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## "Do I pull the race card?" : middle-class African American parental perceptions of racism in their children's public schools

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the passage of several pieces of legislation within the past decade emphasizing home-school partnerships and their influence on students' academic achievement, this study is timely. Strong working relationships between parents and teachers are associated with many propitious educational outcomes such as increased motivation and completion rates (Comer & Poussaint, 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 2001a as cited by Thompson, 2003; Brandon, 2007). Scholars have cited several barriers to these home-school partnerships such as socioeconomic differences (Fine, 1990; Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993 as cited by Barge & Loges, 2003); styles of communication (Fine, 1990); parents' own negative schooling experiences (Aronson, 1996 as cited by Barge & Loges, 2003); and the attitude of the school board and administrators toward parental involvement (Henderson, 1988 as cited by Barge & Loges, 2003). Less carefully explored in the literature is racism's role.

This study examines parental perceptions' of racism in their children's school environment. Perceptions of racism in various contexts or domains have been reported by African Americans (Feagin, 1991; Mays, Coleman, & Jackson, 1996; Thompson Sanders, 1996), yet there are a dearth of studies examining African American parents' perceptions of racism in the domain of their children's' public schools. Context is only one of the factors involved in racism research. Indeed internal mediators such as the sociocultural variables of racial or ethnic identity also play a role in African American

perceptions of racism (Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Helms, 2007). Socioeconomic status (SES) has also been purported to show strong links to racism experiences; for example, Harrell (2000) posited “middle income” African Americans may be more likely to encounter subtle racism than low-income African Americans because of their frequent functioning within mainstream environments (p. 50). This study seeks to explore the understudied population of middle-class African American parents. It also seeks to examine the role of ethnic identity in their perceptions of racism in their children's schools.

An individual's perception or subjective judgment serves as the critical point of analysis in understanding the impact of racism on well-being (Harrell, 2000, p. 44), yet, perceptions of racism within various nondominant groups has yet to be explored as they pertain to various settings and contexts. Subjective experiences of racism are also often questioned or challenged by others (Harrell). Consequently, “such requests for “proof” can create a my-perception-against-yours dilemma that may include accusations of paranoia, hostility, oversensitivity, manipulation, self-serving motives, or having a chip on one's shoulder” (Essed, 1991 as cited by Harrell, p. 44-45). This may add an additional psychological injury to the target. Concisely, the stress and potential damage of racism lies not only in the specific incident but also in others resistance to believing and validating the reality or significance of one's personal experiences. This paper intends to incorporate middle-class, African American parents' subjective experiences of racism in the public schools, including data on their feelings about these encounters and the ways they manage them.

This study has the potential to impact social work practice and policy because it may help social workers, counselors, school personnel, legislators, and the like to be more attuned and prepared to support African American parents and students. This study may also have important implications for educational policy as it relates to school curriculum and the recruitment and retention of school personnel that are more representative of various groups of colors and their cultural values, ideas, and norms. The literature review that follows includes the research findings of other researchers on the phenomenon of racism and a review of some of the parental participation literature.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter considers some of the extant literature on racism and its purported affects on African Americans in order to explore middle-class, African American parental perceptions' of the phenomenon in their children's public schools. A definition of racism is conceptualized that will guide the study. Literature describing the ways in which the United States public school system may perpetuate racism is also reviewed. Jones (1972) delineated three primary categories of racism that are described in this chapter: individual, institutional, and cultural (as cited by Harrell, 2000). These categories serve as a framework for the school-based experiences with racism documented in the literature and are used throughout this study.

This chapter also examines parental involvement and participation literature, particularly studies involving samples of African American parents, and illuminates some of the limitations of these studies. Scholars' findings of variables that mediate perceptions of discrimination, such as ethnic identity and SES, will be summarized briefly. Finally, Feagin's (1991) findings of middle-class African Americans' responses to discrimination in other contexts will be investigated for comparison with participants' responses in this study.

#### *Overview*

African Americans are exposed to overt and subtle forms of both inadvertent and advertent racism daily. These practices, also called “everyday racism,” are associated

with the diminished well-being of people of color (Hudson Banks, Kohn-Wood & Spencer, 2006; King, 2005; Clark, Anderson, Clark & Williams, 1999; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald & Bylsma, 2003, p. 39). For instance, based on the reports of over 520 black adults of various SES', Klonoff, Landrine, and Ullman (1999) found racial discrimination significantly contributed to the respondents' psychiatric symptoms (p. 335).

A more recent study by Carter (2007) found trauma was directly related to racism encounters, while Noh & Kaspar (2003) found links with discrimination and depression. Consequently, racism's effects on African American individuals, families, communities, and society overall, is far-reaching, posing significant barriers to all. More specifically, it hinders African Americans' abilities to contribute to and benefit from society's opportunities and relative prosperity (United States Department of Health and Human Services). A deeper understanding of racism is needed to assess more fully its effects on African Americans, explore the sites or domains in which it is encountered, and acknowledge its various forms.

Racism research has undergone major changes within the past decades, due to scholars' great strides the field, allowing for a better grasp of the phenomenon. Historically, much of the research on racism has relied on explicit or overt forms such as name-calling or physical violence. Nonetheless, researchers began integrating ideas of racism as subtle, unconscious, structural, or institutional in their studies (Brandon, 2007; Swim et al., 2003; Hare, 1987). Another common aspect of past research on racism has been its narrow focus on assessing the beliefs and behaviors of whites (Swim et al.; Harrell, 2000); however, an increase in researchers of color since the 1980s has paralleled

an increase in studies incorporating the voices of people of color. Thus, a burgeoning approach to understanding racism appears to be exploring, observing, and investigating people of colors' experiences with racism (Feagin, 1991; Swim et al.). The benefits of focusing on targets' perspectives include a better grasp of the scope, frequency, and forms of racism (Dovidio et al., 1996, as cited by Swim et al; Feagin & Sikes, 1995). Moreover, relying on self-reports of racism encounters and experiences from people of color rather than the voice of the dominant culture is a mode of empowerment (Swim et al.). These changes in racism research have assisted scholars in broader assessments of the phenomenon and its effects.

Of the scarce literature exploring African American adults' experiences with racism, the domains of employment (Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991), housing (Idson & Price, 1992), public accommodations (Feagin, 1991), and higher education (Farrell & Jones, 1988; Swim et al.) have garnered attention. For instance, Feagin's (1991) study of "anti-black discrimination" in public accommodations drew on 37 in-depth interviews of middle-class African Americans, a population often ignored in studies incorporating African Americans.

Despite the literature's attention to African Americans in the aforementioned domains, there still exists a dearth of studies exploring African American parents' experiences with racism in the public school domain. African American parental perceptions' of racism in their children's schools may have implications for lower student achievement, parents' psychological well-being, school participation, partnerships with school personnel, and more. For instance, one of the reasons for the academic gap

between African American and white children are low rates of parent involvement among African American parents (Wallis, 1995 as cited by Trotman, 2001).

Coinciding with this research has been the emergence of scholarship on the isolation and alienation of African American parents from public schools (Brandon, 2007; Bempechat, 1992). Not only may African American parents' reported isolation correspond with findings of their low rates of parental involvement (Bempechat), but also this isolation may be associated with their experiences of racism in the schools (as cited by Brandon). These findings suggest African American parents may be isolated from their children's schools because of their experiences with racism, among other reasons, thereby impacting their rate of school involvement.

Present parental participation research often relies on the cultural deficit model to explain behavioral differences between dominant and nondominant racial groups in the educational realm (Farkas & Johnson, 1999). In contrast, Bempechat's (1992) study was one of the few that explicitly suggested a direct link between low rates of parental involvement and racism (as cited by Brandon 2007). According to Farkas & Johnson, the cultural deficit model often depicts some nondominant groups of color as incapable or unwilling to attain the levels of socioeconomic and academic status purportedly obtained by the dominant culture. Inherent vulnerabilities and limitations within these cultures or groups are emphasized as barriers to attainment, the authors asserted.

Other studies exploring African American parental participation highlighted parents' reports of feeling unwelcome (Calabrese, 1990), intimidated (Koonce & Harper, 2005), and not respected (Brandon, 2007). Despite these findings, research examining the extent to which parents' perceived racism's contribution to their limited school



experiences and, as well as that of their children, is scarce. Moreover, much of the parental involvement research that includes African American perspectives draws from low SES, urban populations for samples, inadvertently disregarding the heterogeneity of the African American population.

The 2000 Educate America Act, the passage of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, and the subsequent 2002 Supreme Court's decision to uphold parents' rights to choose their children's schools emphasizes the need for public schools to address their relationships with parents, particularly African American parents (Trotman, 2001; Thompson, 2003). For instance, Trotman noted, "The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, consisted of a series of important pieces of legislation that emphasizes strengthening parent-school-community partnerships and promoting parent involvement in learning" (p. 277).

Similarly, the 2001 No Child Left Behind act also "legally mandates educators to establish relationships with parents" (Trotman, 2001). More than ever school personnel are accountable for their interactions with parents because of these legislations' current emphasis on the important role of parent and school partnerships in our society. It is imperative that school personnel consider the ways in which racism, in its various forms, may facilitate the alienation and isolation of African American parents, thus hindering effective collaborations and partnerships between parents and educators.

Reed & Sautter (1990) extended the call for school personnel to take this reflective stance, maintaining that parents could play a strong role in the "school-based" lives of their children only when that role is meaningful, empowered, and long lasting (as cited by Trotman, 2001, p. 278). By sharing their perceptions of racism within their

child's school environment, African American parents may help inspire school personnel to consider attitudes, practices, and beliefs that advertently and inadvertently perpetuate racism in overt and covert ways.

In sum, African American parents may perceive a relationship between their feelings of isolation, intimidation, and alienation and their perceptions of racism. Studies exploring African American parental perceptions' of racism may also shed light on the feelings of isolation and findings of decreased school participation among African American parents.

#### *Towards A Definition and Conceptualization of Racism*

The extant scientific literature reveals a lack of consensus on the definition of racism (Farley, 1988 as cited by Clark, Anderson, Clark et al., 1999; Bonilla-Silva, 1996; Harrell, 2000; Bulhan, 1985; Jones, 1972; Ridley, 1995 as cited by Harrell, 2000). This disparity hinders the integration of studies, theoretical advancements and empirical study on the phenomenon (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding & Walberg, 2005). Among the numerous conceptualizations demonstrated within the literature, racism has been defined as a diagnosable and treatable clinical disorder (Poussaint, 1999; Skillings & Dobbins, 1991; Wilkins, 1992 as cited by Wellman, 2000) practices and acts (Broman, Mavaddat & Hsu, 2000) cognitions and perceptions (Wellman) and attitudes or beliefs that may be acted upon (Loo, Fairbank et al., 2001 as cited by Wellman). For instance, McBride Murry, Brown, Brody, Cutrona & Simons (2001), in their study of the links among maternal psychological functioning, family relationships, and racism, rely on a conceptualization of racism limited to acts committed against a target.

Nonetheless, racism appears to be portrayed most often as an ideology and attitude impacting dominant and nondominant intergroup and intragroup behaviors (Harrell, 2000; Bonilla-Silva, 1996; Benedict, 1945; van de Berghe, 1967). The effects of this limited perspective of racism have implications for research on the phenomenon. Bonilla-Silva, in his review of traditional and alternative approaches to racism, stated, “racism as defined by mainstream social scientists to consist only of ideas, does not provide adequate theoretical foundation for understanding racial phenomena” (p. 474-475). Wellman (2000) argued it is necessary for researchers to work with an understanding of racism that extends considerably beyond prejudiced beliefs and attitudes, particularly since survey data indicates that prejudiced thinking has “radically declined over the last 50 years” (p.30 ).

Other problems exist with conceptualizations of racism in the literature. Bonilla-Silva (1996) highlighted the lack of empirically supportive evidence. Schuman, Steeh and Bobo (1985) and Sniderman and Piazza (1993) argued some social analysts assume the phenomenon is self-evident and fail to provide a definition at all (as cited by Bonilla-Silva). Finally, many scholars tend to ignore the role of structures and institutions in maintaining power and privilege for dominant culture (Allen & Chung, 2000; Bonilla-Silva, 1996; Hare, 1987; Harrell, 2000). Bonilla-Silva asserted, “Until a structural framework is developed, analysts will be entangled in ungrounded ideological views of racism” (p. 474-475.) Nevertheless, despite the conflicts involving the definition and conceptualization of racism, extant research appears to support its existence in various forms.

This paper will rely on the use of a definition of racism that will not only account for these seemingly disjointed definitions of racism but also highlight the structural aspects, which have been invoked by Bonilla-Silva (1996) and Wellman (2000). Harrell's (2000) summation of racism, allows for a comprehensive understanding and conceptualization of racism that will guide this qualitative research inquiry. She reported racism as:

A system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable; and occurring in circumstances where members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideologies, values and behavior that have the intent or effect of leaving nondominant-group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status, and/or equal access to societal resources. (p. 43)

### *Public Schools*

The United States public school system is one of many institutions perpetuating and maintaining racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1996, p. 475; Cooper & Jordan, 2003). African American children, parents, and caregivers have been “historically marginalized, maligned, and misunderstood by educators” (Thompson, 2002a, in press, as cited by Thompson, 2003, p. 8). A two-year study by Gartrell-Nadine (1995) found African American parents had been “tracked” into participating in programs targeted for their

children, yet these programs held little importance to the school's operation (as cited by Casanova, 1996, p. 31).

In a separate study, Gartrell-Nadine also revealed overt practices of exclusion operating at a school. For instance, she noted a "two-tiered reception process" provided well-crafted and comprehensive information to white parents through an administrator-guided tour (as cited by Casanova, p.31). In contrast, she observed a less elaborate and brief meeting was held in the school office for parents of color. A review of the literature documents additional examples of racism inadvertently and advertently at work within the public school system.

Jones (1972) delineated three primary categories of racism this study will use to explore middle-class African American perceptions of racism: individual, institutional and cultural (as cited by Harrell, 2000). These categories interact with each other in various ways and are not mutually exclusive (Harrell). They are used to here to provide a framework for the various types of school-based experiences with racism documented in the literature.

According to Harrell (2000), individual racism consists of a personal belief in the inferiority of a racial or ethnic group. In order to "provide a more adequate theoretical foundation for understanding racial phenomena," this study will expand on these criteria (Bonilla-Silva, 1996, 474-475). This study operationalizes individual racism as the behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and values of a dominant culture member that has the intent or effect of excluding a nondominant culture member from power, equal access to societal resources, and the like (Harrell). Essentially, individual racism focuses on interactions involving a handful of actors (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1973).

An example of individual racism in the school domain might involve a student from a nondominant culture being targeted with racial epithets, slurs, or symbolic gestures, such as a noose being hung from a tree. Another less clear-cut example, in that it may also be interpreted as an example of institutional racism, includes student-teacher interactions. A researcher observation study by Casteel (1998) found that African American seventh-graders received more negative interactions from their white teachers in racially mixed classrooms than did white seventh graders. In addition, his study also found that white students received a greater proportion of positive interactions such as receiving praise, positive feedback and more clues by their teachers more frequently than did African American students.

Casteel's study was one of the few in the literature conducted in a suburban school system. Equally important, the study's findings are consistent with results from previous studies highlighted in the literature where researchers found that teacher-student interactions were racially-biased in integrated classrooms, indicating that race is still a significant factor in the amount of contact a student receives (Casteel, p. 119). Despite these findings, a dearth of research continues to exist in the literature exploring African American parents' perceptions of individual racism in their child's public school.

Downs (1976) defined institutional racism as "placing or keeping persons in a position or status of inferiority by means of attitudes, actions, or institutional structures which do not use color itself as the subordinating mechanism, but instead use other mechanisms indirectly related to color" (as cited by Bullock & Rodgers, 1976, p. 212). This operationalization of institutional racism is in line with a theoretical foundation for understanding racial phenomena more adequately as proposed by Bonilla-Silva (1996)

and as conceptualized by Harrell (2000), which guides this study. It addresses the structural aspect of racism and identifies it as more than an ideology.

Bullock and Rodgers (1976) also argued institutional racism tends to be less obvious because its application includes other groups, and intent may not be present. Similarly, a white teacher reflecting on her recognition of the various forms of institutional racism she encountered in her teaching career, expands on this idea:

. . . . institutional racism typically isn't ugly. Rather than being expressed through racial slurs, it tends to be wrapped in noble proclamations of tradition, fairness, and high standards. Rather than being a rare incident, it is woven into the fabric of our historically racist society. (Hanssen, 1998, p.8)

For instance, Jeannie Oakes's influential work on tracking practices in high schools (1985) revealed how students of color were more likely to be assigned to lower track classrooms characterized by “conformity and low-level thinking (computation, memorizing, and basic facts)” (as cited by Cooper & Jordan, 2003). The disproportionate placement of African American children in special education classes, lower academic tracks, and emotionally handicapped classes are facilitated in part by the use of practices and policies that unintentionally deny African American youth equal access to an high quality education (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). Differences in performance between white and African American students on standardized tests are rationalized mostly by cultural deficit model perspectives resulting in the segregation of African American students (Helms, 1992; Hilliard, 1990; Mensh & Mensh, 1991; Nieto, 1992 as cited by Cooper & Jordan).

Cultural racism is characterized by dominant culture's attempts to maintain the status quo by privileging their physical appearance, ways of thinking, and ways of acting or behaving to the exclusion and rejection of African Americans and other groups of color. For instance, although many schools celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday or Chinese New Year, these events are often limited in various ways such as frequency and scope. Additionally, norms about race and culture are seldom identified, acknowledged, and addressed (Cooper & Jordan, 2003).

Another example of cultural racism is the predominance of a Eurocentric curriculum that excludes the influences, ideas, and nonstereotypic representations of African Americans and other groups of color (Hanssen, 1998). Similarly, the physical environment of many schools lacks artwork, decor, and the like characterizing other ethnicities. The schools may also disproportionately portray stereotypic depictions of ethnically-visible African Americans [such as athletes and entertainers]. In sum, racism in schools has been linked with a predominance of a Eurocentric curriculum and dominant culture norms, values, and behaviors; teacher expectancies; a lack of educators of color; high dropout rates among African American students; disproportionate numbers of suspensions; special education and low track placements among African American students; and more. These findings indicate no other social institution impacts the lives and, more specifically, the mental health of black people in such a direct and significant way (Harvey, 1984).

The number one most cited school-related problem in one of the few studies incorporating the voices of African American parents through a qualitative model of research was racism (Thompson, 2003). Several limitations impacted the generalizability



of this study's findings. About 75 percent of respondents had children who attended schools at a large, urban school district in Southern California where most of the schools were designated as “underperforming.” This suggests the parents were in a low SES. Moreover, the researcher operationalized racism solely as overt acts by a dominant group member targeting people of color.

This study will attempt to build on Thompson’s study by using a qualitative exploratory approach to give voice to parents’ perceptions of racism within the public school system, which is dearth in the literature; rely on respondents with a middle-income SES; use respondents who self-identify as African American; and rely on an operationalization of racism that rests on a structural framework. The structural framework may allow parents to identify institutional aspects of racism they have perceived within the context of their child’s public school environment.

#### *African American Parental Perceptions' of the School Environment*

A review of the literature identified contrasting views held between school personnel and parents of color regarding parents’ barriers to school partnerships and parental participation. Among the findings, African American parents reported feelings of alienation (Brandon, 2007; Calabrese, 1990) and isolation (Brandon, 2007; Harry, 1992 as cited by Koonce & Harper, 2005); intimidation and hostility (Calabrese, 1990) by school personnel; feeling unwelcome (Bradley, Johnson, Rawls & Dodson-Sims, 2005; Calabrese, 1990); and not respected (Bradley, 2007). Bempechat (1992) asserted the implications for these parents’ perceptions are a profound negative impact on children and less parental participation (as cited by Brandon, 1992).

Despite these findings, these quantitative studies have several limitations in common. First, most relied on self-selected, ad hoc, and nonrandom samples, recruited from a single or small number of settings (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999 as cited by Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997) or from a single or small number of cities (Hughes, 2003 as cited by Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997); thereby impacting the generalizability of the findings. Effect sizes also have not been reported (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). Finally, these studies relied on respondents who were part of large, urban samples and held a low SES.

#### *Middle-class African Americans*

Research studies examining African Americans tend to rely disproportionately on respondents who are low-income and reside in urban areas. Arnold (2002), for example, found that the focus of counseling researchers has been on African American families who are poor and “on welfare,” and it depicts them as representing the majority of African American parents (as cited by Bradley et al., 2005, p. 424). Analysts argue that this “unbalanced, deficit-oriented approach obscures the broader picture of African Americans and creates “narrow, flat images” of African American family life (Arnold, 1994 as cited by Bradley et al., p. 424). My qualitative study will explore the perceptions of middle-class African Americans. For the purposes of this study, middle-class will be operationalized by respondents’ income or education.

Scholars have posited SES and education are linked with perceptions of racism (Forman, Williams & Jackson, 1997; Harrell, 2000), although this connection appears multifarious. Some research has noted, for example, that education is positively related to race-based discrimination (Kessler, Mickelson & Williams, 1999) whereas others have

invoked that SES is inversely related to racism perceptions (Sigelman & Welch, 1991 as cited by Clark, Anderson, Clark & Williams, 1999).

Clark et al. also invoked the association between SES and racism among African Americans depends in part on the facet of racism assessed. For instance, they found higher SES African Americans reported perceiving their environments as more “discriminatory” because of their tendency to traverse environments where racism is more covert (p. 807).

In contrast, Harrell (2000) conjectured “middle income” people of color might be more likely to encounter subtle forms of racism because of their frequent traversing in mainstream environments (p. 50). The literature has few studies exploring middle-class African American parental perceptions' of both overt and subtle forms of racism within their children's school. This study will incorporate their perceptions' of both overt and subtle racism.

### *Ethnic Identity*

Given the operationalization of middle-class, it is also essential to note this study defines both race and ethnicity as socially and sociopolitically constructed notions, in contrast to biologically or genetically-based assumptions, that are dynamic and not fixed (Allen & Chung, 2000; Cokley, 2007; Helms, 2007). Similar to racism, ethnic identity maintains multifarious definitions in the literature; consequently, this is “indicative of confusion about the topic” (Phinney, 1992). Phinney further argued this confusion, in part, stems from research that bypasses conceptualization of the term. For the purposes of this study, ethnic identity is defined as “. . . the subjective sense of ethnic group membership that involves self-labeling, sense of belonging, preference for the group,

positive evaluation of the ethnic group, ethnic knowledge, and involvement in ethnic group activities” (Phinney, 1990, 1996 as cited by Cokley, 2007).

Phinney (1989) offered a condensed model of progression of stages of ethnic identity, based on Marcia’s (1966) ego identity model (as cited by Phinney, 1992). Phinney’s model, consists of an “unexamined ethnic identity stage through a period of exploration and [ultimately] to an achieved or committed ethnic identity” (as cited by Phinney, p. 158). Based on this model of ethnic identity, those possessing little awareness of ethnic issues embody the “Unexamined Ethnic Identity Stage (UEIS),” the first stage of Phinney’s three-stage model. The second stage, Moratorium or Ethnic Identity Search, is characterized by an individual’s involvement in exploring and seeking to understand the meaning of one’s ethnicity. The last stage is Achieved Ethnic Identity characterized by the possession of confidence in one’s ethnicity.

Phinney’s model is unique in many ways. First, it relies on self-identification of ethnicity by participants. Secondly, it uses a multidimensional construct of ethnic identity, focusing on three aspects of ethnic identity: affirmation—sense of belonging toward one’s ethnic group; achievement—“exploration and resolution of ethnic identity attitudes;” and behaviors—the extent to which one participates in practices perceived as representing one’s ethnic group (Cokley, 2007, p. 227).

Finally, counseling psychology literature has suggested that cross sectional and longitudinal research support most of Phinney’s model. Although there are current unanswered questions regarding a moratorium or crisis stage of identity, several longitudinal studies have demonstrated associations between perceptions of discrimination and later increases in ethnic identity (Quintana, 2007). In relation to this

study, this finding suggests middle-class African American parents that perceive discrimination in their child's public school might present as more affirmed with African American culture, demonstrating more evolved achievement and a familiarity with cultural practices.

### *Reactions and Responses to Perceived Racism*

According to Feagin (1991), black responses to white discrimination illuminates the changing character of interactions between black and white groups in the United States. Historically, blacks had a tendency of deferring to whites that discriminated against them as a survival mechanism—protection from white violence and other forms of black backlash. Feagin refers to this as “deference ritual,” which according to Goffman (1956) is characterized as symbolic ways of regularly expressing “appreciation” (as cited by Feagin, p. 102).

Notably, some blacks may have outwardly deferred to whites through behaviors, including verbal responses, yet their inner feelings and motives were expressed only among the safety of the Church, family, and friends. Many African Americans also engaged in hidden activities such as protests, marches, or assisting fellow slaves in escaping to freedom (Feagin, 1991) while maintaining their outward deference ritual to whites. Feagin invoked since the passing of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, deference ritual is common only to certain groups of African Americans such as black maids. This study conjectures that deference ritual may still serve as a safe response for some middle-class African Americans, although they may engage in divergent behaviors and possess divergent feelings in other contexts. Nonetheless, the exploration of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study.

Feagin also suggested blacks' reactions to discrimination in public accommodations reflected the "site" and type of discrimination. In other words, responses to discrimination in various public domains will vary, depending on the situation and actors involved. For example, common responses to "racial hostility" in the street (perpetuated by strangers) were withdrawal by "ending the treatment with resigned acceptance" or a verbal response (p. 104). Nevertheless, other instances also increased the likelihood of the use of responses such as resigned acceptance or mild verbal protests (Feagin). These included instances where responses were restricted by danger, such as police harassment.

In contrast, rejection or poor service in public accommodations provided blacks the opportunity to respond verbally, Feagin suggested, with the most common responses to being verbal confrontations or resigned acceptance. He found some blacks corrected whites quietly, while others responded by lecturing or educating the person about discrimination or threatened court action. These black-white interactions are in stark contrast to black-white interactions prior to the passing of the Civil Rights Act (Feagin, 1991). In a similar vein, this study will consider middle-class African American parents' responses and reactions to racism perceived at the site of their child's school. This study will note patterns between perceptions of overt racism and parental responses and compare them to perceptions of covert racism and related responses, thus building on Feagin's study (1991).

As with all research, there are limitations to Feagin's study; for instance, black is left undefined. Consequently, one can only assume that the focus was specifically on African Americans. This study opted to allow participants' to self-identify their ethnicity

to aid empirical study of the phenomenon. Another limitation of Feagin's study was its reliance on examining overt behaviors of the dominant group. This study, by operationalizing racism to include structural and individual forms discriminatory acts as well as the stereotypes, attitudes, values and norms of the dominant group to the exclusion of nondominant groups, will build on an element of Feagin's study, allowing for more in-depth exploration. Consequently, verbal responses may vary by the type of racism encountered in addition to the school site.

Feagin also limited his study to examining blatant or overt forms of discrimination; however, the subtle nature of covert racism, including institutionalized racism, may impact one's responses. Despite these limitations, Feagin's study is significant in that it highlighted racism as a pervasive barrier to middle-class blacks, despite their perceived social, financial, and educational capital. In sum, although numerous variables may mediate an individual's responses or reactions to perceived racism, this study will focus on the site and type of racism perceived by middle-class African American parents as mediators.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) what are middle-class, African American parental perceptions' of racism in their child's public school environment 2) is there an association between a parent's ethnic identity stage and their perception of racism in their child's public school environment 3) what are the ways in which parents respond or react to these encounters with racism and 4) do the types of racism encountered--subtle versus covert, institutional, versus individual--mediate parents' responses?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore middle-class African American parental perspectives' of racism in their children's public schools. Exploratory, qualitative studies generally emphasize investigating new or poorly defined phenomenon in context, with detail, and using small samples (Anastas, 1999). This type of study will be necessary since middle-class African Americans appear as an understudied population in the literature.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) what are parents' perceptions of racism in their child's public school 2) is there an association between a parent's ethnic identity stage and their perception of racism in their child's public school environment 3) what are the ways in which parents respond or react to these encounters with racism and 4) do the types of racism encountered--subtle versus covert, institutional, versus individual--mediate parents' responses? This chapter will present the research design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures used in this study.

#### *Research Design*

A flexible methods design along with open-ended interviewing was used resulting in thematically analyzed narratives from each of the participants. Flexible methods allow the researcher to capture the richness of data and "its closeness to the experience of participants" (Anastas, 1999, p. 285).



### *Sample*

Twelve (12) self-identified African Americans with at least one school-aged child, who respondents' also identified as African American, were interviewed. A sample size of 12-15 is adequate for allowing a variety of perspectives yet small enough to yield the rich, narrative data of the participants' experience central to an exploratory, flexible method study (Anastas, 1999). The researcher will depend on replication logic rather than sampling representativeness for the validity of conclusions (Anastas).

Other selection criteria for potential participants included: being at least 18-years-of-age; having at least one school-aged child between the ages of 10 and 12 who currently attends public school; and a total household income at least \$48, 451 (total median household income for a family of 2.61, according to the US Census Bureau, 2007) or a bachelor's degree. The researcher relied on selection criteria to secure population membership during recruitment for the study because access to a preexisting sampling frame for the population of interest was inaccessible (Anastas, 1999). It is also important to note that locating African American parents with at least one child between the ages of 10 and 12 years of age became increasingly challenging due to the time constraints of this research project. Thus, the researcher was given permission by the research advisor to change the study's criteria to include parents with schoolchildren of any age group.

A nonprobability convenience sample was employed to identify potential participants. Acquaintances, professors, internship supervisors, and colleagues of the researcher were approached and investigated to see if they fit the study's selection criteria. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) argued against researchers using participants with

whom one is acquainted professionally or socially (as cited by Anastas, 1999). Nevertheless, the professional and social contacts approached for this study met the feasibility requirements of an accidental sample Anastas highlighted: they met the selection criteria and were easily available. Accidental samples may also introduce a “volunteer factor” that brings bias into the results impossible to define, but maintaining consistent selection criteria and upholding the sampling site strategy helps to maintain the scale of the study results (Anastas, 1999, p. 286). The researcher maintained consistent selection criteria for the study and upheld the sampling site strategy, thereby decreasing the opportunity of a volunteer factor.

The researcher also relied on local events in the African American community such as book readings and youth sports events for recruiting potential participants; hence, parents were recruited through word-of-mouth. Participants successfully recruited for the study as well as those who declined were also asked to recommend others; therefore, a snowball sampling technique was also employed. The researcher asked those that gave referrals (recommenders) to obtain first the potential participants’ permission for a brief screening via telephone. The researcher instructed recommenders to submit only the contact information of individuals who have given their permission to be contacted by the researcher for screening. The researcher contacted these persons within 24 – 72 hours of receiving their contact information.

#### *Data Collection*

Procedures delineating participants’ rights were created in a proposal of this study and presented to the Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) at Smith College School for Social Work prior to data collection. Approval of the proposal (see Appendix A)

indicated the study was in accordance with the NASW Code of Ethics and the Federal regulations for the Protection of Human Research Subjects.

Initially, the researcher proposed face-to-face, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with candidates at a mutually convenient location. Nevertheless, because of this research project's time constraints as well as potential participants' allusions to the personal inconvenience of an in-person interview, the researcher later obtained permission to conduct interviews over the phone. Thus, data was collected either in face-to-face format (n=5) or by phone (n=7). The questions were semi-structured so they could elicit information around the themes of individual, cultural, and institutional forms of racism (Jones, 1974 as cited by Harrell, 2000) perceived (see Appendix B). They were also open-ended enough to prompt respondents to discuss their personal experiences, reactions, and responses to the questions, facilitating rich, detailed descriptions.

Interview days and times were set up with selected candidates. Interviews were usually conducted during the late evening for those contacted by phone because of participants' familial and work responsibilities. Almost all phone participants indicated they were alone during the interview; however, one acknowledged the presence of their spouse and toddler while completing the interview. At the beginning of the phone interviews, the researcher verbally reviewed the informed consent (see Appendix C) with participants. Participants were asked to acknowledge verbally the informed consent and were emailed a copy to peruse individually. The informed consent outlined their rights of participation as well as some potential risks and benefits. A referral list (see Appendix D) was also emailed to participants with the informed consent form.

Face-to-face interviews were usually conducted in the respondent's office at their place of employment (n=3) or at home (n=2). At the beginning of the face-to-face interviews, the researcher verbally reviewed the informed consent with participants. Participants were given two copies of the informed consent form to peruse individually and sign. One copy of the signed form was given to participants to keep, and the researcher collected the duplicate copy.

The interviews were presented in a non-intrusive manner. The data was collected as consistently as possible throughout all interviews. An open-ended interview guide was used followed by a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E) and The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992) (see Appendix F). All participants were asked the same set of standard questions although additional questions varied as subjects were often asked to elaborate on or clarify certain responses.

The interview guide consisted of 18 questions, written for the express purpose of this study. In order to assure participant confidentiality, demographic information, researcher notes, transcripts, and CD's containing downloads of digitally recorded interviews were separated from informed consent documents and were numerically coded. Any names or other identifiable information from participants that were recorded during the interviews were removed or disguised during transcription and for use in the final thesis project. Permission to digitally record interviews was requested and obtained before any recordings took place, and only the researcher conducted and transcribed the interviews.

Approximately two hours was designated to conduct the full interview, allotting time to provide introductions, answer any questions, and debrief. The actual recorded

interviews lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to one (1) hour and 20 minutes. All interviews took place between March and April 2008. There were often days where no interviews were conducted. Several persons gave the researcher a number to contact them but were unavailable at the appointed time. One potential participant started an interview, answering the first interview question, but never completed it. This person had to end the interview suddenly because their children required their attention. Later, this candidate never responded to any of this researcher's attempts to complete the interview.

### *Data Analysis*

Transcripts were reviewed to identify data relevant to the three forms of racism specified in the Literature Review: individual, cultural, and institutional. Transcripts were also analyzed for major themes that were not sought out by the semi-structured interview guide but were raised by respondents during the interview. A flipchart was used to depict ideas and themes identified from the data according to topic areas and across participants, providing a large, visual representation of the data and allowing the researcher to identify patterns clearly. Direct quotes of participants' narratives were used to corroborate the themes and ideas. Data, as well as ideas and themes from the data, were also weighed against findings in the literature review. It is hoped the data gathered through this study and presented here will stimulate and inform future research.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### *Introduction*

A review of the literature suggests low rates of parental involvement among African American parents as well as feelings of alienation and isolation from their children's public schools. Bempechat (1992) indicated parents' isolation may be related to findings of their decreased school participation and collaboration with personnel. Furthermore, she argued African American parents' isolation of is connected with encounters of racism in the schools (as cited by Brandon, 2007). Despite research exploring African Americans experiences with racism in the public accommodations (Feagin, 1991), housing (Idson & Price, 1992), and higher education domains (Farrell & Jones, 1988; Swim et al., 2003), there is an absence of studies exploring African Americans' experiences with racism in their child's public school.

The number one most cited school-related problem in one of the few studies incorporating the voices of African American parents through a qualitative model of research was racism (Thompson, 2003). This study attempted to build on Thompson's (2003) study by using a qualitative exploratory approach to give voice to middle-class African American parents' perceptions of racism within the public school system, which is dearth in the literature, and use respondents who self-identify as African American.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) what are middle-class African American parental perceptions' of racism in their child's public school

environment 2) is there an association between a parent's ethnic identity stage and their perception of racism in their child's public school environment 3) what are the ways in which parents respond or react to these encounters with racism and 4) do the types of racism encountered--subtle versus covert, institutional, versus individual--mediate parents' responses?

This chapter will present the data from the study's open-ended, semi-structured interviews, demographic survey, and ethnic identity survey. The categories this researcher will be analyzing using qualitative methods are individual, cultural, and institutional forms of perceived racism (Jones 1972 as cited by Harrell, 2000). These categories interact with each other in various ways and are not mutually exclusive (Harrell).

This study operationalized individual racism as the behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and values of a dominant culture group member that has the intent or effect of excluding a nondominant group member from power, equal access to societal resources, and so forth (Harrell, 2000). Essentially, individual racism focuses on interactions involving a handful of actors (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1973). Institutional racism can involve individual acts of racism, and is operationalized in this study as:

. . . placing or keeping persons in a position or status of inferiority by means of attitudes, actions, or institutional structures which do not use color itself as the subordinating mechanism, but instead use other mechanisms indirectly related to color. (Downs, 1970 as cited by Bullock & Rodgers, 1976, p. 212)

A white teacher, reflecting on her recognition of the various forms of institutional racism she encountered in her teaching career, vividly conveyed this notion:

. . .institutional racism typically isn't ugly. Rather than being expressed through racial slurs, it tends to be wrapped in noble proclamations of tradition, fairness, and high standards. Rather than being a rare incident, it is woven into the fabric of our historically racist society. (Hanssen, 1998, p.8)

Cultural racism, which can also serve as an aspect of institutional racism, is characterized by the dominant culture's attempts to maintain the status quo by privileging their physical appearance, ways of thinking, and ways of behaving to the exclusion of African Americans and other groups of color. For instance, although many schools celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday or Chinese New Year, these events are often limited in various ways such as frequency and scope. Additionally, norms about race and culture are seldom identified, acknowledged, and addressed (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). These three categories of racism will provide a framework for presenting the data in this chapter and for analyzing the data using qualitative methods in the subsequent Discussion chapter. The meanings and implications of these findings also will be addressed in the Discussion chapter.

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of men (n=4) and women (n=8). Respondents described their relationship to the child referenced in their responses as biological mother (n=7); biological father (n=3); stepfather (n=1); or other (n=1), with "other" depicted as guardian--aunt. Respondents' ages ranged from 25-57 at the time of the interview with



the following age categories selected 25-37 (n=5); 38-44 (n=5); and 45-57 (n=2).

Respondents referenced male (n=5) and female children (n=7). The youngest age of the represented among the children was 7 and the oldest was 17.

The majority of respondents held at least a bachelor's degree (n=9), yet they varied greatly in their levels of schooling. Most held a bachelor's degree only (n=5); others reported at least one doctorate (n=1); at least one master's degree (n=3); associate's degree (n=2); or no degree but having taken college-level courses (n=1).

All but one respondent reported a middle- to upper-middle-class SES (n=11). Others reported an income at or above \$100,000 annually (n=3); an income range of \$80,000-\$99,999 (n=3); \$60,000 - \$79,999 (n=4); and \$20-\$39,999 annually (n=1). For the sake of demonstrating consistency in my study, the respondent reporting an income in the latter range possessed a bachelor's degree.

The majority of respondents reported their marital status as married (n=7). Others reported their status as single (n=5). Most participants reported living in predominantly mixed neighborhoods consisting of black, white, and Latino residents (n=5). Other types of neighborhoods indicated were predominantly white (n=4) and predominantly black (n=3). The majority of participants said they lived in suburbs outside of small or large cities. Almost all were from the southernmost part of New England with the exceptions (n=2) representing New York state. One of these respondents lived in New York City while the other resided in a suburb outside of the City.

The type of school respondents' children attended was almost evenly split among the main categories: four (n=4), indicated the child referenced in their responses attended schools with predominant amounts of black children (more than 55 percent); four (n=4)

said their child attended schools with predominant amounts of white children; and three (n=3) said a mixture of racial/ethnic backgrounds. One (n=1) respondent failed to address this question.

Of those participants reporting their children attending mixed schools, one characterized their child's school as 15-20 percent white with an unspecified number of black, Asian, Latino, and Indian schoolchildren in attendance. Another respondent designating this category also indicated an unspecified combination of black, white, Latino, and Asian children. The final respondent indicated a majority of Latino students (45 percent) and unspecified amounts of black and polish children present. Lastly, the majority of respondents reported their child attended a school consisting of predominantly white school personnel (n=7) and almost as many (n=5) indicated predominantly black school personnel.

#### *Ethnic Identity Survey Results*

Interestingly, all of the participants scored highly on the MEIM, indicating an achieved ethnic identity status. The lowest score was 2.75 and the highest score was 3.92 on a scale of 4.0. The modal score was 3.58. Over half of the scores were above 3.5 (n=7). An achieved ethnic identity status is characterized by the possession of confidence in one's ethnicity, affirmation with African American culture, a demonstration of more evolved achievement, and a familiarity with cultural practices. Some examples from the MEIM of the behaviors or verbalizations one would expect from an individual at this level of identity include:

I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs.

I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.

I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.

I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music or customs. (Phinney, 1992)

### *Perceptions of Individual Racism*

Respondents were asked seven (7) open-ended, semi-structured questions pertaining to their perceptions of individual racism in their children's public schools. Because of the extensive volume of data captured, the findings for only three questions will be presented here. In their respective order, three of the seven questions respondents were asked are as follows:

3) Please reflect on a time when you felt that anyone within the context of your child's school has held low expectations for African Americans in any area—academic or otherwise. Please describe your thought, feelings, and how you managed the situation.

4) Describe a time when you may have been harassed or ridiculed by anyone at your child's school because you are African American.

6) Describe a time when you felt that you or your child had been passed over for some resource within the school context because of your African American ethnicity.

The findings for these questions are categorized below as low expectations, harassed or ridiculed, and passed over.

*Low Expectations*

Fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents reported perceiving someone within the context of their child's school holding low expectations of African Americans. Forty-two percent (42%) said they did not perceive anyone holding low expectations of their child in the school. Among parents reporting no perceptions of low expectations of their child, one was a department head for a high school and middle school in an urban-suburban area whose child attended a predominantly white school:

I just think the pedagogy wasn't culturally relevant so their way of reaching um African American students they probably weren't trained to deal um to deal with ah culturally um diverse classrooms . . .

He also stressed school personnel held negative stereotypes about African Americans, but he and his wife did not fit their stereotypes. Furthermore, it appeared he suggested stereotypes could develop into low expectations:

I think that their just um perception of how African American parents might be were tainted by speaking with us [he and his spouse] in terms of like probably not having a crystal ball and saying oh well we would use like double negatives and we wouldn't be articulate um and that they had to force us to be involved . . . so it could turn into low expectations if you don't catch it.

Another parent, despite an inability to recall any personal examples of anyone holding low expectations for herself or her child, also stated, "it happens."

Of those respondents reporting perceptions of low expectations being held of their children, several felt this was true specifically in the areas of academics and conduct. One parent who perceived low expectations from school personnel at her child's school felt the low expectations were not for African American children but low-income children in general:

Umm well the one thing you should know about the school system where my child is growing up in [deleted] is that it's primarily everybody is minority. I mean even Caucasians. When you say Caucasians its Polish, so everyone is considered minority . . . So the expectations go for the city . . . I think my daughter as a result going to this middle school with these low expectations of kids who were impoverished um I think it hurt her in the long run. I think it set her back . . . I mean my child would get an "A" on an assignment. Let's say she had a science project, she would start the science project the day before it was due and get an "A" on it, and that's not because my child was just so great at science. It was (chuckles) because you know they just didn't expect much, and no matter how much I complained . . . I would say, "You're teaching them that they can be late on assignments, you're teaching them that they can do something at the last minute and still get an 'A' on it when that's not true and you're not living in the real world and you're not teaching them good study habits. . .

This parent chose to reside in this city in for personal reasons despite her middle-income SES.

Another parent recalled his son's first grade teacher holding low academic expectations for his son. He said both he and his wife often asked the teacher to challenge their son because they felt she required minimum effort from the 6-year-old. The parent found the teacher's reluctance to deviate from "the standards" and "individualize" their son's schooling "upsetting." This respondent's child attended a predominantly black school with a predominantly white school staff.

Examples of school personnel holding low expectations of African American children in the areas of conduct were also recollected. A mother of a young African American male under 10-years-of-age recalled her response when learning all the black males in her child's "diverse" first grade classroom had been placed on "behavioral contracts" within the first two weeks of a new school year:

This same teacher, now 10 days later, seven days after I first met you, you come to me in the cafeteria with a clipboard and say to me, [**Teacher:**] "Oh by the way did you know that your son is on the behavior contract? And he's got to meet these certain standards in order to earn recess time. Umm three smiley faces during the day in order to earn recess time." [**Mother:**] "No, I had no idea that he is on this." I feel my blood starting to boil, but I'm like, "Nope I had no idea that he's on this behavior contract. Is he supposed to tell me that?" [**Teacher:**] "Oh, well you know it's not punitive or anything it's just that we've noticed over the first few days he's had a hard time concentrating and so this is really just to help him keep track and stay on task." [**Mother:**] I was like, you know, "Are there other kids logged on this behavior contract?" [**Teacher:**] "Oh yes, Jonathan and Christopher." So all of a sudden my red flags went off. Jonathan is a little black

boy Christopher is little black boy. Now there's only three black boys--black boys that you have in your class and they're all three on behavior contracts by week two of school?"

The boys had been attending a predominantly white school with a population of more than 30 percent children of color and located in a predominantly white, middle--upper-middle-class, community. One of the mothers of the three boys was an African American doctor. The respondent was a licensed social worker holding more than one master's degree. Moreover, the respondent mentioned not only was she apprehensive of the three black boys being placed on behavior contracts but also concerned the children's parents had been neither informed about the contract's existence nor immediately contacted when their sons were placed on it.

Only one respondent explicitly mentioned perceiving low expectations being personally held for him as a parent. He believed many of the predominantly white school personnel at his son's predominantly black school "had been using the same teaching tactics since he [the father] had been a student there, yet they held the parents responsible" [for their children's academic deficiencies]. The school personnel were predominantly white.

#### *Harassed or Ridiculed*

Most respondents--92 percent-- reported being neither harassed nor ridiculed by anyone at their child's school. Only one respondent reported feeling as such:

The teacher walked out of a meeting called by my husband and myself because of concerns about her [the teacher's] instruction and discipline methods with our

daughter. She walked out of the meeting without trying to hear where I was coming from. I didn't raise my voice at her. In fact, I was on the phone while my husband and the principal were there [at the meeting] in person. She walked out of the meeting before I even finished voicing my concerns.

This parent spoke of feeling as though the teacher respected neither her husband nor herself as neither parents nor as professionals—both parents were employed in the counseling field; one possessed a doctorate. According to the respondent, “I felt like by her leaving in the middle of the meeting, she was saying that we were nobodies in her book. We were not worth her time and neither was our [child].” The teacher was not reprimanded for her actions by the school principal, the respondent added.

#### *Passed Over*

Fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents reported their child had never been passed over for some resource because of their African American ethnicity or that they could not recall an occurrence. Forty-two percent (42%) said their child had been passed over for some resource, and they perceived it as being related to their African American ethnicity. Of those who believed this experience had occurred, all were parents of children attending predominantly nonwhite school districts (n= 5). Four (4) of the schools had predominantly white school personnel while one had predominantly black and Latino school personnel. One parent recalled trying to get a tutor for her 7-year-old daughter through the public school. She eventually had to find a tutor outside of the school, taking on an additional expense of several hundred dollars, because she never received any response to her requests for a tutor through the public school. Later, she



discovered that two other students had received tutors. Both were white students, although the ethnicity of one student was Latino.

Another parent recalled their teenager being discouraged from applying to certain schools by the teen's guidance counselor:

My [teen] was a National Honor Society student. [The teen] wanted to do nursing. I don't know why he wasn't more encouraging to her as a young African American female who wanted to get into an employment area where there's a shortage. The thing was he was black too.

### *Perceptions of Cultural Racism*

Respondents were asked three (3) open-ended, semi-structured questions pertaining to their perceptions of cultural racism in their children's public schools. The findings to all three questions will be presented here. The three questions respondents were asked in their respective order are as follows:

10) Describe whether achievements and ideas of African American authors, thinkers, historical figures, etc., are incorporated into the school's curriculum or whether ideas for such are welcomed and used.

11) Describe whether African Americans are evidenced in the posters, artwork, and so forth displayed in the school's hallways, your child's classroom, the library, and the like? Do any of these perpetuate stereotypes about African Americans in anyway?

12) Describe how African American cultural celebrations are undertaken at your child's school or whether you feel that your child's school is an environment where ideas for African American cultural celebrations would be welcomed.

### *African Americans in the Curriculum*

Initially, it appeared respondents' children attended schools that integrated African Americans into the curriculum. Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents reported their children's schools incorporating African Americans into the school curriculum. Nevertheless, all of the parents in this group reported Black History Month and/or Martin Luther King's birthday as the only or one of the few instances where their children were taught about the achievements, ideas, services, and other contributions of blacks to the United States and the world. One parent seemed to sum up many of the respondent's concerns: "If it weren't for February they probably wouldn't talk about African Americans."

Another parent appeared to believe a concerted effort was underway to keep African American and other black contributions absent from the curriculum with jeopardizing effects: "Whites only want our kids to know what the white race has done . . . If you're going to teach history, teach the whole thing. They don't teach the whole thing, just bits and pieces, and that's not good."

Eighty-three percent (83%) of respondents believed their children's schools would be open to suggestions about incorporating contributions of blacks into the curriculum. Nevertheless, one parent highlighted her distrust in the school system that

also seemed to reverberate the beliefs of these respondents: “Well, they will listen, but they will eventually find a way to maintain the status quo.”

One parent felt his child’s school would not make any changes because African American parents would be slow to pressure the system to change:

Many parents feel that school is a place to go to get an education so they [their children] can work; not as a channel to be educated about black history. They [African American parents] wouldn’t come together to do that [pressure the school system to incorporate black history].

A different parent, a school administrator, argued many educators are oblivious of the need for incorporating blacks and black cultures in the school curriculum: “Educators don’t have a sense of incorporating it outside of black history month.”

#### *African Americans Depicted Throughout School*

Sixty-seven percent (67%) said African Americans were reflected in the artwork in their child’s school. Of those, notably, one respondent reported a wide range of African Americans displayed at his young child’s predominantly African American school; however, none of these individuals could be considered “rebels,” he said. “No Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey or Malcolm X. No one that talked about knocking somebody in the mouth.”

Three parents (3) felt the artwork displayed in their children’s schools portrayed African Americans in stereotypical roles. “That’s all they show—athletes and entertainers . . . We have so many successful people in our culture . . . We’re not just all about playing sports. We do have intelligence and they don’t show none of that.” Some

respondents also felt their children's schools lacked variability in their depictions of blacks. "It's the same people, Martin Luther King . . . not African Americans that children don't know, like the person who invented the stoplight was black."

One respondent replied African Americans were visually depicted in her child's school only during Black History Month or Martin Luther King's birthday. Another respondent offered that the children at her daughter's school drew murals on the school wall, and African Americans were not only apparent in the artwork but were also among the artists. Finally, a different respondent said although African Americans were visually reflected in the artwork at her child's school, she had never examined them; therefore, she could comment on whether they contained stereotypical depictions of African Americans.

#### *African American Celebrations*

Eighty-three percent (83%) of respondents said African American celebrations were undertaken at their child's school. Sixty-seven percent (67%) recalled Black History Month and Martin Luther King's birthday as the main themes for African American cultural celebrations at their child's school. Notably, one parent spoke to these events as being less of a celebration than they are acknowledgements:

Black History Month is not celebrated like other cultural holidays at my child's school [child attends a predominantly white school]. Other holidays get parties in the classrooms and are made fun for the kids. They get to bring in food, wear special clothing, make fun crafts . . . .Black History Month is always civil rights oriented and struggle is always emphasized. This is important but it's hard for

kids to want to be absorb something like that. It can also be scary for them if it isn't taught right, and most teachers are not interested in being sensitive to this.

Significantly, another respondent had mentioned his most poignant experience with racism occurring during his childhood, more specifically, when learning about "black experiences and black history in school." They were "frightening," he recalled. "I remember horrible stories about black men being hanged from trees and police using dogs and hoses on people. They showed us pictures of the men hanging from trees. I was only 9-years-old." His memory of his school's black history lessons appeared to include fear and violence. He did not recollect the lessons presented in a format to celebrate and commemorate, just as the mother of the child attending the predominantly white school spoke of earlier.

Another parent mentioned one of the ways her daughter's school celebrates African American culture is by supporting the existence of a black student's club at school. The idea that the existence of an ethnic club at a school is an example of the celebration of an ethnic group is a unique idea among the group of respondents. Of the two respondents reporting the absence of African American celebrations at their child's school, one referred to the "diversity" in her child's school posing as a barrier to celebrating any one ethnicity:

Well I think like so many other places where there's so much diversity to be embraced that they steer away from specific events for specific cultures and they kind of do joint events for many cultures . . . My son happens to go to one of the magnet schools in [deleted] that is very very diverse but which poses some

challenges for the school, so the school really has had to work around how to manage that diversity.

Significantly, she spoke of “managing diversity” as problematic for the school because the school emphasized the sameness of all individuals.

### *Perceptions of Institutional Racism*

Respondents were asked six (6) open-ended, semi-structured questions pertaining to their perceptions of institutional racism in their children's public schools. The findings for only three questions will be presented here because of the volume of data captured. In their respective order, three of the six questions respondents were asked are as follows:

13) Describe a time when you felt that your child may have been disciplined by school personnel in a way that felt unfair and you felt that it was due in part to your child's African American ethnicity.

15) Describe whether the school tolerates or challenges anyone making generalizations about racial and ethnic groups, particularly African Americans.

18) Reflect on the visibility of African American administrators, teachers, counselors and other school personnel at your child's school.

### *Unfairly Disciplined*

Almost half of respondents, 42 percent, said they felt their child had been disciplined unfairly and it was related to their African American ethnicity. Moreover, one-quarter of respondents mentioned their child had been unfairly disciplined, yet they were unsure whether an African American ethnicity was a significant factor. Overall,

more respondents either perceived their child's African American ethnicity may have played some sort of role in their punishment, for either academic or conduct-related offenses, or at least considered it a tangible factor.

One respondent, who fit the "unsure" category, characterized succinctly the voices of all parents in this category: "

I struggle, I think as many of us do, we question the race card--when it's necessary to pull it out and when it's not . . . I still just question how much are you making an example of this child? How much are you just giving him a harder punishment just because he is a little young child of color?

Another respondent, who believed her child had been unfairly disciplined by a third grade teacher, said the white, female instructor openly referred to certain children of color as irresponsible, in a classroom composed of mostly white students, because they sometimes forgot things:

My daughter told me that the only ones she called irresponsible in front of the class were herself and another little boy who was Brazilian. I've seen the little boy before. His skin is as brown as my daughter's. Ironically, his parents are also millionaires.

Two (2) parents of African American males recalled feeling their sons were often "singled out" for certain punishments. Three (3) parents discussed the experience of having their children's teachers hinting at their children displaying "unusual" amounts of energy or engaging in excessive fidgeting—too much for a classroom setting. All of the teachers who communicated these concerns were white females, according to the parents.

Two (2) parents in particular, both in the social work profession, recalled allowing their children to be tested for ADHD by the school because they felt the school was implying that their child had the disorder. One was a parent of a female, the other of a male. Both were younger than 9-years-old during the time the “concerns” were expressed by their teachers. According to one of the parents:

My child’s last two teachers have said that she moves around and fidgets too much. I’ve heard this argument spoken about many African American children. As for my child, she doesn’t appear to have a problem sitting down or concentrating at home. Whatever they are talking about it’s only happening in school. I’ve tried to explain this to them, but it goes in one ear and out the other. I let them test her. She was average and sometimes above average in their intellectual tests. Her oral skills were off the chart! As for ADHD, she didn’t meet the criteria.

Lastly, 33 percent of respondents felt their child’s African American ethnicity had little or nothing to do with disciplinary outcomes.

### *Generalizations*

Ninety-two percent (92%) of participants felt their child’s school would not tolerate anyone making generalizations about racial and ethnic groups, particularly African Americans. One parent attested to the support of the school's principal as evidence:

Um I would say the school principal umm the current school principal is umm would like to make sure students are aware of certain comments that are



appropriate to make to students that might be from a different background than their own, and if they're curious about umm someone's ethnicity umm definitely framing questions [so] that [they] aren't offensive.

Another parent recalled the numbers of minorities in the school serving as a deterrent to explicit generalizing. A different parent spoke of the parents' level of activity in the school serving as a form of prevention. Another parent simply stated she "hadn't heard anything."

Only one parent reported feeling their child's school would tolerate generalizations being made about African American students. This parent recounted the following scenario:

My daughter told me that she had shared with a white male classmate that she was excited about her cousins coming to visit her. Apparently, she was shocked at his reaction because she shared it with me later that day. The little boy said something like, "Oh are they coming from Africa?" When I spoke with my [spouse] about the incident, we decided to call the teacher, mostly because it bothered my daughter enough to bring it up to us. The teacher, a white woman who had been teaching for over 20 years, said, "Oh I certainly will not talk to [boy's name] parents about that! He is a nice little boy and meant nothing by it, and his mother is a teacher for [town's name deleted]." My [spouse] and I were furious because this had nothing to do with him being a nice little boy. There was some misinformation there that needed to be addressed by somebody! What about my daughter's feelings? She's a nice little girl too . . . .

This parent's child attended a predominantly white elementary school in an "elite" community.

*African American School Personnel*

Almost all respondents, 92 percent, said their children's schools consisted of predominantly white teachers, including those schools which were not predominantly white. According to one respondent, there are "Not enough black teachers. Never are." One respondent noted a connection to African American school personnel: "You could tell the difference. Blacks are more approachable . . . [white school personnel] they fear the worst, think a whole bad story is about to come on them. You ask a question and they think the worse." Interestingly, this comment appears to validate another respondent's experience. She recalled requesting a meeting with a teacher who had accused the respondents' daughter and two classmates of intimidating her:

Well what's unlikely for my child that, you know, one of the things that's unlikely of my child's behavior that this teacher is claiming is that over an extensive period of time like that incident happened Monday, since that day for like two weeks or so the kids will go by her office and look at her and and you know give her the eye and say things to her or, you know, just just like taunting her and trying to get her trying to provoke her and trying to intimidate her. This is what the woman is claiming that my child did. Now this does not sound like my child. My child might child might give you some lip and then move on with her life, but she's not gonna come back and continuously do this to an adult. I can't see her doing that, and so I asked to speak with the the umm teacher because she put in a complaint to my child's [principal], and so they you know, were going to suspend my child

because of that saying that my child's intimidating the teacher, so I went and wanted to talk to the teacher and the [principal] told me that the teacher was not willing to talk to the parents. So it was me--it was three of us three parents and the teacher was not willing to talk to us. Now, you're going to make a complaint against my daughter that she's threatening, but I'm not allowed to talk to you and question you about that and find out what happened? So you know for me I'm thinking she thinks because I'm black that I'm automatically going to come in here with an attitude and want to tell her off and wanna, you know, shake my head and do all this other things when I just want to find out what happened.

At least three (3) respondents, all parents of African American males, commented on the lack of male, African American school teachers and administrators: "Little black boys need black men in their lives as role models. Having a black vice principal beats having just a black custodian in the school. He [respondent's son] can identify with someone in a more prestigious role." A different parent also commented on the presence of a disproportionate amount of blacks employed in service-oriented jobs in the school in contrast to positions of authority, ". . . a lot of the security guards are black."

Another parent shared her perception of the rising number of children of color in the classroom paralleling indicators of institutional racism in the schools: "Same white teachers although classrooms are more diverse. Same ways of thinking, same power structure. Gives you a different representation as if things had changed."

The one parent who recalled her child's school consisting of predominantly teachers of color (black and Latino schoolteachers) had a child attending a predominantly

black suburban school outside a large city. Despite the presence of more school personnel of color, the parent felt the school could use some changes: “A lot of the personnel are ignorant. They speak to you with simple words like you’re dumb.” Finally, one parent commented on the overrepresentation of black teachers who are not visibly ethnic in schools: “There was one teacher at my child’s school, Mr. Jones, but he was very light-skinned.

### *Summary*

The data presented in this chapter reflects participants' experiences of perceived individual, cultural, and institutional racism in their children's schools. There were several surprise findings in this study: respondents' limited recall of personal experiences with racism (versus children's experiences); a pattern among respondents recalling their child had been passed over for some resource--all had children who attended predominantly nonwhite school districts; and the value respondents' placed on their children's education. The importance parents' placed on education was demonstrated by their recollections of endless meetings with teachers and administrators; hours spent with their children on homework assignments; hundreds of dollars spent on tutors; countless hours researching schools and districts in search of the right fit socioacademic fit for their child; and more to assure their child had the best socioacademic opportunities possible. A summary of the findings of individual, cultural, and institutional forms of perceived racism are presented below.

### *Individual*

Overall, it appeared parents had not perceived and/or could not recall many specific instances of individual racism; for example, the majority of respondents could

not recall a time when they had felt harassed or ridiculed by school personnel (n=11). One parent, however, alluded to feeling snubbed or not respected by a teacher who walked out of a meeting.

Less than half of the respondents (n=5) felt their child had been passed over for some resource in the school. Notwithstanding, all (n=5) had children attending predominantly nonwhite school districts. Four (4) had children at a school where the school personnel were predominantly white (group A). The other respondent had a child at a school where black and Latino staff predominated (group B). These parents felt their children had been passed over when it came to recognition of talent (academic or otherwise), good conduct, and services—tutoring. One parent also felt their child was passed over "all the time" because the school did not "take advantage of resources they had access to."

Another theme found in individual experiences of racism was many parents answered these questions based on their children's experiences instead of their own experiences. For instance, despite being asked about experiences of low expectations personally being held for them as parents, all respondents, except one, answered this question based on the experiences of their child. Nonetheless, parents who felt low expectations had been held for their child (n=7) denoted the areas of academics and conduct.

### *Cultural*

Overall, parents recalled their children's schools not only including African Americans in the curriculum but also depicting them in the physical context of the school such as in posters, artwork, and the like. Most respondents also reported their children's

schools participated in African American cultural celebrations. Nevertheless, parents felt African Americans were only part of the curriculum during Black History Month and Martin Luther King's birthday. These themes were also present in findings on questions covering the décor of the school buildings and cultural celebrations. For instance, nine (9) respondents said African Americans were reflected in the artwork in their child's school. Of these respondents, one reported a wide range of African Americans displayed at his young child's predominantly African American school; however, none of these individuals could be considered "rebels," he said. Three (3) parents felt African Americans were not reflected at all.

One parent expressed the artwork displayed in their child's schools portrayed African Americans in stereotypical roles: entertainers/athletes. Some respondents (n=3) also felt their children's schools lacked variability in their depictions of blacks, "It's the same people, Martin Luther King . . . not African Americans that children don't know, like the person who invented the stoplight was black." One parent spoke of "token" blacks in the artwork at their child's school. Another parent felt African Americans were only reflected in the school during Black History Month. Two (2) parents were unsure, one stating that she had never "looked at it [the decorations] from that perspective before," so she could not comment. Lastly, one parent said that murals had been drawn on the wall by kids at her child's school.

Almost all respondents (n=10) said their child's school participated in African American cultural celebrations; however they consistently recalled either Black History Month or Martin Luther King's birthday as the two most celebrated events. One parent felt that Black History Month was not truly celebrated, ". . . like say Cinco De Mayo or

the Chinese New Year," in that these events were "made more fun and entertaining for the children." Of the two (2) parents who felt the school did not participate in African American celebrations, one said that the diversity at her child's makes it impractical and, ". . . they have to steer away from specific events for specific cultures."

Regarding curriculum, nine (9) respondents felt African Americans were included in some aspect. All but one (n=8) felt it was only during Black History month. The exception had a child attending a predominantly black school with predominantly black and Latino teachers. Three (3) parents felt African Americans were not reflected in the school's curriculum at all.

#### *Institutional*

Overall, more participants recalled feeling their children had been unfairly disciplined or questioned the possibility of it having occurred (n=8) than those who could not recall it happening (n=4). Also, several themes arose when parents reflected on the lack of African American teachers and administrators in their children's schools (n=11). Despite some concerns, most respondents (n=11) felt that their child's school would not tolerate anyone generalizing about racial and ethnic groups, particularly African Americans.

Parents felt there were several factors affecting the schools' lack of tolerance for racially/ethnically-based generalizations: too many minorities in the school; active parents; and concerned administrators, for example a school principal as one parent noted, who want to help address these issues. Despite these sentiments, five (5) respondents felt their child had been unfairly disciplined and it was related to their African American ethnicity. Almost as many were unsure (n=3). Of these respondents,

some (n=3) spoke of feeling teachers were overcritical of their children. One respondent, who also teaches in the public school system, recalled receiving a fastidious report from their child's teacher regarding the child's behavior. The respondent said they would not have sent their students' parents the same note.

Two (2) other parents recalled similar complaints from their children's teachers of "fidgeting" and "excessive movements." One of these parents, feeling the school was alluding to their child having ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), allowed them to test her child. Not only did the child not meet the criteria for ADHD after being tested, the child scored off the charts in their oral skills and met or exceeded the standards on the intelligence tests. Other themes present in respondents' narratives included perceptions of school personnel's unwillingness to communicate and involve parents in disciplinary concerns; children being constantly being separated from the group as a form of discipline (black males in particular); and children of color only being openly ridiculed in class.

A majority of respondents (n=11) also recalled their children's schools consisting of predominantly white school personnel, including schools that had predominantly nonwhite populations. Several themes were present among the respondents. Some parents (n=3) gave examples of white teachers in their children's schools who treated them disdainfully. Another respondent said some white teachers were not as approachable as some black teachers they had known. The respondent added white teachers acted in a manner towards them that indicated they "feared the worst." The narratives of three other parents also expressed this sentiment.



Several parents (n=3) expressed their concerns about the lack of black male teachers and administrators in the schools, and one (1) asserted young black males need to see African American male role models, particularly in leadership roles within the schools. Finally, one parent's statement seemed representative of the sentiments of most respondents, "Same white teachers although classrooms are more diverse. Same ways of thinking, same power structure. Gives you a different representation as if things had changed." The implications of these findings will be addressed and discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore middle-class African American parental perspectives' of racism in their children's public schools. This study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) what are parents' perceptions of racism in their children's public schools 2) is there an association between a parent's ethnic identity stage and their perception of racism in their child's public school environment 3) what are the ways in which parents respond or react to these encounters with racism and 4) do the types of racism encountered--subtle versus covert, institutional, versus individual--mediate parents' responses? This chapter will address the findings using the following structure: overview, key findings, strengths and limitations, and conclusion. It closes with a discussion of implications for clinical practice and opportunities for future research.

#### *Overview*

The United States public school system is one of many institutions perpetuating and maintaining racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1996, p. 475; Cooper & Jordan, 2003). African American children, parents, and caregivers have been “historically marginalized, maligned, and misunderstood by educators” (Thompson, 2002a, in press, as cited by Thompson, 2003, p. 8). Teachers' treatment and attitudes towards African American students have been show to have a negative effect on students, including their self-esteem, motivation and academic performance (Casteel, 1998). Harvey (1984) argued

no other social institution impacts the lives and, more specifically, the mental health of black people in such a direct and significant way.

Among the effects associated with various forms of racism, high dropout rates, disproportionate numbers of suspensions of African American students, and disproportionate placements in special education or segregated classrooms have been documented in the literature (Calabrese, 1990). A review of the literature suggests that the effects of racism on parents' psychological functioning and well-being within the domain of the school environment are less documented.

Also less documented are the experiences of African American middle-class parents. The literature tends to focus on African American populations residing in urban areas, disproportionately all black communities, and/or those characterized by high levels of poverty (Simons et al., 2002). This "unbalanced, deficit-oriented approach obscures the broader picture of African Americans and creates "narrow, flat images" of African American family life (Arnold, 1994 as cited by Bradley et al., 2005, p. 424). Research has shown middle-income blacks with at least a college degree report equally high or higher levels of discrimination than those residing in the communities disproportionately used in the literature. Despite claims from some observers that blacks may be paranoid about racism and rush too quickly with racism accusations (Wieseltier, 1989 as cited by Feagin, 1991), the "daily reality may be just the opposite as middle-class black Americans often evaluate a situation carefully before judging it discriminatory and taking additional action" (Feagin, p.103).

The number one most cited school-related problem in one of the few studies incorporating the voices of African American parents through a qualitative model of

research was racism (Thompson, 2003). There were several limitations to this study that impacted the generalizability of its findings. About 75 percent of respondents had children who attended schools at a large, urban school district in Southern California where most of the schools were designated as “underperforming.” This suggests that the parents were in a low SES. Moreover, the researcher operationalized racism solely as overt acts targeting people of color by a dominant group member.

This study attempted to build on Thompson’s (2003) study by using a qualitative exploratory approach to give voice to parents’ perceptions of racism within the public school system, which is dearth in the literature; rely on respondents with a middle-income SES; use respondents that self-identify as African American; and rely on an operationalization of racism that rests on a structural framework; thereby, allowing parents to identify institutional aspects of racism they have perceived within the context of their child’s public school environment.

In addition to SES, studies have shown myriad variables mediate perceptions of discrimination among African Americans including beliefs in values of meritocracy (Hughes et al., 2006); within-group differences (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007) and racial or ethnic identity (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1981; Phinney et al., 1992 as cited by Phinney & Ong, 2007). Studies that examine the ways in which more than one of these variables interact to mediate perceptions of racism have yet to be conducted. This study focused on ethnic identity as an additional mediator to perceptions of racism among middle-class African American parents.

### *Key Findings*

Overall, respondents recalled feeling welcomed at their children's schools, were unable to recount being personally harassed or ridiculed, and believed their children's schools would not tolerate generalizations being made about African Americans. Most were unable to recall personal experiences of overt racism in their children's schools. Thus, some interesting contrasts can be made between this study and other studies examining parents' experiences in their children's public schools. Calabrese (1990), for example, found parents perceived hostility, operationalized as a "lack of "friendliness," and not feeling welcome at the school (p. 151).

Nonetheless, Calabrese's study, as does a disproportionate amount of studies relying on some populations of people of color, drew from an urban area and only a sample of poor and/or low-income participants. Calabrese's quantitative study also neither conceptualized a "minority" for the purposes of the study nor did it generate a random sample. His study was based on reports of minority parents whose children were bussed into a predominantly white school district whereas this study gives voice to middle-class African American families who reside and participate in schools within their various communities.

Calabrese's study highlighted an overarching theme in this study and reverberated by other researchers: African American parents tend to value their children's education (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Denby & Alford, 1995; Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Troutman, 2001 as cited by Bradley, Johnson, Rawls & Dodson-Sims, 2005). The parents in this study spoke of endless meetings with teachers and administrators; hours spent with their children on homework assignments; countless hours researching schools and school

districts in search of the right fit socioacademic fit for their child, sometimes resulting in purchasing a home in the selected community; and the like. Also reported were hundreds of dollars spent on finding tutors; time spent via email, on the phone, and in-person attempting communication with school personnel; and more in order to assure their child had the best social and academic opportunities possible. Despite the variety of methodologies and SES samples in these studies, all documented this shared outlook among African American respondents.

Another important idea found in this study and reflected in other studies was parents' recall of performing thorough assessments of situations before conceding to conclusions of racism. As summed up by one parent:

I struggle, I think as many of us do we question the race card--when it's necessary to pull it out and when it's not . . . I still just question how much are you making an example of this child? How much are you just giving him a harder punishment just because he is a little young child of color?

This careful appraisal process is also documented in the literature. Feagin (1991) found middle-class black Americans often cautiously assessed situations "before judging it discriminatory and taking additional action" despite claims from some observers of being paranoid and quick to pull the race card (p.103). Feagin referred to this cautious assessment process as having a "second eye," a term he quoted from one of the narratives in his study on antiblack discrimination in public places:

I think that it causes you to have to look at things from two different perspectives. You have to decide whether things that are done or slights that are made are made

because you are black or they are made because the person is just rude, or unconcerned and caring. So it's kind of a situation where you're always kind of looking to see with a second eye or a second antenna just what's going on. (respondent as cited by Feagin, 1991, p. 115)

Acts of racism carry not only one's personal past experiences with racism but also centuries of racism directed at the entire group, "vicarious oppression that still includes racially translated violence and denial of access to the American dream" (Feagin, p. 115). Thus, it is this "cumulative impact" of racism that "accounts for the special way that blacks have of looking at and evaluating interracial incidents" (p. 115). Feagin's findings resonate with the sentiments expressed by the middle-class African American parents in this study. Many spoke of making cautious assessments about the possibility of race having played a role and continuing to play a role in their children's school experiences as well as their own. Further research is warranted in this area to explore this concept of the second eye or "knowing when to pull the race card as well as effects on black mental health."

Interestingly, two unexpected themes in the individual racism category emerged from this research. One theme was all of the children of respondents' who reported their child had been passed over for some resource attended predominantly nonwhite schools. The second theme was despite being asked open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of their own individual experiences with racism, most respondents' instead recalled their children's experiences with racism. There may be many reasons for this development, including weaknesses in the semi-structured questionnaire;

miscommunication between the researcher and respondents' during the interview; misunderstanding of the questions on the part of the respondents' as a result of the questions solely being read by the researcher; or no recollections of personal experiences with racism.

Respondents' may have also intuited more racism towards their children than themselves as a defense from racism-based distress (Crosby, 1984; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990, as cited by Harrell, 2000). Taylor et al. argued strong evidence exists suggesting that persons less often perceive personal instances of discrimination as a "protective strategy" to minimize the distress of acknowledging and coping with discrimination (Crosby, 1984; Lalonde, Majumder, & Parris, 1995 as cited by Harrell, 2000). Although the scope of this study limits further exploration of the aforementioned possibility, researchers and practitioners are challenged to broaden research in this area.

Similarly, parents also appeared more limited in recalling instances of individual racism overall (both their own and their children's) than cultural or institutional forms; that is, with the exception of instances where children may have had low expectations held for them. Respondents' limited recall of individual types of racism may have served as a protective strategy against distress from perceived racism involving their family group versus African Americans as a group.

Some forms of cultural and institutional racism reported included unfair disciplinary practices, as determined by a reliance on use of practices such as separation from the group; undue monitoring and surveillance of children; and failure to apprise parents of discipline that had taken place or was occurring. Other forms reported by



parents were a disproportionate amount of white school personnel, particularly in administrative positions, and the invisibility of African Americans and their beliefs, values, and experiences in the school curriculum, cultural celebrations, and school decorations/décor. Exceptions to the invisibility of African Americans and some of their experiences were Black History Month and Martin Luther King's birthday. Respondents' from Zions, Zions, Harrison and Bellinger's (2003) qualitative study on urban African Americans families' perceptions of cultural sensitivity in special education had similar reactions to the parents' in this study on the invisibility of African American values, beliefs, and experiences in the general schooling experience:

Several parents acknowledged that including a poster of Martin Luther King or other Black American icons in the display case in the school library or foyer and announcing Black History month were steps in the right direction but . . . these efforts were still removed from everyday personal interactions and considerations of intercultural differences. (p. 51)

Respondents' in this study also recalled depictions of African Americans that relied heavily on stereotypical and narrow images: "It's the same people, Martin Luther King . . . not African Americans that children don't know, like the person who invented the stoplight was black." One parent noted his child's school neglected to show African Americans who were "rebels." In a qualitative study done on African American teachers in suburban schools by Mabokela and Madsen (2003), an African American educator also reiterated this notion: "African Americans who understood codes of power and the appropriate language and dress were more suited as the token African American" (p.

107). Moreover, the authors argued that "outspoken" African American adults were undesirable in the school environment, particularly those who addressed issues of racial disparity in the system (p. 107).

The other unexpected theme in this study was all of the children of respondents' who reported their child had been passed over for some resource attended predominantly nonwhite schools. Serwatka, Deering and Stoddard's (1989) study may shed some light on this phenomenon was conducted by. They found African Americans are more likely to be discriminated against in districts where they represented a larger proportion of the total enrollment (as cited by Serwatka, Deering & Grant, 1995). There may be various reasons for Serwatka's et al. findings, yet they are beyond the scope of this study and speak to the need for further research in this area, particularly with samples of middle-class African American families and their experiences at predominantly nonwhite schools.

Irrespective of respondents' perceptions of individual, cultural, and institutional racism in their children's schools, they all reported their continued commitment to their children's educational process. All reported responding verbally--a form of active coping --to racism in their children's schools, whether objective or subjective, subtle or overt. An interesting comparison can be made between the active and verbal coping response of respondents' in this study and other studies. Feagin (1991) suggested that blacks' reactions to discrimination in public accommodations reflected the "site" and type of discrimination. In other words, responses to discrimination in various public domains will vary, depending on the situation and actors involved. For instance, rejection or poor

service in public accommodations provided blacks the opportunity to respond verbally, and the most common responses were verbal confrontations or resigned acceptance.

Feagin also reported some blacks corrected whites quietly, while others responded by lecturing or educating the person about discrimination or threatened court action. This study found respondents reported addressing instances of perceived racism in the public school site by attempting to communicate with teachers and administrators to gain information and to problem solve. When concerns arose, they contacted their child's teacher or the school personnel in charge during the event in question. Sometimes they requested meetings with administrators only, that is, when they perceived the problem included their child's teacher.

Parents also reported changing their children's schools when they felt a situation was not or could not be resolved; obtaining outside help or guidance when they perceived the school fell short, such as having to locate and pay additional monies for a private tutor, and so forth. The parents' middle-class SES appeared to provide them with the social, financial, educational, and professional capital they needed to assist in shaping their children's individual educational process. Scholars have referenced the benefits of a middle-class SES in a racist society, particularly for African Americans, "Middle-class status and its organizational resources provides some protection against certain categories of discrimination, particularly in work or school" (Feagin, 1991, p. 102). Also noted is a possible link between the possession of financial capital and the value respondents' in this study placed on their children's education. Future studies may seek to highlight these variables.

There are real advantages to having various types of capital in a racist society. Hare, however, reminds us, "The existence of some privileged black individuals does not contradict or deny the aggregate endangered status of the black community as a whole (Hare, 1987, p. 104)." The findings from this study warrant further research into middle-class African American families and racism's links with and effects on their educational experiences and well-being.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

#### *Strengths*

This study explored middle-class African American perceptions' of racism: a population seldom highlighted in research. Reliance on a small sample size allowed for rich and detailed narratives of participants' perceptions and experiences. Participants' responses also showed surprising consistency in terms of themes and findings (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). Finally, conceptualizing racism helped to set a framework for exploring and interpreting parents' perceptions of the phenomenon, thereby avoiding one of the common indiscretions of other studies researching racism (Schuman, Steeh & Bobo, 1985; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993):

Too many social analysts researching racism assume that the phenomenon is self-evident, and therefore either do not provide a definition or provide an elementary definition. (as cited by Bonilla-Silva, p. 465)

#### *Limitations*

Findings should be interpreted in the context of several limitations. The study relied on a self-selected, ad hoc, and nonrandom sample; consequently, the generalizability and transferability of the findings is impacted (Anastas, 1999).

Respondents were also recruited from a small number of settings (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; Stevenson, 1994, 1995; Stevenson et al., 1996, 1997). Recruiting respondents from a single or small number of settings limits variability because respondents are more similar to those who share a setting than they are to the population as a whole. Thus, studies using larger and more representative samples are critical to the further development of knowledge in this area of study (Anastas, 1999).

### *Implications for Practice*

The lack of research on racism in the United States public school system may be associated with the Mainstream's current opinion racism is a concern of the past that country needs to move beyond (Farkas & Johnson, 1999). Nevertheless, racism continues in America's public schools (Calabrese, 1990; Bonilla-Silva, 1996, p. 475; Cooper & Jordan, 2003). School personnel are urged to consider the ways in which racism is perpetuated in their school systems and facilitate the "removal of systemic barriers that impede the success of poor and ethnic minority students" as well as effect African American parents' school participation (House & Martin, 1998 as cited by Bradley 2005, p. 427). In order to do this effectively, school personnel, particularly mental health professionals, may need to explore their own attitudes about racism, beginning with exploring one's own ethnic or racial identity.

Mental health workers need to have an awareness of the special role that race-related school stress may play in the lives of families and the additional stressors parents of color may have, regardless of SES. Looking for signs of burnout in parents and children that may be related to systemic and/or individual forms of racism and pushing

for change in the state, local, and federal system are important roles for mental health professionals. One parent in this study mentioned perceiving that a Brazilian child being may have been treated contemptuously because of his visible ethnicity despite the boy's affluence: racism is not only a black and white thing.

Social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists are challenged to explore the ways racism may interfere with a client's psychological functioning, while staying mindful racism impacts persons differently. Parents' experiences with racism in their child's schools, and in other contexts, merits clinical investigation as a unique source of stress for families as well as individuals.

### *Conclusion*

Collaborative home-school partnerships are associated with beneficial outcomes for students' functioning in academics, self-esteem, conduct, and the like (Alter, 1985; Barth, 1979; O'Dell, 1974 as cited by Fine, 1990). Nonetheless, scholars have cited several barriers to these collaborations such as socioeconomic differences (Fine, 1990; Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993 as cited by Barge & Loges, 2003); styles of communication (Fine, 1990); parents' own negative schooling experiences (Aronson, 1996 as cited by Barge & Loges, 2003); the attitude of the school board and administrators toward parental involvement (Henderson, 1988 as cited by Barge & Loges, 2003); and political factors (Fine, 1990). Less carefully explored in the literature is racism's role. This study examined parental perceptions' of racism in their children's school environment. Given that African American parents place a high value of education for their children, regardless of SES, it is no surprise these respondents' considered the effects of racism on

their children's social, academic, and emotional well-being: it appears they would explore all factors impacting their children getting the best education possible.

Although most parents in this study recalled feeling welcome at their children's schools, having no recollections of personal experiences with overt racism, and perceiving the school environment as intolerant of overt generalizations and stereotypes being made about ethnic groups, parents voiced many concerns about their children's contacts with racism. These concerns consisted of: children from predominantly nonwhite school districts being passed over for some resource; exposure to African American culture, persons, experiences, and the like limited to only Black History Month and Martin Luther King's birthday; narrow and/or stereotypical representations of African Americans when they are depicted; unfair disciplinary practices; a lack of African American teachers and administrators; and narrow representations of African Americans among the few teachers and administrators of color.

An additional finding was irrespective of respondents' perceptions of individual, cultural, and institutional racism in their children's schools, respondents' value of and commitment to their children's educational process was articulated. All respondents showed evidence of an achieved ethnic identity status and all reported responding verbally--a form of active coping--to racism in their children's schools, whether objective or subjective, subtle or overt.

Reasons for this study's findings may include participant bias; researcher bias (Anastas, 1999); parents' minimization, denial, or repression of individual experiences (Crosby, 1984; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990, as cited by Harrell, 2000); and more. Because middle-class African Americans are a seldom-highlighted

population in research, these findings may contribute to a better understanding of racism's impact on African American families and society overall (Banks, 1984). Although these findings cannot be generalized to all middle-class African Americans, they provide valuable information regarding parents' perceptions of their children's schools and warrants future research in this area (Simons et al., 2002).



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## APPENDIX A

### Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter

January 30, 2008

Tamika Brock

Dear Tamika,

Your revised materials have been reviewed and all is now in order. We see that you are consistently using the term “African American ethnicity”. That is fine as long as you are consistent throughout the study. We are glad to give final approval to your interesting and useful project.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your study.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Joanne Corbin, Research Advisor

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Guide

To be administered verbally to the participant by the researcher. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. There are no right or wrong answers. Please include your thoughts, feelings, and how you dealt with each experience.

1. Please describe your most poignant personal experiences with racism. In what ways have these experiences influenced your life?
2. Please describe how issues of **race and ethnicity** are discussed in your home. Are children included in this discussion?

#### *Individual*

3. Please reflect on a time when you felt that anyone within the context of your child's school has held low expectations for African Americans in any area—academic or otherwise. Please describe your thoughts, feelings and how you managed the situation.
4. Describe a time when you may have been harassed or ridiculed by anyone at your child's school because you are African American.
5. List any times that you or another adult have felt concerned about being judged by school staff or other parents at school on the basis of a stereotype about African Americans.
6. Describe a time when you felt that you or your child had been passed over for some resource within the school context because of your African American ethnicity.
7. Describe a time when you felt that you were excluded or rejected by other adults at school because of your African American ethnicity.
8. Describe when you did not feel welcomed at your child's school, for example, at conferences, parent advisory group meetings, school events, etc. and you perceived it as having to do with your African American ethnicity?
9. Name a time when you felt that your rights as a parent had been violated by another adult at school and you perceived that it was based on your ethnicity. Describe how the school personnel addressed your grievance.

### *Cultural*

10. Describe whether achievements and ideas of African American authors, thinkers, historical figures, etc., are incorporated into the school's curriculum or whether ideas for such are welcomed and used?
11. Describe whether African Americans are evidenced in the posters, artwork, and so forth displayed in the school's hallways, your child's classroom, the library, and the like? Do any of these perpetuate stereotypes about African Americans in anyway?
12. Describe how African American cultural celebrations are undertaken at your child's school or whether you feel that your child's school is an environment where ideas for African American cultural celebrations would be welcomed

### *Institutional*

13. Describe a time when you felt that your child may have been disciplined by school personnel in a way that felt unfair and you felt that it was due in part to your child's African American ethnicity.
14. Describe whether your child's school provides a climate where issues of **race and ethnicity** can be openly discussed.
15. Describe whether the school tolerates or challenges anyone making generalizations about racial and ethnic groups, particularly African Americans.
16. Reflect on the school principal's views on issues of significance to African American parents.
17. Reflect on your child's current teacher's view on issues of significance to African American parents.
18. Reflect on the visibility of African American administrators, teachers, counselors and other school personnel at your child's school.

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

DATE

Dear NAME (or) Potential Research Participant,

My name is Tamika Brock, and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting an exploratory study to examine middle-class, African-American parents' perceptions of racism within their preadolescent's school environment and the parents' ways of handling these encounters. Data obtained in this study will be used in my master's thesis. It may also be used for future presentation and publication on this topic.

Your participation is requested because:

- you may self-identify as an African-American parent and are over 18 years of age
- you may have at least one school-aged child between the ages of 10 and 12
- your total household income may be at least or more than \$48,451 (total median household income for a family of 2.61 according to the US Census Bureau, 2007) OR you hold a bachelor's degree
- your child is currently attending a public school
- you identify your child's ethnicity as African-American

### PROCEDURES

If you choose to participate, I will ask you questions that will encourage you to reflect on the following:

- your awareness of racism through your contact or association with your child's public school environment

- ways in which you manage or have managed these encounters
- your past experiences with racism

In addition, I will also ask you to provide basic demographic information about yourself and your family, such as your age, education level, gender, income range and so forth. Lastly, I will ask you to complete an ethnic identity survey, which is designed to clarify your current ethnic identity stage. I will personally interview you face-to-face as well as present both the demographic information form and survey to you at a mutually agreed upon location that offers the opportunity to have this conversation and complete the forms in private. Interviews will be tape-recorded and the entire process is estimated to take about two hours.

In addition, I will transcribe (type out) the sessions from the tape recording. I may contact you within two weeks of the interview by telephone or email for the purposes of further clarification or elaboration if necessary on any of the questions to which you responded. You may also contact me if you any questions or desire further information about the study. In addition, if you have any additional questions that I cannot answer, I will seek guidance from my research advisor at Smith College School for Social Work, Joanne Corbin, Ph.D., and will get back to you with a response: a 30-day timeframe is standard.

#### ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

Some of the benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to gain insight into racism's impact on your experiences by discussing it in an interview format; to increase your general understanding of the meaning of an ethnic identity; to contribute to research on an understudied and underserved population; and to add valuable, firsthand

perspectives that have the potential to inform educational policy and assist clinical professionals in effectively working with African Americans.

Monetary compensation is not provided for participation in this study.

#### ANTICIPATED RISKS

One of the anticipated risks of participating in this study may be that some interview questions could raise distressful thoughts and feelings related to issues of ethnicity or uncover certain beliefs; for instance, you may remember some painful experiences associated with ethnicity as a child in school or become more aware of internalized racism. The interview could also elicit thoughts or feelings related to ethnicity that may include your child or other significant person(s).

Often, individuals may find that discussing these issues with another professional after the interview might be helpful. A referral list will be given to all participants along with a copy of this informed consent form in case you find yourself in a similar situation. The referral list contains resources that may prove useful to you in locating a clinical professional within your area. Please be mindful that the inclusion of this list does not in any way imply a recommendation of these professionals by the researcher or Smith College School for Social Work.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

You and your family's identifiable information will remain confidential to the extent permitted by law: only a data analyst—if employed-- and I will have access to any confidential information provided. The data analyst will be required to sign a confidentiality statement attesting to their commitment to maintain the confidentiality of your information. My research advisor at Smith College School for Social Work will



also have access to my research data but only after all identifying information has adjusted or removed.

As I mentioned earlier, I plan to transcribe the tape-recorded interview sessions. I will individually label the transcriptions, audio tapes, interview notes, demographic information sheet, the ethnic identity survey, informed consent form, and any other personally identifying materials using numbers or a false name to aid in maintaining your confidentiality. In my written thesis document, I will not use identifying information to describe any individual; rather I will combine the demographic data to reflect the respondent pool as a whole.

Federal regulations require that I lock the aforementioned documents in a secured location during the thesis process and for three years thereafter. These documents will remain locked and secured until I destroy them after the three-year stipulation expires.

#### VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is completely voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. You are free to withdraw from this study before or during the interview by informing me of this intent either orally or in writing, and I will destroy any data. You are also free to withdraw from the study after completing the interview. I will need to know of your intent to withdraw after data collection has been completed either orally or in writing before April 30, 2008; the final report will be written at this point. Similarly, if at any time during the interview you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may say so, and I will move on.

#### CONSENT

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature of Participant\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions about this study, participation, rights of participants, or this consent form, please feel free to ask me at the contact information below. You may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee, Dr. Ann Hartman, at (413) 585-7974. Thank you for your time, and I greatly look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Tamika Brock

## APPENDIX D

### Resource List for Participants

*This list of resources is intended to provide you with a starting point for any services that you might find useful. The inclusion of this list does not in any way imply a recommendation of these professionals by the researcher or Smith College School for Social Work.*

1. National Social Worker Finder  
Support Line: 800-652-0155  
URL: <http://www.helpstartshere.org/common/Search/Default.asp>  
The owners of this search engine have an agreement with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the accrediting and licensing organization for professional social workers. According to their Web site, the search engine contains over 3500 licensed social workers and lists those located near an identified zip code or state and town. Provider search can be limited by hours of operation, areas of expertise, languages spoken, payment options and more.
2. Denise McIntyre, LICSW, LCSW  
McIntyre Counseling, LLC  
115 Elm Street, Suite 103  
Enfield, CT 06082  
Phone: (860) 253-0069
3. Sharon E. Cutts ACSW/LCSW  
80 Garden Street  
Wethersfield, CT 06109  
Phone: (860) 529-9577 ext. 3
4. D. Bri McCarroll, MSW, LICSW  
136 Dwight Road  
Longmeadow, MA 01106  
Phone: (413) 746-1000
5. Julie Abramson, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW  
Abramson Consulting  
126 Cooke Ave.  
Northampton, MA 01060  
Phone: (413) 585-0719

6. The Association of Black Psychologists  
P.O Box 55999  
Washington, D.C. 20040  
Phone: (202) 722-0808  
Email: [abpsi\\_office@abpsi.org](mailto:abpsi_office@abpsi.org)  
URL: <http://www.abpsi.org/listing.htm>  
Web site lists members within several states. May also call, Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. to get assistance in locating a psychologist who self-identifies as Black within your area.
  
7. National Association of Black Social Workers, Inc.  
2305 Martin Luther King Ave. S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20020  
Phone: (202) 678-4570  
Email: [nabsw.harambee@verizon.net](mailto:nabsw.harambee@verizon.net)  
May also call, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. to get assistance in locating a licensed social worker who self-identifies as Black within your area.
  
8. Other professionals, clergy, friends, relatives, family, and the like may also serve as a source of support in dealing with feelings, thoughts, etc. related to **ethnicity** that you may become more aware of after this interview. Please use your discretion in finding the right person to assist and support you.

APPENDIX E

Demographic Information Sheet

Age range (please check one):

- 18 – 24                       25 – 37  
 38 – 44                       45 – 57  
 58 – 64                       65+

Gender:

- Female                       Male  
 Transgender

Highest level of schooling completed:

- Grade School               High School  
 Associate's                 Bachelor's  
 Master's                     Ph.D.

Marital status:

- Single                       Married  
 Divorced                   Separated

Category that best represents your total annual household income:

- Less than \$20,000                       Between \$20,000 and \$39,999  
 Between \$40,000 and \$59,999                       Between \$60,000 and \$79,999  
 Between \$80,000 and \$99,999                       \$100,000+

Category that best represents your current neighborhood

- Predominantly black (more than 55 percent)  
 Predominantly white (more than 55 percent)  
 Mixed (please describe the ethnicities and estimate the percentage of each)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other (please describe \_\_\_\_\_)

Category that best describes the racial/ethnic make up the majority of children at your child's school:

Predominantly black (more than 55 percent)

Predominantly white (more than 55 percent)

Mixed (please describe the ethnicities)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Category that best describes the racial/ethnic make up the majority of school personnel at your child's school (administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers):

Predominantly black (more than 55 percent)

Predominantly white (more than 55 percent)

Mixed (please describe the ethnicities)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Category that best describes your relationship to preadolescent child:

Biological mother

Biological father

Stepmother

Stepfather

Biological grandmother (maternal)

Biological grandmother (paternal)

Biological grandfather (maternal)

Biological grandfather (paternal)

Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Gender of child:

Female

Male

Age of child (fill in)

## APPENDIX F

### The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

**Please fill in:** In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be

\_\_\_\_\_

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

**(4) Strongly agree   (3) Agree   (2) Disagree   (1) Strongly disagree**

\_\_\_ I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.

\_\_\_ I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.

\_\_\_ I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.

\_\_\_ I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.

\_\_\_ I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.

\_\_\_ I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.

\_\_\_ I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.

\_\_\_ In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.

\_\_\_ I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.

\_\_\_ I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.

\_\_\_ I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

\_\_\_ I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.



\_\_\_ My ethnicity is (*choose from numbers below*)

(1) *Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others*

(2) *Black or African American*

(3) *Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others*

(4) *White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic*

(5) *American Indian/Native American*

(6) *Mixed; Parents are from two different groups*

(7) *Other (write in):* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ My father's ethnicity is (*use numbers above*)

\_\_\_ My mother's ethnicity is (*use numbers above*)