIBI-teen instrument (Appendix K) during *Interview Two* to assess the three stable dimensions, centrality, racial regard, and ideology, of racial identity identified by the MMRI model. The instrument had a total of 21 statements: three on centrality, six on racial regard, and 12 on ideology. Participants responded regarding the extent to which they agree or disagree with items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 which was equivalent to strongly disagree to 5 which was equivalent to strongly agree.

Patton (2002) suggested that researchers should show how they value participants' contributions by offering something of value in exchange. On the final interview, the student participants were given a thank you card and small gift bag of items to show my gratitude to them for sharing their life story and personal time to be a part of this research study. The parent/guardian participants were given a thank you card.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and occurred throughout the data collection process, ensuring continuous improvement as the study progressed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Data for this study consists of interviews from at-risk African American female eighth grade students and their parent/guardian, observations, MIBI-teen instrument, and document analysis. The process of data analysis involved transforming raw data into a final description, narrative, categories, and themes (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). Maxwell (2005) stated the first step in data analysis of qualitative research was listening to interview recordings and rewriting and reorganizing field notes. As each participant was interviewed, the focus was centered upon listening to her story. This strategy allowed the participants to lead the direction of their interview in explaining how the racial socialization process impacted the racial identity of at-risk African American female adolescents.

Using the constant comparative data analysis procedures provided the opportunity for analysis to occur at several levels. The audio recordings were reviewed and compared to information documented on the transcription for accuracy. Codes emerged from the data and then the codes were categorized. The bracketing method was used to group codes in the transcriptions. The codes aided in creating categories that were reoccurring throughout the interview (Merriam, 2002). Themes were developed from categories that came from further analysis of data. In the final stages of the constant comparative method, the participants were asked to review and validate findings to reduce distortion. All participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts, clarify ideas presented, and provide additional information to further complete an idea expressed.

Fieldnotes were taken during the interview process as the participants spoke about their perceptions of racial socialization and racial identity. The research journal documented my thoughts from observations seen in the parents/guardians' home environments and non-verbal and verbal cues from participants during their interviews. Upon transcription of the audio recordings, the fieldnotes were utilized to develop follow-up questions and were later used to triangulate data and its analysis. The transcripts, fieldnotes, participants' and researcher's journals were read to identify content.

Coding, reading, rereading, and sorting were part of the management of the data. Codes with definitions and corresponding attributes were developed. This provided a system for categorizing and classifying concepts that emerged from the data. The coding was critical because it allowed for me to place the contents within a category and develop a new category if the parameters need to be expanded. Creswell (2009) suggested the following steps in order to analyze emergent themes: (1) getting a sense of the whole by reading the transcripts carefully; (2) identifying text segments with brackets; (3) assigning a code word or phrase to describe the meaning of the text segment; (4) making a list and grouping the code words; (5) reviewing the transcription; and (6) reducing the codes to themes, which were similar codes put together, forming the major ideas of the transcription.

Following the constant comparative method, after the initial coding, new categories and data were divided. The process of coding, categorizing, and dividing continued until all data was disaggregated. Safeguards were inserted into the research design to promote more dependable and trustworthy findings. To verify the data and

ensure non-biased judgments, a research team comprised of an external auditor and my dissertation chair, reviewed the initial segments, codes, categories, and themes. This peer auditing review process was applied before any final decisions were made. To minimize subjectivity during the data analysis process, a personal statement was recorded on my racial socialization process and how it influenced my racial identity before initiating the study. These belief statements were referred to often during the process to self-audit for bias and to ensure objectivity.

Trustworthiness

According to several qualitative researchers, addressing the issues of validity and reliability is by discussing the concept of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) stated "trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of the person who collects and analyzes the data" (p. 570). As the qualitative researcher, it was extremely important to read and reread the data numerous times, to review and organize the constructs and categories that would ensure the interpretations reflected the participants' experiences (Patton, 2002). To establish trustworthiness, a systematic process was followed and authenticity in interpreting the data were used as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba proposed four techniques that would obtain trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility. As the researcher, my main responsibility was to ensure the credibility of this qualitative research study. Credibility was ensured throughout this study by "prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation and triangulation exercises…" (Seale, 2002, p. 104). A basic interpretive qualitative approach was

employed based on the constructivist paradigm to collect data through observations, interviews, and document analysis (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2005; Braun & Clark, 2006, Patton, 2002). A variety of validity strategies were used in order to enhance my ability to evaluate the accuracy of findings and prove to the readers of that accuracy. The strategies most applicable to this study were triangulation, member checks, clarifying bias, and utilizing a research team; an external auditor and my dissertation chair (Creswell, 2009).

Triangulation of data from multiple sources (e.g., interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents) was used to confirm emerging themes within the data. Creswell (2009) claimed when the researcher established themes based on converging several sources of data and the perspectives from the participants, validity will be added to the study. Maxwell (2005) indicated triangulation aided in reducing the risk for the research study's findings to "reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method" (p. 93) and allowed me "to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating" (p. 93-94). The connection of the existing literature on the middle school concept, identity formation, racial identity, and challenges among African American females was understood in the stories of at-risk African American female eighth grade adolescents.

Member checking was the most crucial technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was a great strategy to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of the information the participant provided (Maxwell, 2005). It was vital to allow participants to review the final product from the audio recorded sessions and verify the accuracy of their responses given in the interviews. I

presented the final transcript to each participant to read; several participants elaborated on their responses after reading the transcript (Creswell, 2009).

It was important to report any personal and professional information that may positively or negatively affect the data collection, analysis, or interpretation of the study (Patton, 2002). Through personal reflection, I identified personal experiences and biases that could possibly affect the study. Hence to ensure the subjectivity, I recorded my perspectives about racial identity development with African American female students in middle school. In addition, I articulated biases of being an African American female and being an educator where the student participants attended middle school.

An external auditor was solicited to read and code selected samples of the data. The auditor's name will be kept confidential and her responsibility helped authenticate the findings (Creswell, 2009). Within the responsibility of authenticating the findings, the auditor was given a written copy of the audio recorded transcripts and interviews along with a list of codes for each identified theme to which she would code. The auditing process was incorporated within the context of the study to enhance the "consistency of the results obtained from the data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 206).

Transferability. Transferability in this study focused on the applicability or external validity. Patton (2002) uses the term *fittingness* to describe the degree of transferability between two different contexts. To address transferability, a detailed profile narrative was provided on each participant and the site of the context of this study (Creswell, 2009). The description of the context allowed the reader to effectively make a conclusion concerning the transferability of this case from its own context to the reader's

(Patton, 2002, Seale, 2002). Creswell (2009) emphasized that 'particularity' rather than 'generalizability' is the hallmark of qualitative research.

Dependability. Dependability focused on the reliability or the consistency in qualitative research (Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2007). Reliability is the "extent to which one's findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 1998). Auditing is a process that involves "'auditors' in the examining of an 'audit trail' for adequacy" (Seale, 2002, p. 105). My documentation of data, methods, choices selected during the research study, and final product was evaluated by a confidential auditor. Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2007) stated it is "necessary for each stage of research to be traceable and clearly documented" (p. 743). Dependability in this research study was addressed in three ways: triangulation, clarifying bias, and an external audit.

Confirmability. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) fourth criterion, confirmability, was designed to replace neutrality or objectivity. Shenton (2004) stated it can be difficult to ensure real objectivity from the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest. Therefore, steps were put in place to present the findings of the experiences and ideas of the informants and not the qualitative investigator's. Auditing and triangulation exercises were used. According to Ryan et al. (2007), when credibility, transferability, and dependability are addressed, confirmability has been attained.

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative studies are unique in nature because ethical dilemmas may arise in the areas of data collection and presentation of findings (Merriam, 1998, 2002). Creswell (2009) emphasized to "not put participants at risk and respect vulnerable populations" (p. 89). Various safeguards were put in place to avoid ethical dilemmas and the potential risk

to participants. In regards of the data collection process, it was my responsibility to establish a rapport with the participants and create a nonjudgmental environment where they felt comfortable sharing their life stories. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. There was a possibility that the participants may experience both risks and benefits from this research study. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic on racial identity, some participants shared profound or offensive stories. However, to prevent any discomfort during the sessions, I made sure to remind all participants of their rights and the norms of the interview. Participants were notified of their ability to withdraw consent at any time without penalty and have the results of their participation, to the extent they could be returned, removed from the research records, or destroyed. The participants were allowed to review the results of the research. Student participants were told that no teacher or parent was privy to the information they provided for the research study. The participants were made aware their participation was strictly voluntary and I explained the research study in detail.

Due to the highly personal nature of many of the questions asked of the participants, confidentiality of all data was the highest priority. Appendices were created for consent forms for the superintendent, principal, parents/guardians, and students. To protect participants of the study, each individual was given a pseudonym. Each participant received a two-digit number and letter to provide additional protection of their identities and their information was stored separately. The confidential data taken from the participants was stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. Audio recordings were destroyed after the transcriptions were typed, edited, and verified for accuracy. An external auditor and I were the only individuals who had access to this information. The

information will be discarded after two years upon conclusion of the research study. Though this research study was entirely voluntary and no monetary compensation was given, I presented a small gift bag to the student participants to express gratitude. Items in the gift bag included writing utensils such as colorful ink pens and pencils, a small notepad, lip balm, hand sanitizer, and small bottle of lotion.

Chapter Summary

A basic interpretive qualitative approach was used to understand how racial socialization messages from parents/guardians influenced racial identity of at-risk African American female eighth graders in this study. This method allowed student and parent/guardian participants to openly share experiences on their racial socialization process and racial identity in middle school. The one-on-one interviews enabled parent/guardian participants to explain their cultural experiences regarding racial socialization; and at-risk African American female student participants described how those racial socialization messages influenced their racial identity in middle school. There is a paucity of literature in the fields of psychology and education discussing racial identity development with at-risk African American adolescent girls. This subgroup often struggles as they transition from their homes to the school cultural environment. Purposeful convenient sampling was employed to select eight participants (four students and four parents/guardians) for this study. Specific criteria were used to select students and parents/guardians. Several sources were used to collect data for this study. These sources were: interviews, observations, a researcher journal, MIBI-teen instrument, and document analysis. A digital voice recorder was used to record the interviews, and transcripts were made after each set of interviews. An external auditor and I read and

analyzed the data after each set of interviews to verify accuracy. Categories and patterns emerging from interviews, observations, and documents were coded as I looked for common themes. Through this research study I gained a deeper understanding of the challenges that at-risk African American female students experience in transitioning from their home environment to the middle school setting.

Chapter IV

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

Chapter 4 presents the narratives of the eight participants in this research study. Through the in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, student and parent/guardian profiles were created. Throughout my interactions with the participants, it was essential for me to tell a story that enabled readers to make a connection with the students and parents/guardians in the research study. This connection is necessary to humanize the participants and make the research more meaningful. All names have been changed to protect the participants' identities.

Group Characteristics

Table 1

Profile of Parent/Guardian Participants

Parent/Guardian Participant	Relation to Student	Marital Status	Members in Household	Highest Level of Education
Samantha	Adoptive guardian to Nicole	Divorced	3	Graduated from high school; some technical college
Candice	Biological mother to Miracle	Single	5	GED; Some technical college
Wilma	Biological mother to Jessica	Divorced	4	11th grade; Job Corps
Helen	Paternal Grandmother to Bianca	Single	3	2nd grade

This table shows the parent/guardians' relationship between the student, her marital status, members of the household, and her highest level of education. The study sample comprised of two biological parents, one grandmother, and one adoptive guardian. All participants were single parents with household membership ranging between three and five. Three participants did not graduate from high school while one participant did graduate; two participants have attended technical college but did not receive an associate degree.

Table 2

Profile of Student Participants

Student Participant	Student readiness for middle school	Number of middle schools attended	Extracurricular Activities (at Lakewood Middle School)
Nicole	No	3	Chorus- 1 year
Miracle	Yes	2	Basketball- 1 year Softball- 2 years
Jessica	Yes	3	None
Bianca	Yes	1	Band- 1 year

This table displays the student participants' readiness for middle school, the number of middle schools attended, and a list of her extracurricular activities in middle school. The study sample comprised of four at-risk African American female eighth grade students. Three of the four participants claimed to be prepared for entering middle school. Three of the four participants have attended two or three schools while in middle school. Three of the four participants were engaged in school extracurricular activities.

Participant Narratives

Samantha. Samantha is Nicole's adoptive mother. She identified her race as Black (African American), from the United States. Samantha is a divorcee with five children, four girls and one boy. The children range in age from 14 to 34. Currently the members of the household are Samantha, Stacy, Samantha's middle daughter, and Nicole.

Samantha was eager and excited to participate in this study. I interviewed her in her home. Her living room was neat and clean. Pictures of a Black woman, possibly a mother, standing near a leopard and a Black man, possibly a father, holding a small child could be seen on the wall of the living room area. There was a New King James Version of the Holy Bible in the middle of the coffee table. An assortment of potted plants was aligned along the wall. A family pet poodle named Brooklyn lived in the home as well.

Samantha is originally from the middle Georgia area. She was raised by her grandparents and enjoyed going to school. In her early school years, she attended a segregated elementary school. Samantha shared that she, "was one of the first students when they integrated Miller Junior High." The racially charged schools integration environment (Howard, 2010) may have soured her experience attending school with white students. When her grandfather overheard her brash comment, "I don't want to go to school with those white folks," he "chewed" her out. While in junior high, she did well academically and became the class president of her seventh grade class. In 1968, Samantha's grandparents separated and she moved with her grandmother to Michigan where she entered high school.

As an adult in Michigan, Samantha raised four biological children and later adopted her youngest daughter, Nicole. As the years progressed, the crime rate increased and job opportunities decreased in Michigan. In addition, the school environment was not conducive for successful learning for Nicole. Samantha stated "The school system it kind of sucked. The environment was not good for me to raise her [Nicole] in." These tumultuous changes influenced her decision to return to the middle Georgia area.

When asked about topics of conversations with her daughter, Samantha stated that she talks with her daughter about race, being a female, discrimination, and self-worth. However when it comes to the topic of race, her daughter, Stacy, had the most influence on Nicole. Samantha acknowledged that Stacy educated Nicole about Black History Month and their heritage. The family embraced their African American heritage. She explained,

> I wear my hair natural. I like to just wash it and go. And Nicole use to get hers relaxed but she took it upon herself to ask her sister to twist her hair. I didn't have to tell her anything. She just did it on her own.

The family also visited museums that host African American art work.

Samantha was very protective of Nicole and did not trust strangers around her. She recalled attending a family reunion and there were some family members they did not know. Samantha asked her other daughter Stacy to escort Nicole to the restroom just to make sure she was safe. That moment she increasingly realized that she was being over protective of Nicole. Samantha proclaimed that due to the "drama and mishaps" which have occurred in Nicole's life, she does not want her to go through it again.

Church was an integral part of Samantha's family life. Her family was a loyal member of a local Baptist Church. Some of the morals and values Samantha instilled in her daughter are "To respect yourself and others. Love yourself and others. Be the best that you can be." The Baptist church hosted a variety of events, such as Youth Explosion and Fall Festival. Samantha encouraged Nicole to attend these types of events because they are safe and fun. Samantha advised her daughter to "Be confident in yourself. Believe in yourself and do your very best." When Nicole began middle school, Samantha

did not like the first couple of schools she attended. She described the atmosphere of the schools and the teachers as 'unwelcoming and not engaging with the parents.' However, she described Lakewood Middle School as having 'a safe and positive learning environment.' Samantha recalled Nicole's science teacher, Mrs. Watkins, calling her when Nicole was misbehaving in class. She was very grateful that teachers were concerned and would call to rectify Nicole's behavior and offer extra academic support. Samantha stated "The Aces team was really good for my daughter. I miss them so much. Please let me know when Mrs. Watkins' retirement party is next year so that I can attend."

Nicole. Nicole is a 13 year old girl originally from Michigan. She described her physical appearance as "pretty, thick hair, small nose, small eyes, and petite (small) body." The only thing she wished she could change was her size. She desired to be "thicker" meaning more weight. Upon meeting Nicole, she was giggly and had a welcoming demeanor.

Nicole often spoke with her head down and in a soft voice when asked questions pertaining to her past. She discussed her past history of being adopted at a young age and recalled the mistreatment she received over those years. Nicole shared

> I was taken away from my mother because she made a bad decision to live in a bad house with me and all my sisters and brothers. And so they gave me to my grandmother and I lived with her for like a year maybe 2. Then they took me away from her [mom] again and I went through a bad home, like, where they didn't feed me, physically abused me…

During her pre-school years, she lived with her birth mother and nine other siblings. They were homeless and lived in an abandoned building. Nicole and her siblings were removed from their mother's custody by the state of Michigan because she lacked the financial means to support them. Thus Nicole's maternal grandmother was awarded custody. However, the living arrangement with her grandmother did not work out, and as a result, she was removed by a social worker and later adopted. In an attempt to protect Nicole from a life of crime and to provide her with a better education, her adoptive family moved to another state. Nicole feared that one day someone will come and take her again. Her past life haunts her. She stated "But my past really does affect me because I'm scared when I wake up. I feel like I'm going to leave her [adopted mother] again or somebody's gonna take me. I feel like I just won't survive in the real world."

Nicole's mood changed from gloomy to being more positive when we talked about memories of life in Georgia. She enjoys the new life she has with her adoptive family. Nicole has had the opportunity to celebrate her birthday and Christmas like some children do with gifts and family meals. Nicole is very selective when befriending someone. She stated "Serenity and Kenya would help me with anything I'm going through. Like, they knew about my past and didn't tell nobody. It was between us. If I had a problem I could come to them." She later acknowledged her closest friends in middle school were African American.

Nicole explained that she was not ready to start middle school. She enjoyed elementary school and had no interest in "growing up." Nicole struggled academically with transitioning from elementary to middle school. She felt that middle school work was too rigorous and that she did not get help from her teachers to help her do well.

Nicole failed some classes in middle school due to lack of teacher support, but was never retained. To get more involved in school, Nicole became a member of chorus. She enjoyed going out to perform and eventually joined the choir at church.

Nicole explained how her mother helped her transition from elementary to middle school. She stated, "My mom taught me that 'you can do it; you just have to put your mind to it.'" She acknowledged being in In-School Suspension (ISS) as well as Out of School Suspension (OSS). Nicole has been to ISS three times and OSS once at Lakewood Middle School. All incidents stemmed from being in verbal and physical altercations with other students.

Candice. Candice is Miracle's biological mother. She identified her race as Black (African American), from the United States. Candice is a single mother of three children, two daughters and a son. She was born and raised in the middle Georgia area.

When asked to interview Candice at home, she stated that she currently lived with her mom and her mom "trips out" about having people over. Candice explained she was in the process of getting her own home in the next few weeks. We agreed to meet at the public library since she had to pick up her daughter once her interview was over.

Candice described her childhood as being 'normal.' When asked what 'normal' meant she stated "I had a mom and dad, sister and brother, had friends, and the bills were paid. We were sheltered, clothed, and fed." Candice was the youngest of her siblings. However, while growing up in a two-parent household, Candice would have preferred to live solely with her mother. She had a strained relationship with her alcoholic father. Her father also physically abused her mother. Having to witness this situation on a daily basis angered and confused Candice. She could not understand why her mother would stay as

well as keep her and her siblings in such an abusive environment. As if this situation was not bad enough, she later found out that her father had a daughter with another woman.

Candice wondered why her mother decided to continue staying in the relationship with her father and "try to make their family work." Candice and her siblings "felt some kind of way" about her father "stepping out" on their mother but did recognize the additional sibling. When asked to describe her relationship with her half-sister she said it is a "decent" relationship. After a few years, her mother eventually separated from her father. At the age of 14, her father died of a heart attack. Her father's passing did not affect her emotionally. She stated that the death of father left her feeling "nothing." Issues that stemmed from Candice's home environment would sometimes influence her behavior. Yet Candice was interested in school and achieved As and Bs in all her subjects. She admitted that they were times when she was mischievous. For instance she would bully her peers. Her rationale was 'because it was something to do.' While in school, Candice had good relationships with her teachers. She felt they were helpful as much as she let them. There were situations when she did not want her teachers to ask questions about her home life. She stated "I am a firm believer in not being a weak individual."

There was a situation in middle school where she got involved in an argument with her teacher because she was late for class. The situation between Candice and the teacher escalated to the point that she was suspended from school. After going to the office and awaiting the consequences, she found out that her mother was not supportive of her side of the story. Having to deal with her mother taking the school administrators side and not supporting her side of the story, Candice felt "bad, upset, and unheard." As a

result of this incident, Candice encouraged her children to defend themselves from teachers and peers if necessary. Nevertheless, Candice listened to both sides of the story and made her conclusions based on the information provided. Candice shared that Miracle recently got into an altercation for fighting a white boy who called her a nigger. She condoned her fighting because "I cannot tell her how to feel at the time she feels she is being disrespected."

While in high school, Candice was expelled in the ninth grade because of a physical altercation with another student. This incident snowballed into a bigger altercation in which some students assaulted two teachers. Consequently, Candice and one of her friends were suspended indefinitely from the high school. While attending another high school in the county, she dropped out in the tenth grade, which resulted in her not graduating. At the age of 18, Candice had her first child, Miracle. A few years later, Candice obtained her General Education Diploma (GED) and has since taken some technical college classes.

As Candice's parent did for her, she tries to provide a stable home. Currently, Candice and her "old man," who is also the father of her youngest children, live together. Some of her decisions have led her to a life of "just trying to make things happen as best as possible." She works a variety of jobs that "pays the bills." Candice expressed she wanted better for her children because "… jobs I work, it's just like modern day slavery. I don't want her to be that way."

Candice stated that it is important to know about your race because "being that we're Black we already have one strike against us." Providing morals and values to Miracle is essential to Candice. She knows she cannot be with her at all times. Candice

tells her daughter to “Act like a lady at all times, not to lie, steal, or cheat, and if you don’t believe in something you’ll fall for anything.” Candice and Miracle have discussions about race, being a female, discrimination, and self-worth.

Candice understood the school environment can be overwhelming. Her most important advice to her daughter is “The dumbest question is the question not asked.” Candice was aware that her daughter has had academic and behavioral issues in school. She yearned for her daughter to change and prepare herself for high school before it is too late. Candice expressed “…Baby, you can’t be a surgeon if you can’t pass your work. Who’s gonna let you operate on them and you making Cs and Fs.” She added “So you have to start focusing now, cause being in the ninth grade, I can’t pacify or hold your hand and pay for summer school for you anymore cause that’s none existent.” She wants her children to get their education and graduate from high school.

Miracle. Miracle is a 14 year old girl from the middle Georgia area. She described her physical appearance as “pretty, natural hair, big eyes, dark-skinned, and petite (small) body.” The only thing she wished she could change was the shape of her head. While laughing, Miracle stated that her siblings tease her about her head being too long.

Miracle and her siblings have lived off and on with their grandmother. Miracle expressed that she enjoyed staying with her grandmother and was not interested in moving to the new house with her mom. She said “I like staying with my grandmother because she is getting older and I like being around her. I get tired of moving.”

Miracle spoke freely about events that took place in school and in her neighborhood. For example, she talked about some of the new gangs in the area. Miracle explained how males and females were initiated into the gangs. She stated “The guys

who want to get in have to get beat up. And the girls have to do nasty stuff to guys in the gang." Becoming a member of a local gang did not interest her. Miracle acknowledged that gangs would have a negative effect on her if she became involved. "I don't want to join any of them because I want to go to school and they just ain't good to be around. The police are watching them too."

Miracle noticed a change in middle school from her elementary routine. Miracle stated that upon entering middle school she felt prepared. She recognized that education is important but gets bored in school. She explained that her classes make school boring. Typically Miracle did not bring homework home because she completed it in class. If she completed it in class, she could come home and sleep. Miracle failed a class at Lakewood Middle School because she was not fully committed to studying and requesting tutoring in subjects she was struggling in. Since she failed the class, she had to attend summer school to prevent being retained in the seventh grade.

Miracle felt she could express her talents at school. Miracle played on the girls' basketball and softball teams. She enjoyed going to school dances to show off her latest dance moves. Miracle got along with her peers, but in middle school she preferred having African American friends. Currently, she associates more with her European American peers because they have displayed a sense of concern to do well academically and behaviorally.

According to Lakewood Middle School's discipline records, Miracle has been to ISS twice and OSS once. The verbal quarrels were described as arguing with a peer and disrespect to the teacher. She explained that just because teachers are educated and are adults, they should not be doing "picky stuff with the students," such as teasing or being

sarcastic. Miracle admitted to sometimes not adhering to her mother's advice of respecting adults because she felt teachers were "playing around with somebody else's education." Though Miracle has faced some challenges in middle school, she desires to graduate and be successful in life.

Wilma. Wilma is Jessica's biological mother. She identified her race as Black (African American), from the United States. Wilma is originally from south Florida, but relocated to the middle Georgia area to seek better opportunities after separating from her ex-husband. She is a divorcee of 4 years and a mother of three daughters.

Her family lived in a duplex housing unit. The home was clean and had minimal home décor in the living room area. There was a television positioned in front of a sofa and loveseat. There were four pictures of her daughters hanging on the wall. Wilma was very polite and displayed her hospitality by opening two windows and the door to allow air and light in the living room to ensure I was comfortable. When her younger daughters arrived home from school, she told them to go to their room and start on their homework. Before leaving the girls were reminded to greet me, since I was a visitor. Wilma trains her daughters to exhibit good behavior and manners.

Wilma described her childhood as "unstable, yearning for love and wanted nurturing." Her mother passed when she was 6 years old. After Wilma's mother died, her father was not willing to assume the responsibility of a full time parent to her and her siblings. This was her second encounter with feeling betrayed and left all alone. Her maternal grandmother would come to raise Wilma, her two older brothers, and younger sister. Interestingly, she and her brothers each left their grandmother's house by the age of 16, but her youngest sister was "not forced out." She explained "My baby sister lived

with my grandmother longer than us [her and her siblings] due to favoritism. And I have no idea why was that. She just did." Wilma felt neglected and resented her family members for depriving her of attention and not tending to her needs as a child. She stated "Once again I was on my own to care for myself. Nobody was there for me. What about me?"

While living with her grandmother, Wilma admitted that she did not like school. She did not graduate from high school because of living in an unstable home environment. Wilma reported "Growing up in Florida was rough. Nobody was there to care for me all the time. So if they did not care about me going to school, then why should I." Wilma's grandmother enrolled her in Job Corps because she dropped out of high school. Job Corps was a viable option for Wilma to venture towards; however, she still felt abandoned. This abandonment led Wilma to "looking for love in the wrong places."

At the age of 17, Wilma became pregnant with Jessica and was put on maternity leave after being in Job Corps for 7 months. Wilma was thankful to have completed her trade and would start working after being released. Wilma stated she enjoyed her experience in Job Corps better than attending school but it was difficult balancing the responsibilities of both a young mother and student. Wilma described how she learned to be a mother without any family support. Wilma recalled, "It was very tough having a baby and being on my own. I needed more support and wanted to get away from the drama." Eventually Wilma's oldest brother offered her an opportunity to move to Georgia. This change provided more stability in her life.

Wilma had conversations of how to be a lady and discussed the importance of self-worth with her daughter. She shared, “I tell Jessica you’re a young lady. If you respect yourself then other people will respect you.” Her moral compass is based on the Jehovah’s Witness faith values. For instance, due to her religious practice, Wilma does not discuss issues of race or discrimination with her daughters. Her daughters are not members of the faith and she does not force her children to be Witnesses. She explained:

> Well see my kids are not baptized. So my kids are not Witnesses, see that's another thing we don't, they don't do. We don't baptize the kids while they're young because baptism is something important. So they want them to have an understanding to why they're being baptized. So the reason they're probably saying their Witnesses is because that's how I raised them, as Witnesses. But technically, you know once they get old enough to decide and make that decision on their own it's up to them if they want to be a Witness or not be a Witness.

Until then she will guide them with morals and values that strengthen them as individuals.

In terms of advice for school, Wilma wanted Jessica to “Go to school and learn.” She did not like Lakewood Middle School’s African America female administrators. She believed they were on a mission to “get” her daughter. For instance, Wilma told her daughter to skip eating breakfast in the cafeteria so she would not have “to bump heads” with the assistant principal. Wilma supported Jessica’s teachers’ efforts to keeping her daughter on track in school. Wilma acknowledged that her daughter has an “attitude problem” that sometimes leads her into trouble with her teachers and classmates. She

stated “I just tell Jessica you don’t go to school to be in no he say/she say, no fuss, no fights. Go to school, get you work done, and do what you have to do.”

Wilma expressed gratitude for being part of this study. She hopes more people will take an interest in the mother-daughter relationship that occurs during their daughters’ teenage years.

Jessica. Jessica is a 14 year old girl originally from south Florida. She described her physical appearance as “pretty, thick and natural hair, big nose, big eyes, dark skinned, big lips, and petite (small) body.” She had no desire to change how she looks because she felt beautiful. She stated “I am not shameful. To me I’m just perfect the way I am.”

When I asked her to describe her background, Jessica explained she moved back and forth between Florida and Georgia. She said “My momma’s brother wanted us to relocate and come live with him to get away from issues my momma was having in Florida. We stayed in Georgia for about a year, and then we moved back to south Florida.” Jessica could not recall how old or the school grade she was in when she and her mother relocated to Georgia the first time. The second time, Jessica and her family returned to Georgia, she was entering the seventh grade. This was after her mother and stepfather separated. Jessica preferred to live in Florida because she was closer to other family members as well as there were more social events and activities to attend.

Jessica was the oldest of three siblings on her mother’s side; and she was the oldest of seven on her father’s side. She expressed not knowing her siblings on her dad’s side. Yet, she was interested in meeting them and building a relationship with them. Being the oldest sibling has placed Jessica in having adult responsibilities in her mother’s

household. For example, if her mother decided to go out to attend a night function, Jessica was the head of the household and became the care-taker for her little sisters. She expressed, “When my momma goes out I am responsible for cleaning, cooking, and taking care of my little sisters. Like, last week when you wanted to come get me for the interview, I couldn’t because my momma was sick and I had to help her.”

Jessica expressed her feelings of coming to middle school. She recalled that her mother did not prepare her for middle school because “I was ready already.” She did not have a rational explanation for her thought. However, Jessica acknowledged that she was not expecting to have an abundance of class assignments and homework to complete during the day. She reflected on her fond memories of middle school, having positive relationships with a teacher, Ms. Bentley. It made her feel good because “she communicated with me when I really needed help.”

In relation to being social at school, Jessica interacted well with her peers. Most of her friends were African American. When asked about school work she stated “it is tiring at times but I get through it.” Her favorite subject was math because it was the easiest to understand at times. Her least favorite subject was science. Jessica reported “it is difficult and hard to get.” She requested assistance from her teacher but still did not pass because of having difficulty in the subject. As a result, she was retained in the seventh grade.

Throughout middle school, Jessica stated that her mother advised her to “Be yourself and stay out of drama.” She was aware that her mother did not graduate from high school and aspired to be a positive role model for her younger sisters. Jessica shared that she did enjoy school but did tend to get around the “wrong crowd” or get involved in

"drama," which in turn resulted in her getting in trouble. Jessica has been to ISS and OSS twice respectively at Lakewood Middle School.

Helen. Helen is the grandmother of Bianca. She identified her race as Black (African American), from the United States. Helen was born into a family of 13 children, three of whom are deceased. She was raised in a small town about 80-85 miles away from the middle Georgia area. Helen is the mother of one son and currently raises her son's twin daughters.

I interviewed her in the living room of her trailer home. The living room area had several pictures of her granddaughters and their awards hanging on the wall, such as perfect attendance and choral participation certificates. In addition, there was a picture of Jesus hanging on the wall. The sofas were mismatched with a cluttered coffee table in front. There was a computer on a short stand near the front door of the living room, and the television was located in the corner. Helen instructed the girls to go to their room or outside while we talked. Despite Helen's instructions, the girls were in and out of the home while the interview was being conducted.

I asked Helen to provide her demographic information before the interview began. She appeared uncomfortable when asked to complete the demographic information sheet provided. I offered to help her complete the information sheet when I realized that she was having reading and writing difficulties. Helen explained that, "I don't read good and write a lot." Barely 5 minutes into the interview, Helen started to cry. We sat in silence for a moment before I asked her what was wrong. Helen was hesitant in replying but then stated, "I'm tired and it gets hard raising them. They [girls] misbehave and I'm trying to lead them in the right direction."

Currently Helen is not employed and receives a disability check. Helen is financially strained because she supports herself and the girls on one income. She shared there was a friend who provided assistance every now and then. Helen explained her relationship with her son as she shook and lowered her head, “He is always in and out of jail. He doesn’t help with the girls. It’s sad because they are his children.” Her son is in the penitentiary system for failure to pay legal child support. Helen stated the twin’s mom was always “in trouble” and provided minimal support as well. Helen was awarded custody of her twin granddaughters when they were three months old.

As a child, Helen shared she moved around frequently because her mother was always following her step-father. Her parents did not have stable jobs and solely worked to provide the essential needs for the family. Due to relocating very recurrently, Helen never advanced past the second grade. Like Helen, none of her other siblings have a formal education past middle school. Several of her brothers are deceased or in and out of the penitentiary system.

Helen explained that she valued education greatly. She advised her granddaughters to “try to get a good education because it is hard out here.” With Helen’s limited formal education and lack of transportation, she felt unable to be an active participant in the girls’ schooling experience. There have been numerous conferences requested by teachers throughout their time in middle school, but she has never attended. Often times Helen was called and spoke with the teacher or administrator on the phone. Helen encouraged her granddaughters to “Be respectful to everyone. Do not steal or do other bad things that people be out there doing.” She felt those simple values would keep them out of a “whirlwind of trouble” and they can go on to be successful.

Bianca. Bianca is a 14 year old identical twin from the middle Georgia area. She described her physical appearance as "pretty and ugly, thin hair, brown-skinned, big nose, big eyes, and big lips." The only thing she wished she could change was her size. She desired to be skinnier.

Initially Bianca was willing to be a participant in the study; however it is important to note her reluctant behavior once the interview began. Her nonverbal communication during the first interview displayed a sense of shyness and possibly being uncomfortable. For example, Bianca preferred to stand rather than sit down. She spoke with her hands over her mouth and in a low tone. Bianca was the most difficult interviewee and did not journal in depth on certain topics. The interviews were brief in the length of time, and she wrote one sentence about how she felt about being an African American girl every other day.

Bianca had a strained relationship with her biological mother and father. Her father has been in and out of the penitentiary system due to unpaid child support. Bianca admitted to having multiple siblings from her father; however, she did not know many of them. For the past 2 years Bianca's mother has been working towards get custody of her and her twin sister. Bianca had no interest in moving away from the area and living with her mother. She expressed this new found situation has her "scared." A lawyer informed Bianca that the court might award her mother custody because she had a job and had obtained a stable place of residence. Bianca shared she was very close to her twin sister, who lived with her and her grandmother.

While living with her grandmother, Bianca went to church with her twin sister and friends. She enjoyed going to learn more about Jesus. She stated her grandmother

encouraged her to “believe in God and know that He is good all the time.” Her belief in God led Bianca to wonder why some people could be racist and rude to African Americans. There were situations where Bianca has experienced discrimination and racism. For example, she was called a ‘nigger’ by white men while walking in her neighborhood.

Bianca was the only participant who has attended the same middle school from sixth to eighth grade. While in middle school she befriended mostly African American and Hispanic friends. She participated in the band during sixth grade; however she was dismissed from the band due to constantly not following classroom rules and procedures given by the band director. Bianca reported “I would get in trouble for chewing gum and talking in class.” Similar inappropriate behaviors and other verbal disputes have lead Bianca to ISS numerous times as well as OSS.

Bianca shared advice she received from her grandmother. She stated, “Be respectful to adults and students. Don’t talk while other individuals are talking. Don’t judge anyone.” Sometimes she listened and followed through with this advice and at other times she handled the situation ‘differently.’ Bianca shared that ‘differently’ meant, “doing the opposite of what she tells me. In some of my situations I don’t walk away.” Bianca has been to ISS and OSS eight times respectively at Lakewood Middle School. Bianca’s poor behavior of rebelling against teachers and not being respectful has negatively affected her schoolwork as well. She failed some classes in middle school and was retained in the seventh grade. Bianca’s poor academic performance and behavioral decisions in the eighth grade have led her to being retained yet again in middle school.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented brief narratives of the eight participants to provide a glimpse into understanding each student's and parents'/guardians' background. The parents'/guardians' stories are included as a way of introducing the reader to the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional lives of how parents/guardians were raised by their parents, how they racially socialized their children, and highlight their family's household core values. The students' stories share to the reader how their interpretations of their parents'/guardians' messages and practices influenced their racial identity and journeys through middle school. The participants in this study understood the importance of telling their stories of how they were prepared for transitioning from their home environment to the school, which is predominantly a European American based culture. Chapter 5 will present a detailed discussion on the thematic analysis of the data and composite description of the meanings and essences of the student and parent/guardian participants' experiences.

Chapter V

FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter 5 presents the findings from participant interviews, observations, and document analysis as they answer the research questions that guided this research study:

RQ1: What racial socialization messages do at-risk African American female eighth grade students receive from their parents/guardians?

RQ2: How do at-risk African American female eighth grade students interpret racial socialization messages received from their parents/guardians in the context of middle school?

RQ3: How do the racial socialization messages received by at-risk African American female eighth grade students influence the development of their racial identity? The exploration of the dynamics that the participants considered significant to their racial identity process provided rich data for the study. This chapter identifies how racial socialization messages from home influenced the student participant's racial identity development during middle school.

Thematic Analysis

According to Braun and Clark (2006), thematic analysis is a method for the researcher to identify, analyze, and report themes within data to describe the information

set in rich detail. The themes that emerged from the students and parents/guardians' stories were critically examined by me. By carefully examining the data, themes were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of the participants' collective experiences. The themes are interrelated and will clarify how racial socialization impacts the racial identity of at-risk African American female students in middle school. The data from this study resulted in the following five major themes: *cultural preparation for school*, *advocating and developing racial identity, importance of self-awareness, the middle school experiences of at-risk African American female students,* and a*dolescent racial identity development*. It was apparent that each participant showed a strong sense of character and unique personality. The girls expressed their feelings about how their parents/guardians raised them and how that determined how they behaved at school. The themes reflected voices of participants on their understanding of their racial identity development and the girls' middle school experiences.

The following section presents the experiences as expressed by the participants and presents the major findings that surfaced in relation to each theme. The participants' voices are presented in everyday vernacular to preserve any nuances in their experiences. This was done to allow the reader an opportunity to draw on the reflection of thought given to the participants' responses.

Table 3

Main Themes and Related Subthemes

Main themes	Subthemes
Cultural Preparation for School	
Advocating and Developing Racial Identity	Race advocates
	Educating children about African American history
Importance of Self-Awareness	The influence of religion
	The influence of popular culture
The Middle School Experience of At-risk African American Females	Adolescents' relationship with parents/guardians
	Being Black and proud
	Messages for academic success
	Messages on social interaction
Adolescent Racial Identity Development	Centrality
	Racial regard
	Ideology

This table displays themes for this research study. The themes *cultural preparation for school*, *advocating and developing racial identity, and importance of self-awareness*

were derived from parent/guardian participants' interviews and observations. The themes *the middle school experience* and *adolescent racial identity development* were derived from student interviews, student journals, and the MIBI-teen instrument. The theme *advocating and developing racial identity* had two subthemes *race advocates* and *educating children about African American history.* The theme *importance of self-awareness* had two subthemes *the influence of religion* and *the influence of popular culture*. The theme *middle school experience* had four subthemes *adolescents' relationship with parents/guardians, being Black and proud, messages for academic success,* and *messages on social interaction.* The last theme *adolescent racial identity development* had three subthemes *centrality, racial regard,* and *ideology.*

Cultural Preparation for School. School should be seen as a facility for learning, nurturing, and growing in the academic and social spectrum. Racial socialization messages and modeling from parent/guardian participants were used to prepare their daughters for school and life in general. It was apparent in the data that all parent/guardian participants felt it was important to racially socialize their daughters for a predominantly European American school culture.

The theme *cultural preparation for school* shows how parent/guardian participants prepared their children for the transition into the middle school environment. The parents/guardians in this study perceived schools were designed foremost for safety and subsequently the academic advancement of children. Schools idealistically should be welcoming and inviting spaces, yet the parent/guardian participants' past experiences influenced their decisions on how to prepare their daughters.

Being a student during the time of racial turmoil and change in the educational realm as well as the nation, has shaped Samantha's perception on the influence of the school setting. As a student she had firsthand experience of the hardship integration of the races placed upon her because she didn't "wanna go to school with no white folks." She attributes this transition as a main catalyst in her changing behavior. Decades later, Samantha, still feels race has a significant impact on her daughter's behavior in the school environment. She explained "to me we are living in 2014 but we still in 1968. It's just not as open as back then." In other words, the parent participant believed that the integration of the races in the social and academic worlds has had an impact on the choices made by black students.

Raising their daughters in the 21st century, parents/guardians wanted them to receive a quality education and have the opportunity to surpass their own level of education. Candice shared her past school experience of being physical abused by a white teacher, in which she has taught her children to be defensive when interacting between their teachers and peers. Candice felt that the school had failed to protect her, so she has taken measures to prepare her children. She stated, "If I tell my kids to protect themselves when someone approaches them in a threatening way, another person may not understand my mentality. I know what it's like." Candice also did not have respect for school personnel. Wilma lacked a nurturing teacher-student relationship and her dislike in school was seen in her comment, "I did not like school." With the lack of teacher support and respect for school policies and procedures, this led both of them to dropping out of school. Past experiences of Wilma and Candice dropping out of school and Helen only

having a second grade formal education motivated them to have a better appreciation of the importance of schooling for their daughters.

From past experiences of growing up in the segregated South, Helen understood some people "stereotype and prejudge Black folks." She hoped having conversations on the importance of learning and behaving appropriately in school would guide her granddaughters into being productive students. Though Helen had a second grade formal education she valued education and encouraged them to "…ask the teacher" when they needed assistance with their work.

Tatum (1997) neatly captures the role of parents/guardians in preparing their children for their transition: "Our self-perceptions are shaped by the messages that we receive from those around us…" (p. 53-54). For example, Samantha made sure to discuss messages on racial pride, racial barrier, self-worth, and egalitarianism with Nicole so she will "embrace who she as an African American." Candice and Helen focused more on racial barrier, self-worth, and egalitarianism messages with Miracle and Bianca respectively. A racial barrier message Helen shared with Bianca was "I told her the person those who was calling her those names [nigger] they were just being ignorant." Candice explained, "I didn't raise any punching bags." Due to Wilma's religious beliefs, she only focused on self-worth and egalitarian messages that were centered on her children "remaining neutral." All participants expressed the negative influences of media on African American women in negative messages.

Advocating and Developing Racial Identity. Race as a topic is one that many people find to be a sensitive subject and have difficulty discussing. All participants felt that race was a complicated notion that their children could not navigate alone. The

theme *advocating and developing racial identity* shows how parents/guardians elaborated how they role modeled and encouraged their daughters to embrace their racial identity. It was important for parents/guardians to be their children's advocates and educate them about being an African American. Racial pride and racial barrier messages can be seen in those subthemes. The parent/guardian participants' life experiences were influential in how they explained the concept of race, racism, and discrimination, as well as shaping their children's attitudes about being 'Black'. Candice's statement "I realized I was different and was not going to get support like the other white kids did" was how the majority of the parent/guardian participants felt as children and saw the need to develop their daughters' racial awareness.

Race Advocates. Due to the sensitivity of racial issues, each of the parents/guardians waited for their daughters' curiosity to initiate the conversation of race. Parent/Guardian participants perceived different ages as to when was the most appropriate time to discuss racial awareness to their children. Candice, the mother of Miracle, felt it was imperative to begin race discussions with her children at a very early age. Candice shared:

> Probably about four or five. They're entering school with other kids of different colors. They may think 'I haven't played with a little white girl or a little Mexican girl.' And I want them to know you don't suppose to look like them.

Candice wanted her children to feel comfortable "in their own skin." She went on to say "They should not be ashamed of who they are."

Not all parents/guardians agreed with Candice on the issue of talking about race with their children at an early age. Wilma and Helen preferred to share racial pride and

racial barrier messages at a more mature age. Wilma, Jessica's mother, stated, "I'd say about 10, start young. Because that's when they understand more, they comprehend better." However, she implied that she did not really talk with her daughters about race. The influence of her religious beliefs, as a Jehovah's Witness shaped Wilma's attitude was a huge factor as to why she did not engage in racial pride conversations with her daughter. She admitted, "I don't like talking about race too much, but I need to do it." In addition, Wilma expressed that her daughter did not ask questions about race nor had she overheard any conversations pertaining to race among her daughters. Wilma stated, "I'd rather them to just remain neutral" when it comes to race, discrimination, and gender.

Helen, Bianca's grandmother, agreed with Wilma's choice of when to talk with her granddaughter about race. Helen responded "Nine or 10 is an appropriate age…cause once they go to getting older I guess they start paying more attention to their color and how they look and stuff like that." Helen and Candice stated that their daughters had questions about their skin color and they were trying to be proactive in creating a positive perspective about being African American.

Samantha observed Nicole's increased interest in racial interactions while in middle school. She explained that the issue of race came up "When Nicole started asking questions." Samantha emphasized she rarely discussed any personal encounters of Nicole with racism. She felt because "the race thing is not a problem here." When asked what she meant by 'here,' Samantha clarified that since moving to Marshall County, her daughter has reported only one incident with discrimination. However, Samantha has witnessed racism and shared racial pride and racial barrier messages with her daughter.

While the parents/guardians did not have a consensus of the best age to have racial discussions with their daughters, they all agreed that such conversations hold value and should be discussed with their children in order to prepare them for situations dealing with race. Parents/Guardians took it upon themselves to be race advocates for their children. Each parent/guardian, except for Wilma, strongly felt it was important for their daughters to know and embrace their racial identity.

Educating Children about African American History. The parent/guardian participants' upbringing and cultural awareness influenced their rationale of practicing particular family traditions in their household. All parent/guardian participants shared they were citizens of the United States. Samantha, Candice, and Helen acknowledged that they celebrated national holidays, such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Independence Day. Samantha was the only participant whose family celebrated special African American holidays. Wilma did not celebrate any holidays due to her religious beliefs being a Jehovah's Witness. Table 4 highlighted African American holidays, traditions, and religions practiced in the household of each parent/guardian participant.

Table 4

Family Traditions and Practices

Parent/Guardian Participant	African American Holidays Observed	Religious Practice
Samantha	Black History Month Kwanzaa	Baptist
Candice	None	Baptist
Wilma	None	Jehovah's Witness
Helen	None	Baptist

Only one of the participants observed and practiced any African American holidays. All the participants claimed a religious faith.

Samantha was the only parent/guardian who felt that it was important for her as a mother to begin the educating process of her daughter's African American heritage. For instance, Samantha encouraged her daughters to become a part of the natural hair movement and her family visited historic museums and exhibits on African American history and culture in Georgia and Michigan. Samantha explained how her family celebrated Black History month.

> Stella, my 26 year old, she recorded every Black movie that came on television. They sit down together and watch them and you know, she had questions for her. Then she would explain to her what went on.

In addition to Black History month, Samantha was knowledgeable about and has attempted to practice Kwanzaa. This seven day holiday focuses on the principles of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose,

creativity, and faith. She reported that, “Every year I say this though, that we’re going to start doing Kwanzaa you know and the first couple days we start and then I’m all zonked out from Christmas.” Samantha explained, “She [Nicole] needs to know where she came from and her ethnic background. Just basically the whole thing about being black and proud.”

Although reasons why the other parents/guardians did not observe African American traditions varied for each participant, they expressed interest in their children learning about African American history. Helen expressed she talked with her granddaughter about race, racism, and discrimination. She reported, “It’s very important, you know? ‘Cause they getting up in age…I just don’t want them to be another Black person.” During Helen’s interview, she spoke in a low, melancholic tone when we discussed race. She acknowledged her parents did not have conversations on the topic with her growing up and she wants to provide racial awareness for her granddaughters. She stated,

> When I see the way they try to get out of hand or something I just try to tell them how it was when I was growing up, how bad it was. And I don't want them have to deal with stuff like that.

Conversations about racial pride and discrimination were spurred by incidents on television or in the community such as the murder of Trayvon Martin. Candice shared messages on racial pride to Miracle, talking with her one-on-one about her appearance. She reported,

> I think it's very important for her to know that you are who you are. You're not supposed to be another color, you hair is not supposed to look like white people's hair. I just want them to be happy with themselves, with their color.

Candice shared that Miracle sometimes struggled with the dark complexion of her skin but reassures her that she is "made like God wants you to be."

All of the parents/guardians expressed a desire to be more active in African American traditions and practices. Unfortunately, they expressed feeling uncomfortable being the primary educators because of their lack of formal education. Therefore, the parents/guardians are in a juxtaposition to trust the education system they believed failed them. Three of the four parent/guardian participants explained their children are educated in depth about African American people, history, and traditions through the school system.

Wilma, Helen, and Candice explained that their daughters learn about the majority of their heritage through class lessons. Wilma stated, "They get educated about that stuff [African American history] at school." However, on one occasion when her family was watching a movie about slavery her daughter asked her mother "Why do White people do bad stuff to us mommy?" Wilma told her daughter "… Some people are mean and do not know better. But you should not do that cause that's not how God acts." She continued saying she does not feel comfortable having conversations about race and discrimination with her daughters.

Helen has encouraged her granddaughters to "pick up a book and read." Helen shared that even though she lacks formal education, she wants them to learn about influential moments in history with African Americans. She explained, "I feel that the

best place for them to learn about that stuff…African Americans like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X should be in school. They know more than me."

Candice admitted to only celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King's Jr. Day because it is a national holiday. She expressed an interest in her children learning about influential African American people, events, and traditions in their culture. However, Candice felt Miracle would learn more from her teachers in the classroom. Candice stated "I want to start new traditions with them." She did not specify which ones.

The parent/guardian participants suggested various appropriate ages to start conversations about race with children. The data shows that Samantha was the only parent/guardian who provided racial pride messages to her daughter on embracing who she was as an African American primarily at home. Nevertheless, three of the four parents/guardians were actively engaged in providing racial barrier messages because they noticed it was necessary for their daughters to be prepared to live in a predominately European American society. From Wilma's responses, it was indicated she did not engage in modeling or discussing those messages, which are a part of the racial socialization process, but wants Jessica to be proud of who she is as an individual.

Importance of Self-awareness**.** The current theme, *Importance of Self-Awareness*, focused on the significance of parents/guardians educating their daughters embracing their individuality as an African American female. Participants discussed both specific and general examples of how the discussion of self-worth, egalitarianism, and negative messages promote positive images of being an African American woman. Through analysis of the data, the subthemes the influence of religion and the influence of popular culture, were the basis of how parents/guardians developed these messages.

The Influence of Religion. The religious practices of the parent/guardian participants played a vital role in shaping their daughters' identities (see Table 4). Religious concepts supported and reinforced self-worth and egalitarianism messages delivered to their daughters. Each parent/guardian reflected on how messages from the pastor, church sermons, or Bible study lessons were positive influences for raising their daughters. In the African American culture, religion is important because many individuals view it as dictating how they are to act (Barnes, 2005). Samantha, Helen, and Candice identified their denomination as Baptist. Samantha acknowledged, "I love church, I was raised in church." She encouraged her daughter to join the church choir and they attend different events hosted by different churches. Samantha notated that church is very important in her household. She expressed, "It is good for Nicole to be around people who love everyone for who they are. We must teach our kids that you have to treat people right like Jesus did." The messages from church encouraged Samantha to share with Nicole, "I want her to accomplish getting her education so she can go to college and she can be self-sufficient. If anything happens to me she can take care of herself." Samantha's past relationship of being married but now divorced influenced her advice to Nicole. She did not want her daughter to have to "depend on a man or anyone else to take care of her."

Candice and Helen admitted to not attending church on a regular basis. However, Candice stated she attended church as a youth, but strayed away as she got older. She stated "It's been a while so at this point I'll say no about going to church but we will." Candice remembered going to Easter services, Christmas plays, and participating in communion. Candice encouraged Miracle and her siblings to attend and participate in the

youth group of a predominantly White church. Later she stated, "…My children liked going to the church because they had fun. And I didn't have a problem with them being at a White church. But as they got older, it's back to a predominately Black church." Attending church was viewed as a positive way for Candice to show children how they should interact with children of other races. The messages from church promoted Candice to reinforce the importance of Miracle being true to herself. She stated "To remain truthful to herself and not to become a follower. Because she is a girl, I want her to be a leader. And when she's ready to do anything let it be her choice, not others."

Helen was the oldest parent/guardian of all participants and encouraged her granddaughter, Bianca, to get a good education so she could have a good job and be successful. Helen was not raised in the church and her parents did not instill any religious values within her and her siblings. As an adult she said "I go every once and a while." Helen stated her granddaughters go on a regular basis and they seem to enjoy. She explained the church is predominantly White and the church van transports them to and from church. Helen explained the messages from church: "Give the girls a better understanding of how they should be as people. Treat everybody right and don't judge others." As of late, some of her self-awareness discussions focused on her granddaughters' new found interest in boys. She taught them to respect their minds and bodies, so others will too. Helen stated, "I try to teach them you don't go out there and try to mess with these boys because they only want one thing. And once they get that that's it."

The Jehovah's Witness faith was very influential in the egalitarianism and self-worth messages Wilma discussed with Jessica. Wilma shared she was raised in a

traditional Christian household. However, as Wilma grew older, she researched other denominations and found that being a Jehovah's Witness was befitting to her. Some of the practices of this denomination include not celebrating holidays, including birthdays and Christmas. As a Jehovah's Witness, Wilma stated everyone is to be treated the same regardless of race or gender. Unfortunately messages about how African Americans are to portray themselves in society can be misleading. Wilma explained, "I think the way the world is today, anybody can come to you with information. Sometimes you can't go by it [what is said] unless you do your own research." She was aware that during Jessica's adolescent stage she have may be influenced by her peers or the media, thus she tried her best to instill morals and values based on the Jehovah's Witness faith. Wilma shared that Nicole's attitude had been tough dealing because "she thinks she knows it all." Regardless, she was constantly reminding Jessica to "… have a good attitude and people can respect you more if you have a better attitude." It is important to Wilma that Jessica understands that she has to "make good decisions, act appropriately, and be respectful." Wilma is divorced from Jessica's younger sisters' father and described the relationship as "strained and not healthy for me or my babies." The separation from her ex-husband was Wilma's way of modeling self-respect and remaining strong and positive as a woman. Wilma constantly told Jessica:

> You're a young lady, you know. It's a lot of things that I hear of these little girls out here doing and I only can teach her and tell her and it's up to Jessica, cause I don't know what she does when she leaves home.

The teachings from the parent/guardian participants' religion created a foundation to encourage their daughters on how to respect others, embrace other peoples'

differences, and have high hopes and aspirations for the future. In addition to parent/guardian participants admitting to raising their daughters' in single-parent households, they expressed it was important for them to continuously promote positive images of African American women. The parents/guardians believed self-awareness should begin being taught at home and should not be based on what is seen on television, social media, or in magazines. In addition, they all expressed the media was a poor influence on how African American women should portray themselves in society.

Influence of Popular Culture. Adolescents' self-identity is sometimes skewed by media influences. Popular culture entails what is current and trending in society. Thus parents blame popular culture for their children's struggles at home and school and were adamant on dispelling negative (stereotype) messages. Each of the parents/guardians shared their concerns about today's media, which could have an influence on their daughter's behaviors. Samantha admitted several channels on the televisions in their house were blocked. "You know, all this rapping with this profanity and all that, no…all those X-rated movies. It's very selective." She shared that when her daughter traveled in the car with her they listen to gospel music. Yet when she traveled with other individuals, she did not know what she was listening to but she set the precedent of what was appropriate at home. Samantha had a very low opinion of her daughter's musical choices. She stated, "What they call music is not music to me. I guess I'm old fashioned."

Samantha and Helen had similar music recommendations for their children. Helen admitted, "I would like for them to know some of the music that I listen to like ZZ Hill, BB King, Bobby Glenn, Aretha Franklin, and Betty Wright." Helen explained the lyrics in today's music, such as rap, are "stupid and just ridiculous," and she felt music videos

were influential on the behaviors of her granddaughters. Helen has observed the change in her granddaughter's attire and attitude and even compared her dress to the "video girls" in music videos. Helen has developed a fear of Bianca becoming sexually active early because of "the way she dresses and starting to carry herself."

Wilma reported that the messages highlighted in music often portray "money, sex, women, and partying." This construed connotation does not promote self-awareness for young African America girls on how African American females should carry themselves. Wilma shared her feelings on the music that her daughter and sometimes she listened to,

> It's like with the world today, with this music that everybody wants money, especially us Black folks. Yeah we do fall for it. It influences us a lot. That's why I'm very careful what we listen to and watch. That's what I try to teach them because it influences us. Especially the type of music you listen to. If we listen to music that's got cussing and doing all this stuff, that's how it's gonna influence us to be. To act. But if we listen to something more relaxed, mellow, then we'll be more relaxed and mellow.

Candice's thoughts of mainstream music were "It's very degrading. And I try not to let my kids listen to it but I know they are going listen to it." Her thoughts were similar to television shows. Candice stated that it was difficult raising her daughter with popular television shows and the usage of social media. She stated,

> Sometimes I get pissed off. With the best shows that come on TV, they're very entertaining and my kids like them. And the little reality shows, it shows all the Black women sleeping around, like that's all we do. Or it looks as if we just fall for anything. It's just makes us look very stupid sometimes.

Wilma's responses agreed with Candice's on how popular television shows impact their daughters. She stated, "Because you're going to want be just like them. You see the TV shows like Love and Hip Hop and sometimes you try to relate that to your lifestyle." Wilma said she was "frustrated and disgusted" of how reality shows, social media, and music videos represent African American women in a "negative light."

The theme, *importance of self-awareness,* elaborated on how parents/guardians messages on egalitarianism, self-worth, and negative stereotyping were influenced by religion. In retelling examples of messages on self-worth and equality, all but one participant admitted to embracing Christian-based principles. The ideals of popular culture in today's society influenced the parents'/guardians' messages and modeling towards their daughters as well. Each of the parents/guardians wanted to increase awareness of Black femininity and promote positive images of African Americans through these socialization messages.

The middle school experiences of at-risk African American female students. Middle schools are a crossroads for many adolescents; it is a place of many challenges and choices as well as a place of development: physically, mentally and emotionally (Hill & Tyson, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Lounsbury, 2009). The habits formed during this stage can set the tone for adult habits and can affect future experiences. Most of the student participants explained their interpretation of the messages and role modeling received from their parent/guardians on the topics of racial awareness, academics, and social interaction. Four subthemes emerged: *adolescents' relationship with parents/guardians, being Black and proud, messages for academic success, and messages on social interaction*. The at-risk African American eighth grade girls shared

their personal experiences related to being in middle school and how they utilized their parents/guardians' messages.

Adolescents' Relationship with Parents/Guardians. The student participants expressed having a positive relationship with their parents/guardians. However, when the student participants entered middle school, they admitted the communication between them and their parent/guardian declined. Adolescents became more selective in the information they share with their parents. Research suggests adolescents are protective of social aspects in their lives and place more value on friendships rather than strengthening the parental bonds (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010; Steinberg & McCrary, 2012).

When it came to school life, the student participants rarely wanted to engage in conversation about what happened during their school day. Boundaries were placed on topics of their classes, homework, friends, and events that took place in school. Miracle shared basic information with her mother about school: "Me and my mom talk about my grades or how I do in school. She asks me: 'Do I like it? Do I have any issues with teachers or students?' I just tell her a little bit because if I tell my mama the whole story she gets overly exaggerated. It's crazy." Later Miracle explained she did not want her mom to know "all in her business," hence she limited the discussion when it involved her friends and other social interests.

Nicole and Bianca claimed to be 'private' people and wanted to keep their school life separate from their home life. Both girls felt the two environments, school and home, did not need to be intertwined. Nicole and her adoptive mother have a "good relationship." Nicole explained that she felt comfortable talking about certain issues with Samantha. Yet when school was the topic of discussion, Nicole stated, "I don't talk a lot

about my days. I just like to leave stuff at school." Nicole preferred to talk with friends about events in her past life and issues she may be dealing with at home.

Likewise, Bianca stated she did not desire discussing events that took place at school in depth with her grandmother. Bianca acknowledged the generational gap between Helen and her was an additional factor to not talking in depth about school. She shared, "I do not think she will understand." Thus Bianca told her basic details of events that happened at school. She added, "I am honest for the most part."

Jessica felt comfortable talking about various subjects such as boys, friendships, and personal issues that occurred in her life. Jessica described the relationship between her and her mother "as being sisters." On the topic of school life, Jessica shared the 'basics' of what happens in school with her mother. Jessica reported that "It's basically bad things, if I get in trouble or she'll ask me what's wrong with me or something that."

The student participants expressed having positive relationships with their parents/guardians because they provide structure, support, and encourage the girls to be successful in their personal lives. However, the student participants wanted to establish and maintain boundaries around their school life because they did not feel their parents/guardians would understand issues they went through as adolescents.

Being Black and Proud. Parental messages of how to productively work with students of different races were tested alongside maintaining true to the message of sustaining individuality and Black pride for the student participants. All student participants acknowledged advantages as well disadvantages to being African American in a diverse environment. Middle school has been a place where some of the girls witnessed or experienced discrimination. Each girl expressed she was proud to be African

American and wanted to be treated equal to her peers. Nicole, Miracle, and Bianca shared stories of feeling ostracized as African Americans.

Miracle expressed learning in school that African Americans were not always afforded the same opportunities as other races. She was proud of her race because "Everything Black people couldn't do back then, we can now." When asked what disadvantages of being a young Black person were, she stated, "We still don't have as much opportunities as White people." It was apparent that Miracle realized African Americas are still not treated fairly in the 21st century. Nicole and Miracle shared their knowledge of learning African Americans had to work hard to earn career opportunities as well as respect from European Americans.

Learning about Black history gave Nicole an appreciation for those who had lived during the Civil Rights Era. After learning about racism and segregation, Nicole shared "I couldn't do it. It was so much racism. People had to go to specific places and you couldn't sit anywhere. Then it took some people two hours, three hours, maybe five hours to get home from wherever they were walking." Nicole expressed her confusion of why White people were in constant competition with people of different races. Nicole was very candid on her opinion of her fellow European American peers. She stated:

> White people think that Black people won't get anywhere in life. When you are in class they like 'Oh, I got a higher grade than her' but when you [Nicole] take the test and made a higher grade than them, they be like 'How she do that?'

Nicole continued, "They are stuck up." She included that "White people don't want to be bothered with Black people." Nicole was convinced "Whites are better than Blacks."

Even though Bianca had a diverse group of friends, she commented, “I feel there is always going to be someone who still judges African Americans.” When I probed why she felt people were racist, she told me a story of being called a ‘nigger’ with her sister. She explained, “I was just walking in the neighborhood and this white dude just comes out and calls me the n-word.” Bianca admitted that she did not respond to the man’s derogatory comment and walked away feeling sad. While this event happened outside the school premises it still shaped her attitude towards discrimination and racism. Bianca quoted the Bible verse John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for whosever shall believe in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” Bianca interpreted the verse to mean, “People should think about how God was with others and try to be nice.”

Miracle’s verbal spar with a European American boy in class led her to get into a physical altercation. Her reaction led her to getting ISS. She explained:

> There was a White student telling people in class that he did not like Black people. I said ‘Ain’t nothing wrong with Black people.’ He said something about his granddaddy raised him up to not like Black people. I was like ‘Black and white are the same.’

Miracle stated, “My mom told me don’t worry about what other people say about you. You just go to learn and get your education.” In retaliation to Miracle’s situation, she put her mother’s advice of protecting herself in action and got physical with the student. Miracle had no intentions of fighting but her emotions took control of her actions. The comments made by White individuals were hurtful and the girl participants tried to process why would people say hurtful remarks.

Nicole was in a similar situation as Bianca and Miracle. When Nicole was called a 'nigger' she tried to reflect on what was taught at home and apply what she learned at church. Yet the incident "made me [Nicole] boiling mad." She opened up about an experience when a European American student was talking about her and some other African American students in chorus. Nicole overheard a portion of the girl's conversation and "And then we hear the n-word! What?! So me being me, I'm like 'What did you say?' She said it again with the 'er' at the end." She explained how she physically assaulted the girl against the locker. From watching Nicole tell the story, she began to ball up her fists and punch her legs. She stated she was getting upset about the incident all over again adding, "It made my blood boil."

All the girls appeared to appreciate their parents'/guardians' efforts of providing strategies and explanations on how to combat discrimination. The girls shared some strategies were to walk away from the antagonist and report the incident to a teacher. Yet Miracle and Nicole made decisions on how to handle their situations of being discriminated based on emotion and not the racial socialization messages of their parents/guardians. Racial discrimination during such critical years has the potential for life-long effects. The last theme in Chapter 5 will discuss the topic of racial identity development for the student participants.

Messages for Academic Success. As stated earlier, during the transitional years of adolescence, students place more time and energy on social and personal issues rather than academic concerns. After having the experience of failing a class, and possibly being retained, all of the girls realized the importance of their parents/guardians instructing them to stay focused, study and be prepared for class, and communicate with

their teachers in order to be successful in middle school. Not following such advice was the defining call for two of the girls, Bianca and Jessica, who were retained. Table 5 highlights the academic result of academic struggles for each student participant.

Table 5

Academic Records Lakewood Middle School of 2013- 2014

Student Participant	Number of classes failed	Subjects failed	Number of grades
Nicole	3	Math Science (twice)	0
Miracle	1	Language Arts	0
Jessica	1	Math	1
Bianca	3	Math Science Social Studies	1

All the participants failed at least one academic class. Half of the participants were retained at least once.

The participants' preparation for middle school at home was a factor in their ability to make friends, be successful in their academics, and exercise appropriate behavior. Nicole was not prepared for the idea that the academic work in middle school would be more difficult from work in elementary school. She stated, "I wasn't ready when I got to middle school. I guess I had to grow up. I just wasn't ready for that part of my life."

In middle school, Nicole admitted to struggling in math and science. She described how she felt when she experienced test anxiety as she took those subject area tests. Nicole explained, “I would get nervous and would guess. I basically would just ‘Christmas tree’ on my answer sheets.” The phrase ‘Christmas treeing’ was explained as guessing. Nicole noticed that extra credit would be needed to redeem herself in the class. However, she stated, “I mean extra credit was good for me but like some of the extra credit assignments she gave me I was like ‘I still don’t know how to do this!’”

Nicole realized Samantha’s advice of staying focused and requesting tutorial services from the teacher was key to her being successful in school. Her experience of failing a class led her to provide advice for other middle school students:

> Always listen to your parents. Always go to tutoring. If you need help, don't just sit there in class with your head down not doing anything. Write down whatever she's writing on the board, pay attention! If you need, help get it. Don't wait until the last minute or to the last day of the school year. Or you are just going to fail.

Adolescents must be able to make transitions and adjust to the ideals of middle school: having multiple teachers, increased class assignments, and increased rigor in the curriculum. Miracle stated, “My mom told me I would have more classes, lockers, and different teachers. But I was confused. When I first walked in the building I didn’t know where to go. I was lost!” She acknowledged it took a few weeks to get adjusted to the overwhelming physical dynamics of the school. Despite the new environment, Miracle’s mother expected her to perform well in school. While in middle school, Miracle admitted she was not on task and played around in class. When Miracle’s grades began to suffer,

she said, “My mom told me ‘You go to school for one reason, and that is to try to be successful in life. You don’t have time to play with others.’”

According to Miracle’s academic records, she failed one class. As a result of failing a class, Miracle was required to attend summer school in order to be promoted to the next grade. This upsetting news made her emotional, and she expressed being very disappointed because she realized her summer would be spent retaking the course. Having this experience motivated her to start focusing on her school work. She reported, “I can’t fail! I got to step up. I want do sports and stuff.”

Miracle had partial knowledge of her mother’s educational background. She did not want to drop out of high school as a teenager nor did she desire to repeat some of the same cycles. For Miracle, the purpose of going to school was to “do your work, study, and not waste your time. If I fail, it will all be on me." That message from her mother reinforced her responsibilities of being a good student in class and performing to her highest potential. Miracle added more of what her mother emphasized to her about school:

> She tells me you only go to school for one reason…to work. Last year I used to play around a lot, and she [Candice] got mad and she was like this year I need to step it up so I can graduate on time. Or my sister and brother are going to catch up with me.

Miracle regretted not focusing on her work. Like Nicole, she is now open to getting tutoring when she sees her grades are in danger of failing. On the contrary, Bianca was hesitant to request assistance from the teacher. Bianca felt she should know the material since she was a grade behind and did not like ask for help.

According to the records at Lakewood Middle School, Bianca failed the most classes out of all participants. Bianca stated she was an A and B student in elementary school, but after being immersed in the middle school environment, e.g., school work, peer acceptance, her grades plummeted. This resulted in failing classes and a failing grade. Bianca did not think it was a big deal to fail a class but failing a grade was different. She realized failing a grade would keep her from being promoted to the next grade with her friends.

It was evident in Bianca's academic records that she did not take heed of her grandmother's advice about striving for academic success. Bianca said she was told to, "Pay attention and stay focused. Listen to all of what they have to say and not just some." Consequently, Bianca expressed to having a lack of interest about some of her classes.

Bianca had been contemplating dropping out of school. When asked why she would drop out, she stated, "Certain things about education are important. Like having the math part. You are going to need to know how to use that information in the real world." Bianca continued, "It is boring and I do not have time for it." Instead of attending school, she preferred to "attend parties and get a job to have money." However, Bianca stated, "I know my mom [Helen] won't sign the paperwork for me to drop out. So I have to finish school."

Bianca was aware that her grandmother only completed the second grade. Therefore, she understood that education was important to her grandmother, but Bianca was still figuring out "Is school for me." Bianca stated she was in danger of being retained again in middle school due to her failing five out of six academic classes.

Jessica's mother provided advice on how to be successful in school. Wilma constantly reminded Jessica of the struggles she faced on a daily basis so Jessica would understand her purpose in school. Jessica shared her mother did not want her to focus on socializing and getting off track in school: "If I see a friend, say "Hey" and keep it moving. Don't just sit there and try to talk all day. I'm at school for one reason, one reason only. That is to get my work."

Jessica attended three different middle schools. The first middle school Jessica attended was in Florida. The last two schools have been in Georgia. She explained that she had a rough time adapting to the different school environments, but was happy with her experience at Lakewood Middle School. Nevertheless, Jessica transferred to Lakewood Middle School with two failing grades. She was aware of her transfer grades, and was told by teachers at Lakewood Middle School she needed to improve academically in order to be promoted to the next grade.

Unfortunately, Jessica failed a class and was required to attend summer school to retake the class in order to be promoted to eighth grade. Jessica did not attend summer school because her mother explained she did not have adequate finances. Jessica shared "My mom said I couldn't go because we did not have the money." Therefore, she was retained in the seventh grade. The heartbreaking news of being retained provided Jessica with a better appreciation of taking her education seriously. It appeared that not getting acclimated to the middle school environment might have been why Jessica struggled academically.

Jessica stated, "It motivated me to push myself even harder. Don't just be like 'Oh I'm failing, I have to give up.' It just helps me to be stronger and study, pay attention

more." Jessica knew the reason her mother dropped out of high school was due to Wilma not getting academic support at home. She expressed, "I am thankful she cares so I can do well in school."

In summary, all student participants faced their share of academic struggles while adjusting to middle school. Parental guidance was provided to each girl in order for her to be successful in school. After the girls reflected on their actions in class, they realized the importance of their parents/guardians' messages on being promoted to the next grade.

Messages on Social Interaction. Many of the academic challenges manifested because of the student participants' inability to follow school regulations and procedures. When students are given In School Suspension (ISS), they are absent from the classroom for three, five, or seven days. The number of suspension days depends on the level of infraction and the number of times the individual has been in ISS. Some examples of infractions that lead a student to receive ISS are: fighting with students, infraction of the cellphone policy, and disrespect to a teacher. The setting of the ISS room consisted of: isolation in a desk with high borders on both sides which prevent students from seeing one another, being provided a sack lunch, having two restroom breaks a day, and not being allowed to return back to the classroom until all work is completed. When a student received Out of School Suspension (OSS), which is being suspended to home, he/she is not allowed to return for three or five days. When a student received OSS, zeros were given as grades for the missed class assignments and he/she was not allowed to make them up. Upon returning to school, parents/guardians are required to meet with the principal. Table 6 displays the amount of times each student participant spent in ISS and OSS.

Table 6

Discipline Records from Lakewood Middle School of 2013-2014

Student Participant	Number of times in ISS	Number of times in OSS
Nicole	3	1
Miracle	2	1
Jessica	2	2
Bianca	8	8

All the participants have been placed in ISS and OSS. The majority of the situations stemmed from confrontation with peers.

All participants shared and described altercations that led them to being placed in ISS or OSS and adversely how their behavioral actions affected them academically. Jessica discussed the reason she fought in school was because people tended to "start drama and spread rumors." Discipline records from Lakewood Middle School indicated that the majority of Jessica's school suspensions were documented as "instigating fights." Jessica described a situation that an administrator claimed was instigating but was merely seen in Jessica's perception as supporting her friend. She stated:

> So when we went to get our bags and stuff, Kendall came in Jayla's face and was like 'I heard you wanted to fight me! You was on Facebook or whatever talking.' Then Jayla put her hand up and was like 'I'm not worried about you.' So she [Kendall] said it again. And so instead of leaving, Jayla was like 'I said I'm not

> worried about you. Let's go!' So Kendall had reached out to hit her and instead of hitting Jayla she hit me.

Jessica explained that she would have walked away but was hit a second time and began to fight back. Needless to say, the incident led for all students involved to report to the office and await disciplinary action. Jessica expressed "I was mad. I was crying. I didn't want to talk to nobody. I just wanted to get to the office to call my mom." Jessica was not worried about her mother's reaction because of their good relationship and knew she would understand. Jessica explained to her mother what had happened and her role in trying to avoid a physical altercation by encouraging her friend to walk away. In turn, Wilma was supportive and understanding of Jessica's initial intentions. Jessica stated:

> My mom told me 'This is why I tell you that you need to get your work done and do what you got to do.' She was like 'I'm just tired of coming up to this school so you need to hurry up and get out of this school.'

Jessica was aware that her mother and one of the administrators did not get along. Jessica shared "My mom says the assistant principal always be trying to pick sides and choose and say that I'm always the bad person in the situation." That information was key for Jessica to understand the importance of Wilma's advice on how to conduct herself in school for the remainder of the school year. Unfortunately, Jessica's latest choices on how to conduct herself have resulted in her being put on probation for twelve months.

Miracle was an outgoing individual and enjoyed spending times with her friends, yet there were times that she faced conflict with her peers. In the event conflict occurred Miracle recalled, "My mom told me to mind my business and keep going. But if someone does something to me, then do I what I have to do." Miracle described a situation where a

girl in the neighborhood was antagonizing her and she followed her mother's instructions.

> This girl had already been messing with me. I tried to ignore her. Then one day we started arguing on the bus. She said something to me; I ignored it. I got off the bus and went into the school. Then she came up in my face talking junk so I said something back. Next thing I know I started swinging.

Miracle's interpretation of Candice's advice resulted in her getting suspended from school for one day and placed in ISS for three days. Miracle admitted to not initially walking away and getting an adult involved. She said, "I just zoned out because I didn't care at that moment." Her rationale was she felt the administrators were not concerned with "getting the entire story." Miracle expressed her frustration of not having her voice heard when she would get in trouble at school. Candice supported her daughter and scheduled conferences with teachers and/or administrators to be informed of what happened at school. Miracle was thankful that her mother would stand up for her but was honest in noting, "Sometimes I was wrong and did what I wanted to do. So my momma would put me on punishment and not let me do nothing." Though Miracle was the only girl participant taught to defend herself, she had the least amount of discipline referrals.

Nicole's bubbly personality would lend people to think she did not get in trouble. Yet she had been suspended and placed in ISS. A racially motivated fight that took place at Lakewood Middle School was described in subtheme, *Being Black and proud*. Nicole reflected on her reaction of physically assaulting the student who called her a derogatory name. Her voice cracked as she said, "I realized I shouldn't have done it. I went to the office, I apologized to her, gave her a nice hug." Nevertheless, Nicole justified her

actions claiming, “The teacher was right there. She was watching the whole thing!” When asked how Nicole felt, she stated, “That made my blood boil even more. She didn’t even say nothing and she was looking dead at her!” From this incident, Nicole realized racism still existed.

Nicole shared that her mother did not condone her violent behavior and was “very upset.” She stated, “My mom wants me to walk away from the situation and be the bigger person.” Nicole was appreciative of having conversations on morals and values with her guardian because “I’ve been through a lot with them and being adopted. I now see the world differently.”

Bianca and Nicole shared the same views about fighting. They did not like to fight but felt compelled to show that they were not scared of the individual and would not tell a teacher about the situation because it was looked upon as ‘snitching.’ The term ‘snitching’ is another word for tattling. Nicole stated:

> I would rather try to walk away. Even if a teacher is near me, you know, I wouldn't snitch. I wouldn't snitch because I'm not that type of person, you know. I would just want them to put me in ISS for half the day.

Bianca responded, “People are gonna think of you, as scared if you walk away. So I didn’t walk away, because I knew I wasn’t scared.”

Discipline records from Lakewood Middle School showed Bianca was given ISS and OSS for inappropriate behaviors such as instigating, fighting, and disrespect to teachers. When Bianca received afterschool detention, due to her grandmother, Helen, not have transportation to pick her up, her punishment was converted to ISS. Bianca had the most suspensions of the three student participants. Bianca struggled with respecting

authority with teachers and received several disciplinary referrals for disrespecting teachers. Bianca shared an incident that occurred in her science class:

> I was sitting in class minding my own business. The teacher thought it was ok to call me out. I don't even remember what it was but she shouldn't have said nothing to me. So I didn't say nothing at first, but then she kept on. So I said "Man whatever. You and this class is stupid."

As a result of her comments, she received a disciplinary referral for disrespect and was placed in ISS for three days. She shared that her grandmother, Helen, advised her to walk away and try to stay out of trouble. Bianca was cognizant that her behavior was 'disturbing, inappropriate, and upsetting' to her grandmother. During the interview, Bianca's body language of shrugging her shoulders coincided with her nonchalant responses on her behavior. Nevertheless, Bianca admitted those were her worst experiences in middle school.

While at Lakewood Middle School, Bianca had physical altercations with students as well. Bianca reported she and another girl were "pushing in the connections hallway." She went on to explain, "The girl had said something I didn't like and I pushed her." A teacher intervened the situation before it escalated and both girls were escorted to the office. Bianca felt being punished with three days of ISS was fair for the both of them and knew her grandmother was going to be disappointed. In spite of her grandmother's feeling, Bianca stated, "Sometimes I listen, sometimes I don't. I don't know. It's hard because I like doing my own thing."

The girls realized that it was disappointing for their parents/guardians to be notified by school personnel after receiving disciplinary referrals. Bianca acknowledged

that her grandmother got emotional when teachers and administrators called to report her inappropriate behavior in school. She stated, “I shouldn’t be getting in trouble and every time I do I upset her.” In addition, Bianca admitted she ‘got behind’ on her class assignments but was not motivated to ask questions to get assistance. Nicole did not like being isolated in ISS from her peers and teachers. She described the environment of ISS as “cold, boring, and feels like jail.” Nicole compared her experiences of ISS to OSS. “Neither one is good you know. When you get suspended from school, you miss a lot of work. I'd rather be in ISS.”

Jessica acknowledged she had to do better because her younger siblings looked up to her as a role model. Jessica did not want to be a negative influence for her sisters. Like Jessica, Miracle wanted to be a positive role model for her younger siblings. Miracle stated she has tried to make more effort to walk away from confrontations or get a teacher involved to deescalate the situation. Miracle described how she felt about getting suspended:

> It ain't good cause, you have a record from ninth grade through twelfth grade. And if you want to get accepted into college it ain't going to look good if you have a record of bad behavior. You got to have good behavior and be smart to make it.

Jessica, Nicole, and Miracle reported attending more than one middle school. Several of the girls admitted to not being prepared for transitioning to different school environments. However they all shared how they enjoyed their middle school experience for ‘the most part.’ Bianca, Miracle, and Nicole were involved in extracurricular activities in order to embrace the full “middle school experience.” Jessica expressed

interest in extracurricular activities at school but never followed through to join a club or tryout for a sport. The girls had to work harder to master academic concepts from missed classroom instruction and strategized how not to fail those classes. As in other situations, the girls expressed knowledge and understanding of the correct response to difficult circumstances, as instructed by their parents/guardians, but the girls proved unable to follow the parental advice when the moment presented itself. Their middle school experiences led to the overwhelming conclusion that these at-risk African American students were not properly informed on what to expect upon arriving to middle school.

Adolescent Racial Identity Development. The final theme that emerged from the data was *adolescent racial identity development*. This theme explored at-risk African American eighth grade female adolescents' progress through puberty as they asked: "Who am I?" in the context of discovering who they are as a person. In addition to asking this question, African American children ask, "Who am I ethnically?" or "What does it mean to be Black?", which explores not only who they believe to be but also their racial make-up (Tatum, 1997). Critical race feminism encourages females of color to share their experiences when it comes to race, gender, and class (Berry, 2010; Wing, 2003). In previous themes, racial socialization messages conveyed from their parents/guardians played an integral part in the development of their racial identity. Through the usage of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity model (MMRI), the racial identity progression of the at-risk African American eighth grade female adolescents was assessed. The data shows that the girls were progressing through the model. The MMRI model involved the following stages: salience, centrality, racial regard, and ideology.

Table 7 displays the student participants' scores in each category from the Multidimensional Inventory Black Identity (MIBI)-teen assessment.

Table 7

MIBI-teen Results

Student Participant	Centrality (Highest- 15)	Racial Regard (public and private) (Highest- 30)	Ideology (Highest- 60)
Nicole	12	25	34
Miracle	11	17	34
Jessica	14	22	36
Bianca	14	25	37

The MIBI-teen assessment evaluates the following stages in the MMRI model for adolescents: centrality, racial regard, and ideology.

Centrality. Centrality played a role in terms of interpersonal relationships with students. All student participants exhibited a high level in this dimension. On the MIBI-teen instrument the student participants strongly agreed on the centrality statement "I feel close to other Black people." Nicole and Jessica stated their closest friends were African Americans. This was important because the girls had a strong sense of belonging with other African American people. The girl participants further explained the rationale for friend selection. Nicole and Jessica viewed European American people as being

supportive when it pertained to academics but felt more comfortable developing a more personal relationship with African Americans.

Miracle reported that her friends included African Americans and European Americans. She explained while being in middle school she thought "White people consider Black people ghetto. So, like how I talk, they be like I'm ghetto so I just hang with Black people and I fit right in." However, as she prepares to enter high school, some European American students have encouraged her to change her ways and seek to excel in academics. Miracle stated, "I realize some of my other [Black] friends do not want the best for me. So I just started hanging with a lot of White people because it is better to be around those that know me over the years and see me changing."

Bianca resided in a racially mixed neighborhood and attended a predominantly European American Baptist church. She explained the majority of her friends are African American but she interacted with all kinds of races, echoing the parental message of not allowing race to get in the way of establishing relationships with people.

Racial Regard. Racial regard encompassed both private and public thoughts about African Americans. The girls expressed how they felt about being African American through writing in their journal and/or during the interview. Miracle wrote, "As a Black girl I think I can do things the same as White people." Initially, Jessica felt indifferent about being African American. She stated in the first interview, "I don't feel any type of way about being Black." However after reflecting and finding a deeper meaning, she wrote in her journal, "I love being a Black little girl. Because we as individuals can do what we want now." In addition, Nicole shared "I love my race." When asked how she felt being an African American girl, she stated, "I am proud." Though Bianca was

hesitant in elaborating during the interview, she wrote in her journal: “I have opportunities that many African American females in other countries don’t have.” Although the participants described a desire to show pride in their race, most of their responses reflected their parents’/guardians’ racial socialization messages on racial pride. The student participants scored high on private regard statements such as “I am happy that I am Black.” and “I am proud to be Black.”

In regard to public racial regard, Bianca, Nicole, and Jessica described how African Americans should portray themselves in public. Bianca declared, “They should learn more grammar skills. You don’t even understand what they are saying when talking with them.” Furthermore, Jessica stated “When in public, do not talk out loud and stuff. And dress classy and respectful.” Nicole stated

> Females and guys should dress nice. Do not have your pants down, because then they [teachers] are going to say something as soon as you walk into their class. ‘Oh I know what he is right off the bat!’ Or when she walk in the class and got them tight clothes on ‘She is thotty thotty [that whore over there]!’

These opinions of the student participants demonstrated their awareness of how people stereotype African Americans based on their behaviors. The girls knew lower expectations were placed on them by society and feared being “another Black girl” who “fell short” of becoming a victim to the negative influences of media. Miracle laminated “White people do not expect Black to be successful.”

Miracle and Nicole expressed their thoughts about movies they watched on television, which educated viewers on how African Americans were unable to eat and drink in restaurants and protested in the streets. Miracle said, “I just like being Black

because everything that people could do back then, the Black people, we can do now." Nicole reported, "I enjoy celebrating Black History month because I get the opportunity to learn about my heritage, famous people, and interesting events that occurred in the past." Miracle and Jessica scored the lowest on public regard, with statements such as "I am happy that I am Black." and "I am proud to be Black." Each girl wanted to be viewed as an African American girl with integrity, good values, and having a desire to be successful. While parents/guardians shared concerns over media influencing their daughters, the student participants demonstrated an understanding on the dichotomy that existed between reality and television.

Ideology. Student participants rated statements such as "Black people should act more like Whites to be successful in this society" and "Whenever possible, Blacks should buy from Black businesses." It was evident from Table 5 that the girls were low in the ideology dimension. Due to the girls being in the adolescent stage, it is possible they are still going through their racial identity development process. The ideology dimension is usually achieved during adulthood when they have begun to establish their own opinions based on life experiences (Sellers et al., 2006).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 detailed the findings of this basic interpretive qualitative study. The three research questions were centered on racial socialization messages from African American parents/guardians, middle school experiences of at-risk African American female eighth grade students, and the adolescent racial identity development of the student participants. The parent/guardian participants discussed sharing racial socialization messages on the topics of race, egalitarianism, discrimination, and self-

worth with their daughters. Additionally, they want their daughters to embrace their identity as females and African Americans. The student participants revealed their perceptions as African American adolescent females in middle school, described their poor academic performance, and behavioral choices in middle school. Each student participants' racial identity development process was reviewed through the MMRI model using the MIBI-teen instrument. The next chapter interprets the meaning of the data and secondary sources from this chapter. Specifically, Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the findings, conclusions drawn as they relate to the research questions, implications for practice and research, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter VI

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

African American children have been, and currently are, educated in a school system based on European American, male, middle-class norms (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This study maintains the conception African American parents/guardians share messages that affect the transition of at-risk African American female eighth grade students from their home environment to the school.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich descriptive analysis of how the racial socialization process influences at-risk African American female eighth grade students' racial identity and consequently their middle school experiences. The racial socialization process and critical race feminism theoretically framed the methodological approach used to evaluate and develop a critique on the racial identity development process of at-risk African American female eighth grade students in middle school. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What racial socialization messages do at-risk female African American middle school students receive from their parents/guardians?

RQ2: How do at-risk female African American eighth grade students interpret racial socialization messages received from their parents/guardians in the context of middle school?

RQ3: How do the racial socialization messages received by at-risk female African American eighth grade students influence the development of their racial identity?

To generate authentic and credible data, at-risk African American female adolescents and parents/guardians were recruited. For purposeful sampling to be effective, the students and parents/guardians were selected based on the criteria created for this research study. Chapter 4 presented participant narratives of the four student participants for this study, who were eighth grade students at Lakewood Middle School in Marshall County. Participant narratives were also created for the four parent/guardian participants, who were the primary providers for the girls. Samantha, a single parent, was the adoptive guardian of Nicole. Candice, a single parent, was the mother of Miracle. Wilma, a single parent, was the mother of Jessica. Helen, a single grandmother, was the legal guardian of Bianca. In order to examine the influence of racial socialization of at-risk African American female eighth students, I analyzed the nature of the relationship between parents and students through face-to-face interviews, observations, and document analysis. Chapter 5 reviewed the data collection, data analysis, and findings from the study. The analysis of the data revealed the following major themes: 1) *cultural preparation for school*, 2) *advocating and developing racial identity, 3) importance of self-awareness, 4) the middle school experiences of at-risk African American female students,* and 5) a*dolescent racial identity development.* This study examined the racial identity development of at-risk African American female eighth grade students from both the psychological and sociological perspectives. This study explored how racial socialization messages received from their parents/guardians in their home environment impacted these students' racial identities as well as middle school experiences.

This chapter discusses and analyzes the study's findings. The chapter also provides a discussion of the implication and recommendations.

Discussion and Interpretation

Dotterer et al. (2009) suggested "attitudes, beliefs, values, and ideas about race and race-relations" are all aspects of shaping a child's racial identity (p. 63). The racial socialization messages at-risk African American female eighth grade students received from their home environments played a role in the articulation of their racial identities and how they interacted with teachers and peers in middle school.

Cultural Preparation for School. African American parents/guardians reported in this research study communicating racial socialization messages suggested in the literature review: racial pride, racial barrier, egalitarian, self-worth, and negative messages. They delivered these messages in the forms of oral communication, modeling, role-playing, and exposure to media sources (Coard et al., 2004). Sellers et al. (2006) research study found that racial socialization played a role in the racial identity development for African American children.

Generally, minority parents have reported having negative schooling experiences (Harper & Koonce, 2005; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Parents/Guardians' experiences of struggling educationally and rarely fostering egalitarian relationships between themselves and their teachers shaped how they prepared their daughters for the school environment. Candice and Wilma explained their negative experiences were related to having a poor teacher-student relationship. Samantha and Helen expressed the difficulties of attending schools during the period of racial integration. Despite their challenging school experiences, the parent/guardian participants wanted the best education for their

daughters. As Somers et al. (2008) found in their research, the parents/guardians valued education. They understood social support from teachers, administrators, and other school personnel was necessary for the advancement in their children's education.

Advocating and Developing Racial Identity. Each parent/guardian participant described their experiences of growing up in the South where racism still persisted despite Civil Rights acts and laws put in place to ban discrimination (Schimmel et al., 2008). Helen's comment of "I did not want my granddaughter to have to go through the things I have and seen" was why parents/guardians felt the need to teach their daughters about embracing their racial identity. Their life experiences shaped the racial pride and racial barrier messages they conveyed to their daughters.

It was important for parents/guardians to create the foundation for their children's African American identity rather than adopt a European American identity. Messages received from parents/guardians encompassed developing racial identity as African Americans, becoming knowledgeable of the history of African Americans, and understanding the importance of advocating for their race. This finding confirms the Chavous et al. (2008) study that found that when a person understands his/her racial identity it would be seen as a "protective factor." In a similar study, Bennett (2006) supported the importance of developing African Americans' racial identity during adolescence. The data suggest that parents/guardians should be the primary educators and advocates in discussing race with their children.

Family traditions, practices, and religions are taught in African American families to promote racial pride (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Two surprising findings were displayed in Table 4. The first finding was contrary to the other participants; Wilma did not

celebrate any traditions or holidays, national or African American. The impact of religion on race is discussed in detail under the '*importance of self-awareness'* theme. Candice, Wilma, and Helen supported the notion of teachers cultivating their daughters more about African American history and culture. Secondly, due to the parents/guardians lack of formal education, they felt confident in the school's curriculum educating their children on the history of African Americans, which included historical events, iconic heroes, and significant contributions of these individuals. This finding is contradictory to prior research by Koonce and Harper, Jr (2005). Those researchers found that parents who had negative schooling experiences neglected their children's academic needs. In contrast the data in the present study suggested despite the parents/guardians fear of the school environment, it appeared they supported the school in taking part in the racial socialization process of their daughters in the instance of promoting racial pride.

The Importance of Self-awareness. The *importance of self-awareness* theme refers to building the girl participants' self-esteem and self-confidence. This notion of self-awareness was given mostly by the parents/guardians. Parents/Guardians in this study delivered powerful messages to their daughters that may have contributed to development of their self-awareness. For instance, Jessica stated, "Be yourself" and Nicole shared "My mom taught me that 'you can do it; you just have to put your mind to it.'" Parents/Guardians shared how the influence of religion and popular culture impacted the racial socialization process with their children. The findings discussed in this theme support the work of Sue & Sue (2003) and Oney et al. (2011), who found that self-esteem and self-worth are aspects that need to be taught to African American girls in order for them to feel confident in being an African American female in society.

The standards of beauty for society have been based on European American women dating back to the 17th century (Sanders & Bradley, 2005). Parents/Guardians in this study set their own femininity standards for their daughters that would promote beauty, self-worth, and self-confidence as African American females. Candice encouraged wanting her daughter to be proud and embrace who she was an African American female because "God made her how she is and she is not supposed to look like other children of other races." Helen and Samantha encouraged their daughters to embrace wearing their ethnic hair in its natural texture and not using chemical processes to straighten their hair. This finding is supported by Thomas et al. (2011), who found that the perception of the standards of beauty was important to African American females. The high school girls in the study realized that due to their race and gender, they had to create their own boundaries to feel confident and beautiful.

The Christian faith is known to be the dominant faith in most African American households. Barnes (2005) stated that most African Americans attended church to help "provide meaning and clarity for historical events such as slavery and present day discrimination and poverty as well as possible avenues for collective redress" (p. 969). Samantha, Candice, and Helen were affiliated with the Baptist denomination. Their knowledge of religion included quoting Bible verses, attending church services and events, and being active in church ministries. A surprising finding was the effort made by Wilma to separate her religious beliefs from the typical racial socialization messages she delivered to her daughter. Wilma did not partake in providing racial pride or racial barrier messages in accordance to norms and beliefs of her Jehovah's Witness faith. However, self-worth, egalitarian, and negative messages were prominent in Jessica's racial

socialization process. The impact of religious beliefs on the messages parents/guardians sent to their daughters needs to be explored more in further research.

As parents/guardians of adolescent girls, they realized their daughters were exploring who they were, figuring out their identity, and where they belonged (Hamman & Hendricks, 2005; Gullan et al., 2011). The parent/guardian participants believed that negative messages stemmed from the media, including the hip hop and rap genre of music that their children listened to, and the reality television shows they watched. They saw African American women being portrayed as "all we care about is sex and money" or "we like to fight and cuss and the time." The parents/guardians perception of the negative messages from the media was sustained by Hall and Smith (2012) study. They found that the high school girls in the case study often found the media guilty of portraying African American women in a devaluing and derogatory manner. The data from the study suggest self-worth, egalitarian, and negative messages are important for their daughters. It was the intent of the parents/guardians that these messages influenced and built the foundation for at-risk African American girls to achieve academic success, embrace their appearance, and realize their value as African American females.

The middle school experiences of at-risk African American female students. The data confirmed the commonalities of middle school experiences of at-risk African American female eighth grade students related to navigating through puberty (Hill & Tyson, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Kingery et al., 2011). The theory of critical race feminism emphasized how the study's student participants, at-risk African American female adolescents, needs were different from European American female and African American male adolescents (Wing, 2003; Wing & Willis, 1999). The student participants

were able to share their stories on how they experienced exhibiting multiply identities due to having to choose between following the advice of their parents/guardians or finding an alternative strategy that was more acceptable by their peers. Student participants' responses created the subthemes adolescents' relationship with parents/guardians, being Black and proud, messages for academic success, and messages on social interaction. These subthemes uncovered the similar difficulties that the student participants in the study went through which led them to being labeled "at-risk" in middle school. Each of the student participants was labeled "at-risk" because she exhibited poor academic performance, (i.e., failing grades) and had multiple disciplinary referrals (i.e., suspended from school) (Donnelly, 1987).

Adolescents' Relationship with Parents/Guardians. During identity formation, children tend to sway from the parents and begin to develop relationships with their peers (Christenson et al., 2007; Hamman & Hendricks, 2005). Each of the student participants reported having a positive relationship with her parent/guardian. Conversely, none of the student participants claimed to want to share their "new found personal lives in middle school" with their parent/guardian in detail. As Nicole stated "I want to keep home and school life separate" and the other girls wanted to adhere to that code.

As the girls went through adolescence, they expressed knowing the environment from elementary school to middle school. The identity-formation process requires adolescents become engaged in their critical, abstract thinking, and moral reasoning skills (Akos & Ellis, 2008). Analysis of the interview transcripts and report cards from Lakewood Middle School provided concrete evidence that each girl struggled in her academic classes and encountered behavioral problems in middle school. For instance,

Nicole shared what she discussed with Samantha about her friend selection, “Like are they good influences…The type that get Fs all the time or are they the type that get As cause I'm not supposed to be hanging around the bad crowd but the good crowd.” Though there is a 40 age difference between Bianca and her grandmother Helen, she listened to her statement of “I just need to be myself and don't care what other people think about me.” Data supported the girls understood the rationale of their parents/guardians conveying racial socialization messages and practice to help guide them in school and life. Unfortunately, the girl participants felt confident as adolescents to not always adhere to their parents’/guardians’ advice, yet their decisions led them to an increase in academic challenges and behavioral issues in middle school. The third tenet of critical race feminism explained minority women as sometimes forced to develop multiple identities. Thus it was observed that the girls believed they had the identity shaped by their parents/guardians, the identity formed by their own self-perceptions, and then transformed into another identity for school. The student participants’ interpretations of the situations selected the type of identity they would display in that particular environment.

Being Black and Proud. African American parents/guardians in the study shared racial pride and racial barrier messages with their daughters. Racial barrier messages were designed to protect African American children from racism and discrimination. In addition, racial pride messages served the purpose of building their self-esteem and self-confidence in being Black and proud in school and society. Rivas-Drake et al. (2009) suggested non-minority administrators, teachers, and other school personnel perceive ‘ethnicity’ differently than minority parents and students. Bianca, Miracle, and Nicole

realized European Americans would “label and judge” them based on their skin appearance. Tatum (1997) explained that during adolescence, children become interested in “Who I am?” Data confirmed that the at-risk African American female eighth graders were at the adolescent stage of questioning their racial identity and inquired what it meant to be Black.

Bianca, Miracle, and Nicole dealt with experiences of discrimination by being called the racial slur ‘nigger.’ Those girls questioned their parents/guardians on why people would call them mean names. The students received sympathy from their parents/guardians but not the school personnel. Thus racial discrimination of the girls at school often led to negative reactions. For example, Nicole and Miracle’s reaction to derogatory name calling ‘nigger’ led them to fight their perceived abusers. Candice stated, “It was wrong for Miracle to do that [hit the White boy], but I can’t tell her how to feel. Those are her feelings and I probably would have done the same thing.” While parents/guardians understood their children’s right to defend themselves from the verbal abuse, the administrators perceived the girls’ physical reaction as unacceptable and punished them for bad behavior.

The conflict between the messages the girls received from home and the school may have fueled their struggle to transition from elementary school to middle school. This study suggests a complete communication breakdown between the school and parents in which the girls are the victims. Racial barrier messages were created and delivered for adolescents to cope effectively with racial discrimination (Hughes & Chen, 1997). These messages did not help Bianca, Nicole, and Miracle in school; instead, they perpetuated their negative behaviors in school, which in turn led to academic failure.

Schools need to search for a solution that will break this vicious cycle that makes it extremely difficult for African American girls to be successful in middle school. Inappropriate racial messages from European Americans can lead at-risk African American female students to experience an identity crisis (role confusion). The research work of Christenson et al. (2007) found that self-worth and self-confidence correlated to middle school and high school adolescents' school performance and behavioral problems. The girls' in this study desired to "fit in" with their peers and teachers at school and be accepted as an African American. Miracle's feeling as an African American student was "Don't let the Black kids get left out. Like put the White kids in some Black groups and put the Black people in White groups…so it won't feel racist." This statement may be seen as that student participants were aware of their racial identity and wanted their teachers and peers to treat them equaling.

Messages for Academic Success. While attending Lakewood Middle School, all student participants exhibited poor academic performance. Nicole and Bianca failed three classes and Jessica and Miracle failed one class. Jessica and Bianca were retained in the seventh grade in middle school. The data revealed the girls acknowledged their behavioral problems were the attributing factor that led to poor academic performance. In addition, the girls expressed their academic challenges stemmed from a lack of understanding the teacher or they being unable to adapt to the rigorous curriculum in middle school. Another factor for their academic challenges may have been the transitory lifestyle of their parents/guardians. Table 2 displays that three of the four students attended more than on middle school.

Each of the student participants explained their parents/guardians' detailed strategies and advice on how they were to be successful in school. These strategies and advice were based on the parents'/guardians' past schooling experiences. Jessica, Bianca, and Miracle were cognizant of their parents/guardians not graduating from high school. Through their racial socialization process the student participants were provided self-worth and egalitarian messages that would build confidence and self-esteem in them knowing they could be successful in school and life. A connection between racial socialization and academic performance appeared in the data. When the at-risk African American female eighth grade student ignored the messages delivered from their parents/guardians, their poor decision making skills led them to academic failure.

The findings from this study varied with other studies. The Bennett (2006) study findings suggested that positive racial identity of African American adolescents in eighth through twelfth grades may positively promote school engagement. However, racial socialization did not increase school engagement with the African American adolescents. The Dotterer et al. (2009) study stated racial socialization, discrimination, and ethnic identity were not related to a minority student's academic performance. The researchers did not find a correlation between academic performance and ethnic identity and racial socialization.

It appears after the students in this study failed a class and grade, the realization of how valuable and beneficial the messages and strategies were motivated them to "work hard and change my ways so I can pass to the next grade." Student participants perceived being an African American student in middle school would lend teachers and their peers to stereotype them based on their academic performance. This stereotype would be that

African American students are "lazy and stupid." Developing personal academic goals was essential to dispelling the myth and having an anticipation to graduate from high school. My data suggest they understood that "fitting in" to the school culture would be beneficial for them to be successful (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, Nicole, Miracle, and Jessica created personal goals to follow their parents'/guardians' advice on how to be successful in school. Despite the academic failure, Bianca thought her strategies and plans for academic success were better than her grandmother's. While in middle school each girl had the opportunity to re-examine her identity and decided to alter some behaviors e.g., work ethics, requesting teacher assistance, and paying attention in class before entering high school.

Messages on Social Interaction. The at-risk African American female adolescents in this study reflect Erikson's (1963, 1968) fifth stage of psychosocial developmental model, identity versus role confusion. Nicole, Miracle, Jessica, and Bianca shared the social and behavioral challenges they faced in middle school. These social and behavioral challenges resulted in each participant being suspended in school or from school. This research study's findings are similar to those of Morris (2007), Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012), and Koonce (2012), who commented that African American girls are labeled as "loud and aggressive" based on the perceptions seen by European Americans.

Several student participants shared their parents/guardians conveyed self-worth, egalitarianism, and negative messages in order to socially interact in the school environment. Consequently, the girls believed that their parent/guardians' advice was not always applicable to situations they encountered at school. For instance, Bianca admitted she felt capable of handling confrontations with peers or teachers through her own vices

and decided to go against their grandmother's "old school" advice. This finding is congruent with the individual student in Akos and Ellis (2008) study. The student participants, like the subject in the case study, were trying to figure out in search of their own way of solving problems in middle school.

Another surprising finding that emerged from the research involved Bianca and Nicole. They felt they had to fight to show they were not afraid of the person or situation. This finding is similar to those of Morris (2007). The researcher found this demeanor as a self-affirming technique to deal with sexism and racism. This is another aspect of identity formation because the girls perceived their actions were a better choice than those of their parents/guardians. In addition, it appears the girls complied with fighting because they wanted acceptance from their peers. More research needs to be conducted on the issue of peer acceptance and how it relates to African American females in middle school.

Many of the girls echoed Jessica's sentiments on the impact of school suspension on their school progress. She stated, "It affected me because I was missing work and not being there [in the classroom] to learn what their [teachers] teaching." It appeared that the girls' social and behavioral issues affected their academics. The student participants in Archer-Banks' and Behar-Horenstein's (2012) study also complained that school policies and procedures were not favorable to them when it came to their well-being and positive behavior. They also stated that they had to work harder than their European American peers to achieve the same level of academic success. In the current research study, the data suggests that at-risk African American female eighth graders had to work harder to achieve academic success due to being suspended numerous times. For instance, Jessica stated, "I don't like going to ISS because I miss so much work. I get behind." Miracle

shared, “It is hard to catch up when I’m in ISS.” Though these girls were suspended they were still accountable at the same academic level as other students.

The at-risk African American female adolescents in this study confirmed Steinberg and McCray’s (2012) ideas of wanting to have their voices heard and be understood at school. These girls realized how they wanted to be treated and the types of relationships they desired to have with their peers and teachers. Gorvine et al.’s (2008) study also confirmed there is a need for programs to be developed and established for at-risk minority students who appear to have transitioning difficulties from home to school. Data from this study support a need for these programs that focus on identity formation through the adolescent stage and developing interpersonal skills with peers and teachers.

Adolescent racial identity development. Robert Seller’s MMRI model was utilized to explore the racial identity of the student participants in the study. Three specific stages of racial identity development were assessed for each participant: centrality, racial regard (private and public), and ideology. It was imperative to capture and reveal the results of the MIBI-teen instrument from this study because there is limited research on how racial identity models apply to minority development, especially for African American female adolescents.

Centrality was the dimension for which student participants demonstrated how they define themselves racially. The Clarks’ “Doll Study” (1939) was the premise of justifying the rationale of the importance of racial socialization. Findings from the Clarks (1939) and Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) studies are congruent with this study’s findings of all four student participants identifying themselves as “Black” based on their skin color. According to data, the student participants did not have a personal definition

of what it means to be Black. It appears the girls had a lack of understanding of what Black truly meant to them. In addition to centrality, Nicole, Miracle, and Jessica stated their personal friends were of the African American race.

In terms of public and private regard, the student participants were knowledgeable on the history of African Americans and historical events they learned in school. They reflected on information received from their parents/guardians explaining how African Americans are treated positively and negatively in society. As stated in chapter 2, Sellers et al. (2006) and the Byrd and Chavous (2011) studies explained that centrality and racial regard were dimensions used to help understand African American adolescents' racial identity. Those reflective moments for the girls formed their perceptions and beliefs on Tatum's (1997) questions of "Who am I racially?", "What does it mean to be Black?", and how African Americans should be treated as equals, but realized they were not always. This finding is similar to Sellers et al. (2006) in that racial socialization was found to play a shaping African American adolescent's racial identity. The student participants reflected average to high scores in the centrality and racial regard stage.

Lastly, the student participants are still developing in the ideology stage of the MMRI model. Essentially, it was the first time the girls took the time to reflect on being African American females in middle school. This study encouraged them to evaluate how their racial socialization process at home defined them. They compared and reflected on how messages and lessons from their parents/guardians impacted their decision-making skills and social interactions in the school environment.

In summary, student and parent/guardian participants thought it was unique to be selected for this research study because they were able to share their story as African

American females. This study demonstrated that racial socialization messages impacted at-risk African American adolescent female students' racial identity. However, their interpretations of those racial socialization messages did not help them transition smoothly in the middle school environment. The MMRI model and MIBI-teen instrument served as tools to analyze at-risk African American female eighth grade students' racial identity development. When teachers and school personnel are knowledgeable of the cultural and home background of at-risk African American female students, they will be able to determine their level of comfort, or cultural fluency, within the school environment.

Limitations

The information presented in the research study is far from being universal because it represents a snapshot of a small group of at-risk African American females at one middle school. The data from the study is more suggestive for a population of students in an urban middle school. This particular design was intentional, but conducting a similar research study in various locations could undoubtedly lend additional and valuable insight into at-risk African American females' experiences on racial identity development.

A second limitation was developed based on the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) limitations. As the researcher, my role was solely to function as a non-participant observer and not a participant observer. As a participant observer, I would have been able to witness the actual parent-child interaction in the home environment. I would have the opportunity to observe and listen first hand to the racial socialization messages the mothers provided their daughters. In addition, I would have had access to

observing the students in the classroom as they interact with their teachers and peers. This information would provide insight of the school's climate and culturally relevant teaching for African American adolescent females in middle school.

Future studies may focus on a diverse pool of adolescent research candidates, from various urban middle schools could increase the range of reported experiences and their racial socialization process. Future opportunities for research could extend this study to urban at-risk African American females in middle school across the nation.

Recommendations

In this study two recommendations are made, both aimed at helping school personnel and parents effectively educate at-risk African American females in middle school. The initial recommendations will be suggestions for school personnel, in which programs and interventions will be provided to assist at-risk African American female students in middle school. The second set of recommendations is presented to assist parents and school personnel build relationships that will assist their children be academically successful.

Recommendations for African American Females in Middle School

African American female adolescents need to interact with successful women who look like them. To increase positive images of African Americans, these adolescents should have a mentor of the same race and gender to create a relationship (Hurd et al., 2012). Mentoring programs can be peer-to-peer, faculty/staff-to-student, or students can have an outside mentor from an approved organization in the community. Participants from this study spoke specifically to their desire of wanting to be successful in school and being a positive reflection of their home environments. In addition, they

want help from a guide who will assist them in transitioning through the academic environment as well as personal/ social aspects as they approach high school. A successful mentoring program would include having a one-on-one relationship that provides measurable goals and outcomes for the participants, and the program as a whole. Throughout the process of development and implementation of the program, students should feel validated and valued as individuals, females, and African Americans. Thus, holding the mentors accountable for their commitment to the students involved will attribute to the overall success of the mentoring program.

When racial socialization and racial identity are investigated together, having resources such as educational classes, youth empowerment groups, and rites of passages groups available for the African American adolescent female is vital. These programs can help to build the girl's understanding of her culture and increase her awareness and knowledge of herself in relation to her culture. Sisters of Nia (Belgrave, Reed, Plybon, Butler, Allison, & Davis, 2004), Sapphires in transition (Young, 1994), and Young Empowered Sisters (YES!) program (Thomas et al., 2008) are mentor programs that have been utilized in schools and had positive results with girls. These programs can be set up as afterschool programs or small mentoring groups with the assistance of school counselors, teachers, and community members.

School counselors are vital role players in facilitating mentoring and small group programs from African American girls because they are the liaisons between students and community agencies that can have a positive impact on assisting with meeting the students' academic, social, and personal needs. Such opportunities offer African American females to have a safe environment in a predominantly European American

environment. However, it is important for all adults to be culturally sensitive, willing to actively listen, empathic to the personal foundations African Americans bear, and lastly, be ready to acknowledge aspects that are influential to adolescent girls' experiences.

Recommendations for School Personnel

It is necessary for schools to create and establish a positive rapport with the parent to ensure they have their child's best interest at heart. Many barriers that exist between middle schools and African American parents could be erased when school counselors create a responsive school (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008). African American parents need to have a voice in the academic success of their children. The negative experiences the African American parents/guardians may have faced need to be dispelled in order for them to have an egalitarian relationship with the school. Candice and Wilma stated their past schooling experiences are the reason they do not trust the school's policies and procedures.

Teachers, administrators, and school counselors can work together to create innovative ways on how to get parents involved. Administrators must encourage and promote teachers, school counselors, and other school personnel to be open and available to communicate with parents/guardians. Though parent-teacher conferences and academic nights are the typical parent involvement activities, other meet and greet interactions are needed. For instance, parents/guardians could be invited to "School Chats." These "School Chat" meetings would allow parents/guardians to share personal information on how to better assist their child academically or personally. These parent-teacher interactions display the school's efforts of being a friendly and safe environment for parents and their children.

It is important to encourage parents to be present and participate in school activities. This strategy could be utilized to promote positive school culture. Teachers can place emphasis on wanting to work as a team with parents to help their children be successful academically, personally, and socially. For example, Samantha share her interest in Nicole being involved with her heritage. Therefore, she could come in and share her knowledge in Social Studies class during Black History month. This opportunity allows the parent to be a part of their child's learning process. Newsletters, emails, and phone calls are plausible ways to keep parents/guardians abreast on what is going with their child's daily school activities. For instance, administrators could make weekly call outs to parents/guardians that will share events and activities that will occur during the week at school. Teachers will provide weekly newsletters on academic websites, upcoming projects, and homework assignments.

The salient responsibility of school counselors is to be an advocator for students and assist with their academic, personal, and social needs. It is beneficial to all students academically, socially, and personally when they are able to have a smooth transition of leaving elementary school and entering middle school. Another task of school counselors are to collaborate and consult with parents and teachers. This interaction will help students be a success in their transition process through school and support parents/guardians in clarifying any inquiries that could benefit or deter their children from being successful.

With the implementation of these strategies, parents/guardians will be more receptive to being involved in the middle school environment. Parents and teachers need to have better ways to communicate, which can be done by flexible parent conferences

and after school phone calls. These recommendations will help educators, administrators, and school counselors create school environments that are inclusive and equipped to serve all people.

Implications

Although this study focused on at-risk African American female eighth grade students, it has broader implications, particularly for the social competence training of middle school educators. For example, this study described the everyday racial tolerance endured by the four at-risk African American female eighth grade students, which might need to be incorporated into the overall training of educators in Georgia. Currently, most of the teacher preparation programs lack a strong emphasis of cultural competence. Cultural competency workshops can be conducted during professional learning days to teach and expose school personnel to the importance of being culturally sensitive and empathic with students. Having this training could make a difference with academic performance as well as truancy and disciplinary issues.

Future studies should be conducted to support the value of using cultural relevant teaching pedagogy in classrooms. Educators must be aware of cultural and societal factors in the home and community context of minority children (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Displaying cultural sensitivity will assist in building relationships; which has been found in to be a huge factor when working with children, especially adolescents. Culturally relevant pedagogy might assist future educators in discovering the value of the social environment influences of minority children (Ladson-Billings, 2009). These socializing agents can be seen as factors in how they act and/or react to situations that

occur in school. Findings from this investigation support how schools can provide a safe and comfortable environment for all students.

The study's small sample size restricted generalization. This research study on racial socialization impacting identity should be extended to include adolescents of color who identify racially or ethnically, as other than African American. For example, the sample could be Hispanics, children living in rural communities, and children who are identified as having low socioeconomic status. These historically marginalized sub groups are associated with the term at-risk (Donnelly, 1987). A larger study involving different minority populations needs to be conducted to address academic and social needs of adolescents.

Similar studies at different grade levels in middle school will also add to the generalization of the data. More research is needed to evaluate racial socialization without a specific reference to gender. Removing this specific reference to gender may reveal a broader range of socialization messages used by parents of minority youth. In addition, adolescents are not merely recipients of racial socialization, they are active participants in the identity formation process. Future research should include female adolescents' perception and/or receipt of racial socialization as an important factor.

Lastly, more qualitative work is needed to further understand the extent in which the racial socialization process impacts racial identity with African American females. Ethnographic observations would provide more information about the subtle differences of racial socialization messages, which would include the inadvertent, unspoken messages that may go unmeasured. Conducting a research study of this sort could be used to develop a qualitative measure of racial socialization for empirical investigation of

adolescent African American females and families. Further exploration of racial socialization processes and racial adolescent development could potentially be used to age and gender specific parenting education curricula for parents with African American girls.

Researcher's Reflections

As stated in Chapter 1, having had my own experiences of teaching African American adolescent girls, this research was personal in nature. The only expectation I had was that the girl participants in the study would report their middle school experiences; and that their racial identity development may be loosely shaped based on racial socialization messages from home. I did not assume anything about the racial socialization process, feelings of being an African American female, and what stages of identity development would be reported. I was surprised to discover how daughters interpreted racial socialization messages from home.

Though I taught each girl, my personal connection to the study did not affect the findings. In addition, the informal and personal nature of contacting participants in reference to interviewing the parents/guardians home in their homes, allowed the participants to trust me and feel bonded to me, and I to them, more so than traditional research methods of the past. This contact and comfort level allowed for much more personal information to be shared during the data collection process. The data were filled with rich information and stories of their personal experiences that may have not been shared using less personal forms of contact. Overall, the research experience was rewarding and deepened my commitment to providing the best possible classroom environment for at-risk African American female students.

Conclusion

Sojourner Truth (1851) “Aint I a Woman” speech publicly addressed that African American women should be treated fairly and they should be recognized and valued as individuals. This study is an extension to her speech because it expounds on the racial development for African American adolescent females. This study provided a snapshot of how racial socialization messages from parents/guardians influence the racial identity of at-risk African American adolescent females in middle school. Racial socialization is conveyed through racial pride, racial barrier, self-worth, egalitarianism, and negative messages. These messages are intended to influence minority children’s racial identity as well as prepare them for a predominant White Euro-American school environment. African American adolescents experience a dichotomy of adhering to their parents/guardians guidance, or determining their own how to assimilate into the school culture with teachers and peers. The study revealed that the students’ interpretation and application of their parents/guardians racial socialization messages resulted in having a difficult transition from their home environment to the middle school setting, which led in low academic achievement and school disciplinary problems.

This study extended the current literature on the racial identity development of at-risk African American female adolescent in middle school by not only discussing their experiences, but by also detailing the racial socialization messages they received from home that influence their racial identity. The knowledge gained from this study would enable school personnel to assist at-risk African American female eighth grade students by increasing academic support, decreasing negative behavioral issues, and promoting cultural competence through fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Further

studies are necessary to broaden the research on racial development for African American female adolescents.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants

NEW PROTOCOL APPROVAL

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-03078-2014 **RESPONSIBLE RESEARCHER:** Victoria Lockhart

PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of Racial Socialization on Racial Identity of Female African American Eight Grade Students in Middle School

APPROVAL DATE: 8/12/14 **EXPIRATION DATE:** 8/11/15

LEVEL OF RISK: ☒ Minimal ☐ More than Minimal

TYPE OF REVIEW: ☒ Expedited Under Catetory/ies :7 ☐ Convened (Full Board)

CONSENT REQUIREMENTS:

- ☐ Adult Participants – Written informed consent with documentation (signature)
- ☐ Adult Participants – Written informed consent with waiver of documentation (signature)
- ☐ Adult Participants – Verbal informed consent
- ☐ Adult Participants – Waiver of informed consent
- ☒ Minor Participants – Written parent/guardian permission with documentation (signature)
- ☐ Minor Participants – Written parent/guardian permission with waiver of documentation (signature)
- ☐ Minor Participants – Verbal parent/guardian permission
- ☐ Minor Participants – Waiver of parent/guardian permission
- ☐ Minor Participants – Written assent with documentation (signature)
- ☐ Minor Participants – Written assent with waiver of documentation (signature)
- ☐ Minor Participants – Verbal assent
- ☐ Minor Participants – Waiver of assent
- ☐ Waiver of some elements of consent/permission/assent

APPROVAL: This research protocol is approved as presented. If applicable, your approved consent form(s), bearing the IRB approval stamp and protocol expiration date, will be mailed to you via campus mail or U.S. Postal Service unless you have made other arrangements with the IRB Administrator. Please use the stamped consent document(s) as your copy master(s). Once you duplicate the consent form(s), you may begin participant recruitment. **Please see Attachment 1 for additional important information for researchers.**

COMMENTS: NONE

Lorraine Schmertzing 8/12/14 *Thank you for submitting an IRB application.*

Lorraine Schmertzind, Ed.D., IRB Chair Date *Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.*

Form Revised: 12.13.12

APPENDIX B

Superintendent Permission Letter

August 13, 2014

Marshall County Superintendent
P.O. Box 500
Marshall, GA 31085

Dear Marshall County Superintendent,

I am requesting permission to carry out my doctoral research proposal in Marshall County. The research study, "The Impact of Racial Socialization on Racial Identity of Female African American Eighth Grade Students in Middle School," will be conducted at Lakewood Middle School where I am currently employed. The purpose of the study is to examine racial socialization messages from parents/guardians and explore how these messages impact the racial identity and middle school experiences of at-risk African American female eighth grade students. It is my hope that an examination of parents/guardians and at-risk African American adolescent girls relationships' can be valuable for teaching and learning in the classroom for the school district.

The qualitative research study may be regarded as "research with low-to-moderate risk" to the participants, according to the standards of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Valdosta State University. There will be no harm, discomforts, inconvenience or risks associated with the research activity. The identity of students, staff members, the research site, and the local system will not be revealed in any publication of the results. Parent/ Guardian consent, parent/guardian permission for students, and student assent forms have been developed, reviewed, and approved in order to inform participants of the study and protect their confidentiality. The administrators of Lakewood Middle School will permit me to review confidential information of students, which include students' academic performances and discipline records. In addition, the administrators have agreed to allow me to recruit students to participate in the research study. The data collected and analyzed will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the system and individual prior consent unless otherwise required by law. Dr. Rudo Tsemunhu, assistant professor of educational leadership, is directing this research project and can be reached at (229) 333-5694. Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Victoria A. Lockhart
Doctoral Student
Valdosta State University

APPENDIX C

Principal Permission Letter

July 21, 2014

Mr. John L. Riley
Lakewood Middle School
Groverton, GA 31072

Dear Principal Riley,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology at Valdosta State University. For my dissertation, I am interested in conducting a qualitative research study to examine racial socialization messages from parents/guardians and explore how these messages impact the racial identity and middle school experiences of at-risk African American female eighth grade students. I am in need of your written permission to engage in the research. I am requesting permission to recruit students to participate in the research study. In addition, I will need to review students' academic performances and discipline records in order to collect and analyze data. The data collected and analyzed will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the system and individual prior consent unless otherwise required by law.

The study may be regarded as "research with low-to-moderate risk" to the participants, according to the standards of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Valdosta State University. There will be no harm, discomforts, inconvenience or risks associated with the research activity. Parent/Guardian consent, parent/guardian permission for students, and student assent forms have been developed, reviewed, and approved in order to inform participants of the study and protect their confidentiality. The identity of students, staff members, the research site, and the local system will not be revealed in any publication of the results.

It is my hope that an examination of parents/guardians and at-risk African American adolescent girls relationships' can be valuable for teaching and learning in the classroom for the school district. Dr. Rudo Tsemunhu, assistant professor of educational leadership, is directing this research project and can be reached at (229) 333-5694. Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Victoria A. Lockhart
Doctoral Student
Valdosta State University

APPENDIX D

Minor Assent Form

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Assent to Participate in Research

Hello my name is Victoria A. Lockhart. I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. I am interested to see how conversations about race from parents/guardians influence you as a female African American. I would like to ask you to help me by participating in a study, but before doing so, I want to explain what your role will be if you decide to help me.

I will ask you to discuss your experiences as a female African American student in middle school. I want you to share your thoughts and feelings about how your parents are raising you. I would like for you to keep a personal journal on your thoughts and feelings. There is no right or wrong answer when participating in the discussions about who you are, how your parents raise you, and your school experiences. Just simply share your feelings and ideas about what you went through in middle school.

Your responses and participation through interviews and journals will not be shared and will be kept confidential. Your information will not be identified or shared with your name on it with any outside people. I will not reveal your name or your specific contribution to the information that I share about our research study.

Your parent(s) says it is okay for you to be in my study; however, if you do not want to be in the study, you do not have to be. What you decide will not make any difference with your grades or about how people think about you or have any impact on your participation in any of your school activities or classes. I will not be upset, and no one else will be upset, if you do not want to participate in the study. If you want to be in the study now but change your mind later, that is okay. You may stop at any time. If there is anything you do not understand please tell me so I can explain it to you.

Feel free to ask me questions about the study. If you have a question later that you do not think of now, you can contact me by telephone *(478) 952-7823* or send me an email *valockhart@valdosta.edu.*

Do you have any questions now?

Would you like to be in my study and participate in the study by being interviewed and journalizing your thoughts and feelings on topics?

NOTES TO RESEARCHER: The child should answer "Yes" or "No." Only a definite "Yes" may be taken as assent to participate.

Name of Child: _____ (Optional) Signature of Child_____

Parental Permission on File: ☐ Yes ☐ No
(If "No," do not proceed with assent or research procedures.)

Child's Voluntary Response to Participation: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signature of Researcher: _____Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Student Consent Form

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Parent/Guardian Permission for Child's/Ward's Participation in Research

You are being asked to allow your child (or ward) to participate in a research project entitled, "*The Impact of Racial Socialization on Racial Identity of Female African American Eighth Grade Students in Middle School*." Victoria A. Lockhart, a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology at Valdosta State University, is conducting this research project. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks to your child (or ward). You may ask the researcher any question you have to help you understand this study and your child's (or ward's) possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. From this point on in this form, the term "child" is used for either a child or a ward. Please read the remainder of this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed permission if you will allow your child to participate in this research project.

Purpose of the Research:

This study involves research. The purpose of the study is to explore how racial messages from parents/guardians influence female African American students' perceptions of their racial identity and their middle school experiences. The research will focus on learning about experiences that occur during the racial socialization process, which is the concept of how parents discuss and teach their children about their race. The overall goal of the study is to increase the sensitivities of school personnel toward the manners and behaviors of "at-risk" female African-American adolescents who struggle in the middle school setting.

Procedures:

Your child (ward) will be asked to participate in sharing their perceptions of being a female African American student in middle school. Participation is voluntary and you or your child may request for your child to be withdrawn from the partner school participation at any time. The researcher will meet with your child three times. The interviews will take place at the public library and will last between 45-60 minutes. All interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recording device. Your child will be asked to keep a personal journal of her thoughts and ideas on our conversations. During those three meetings, interviews will be conducted during the first and second meetings and the last meeting will be to collect journals, debrief, and present a small gift bag to your child. Data analysis of the information gathered will be on going and a printed copy of the transcripts will be given to your child for review.

Timeline:

The actual participation will occur between August 2014 through November 2014.

Possible Risks or Discomfort:

Although there are no known risks to your child associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks.
By granting permission for your child to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you or your child may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researcher.

Potential Benefits:

Your child may benefit from participation in this research study in the following ways:

Skills – children will learn to:

- develop competence in spoken and written English
- ask and answer questions

Values and attitudes – children will learn:

- more about their racial identity
- understand the purpose of racial socialization
- learn of the importance of racial identity development

Costs and Compensation:

There are no costs to you or your child for your child's participation in this research project. At the third meeting, your child will be presented with a small gift bag which will include writing utensils such as colorful ink pens and pencils, a small notepad, lip balm, hand sanitizer, and small bottle of lotion.

Assurance of Confidentiality:

Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. The interview data will be confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone except for our research partners. All data reporting in final reports or presentations will not disclose individual's names or school identities. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information. Any published work or conference presentation resulting from this study will not include any identifying information of your child.

Data Storage and Access:

All reflective journals by students will have the name removed and a code name assigned. All data will be kept confidential throughout the study and data analysis. Electronic data (audio recordings, typed documents, etc.) will be password protected and filed in a folder on the researcher's lap top. Only the researcher will have direct access to this information. Print materials (journals, field notes, etc.) will be kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet within the

home of the researcher. The researcher, her advisor, and an external auditor will have access to the printed materials. Two years following the completion of the data analysis and reporting, all print materials will be shredded (July 2016).

Data Reporting:

Participants will not be directly named in the data reporting. Data will not be individually identifiable or reported in the final report or in any conference presentations that may result from the study. During data analysis, data will be managed in a secure manner so that participants' information is kept confidential.

Voluntary Participation:

Your decision to allow your child to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to allow your child to participate and you change your mind later, you are free to withdraw your child from the study at that time. Even if you give your permission and want your child to be part of the study, your child may decide not to participate at all. By not allowing your child to participate in this study or by withdrawing her from the study before the research is complete, you are not giving up any rights that you or your child have or any services to which you or your child are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University. Likewise, if your child decides on her own not to participate or to drop out of the study later on, she is not giving up any rights, including rights to services from Valdosta State University to which she is otherwise entitled. Your child may skip any questions that she does not want to answer. Should you decide to withdraw your child from the study after data collection is complete, the child's information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in research results.

Information Contacts:

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Victoria A. Lockhart (valockhart@valdosta.edu) at 478-952-7823. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Agreement to Participate: The research project and my child's (or ward's) role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for my child to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am either the custodial parent or legal guardian of the child. I have received a copy of this permission form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study: _____ *Yes* _____ *No*

Mailing Address:

_____

E-mail Address: _____

This research project has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants through the date noted below:

_____
Printed Name of Child/Ward

_____
Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

_____
Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX F

Adult Consent Form

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled, "*The Impact of Racial Socialization on Racial Identity of Female African American Eighth Grade Students in Middle School*." Victoria A. Lockhart, a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology at Valdosta State University, is conducting this research project. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks to your child (or ward). You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this study and your child's (or ward's) possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. From this point on in this form, the term "child" is used for either a child or a ward. Please read the remainder of this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed permission if you will allow your child to participate in this research project

Purpose of the Research:

This study involves research. The purpose of the study is to explore how racial messages from parents/guardians influence female African American students' perceptions of their racial identity and their middle school experiences. The research will focus on learning about experiences that occur during the racial socialization process, which is the concept of how parents discuss and teach their children about their race. The overall goal of the study is to increase the sensitivities of school personnel toward the manners and behaviors of "at-risk" female African-American adolescents who struggle in the middle school setting.

Procedure:

As a parent/guardian participant in the study, you will be asked to share and explain messages on the concepts of racial pride, racial barrier, self-worth, egalitarian, and negative perceptions that are your daughter(s). Participation in the interview will be voluntary. You will be interviewed once for a period of 45 to 60 minutes. I request that the interviews take place in your home in order for you to be comfortable in a familiar environment. The interview will be recorded using a digital audio recording device. You may withdraw at any time during the study. The interview material will be used to determine what messages and illustrate examples but will not be presented in its entirety in the final report. Particular viewpoints or statements will not be attributed to individuals. Confidentiality will be assured. Anonymity will be assured where possible. Data analysis of the information gathered will be on-going and a printed copy of the transcript will be given to you to check for accuracy.

Possible Risks or Discomfort:

Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks.
By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Potential Benefits:

The parent may benefit from participation in this research study in the following ways:

- Developing knowledge about racial socialization process
- Understanding about their daughters everyday lives, interests and experiences
- Encouraging communication between the parent and daughter(s)

Costs and Compensation:

There are no costs to you. There is no compensation (no money, gifts, or services) for your participation in this research project.

Assurance of Confidentiality:

Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. The interview data will be confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone except for our research partners. All data reporting in final reports or presentations will not disclose individual's names or school identities. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information. Any published work or conference presentation resulting from this study will not include any identifying information of you.

Data Storage and Access:

All data will be kept confidential throughout the study and data analysis. Electronic data (audio recordings, typed documents, etc.) will be password protected on the researcher's lap top. Print materials (journals, records, etc) will be kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet within the home of the researcher. The researcher, advisor, and an external auditor will have access to the print materials. Two years following the completion of the data analysis and reporting, all print materials will be shredded (July 2016).

Data Reporting:

Participants will not be directly named in the data reporting. Data will not be individually identifiable or reported in the final report or in any conference presentations that may result from

the study. During data analysis, data will be managed in a secure manner so that participants' information is kept confidential.

Voluntary Participation:

Your decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study. If you decide to not participate in the study, your child will not be able to participate. Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating at any time in the future will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University.

Information Contacts:

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to *Victoria A. Lockhart (valockhart@valdosta.edu) or (478) 952-7823*. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Agreement to Participate:

The research project and my role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am 18 years of age or older. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study: _____ *Yes* _____ *No*

Mailing Address:

_____

e-mail Address: _____

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____
Signature of Participant Date

_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

This research project has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants through the date noted below:

APPENDIX G

Student Demographic Profile Sheet

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SHEET

1. Pseudonym:_____

2. Grade Level:_____

3. Age:_____

4. Sex:_____

5. Name of community:_____

6. Middle school attended:_____

7. Number of years at the same school:_____

Physical Appearance/ Ethnicity

8. Black (African American) or Black (Origins from another country) — Circle One

If from a country other than the United States please list which one:

_____

9. How would you describe your physical appearance? Circle all of those that apply

Pretty	Thin hair	Big nose	Thin lips
Ugly	Thick hair	Small nose	Big lips
Cute	Natural hair	Big eyes	Curvy body
Unattractive	Relaxed hair	Small eyes	Petite (small) body
Light-skinned	Brown-skinned	Dark skinned	

Family Related Questions

10. Number in the family (who lives in your household):_____

List the members:

_____

11. Do you and your family talk about race or events dealing with race?

_____ Yes _____ No

12. Do you and your family go to church?

_____ Yes _____ No

13. What morals and values did your parent/guardian(s) instill in you?

14. Does your parent/guardian(s) advise you on how to act in school?

_____ Yes _____ No

15. Do you use the advice your parent/guardian(s) give you?
Often Sometimes Rarely Never

School Related Questions

16. Have you ever failed a class in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

If so many classes have you failed in middle school? _____

What was/were the academic subject(s)?_____

17. Have you ever been retained in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

If yes, what grade(s) were you retained?_____

18. Have you ever had an argument with another student while you were in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

19. Have you ever had a physical fight with another student while you were in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

20. Have you ever been placed in In School Suspension or Out of School Suspension in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

Number of times being in _____ISS and/or _____OSS in middle school.

21. Have you ever had an argument with a teacher while you were in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

Were you reprimanded or disciplined for this action?
_____ Yes _____ No

APPENDIX H

Parent/Guardian Demographic Profile Sheet

PARENT/GUARDIAN DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SHEET

1. Pseudonym:_____

2. Relation to Student:_____

3. Sex:_____

4. Status: Single Married Divorced Widowed

5. Number of children:_____

6. Name of community: _____

7. Highest level of education: _____

Ethnicity

8. Black (African American) or Black (Origins from another country) —Circle One

If from a country other than the United States please list which one:

_____

Family Related Questions

9. Do you talk to your daughter about race or events dealing with race?
_____ Yes _____ No

10. Do you celebrate any special days in relation to your racial background?
_____ Yes _____ No

11. Do you study the history and/ or tradition of people of your racial background?
_____ Yes _____ No

12. Do you talk to your daughter about being a female?
_____ Yes _____ No

13. Do you talk to your daughter about discrimination?
_____ Yes _____ No

14. Do you talk to your daughter about self worth?
_____ Yes _____ No

a. What morals and values you instill in your daughter?

_____

15. Do you think Black girls should receive different information from their parents about what it means to be Black in the United States?
_____ Yes _____ No

School Related Questions

16. Do you advise your daughter on how to act in school?
_____ Yes _____ No

a. What is most important advice you share with your daughter?

_____

_____

_____

17. Have you ever had to go meet with a teacher or administrator about your daughter in middle school due to an altercation?
_____ Yes _____ No

18. Have you ever been notified that your daughter was going to be placed in In School Suspension or Out of School Suspension in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

19. Have you ever been notified by your daughter's teacher of her failing a class in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

20. Has your daughter ever failed a class in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

21. Has your daughter ever been retained in middle school?
_____ Yes _____ No

APPENDIX I

Student Interview Protocol

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview 1- Past Experience

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How do you view yourself racially?
    a. Describe your racial experience (with family/friends/teachers).
3. What is good and/or bad about being a young African American?
4. What do you and your parents/guardians talk about when you come home from school?
    a. Do you talk about your friends/teachers/homework?
    b. What in particular do you talk about?
5. Do your parents/guardians give you advice?
    a. What do they tell you?
        i. Is there anything to do with race?
        ii. If yes, what do they tell you?
        iii. If no, why not?
6. Do you feel safe at school? Give examples.
    a. If so how? Why?
    b. If not how? Why?
7. Share any stories you may have to show how you feel at school and at home.
    a. Do you feel the same way at home? Please explain.
8. Did your parents help you get ready for the transition (move) to the middle school?
    a. If so, how did they help?
    b. If not, why?
9. When your mother advices you about school, how do you think she wants you to act with your peers (i.e. friendships, confrontations)?

a. …With your teachers?
b. …In your classes?

10. Share some stories about your best memories from middle school?
    a. What happened?
    b. Who are your best friends?
    c. Who do you consider as friends who are not your best friends?

11. Share some stories about your worst days in middle school (eighth grade).
    a. What happened?
    b. How did you cope/ get through that experience?
    c. What did you learn from that experience?

12. Tell me about your teachers?
    a. Do you have a favorite teacher?
    b. Why is he/she your favorite teacher?
    c. Is there a teacher you do not like?
    d. Why?

13. Tell me about the challenges you face in middle school.
    a. Challenges being African American in middle school?
    b. Explain why you feel that way.

Interview 2- Present Experiences/ Reflection on Meaning

1. During our first meeting I asked you to talk and journal about past memories of being in school and being raised at home.
    a. What were some of your reflections dealing with your race?
    b. …dealing with your events in middle school?
    c. …thinking about how your parents raised you (your racial socialization process)?

2. Understanding that your parents have provide you with morals, values, and guidance to function in school and society successful, how has your upbringing thus far, influenced you are a person?
    a. An African American?
    b. A female?
    c. A student?

3. At the first meeting, you shared with me messages (i.e. how to act in school) and practices (i.e. going to church) from your mother that were provided to shape your life. Do you always do what she told you to do?
    a. Why or Why not.

4. Do you feel you should act a different way from what your mother advises you to do?
    a. Explain why you feel that way. Think about in terms of relationships with your friends. (i.e. Verbal altercations or fights)
    b. How about relationships with your teachers?
    c. Your behavior and actions in class?

5. When your mother has conversation about race with you (and siblings), what types of behaviors (actions) do you think she wants you to do as an African American?

a. For example, how should African American children portray (act) themselves in society?
b. How should they dress?
c. How should they speak in public? With friends?

6. In the last interview, we discussed you failing a class and even failing a grade. What will you do in the future to be prevent failing again?
    a. How do you feel about failing in your academics?

7. We also discussed you being in an altercation with a student. Your action(s) resulted in you getting ISS or OSS. If the situation were to occur again, how would you handle it?
    a. How do you feel about getting suspending from school or in school?
    b. How has being suspended (in school or out of school) affected you?

8. After freely talking about how you feel being an African American female, being a student in middle school, being raised by a your mother discrimination, what knowledge have you gained?
    a. Have any of your views changed about being African American
    b. …a female?
    c. …a student?

9. What do you think other people (such teachers, parents) need to be aware of about growing up as an African American?
    a. Share and discuss any challenges or issues that are unique to being an African American girl.

APPENDIX J

Parent/Guardian Interview Protocol

PARENT/GUARDIAN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. At what age do you think it is appropriate to start talking to your daughter about race?
    a. Do you discuss the impact of your race (being African American) in society?
2. What has it been like raising an African American girl?
    a. What challenges have you faced?
3. Do you think that African American parents face particular challenges raising their children that other groups may not face?

    a. Have you faced any of these challenges?

    b. Do you feel the challenges that you face are different from those your parents faced?

Racial Pride Messages

4. How important is it for your daughter to know about her racial identity?
5. How often do you talk with your daughter about her racial identity (being African American)?
6. How does your own upbringing, for example the way your parents talked to you about your race (what it means to be African Americans), influence the process of discussing behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes of your race with your daughter?
7. How often do you find yourself talking to your child about race, racism, or about being African American/Black?
    a. Can you give me some examples of what you might talk about?

8. What kind of stories do you tell your children about what it means to be African American—either about you, other family members, or well-known African Americans?
9. Does your child ever tell you stories about experiences he/she has had related to race? Can you give me some examples?
10. Do you educate your child about Black history or encourage them to learn about the history?
11. Do you promote racial pride with your daughter?
12. Are there particular holidays that you celebrate or family traditions that you have in which you celebrate your culture and heritage as an African American?
    a. In what ways do your children participate in these practices?
    b. How did you come to adopt your current practices (i.e., are these traditions passed on from your family, have they changed over time)?
13. Is there anything you would like to change in the future in terms of how your family honors or celebrates its heritage (i.e., add or remove pieces, make it more inclusive [multicultural] or exclusive [Afro-centric], increase or decrease in frequency or amount of resources devoted)?
14. Are there certain clothing or hair styles associated with the African American community that you really like? Ones that you dislike? (e.g., braids or natural hairstyles vs. chemically processed, loud suits, etc.)
15. How does the media, for example, television and music, influence your behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes of your race (African Americans)?

Racial Barrier Messages

16. How often do you talk to your child about discrimination she may face because of her race?
17. What sort of problems do you anticipate in the future for your daughter?
    a. Do you think it is likely that your child will face racism or discrimination in the future? From who or in what settings?
18. In what ways do you attempt to protect your child from racism or discrimination? (in the form of modeling, advice)
19. What do you tell your child to do if another person calls her racially insulting names? Why?
20. As a parent do you help your daughter interpret the racial implications or meanings of the different experiences she has?
21. What is your understanding of your child‘s current level (i.e., high/low, shallow/deep) of racial awareness?
    a. Where do you think this level of understanding has come from—you, teachers, peers, church, other relatives?
        i. When did you first see evidence of this?
    b. Do you think your child knows she is African American?
    c. How does your child feel about this or what does it mean for her?

Religion/Spirituality

22. What do you think about your religious faith’s impact on how you raise your children?
    a. In what areas? Share some examples.

23. Tell me about the church you attend and how you chose it.
    a. What do you like about your church?
    b. Is there anything you would change?
    c. In what church activities do your children actively participate?

Educational Achievement

24. How do you prepare your daughter for the school environment?
    a. Are things any different for you now that your child is in elementary school?
    b. Do you notice or anticipate any differences compared to her younger siblings?
    c. What do you think about the middle school environment? Why did you (or not) find the school to be a good choice?
25. Did you notice a turning point where your daughters began act different (e.g., like during the transition to elementary school/ school work/ social interaction)?
26. Do you think African Americans students should receive different information from their European peers when it comes to being African Americans in the U.S.? If so, please give me examples?
27. What are your aspirations for your child in school?
28. When I interviewed you for the very first time you explained how you have been proactive in anticipating challenges that your child may face in school such as racism or discrimination. Has your child experienced any of these challenges yet?
    a. If so, how did you handle them?
    b. If not, what do you think has protected your child?

Conclusion

29. What kind of advice would you give other African American parents, such as myself, raising young children?

Before we end, is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you so much for participating in this interview and study!

APPENDIX K

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity- teen

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity-teen

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity –teen (MIBI-t) assess the three stable dimensions of racial identity identified by the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (Centrality, Regard, Ideology) in African American early and middle adolescents.
The MIBI-t has demonstrated evidence of both construct validity and external validity in a sample of African American middle school and high school students (Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen, under review). The MIBI-t consists of seven subscales comprised of three items each. Participants respond regarding the extent to which they agree or disagree with items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Likert Response Scale:

(1) Really Disagree; (2) Kind of Disagree; (3) Neutral; (4) Kind of Agree; (5) Really Agree

Centrality Scale

1. I feel close to other Black people.
2. I have a strong sense of belonging to other Black people.
3. If I were to describe myself to someone, one of the first things that I would say is that I'm Black.

Regard Scale

Private Regard Subscale

1. I am happy that I am Black.
2. I am proud to be Black.
3. I feel good about Black people.

Public Regard Subscale

1. Most people think that Blacks are as smart as people of other races.

2. People think that Blacks are as good as people from other races.

3. People from other races think that Blacks have made important contributions.

Ideology Scale

Assimilation Subscale

1. It is important that Blacks go to White Schools so that they can learn how to act around Whites.

2. I think it is important for Blacks not to act Black around White people.

3. Blacks should act more like Whites to be successful in this society.

Humanist Subscale

1. Being an individual is more important than identifying yourself as Black.

2. Blacks should think of themselves as individuals, not as Blacks.

3. Black people should not consider race when deciding what movies to go see.

Minority Subscale

1. People of all minority groups should stick together and fight discrimination.

2. There are other people who experience discrimination similar to Blacks.

3. Blacks should spend less time focusing on how we differ from other minority groups and more time focusing on how we are similar to people from other minority groups.

Nationalist Subscale

1. Black parents should surround their children with Black art and Black books.

2. Whenever possible, Blacks should buy from Black businesses.

3. Blacks should support Black entertainment by going to Black movies and watching Black TV shows.