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Promoting Equity for Black Males: A Master Gardener's Narrative for School Change

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Abstract

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Antoinette R. Hudson

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Preface

My confidence has always been that education provides hope in a future unseen (Suskind, 2010). As a first-generation college student and graduate, I value all the possibilities a higher education degree can provide individuals who are determined to make an impact within their community. As an elementary school principal, I successfully turned around the lowest performing school in the district (with the highest population of students in poverty) in 3 short years. I attribute much of my success to my desire that all students receive an equitable opportunity to learn and are taught by teachers who love and care for them. My goal is that families remain confident in the education their child receives and students are equipped with a great foundation for learning that will positively impact their school career, leading towards successful opportunities in their future. As an educator, I am aware of the politicized challenges, systemic issues, and faulty processes existing in schools that contribute to unequitable outcomes for students. My desire is that parents are knowledgeable of school systems and processes that might cause harm that can ultimately impact their child's future.

As a Black single mother of four, I realize that my daughter has reaped some of the benefits from my determination and drive to succeed as a 17-year-old teenage mother (being a statistic of lifelong poverty). I now enjoy watching my daughter succeed; she graduated with her Master's degree from Louisiana State University in 2018, with her tuition being fully paid—goals that I hope for so many students. Moreover, raising three sons alone is never an easy feat, with each son possessing distinctly different needs: One twin is in the overidentified population of Black male students receiving special

education services. Another son is in the under-identified population of Black gifted male students. For my last son, the oldest twin, my wish is that he always strives to live up to his fullest academic potential. My sons do not remember their mom struggling much financially to provide for them. Yet, they see me working diligently to complete my degree. Stressing how they must work hard to achieve in school regardless of their present-day academic or social struggles has become a constant conversation I have with my sons, while raising them alone only aids my role as an educator and researcher in many ways. I value their innocence, oftentimes to the point of naïveté. How marveled they are by the world, yet unaware of the fear many perceive regarding who they are or what they will one day become. Right now, they are looked upon for their cuteness. They still trust in others to protect them and have their best interest in mind. Sadly, their innocence and trust will one day fade away, when they come to know the cruelty that exists in this world, for their unfortunate disadvantage of being Black and male in America.

Lastly, my roles as an educator, researcher, and mother are all the same: to ensure that equitable outcomes, attainment, and success are witnessed for the most underserved and voiceless members in our society. When Black lives matter to so many, the lives of my own children, my students, and the lives I impact each day because of my research all matter. My goal as a researcher is to challenge and help dismantle educational systems of oppression, where Blacks males are consistently being channeled out of the college experience, beginning in the early years of school. My research on the status of Black males in education will serve as one of many voices for the countless number of Black

male students in K-5 public schools who unsuccessfully navigate through elementary

school and the education system with a belief that they cannot achieve academic success.

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Chapter One. Introduction

My Brother's Keeper and the Black Male Crisis in Education

In 2014, President Obama launched My Brother's Keeper (MBK), a new initiative to address the historical crisis facing Black males in the United States. The MBK initiative was President Obama's attempt to expand opportunities for young boys of color to engage in mentoring, gain access to support networks, develop skills necessary to secure a quality job, or encounter opportunities that increase their access to college (Obama, 2014). During the launch of the MBK initiative, President Obama extended a challenge to leading foundations and businesses to commit significant resources to research critical interventions to counter damaging narratives that exist concerning boys and young men of color with solutions for the highest potential impact in such areas as early childhood development, school readiness, reading on grade level, parent engagement and parenting, literacy, educational opportunity and school disciplinary reform, criminal justice systems, economic opportunity, and healthy families and communities (Obama, 2014).

Two years later, in 2016, private sector donors committed more than $600 million in grants and in-kind resources. Specifically, 11 foundations collectively committed to invest $200 million toward MBK-related priorities over the next 5 years. The MBK Task Force has garnered greater collaboration among federal government agencies to develop new policies, review grant programs, and align efforts intended to enhance the key

milestone efforts necessary to expand opportunities to boys and men of color (My Brother's Keeper, 2016)

The MBK initiative is a national effort to address the disturbing plight of Black male students in K-12 public education, a dismal fate where race and racism contribute to the dilemma of African American males in schools, where only 59% of Black male students graduated from high school in 2012-2013 (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). The reality is that schools in America are failing Black males at disproportionate rates (Howard, 2008). For example, Kena et al. (2015) found that on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment, Black male 12th-grade students averaged a lower scale score of 262 on the NAEP reading test than did their cohort of peers by race/ethnicity and gender, with Black females at 272; White males at 290, White females at 302, Hispanic males at 272, and Hispanic females at 278. Similarly, in 2013, Black students in the 12th grade averaged a lower scale score on the NAEP mathematics test than did their cohort of peers by race/ethnicity and gender, with Black males at 132 and Black females at 131, compared to White males at 162, White females at 160, Hispanic males at 141, and Hispanic females at 138 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Unfortunately, schools in this country continue to channel Black males out of college, resulting in a now-growing crisis affecting the life chances of 5 million Black boys in the United States (Harper & Davis, 2012; Holzman, 2006). Kanter, Ochoa, Nassif, and Chong (2011) found that one of the principal barriers to academic success in students across the United States is attributed to the persistent achievement gap among all ethnic groups.

Holzman (2006) suggested the present achievement gap is a silhouette of a larger opportunity gap that is identifiable by both race and socioeconomic status. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (Holzman, 2006) posited that African American[1] males are the "canary in a coalmine" of public education whereby improving the educational outcomes of Black males will lead to improved outcomes for all other populations. Smith (2002) suggested that Black male students begin school with an immense excitement and fortitude for learning, and that by 9 years old, or in the fourth grade, they lose their enthusiasm for learning. Likewise, Kunjufu (2005) argued that the fourth grade failure syndrome is not uncommon when African American males hear and view messages within society of the Black male demise. "Regrettably, researchers have found that the demise of Black boys in their educational journey begins in the early years of schooling, where Black males are highly represented in special education" (Milner, 2007a, p. 240) and underrepresented in gifted programs (Blanchett, 2006; Daniels, 1998; Davis, 2003; Ford, 1995, 1998; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Milner, 2007a; Whiting, 2006). Moreover, the achievement levels and educational outcomes of African American/Black males in America, compared to White children in comparison of school failure for Black males that has been well documented by researchers for many years (Coleman, 1967; Kena et al., 2015; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; Spellings, 2008).

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[1] The terms Black and African American are used interchangeably throughout this praxis project, referring to persons having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Problem

Racism is one of the factors that contributes to the dilemma of Black male students' underachievement in school. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that if racism were merely an isolated, unrelated, individual act, we would expect to see a few examples of educational inequities in schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, the prevalence of racism throughout the educational system provides evidence that race and racism contribute to educational disparities for Black male students. According to Gordon, Piana, and Keleher (2000), the trajectory of school failure for most Black students is a reflection of racism in our society that shows up in education. The failure to discuss race, racism, power, and the manifestations of each is potentially destructive and furthers the silencing of voices of those marginalized by the effects of racism (Howard, 2008). James (2012) cited scholars Henry, Rees, and Tator's assertion as follows:

> All forms of racism—from the individual to the institutional to the structural (or societal)—are maintained through the process of racialization, which is the categorization of individuals into groups with reference to their physiological characteristics (specifically, skin color) and attributing abilities, cultural values, morals, and behavior patterns that reflect these characteristics. (p. 469)

Increasing access to college and careers for all students is a critical responsibility educators must embrace. The process of maintaining this core belief is extremely crucial, amid the day-to-day realities of teaching and the failure of Black males to achieve academic success and remain within the college-going population.

Despite the challenges to educate all students, James (2012) contended that the persistent and chronic conditions Black males encounter in the education system are

directly correlated to educational authorities' disregard for or unwillingness to acknowledge and address race, racism, and factors influencing engendered schooling. An explicit examination of the ways race and racism manifest themselves in education can serve as a new frame of analysis for dismantling the underachievement of African American males in education (Carter, 2008; Ford, 1995; Howard, 2008).[2]

Purpose

This doctoral research project discusses the status of Black male students in education, provides an in-depth understanding and explanation related to the educational disparities that exist for Black male students in school, and determines possible remedies to increase the academic achievement of Black males in schools, thus placing many more students back into the pipeline to college. According to Howard (2008), an obvious deficiency in research concerning African American males is the lack of detailed, firsthand accounts and life experiences provided by African American males regarding the role power, race, and racism play in their educational experiences (p. 967). Therefore, to better understand the disparities that exist for Black male students in education, Jones's (2000) conceptual framework, "A Gardener's Tale," was used to examine how schools can promote equity for Black male students in schools. The purpose of this study is to come to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the researcher as a school leader at a once failing school, implementing practices to change the trajectory of school

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[2]Although Black female students experience challenges in K-12 education, the focus of this research specifically addresses challenges related to Black male students in education.

failure for Black male students. This study seeks to understand the essence of the researcher's lived experiences as a school leader. The central research question framing this paper seeks to understand the autoethnographic experiences of a school leader, while promoting equity for Black males in school. Three supporting questions guide the doctoral research project.

Research Questions

The following central research question guides this project:

- What are the experiences of a school leader to promote equity, excellence, and success for Black male students in an elementary school?

Three sets of research questions, addressing the three levels of racism, support this central research question:

Institutionalized Level:

- In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black male students?

- What are the obstacles school leaders must overcome to support the academic success of Black male students?

Personally Mediated Level:

- In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the personally mediated level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

- What actions did I as a school leader do to build relationships with teachers and Black male students, contributing to their success in school?

Internalized Level:

- In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the internalized level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

- What actions did I as a school leader implement to address racism at the internalized level to promote the success of Black male students, leading to their success in school?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) began with the premise that racism is normal not aberrant (Bell, 1980; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT scholars and social scientists alike hold that racism is pervasive, systemic, and deeply engrained in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Thus, challenging racist ideologies and practices requires an acknowledgement that race and racism exist, and that in their existence, systems throughout America are impacted, including our judicial and educational systems. For example, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) posited that if racism is embedded in our thought processes and social structures, then the "ordinary business," routines, practices, and institutions that we rely on to affect the world's work will continue to keep Black males in subordinate positions.

Parker and Lynn (2002) ascertained that CRT can be used as a "tool through which to define, expose, and address educational problems" (p. 7). CRT has three main goals:

1. Present stories about discrimination from the perspective of people of color (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Such stories may come from qualitative case studies of descriptions and interviews that may be drawn together to build cases against racially biased discriminatory practices (Creswell, 2013).

2. Eradicate "racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct" (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 10), not a fixed term, but fluid and shaped by political pressures and informed by the lived experiences of racialized groups (Creswell, 2013).

3. Draw important relationships between race and other forms of domination (Parker & Lynn, 2002). For example, Creswell (2013) described the forms of difference, which include gender, class, and other inequities individuals can experience.

Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) contend that CRT is an analytical and theoretical framework through which one can view, question, challenge, or critique race and racist ideologies. Accordingly, CRT serves as the intellectual foundation for this doctoral research praxis project. Specifically, I use the influence of CRT in education as a theoretical framework to support the examination of the effects of racism in K-12 education (Howard, 2008; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Warren and Hotchkins (2014) pointed out that CRT in education is a useful tool to examine how schools as social institutions produce and sustain racism at all levels throughout the institution, including at both the structural and interpersonal levels. Using CRT in this study allows me to highlight the existence of race and racism in education (Howard, 2008; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015;

Lynn & Parker, 2006) and better understand the impact, if any, racism has on education, as well as explore ways to improve the academic outcomes for Black male students.

Conceptual Framework: Three Levels of Racism - "A Gardener's Tale"

In addition to the influence of CRT in education as the theoretical framework in this doctoral research praxis project, I draw upon Jones's (2000) conceptual framework, which abstractly provides insight into the potential of race-based inequities in education. Jones's conceptual framework regarding the three levels of racism addresses the conscious awareness of race in American society and how the social classification of race is typically disaggregated to include a proxy of concerns associated with innate biological differences rather than acknowledge the contributing impact of racism. Using Jones's conceptual framework allows me to deconstruct (a) the manifestation of ways racism might occur throughout the educational system, (b) the influence racism might have on the achievement of African American males in school, and (c) the impact racism has on African American males' ability to successfully navigate through school and enter into college.

Jones (2000) defined the three levels of racism as institutional racism, personally mediated racism, and internalized racism. According to Jones, *institutionalized racism* is defined as being normative and legalized, often manifested to some as an inherited disadvantaged, whereas others benefit from "differential access to goods, services, and opportunities of society," (p. 1212) as characterized by race. Institutionalized racism is observed as inaction in the face of need and is manifested in conditions of access to power (Jones, 2000). Jones uses the allegory, "A Gardener's Tale," to explain institutionalized racism, which is reflected in the treatment of the flowers. In this allegory

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(described in greater detail later), the gardener is the U.S. government, whereby the gardener possesses the power to act and control resources. The gardener plants flower seeds specifically based upon preferential and differential prejudices between red and pink flowers. *Personally mediated racism*, the second level of racism, is defined in broad terms by Jones as prejudice and discrimination. Personally mediated racism refers to the intentional or unintentional acts of omission or commission whereby prejudice presents "differential assumptions about the ability, motives, and intentions of others" (Jones, 2000, p. 1212), whereas discrimination is the "differential actions toward others according to their race" (Jones, 2000, p. 1213). *Internalized racism,* the third level of racism, refers to the acceptance of negative messages about one's abilities and intrinsic worth "by members of the stigmatized [race]" (Jones, 2000, p. 1213). Internalized racism reflects the acceptance of "self-devaluation . . . rejection of ancestral culture" (Jones, 2000, p. 1213), and a resignation of hopelessness and helplessness.

Jones's (2000) conceptual framework on the three levels of racism, together with its accompanying allegory, "A Gardener's Tale," was first published by the *American Journal of Public Health* in 2000 to (a) raise awareness of race-associated differences in health outcomes, (b) create a new hypothesis about race-associated differences, and (c) support the design of effective interventions to eliminate race-based health outcome differences. Jones explained how racism operates in America in a manner many might understand by the use of allegory and narrative structure. The allegory, "A Gardener's Tale*"* connects the relationship between the three levels of racism (institutionalized racism, personally mediated racism, and internalized racism) and narrates how each

operates within society. Jones's use of symbolism in this allegory helps readers better comprehend the occurrence of racism in American society.

The allegory "A Gardener's Tale" begins with the gardener's preference for red flowers, leading to the preferential planting of red seeds in the first flower box, filled with rich, fertile soil. The gardener's irreverent treatment for pink flowers results in intentionally planting pink flower seeds in a compromised environment of poor, rocky soil. Jones (2000) suggested that over time, all the preferred red flower seeds sprang up quickly, with flourishing flowers towering tall. The vivid beauty of the red flowers validated the gardener's prejudicial preference for red flowers over pink flowers. However, the second flower box containing pink flower seeds yielded different results. Far fewer seeds sprouted, and the strongest of the seeds produced flowers of mid height; the weakest among them had died.

The gardener pitied the scrawny pink flowers and their dismal growth. So before the pink flowers fully blossomed, the flowers were plucked by the gardener, never to see their fullest potential and beauty. According to Jones (2000), like the government, the gardener in the allegory possesses the power to act and control resources. The symbolism of personally mediated racism is shown in the gardener's preference for red flowers and differential treatment toward pink flowers. The pink flowers began as seeds with disadvantages in their foundation, the soil in which they were planted. The systemic structures that would have allowed the pink flowers to thrive, similar to the red flowers, were absent in the quality of the soil in which these seeds were planted.

Similarly, as indicated by disparities in educational data, the red flowers represent many White students who are privileged in receiving a fertile foundation (access to

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opportunity and resources), which aids in their achievement and advances toward education attainment. The pink flowers represent African American males in K-12 education who biologically have the potential to learn, thrive, and survive, like red flowers, but the absence of quality soil or the presence of disparities in education prevents many from being able to thrive and survive, toward the pursuit of a college education. Critical race theorists have posited that racism is codified by the power and actions and inactions of the others to persist and exist in education and in law (Jones, 2000). Similar to what these theorists contend, the gardener allows indifference to occur through the inequitable treatment of the flowers (Jones, 2000).

Structure of Doctoral Research Praxis Project

In Chapter 2, I will provide a brief review of the literature, using Jones's (2000) three levels of racism: "A Gardener's Tale" as a conceptual framework. In Chapter 3, I will present a methodological overview of qualitative research. With a specific focus on evocative narratives, I will offer a rationale for engaging in autoethnography as the most appropriate mode to examine how the I, the researcher, experienced and navigated through the three levels of racism to promote equitable practices for the success of Black male students in school. Next, I will share my role as the researcher and my connection to the study. In addition, I will provide a description of the data collection procedures, data analysis process, and discuss issues of ethical considerations and potential limitations of autoethnography. I will conclude the chapter with an overview of my organization of the autoethnological data, collected according to the three levels of racism and presented in the next three chapters. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I capture my self-narratives. Chapter 7, I will conclude the doctoral research praxis project with a discussion of the themes,

findings, implications, and recommendations, ending with the finale "Master Gardener's

Narrative for School Change."

Chapter Two. Literature Review

Black Males in K-12 Education and the Three Levels of Racism

In this section, the allegory "A Gardener's Tale" is revisited and, in turn, connected to how racism is operationalized within the educational system (presented in italics). Particularly, the symbolism of both institutional racism and personally mediated racism is discussed in the context of the allegory. When possible, student voices are shared to represent the challenges Black males experience in public schools in the United States. As the literature review concludes, an interrogation of school policies and procedures to address institutionalized racism occurs, with the intent to define the need to create equity-minded and race-conscious teachers and the need for culturally relevant pedagogy. Programs and initiatives that support and develop positive Black male identities are highlighted as examples of interventions and approaches presently enacted to remedy the educational disparities that exists for Black males in American society. Last, but not least, the allegory, "A Gardener's Tale" meets the allegory, "Roses Growing in Concrete," to emphasize approaches educators and researchers can embrace to increase the academic achievement of Black males in K-12 public education.

Symbolism of Institutionalized Racism in "A Gardener's Tale"

Institutionalized racism is observed as inaction in the face of need and is manifested in conditions of access to power (Jones, 2000). Institutional racism is reflected in the treatment of Black males, where the gardener symbolizes American

schools that possess the power to act and control resources. The schools or sustainable resources separate flower seeds specifically based upon preferential and differential prejudices between red (Black male students) and pink flowers (White students).

The more preferred flower, the red flower (White students), was planted in the most desirable environment, and the least preferred flower, the pink flower (Black male students), received a malnourishing environment. Unfortunately, year after year, the flowers would go to seed and regeneration would occur, with the same results: the red flowers (White students) continued to thrive, and the pink flowers (Black male students) struggled to survive. In Jones's (2000) example, separating similar and different flower seeds allows the reader to conceptually understand the acts of segregation.

Institutionalized Racism in Education

Institutionalized racism in education is the systemic manifestation of conditions (educational policies and structures) that perpetuate challenges directly impacting Black male students in schools. According to Gilborn (2005), institutional racism in educational policy is neither accidental nor intentional unless approaches to eradicate racism, when clearly present in policies, are deemed not important. Institutional racism is manifested in a multitude of ways that continuously promote educational conditions of power that have historically harmed Black males (Gilborn, 2005). Determining where inequities exist in education can be accomplished through a critical analysis of student achievement gap data (Davis, 2003; Duncan, 1994; Gilborn, 2005; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Haycock, 2001; Lee, 2002; Noguera, 2008a; Whiting, 2006), student performance data (Fryer & Levitt, 2005, 2006; Milner, 2007a; Murnane et al., 2006; Musa-Gillette et al., 2016; Neal, 2006), and disciplinary data in schools (Children's Defense Fund, 1975;

Skiba et al., 2011). Local school, district, state, and national data depict the magnitude of educational disparities in schools with respect to Black male students. For instance, in public K-12 schools, examples of such educational disparities include (a) the underachievement of African American males in schools (Ford, 1995; Ford et al., 2008), (b) underperformance on national standardized assessments (Musa-Gillette et al., 2016; Neal, 2006), (c) harsh disciplinary sanctions (Gregory et al., 2010), (d) increases in the criminalization of African American males as a result of zero tolerance policies (Delpit, 2006; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba et al., 2011), (e) overrepresentation in special education (Blanchett, 2006; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Milner, 2007a; Patton, 1998), and (f) underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education (Ford, 1995; Ford et al., 2008; Grantham, 2004; Milner, 2007a; Whiting, 2006).

Overrepresentation of Black males in special education. Well documented by researchers is the overrepresentation of Black males in special education. According to various researchers, 50 million students were enrolled in public schools across the nation in 2011-2012 (Fergus, 2016; Kena et al., 2015; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Nearly 6 million or 13% of students in public schools nationwide receive special education services through the 1975 Individuals With Disabilities of Education Act (Snyder et al., 2016). Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of Black students receive special education services across the nation. Although available statistical data are not disaggregated by gender but by race/ethnicity, in 2013-2014, Black students between the ages of 3 and 21 accounted for 15% of all students receiving special education services, with White students accounting for 13% (Snyder et al., 2016). The classifications of special education services varies by disability type: specific disability,

speech or language, other health impairment, autism, intellectual disability, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, emotional disability, multiple disabilities, and hearing and orthopedic impairment. The distribution of students identified to receive special education services also varies by disability type. Thirty-eight percent of Black students were identified as having a specific learning disability as compared to 31% of White students. Black students represented a higher percentage of students possessing a speech or language disability as compared to 21% of White students (Snyder et al., 2016).

Harry and Anderson (1994) provided a brief overview of the history, role, and function of special education in the United States. According to these authors, the purpose of special education is to provide students with access to specialized services and extend learning opportunities to students who are unable to benefit from learning in the regular classroom by virtue of their disability. Harry and Anderson argued that the entire process of identifying students to receive special education services is seriously biased against African American males, beginning with the initial steps of regular general education instruction to the referral, assessment, and placement process. The flaw in the system was apparent when the assessments to identify students were found to be biased—especially biased when the disproportionate placement of students within a particular group was not representative of the greater percentage of the school population (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

Zero tolerance policies and school safety. Zero tolerance policies became merely one of many symptoms of a larger systemic illness in the educational institution. Skiba and Knesting (2001) found that school disciplinary practices and the effects of

those practices in schools did not change students' behavior nor guarantee an increase in school safety. Educators frightened by the overwhelming tide of violence in schools developed a no-nonsense approach to address issues of drugs, weapons, and gang violence in schools. Unfortunately, the resultant zero tolerance policies established to increase safety in schools have a history of maintaining discriminatory practices against African American students (Skiba et al., 2011). Zero tolerance policies result in mandatory expulsion of students who commit offenses involving guns, other weapons, violence, or similar acts or a combination of acts (Snyder et al., 2016).

In 2012, the percentage of Black male students who were suspended from school was 48%, twice as high as Black females and other racial/ethnic groups: Black female students, 29%; White students, 24%; Hispanic students, 22.6%; and Asian and Pacific Islander students, 11% (Snyder et al., 2016). In addition, Black males accounted for nearly a quarter of all suspensions given to students in 2011 and were more likely to be expelled without receiving educational services as compared to their peers (Snyder et al., 2016).

Negatively affecting their access to educational services, Black males had the highest number of juveniles placed in residential correctional facilities among any other racial group and gender. In 2011, 730,000 Black males were living in these residential facilities as compared to 101,000 Black females, 32,000 White females, and 153,000 White males (McFarland, Stark, & Cui, 2016). Such data reflects exclusion from learning environments Black males encounter, which can impact their access to educational opportunities and, in turn, their ability to successfully graduate from school.

Harsh disciplinary consequences. Another systemic and chronic issue concerning classroom and school discipline that continues to exist for Black males throughout the educational institution is the overrepresentation of Black students receiving harsh disciplinary actions, resulting in an overabundance of not only disciplinary referrals to the principal's office, but also out-of-school and in-school suspensions for behaviors and actions that occur within the school. For decades, researchers have argued that Black students continue to receive harsher disciplinary consequences than do other racial or ethnic groups (McFarland et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 48% of Black male students were suspended from school, which was more than other ethnicities (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Even more startling were the percentages of Black male students expelled from school. According to Musu-Gillette et al. (2016), 6% of Black male students were expelled from school at a much higher percentage than Hispanic male students, at 2%, and White male students, at 2.6%. The overall rates of suspension and expulsion were higher for males than for females (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

Teacher perceptions of Black male intelligence and deviance are often influenced by racist discourse about Black masculine performance, and teachers regularly interpret the behavior of Black boys as aggressive, disrespectful, defiant, and intimidating, even when such behaviors were not intended to be so (Davis, 2003; Ferguson, 2001; Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010; Noguera, 2003). The imprecise interpretation of these behaviors results in discipline that is often unnecessary, unfair, and in many cases, harsher for Black boys than it would be for their White counterparts (Monroe, 2005; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). In 2014, in Grades 6 through 12, Black males accounted

almost 50% of the suspensions. The proportion of public school students who were expelled from school was much higher for Black males, at 6.9%, and Black females, at 2.2%; this was significantly more than all other racial groups (Snyder et al., 2016).

Underrepresentation of Black males in gifted and talented education. Black males are consistently underrepresented in gifted and talented programs in the United States (Whiting, 2006). In 2011-2012, Black students in the nation accounted for 4% of the gifted and talented population in U.S. public schools as compared to 7% of White students and 13% of Asian students (Snyder et al., 2016). The underrepresentation of Black students, particularly Black males in gifted education, is not a new phenomenon.

Grantham (2004) explored the anomaly of Black male students in gifted programs by conducting a case study of Rocky Jones, a gifted 11th grade student, as a method to better support the recruitment and retention of Black male students in gifted education. Grantham found that one reason for the underrepresentation of Black male students in gifted education is attributed to inadequate assessment identification policies and the motivation students must have to participate in gifted programs. Rocky's responses to questions posed by Grantham are relative to the outcomes of advanced-level classes and teacher support for students to achieve:

Interviewer: Tell me about some benefits, just in general, some benefits of being in those classes.

Rocky: We get to go certain places that other classes don't get to go sometimes. We get to go on certain field trips and we learn more in depth in certain subjects. Last year, my class went to the Chesapeake Bay for 2 days. Only the gifted program went. It was a

really interesting thing. We, like, went canoeing and we did a

whole lot of things that the other people [in the regular program]

didn't get to do. (p. 213)

Grantham explained that Rocky commented on other academic opportunities during his

middle school years and how they benefited him at the high school level:

Rocky: Yeah, I took Algebra I last year. I took 8th grade math in 7th

grade, and so I took 7th grade in 6th grade, so I knew geometry. I

think that was like [setting up] an opportunity for me to take AP

math or calculus or something like that in my senior year.

Interviewer: What was it like being in French and the level math class receiving

high school credit? You were doing everything sort of one year

ahead it seems like, so you were taking 8th grade math in the 7th

grade. Did you take classes with 8th graders?

Rocky: No. See, we had a whole gifted program. All the kids, they had a

separate class for all the kids that were in that program. (p. 213)

Rocky's comments confirm that Black male students benefit in gifted and talented classes

through their increased exposure to extended learning opportunities that begins prior to

high school.

Whiting (2006) posited that Black males are more likely to achieve academic

success when they possess a scholar identity and are viewed by educators as highly

capable of achieving at high levels. This scholar found that in 2000, Black males

represented 8% of the nation's student population and comprised 3% of the gifted and

talented population. Similarly, Henfield, Moore, and Wood (2008) noted that for decades,

researchers have documented low enrollment of Black males in gifted education, yet research is often absent with respect to in-depth information explaining the meaning and process by which African American students are identified to enter gifted education programs and develop perceptions of their educational experiences.

Similar to the allegory "A Gardener's Tale," where the structural factors of the flower boxes kept the soil separate and each successive gardener would perpetuate the inequities through inaction (Jones, 2016), the same structural foundations exist for African American males in the educational institution. Regretfully, their present status in education is overshadowed by a dismal and dreadful past of underachievement and underperformance wherein many systemic structures within the educational institution are detrimental to their success.

Symbolism of Personally Mediated Racism in "A Gardener's Tale"

The gardener's (schools') preferential treatment for red flowers (White students) over pink flowers (Black male students) is exhibited in education when academic achievement data reflects racial group disparities and gaps in education. According to Jones (2000), preferential and differential treatment is personally mediated racism, where the "differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intentions of others" (p. 1212) are based upon race or prejudices, and discriminations. Personally mediated racism refers to intentional or unintentional acts of omission or commission and is manifested "as a lack of respect . . . suspicion . . . devaluation . . . scapegoating . . . and dehumanization" (Jones, 2000, p. 1213). The symbolism of personally mediated racism is shown in the gardener's (schools and their sustainable resources') preference for red flowers (White students) and where differential treatment is evident toward pink flowers

(Black male students), ensuring equitable education opportunities exist only for red

flowers (White students). The gardener (schools and their sustainable resources) planted

red flower seeds (White students) in a flower box filled with rich, fertile soil. The

gardener's (educators or their sustainable resources') irreverent treatment for pink

flowers (Black male students) consisted of the intentional planting of pink flowers (Black

male students) in flower boxes already comprised of poor, rocky soil (failing schools or

classrooms).

Personally Mediated Racism in Education

Personally mediated racism occurs in education when African American male

students are exposed to (a) school personnel in fear of Black male students (Ferguson,

2001; Harry & Anderson, 1994), (b) negative stereotypes and biases (Ferguson, 2001;

Gibbs, 1988; Noguera, 2003, 2008b; Noguera, 2014), (c) white teachers teaching Black

males (Allen, 2012; Delpit, 2006; Downey & Pribesh, 2004), and (d) experiences with

racial microaggressions (Allen, 2010; Henfield, 2011; Howard, 2008; Pierce, Carew,

Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1977; Sue et al., 2007). When cultural mismatch or

incongruence exists between Black male students and teachers (Delpit, 2006; Duncan-

Andrade, 2009), the cultural background of students and teachers exposes conflicts and

issues that hinder learning for students (Duncan, 2002) and impact their opportunities to

learn. When Black male students are stereotyped by their teachers, racially profiled by

administrators, and experiencing racially differentiated discipline, they engage in conflict

with white institutional hegemony and a racially stratifying system (Brown, 2003;

Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Essed, 1991; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Gibson, 2002, Noguera,

2008a). Research continues to paint the picture that Black male students are at risk of failing and not achieving academic success.

Fear of Black males. Black men have been defined as dangerous (Gibbs, 1988), often feared (Ferguson, 2001; Harry & Anderson, 1994) because of their uncontrolled and undefined masculinity (Noguera, 2014). Unfortunately, the fear of Black males is not a new occurrence. Ferguson (2001) recalled the moment Lamar, a 10-year-old Black elementary student, barely four feet tall, wearing a hoody and baggy sweat pants, passes by on his way to the school's "punishing room." The image of the rapper Tupac Shakur advertising the movie *Juice* on a poster crosses her mind as she observes Lamar. Ferguson's companion, a staff member states, "That one has a jail cell with his name on it" (p. 581) —Lamar's future was already becoming shaped by the perceptions of that educator. Unfortunately, the image of differential treatment based on race is noted in the criminalization and demonization of Black children. Ferguson (2001) found the convergence of external institutional racial bias beyond schools through the media and criminal justice system being reflected within the education institution when schools implement punishing rooms for students, and there exist the long-term effects of being Black males, living with longstanding labels of being trouble-makers.

This is clearly reflected in Ferguson's interview with Jerome G. Miller, who directed justice detention systems in Massachusetts and Illinois:

> I learned very early on that with black youth, virtually everything—from arrest summaries, to family history, to rap sheets, to psychiatric exams, to "waiver" hearings as to whether or not he would be tried as an adult, to final sentencing— was skewed. On the contrary, a middle-class white youth was sent to us as

"dangerous," he was more likely actually to be so than the black teenager given

the same label. The white teenager as more likely to have been afforded

competent legal counsel and appropriate psychiatric and psychological testing,

tried in a variety of privately funded options, and dealt with more sensitively and

individually at every stage of the juvenile justice processing. For him to be

labeled "dangerous," he had to have done something very serious indeed. By

contrast, the black teenager was more likely to be dealt with as a stereotype from

the moment the handcuffs were first put on, easily and quickly relegated to the

"more dangerous" end of the "violent-nonviolent" spectrum, albeit accompanied

by an official record meant to validate each of a biased series of decision.

(Ferguson, 2001, pp. 585-586)

Over time, the fear some educators have of Black males moves beyond a situational one,

in the moment fear, to become more generalizable and severe, with damaging

consequences, transitioning from the "punishing rooms" in schools, to jail cells.

Noguera (2003) contended that Black males represent signs of trouble and distress

in many school districts throughout the United States, and in some instances, evoke

feelings of fear among some teachers. For example, Monroe (2005) employed as a

middle school teacher at a large predominately African American school of middle- and

low-income students, witnessed a 13 year old arrested at the school. Reflecting on what

was known about the student who struggled academically, Monroe questioned the life

implications of his being arrested as a juvenile and the impact his arrest would have on

his intellectual development. In particular, Monroe acknowledged how the cultural

mismatches among students, teachers, and school leaders can create conditions for

systematic school failure of Black male students. Consequently, they are more likely to be incarcerated than any other population in the United States. Those likely incarcerated are poor, uneducated, or suffer with a mental disability or drug addiction (Noguera, 2014). Rather than entering college or a career following high school graduation, a substantially large number of Black males between the ages of 18 and 24, among all other youth by race/ethnicity, were incarcerated.

Negative stereotypes and teacher biases. Unearthing the biases teachers bring with them into the classroom can yield a number of troubling findings. Delgado (1996) explained,

> The incessant characterization of blacks in demeaning terms means that the average member of society virtually equates any one of us with trouble. We come to be seen as absent fathers, welfare mothers, lazy office worker "quota queens,'' and so on. Once this sets in, we have little chance of appealing to the better natures of persons who hold this unconscious image of us. The image renders us "Other.'' It means people simply don't think of us as individuals to whom love, respect, generosity, and friendliness are due. We are "beyond love.'' (p. 51)

Debatably, the characterization of Blacks in society represents troubling perceptions that are not easily dismantled.

Sewell (1997) argued that schools do not exist in isolation or in a vacuum and that the wider perceptions of Black males in society (e.g., popular culture and music) influence how Black boys are perceived and perceive themselves. Ferguson (1998) contended that the pervasive discrepancies in test scores are the result of teachers' perceptions and expectations; and behaviors probably do help to sustain and perhaps even

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expand this Black-White test score gap. Delgado (2002) posited that the negative stereotypes held of Blacks are engrained in the psychology of others, and the prevalence of generalizations are that Blacks are seen as troublemakers.

Unfortunately, the negative stereotypes of African American students in society held by teachers can lead to the lowering of expectations, resulting in less rigorous academic instruction, and may contribute to the lower performance of African American students (Delpit, 2006). Duncan (2002) highlighted the stereotypical attitudes teachers had of Black male students when the teachers did not provide necessary feedback for students to grow academically. In this regard, he recounted an excerpt from a focus group interview with a Black male student and his experiences in school:

> You see, I wanted to be in a math contest last semester, and Ms. C. was like, "No, you can't be in it.'' I was like, "Why not? '' Then this semester, she was like, "You can't be in it because you are not able to do the work.'' And I was like, "How you gonna say that to me?'' She was like, "Well on your homework, you are not getting the answers right.'' I said, "That's strange because I get 100s on my homework.'' She then said that she doesn't have time for all that: "I only give you 100s because you completed the assignment." I'm like, that's wrong because now I'm thinking that I got all the answers right and I don't know what I'm doing wrong. And she was like, "I have a life. What do you want me to do about that?"
> (p. 139)

The negative stereotypes of Black male students are damaging portrayals of low expectations, which if internalized, damage their ability to thrive and survive in education.

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Warren (2013b) found that White teachers who identify themselves as culturally responsive might unintentionally oppress students because they fail to get rid of dominant frames of reference when providing culturally relevant examples, activities and instructional practices. A teacher, reflecting on her initial contact with students, provided researchers with the following reflection:

> Teaching here, I had to, I had to learn like about Black culture. . . . I had never, I had never known what it was like to have a link card or umm . . . . They experience death alot and people are like in jail. Friends are doing drugs and the culture of girls getting pregnant and all of this kind of stuff. I never experienced in the years I was in high school. Like, the pain and horrific things that they have seen, like I feel, it saddens me that kids their age would even have to even, even think about knowing what these things are like. (Warren & Hotchkins, 2014, p. 285)

According to these researchers, such judgements fail to consider individual agency, but rather, cast deficit-based understandings of cultures.

In an effort to address teachers' misinformed judgments, negative preconceptions, and in turn, low expectations, Warren (2013b) developed themes of empathy's utility for culturally responsive interactions to include (a) building trust and classroom community, (b) risk-taking/flexibility, and (c) providing proactive interventions. Additionally, Warren and Hotchkins (2014) designed an empathy's application and instructional framework for educators to embrace when getting to know students and to improve teacher effectiveness when teaching in urban and multicultural classroom settings. Possible practices include (a) perspective taking, (b) paying attention to the needs of the "whole child," (c) ensuring

teacher availability, and (d) taking time to get to know students. Delpit (2006) concluded, "If we are to successfully educate all children, we must work to remove blinders, stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, biased research and racism" (p. 182).

White teachers teaching Black males and cultural mismatch. With more than 70% percent of the nation's teachers being White, and a large majority of students being students of color, a mismatch in cultural understanding is bound to occur. Although the nation's diverse student population is increasing, the nation's teaching forces are becoming less ethnically and culturally diverse (Ladson-Billings, 2005). A study conducted by Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, and Brewer (1995) found that although teachers' race, gender, and ethnicity do not affect how much students learn, it does seem to influence teachers' subjective evaluations of students, which can influence the way they track minority students and the encouragement they provide to them. Ferguson's (2001) study of Black male students in an inner-city school found that teachers and administrators alike were inclined to identify certain students as criminals. Likewise, Downey and Pribesh (2004) found that White teachers' bias at least partially explained the fact that Black students were consistently rated as poorer classroom citizens than were White students. In addition, Morris (2005, 2007) found teachers were more likely to discipline differently Black students based on their external appearance, particularly with regard to dress and manners, as opposed to their White or Asian counterparts (see also Scott, 2003). Further, Harry and Klingner (2006) found racial bias present in the ways teachers interacted with children and their tone of voice: "It was present in some teachers' discomfort with, even fear of, the behavioral styles of their students and in the

low expectations that accompanied this discomfort" (p. 55; see also Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007). Indeed, Black boys were the most likely students to be assumed at-risk (Noguera, 2008b) and disproportionately assigned to special education (Arms, Bickett, & Graf, 2008; Delpit, 2006; Harry & Klinger, 2006). White teachers and even some middle class Black teachers unfamiliar with the life experiences of Black or poor children may operate from a deficit perspective and perceive these students as "other people's children," stereotyping them as "damaged and dangerous caricatures" rather the vulnerable and impressionable beings before them (Delpit, 2006, pp. 167-168). Allen (2012) found that racial stereotypes, fear, and curiosity about Black males contributed to how they were treated differently in matters of discipline. For example, Sean, a high school junior, described his experiences of differential treatment:

It wasn't . . . like they said, "Oh I hate you because you're Black," kind of thing, but being Black, I think I can tell when somebody has that type of feeling towards me. There will be times where I can do something and another race can do something, but I get in trouble for something and they wouldn't. I think it happens more than people think. (as cited in Allen, 2012, p. 181)

Hence, Black male students should not be subjected to, nor the witness of differential treatment occurring in schools by educators. Unfortunately, cultural and gender mismatches in schools can promote such experiences for Black male students.

The NCES reported recent public elementary and secondary school enrollment data between 2008 and 2013, noting a decline in Black student enrollment from 17% to 15% (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016), making African American students the third largest school-age minority population in public schools in the United States, behind

White and Hispanic students. Whereas the percentage of White teachers has remained

constant over the past 30 years at approximately 90%, the percentage of non-White or

Hispanic/Latino(a) students has also grown (Naman, 2009). More recently, the

population of African American teachers accounted for only 8% of the nation's teachers

in 2011-2012 (Snyder et al., 2016).

As a result of the mismatch, Delpit (2006) posited that a clash between students'

school culture and home culture can result in teachers' easily misreading students'

aptitude, intent, and abilities, leading to (a) incongruence in student-teacher

communication, (b) misaligned instructional teaching styles, and (c) disciplinary

practices that are at odds with the community. The interactional styles seem to

disproportionately affect African American boys as a result of cultural influences (Delpit,

2006) and gender differences (Delpit, 2006; Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2009), when

African American males exhibit a high degree of physicality and desire for interactions

(Delpit, 2006). Teachers and school leaders who see the interactions of African American

students as negative are likely to administer more harsh disciplinary consequences for

minimal behaviors.

Allen (2012) highlighted the implications of a cultural mismatch from the

perspective of a student, Mark, who observed in the statement below, the incongruence

and mismatch between Black students and teachers, leading to academic exclusion:

> Some of the teachers don't know how to deal with the Black kids, so instead of
>
> teaching them or working with them, they send them to some other class and
>
> write them off as ADD. They send them to OCS, suspend them. They do what

they can to get them out of their hair not caring what happens in the long term. (p.

181)

Sadly, students notice the ramifications of teacher and student incongruence and of the

cultural mismatch in schools.

The implications of the cultural gap between teachers and students is large and

growing (Sleeter, 2001). Irvine (2003) discussed implications of this cultural gap between

teachers and students as follows:

When teachers and students are out of sync, they clash and confront each other,

both consciously and unconsciously, in matters concerning proxemics (use of

interpersonal distance), paralanguage (behaviors accompanying speech, such as

voice tone and pitch   and speed rate length), and coverbal behavior (gesture,

facial expression, and eye gaze).

(p. 7)

With the growing cultural gap comes challenges to how teachers understand students

through biased perspectives and stereotypical beliefs (Allen, 2012; Sleeter, 2001). In the

United States, it has taken some time for teacher educators and school districts to

recognize what is now widely referred to as "cultural competence" as a core skill set for

teachers (Noguera, 2009). Black males are alienated or excluded from school due to

cultural incongruences and clashes between home and school culture (Allen, 2010).

Racial microaggressions. The overt expressions of racism have shifted away

from the explicit era of Jim Crow and segregation in schools. Lynn and Parker (2006)

described microaggressions as everyday forms of racism that are subtle, automatic, non-

verbal exchanges that are derogatory slights against people of color. Microaggressions

are incessant and cumulative, as practiced everyday by individuals, groups, institutional policy, and administrative procedures (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Sue et al. (2007) posited that racial inequalities are so deeply ingrained in American society that covert acts of racism are nearly invisible. The masking of racism is recognizable through incidents of microaggression. Thus, according to Sue et al., microaggressions, as implicit forms of racism, are commonplace, occur daily, and briefly transpire through the verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities embodied by negative racial slights, which are derogatory insults or targets directed at people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware they are engaging in such interactions, communications, or insults, whereas prior qualitative research has found that Black American adults are acutely aware of microaggressions when they occur (Sue et al., 2007).

Howard (2008) contended that racial microaggressions from classroom teachers can manifest themselves in different ways. Howard wrote about Justin, a high school senior, who shared his lived experiences on the subtle, yet harmful put downs that students may feel:

> We had an assembly at school for all the seniors who were going to college. They had the students come up on stage and say what college they were going to. For whatever reason, they forgot to call me up during the assembly, so I asked Mr. Matthews (the assistant principal) after the assembly why I didn't get called up, and he said that they were only calling up the kids who were going to "good colleges," and they didn't think that Morehouse was a really good college. That was like a slap in the face to me. Morehouse is a good college. I'm one of the first

kids to go to college in my family, and he says that it is not a good school. (pp.

973-974)

The racial microaggression that Justin experienced was one that situated a historic Black university as less credible than the "good colleges" other students were attending. This racial microaggression imposes an attitude and belief that Justin's selection to attend Morehouse was inferior to that of his peers.

Henfield (2011), too, argued that the overt expressions of racism have shifted to more covert, subtle acts of discrimination known as racial microaggressions. This researcher analyzed how racism in the form of racial microaggressions is problematic and difficult to recognize by perpetrators, including some educators when they perform microaggressions. Henfield explored the perceptions and attitudes of five self-identified Black male, 8th grade students who attended a predominantly white middle school. The study focused on one broad question: What are Black male students' perceptions of and experiences of microaggressions in a traditionally white middle school? In one case study, Henfield described the experiences of three Black male students as living through assumptions of deviance based on interactions with the teacher. In Henfield's account,

Fred stated that some teachers would get upset if a student did 'something small,' such as toss a pencil at another student. Joe, similarly stated that teachers assigned detention to students for 'stupid things,' such as tapping on a desk. (p. 151)

Allen (2010) explored the use of CRT and racial microaggressions as a theoretical lens to explain race and racism in the secondary school experiences of Black middle-class males. This study extended the discussion on the everyday subtleties of race and the occurrence of racial microaggressions in the secondary school experiences of Black

males. Students in Allen's study shared their sense of feeling invisible, disapproving and judgmental attitudes of teachers based upon stereotypes held of Black males, and feelings of being tracked out of educational opportunities. In one of the stories shared by students in the study, Darrell recalled an unfulfilling relationship he had with his teacher:

> She doesn't know my name, like, just the other day we were having a test review
> game and like she was throwing popsicle sticks out of the [cup], and I'm like, you
> know, I'm the only Black kid in your class, uh, next to three other Black kids in
> there, and I'm like one of the most goofiest ones in there and so she pulls my
> name out and she goes, "D-D-Darrell?" And it's her own handwriting and
> everything and I'm like, "Come on now, lady. I've been in your class now for
> about four months now and you don't know my name." She doesn't know me or
> anything like that. (as cited in Allen, 2010, p. 130)

Darrell experienced feeling invisible in a class he had attended for 4 months. His teacher relationship was quite dismal in regard to his feeling of being invisible—uncared, nourished, and unimportant. Darrell also expressed feelings of differential treatment by an African American teacher because of his style of dress and music preferences:

> I think it was definitely, her thing was definitely a race thing, I think, because
> there was this other Black kid in there named Jon and he was like the loudest of
> the loud in there and everything, but you know, I think it's the fact that you know,
> I came in there dressing the way I dress, which is more Hip-Hop style and this
> other kid Jon who, you know, dressed in this Polo and the tie and stuff every day.
> You know, I think she appreciated him way more out of everybody. And you
> know, you try your hardest in the class, and she was just so aggravated with all

these kids, seeing these fights every day at school with these kids that look like

me, dress like me, whatever, it kind of had an impact on her and mine

relationship. (as cited in Allen, 2010, p. 131)

Another student in Allen's (2010) study, who was attending school at a

predominantly White suburban high school, recounted the cultural bias and presumed

fear exhibited by school staff towards African American students:

I think they also have sort of the same, well oh, I see a bunch of Black people

wearing baggy pants, Nikes and some hoodies and so what they do is during

lunch where the Black people are at, they will stand literally like 10 feet away and

watch them the whole lunch. Literally. No joke. . . . Yeah, I definitely think it's an

issue of fear, meaning that their school, they think that their school will go into

chaos if they let, you know, these Black youths go crazy at their school. (p. 133).

Here again, as supported by the experiences of Darrell and other Black male students

who attended this predominately White suburban high school, is evidence that racial

microaggressions are overt expressions of racism that occur subtly.

To reiterate, personally mediated racism occurs in education when Black male

students are exposed to negative stereotypes and biases by school personnel. Moreover,

when cultural mismatch occurs, an incongruence exists between Black male students and

teachers, resulting in conflict between them, thus negatively impacting students'

opportunities to learn. Research has continued to paint a dismissal picture of a false hope

that Black males will ever achieve academic success. Similarly, in "A Gardener's Tale,"

differential treatment is given to the pink flowers (Black males): The relationship the

gardener has with the pink flowers is broken based upon differential treatment, and for

Black males, this differential treatment refers to negative stereotypes and biases as well as cultural mismatches that foster exclusionary practices. The damaged relationship between students and school personnel results in conflict. Ultimately, Black male students (the pink flowers) witness and experience inequitable treatment, leading to a lack of nourishment. The additional atrocities create further damage beyond the lack of nutrients already established in the malnourishing soil. The structural foundations in the educational institution (the soil) represent an unequal starting point of disadvantages when Black male students begin school with a lack of nourishment in their learning environment, inhibiting their ability to fully thrive and survive in a toxic environment filled with racial microaggressions.

Symbolism of Internalized Racism in "A Gardener's Tale"

Internalized racism appears in the allegory when inanimate flowers express their feelings about their treatment. The pink seeds (Black male students) would one day bloom into flowers and resent the differential treatment they received. The pink flowers (Black male students) would know that they were different and how ill-equipped they were to survive. The red flowers (White students) might look upon the pink flowers (Black male students) with disdain and pity as did the gardener (schools). White students might not comprehend why the pink flowers (Black male students) could not grow sufficiently and suggest that something was genetically wrong with the pink flowers (Black male students). Although the pink flowers (Black male students) were planted in soil, watered daily, and received the same amount of sunlight as did the other flowers in the garden, the red flowers (White students) might question why the pink flowers (Black male

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students) could not thrive and thus blame them for not surviving or fully rising beyond

mid height.

Internalized Racism in Education

Internalized racism in education is evident through the perceptions African American male students have of themselves as individuals and as a race (Jones, 2000). Noguera (2003) examined the influence and impact of environmental and cultural factors in regard to the academic outcomes and school performance of Black male students. Noguera asserted that carrying negative stereotypes is an onerous burden. Thus, African American males need to be aware of the negative stereotypes ascribed to them by society, the media, as well as the negative perceptions others have of them and not succumb to those perceptions (Noguera, 2003; Whiting, 2006). Oftentimes the internalized perceptions Black students have of themselves and their racial peers impact their academic achievement (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008).

Osborne (1999) reviewed three prominent theories to address the social and cultural factors that inhibit Black males from achieving excellence in education: (a) Steele's 1997 theory on stereotype threat, which challenges inherent systems of racism in society that prevent students of color from viewing themselves as learners; (b) Majors and Billson's 1993 theory, cool pose, which describes factors within the United States that prevent students of color from viewing themselves as scholars and students, thus personally devaluing education; and (c) Ogbu's 1995 cultural-ecological perspective, which supports the view that Black males lack an identification with academics, which is the cause of their school failure—arguably another form of acting white, deficit perspective against Black males. As such, Osborne argued that Black males'

identification with academics is rooted in their perspective on self-esteem. In the literature, multiple researchers have provided studies on various internalized racial perceptions known to hinder the achievement of Black males in education, as follows: (a) experiencing stereotype threat (Ford et al., 2008; Spencer, Dupree & Hartmann, 1997; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995), (b) "acting white" (Ford et al., 2008; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), (c) maintaining a "cool pose" (Osborne, 1999), and (d) normalizing underachievement (Ford et al., 2008) are known to hinder the achievement of Black males in education. The salient internalized perceptions of stereotype threat and acting white are discussed below.

Stereotype threat. Spencer et al. (1997) posited that stereotypes about a culture can become self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, African American males might unwillingly take advantage of societal interpretations that perceive them as violent and hostile and live out the stereotypes with an increase in their aggressive behaviors or offset feelings with coping strategies (Spencer et al., 1997).

Steele (1997) identified the negative stereotypes Black males encounter as the contributing source to their underperformance in schools. According to Steele, stereotypes shape how students identify themselves with school success, defining the concept of stereotype threat as follows:

It is the social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype. Stereotype threat, it is a situational threat—a threat in the air—that, in general

form, can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists (e.g., skateboarders, older adults, White men, gang members). Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype. (p. 614)

Steele and Aronson (1995) examined the impact stereotype threat has on African American students and their ability to achieve high scores on standardized tests. In particular, these researchers found that when graduate students were prompted to indicate their race prior to taking the Graduate Record Examination, they underperformed on the test. Thus, the assessment results for the control group demonstrated test apprehension and lower test results. The researchers found that regardless of one's racial group salience, undergoing the process of acknowledging one's racial identity prior to the test resulted in students' confirming the negative stereotypes of their own racial group, which depressed their performance on the test. Steele and Aronson (1995) pointed out that "Black students are particularly vulnerable to negative stereotypes associated with . . . their intelligence" (p. 808).

Similarly, Carter (2005) found that Black students attending a predominantly White high school also experienced stereotype threat as they combated the black intellectual inferiority complex. The following interview between Carter and a student illustrates this well:

Student: I don't talk much in class. I think it's because I don't wanna have the wrong answer if I answer the question. I don't wanna say the wrong answer.

Carter: Do you think any of that is related to race?

Student: In a way cuz black people are considered not as smart as, like, white

people—by a lotta people.

Carter: Do you think your white peers think that also?

Student: Some of them. (p. 164)

Unfortunately, Black students do not perform as well because of stereotype threat—the

constant belief and negative comparisons held of Blacks and their performance on tests—

in addition to factors associated with their motivation, academic skills, and biases on tests

(Ford et al., 2008). Blacks have internalized negative perceptions of their achievement

and intelligence (Ford et al., 2008).

To counter this deficit paradigm wherein Black male students underachieve in

school due either to the peer pressure of being viewed as "acting white" by their peers, or

to their living out the negative perspectives of others, I offer a different perspective to

understanding how Black male students internalize racism: the performance of

"stereotype lift." According to Walton and Cohen (2002), "stereotype lift is a

performance boost caused by an awareness that the outgroup [Black male students] is

negatively stereotyped" (p. 456). The achievement within that group is perceived as

negative, thus the extra boost of feelings to counter the negative perceptions becomes

motivation for the ingroup to gain confidence to excel upwards. Hartley and Sutton

(2013) studied the effects stereotype lift and stereotype threat had on the achievement

gaps of different social groups. They found that males and females performed better after

negative outgroup stereotypes were explicitly linked to performance, thus correlating a

link between stereotype lift and improved self-confidence in males.

Acting white. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) reviewed previous explanations on the underachievement of Black male students and found African American students operationally defined the idea of "coping with the burden of 'acting white'" (p. 186), suggesting students resolve the tension of wanting to perform well in school in two ways: successfully or unsuccessfully. Students who maintained their academic performance learned how to cope with the burden of acting white and continued their success in schools, whereas students who underachieved did not enhance their academic success. Fordham and Ogbu found that the fear African American students had of acting white was a significant factor contributing to their underachievement in schools. Arguably, Tyson (2002), in her ethnographic study at two all-black elementary schools, found that Black children begin school with a focus on achievement and are engaged with the process of schooling. With few studies to examine regarding the misconceptions of acting white, the pervasiveness of this deficit ideology is embedded within our psyche to believe that avoiding acting white is a reality among Blacks to oppose the schooling experience and their underachievement as Black students (Gallenta & Cross, 2007; Tyson, 2002).

Ford et al. (2008) studied Black gifted students, their achievements, and the perceptions others have of them as acting white or acting black, as well as the perceptions they internalize. In line with Bergin and Cooks (2003), they found that acting white is a form of peer pressure that is experienced by Black students. This form of peer pressure is synonymous with one denying her or his racial identity or culture by accepting another White identity in order to receive a "quality" education. Thus, being accused of acting white is viewed as betrayal to one's race in that the student has given up all racial, cultural ties to adopt the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the oppressor (Ford et al., 2008)

to successfully navigate or "fit in" with the dominant culture and survive in White normed spaces. This form of assimilation privileges Whites and causes Black male students to see themselves as "less than," thus acting out a form of learned helplessness.

Likewise, researchers have also critiqued Fordham and Ogbu's historical connections of acting white to slavery and the deficit generalizations made throughout their research studies. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) believed that acting white is descriptive of Blacks living out an "oppositional culture" toward school (Gallenta & Cross, 2007; Harper & Davis, 2012; Tyson, 2002). Tyson (2002) found that the pervasive perceptions of Blacks as oppositional toward education, anti-academic, or anti-education was deceptively incorrect in that Blacks place a high value on educational achievements. Galleta and Cross (2007) argued that the theory largely situates Blacks to be in opposition to education and schooling, while linking the theory back to the opposition slaves held in resistance toward the institution of slavery. As such, Galleta and Cross explained the historic propensity for slaves and freed slaves to become educated after slavery and the Civil War as they participated in the building of Schools in the south. According to Galleta and Cross,

> If the drive for education and meaningful freedom had been allowed to run its natural course, beginning in the 20th century, some 40 years after the end of the Civil War, Blacks would have been disproportionately represented across all levels of the public education establishment in the South, including higher education. (p. 19)

Furthermore, Harper and Davis (2012) argued that the oppositional culture theory suggests that Black Americans resist social structures wherein the perceived school

domination engenders, among Black students, an opposition to and a devaluation of school achievement based upon the unearned privileges and advancements of White Americans in education. Harper and Davis found many of the essays written by students spoke strongly about the inequities that exists in education. Such inequities consisted of inadequate and under resourced schools, inequitable educational policies and conditions that sustain racial gaps, and an awareness that underrepresented groups continue to struggle in education and receive unequal opportunities.

Internalized racism in education within "A Gardener's Tale." Internalized racism appears in education similar to the occurrences in the allegory, "A Gardener's Tale." Although the pink flowers (Black male students) were planted in soil, watered daily, and received the same amount of sunlight as did the red flowers (White students), the pink flowers (Black male students) begin to question why they are not thriving and surviving beyond mid height. The pink flowers (Black male students) begin to establish an internalized belief that something is wrong with them, either based upon their positionality in the environment or because their relationship with the gardener (educator) does not create opportunities for them to succeed. As a result, they begin to succumb to the negative stereotypes and beliefs of themselves as pink flowers (Black male students). Some of the pink flowers (Black male students) begin to develop a strong preference for flowers similar to themselves, while others develop a belief to counter against any effort that leads them to assimilate or act white like the oppressor (or red flowers); yet others surrender to the known threat, "stereotype."

Dishearteningly, many of the pink flowers (Black male students) continue to regenerate the same prevalent conditions as those of the generation before them,

succumbing to the negative perceptions others have of them, while internalizing a normalized belief of failure. As stated earlier, internalized racism in education is evident through the perceptions Black male students have of themselves as individuals and as a race. Statistical data regarding the frequent realities of African American males merely suggest that African American males are living out the negative stereotypes and images they are faced with, because a lack of interventions and strategies to address these challenges is evident (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008).

Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that the "historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an education debt" (p. 5) and the educational system owes so many students who continue to or have been poorly served. Thus, "the historical debt accounts for the racist and xenophobic practices that occurred in education that decried notions that Blacks were capable of education (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 6).

Implications for Responding to the Three Levels of Racism

Race and racism in society (a) permeate the educational institution (through biased policies and procedures), (b) are personally mediated through conscious and unconscious biases, and (c) are internalized negatively by Black male students. The continuance of racism in education is evident in the persistent underachievement of Black male students in comparison to other races and genders. The educational problems will continue, if not, worsen in time unless drastic changes are made to change how Black males are perceived and perceive themselves, countering negative stereotypes and biases, improving the conditions within the school environment to promote equity to increase

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their opportunities to thrive, and eliminating detrimental policies that persist and channel Black males out of the college-going pipeline.

Interrogating School Policies and Procedures

Interrogating school policies and procedures, as early interventions to address institutionalized racism**,** can lead to solutions to increase Black male students' achievement in schools. Similar to "A Gardener's Tale" wherein one might change the environmental conditions in the flower box encompassing the pink flowers and counter the negative perceptions and stereotypes of the gardener and pink flowers, in reality one might be able to change the status of education concerning Black males. In efforts to do so, the systemic institutional structures that continue to produce the same results of underachievement of Black male students must be addressed. Whiting (2006) believed that if we, as educators, intervene sooner to develop scholar identities in Black male students, the achievement gap can be closed and the vicious cycle of underachievement, broken.

Although emphasized in research, educators oftentimes neglect to include societal personal perceptions Black males have of themselves. For example, Kafele (2012), a national education consultant, found that elementary school educators struggle with ideas on how to engage and inspire Black male students to succeed academically. As a principal at Newark Tech High School in Essex County, New Jersey, Kafele developed the Young Men's Empowerment Program, an empowerment group for his Black male students, to increase their access to Black men who served as role models, which inspired students to live beyond their current realities and circumstances and develop dreams of their future success. In the article "Empowering Young Black Males," Kafele described

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the process he undertook to motivate students to learn and increase their desire to learn and succeed academically.

Kafele (2012) argued that the crisis of Black males in education does not begin at the point of students dropping out of school. Rather, it begins when students enter secondary school, reading below grade level. Their underachievement persists as they advance grade levels with low-achievement scores on standardized tests, excessively high suspension and expulsion rates, and are disproportionately overrepresented in special education. The education gaps students encounter in school impact their life outcomes, which can result in higher levels of Black males unemployed or underemployed, with less access to quality health care and a greater likelihood of being arrested or incarcerated (Kafele, 2012). Kafele (2009) shared how the program he implemented can be expanded as a comprehensive model to support elementary, middle, and high school Black male and female students. The following strategies incorporate some of Kafele's suggestions, along with insights of mine, based on my experience as a school leader:

1. "Form an empowerment committee to determine what the goals of the program will be" (Kafele, 2009, p. 74). The committee should be comprised of educators, administrators, and guidance counselors;

2. "Conduct a needs assessment for the male population at the school" (Kafele, 2009, p. 74);

3. "Determine the characteristics that will need to change" (Kafele, 2009, p. 75) and what is currently happening;

4. Assess the resources in the school and the school's ability to attract expertise;

5. Set goals for the program and what students should take away from the program;

6. Determine the frequency of when meetings will take place, and so on.

These strategies describe a process educators can implement in forming a comprehensive program for students.

Creating equity-minded schools. Noguera (2003) argued that schools that serve African American males consistently fail to nurture, support, and protect them. This scholar (as well as Davis, 2003) suggested that the trouble with Black boys begins at school as they begin to experience stereotypes and inequitable challenges that lead to school failure in the early years of school demise. Similarly, Noguera asserted,

> The structure and culture of schools play a major role in reinforcing and maintaining racial categories and the stereotypes associated with them. As schools sort children by perceived measures of their ability and as they single certain children for discipline, implicit and explicit messages about racial and gender identities are conveyed. (p. 444)

Noguera believed that when students feel the school staff or someone specifically cares about them and they have access to positive role models and social supports, they tend to perform better in school.

Schools are critical sites for young Black males to develop their identity as they make meaning for who they are or are perceived to be (Davis, 2003). According to Ford et al. (2008), it is important that schools develop strategies to promote achievement throughout the school district, in buildings and classrooms. Noguera (2003) concluded, "If schools were to become more nurturing sources of support for Black males, students

will more likely perceive schools as a source of hope and opportunity rather than a place to avoid and escape" (p. 455).

Creating equity-minded and conscious educators. Warren (2013a) found that teachers who are aiming to become culturally responsive must be concerned with negotiating professional interactions that produce favorable outcomes for the culturally diverse students under their charge. Very few studies offer empirical evidence of empathy's utility in the culturally responsive classroom, especially when the teacher is culturally different from his or her students. Warren's study is an examination of empathy's benefit for improving the student-teacher interactions of four White female educators and a group of their Black male students. Based on the study's findings, empathy helps (a) facilitate teachers' instructional flexibility and risk-taking, (b) establish trusting student-teacher relationships, and (c) support teachers' ability to intervene proactively to ensure students meet high academic expectations. The nature, importance, and usefulness of empathy for helping teachers maintain interactions with youth that produce evidence of cultural responsiveness are discussed.

Culturally relevant pedagogy. Irvine and York (1995) insisted that student-teacher interactions are the places where learning takes place. Similarly, the core of culturally responsive pedagogy consists of the interactions between teachers and their students. Making sure each interaction appreciates, builds upon, and affirms the cultural identities of youth can be extraordinarily challenging work. Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) conceded that engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy seems "Herculean" to teachers who are attempting to balance the many demands of their jobs. These scholars also argued that culturally responsive pedagogy "clashes with the traditional ways in

which education is carried out in our society" (p. 444). Moreover, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contended that utilizing culturally relevant pedagogical practices as guiding principles to instructing students is not limited *just* to teachers of color, but to all teachers who are able to deconstruct and construct their racialized experiences and the role race plays in the eyes of students, parents, the community, and within themselves.

Brown (2007) asserted that the academic achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds would improve if educators were to make the effort to ensure that classroom instruction was conducted in a manner that was responsive to the student's home culture. An important aspect of a culturally responsive classroom is the teacher's belief that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds want to learn (Brown, 2007), and that the instructional strategies and teaching behaviors of the teacher can engage students in ways that lead to improved academic achievement.

Support Programs and Development of Positive Black Male Identity

Whiting (2006) examined the poor achievement status of Black males for over 20 years, critiquing initiatives and remediation strategies used as the missing ingredients to close the achievement gap, thus devoting much of his efforts to supporting the development of positive images Black males have of themselves as scholars. Whiting described the characteristics of a scholar identity and offered recommendations on how to develop a sense of self in Black males within the school setting. These recommendations include promoting self-efficacy; developing an internal locus of control, self-awareness, and a need to achieve; and building self-confidence and a willingness to make sacrifices, while creating an orientation for their future. Key aspects to improving the achievement of Black males include supporting them in efforts to acquire a high regard for their racial

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identity and a greater sense of self-efficacy to help promote a scholarly identity (Whiting, 2006). Such support is needed and can be achieved through mentors and role models, who can not only help develop the gifts and talents of Black males, motivating them to achieve academically while fostering leadership and conflict resolution skills, but also help build the positive relationships they might need. To meet the challenge of closing the achievement gap, we, as educators, must reverse the negative perceptions Black males have of themselves as scholars (Whiting, 2006).

Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color. At the institutional level, the national Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC, 2017) focuses on promoting the educational success of boys and young men of color in education. Founded in 2006 by Ron Walker, COSEBOC (2017b) works directly with community and school leaders in pre K-12 to establish programs and services that are designed, using a framework of success rooted in Standards of Practice, to incorporate the best ways to educate boys and young men of color to achieve academic success. Rite of Passage is a school mentoring program aimed at increasing the attendance and graduate rates of students. This program offers students principles of manhood and supports them during their transition through varying stages to develop a conscious potential to achieve (COSEBOC, 2017d).

The mission of COSEBOC is "to connect, inspire, support, and strengthen school leaders dedicated to the social, emotional, and academic development of boys and young men of color (COSEBOC, 2017a, Mission section). Participating schools, school leaders, practitioners, and students must embrace COSEBOC's seven pillars or standards of

practices necessary for effective schools. COSEBOC's standards define the following

seven core essential components:

1. Assessment

2. Parent/family/community partnership

3. Curriculum and instruction

4. School environment and culture

5. School leadership

6. School counseling

7. School organization. (COSEBOC, 2017c, para. 3)

The vision for COSEBOC is to

1. Build a network of school leaders who are able to increase their schools'

   success with boys and young men of color;

2. Provide professional development, promising practices and other resources to

   support and strengthen our network of school leaders as a learning

   community;

3. Promote the concept of schools that are intentionally designed to ensure

   educational success for their male students of color and the reality of

   COSEBOC Award Schools that have met this goal and whose male students

   of color demonstrate success (COSEBOC, 2017a, Vision section).

Black Male Development Symposium. To address personally mediated

challenges of learning about, and approaches to support the development of Black males,

the Black Male Development Symposium (BMDS) was established by Chicago's Third

World Press, an African-American publishing house in Chicago. The mission of BMDS

(2017) is to promote conversations on the state of Black males in the United States. The

first symposium occurred in 2004, followed by an annual conference each year, with over

1,000 attendees joining the symposium. Every year, the inescapable reality of the state of

conditions and the reality of Black males are discussed, as well as strategies for

community survival and empowerment. Black males 12-15 years of age have represented

the largest group in attendance at the symposium over the last 8 years (BMDS, 2017).

The symposium offers workshops in four distinct areas, which are presented by

individuals and groups who are selected through a national competition and request for

papers. The four areas or "pathways" include (a) investigate, (b) create, (c) relate, and (d)

elevate. These pathways focus on the following topics:

1. Overcoming the school to prison pipeline;

2. Advance your SWAG (soulful wisdom and genius);

3. Family and relationship;

4. Health, wellness, and spirituality;

5. Winning the future through economic development. (BMDS, 2017,

    Pathways/Workshops section)

Black Male Summit. At the internalized level, each year the Inclusive Excellence

Department at the University of Akron hosts the Black Male Summit, which is a 1-day

symposium to equip high school and college students, educators, counselors,

administrators, and community leaders with the necessary tools needed to better serve

Ohio's African American male students. Traditionally, the summit draws students,

educators, and lecturers to discuss networking and race relations, promote healthy

relationships, develop healthy self-esteem, and promote personal and professional growth

(University of Akron Inclusive Excellence, 2017). The symposium provides training from leading national experts in the African American community on educational achievement. The symposium provides best practices to address achievement concerns by showcasing leading initiatives. Two tracks are offered for the audience to attend:

- Track One: College and Community Track, offered to the greater Akron and Ohio area;
- Track Two: Black Male Summit Academy is offered to high school and university students. (University of Akron Inclusive Excellence, 2017).

Black Male Initiative Summit. In 2009, the University of Denver (DU) Center for Multicultural Excellence established the Black Male Initiative Summit (BMIS), addressing the need to provide "intentional and purposeful college access programs and initiatives for African American Black male students" (Varaxy, Teck, & Brame, 2014, p. 2). As a pipeline initiative, young Black male students in the 6th through 12th grades and beyond develop a knowledge base to understand the importance of attending college, developing a college-going mindset, and gain resources to remain academically driven and successful throughout their education journey, while being connected to a higher education environment and mentors (Varaxy et al., 2014). In 2010, BMIS held its first 1-day leadership conference, with an annual theme to promote resilience, advocacy, and social change, and guide conversations to inform participants. Since the inception of BMIS, over 500 Black male youth have participated in the leadership conference (Varaxy et al., 2014).

Through MBK initiatives, which highlight a need to focus on the achievement and life experiences of Black male students, programs, such as those mentioned above,

provide students with access to resources, aid in their development as African American males, and help connect them to positive role models. Black male students also receive mentoring support through in-kind contributions from committed community members. Likewise, educators also receive support and resources necessary to meet the needs of Black males in schools through community and school partnerships and from local and national initiatives.

Conclusion: "A Gardener's Tale" Meets
"Growing Roses in Concrete"

Tupac Shakur (2009) wrote,

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete? Proving nature's laws wrong it learned to walk without having feet. Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air. Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else even cared. (p. 2)

Duncan-Andrade (2009) described the metaphorical poem by Tupac Shakur emphasizing successful young people as roses who emerge out of defiance from the socially toxic environments as "roses that grow from concrete" (p. 186). Similar to the allegory, "A Gardener's Tale," the concrete environment the roses grew in is symbolic of the most deplorable conditions for roses to grow in, because concrete is devoid of nutrients, often situated in environments where pollutants would threaten the very existence of their survival (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Duncan-Andrade contended that hope is required to grow roses in concrete. To grow roses beyond the toxicity of their environment, Duncan-Andrade argued to end the existence of *false hope,* which perpetuates disadvantages for students. However *critical hope* is necessary for educators

when teaching urban students, thus growing roses despite the environmental conditions in which they live. The two categorical forms of hope, false hope and critical hope, are discussed below.

False Hope and Critical Hope

False hope, the enemy of hope, is pervasive and highly peddled in many urban schools (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Duncan-Andrade (2009) contended that the prevalence of false hope is ever common in the education system: The evidence of this atrocity is realized when the achievement gap of Black males remains a persistent challenge, similar to institutionalized racism. False hope is comprised of "mythical hope," "hokey hope," and "hope deferred," all of which operate independently of each other; yet false hope maintains a dismal and eroding hope that educators must resist (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

Abandoning false hope. *Mythical hope*, at the level of institutional racism, is what Duncan-Andrade (2009) posited represents the normalized structures within the educational system that mystify the historical, societal, and cultural pasts that have led to barriers students encounter. Mythical hope refers to the creation of systematic structures of standardized learning, grade level expectations, and assessments on state and national standards that promote a mythical view of equity and educational progress for all students. Yet, the existence of an academic achievement gap among disproportionate groups of students and their White and Asian counterparts reinforces the mythical image that the educational playing field is equal (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Lee, 2002). Educators who demonstrate a mythical hope negate their responsibility for contributing to student underachievement by simply placing the blame of missed opportunities to learn on the student (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

Hokey hope, at the personally mediated level, is the sense of false caring that

educators unconsciously express to students by failing to build meaningful and

significant relationships with students. Hokey-hope educators knowingly or unknowingly

endorse a belief that students are solely responsible for their own learning by lacing up

their own "boot straps," thereby reinforcing the myth of meritocracy (Carter, 2008).

Hokey-hope educators who adhere to this boot strap mentality error in the relinquishment

of their responsibility to ensure every student learns and is provided with an equal and

equitable opportunity to learn.

Hope deferred, at the internalized level of racism, results in the chronic stress and

negative educational experiences Black male students encounter that impact their ability

to access opportunities to learn. Hope deferred occurs when educators continuously

promote a distant future of hope for students and fail to provide students with the

necessary tools to navigate through their present-day circumstances and educational

challenges (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

Embracing critical hope. *Critical hope*, the enemy of hopelessness, rejects false

hope and demands that collective and active struggle must occur to challenge inequality,

group xenophobia, and personal despair (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Educators must

possess critical hope, which is comprised of "material hope," "Socratic hope," and

"audacious hope"; each is interrelated and interdependent of the others (Duncan-

Andrade, 2009).

Material hope requires that educators provide students with quality teaching and

relevant opportunities to learn that are academically rigorous and able to produce student

growth—to scaffold, differentiate, and challenge students to think while connecting

learning to relevant life experiences. Teachers implementing material hope empower

students to develop their voice within the education system (Freire, 1970). In contrast,

educators who simplify learning do not instill a desire to learn within students, rescue

them from achieving true academic success, and diminish their opportunity to learn—all

of which are detrimental to the material hope students must possess (Duncan-Andrade,

2009).

Socratic hope is based on the philosophical views of Socrates wherein the

"unexamined life is not worth living." Socratic hope embodies the examined realities,

experiences, and lives of students and teachers, while forming deeply connected, trusting,

and sometimes painful relationships whereby teachers view student failure as their own

personal failure and engage in a self-critique to ensure student success. Teachers who

exude Socratic hope understand the cliché of *showing* students you care rather than

telling them, thus increasing opportunities to develop teacher-student relationships at the

personally mediated level.

Audacious hope legitimizes suffering but stands boldly in solidarity, demanding

that we reconnect and radically heal in our collective pain, suffering, victories, and

successes. Audacious hope negates individualism and promotes a belief in humanism and

the "collective struggle" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). As humans, we experience celebratory

moments and challenging situations. Educators who utilize audacious hope in the urban

classroom setting look beyond the manifestations of student behaviors as negative but

rather, challenge students to move beyond painful experiences toward opportunities to

cope.

In closing, educators must be willing to meet the critical needs of Black males, increasing their ability to learn and access educational opportunities. Duncan-Andrade (2009) asserted that the mindsets of educators must improve from placing the blame on students' racial makeup, socioeconomic status, educational background, or poor academic preparation as the source of school failure. Smith (2002) believed that when teachers are able to identify and understand the underlying assumptions they have of African American students and their behaviors; these teachers will understand why they are not be able to engage them as learners. Smith contended that in order for teachers to reach African American students, teachers must identify with them through their language, culture, and background. Because social and cultural differences may exist between students in urban schools and their teachers and administrators, teachers and administrators must understand that relational connections comprise a crucial element of effective instruction and the increasing of students' opportunities to learn and achieve academic success.

The deficit and problematic challenges that exist for Black male students are well documented in research and in educational data. Unfortunately, remedies and approaches to improve the disparities for Black male students is largely missing in research. This doctoral research project will contribute to gaps in research literature on approaches school leaders can implement to promote equity for Black male students. This autoethnographic research praxis project will share the lived experiences of one school leader who navigated through the three levels of racism to promote equity and improve the achievement of Black male students at a once chronically underperforming school.

Chapter Three. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to come to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the researcher as a school leader at a once failing school, implementing practices to change the trajectory of school failure for Black male students. This study seeks to understand the essence of the researcher's lived experiences as a school leader. Whereas there are many alternative and traditional approaches of inquiry, autoethnography has provided an in-depth understanding and explanation related to the experiences of the researcher as a school principal. Jones's (2000) conceptual framework, three levels of racism: "A Gardener's Tale," has been used to examine how one school leader promoted equity for Black male students, ultimately, turning around a chronically underperforming school in 3 years. The goal of this research study is to examine how school leaders can become "active" agents of school change to promote the success of Black male students in school. The results of this research study should provide recommendations school leaders can embrace to dismantle school systems and practices that hinder the success of Black male students in school.

This chapter offers a rationale for engaging in qualitative research methods, specifically autoethnography as the best suited approach for inquiry in this study. Next, I engage in my researcher positionality, which addresses my connection to conducting autoethnography as the focus for this research study. Then, I discuss the process for

gathering data, conducting research, and data analysis. Lastly, I provide an account for the trustworthiness, credibility, and potential limitations of this study.

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research seeks to understand not only how people interpret their experiences and construct their world, but also the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Creswell (2013) posited qualitative research is conducted to empower individuals, share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that exists between a researcher and study participants. Qualitative research can also contribute to the formation of public policy and can underwrite and inform decisions organizations and governments make based upon research conducted. In the education field, qualitative research draws upon concepts, models, and theories in educational psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, and sociology (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative research approaches commonly found in the field of education include ethnography, autoethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. In qualitative research in education, data collection includes observations, interviews, and document analysis. Analysis results often specify reoccurring patterns, categories, and themes not leading toward substantive theory or grounded theory results. (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2002) found that most researchers in the field of education have experiences with formal schooling, possess an interest in knowing more about the field, pursue improvements in educational practices, or seek to contribute to their knowledge base.

Autoethnographic Research

Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach that involves the researcher's exploring her or his own personal experiences and relating those experiences to broader issues in the community through literature. Reed-Danahay (1997) described self-ethnography as the connection of the vulnerable self—emotions, body, and spirit—to evocative stories. Ellis and Bochner (2000) defined autoethnography as the idea of "multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). Elaborating on this research approach, they described it as

> An autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-single lens, focusing outward on the social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 739)

Chang (2008) also described autoethnography as a "combination of cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details" (p. 46). For Muncey (2010), autoethnography can be viewed as a connection between "multiple layers of consciousness, the vulnerable self, the coherent self, the critiquing self in social contexts, the subversion of dominant discourses and the evocative potential" (p. 28).

In addition to defining autoethnography, Reed-Danahay (1997) believed that autoethnography is both an analytical and interpretative research approach (p. 2). For Muncey (2010), the two approaches to autoethnography are evocative and analytical. Evocative autoethnography captures the heart and the imagination of the reader by

sharing the researcher's vulnerable self through descriptive details of the tensions

between pain and the revelations of the researcher (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Mendez,

2013). Ellis and Bochner (2000) observed that evocative autoethnographies are

confessional, emotional, therapeutic, creative, and unconventional. On the contrary,

Anderson (2006) challenged the obscuring vision of autoethnography as only being

emotional or evocative by emphasizing a paradigmatic view that autoethnography can be

analytical and consistent with qualitative inquiry. Anderson (2006) offered five key

features required to conduct analytical autoethnographic research that differ from

evocative autoethnography:

1. "A full member in the research group or setting" (p. 373);

2. "Analytic reflexivity" wherein the researcher is aware of her or his influence
   on the data and throughout the research process;

3. "Visible in the researcher's published texts and possesses analytical
   reflexivity" (p. 373);

4. "Dialogue with informants beyond the self" (p. 378);

5. Commitment by the researcher to the analytical research agenda, focused on
   improving theoretical understandings of the broader social phenomenon.

Although the methods of autoethnography can vary between evocative and

analytical, the origins of autoethnography stem from the field of anthropology, where

anthropologists use storytelling and other genres of self-narration to engage in cultural

analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008). Although autoethnography is still an emerging

research approach, it has been in existence since the 1970s (Ellis & Bochner, 2000;

Patton, 2015), first referenced by anthropologist Karl Heider who studied the Dani people

in 1975. Heider referred to autoethnography as the Dani's "own" account of the study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Later, in 1979, cultural anthropologist David Hayano is credited as the originator of the term "autoethnography," referring to an analysis of one's own life through the procedures of ethnography (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Since that time, many scholars, including Ellis and Bochner, began to challenge the limitations of social science's ontological, epistemological, and axiological research perspectives regarding what constitutes "fact" and "truth," critiquing paradigmatic views on research and how it is conducted (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Such critiques led researchers to embrace autoethnography as a positive response to produce meaning, accessibility, and evocative research grounded in personal experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). Ellis et al. (2011) believed that research, such as autoethnography, should help readers become sensitized to understanding the meaning of experiences which often silences the voices of those marginalized by their experiences and cause others to "empathize with people who are different from [them]" (p. 274). In many cases, the voices of those conducting the research are silenced or hidden. In autoethnography, the voice of the researcher is no longer silenced, but revealed. For the purposes of this research study, the marginalized voice of the researcher has not been silenced or hidden in the research process.

Forthcoming in Chapter 3, I share my role as the researcher and my connection to this study, followed with a description of the data collection procedures and data analysis process, and concluding with a discussion of ethical considerations and limitations. The hope of this doctoral research praxis project for Chapter 4 is to tell the researcher's story through a self-narrative.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of primary researcher is often the primary (person) or instrument for gathering data, conducting an inductive analysis of the data, and sharing descriptive findings (Merriam, 2002). Merriam proclaims that qualitative researchers "seek to discover an existing phenomenon, a process, perspective or worldview of the people involved" in the research study (Merriam, 2002, p. 11). To accomplish such descriptive findings within qualitative research, the researcher must maintain specific goals to (a) elicit understanding and meaning, (b) remain open to ambiguity, and (c) be sensitive to the information gathered and "the contexts of the population served" (Merriam, 2002, p. 21).

Social scientists have found varying methodological approaches can be utilized to conduct autoethnography research (Anderson 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011; Muncey, 2005). Ellis and Bochner (2000) highlighted a few examples, such as the biographical method, personal experience method, and experiential analysis method. Chang (2008) found that autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary data where autobiographical narratives provide valuable insights and integrate intentionality in the research process and product. Similarly, based on the works of both Ellis and Muncey, Creswell (2013) asserted that "autoethnography is written and recorded by the individual, who becomes the subject of the story" (p. 73). As such, the personal story of the researcher connects to the larger cultural meaning of the individual's story wherein autoethnographers come to understand "self" in deeper ways through an understanding of self and others. Ellis et al. (2011) argued that autoethnography acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the

influence of the researcher in the research, rather than hiding the influence of the researcher or providing assumptions that such influences do not exists. Similarly, "reflexivity suggests that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research, seeking to understand their part in, or influence on the research" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013, p. 190). Throughout the research study, the researcher has balanced reflexivity in that qualitative research often relies on subjective judgment to bring to light the inner state of human subjects not expressed outwardly in the research (Hatch, 2002). Rather than pretending to be objective and removed from influencing research, qualitative researchers and autoethnographers acknowledge subjectivity when moving from description to interpretation (Hatch, 2002; Chang, 2008).

Researcher Positionality

As a school leader, I sometimes struggle with how my life evolved from my previous lived experiences as a student into being a principal. My goal while being a school leader is to ensure all students, especially Black male students, have an equitable education despite the disadvantages students encounter due to poverty, low performance academically, and exposure to potential race and racism in education. Growing up, I witnessed how the educational system often thwarted the experiences of men in my family to successfully graduate from high school (on time with a high school diploma), wherein none of them graduated from college—if they attempted to pursue a college degree at all.

My goal in describing the three levels of racism in education is to remain committed to the role of influencing educators, impacting current school systems and structures that have systemically created gaps in learning for students of color. Therefore,

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the role of the researcher in this research project serves as an insider. The researcher is an insider with 100% full membership to the group (self) studied. The researcher is also an insider in the field of education with 16 years of experience: as a teacher for 8 years and an assistant principal and principal for 8 years. Both teaching and leadership experiences served to amplify the learning needs of diverse students, comprised of varying racial and economic backgrounds. As an insider, the researcher has led in diverse urban schools for 8 years where issues of poverty and the underachievement of students resulted in state mandated school turnaround. During both leadership experiences—as an assistant principal and principal—students made remarkable achievement gains on assessments, with high growth and higher levels of students achieving grade-level proficiency.

As an insider, the researcher possesses the unique ethnic background of being Black. The ethnic background of the researcher is uniquely different than most teachers who teach in many schools across the nation. Milner (2007b) believed that researchers do not have to come from similar racial cultures or communities in which research is being conducted. Instead, Milner argued that researchers must be actively engaged and forthright about the tensions that surface when conducting research, where race and culture are concerned. To do so, researchers must be aware of seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers when conducting research (Milner, 2007b). Seen dangers explicitly emerge as a result of actionable moves made by the researcher; unseen dangers are hidden, covert, and implicit; unforeseen dangers are unpredictable dangers (Milner, 2007b). With these dangers in mind, the researcher was challenged to examine deficit-thinking epistemology, which often creates a marginalized normality shaping the perceptions of Blacks and Black males into a deficit frame.

Lastly, autoethnography methodology affirms my disposition as a researcher: Research should be value-centered rather than affirming to the value-free belief held in social science research. As such, Ellis and Bochner (2006) emphatically asserted,

> Autoethnography should show struggle, passion, embodied life and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning. . . . It needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate. . . . It shouldn't be used as a vehicle to produce distant theorising. (p. 433)

I uphold this belief that the self-narrative created will benefit not only the researcher, therapeutically, but will also serve as an instructional tool for educational practitioners, such as teachers and school leaders; for the general population, it will provide insight into the potential culture of race and racism in schools at the institutional, personally mediated, and internalized levels of racism.

Research Questions

Patton (2015) argued that autoethnography as a methodology seeks to gain insight and uncover a deeper understanding about the researcher's culture, situations, and way of life. As such, the critical questions framing this doctoral research project have been posed in the self-narrative. The questions address the experiences of the researcher, as principal, at the three levels of racism that potentially occur in schools. The central research question guiding this research project is "What are the experiences of a school leader to promote equity, excellence, and success for Black male students in an elementary school?

The critical supporting questions that frame this doctoral research project, reflecting each of the three levels of racism, are as follows:

Institutionalized Level:

1. In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black male students?

2. What are the obstacles school leaders must overcome to support the academic success of Black male students?

Personally Mediated Level:

1. In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the personally mediated level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

2. What actions did I as a school leader take to build relationships with teachers and Black male students, contributing to their success in school?

Internalized Level:

1. In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the internalized level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

2. What actions did I as a school leader implement to address racism at the internalized level to promote the success of Black male students, leading to their success in school?

For the purposes of this doctoral research project, *success* is defined as increasing the numbers of Black male students enrolled in gifted and talented courses who are on grade level or excel academically in all content areas. *Excellence* in this project is defined as setting high expectations and goals for Black male students, establishing ways to help

Black males achieve these goals, while diminishing the number of Black male students who are identified as needing special education services or who receive harsh disciplinary consequences, such as school suspensions and/or expulsions.

<div align="center">**Data Sources and Data Collection Process**</div>

In autoethnographic research, autoethnographers seek to understand the phenomenon of their personal and cultural experiences. Narrowing the focus of these experiences, this research study used a personal experience method to capture the lived experiences of the researcher as a school leader. The research questions are designed to capture the school leader's experiences in efforts to address inequities concerning Black male students and promote academic success and excellence for Black male students. The three levels of racism conceptual framework is used to categorize the experiences of the school leader. To accomplish this research approach, the researcher's own personal memory of leadership experiences was the primary source of data, which includes the past and present lived experiences of the researcher, in addition to external data sources, in the form of public and personal documents.

Internal Data Sources

Internal data sources include collecting personal memory data of the researcher through self-reflection, using a field journal. According to Chang (2008), "personal memory is the building block of autoethnography because the past gives context to the present self and memory opens a door to a richness in the past" (p. 71). Collecting personal memory in autoethnographic research involves a process to gather past and present data. Sources of personal memory data collected in this research project include (a) a chronicling and reflecting on the researcher's past experiences, (b) a recalling and

gathering of present self-observation and self-reflection data, in addition to (c) an

analysis and reflection of specific external data sources (discussed later). Data sources

utilized in this research study are grouped together by relevance to coincide with the

process for data collection. Data collection was categorized using the research questions

and the conceptual framework to include the experiences of the researcher at the three

levels of racism (institutional level, personally-mediated level, and the internalized level).

Internal Data Sources

Chronicling past experiences. Chronicling the researcher's past experiences is a

process to develop an "autobiographical timeline of memorable events and experiences"

(Chang, 2008, p. 72), placing them in sequential order of their occurrence. The purpose

of chronicling for this research study aided in the identifying of specific events that

potentially shaped the researcher's educational, teaching, and leadership experiences,

leading to the researcher's cultural understanding of school. The chronicling process and

autobiographical timeline included the researcher's sharing of relevant external artifacts

created by or referencing the researcher. The researcher also evoked self-reflection in the

completion of four writing exercises to reflect on the chronicling of past educational

experiences of the researcher. Creation of the autobiographical timeline involved listing

events and experiences to expand and capture the following four themes the researcher

reflected upon:

1. The researcher's educational encounters as a student;

2. The researcher's experience as a teacher;

3. The researcher's experience as a leader;

4. The researcher's educational and philosophical beliefs regarding school.

Collecting personal memory. Although the process of chronicling the lived experiences of the researcher involved a process to collect past data, the researcher also collected present data related to this study through a systematic process to specifically focus on the experiences of the principal as a leader.

According to Chang (2008), self-observation data are factual data occurring at the time of the study and allow the researcher to preserve vivid details and a fresh perspective, recording the thoughts, actions, emotions, and behaviors of the researcher while the study is occurring. In this study, the researcher sought to gain a cultural understanding of self as a school principal, while promoting equity for Black male students. To accomplish this goal, the researcher used a systematic process to collect self-observational data at designated times throughout the day for a specified period of time, using a pre-formatted recording sheet (see Table 3.1). The set time to conduct self-observation data included every waking hour: in the morning between 5-6 a.m., 10 a.m., 12 p.m., 6 p.m., and 10 p.m., for a month, at 15 minutes per session.

Data were also collected immediately when the researcher became aware of a rising occurrence of emotions or an experience of cognitive dissonance stemming from an event or memory that occurred throughout the day. The researcher retreated from the field of action and recorded the experiences using the pre-formatted field note sheets (see Table 3.2), later journaling the experience in a solitary space.

Data collection occurred when others were not present. The self-observations were logged onto pre-formatted field note sheets at the specified times. During the data collection process, the researcher did not involve others or expose them to the autoethnographic research process being conducted. The day ended with the researcher

inputting data into a data storage tool and writing a self-reflection for the day. Table 3.1

presents an example of "interval" self-observation. Table 3.2 depicts an example of

"occurrence" self-observation (Chang, 2008).

Table 3.1

Sample Recording of "Interval" Self-Observation

Date				
Time	*Thoughts*	*Feelings*	*Behavior*	*Actions*
6 a.m.	Busy day ahead	Anxious about the day	Slow to move	Getting dressed
10 a.m.	I'm wide awake now	Can I get one moment to breath		Rushing to the next meeting

Table 3.2

Sample Recording of "Occurrence" Self-Observation

Topic: People I interact with throughout the day and my activities		*Date:*	
Time	*Persons in interaction*	*Engaged activities*	*Location*
8 a.m.	Winnie	Eating breakfast	Lunchroom

Research journal and self-reflection. Throughout the data collection process,

the researcher kept a journal in which field notes and memos were written, pertaining to

the self-reflections of the researcher. Memoing is the process in which the researcher jots

down and keeps track of the thoughts, feelings, actions, and rising questions of the

researcher regarding the study. In the journal, the researcher recorded self-reflections,

insights and thoughts about the study. The researcher also wrote a daily reflection of the

events captured in the field notes as recorded throughout the day. The self-reflections will expand upon the lived experiences of the researcher as collected in field notes. Self-reflections will also occur through a data analysis process of external data sources which captures the culture of the school prior to the present success of the school.

External Data Sources

The collection of external data sources includes textual artifacts, personally produced documents, and official public documents referencing the researcher. In this study, the external data sources collected include the following public and personal documents:

- Three years of school report card (SRC) ratings in the years: 2014-2014, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017. SRC ratings for schools were not given in the 2014-2015 school year;

- Two school evaluations (SEs) in the years 2013 and 2015;

- 5 years of Traditional School Design Plans (TSDP), which are made public through the State of Colorado for the years of 2013-2017;

- District's Shining Star Case Study Report, which highlights the success of the school utilizing the voice of the school leader;

- Public news articles and blogs that cite or reference the researcher;

- Personally produced texts that capture or preserve the researcher's thoughts, emotions, and perspectives at the time of the creation of such documents.

Autoethnography research begins with a research focus on self rather than an investigation on the unfamiliarity of others (Chang, 2008). Thus, to recap, internal and external sources of data were collected in this research study. Internal sources of data

included a chronicling the researcher's past, collecting self-reflective data, and journaling. External data sources included textual artifacts, personally produced documents, and official public documents referencing the researcher.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chang (2008) defined data analysis as the researcher staying close to the data wherein interpretation involved the researcher's finding cultural meaning beyond the data to make sense of the data. Unlike other qualitative research methods, there are no uniform or universally acceptable data-analysis, procedural steps to follow in conducting autoethnographic research. However, Chang offered some systematic steps for coming to an in-depth understanding of self through research and composing narratives of self and others utilizing autoethnographic processes. As such, the data analysis process followed the structures presented by Chang, according to Ellis and Bochner's triadic model, which emphasizes the self, culture, and the research process to varying degrees, depending on the researcher's preference.

Overall, data collected through self-observations, self-reflections, and external data sources provided a rich foundation for understanding the personal and professional lived experiences of the researcher to promote equity for Black male students. At the beginning of the data analysis process, the researcher was immersed in the data through writing, reading, and rereading self-observations and self-reflective data. Adding new data onto the chronicling events of the researcher's autobiographical timeline in order to understand how the researcher experienced past and present events led to the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data.

An autoethnographic approach to data analysis included the researcher reviewing and coding data, organizing data into broader themes and issues, and identifying exceptional occurrences (Chang, 2008). This involved starting with the four themes, mentioned earlier, that the researcher reflected upon, referencing the past educational experiences of the researcher. The researcher's past experiences provided the general population of readers with access into the history and vulnerable self of the researcher and the researcher's cultural identity and understanding of school. According to Chang (2008), the process of writing autoethnography requires the researcher to

1. "Look for cultural themes in all sources of data" (p. 132);

2. "Identify exceptional occurrences" (p. 133);

3. "Analyze inclusion and omission" (p. 133);

4. "Connect the present with the past" (p. 134);

5. "Analyze relationships between self and others" (p. 134);

6. "Contextualize broadly" (p. 136);

7. "Compare with social science constructs" (p. 136).

In this study, the research attended to these requirements.
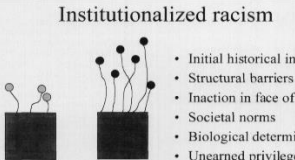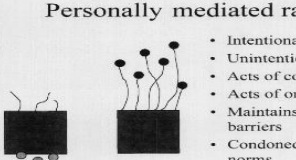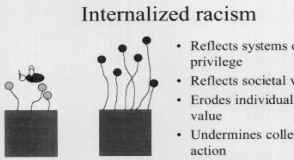
Utilizing Chang's (2008) process, the data analysis phase began with the researcher's identifying cultural themes or codes in the data that are significant to the research study. After clustering the identified themes. The emerging themes were structured using textual descriptions that focused on what the researcher experienced. Next, the researcher identified exceptional occurrences that appeared in the data to look for inclusions and omissions regarding how the researcher experienced a phenomenon described. Then, a combination of structural and textual descriptions served to highlight

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the essence of the experience, with an emphasis on what and how the experience occurred for the researcher.

Lastly, after themes were developed, the researcher utilized the three levels of racism: "A Gardener's Tale" conceptual framework to evaluate how, if at all, each level of racism was textually and structurally represented in the data (see Table 3.3). The informed and final product of the research study was the descriptive self-narrative of the researcher, addressing how the researcher's past and present experiences to promote equity for Black male students occurred from the researcher's past and present experiences.

Table 3.3

Jones's (2000) Three Levels of Racism: "A Gardener's Tale" and Research Questions

Institutionalized-Racism	Personally Mediated	Internalized Racism
In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black males? What are the obstacles school leaders must overcome to support the academic success of Black male students?	In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the personally mediated level to positively impact the success of Black males? What actions did I as a school leader take to build relationships with teachers and Black male students, contributing to their success in school?	In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the internalized level to positively impact the success of Black males? What actions did I as a school leader implement to address racism at the internalized level to promote the success of Black male students, leading to their success in school?

Themes represented in the data:	Themes represented in the data:	Themes represented in the data:

Data Interpretation: Self-Narratives

According to Chang (2008), Ellis and Bochner's triadic model of autoethnography situates the methodological approach in which the autoethnographer balances the research process in the methodological orientation (collecting field data). This includes analyzing and interpreting culture and is autobiographical in the orientation and data sharing process to achieve cultural understanding. The data sharing process in autoethnographic research can take on many literary forms of self-narratives: autobiography, memoirs, journals, personal essays, and letters. This process allows for the researcher to gain an understanding of an experience she or he has lived through. Ellis and Bochner (2000) described the process for engaging in autoethnography research as resembling a symbolic camera wherein the lens zooms outward and inward:

1. "Outwardly the camera focuses on the social and cultural aspects of one's personal experiences" (p. 739);

2. The zoom inward exposes the vulnerable self of the researcher using the "systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall process to understand an experience" (p. 737). In this process, the researcher begins to "pay attention to their personal life, physical feelings, thoughts and emotions" (p. 737). Ellis and Bochner (2000) believed that by understanding an experience will lead to understanding a way of life;

3. The autoethnographer "retracts and resists cultural interpretations" (p. 739);

4. The autoethnographer writes the research in first person and selects a written form to share the experience (short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, and journals);

5. The created text is influenced by "concrete actions, dialogue, emotions, embodiment, spirituality" (p. 739).

The process of zooming outward, inward, and outward, metaphorically represents the lens of a camera, wherein the autoethnographer continuously zooms outward on cultural interpretation (culture/ethno), then inward (auto) on self and personal experiences, and outward again (culture/ethno) this process eventually blurs the distinction between personal and cultural experiences (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Similarly, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believed that autoethnography is more than focusing on self alone, but an understanding of others through an analysis of self within a culture or society. Unlike ethnography, autoethnographic research begins with a research focus on self rather than an investigation on the unfamiliarity of others (Chang, 2008, p. 46).

Precisely applying autoethnography has evolved and broadened to include a vast array of "similarly situated terms" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739), such as personal narratives, narratives of self, personal ethnography, ethnic autobiography, and so on. Autoethnography challenges traditional social sciences in that autoethnographies can be written in first person voice and appears in a variety of forms; short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, and fragmented layered writing (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Self-narratives are an example of a first-person narrative

and a form of autoethnographic research. Self-narratives include storytelling to reflect the different forms of presenting field data collected.

Regardless of the form autoethnography is presented in, Chang (2008) asserted that autoethnographic research should pursue the ultimate goal of gaining cultural understanding utilizing autobiographical experiences, by undergoing an ethnographic research process of data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and report writing. Ellis et al. (2011) added that autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography:

> When writing a biography, the author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences, most often writing about epiphanies. When researchers do ethnography, they study a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders and outsiders understand a culture. When researchers do autoethnography, the retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or possessing a particular cultural identity. (pp. 275-276)

Ellis and Bochner (2000) concluded that autoethnography transcends autobiography by "connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739).

Through an analysis of the data collected, the self-narrative was constructed according to the following process suggested by Bochner and Ellis (2016):

1. "Identify story features: characters, setting, time" (p. 83);
2. "Define the plot or moral features of the story" (p. 84);
3. "Determine the trouble or conflict characters are confronted with" (p .87).

As such, characters were created in the self-narrative to represent either a protagonist, antagonist, or a supporting character. The protagonist, the voice of the researcher, is the main character who narrates the self-narrative. As each of the characters was developed, the acts and scenes encompassed the interactions of the researcher's experiences to include the beliefs, fears, and hopes of the researcher, leading in a school and personal experiences at the three levels of racism.

Next, dialogue among the characters was formed using a three-column diagram that highlighted a discussion between the characters in the first two columns. The third and finally column conceptualized the thought processes of the protagonist, the lived experiences of the protagonist, and the contextual background of each incident when having to navigate race and racism at the three levels of racism, guided by the conceptual framework. The protagonist wrestled with inner thoughts based upon personal experiential knowledge and lived experiences on how to address racialized incidents in the school setting.

The structure of each self-narrative, as guided by the three levels of racism: "A Gardener's Tale" conceptual framework, followed a three-act narrative structure, comprised of a beginning act, middle act, and ending act. Within each act, an opening introduction to the narrative was presented. A rising plot or climax will be situated in the middle act, with a rise in tension occurring in the final act. The results of the constructed self-narratives created "A Master Gardener's Narrative," thereby becoming the analysis of practices school leaders can implement to promote the academic success of Black male students. As the narrative was framed, dialogue was removed from the three-column diagram (see Figure 3.1) and separated into the three distinct acts and scenes (see Figure

3.2). The characters conversed with each other in dialogue form, which was then

displayed in outline structure as what the protagonist and antagonist "said." The thoughts

of the protagonist were embedded into the outline structure to eventually include the

lived experiences of the protagonist, in addition to historical and societal accounts of

racialized incidents involving Black males.

Protagonist:	Antagonist	This column includes the background, synthesis of events occurring in society, and the inner thoughts of the protagonist
		1.
2.		
	3.	
4.		
	5.	
		6.

Figure 3.1. A three column diagram to organize the dialogue of protagonist and

antagonist, and the cultural context and inner thoughts of the protagonist.

1.
2.
3.
4.

Figure 3.2. Form for constructing the narrative.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Milner (2007b) discussed the dangers in education research that may surface for the researcher, readers or consumers of the research, and for communities or participants in research. Avoidance of racialized issues without individuals interrogating their own systemic beliefs about race suggests that individuals possess a color-blind or culture blind epistemology, which might make such research with research participants difficult to accomplish (Milner, 2007b). Therefore, research participants were not invited to participate in this research project to avoid seen dangers of exposing participants to sharing and recounting racialized experiences in their direct participation in this research praxis project. Despite not having direct participation by research participants, the creation of the researcher's self-narrative emphasized the "real life" experiences of the researcher.

Researching potential participants in the field of education was a challenge and constraint that limited the researcher for the following reasons: First, the researcher's level of influence and authority in the education field as a school leader might cause sensitivity during the collection of data. Hatch (2002) claimed that researchers should be sensitive to vulnerable populations, imbalanced power relations, and placing participants at risk. To counter such biases, data collected relied on the researcher's internal and external data sources to account for the sensitivity of others not included in this research study. Moreover, the researcher was committed to keeping any identifiers, including the names, locations, and examples of real life events, confidential.

On a different note, Ellis and Bochner (2000) pointed out that conducting autoethnography research is extremely difficult for the researcher. According to these

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scholars, "most social scientists are unable to write well enough to carry it off [or] not observant enough of the world around them" (p. 738). Ellis and Bochner suggested that for researchers, autoethnographical research requires the following:

- Being vulnerable and "introspective about their feelings, motives, or contradictions experienced" (p. 739);

- Self-questioning and "confronting things about oneself that are less than flattering" (p. 739).

"Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fear and doubts—and emotional pain" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 738).

Potential Limitations of Autoethnography

Although this research study is carefully designed to record the professional and personal experiences of the researcher through self-reflexive and self-observational processes. This study does contain two potential limitations within this study might occur. First, Hayano (1979) discredited the research benefits of self-ethnographic research as not being applicable to other cultures. To address this criticism, the study's design, in regard to presentation of the self-narrative, encompassed a cultural understanding of school leadership in ways that insiders and outsiders to that role could understand. Although the nature of the research is subjective and potentially biased as voiced through the lived experiences of the researcher, the researcher strove to remain objective of those experiences in relation to the researcher's studying "oneself" as a leader who is situated to influence or embrace the culture within a school. The researcher, as school leader, was aware that the perspectives of others might differ on the

recollection of accounts; therefore, the researcher presented data that was factual while maintaining the confidentiality of others.

The second potential limitation was voiced by Ellis and Bochner (2000). They believed that there are many ways of knowing and inquiry, and no one way should be privileged over another. As such, these researchers found that the benefits of autoethnography relate to how the author/researcher is situated as a "full insider . . . [member, and] native [of the group being studied]" (p. 739). They also found that the autoethnographic contributions of the author/researcher can reduce social control regarding what information is shared and how that information is shared to academia and others. In their support of autoethnography as a methodological approach, Ellis and Bochner (2000) argued that the epistemology of knowledge gives voice to those often marginalized in research to contribute their own unique insider experiences to the field of research. As such, the researcher in this study remained transparent by including external data that shared different elements of school culture—data that potentially centers the school leader or environment in potentially positive or negative light. The unique perspective of the researcher acknowledges the potential of bias to be conveyed by sharing the personal and professional experiences of the researcher.

Summary

In summary, this chapter has provided a detailed description of the research methodology. Qualitative research and autoethnography were utilized in this study to provide a deeper understanding and analysis regarding the experiences of the researcher as an elementary school principal, seeking to improve the conditions in a school for the success of Black male students. This study seeks to understand the essence of the

researcher's lived experiences as a school leader. Whereas there are many alternative and traditional approaches of inquiry, autoethnography was chosen to be best suited for this research study, guided by Jones's (2000) conceptual framework, three levels of racism: "A Gardener's Tale." As such, the use of autoethnography allowed for a deeper understanding of the potential role race and racism plays in schools through the experiences of the researcher as the school principal, who focused her efforts to improve the achievement of Black male students in a once failing school in turnaround.

Organization of the Self-Narratives: Chapters 4 Through 7

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are organized in narrative structure, each beginning with a brief synopsis and background of the allegory of "A Gardener's Tale" conceptual framework, including a connection to how racism is operationalized within the educational system (presented in italics). Following are the research questions to be answered in the narrative, based on the researcher's experiences with navigating racism in education. Each chapter is also organized in narrative structure to include the experiences of the researcher as an elementary school leader navigating racism at three different levels. When possible, the researcher's voice, inner thoughts, and emotions are shared to uncover the challenges the researcher experienced, leading in a public school in the United States, in efforts to promote equity for Black male students.

The initial narrative begins in Chapter 4: "Fighting Against Institutionalized Racism," with a focus on answering the following research questions: (a) In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black males? and (b) What are the obstacles school leaders must overcome to support the academic success of Black male students?

Chapter 5: "Combating Personally-Mediated Racism" addresses my efforts to battle against racism with the intent to address the following research questions: (a) In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the personally mediated level to positively impact the success of Black males? and (b) What actions did I, as a school leader take to build relationships with teachers and Black male students, contributing to their success in school?

The narratives conclude with Chapter 6: "Overcoming Internalized Racism," which addresses the following research questions: (a) In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the internalized level to positively impact the success of Black males? and (b) What actions did I as a school leader implement to address racism at the internalized level to promote the success of Black male students, leading to their success in school? In all three chapters, the three levels of racism conceptual framework were used to categorize themes derived from an analysis of the data in the narratives. And finally, Chapter 7 discusses the themes, findings, and implications. It then concludes the study with recommendations for researchers and educators to study further and implement to promote equity for Black males in schools.

For the purposes of the narratives, I operate as the Master Gardener, leading gardeners (educators) in our garden (the school). I am the visionary for school change and serve as an instructional leader who sets the tone of for how and what students will learn. I also serve as the instructional coach who provides teachers with actionable feedback and guidance on how to improve outcomes for students by a data analysis process to analyze students' performance and achievement data and establish targets for them to achieve. Also, I am the protector of the garden, carefully weeding out negative

influences, buffering attitudes, beliefs, or actions that might distract gardeners (educators) from successfully meeting the needs of our developing and growing seeds (our students).

Chapter Four. Fighting Against Institutionalized Racism

The self-narrative presented in this chapter and in the two successive chapters were constructed through the analysis of the data collected utilizing the three levels of racism conceptual framework to incorporate the personal and professional lived experiences of the researcher. The design and presentation of the self-narrative was structured to share the experiences of a school leader at each level of racism to promote equity and academic success for Black male students in a school. A synopsis of the study is provided below as the backdrop for this chapter's self-narrative on the fight against institutionalized racism. This chapter, along with the next two, are prefaced by the "Master Gardner's Narrative" and accompanying research questions.

Synopsis of the Study

This autoethnographic research project seeks to understand how I as a school leader experienced and navigated racism to promote equity for Black male students at my school. Research has found that race and racism are contributing factors that influences the dilemma of underachievement of Black male students in schools (James, 2012). Of the three levels of racism, racism at the institutional level includes the overrepresentation of Black males in special education, harsh disciplinary consequences, and underrepresentation of Black males in gifted and talented programs. Racism at the personally mediated level specifically addresses the fear of Black males, negative stereotypes and teacher bias, White teachers teaching Black males, cultural mismatch,

and racial microaggressions. Racism at the internalized level, which contributes to the underachievement of Black males in schools, includes such racial perceptions as stereotype threat and acting white. The purpose of this study is to come to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the researcher as an elementary school leader at a once failing school, implementing practices to change the trajectory of school failure for all students, especially Black male students.

By further researching my experiences as an elementary school leader to promote equity for Black male students in education, I seek to provide educators with useful strategies that can potentially place many more Black males back into the college-going population. Therefore, to better understand educational disparities, Jones's (2000) conceptual framework, "A Gardener's Tale," with its three levels of racism, was used to examine my experiences as a school leader, working to promote equity for Black male students in my school. The central research question, "What are the experiences of a school leader to promote equity, excellence, and success for Black male students in an elementary school?" was used to frame this study.

Master Gardener's Narrative

Institutionalized racism is observed as inaction in the face of need and is manifested in conditions of access to power (Jones, 2000, p. #). *Institutional racism is reflected in the treatment of Black males, where the gardener symbolizes American schools that possess the power to act and control resources. The schools or sustainable resources separate flower seeds specifically based upon preferential and differential prejudices between red (Black male students) and pink flowers (White students). The*

more preferred flower, the red flower (White students), was planted in the most desirable

environment, and the least preferred flower received a malnourishing environment.

Research Questions Related to Institutionalized Racism

The two research questions that guided this chapter's self–narrative, "Fighting

Against Institutionalized Racism" are provided below:

- In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black males?

- What are the obstacles school leaders must overcome to support the academic success of Black male students?

Self-Narrative: Fighting Against Institutionalized Racism

Background

James Hamilton Elementary (JHE) School, located in the heart of the Hype

Moore neighborhood. A beige-brick building standing three-stories tall. The Hype Moore

projects is located near JHE School, situated on twenty-two acres of land, owned and

operated by the Brown Housing. The neighborhood is surrounded by industrial

businesses, power lines, concrete, dumpsters, few trees, and even fewer flowers.

Moore Housing is designated as housing for families who qualify for low income

housing. Approximately 250 students attend James Hamilton in grades Pre-K through

fifth grade, where 100% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. All but 3% of the

student population are students of color. In contrast, 70% of the teachers are White and

do not reflect the diversity of the student population. The racial breakdown of the student

population includes 60%, African American (African); 29%, Hispanic; and 1%, White or

Asian. Thirty percent of students speak a second language other than English; in all, 15 different languages are spoken by students at the school. Twenty percent of the students receive special education services in the general classroom setting or in one of two multi-intensive classrooms in grades K-2 or Grades 3-5.

As a school, we strive to provide the community with a warm-welcoming environment, comprised of committed staff who have been at the school for numerous years. Our goal is to ensure the school atmosphere is conducive to learning, provides families with food resources they need for their household, and supports students socially and emotionally. Historically, gentrified neighborhoods uproot and leave poor and racialized families packing to new homes outside of their community.

When I began leading, one of the many institutionalized challenges I addressed was promptly stopping the community's access into the building. Now, all the school doors are locked during the day and only two doors are used as our entrance and exit doors. People buzz for entrance into the building with cameras directed at the doors. All other doors are guarded during dismissal to reduce the likelihood that a stranger enters the building with us not knowing. I also petitioned for more handicap accessibility ramps to be added to the school.

Community partnerships and additional district bond dollars allowed for fresh paint to fill the halls; the school is well lit and clean. Classrooms are enjoyable spaces to learn, in with banners hung in our halls displaying our school mission in different languages; our mascot is hung with pride and so are pictures of our awesome students. Underneath the visible surface of community supports to improve the school, a waging battle brews.

I grew up a fighter. In fact, from the moment I was born, I fought to stay alive. Like with any fight, whether victorious or not, there are always battle scars.

But this fight was different!

Daily, I had to fight against IT!

What is *IT*?

What is *IT,* you ask?

You know, *IT*!!?

IT is institutionalized racism.

You cannot see *IT* with your eyes, but look deeper, and you can see the results of *IT*. *IT* is reflected in the performance and achievement of students, especially, students of color. Students who often attend underperforming schools in need of redesign. Sadly, this scenario was true for the school I led out of redesign.

I began this fight the moment I was hired in the spring of 2013 to lead James Hamilton Elementary School the upcoming Fall 2013. Being hired early granted me the opportunity to transition into the role and allowed me time to develop an entry plan on how best to support the school as I moved into the role, as their new leader (better yet, in hindsight, I was being prepared for the battle against my opponent, *IT*). My entry plan was filled with many questions. The questions permitted me to gain a better understanding of the school's culture (and what I would be fighting against). To start the battle, I began by asking simple questions, such as,

- What time does the school day begin for teachers and students?

- What time is dismissal, at the end of the day, for students and teachers?

I also asked more complex questions:

- What was the focus of professional development this school year?

- What type of coaching support did teachers receive this year?

As I transitioned, I requested documents from the school leadership team, with the purpose of maintaining continuity of established systems and structures. I requested such copies as the staff handbook, lunch and duty schedules, and the instructional schedules for teachers and students. Unfortunately, the answers to many of my questions were basic or not substantial; therefore, I could not gain a true understanding of what I needed to work on and not work on over the summer break. Also, I couldn't tell how the school was performing in my multiple visits. So, I spent time getting to know the school community, including: teachers, students, and businesses in the neighborhood. I learned about the history of the school and the evolving needs of the community. I also spent time asking staff questions, listening to different stakeholders, observing how the school operates, and building relationships with teachers and students.

Over the summer, I was busy hiring new staff for open positions and meeting with a group of teachers to develop a solid plan to address and intervene with student behaviors. I met with another committee group of teachers to discuss our instructional focus and priorities for the year. The time spent with teachers that summer, ahead of my fully leading the school, was very cordial and exciting.

Designated for School Redesign: School Evaluation

In the fall of 2013, within my first 2 months as the leader, I became aware of the overall conditions of the school. Unfortunately, all was not as it appeared to be. By mid-September, the school district released the annual school report card ratings known as the School Report Card (SRC). The SRC utilizes various measures and categories of

accountability to determine the overall performance of school of the prior year. James Hamilton received a drastic "Red" rating in most performance categories. Not only was the school not meeting expectations, but we were the lowest performing school in the district.

Only one other school achieved a rating lower than us, but that school had closed. To my dismay, I could not grasp how I did not know about the conditions of the school prior to my interview and accepting the position. The school building was also in disarray internally. Classrooms were filled with old books, useless green chalkboards, few whiteboards, older promethean boards, and out-of-date access to personal learning devices/computers. Older boilers heated the building through pipes that run under classroom floors, unevenly distributing heat to classrooms. Paint was peeling off the walls in common areas, and bathrooms reeked of unpleasant smells. The building to outsiders did not reflect that of a school—such unfortunate conditions for a school, comprised mostly of students of color. Who cared that missing signage did not signify the building as a school. In wealthier neighborhoods comprised of majority White students, the conditions inside the building would not have been acceptable. Moreover, outside the building was even worse. The school grounds consisted of overgrown trees, dying grass, and geese swarming the property, leaving behind their droppings that filled the sidewalk and grassy areas with white poop. Students and parents in wheelchairs were without accessible accommodations to enter the building. They could only gain access through a cafeteria door on the north side of the building. All other entrances were surrounded by stairs. The doors were never securely locked, so the community had open access and permission to walk through the building, as if they were crossing the street.

In all that was wrong with the building, I wondered if the perceptions students received from their school was one of failure, thus perpetuating the belief that they were unworthy of receiving anything better in school—missing subtleties and resources commonly provided in more non-diverse school buildings. For students to esthetically enter a school building that did not provide them with a sense of belonging but kept them confined to the basement to learn, further reciprocated a belief of hopelessness and helplessness for students.

By early October, I received a dreadful email that most school leaders are afraid to receive. Hidden in the message of tiered supports was the communication that my school was being designated as a school in redesign. Having been a co-leader at a school in redesign, I understood the criteria for being designated for redesign. Undergoing a diagnostic review is the first step in the process. The email read,

Dear Building Leaders,

I am writing with an update on the Tiered School work that we discussed…At that time, we explained that the district will be providing each of your schools with additional support this year. . . . (1) School Evaluation [SE].

The purpose of the SE is to provide Intensive Tier schools with formative/qualitative feedback in support of school improvement efforts. The SE places a team of two experienced educators by business "XYZ" in a school for two consecutive days to collect and analyze data about school performance. The team will be in the school from approximately 7:00 am to 6:00 pm on each day of the review."

After receiving confirmation that the SE process would be conducted, I gathered the essential data requested in the school's checklist document. The reviewers wanted them prior to and during their visit. The requested documents included

- Rosters of ALL staff, including grade levels and subject areas taught;

- Master schedule for all staff, including periods/times teaching and room numbers;

- A list of teacher preparation times or "free" periods (if not included in either the roster or master schedule);

- School bell schedule;

- Documentation that faculty and staff are aware of the visit and its purpose;

- Evidence that private meeting space is reserved for the SE teams.

James Hamilton's diagnostic review was scheduled for late October. The days the reviewers were in the building were extremely stressful. Focus groups were conducted, consisting of school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Although, the initial SE acknowledges that the leadership team was installed at the school 2 months prior, much of the blame for the school culture, climate, and the learning environment became the sole responsibility of what the school leadership team created. Wednesday, at 6:00 p.m., the reviewers had completed their evaluation of the school, and the meeting to discuss their findings occurred in my office. The results included a list of all that was "right" and "wrong" in the school:

- Many educators reported feeling professionally unsafe and described a professional culture that lacked an openness to sharing data and solving challenging instructional problems;

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- Others reported feeling professionally unsafe based upon perceived levels of non-transparency, competing preferences, and inconsistent expectations among staff;

- Educators reported that they received limited recognition for their hard work and service to the students and families;

- Teachers were fearful of being blindsided into losing their positions without having an opportunity to improve their teaching practices;

- Teachers felt that expectations fluctuated where some teachers had to turn in their lesson plans and others did not;

- Teachers did not want to share their own instructional practices, unwilling to seek feedback from others;

- According to teachers, the school leader does not involve all teachers when making and implementing meaningful decisions that guide school improvement;

- Although school leaders do not inform all staff at the same time, some teachers felt decisions were made and then dictated to teachers;

- Some teachers reported feeling isolated and uninformed in that not all teachers participate in collaborative planning and data analysis sessions;

- The school does not reflect a safe and trustworthy professional climate.

The SE also revealed even more challenges, in that the school lacked stated and clear expectations for students.

I questioned the feedback given. "How am I the one responsible for these results?" I stated angrily with tears filling my eyes. I challenged owning the dysfunctional

climate as something that I created. "I inherited these challenges!" I added. Clearly, my name goes through the mud for trying to improve the conditions of the school, I thought.

When I entered as the school leader, I made changes to the professional culture. However, no one told me the slightest deviation or suggestions of improvements would cause such push back from staff. I set a target date requiring everyone on staff to come to work dressed professionally and adhere to the new dress code policy, which eliminated jeans and sneakers every day of the week except Friday.

Even though stated changes did not happen immediately but by a specific date that was 3 months away, the entire school staff had to comply with the policy. It is my belief that students should see staff as professionals who arrive to work in their best professional attire. "But, it's all my fault that we are like this….?" I thought.

Instructional changes were also made. Typically, teachers in elementary school teach all content areas. However, in my first 2 months as the school leader, I saw a need for teachers to become more familiar with teaching a specific content rather than having to teach all subjects well. So, teachers began to platoon or departmentalize how they teach, except for kindergarten and first grade teachers. Thus a teacher would teach either literacy or math, science, and social studies. Although the decision to platoon teach in different content areas helped to reduce the amount of time teachers spent preparing to teach, they still expressed disdain with the anticipated change in their schedules, as evident in the SE.

In my defense, I communicated the change to the School Leadership Team (SLT), which included teacher leaders, a bargaining representative, and the school leadership team. To minimize confusion, initially I only spoke with teachers who were impacted by

a change in what they would teach. I shared with the entire staff the results and next steps. Each teacher agreed to make the change happen, and the entire staff viewed the new school schedule and understood which students would be taught literacy or math in the morning or in the afternoon. Teachers added their voices to ensure the schedules would work before the changes began.

At the time, I did not hear their dissatisfaction with the schedules. It was not until I heard back from the school evaluators that I learned teachers were concerned that the structure of schedules was not working. According to the SE, leadership communicated a relentless effort to improve academic achievement and make sure students were well prepared for success in college and beyond. Despite this acknowledgement of my efforts, staff shared with the school evaluators their discontent as follows:

- Staff were overwhelmed with the amount of rapid change, such as frequent schedule adjustments and the shifts to departmentalization;

- Staff felt they did not have sufficient time required prior to teaching specific content areas;

- Staff felt it was not yet clear when and how the leadership team of teacher representatives would communicate information to all staff.

Staff also reported that there had been no designated staff meetings held in which school leaders communicate with the entire faculty. Arguably, the school schedules did not allow for me to conduct monthly staff meetings and still honor their guaranteed 300 minutes of self-directed planning time.

I thought, *Teachers were also not used to the process of being observed by school leaders*. This was another contentious battle I had to fight. Prior to my leading, teachers

were not used to receiving feedback from school leaders, because some were observed by a district peer observer or the in-building coach.

Receiving the list of what was right and wrong during the review process had me distraught. I was furious, crying tears of anger, frustration, and resentment. I wanted to quit the fight before it even began. Boy, I was so close to doing so. But, I had a flashback memory of the promise I made to my grandmother and the plaque on my office wall starred down on me, haunting me. The voice of my grandmother repeatedly played over again in my head. Man, *IT* was trying to win the battle! But my grandmother's voice was screaming at me, "Antoinette, remember the promise?"

Reflecting on the memories of grandmother, I recalled the day I said my final goodbyes to her. It was like she instinctively knew that I would never see her again. She had been lying quietly in her bed, watching TV, ill from the progression of lung cancer. I silently entered my grandmother's bedroom and kissed her gently on the cheek. Whispering to her, I said,

"Grandma, I'm headed to school now. I love you,"

She whispered back, "Love you, too"

"Do you want me to stay with you today," I asked

"No, I will be alright. Promise me you will always stay in school," she demanded

"I promise you grandma, I will never stop learning," I said.

I thought about my grandmother all day long while at school. For the 4 short years, I lived with her, between her home and my dad's home, our relationship grew stronger with time. Little did I know, that day would be the last time I would see her alive.

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I never realized that my promise to her, to never stop learning, would lead me down the path of school leadership. I never imagined that my grandmother—in all her nurturing ways to the kids in the neighborhood, friends of my father, aunts, uncles, cousins, and my own friends—would lead me to an understanding of how we all should be more caring to others.

I have come to hope that education will one day become just as nurturing to Black male students as my grandmother was toward me. Sadly, the realist within me is not quite sure others are willing to fight *IT*. I am fearful that the perceptions society has of Black males is mimicked in the education system. This fear causes me to worry daily about my own sons being harmed first in the school system, then again in society.

The state of conditions Black males experience in society continues to show a lack of care for their existence, in their killings at the hands of police or in education, where they are treated unfairly as compared to many of their peers. The constant coldness, the "chilly climate" they receive in schools is evident throughout the educational system. Black males experience harsh disciplinary actions with the overabundance of suspensions; they are overly represented in special education, with the classifications of being "dumb"; they are not thought of as portraying giftedness or talents beyond being an athlete or rapper. This coldness also appears in society with harsh, unjust policies and treatments enacted out of fear. Chilling messages are sent to Black men when their lives are easily taken away at the hands of police officers who are mandated to serve and protect the public. This problem is not new, but the public outrage becomes more real when a man's killer escapes conviction, like George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin—all because the killer feared Trayvon, as a young Black

man wearing a hoodie in the "wrong" neighborhood. But the killings have not ended. Countless more lives have been taken away at the hands of police officers since Trayvon's death and the years preceding it.

Philando Castile, a Black man who worked in the cafeteria of a school, pulled over by police, following their directions with a child and girlfriend in the car, informed police that under his right to carry a firearm, he was armed. Consequently, he was tragically shot and killed in the matter of seconds. I cried in disbelief as I witnessed the media coverage on the police killing of Philando Castile. "Has America has forgotten its own history and the results of a traumatic past continues to haunt us in the present" I shout out loud. "Our Black boys and men continue to suffer the consequences of frequent police killings, while mothers and fathers wonder if our own sons will be next. Black males continue to suffer more by our disenfranchisement in education, an abundance of joblessness, broken homes and mental defeat" (*IT* is everywhere!!!).

On the news following the death of Stephon Clark, I watch *CNN* political commentator, Angela Rye, and listen as she read the names of Blacks killed across the nation. Some of the men and boys included Laquan McDonald, John Crawford, Eric Gardner, Amadou Diallo, Johnathan Ferrell, Sean Bell, Tamir Rice Walter Scott, Freddie Gray Alton Sterling." The list of other men, women, and girls have also died at the hands of police: Sam Dubose, Sylville Smith, Terence Crutcher, Keith Lamont Scott, Jamar Clark, Ricky Ball, Jeremy McDole, William Chapman, Eric Harris, Oscar Grant, Akai Gurley, Michael Brown, Rekia Boyd, Sandra Bland, Charleena Lyles, and Aiyana Jones" (*CNN News*, "Angela Reads Names" video, 2018). I ask myself, "When will it end? Will the killings of Black men ever end?" I constantly wonder, in a state of trepidation, what

would happen if all the Black boys and men in America were to disappear; would Americans no longer be in fear for their lives? their possessions? or, their pride? considering that Black men meet the description of being criminals, sexual deviants, drug dealers, gang bangers, athletes, rappers, and dead beats, at least in the eyes of many Americans.

"Do Black lives really matter?" I ask myself. If the deaths were centralized to one state, I might say that police officers need better training. However, these deaths are widespread throughout America. In many instances, white America would say that the incidents are the result of Black men not obeying the law and so they must learn to comply with authorities. Yet, the truth is, *IT* runs rampant throughout our systems, and in most of these major incidents, Black men did comply. I am bothered by the feeling that Black males continue to be the most hunted, wanted, and sought-after commodity to render a death sentence to, because of fear and prejudice. To talk about racism in schools is to discuss how racism occurs at all levels throughout the institution, even for Black school leaders and teachers who experience acts of racism by the teachers, parents, and other school leaders.

Our present-day irony involves our witnessing the history of Jim Crow laws reenacted as injustices now being unearthed in the over-policing and killing of Black men, the over-criminalization and racial disparities of Black men in the school to prison pipeline, and economic disparities of joblessness of people of color (*IT* tries to fool us all, but the data tells the truth).

So, the necessary changes to support Black male students in education and society have been extremely harsh for Black males to survive and thrive. Even under the best

circumstances, the ability to matriculate Black males from pre-k through high school to college have been filled with inequities. Take for example the resurgence of segregation in our schools. It is no longer the former Jim Crow laws causing segregation to occur, but an economic crisis now separates the "Haves and Have Nots" in our society. The Have Nots are those who struggle to afford the homes in wealthier neighborhoods where better schools reside. Yes, the "modern day" *Brown v. Board of Education* is occurring before our very eyes. School choice opportunities are not really opportunities of choice for families who struggle with transportation and are unable to send their child to a better school (*IT*). So then, better neighborhood schools, by happenstance, comprises our newest slogan to ensure equity occurs for all. Unfortunately, better schools in diverse or poor neighborhoods with high quality teachers and resources is an anomaly according to statistical data regarding schools in urban cities. The root of the inequities in schools across the nation are missing the mark in education (not many are willing to address *IT*).

Recently, school districts began to acknowledge the presence of *IT*—institutionalized racism—in their organizations. In excitement, one might start to believe that systemic barriers for students of color to access education will occur and the opportunity gaps will narrow. However, just acknowledging *IT* as racism is not enough. School districts need to do more to deconstruct the different levels of racism to improve student outcomes. The underlying challenges districts, schools, and school leaders take to find research-based solutions to address the historic issues are not sufficient; systems of accountability to monitor the effectiveness of implementation strategies are crucial. I have yet to see an equity plan address how educators will measure the effectiveness of their plans, as schools must do each year in their Traditional School Design Plan (So, *IT*

continues to live on). For example, in 2010, the Heights Department of Education created

an educator equity toolkit on how best to increase equity initiatives for school districts in

the state. One such district made public commitments to end the harsh disciplinary

practices of students in grades PreK-3, whereas other local school districts refused to take

such bold measures. Regardless, decisions to address inequities in some school districts

occurred more than six years following the public announcement of the equity toolkit.

Regrettably, some school districts and many more schools have not begun to address

inequities altogether (will *IT* ever end?).

Beyond creating simplistic equity plans, some school districts in other states, seek

to specifically address the historic underachievement of Black male students. Oftentimes

these school districts note the drastic underperformance of Black male students as a

major concern toward ensuring equity occurs for all students. For instance, the Oakland

Unified School district began an intensive focus on equity recommendations concerning

Black male students in 2010.

The heightened focus of school districts to ensure equity for students of color,

particularly Black male students, may not resolve the achievement issues entirely for

three reasons: (a) The created equity plans are not rigorous enough to address the root

causes of racism and the racialized experiences of Black male students, (b) districts and

schools are not implementing the action steps they recommended with fidelity, and (c)

the challenge to address the historical issues is beyond the capacity of most educators and

their understanding of how to enact institutional change.

In the 1954 Brown decision, it took decades for compliance and action to address

segregation throughout the nation, which ultimately led to mandatory school busing. Will

these newfound equity plans be another checklist like the Brown decision in the Civil Rights Era, which had no true intentions of promoting better educational outcomes for students of color? As Derrick Bell believed, I wonder why *now* the convergence of interest to promote equity for students.

I believe leading a school is one way to combat *IT* by seeing how it is manifested in a school, like that of a flower garden. Schools should be nourishing and cultivating environments where all of students (seeds in the allegory) are planted in "good" soil (the garden) and receive the nourishment they need to thrive (learn) and survive (continue on or graduate as proficient students). But, such is rarely the case for many students who are taught in malnourishing environments. Yet, fighting *IT* is up to us. We must provide students with the best environment that allows for them to thrive and survive.

"One must look beyond the seed and visualize what the seed will one day become!" My hope is that society and the education system will begin to see Black males as valuable and no longer perpetuate the fear of them in our schools. The proper care we would give our preferred flower or valuable possession must occur in our treatment of Black males. I was willing to change the paradigm and fight *IT* by addressing, changing, and dismantling systems and structures that often marginalizes Black male students in school. I refused to perpetuate historical issues in my school.

I began reading about Guinier, Torres, and Guinier's (2002) book *Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* and began to recognize how Black male students represent the "canary in a coalmine." Accordingly, if we improve the conditions for Black male students in education, we would improve the conditions for all students. So, I set out on a mission to defeat *IT* by dismantling systems

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that systemically harmed Black male students. This included our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support or Response to Intervention process that largely placed Black male students in special education. I worked to dismantle harsh disciplinary consequences against Black males and explored ways to improve instruction to increase the likelihood that students could be identified as gifted or talented. I believe if schools would make a stronger concerted effort to improve the learning conditions of Black males, learning will improve for all students.

The battle was not easy, but I had Black males on my mind the entire time. I understood the nine qualities of an effective school suggested by Shannon and Bylsma (2007):

1. "Clear and shared focus" (p. 9);

2. "High standards and expectations for all students" (p. 11);

3. "Effective leadership" (p. 14);

4. "High levels of collaboration" (p. 17);

5. "Curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards" (p. 20);

6. "Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching" (p. 26);

7. "Professional development" (p. 28);

8. "Supportive learning environment" (p. 31);

9. "High levels of family and community engagement" (p. 36).

Accordingly, I used many of these resources and the information they highlight in my plan to strategically intervene and plan for our school's success. The attributes the many resources, reports, and case studies presented served as my guide. The ultimate change

initiatives were grounded in my ability to not only navigate beyond the daily, yearly, and surprise challenges that would frequently occur but also maintain a single focus to enact change. In order to do so, I had to sharpen my skillset and lead with my strengths rather than based upon my racialized identity. My assessed strengths include responsibility, being an achiever, my belief system, and the qualities of connectedness and my focus on a restorative approach (Rath, 2007).

Behavior Systems and Classroom Management

In my efforts to dismantle systems that have historically labeled Black males as troubled and bad, I began to imagine how to intervene and improve the engagement and achievement of Black male students in the classroom by setting clear and high expectations throughout the school. I created a structure to address discipline throughout the building and established a protocol on how teachers should manage their classrooms.

 The established school-wide expectations took a tiered approach to intervene and address challenging student behaviors. The process ensured that school staff remained consistent with addressing behaviors and that students and teachers who had substantially high data for distributing referrals or classroom think sheets and refocus sheets received "real time" coaching through No Nonsense Nurture3, wherein teachers were required to build authentic relationships with students, and students received behavior intervention supports.

I also ended suspending students unless they committed a major offense that harmed another student. By the end of my fourth year, less than 10 students were suspended from school and less than 5, the following school year. By not suspending students, restorative practices were developed and implemented; student intervention

plans were created to support students at their level of need. The Black and Hispanic

male students and a handful of girls made up the students who were either in conflict with

teachers or frequently in trouble and in my office for class disruptions. Many of them

struggled to read or they lacked engagement in the classroom because instruction was not

rigorously challenging them to think. Nearly a third of the students needed intensive

interventions in literacy and math instruction to get them on grade level.

Improvements did not occur immediately. Over 2,000 office referrals, classroom

think sheets, and refocuses were given to students in my second year. The year prior,

even more were given to students. My office was filled with students who lost recess or

were sent out of the classroom for their behavior. I began to understand that the all too

familiar pattern of school failure was also occurring for my Black males, and the issues

were not their fault. My Tier 1 goals were

- Reduce the number of students who require Tier 2 intervention support –
  frequent check-ins and check-outs;

- Increase restorative justice approaches to minimize in-school and out-of-
  school suspensions.

- Monitor and reduce the number of students and incidents that require an office
  referral, think sheet, or refocus using previous year and monthly data recorded
  in the School-Wide Information System (SWIS) and Infinite Campus (IC)
  data system;

- Increase the recognition and celebrations of positive behaviors in the
  classroom and school-wide through weekly celebrations of students, teachers,
  and staff members;

- Monthly student recognition for Students Working to Achieve Greatness (SWAG) and Flying Higher;

- Weekly recognition of primary/intermediate "Student of the Week";

- Caught Caring—increasing the number of students who are caught caring throughout the school—efforts to increase empathy and reduce bullying.

Addressing Teaching and Learning

To mitigate student failure in the classroom requires all stakeholders to pay attention to learning at different levels: The school leader must establish high expectations of teachers and students and monitor planning and delivery of instruction by observing teachers frequently and providing them with actionable feedback to improve planning and teaching practices. As such, my goal to improve the quality of education students received required students to have access to high quality instruction. Students having access to high quality instruction will not account for improvements in their ability to learn. Students needed to remain in the classroom where learning was occurring. By increasing their opportunity to learn in the classroom required effort on the part of teachers to effectively manage the classroom. So, I had to be very firm with teachers and their practices, which did not always result in my being liked or understood. This was one of the biggest hurdles I had to overcome.

In my second year of leading, I improved my efforts with serving as the instructional leader and received coaching and guidance support through a school-based partnership with Achievement Network. As I improved in my ability to understand our new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), I could better support teachers.

Eventually, the curriculum teachers taught changed. This change allowed teachers to teach in alignment with the rigors of the CCSS standards at each grade level and supported students with the competency they needed to learn and be able to think at their grade level. Teachers received substitute relief time to deeply plan for their next instructional module whether it was teaching Eureka math or Expeditionary Learning in literacy. By my fifth year, math teachers annotated their lessons, applied their correct grade level standard to the lessons, supported students to use academic language, and frequently distributed and monitored daily exit tickets as a formative assessment of the lesson. Literacy teachers supported students with daily Guided Reading Plus lessons as an intensive reading intervention to ensure students were reading on grade level.

Each year in my role as a school leader, I addressed students' choosing to opt out of learning in the classroom. As I spoke with students about their behaviors, I coached them to reflect on the reasons they were being sent out of the classroom. Many of their responses were related to an avoidance to learn. So, I held students accountable for their learning by establishing systems to support them and increase their ability to engage in learning within the classroom. First, students could no longer be sent out of class due to disruptive behaviors if teachers did not intentionally address the behaviors with students and allow them opportunities to adjust their behaviors first. The process was not new; some teachers would fail to follow the discipline policy and coach students to meet their expectations. In meeting with students, I held them accountable to my expectations and would intervene if I received reports that they struggled in different areas. In my conversations with students, I painted my vision of success for them regarding their academics, their behavior, and their engagement in school. This would lead to

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establishing school-wide assessment goals in all content areas, behavior, and attendance that students were required to achieve.

Over time the learning gaps of our students had diminished dramatically, the quality of instruction substantially improved, and the use of student data to drive instruction became a common practice. Teachers monitored the effectiveness of their lessons, the performance of student's during and after each lesson, intervening sooner to support them with learning in small groups. Celebrations occurred frequently for students who accelerated their learning and reached the goal established. The priority focus of instruction included

- Literacy instructional priority focus: Write standards-aligned, scaffolded text-dependent questions (and responses) that translate into text-based discussion and writing—all driving toward key understandings in the text.
- Math instructional priority focus: Deeply study and understand coherence within grade-level standards by studying connections across concepts. Look for it in instructional materials especially grade-level problems and exercises so that teachers can identify students' conceptual understanding and their ability to apply mathematical concepts.

Targeted Academic Interventions

For 3 years, students arrived at school 45 minutes early. In their arrival, all students are provided with a hot breakfast—one that is not pre-packaged. I ended the process of unhealthy breakfast foods being given to students through the "breakfast in the classroom" program. Students arriving early are engaged in some level of tutoring whether computer-based, pulled by their teachers for early instruction, or whole group

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practice with their peers. Years earlier, I had partnered with an AmeriCorp program, a state community organization that supported classroom instruction. Besides supporting classroom instruction, this program supported intervention, building relationships with students, progress-monitoring performance and attendance data of students; program volunteers were available during morning tutoring. Together, we, the James Hamilton staff, really made an impact through such community partnerships, which helped to propel us to becoming an effective rated school.

Instructional Schedules

For teachers to teach effectively, they needed uninterrupted blocks of time to teach. As such, 2½ hours each day were designed for students to engage in literacy and math instruction. The blocks of time were rarely interrupted with outside programming and were consistently monitored to ensure learning was occurring. Our resource teachers were given intentional times to teach students who received special education services or English Language Development. The priority was that students received the whole group lesson with time to work or read independently. This was to account for students' having access to grade-level standards.

Special Education and the Identification Process

I ended the system that streamlines students into Special Education when the criteria of students' reading or doing math a year below grade level could not be isolated to their inability to learn or demonstrate they have a disability. Instead, I ensured high quality teaching was occurring in every classroom, ruling out any issue other than that students' not learning was the result of their possessing a disability.

Hiring and Retaining Teachers

One the major goals I had was being able to hire and retain committed teachers who saw this work as significant beyond a paycheck. I wanted teachers who would set high expectations for their students and rise to the expectations I held for them, and could handle my push for holding them accountable. I focused a lot of my effort on finding teachers who would fit in with the school culture and environment I was creating at James Hamilton and would maintain the vision that all students can learn. If it meant that I would grow and develop a first-year teacher to have good people in the building, I would hire that person. Initially, when I started as school leader, fighting against *IT* was challenging. I received heavy push back when I changed systemic structures staff were used to. Their disdain in my leadership led me to hire five classroom teachers of color, including men. Moreover, the redesign funds the school received from the state allowed me to hire personnel and programs that supported interventions; staff managed and oversaw systems that were developing to increase teacher performance and student achievement.

School Evaluation

In all that I believed was wrong with the school evaluation process, I had to own the data and accept responsibility for the culture and climate of the school. The process was painful—to own data and a school culture that I did not create—but I was able discard systems that were ineffective and develop improved systems. Along with the SE came the funding and resources I needed to turn James Hamilton around.

Overall, more than a million dollars supported my school redesign efforts in the 3-year time span. In the December 2015, the school's SE was initiated. Our results were

higher than the other schools who were in redesign like us. If we did not improve, school closure was looming, because the district embarked upon the School Design Plan, a process to support, intervene, and close underperforming schools. I sat at the decision-making table in the district to stay informed of the policy. In doing so, I was able to challenge those in the district from enforcing a third SE on us by using the language of the policy to emphasize how our results met the criteria that would end their evaluation of us. Highlights from the second SE included ratings in the following domains: instruction, students' opportunities to learn, educators' opportunity to learn, and leadership and community.

The second SE results were positive! We did not achieve any red indicators, thus opting us out of district interventions. We also met the criteria of our students achieving high growth on the state's literacy and math assessments and the language proficiency test. In all, the SRC reflected a growth of 73.8%, placing us near a distinguished rating (*IT* did not win this battle!).

I often share with others that a school does not just become a school in redesign. Systems and structures within the school are failing students long before the failure of students is reflected in a school's performance data. Ultimately, the failure of a school often lies with the responsibility of the leader to ensure that the culture and climate of the school is indicative of high expectations established for all. The year following the SE, we demonstrated tremendous growth on the district's SRC measures for the 2015-2016 school year. We jumped from the lowest rating of "poor performing" to achieve the second highest rating of "green" in 1 year.

Summary

In summary, many of my students, especially Black male students, are not always seen as the "preferred" flower in a respective gardener's eyes (categorically speaking). They are often planted in the most undesirable and malnourishing environment where the conditions of their growth were stagnant, as evident on mandatory state and district assessments—stagnated to the point where the school was designated as redesign by the Heights Department of Education.

Fortunately, in a 3-year time span, the least preferred flowers received a change in their soil, providing Black male students with access to the nutrients they needed to thrive and survive in their environment. Even though improving the conditions of the school environment was years in the making, it took a committed team of educators to improve the culture and climate of the school, all while being led by a strong, tenacious, and fearless leader, who fought against institutionalized racism (*IT*) to promote equity for Black male students.

Chapter Five. Combating Personally Mediated Racism

Master Gardener's Narrative

The gardener's (educators/schools') preferential treatment for red flowers (White students) over pink flowers (Black male students) is exhibited in education when academic achievement data reflect racial group disparities and gaps in education. According to Jones (2000), preferential and differential treatment is personally mediated racism, where the "differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intentions of others" (p. 1212) are based upon race or prejudices and discriminations. Personally mediated racism refers to intentional or unintentional acts of omission or commission and is manifested "as a lack of respect, suspicion, scapegoating, devaluation and dehumanizing" (Jones, 2000, p. 1213).

The gardener's (schools or their sustainable resources') irreverent treatment for pink flowers (Black male students) consisted of the intentional planting of pink flowers (Black male students) in flower boxes already comprised of poor, rocky soil (failing schools or classrooms).

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this chapter's self–narrative, "Personally Mediated Racism," are provided below:

1. In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the personally mediated level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

2. What actions did I as a school leader take to build relationships with teachers and Black male students, contributing to their success in school?

Self-Narrative: Combating Personally Mediated Racism

Although I never fully understood the mind, actions, and patience of gardeners, I realize that they must have hope and faith to believe that seeds planted in nourishing soil will one day produce a harvest, a crop, or cultivate the most beautiful flower garden. From planning the garden to carefully planting the seeds to patiently waiting for flowers to bloom, gardeners must be knowledgeable of the types of flowers they want to grow. They must take the time to nourish the flowers planted in their garden, providing the seeds with the correct amount of sunlight, water, and warmth, thereby protecting the seeds against outside influences that can harm or destroy their chances (vision, hard work, and labor of the students) to blossom fully. So gardeners must have the right mindset and discipline to grow their desired flower garden, despite the obstacles they might encounter in the process.

Essentially, leading a school out of redesign is no different. As school leader, I believe in the seeds that are planted in my school. Our seeds, as students, come from Vietnam, China, Somalia, the Congo, Ethiopia, Mexico, Iraq, Afghanistan, and throughout the United States. Students' lives might be impacted by poverty, homelessness, divorce, death, and familial mental illness. Students might struggle cognitively, social emotionally, physically, and communicatively. Yet ideally, we, as

school leaders in the United States, do not refuse anyone access to high quality instruction nor do we preferentially determine which students are provided with the best treatment and care. We must provide the space and resources teachers need to safely grow and allow the planted seeds to thrive. Having the best teachers to do the work of teaching diverse students is important. Teachers must be mindful to learn about the seeds they receive and the types of nourishment and care the seeds need to thrive. Sometimes teachers understand the seeds correctly and provide the correct nourishment and other times they do not.

As the leader, I carefully know my seeds (students), how they learn, what they need, and how teachers can best support them. I learn about them by watching them throughout the years, building relationships with them, highlighting their successes, analyzing their data; I monitor how teachers teach and ensure that teachers are speaking with students to understand how they process information, learn, and develop problem-solving skills. I use this information to provide teachers with additional information they might need to reflect on, as they plan lessons for students. Frequently we assess and measure students' data and reteach lessons for students in small groups, based upon their individual needs. Not only am I a front-runner for understanding the needs of students, but I also learn the needs of my teachers, their strengths, growth areas, and supports they need to grow to remain effective in their practice. My hope is to provide teachers with insightful feedback that they find beneficial and can help them grow as teachers. Their growth ultimately impacts the growth of students.

In my understanding of the types of hardships and trauma my students experience, I am aware that such "risk" factors could potentially impact their ability to thrive and

survive throughout their educational journey. So, I started my mission as school leader to uncover and dismantle historical trends of school failure for Black male students. My work began with a focus on Kunjufu's (2005) work on the fourth grade "failure" syndrome in *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, which highlights that Black males start off with the same fortitude and potential for learning as their peers, but by the fourth grade, their learning dramatically declines. I began to wonder about how his work is represented in the work of Duncan-Andrade (2009), who discussed the significance of educators having hope when growing roses from concrete (see also Shakur, 2009).

Thus, I began to see my students as the *Roses Growing from Concrete* (Shakur, 2009), based upon the conditions of their environment: They are surrounded by the most dismal conditions within their neighborhood, yet they are filled with potential to thrive as seeds and become beautiful flowers. So I set out to achieve the image of success for Black male students that is reflected in the research that I read throughout my doctoral studies. I believed in my students. I saw them as bright, talented, and filled with potential. I desperately wanted others to see my vision become a reality. Therefore, I worked toward improving the achievement of Black male students—students who resemble my own three sons.

Strategically, I developed our school's mission, created by me and inspired by the words of teachers I had met the summer before I began serving as the school leader. This mission states, "At JHE, we strive to provide all students with rigorous instruction tailored to meet their specific learning needs." The mission embodies what we believe as educators: to provide all students with rigorous instruction tailored to meet their specific

learning needs. In order to improve student achievement outcomes and student growth, James Hamilton began to implement a stronger instructional program during the school day to meet the learning needs of students. Thus, as of 3 years ago, the instructional programming came to include providing students with healthier meals and adjusting the start time for students so that we could help prepare their minds to think. This involved engaging students in morning tutoring prior to the start of the school day, using online resources or intervention support from teachers in reading or English as a Second Language (ELS) supports**.** The mornings were also structured for teachers to collaborate with their vertical teammates in literacy, mathematics, or special education service providers.

Leading the School Out of Redesign the First Year

Dejectedly, *IT* did not like that I was winning the battle to dismantle oppressive systems and structures to promote equity for all students, especially Black males.

So, *IT* shared his defeat with a crew of his friends and

demanded to fight once again.

The second battle was a tough one,

A painful one,

A lonely one.

I had to fight against *IT and his Friends*

Sadly, *Friends of IT* have a preference

for who they choose to not like and whom to fight.

I happen to meet that description.

So, I received the worse of their differential treatment,

based solely upon my characteristic features

of being Black

and a woman,

while leading…

Leading a school out of redesign as a first-year school leader is difficult. In fact, leading any school is challenging, especially when the prior school leader had been there for over 10 years. When I first took over as the school leader, few teachers of color taught at the school—specifically, two Hispanic and Latino staff members, with only one Black staff member whom I hired in my first year. The school and community, whether intentional or not, had an established culture—a way of being and acting, a history that I could not comprehend. So, entering the school and culture as a leader, a Black leader, where nearly 90% of the teaching staff was White, was an inevitable set up for disaster. Being Black and a woman leader, leading in two previous schools as the assistant school leader, I brought with me my own culture, beliefs, and passion for ensuring students were learning. As a result, I changed systems and structures almost to the advantage of tilling the grounds in preparation for seeds to be planted (categorically speaking)—not in just any soil, but in "good" soil. Although entering the school brought about change, change is almost always difficult for everyone involved.

Initially, fires would spread, and containing the fires proved to be very difficult! The fires consisted of conversations that focused on unprofessionalism. In particular, these conversations centered around actions that promoted and maintained (a) a negative staff culture, (b) inappropriate use of absences, (c) ineffective instructional practices, (d) an inability to resolve conflict with colleagues and students, and (e) the violating of

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student confidentiality. I recall working my hardest to improve the conditions in the school. But staff members plotted against me, or so it felt. Staff would smile at me in person and contribute snide remarks about me on anonymous surveys, public blogs, and posts. On several occasions, teachers would share with me posts and comments that their colleagues would write. In my efforts not to internalize the negative culture or the actions of others, I maintained a resolve to live out my beliefs to ensure all students were learning. I was also eager to accomplish my dreams and achieve our school goals with increases in outcomes of students learning. "All students who enter this school, will be warmly welcomed, feel safe, and benefit from learning" I would say. Except that I, as the leader did not always feel safe.

One day a teacher scheduled a meeting with me to discuss concerns she was having with her colleagues:

"Did you know you have the KKK working in your building?" she asked.

"The KKK?" I replied.

"Yes!" she said.

"No. I didn't know," I added.

I had no idea how to respond to the statement she made. I could not tell if the teacher was overreacting to a problem they were having with colleagues, or if a real threat existed at the school. My mind began to wonder how to appropriately respond to her statement. So, I passively brushed it off by saying, "No, things are okay. We are just going through a rough time right now." I quickly ended that conversation. Yet the statement resonated heavily in my thoughts and actions for years. However, it was at that time that I promised to live my values and beliefs of ensuring equitable spaces and practices existed for

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students. I no longer cared about slow change. I needed to weed out staff who permeated the school culture with drama, unprofessionalism, and negativity.

Some staff also quit working at James Hamilton midway through my first year. However, they continued to add fuel to fires they had created to discredit my efforts of turning around the school (i.e., the learning environment, the staff, and student culture). Although these staff members no longer worked in the building, they still had an influence over other staff members, inviting them to lunch or weekend gatherings, or randomly popping up at the school for visits. The moment I would say something or "make a decision," some teachers disagreed with me. I was ridiculed, and my actions were interpreted as angry. I became labeled as "the angry Black woman" (sadly, *IT and his Friends* do not fight fairly).

Continuing Challenges to Combatting Personally Mediated Racism

Near the end of my second year, teachers began advocating for my dismissal, which prompted conversations of my ineffectiveness as a school leader. As such, my supervisor began to interview every member on my staff to get a better understanding of how teachers were feeling. Even though I knew this was occurring, I was upset that my opinion regarding the dissatisfaction about me that was occurring was neither heard nor understood. The various actions taken to address this discontent appeared to reciprocate a belief that my voice did not matter. In addition to my supervisor's interviewing teachers, a survey by their teacher's union was distributed to all teachers, for them to share their concerns with my role and performance as a leader. I was informed about the anonymous survey and elected to complete the survey four times, advocating on my own behalf. I gave all that I could to hold the school together.

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But the final straw took place when staff attended a board meeting, predicated on my decision to non-renew several teachers in the school. The day following the board meeting, I was sitting in my office when I heard a knock on my office door. "How can I help you," I ask. The teacher at the door enters. Politely handing me a letter, she states, "I just want you to know that this happened. I was at the board meeting for something else, I wasn't a part of it." –I respectfully take the letter. The letter says,

Must Read:

When teachers can't voice their concerns in a OSSD school, someone steps up and speaks on their behalf at the 4/23/15 Board meeting:

"I am reading this statement on behalf of anonymous teachers at James Hamilton Elementary. These teachers feel they cannot speak out for themselves in front of this board without fear of retaliation from their school leader.

If OSSD claims that it puts students first, then James Hamilton rivals that claim. James Hamilton is a Title 1, red school. It has had 60% turnover in classroom teachers for two years

Antoinette Hudson was named as one of the worst school leaders. She has destroyed James Hamilton Elementary. A school where I worked for over ten years.

But, you added to the online post, I thought. Another comment online read, "Antoinette is so punitive." (Unfortunately, *IT and his Friends* are very conditional on who they choose to like and not like; I met that description.

Thinking to myself, I wondered how some people can have the audacity to hand this to their boss, let alone not acknowledge that they were part of the post commenting

about the incident. I was furious. But there was nothing I could do about *IT*. *Yeah, I read the post already*, I thought, refusing to acknowledge the meeting existed. *Why must I hear from a family member that this happened at a board meeting on Thursday? I did not hear about this from my supervisor, nor did anyone else in the district mention what took place at this public meeting*, were the thoughts that raced through my head.

When the teacher left, I turned my chair around and began shredding the letter in the shredder, as I desperately refused to let the madness of the school culture hurt me. *I have to keep doing what I know is best, regardless of the opposition I face,* I thought boldly to myself. I was sure that this battle would be the finale of my career. *IT and his Friends nearly won!*

Fortunately, not much resulted from the interviews, survey, or board presentation. My second year as the school leader, haunted me. I soon realized that I had to be extremely thoughtful in how I made decisions and communicated to staff. I had to remove any facial gestures or body language that others might scrutinize as wrong. This included my ability to not show signs that I was frustrated. I learned how to remove any signs that I was exhausted, tired, or over the entire experience of leading staff who did not want me there. I also had to learn how to be strategic and thoughtful in my actions. I could not respond to situations without first deliberately planning my next moves. I also learned how to be patient and wait. By holding staff accountable for their actions, I was becoming known as a "terrible" school leader.

The culture I inherited was so deeply engrained throughout the school that outsiders would often share stories with me about the toxic experiences they encountered when they would visit the school. Students and parents were frustrated by the way they

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had been treated. Some shared concerns regarding the large white dog that had frequently roamed the halls and classrooms prior to my leading.

In all that had been accomplished to redesign this once chronically underperforming school, I still have flashbacks of my journey and the pain I endured. This included my return to work following a car accident where I was rear-ended, often in chronic pain. I showed up each day to work, scared that my absence would show signs of defeat, that I had quit and given up. I was determined to make changes quickly for all students, especially my Black male students.

All that I desired was to have a consistently harmonious school culture that simply aimed to do what is best for students. Ignoring the drama associated with school change, I understood that I could not please everyone. In fact, someone was always going to be unhappy or in disagreement with a leader. Unfortunately, the power dynamics with me as a leader of color created a "toxic" culture when my vision of success differed from that of my teachers. Although I prided myself in being a firm yet stoic leader who rarely showed emotions, others were led to believe that I was heartless and uncaring.

In reality, the opposite is true. As leaders, we are taught not to show our feelings. Showing emotions is a sign of weakness. Instead we are trained to show we care through our actions and conversations with all stakeholders. Sorrowfully, this leaves leaders to carry the burden of being lonely in the profession. You are never truly great friends with teachers:

- You are their leader;

- You are not their confidant;

- Sadly, you might never be the person they vent to privately;

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- In fact, they might vent about you to their colleagues.

Overall, I learned never to become too relaxed as a leader, always guarding against my actions so they would not be perceived negatively, with a grievance filed against me. Even with the best of intentions, the wrong look, the wrong words spoken, or the wrong decisions made or perceived to be made can destroy the school's culture, as *IT and his Friends whisper division in the ears of those who will listen*. So, I trained myself to be reserved in my actions, and distant in my relationships with staff. As a result, I paid a heavy price for my actions, both positively and negatively. Regrettably, I never got to fully know my staff, and they never got to know me as their leader. In times of crisis, having a strong relationship with staff is important; yet I found it necessary to compartmentalize my feelings in efforts to avoid being hurt in my role as leader.

The residue of my past experiences, made public—calling out my inability to lead—still impacts me today. I learned to be quiet, silencing my voice and learning how to discretely express my opinions. My office became my safe space and saving grace in my role as school leader. When opposition regarding me arose at school, I could temporarily retreat there. *What do you do when you cannot forget the blows you have taken to promote equity for Black male students in school?* I pondered, then said out loud,

I guess, you learn how to take the hits,

the punches,

and the knives in your back.

Although I am not heartless, I am reminded to stay expressionless, so that others cannot see the pain they have inflicted upon me is real. Then I recall my first battle to prove my worthiness to lead and become a leader.

Flashback of My First Battle to Become a School Leader

On a trip out of town in mid-June, I realized that I had not heard back from this school leader regarding his decision to select his leadership team for the next school year. In early June, I interviewed to potentially become school leader at two schools. Both schools interviewed me. One school loved my interview but went with a more experienced candidate. I had not heard back from the second school, regarding my interview there. Curious about being hired, I reached out to call the school leader directly. Mr. Barnes was a White, middle-aged man whom I was familiar with. He had taught a graduate course in the absence of my professor, 2 years prior. Also, he was close friends with a leader I deeply admired. In his familiarity of me, he knew more about me than did most other school leaders in the district. My call to Mr. Barnes went as follows:

"Welcome to Park Elementary, how can I help" the secretary answered.

"Hi, I was calling to speak with Mr. Barnes."

"May I ask who's calling," she asks.

"Antoinette Hudson," I responded.

"Let me transfer your call," she says. The call transfers.

"Hello," Mr. Barnes answers. "Hi Mr. Barnes, it's Antoinette Hudson. I was calling to see if you have selected your assistant school leader for next year?"

"Yes, I made a decision to go with another candidate. Nothing was wrong with your interview, and your references were fine. My only concern is your family status," he said.

My family status? I thought. *What's wrong with my family status? I had never heard my status was a problem.*

"Ok," I said. "Thank you for letting me know."

"Keep applying" he said. "I am sure you will find something soon."

"Thank you for your time." I added as I hung up.

Confused and furious, I could not understand what happened. A wave of emotions, from anger and resentment to indignation, took over me. As I vented, these were my thoughts:

I was not selected to be his assistant school leader because of my family status.

What's wrong with my family status?

Who was he to judge my abilities by undisclosed qualifiers?

How does he know what I can and cannot do because I am a mother?

I made it this far in my role as a teacher….

Who's to say that I cannot lead a school because I'm a mother with four kids? He had no right to discredit my abilities.

Does he understand the hardships I endured to be the success that I am today?

An unjust cry pierced my heart as I thought,

Is what he said discriminatory?

Is it legal?

I was so close to my dream of becoming a school leader, yet so far away!

As the new school year was approaching, my pain lingered on. I searched desperately for a resolution to the incident. All that I could think about was quitting the current job I had as a classroom teacher. My school leader, however, was less than supportive of my situation and reminded me that I needed to move on and get prepared for students to arrive at school soon. I wondered how the district would make the wrong done to me, right. To no avail, nothing happened. *IT and his Friends* do not care—my

place is beneath them, as *IT* closes systemic doors, preventing me from leading. Ultimately, *IT* became his words against mine. So, nothing was done. Resolved to lead, I set out to learn the craft of leading as school leader.

I was determined to move out of the classroom as a teacher, even if it meant leaving my current school district. Unfortunately, I never perceived how my dream would one day manifest itself in becoming a reality. Nor did I consider the barriers in which institutionalized racism, personally mediated racism, and internalized racism would make me want to quit the journey entirely. Many dreamers never see the fruition of their dream manifest itself in reality, because they are not actionably pursuing steps to achieve their dream. All I could dream about was the school leadership and how I wanted to improve the quality of education for students. I developed a vision for what the pursuit of my dream would look like. I wanted to prove people wrong for doubting what I knew to be true about myself.

Moving On: A Determination to Survive and Thrive

After teaching the rest of the school year, I left my assignment without a job for 3 months, eventually landing a district leadership position. Two years later, I accepted my first role as a school leader, co-leading a school in redesign, out of the brinks of low performance, encompassing a high population of free- and reduced-lunch students. Even more special, my role meant leading in the same school I attended as a child growing up. I was passionate to be a part of the school's success, which needed strong leadership to improve the academic achievement of students. In this assignment, I learned how to be tough, firm, and unwavering in my vision of what students needed to succeed in school. I

learned how to create positive behavior supports for students and improve the student culture.

In another assignment as a building leader, I learned how to soften my approach to leading and be mentored and coached as a 1-year school leader resident. In this assignment, I was coached under a successful school leader at a uniquely diverse school based upon school programming, in conjunction with a magnet school with very few students who qualified for free and reduced lunch. Unfortunately, most of the students, staff, and parents at the magnet school did not resemble my racial identity, so I learned how to navigate within white spaces and enculturate myself into the school where, in most cases, I wanted to hide.

Even though being the "only" Black educator in a school was not a new experience for me, I had to make use of my repertoire of teaching experiences and know how to "act" to be accepted by the school community. The day I disagreed with a teacher on a decision, that teacher approached me, angrily pointing a finger in my face, sharing a lack of approval for my actions. In my past role as a leader, the actions of this teacher would have been followed up with corrective action for such behaviors. But, I had to tread lightly in this space, which meant silencing my voice and lessening my actions to finish my assignment. Keeping the vision of my goal ahead of me, I followed up the actions made by the teacher with a conversation and an agreement of what respect would look like when addressing a disagreement with leadership and how to maintain a professional disposition.

Back to the Battle at Jefferson Hamilton Elementary

As a new school leader, I was conflicted because I never fully understood the rationale behind my appointment to the school. I often wonder if I was set up to fail. It is not that I was lied to about the school. The issue is that the truth was not fully disclosed concerning the culture and climate of the school. So, I blindly entered a school culture that was not used to a school leader establishing criteria for maintaining professionalism nor was there a clear understanding and expectation for students learning. My thinking at this point was, *Nothing is new, just like the last time I fought IT. I know where the attacks are coming from.*

So, my battle to fight *IT and his Friends* continues. Looking at your staff in the presence of their discontent gets harder to do each day. My smile is now a programmed one, even though I want to scream! Keeping a joyful temperament is not easy, especially when all you want is peace, and a committed staff culture to embrace all that is good and avoid negativity. With student enrollment anticipated to drop over the next 2 years because of the redevelopment in the neighborhood**,** the heart-wrenching pain of not knowing what to expect in the coming months has me desperately wanting to scream, "Can we all just, stop with the drama! Don't they get it?" But, I do not get the luxury of screaming or yelling, or even showing my feelings.

More is at stake for the school community to continue to exist than secret meetings, where some of teachers are venting to share their contempt of me. I have already heard rumors of the dissatisfaction in their conversations while meeting with the union representative, *which means a grievance can be filed against me,* I thought. I wondered what I had done wrong this time. Could it simply be about the requirement that

certain teachers turn in annotated lesson plans or they are unhappy with my observation feedback, where I need them to look more closely at their relationship with our boys. Their actions are not producing the best outcomes of our students. This is what I get for openly promoting equity for students. Being misunderstood is a challenge for me. I want the best for all my staff. I am not sure how much more I can communicate this to them. I am learning that in times of high stress, teachers often forget how much I support and care for them, such as

- Intervening with challenging behaviors;

- Supporting them with discipline;

- Supporting them with challenging parents;

- Facilitating difficult conversations, they might have with staff;

- Providing them with coaching support;

- Guiding their efforts to improve student achievement;

- Celebrating their successes and efforts to support students and their co-workers.

Progress Arrives

Our schoolwide success is not mine alone. I proudly share with media outlets how great my staff is and how hard they work at the school. Some teachers even arrive to work 2 hours early each day to prepare to teach our students. To maintain our positive school culture, I made the decision that at our emergency faculty meeting, I will be sharing the most up-to-date information I have, following my last budget meeting. Thus, I announce,

Due to anticipated, low student enrollment and student projections for next school

year, I want to prepare everyone for what will lie ahead of us in January. The

governing committee will be making the difficult decision to approve reductions

to positions in the building.

The staff becomes quiet. I add, "We all know that the redevelopment of our

neighborhood is coming soon. The timeline for construction will begin as early as May or

June." Continuing, I say,

Families will begin to receive notice of their need to vacate soon. Families will

have options to stay in the neighborhood or move throughout the city. But I will

keep everyone updated on the details of the redevelopment as they come my way.

All the while I am thinking to myself, *This is not the time for us to fall apart. We have*

come so far from where we started. Everyone who enters our building enjoys the feeling

they get when they visit. The atmosphere alone says that we are doing great work in the

school.

Leaders of color leading White teachers is difficult, leading timid teachers is

challenging, and leading passive-aggressive teachers is gut-wrenching. "Is there a level of

mistrust occurring with my staff?" I began to worry. As for teachers and staff, the school

evaluation that was conducted revealed just how much distance stood between the

teachers and myself. The way we communicated was very different. The way we

establish relationships and expectations for students was just as different. I was reminded

that only a few of my teachers reflected my racial identity, and many did not reflect the

identity of my diverse student population (*IT and his Friends* codify strife in their

preferential and differential treatment of others).

I realized that we spoke different languages. We saw the world through our own unique lens, based upon our world view and the paradigms we shape that have become our reality. I wondered, *Was there ever true trust in me as their leader or was trust provided because of the White allies I carefully selected to work closely with them?*

White allies helped me bridge communication and expectation barriers I had with staff. They helped me monitor my leadership actions, gave me feedback when I needed it. They helped me to reflect on what I wanted to say but could not. They understood my vision of success and helped teachers to arrive at my expectations. They interpreted my broad goals into specific details and helped me to call out the specifics of what I expected from others. I learned how to celebrate and find strengths in others because of their support. Our work together improved the student and adult culture.

Unfortunately, for teachers who do not look like me, the fear and intimidation of me as a leader has never resolved. This same fear is present in how teachers relate to students. I had to dismantle the level of fear teachers had of students, even if I could never resolve the fear they had of me.

"I hate my teachers! I hate school!" He yells as he enters my office.

"Well why is that?" I ask. "Have a seat, let's talk."

"Because, my teachers push me," he says.

Curious if I have understood what he meant, I ask,

"Push you? Do you mean like, physically pushing you with their hands?"

"No. They challenge me," he responded.

Breathing easier from his answer, I know how to sway this conversation with my student so that he can see school differently:

"Tell me how pushing you is wrong? Shouldn't they challenge you?" I ask.

"Yeah!"

"Okay… so what's the problem?" I counter.

"They tell me 'No.' They tell me to keep trying. 'Try this problem.' Then they say, after that, 'You can go get a drink of water.' So, I do a little more," he shares.

"Then, what happened?" I ask,

"I got up and then I got in trouble," he adds, realizing that he was wrong for not raising his hand—now in trouble for leaving the classroom without permission.

"Okay. What did you do wrong?" I asked.

He quietly lowers his head. Breaking the silence, I add,

"I promise you, you want to be in a school that challenges you. Let me tell you a secret," intentionally hooking him into our conversation.

"Do I make sure that you have everything that you need for school? Like school supplies, a backpack?" I ask.

"Yes," he nods.

"If you need someone to talk to, do I make sure that you have someone to talk to?"

"Yes," he says, as he shakes his head.

"Great! It is also my job to make sure that your teachers are teaching you all the things that you need to know. If teachers are not teaching you appropriately, then they have to deal with the tough me," I jokingly laugh. Continuing, I say,

"So, your job is to not shut down, but talk if you have something bothering you, and I will listen. But you must do the hard work now, because your future depends on you learning all that you need to know today."

"Does that make sense?" I asked him.

"Yes," he says once again, nodding his head.

"Great! Know that life might be hard at home. But when you walk through the school doors. We will make sure you have what you need."

Likewise, to capture the hearts and minds of Black male students, you have to talk with them, break the ice, and get to know them.

Inspiring critical hope. I tell my Black male students what I see in them, their future, and I speak life into them. When they make mistakes, I see them as boys and not men. I coach and guide them to make better choices in the future. Every time I look at my Black male students, I see the hope of their calling, their potential, and what they will one day become: from our past President Barack Obama to great scientists, inventors, intellectuals, lecturers, and athletes, such as Charles Drew, Benjamin Banneker, Elijah McCoy, Carter G. Woodson, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., W.E.B. Dubois, Langston Hughes, Derrick Bell, Satchel Paige, and Jackie Robinson. Someone believed in them and their potential for greatness. This same external belief of their abilities should occur for Black males internally in the field of education, but this belief is not always esteemed as true in education.

Battling *IT* is the same for a parent. **"**I am not that parent!" I boldly stated to the staff at my son's school. The school leader in this case continued to have conversations with me that my son is clinically depressed. The social worker at the

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school assessed my son, using skewed data that reflected the school's perceptions of him as a student and overlooking the cognitive score, which reflected him to be beyond the normal ranges of intelligence. "Please allow me to take off my administrator hat," I demanded, adding,

> See me in this moment as his mother only and not as a school leader. I know the game better than most parents, and you will not identify my son as clinically anything. You will go through this process again, the right way!

Referring to the support staff member who inaccurately assessed him to validate the school's belief about him, I stated, "She will not be the one to collect his data—and this assessment should be exempt from his educational file."

By looking at the data, I gathered that the behavioral assessment was overly and negatively skewed by teachers. The findings were contrary to the parent survey. So I added,

> You shaped this entire IEP process to say what you wanted it to say. If you believed he was clinically . . . His behaviors would be consistent at school and at home. The data does not reflect that. In fact, being at school, in the conditions in which you do not support students who feel isolated, without friends, and even bullied, I blame the environmental structures you have here, which are not conducive to students who look like my son, but for students who look like you.

Continuing, I argued, "You are essentially labeling him without ensuring you are meeting his needs as a diverse learner, identified as needing special education, all the while ignoring his cognitive score that is beyond the "normal" range, highlighting his potential for giftedness."

Rather than seeing greatness and potential in Black male students, educators can sometimes only see the deficits and blame Black males for their own failure. As an educator and mother, when I look at my sons, I have yet to consider them as dangerous.

However, my sons are unaware of society's convictions against them just because they are Black and young men. Society holds tight to the fear of Black males in society through the massive killings, lynchings, and beatings that are commonly known to be criminal acts that somehow go without convictions in our nation's courts, unless White men are the defendants. In fact, consider the life of Emmett Till. He was a 14 year old when he visited relatives in Mississippi in 1955. Common practices held by Jim Crow laws of the South were much different than his experiences in Chicago where he lived. While in Mississippi, he was inaccurately accused of verbally talking to and whistling at a White woman in a store. For those actions, he was horrifically lynched by the woman's husband and brother. Both men were acquitted of the murder charges, and recently the accuser acknowledged lying about the entire incident (*Friends of IT* do not question the system, they perpetually feed IT).

As a mother, I only wish the world could see my sons and other Black males as human, not essentialized to be problems in society or seen as dangerous. I see them still learning and growing as seeds who need the right amount of warmth and nurturing to survive. So, I strive to transform how my staff views Black males in my school, how we communicate to them, how we inspire critical hope, how we challenge master narratives that provide us with negative images and perceptions of our Black males in education and in society. We first must look at the conditions of our garden and the soil we selectively

plant our seeds in. By doing so, as gardeners, we must address our own biases, negative

perceptions, and stereotypes by first acknowledging they exist.

I admit. However, not every teacher I have worked with has fully realized that

they maintain biases of their own, whether explicit or implicit. This was evident in one of

our equity team meetings where we took an implicit bias test. The test results for one

teacher were shared as follows: "I have a preference for Blacks over Whites." Shaking

my head in disbelief, I thought, *We have a lot of work to do. Somehow those results are*

skewed.

Based upon our equity work engaging in the line of meritocracy, the staff began

to recognize and understand that our backgrounds, lived experiences, and world view

sometimes shape our experiences. As we completed the "line of meritocracy" exercise

found in Fergus's (2016) book *Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity: A*

Leader's Guide to Using Data to Change Hearts and Minds (2016), we lined up together

in the gym. A teacher read the questions emphasized in the book. We moved forward in

line if we had a positive experience and backwards if our experiences were not so

positive, until all of the questions were asked. Looking around the room, I realized that

once again, I was in the back of the room with two other staff members. Discouraged that

I started in a similar line to that of my staff, I remained in the back, based upon my

experiences growing up. To arrive at the "level" of success I have had as a leader, I know

that my success took more than "grit" to be here as their supervisor. I believed this

introduction would be an eye-opening process for most of my staff to experience as we

began to engage in conversations focused on equity.

The master gardener's work does not get easier. But my fifth year leading has not been getting easier when discussing equity. We began our school year with my sharing our vision of success for the year. Our theme for the year focused on staff becoming master gardeners. The vision anchored our work in previous school years (The Dream Team, The Perfectly Fit Dream Team) to now James Hamilton's Master Gardeners' Team.

We began the school year understanding our role as gardeners. "This year, each of us will become master gardeners," I began, Continuing on, I explained,

> As master gardeners, others will come to us to understand what and how we were able to grow our students into the learners they are today. They will want to know what we did to become successful. Like any garden, cultivating a flower garden is never an easy thing to do. Just getting started requires work. An essential requirement to gardening is to develop a design plan and begin to learn about our seeds (students)."

Every staff member received a flower pot, soil, and a package of seeds they had to learn about prior to planting. A staff member modeled the process that staff had to follow to plant their seeds.

I demonstrated how each flower pot has soil in which we plant our seeds. "We can choose the type of nourishment our seeds receive and the type of soil our seeds are planted in." I shared how seeds can be planted in rocky unnourishing soil or in fertile soil, I then asserted,

> But the possibilities of planting seeds in different flower pots will impact the
> growth of the seeds as they become flowers, and James Hamilton and each

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classroom is its own garden. By the end of the school year, we want to produce the most beautiful flowers. However, not every flower requires the same treatment to grow and thrive—in fact some flowers require less water or sunlight to thrive than others. We must be committed to seeing each seed grow by providing the care and treatment each flower needs to thrive and survive.

As staff continued to plant their seeds, I began to display for them the unique experiences our Black male students have in education. How historically, the education system and society have further marginalized them, preventing them from thriving and surviving. Afterwards, we watched the video of Duncan-Andrade (2012), illustrating my vision beautifully in his speech "Roses in Concrete" to further make the connection between our equity work for the year and our role as master gardeners growing our diverse seeds (students) as learners. Conceptually, students became seen as seeds and roses that we, as educators, allow to flourish despite their condition and placement in society. This message has rung true for my focus on Black male students throughout the years as one of James Hamilton's school leaders.

Unfortunately, I spent more time addressing the negative perceptions some staff had of students, helping them recognize their own biases, while I experienced different levels of racial microaggressions by staff who have worked with me for years as well as with staff members who were not aware of their own biases or actions towards students, particularly Black male students. Many of the incidents were comprised of teachers' maintaining a level of privilege, in that they wanted systemic policies and practices to change rather than having to change their own actions and perceptions. Undesirably, the level of stress in the actions of teachers exemplified just how easily negative perceptions

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can be transmitted to them, based upon their interactions with students. Seeing the negative interactions between some teachers and students was gut-wrenchingly painful. In my feedback to teachers regarding their unconscious and conscious actions, I unknowingly caused visibly high levels of stress and anxiety for them when I held them accountable for their actions by addressing inequities that were observed in their classrooms and in their relationships with students. What I learned in the process of doing equity work is that this work is best done by outsiders and not school leaders, unless the entire staff is ready to become more equity focused and tackle our own biased beliefs. I learned to gently push and help others recognize their preferential/differential treatment of students. A strong push to increase teachers' awareness of bias can disrupt the school culture and threatens my ability to lead. So demanding equity and excellence for Black male students remains a hidden agenda of mine.

What I am learning in the process is that sometimes timid teachers are difficult to understand; thus, my learning how to support them has been a challenge. For the most part, timid teachers seldom speak to me regarding concerns or challenges they are having with teaching, instruction, or improving their pedagogical practices to build relationships with students. If teachers are not talking with building leaders, they are talking to each other and their challenges might go unaddressed and unresolved, thus creating a firestorm among the staff culture. The failure of staff to communicate issues or challenges in efforts to resolve them makes me more nervous, because I would rather know their concerns so that I can make the necessary changes to support them.

Why did I fight so hard? But it is times like these, when teachers are stressed and overwhelmed, that my mind keeps racing back to the reason I began this journey.

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"Why did I fight so hard to arrive at this place?" I asked myself. To make it through this new battle to openly promote equity, I had to always keep in my mind the reason for my leading. Frequently, I reflect on why I fought so hard to become a school leader.

Then, my eyes becomes fixated on the plaque on my wall. I say, "I remember how I got here! . . . When I accepted the position, I had no idea that this is what I would be doing. What made me think I could do this job?" My mind takes me back to my role as a teacher, excited when my goals to leading were on the horizon. It was the start of the school year; students had just arrived when I received a phone call from the office:

"Ms. Hudson, please stop by the office. We have a package for you that was just delivered. It's too big to fit into your mailbox. You will have to come and get it," the secretary said.

"Okay, thank you. I will be there to get it later today," I answered.

During my lunch break, I made my way to the office where the secretary handed me the package. "Wow! This is heavy," I observed, as I unwrapped the brown paper. To my amazement, the plaque unveiled a copy of the Rocky Mountain News article titled, "Teacher's Lesson: Never Give UP." The article displays a large picture of me looking down, deep in thought, with a subtext that read, "I missed my childhood. I can't go back, but I can help someone else not go through what I went through." *This is nice*, I thought. *So much nicer than the newspaper version of the article*. The article highlights my life— my life as a single parent of four and my dreams of becoming an elementary school leader. *I never imagined that my life's story was one others wanted to read about.* I mused. *Arriving here in this moment was from one favor: Helping a friend promote his higher education program led to a major newspaper in Richland, Heights, capturing my*

dream, I thought. Proudly, the plaque has served as a reminder of my journey to become a school leadership and to never quit. Others may never understand my journey, pathway, and commitment to lead as school leader, but I am reminded each day I enter my office.

Summary

A key component of James Hamilton's success is providing students with rigorous research and evidence-based instruction that allows them to become critical thinkers and participants in their own learning. Teachers are very thoughtful and caring when planning for students academically, socially, and emotionally. A whole-child focus includes developing strong relationships with students, parents, and the community. Most importantly, James Hamilton's success and source of greatness is our ability to ensure a warm, safe, and friendly environment for students and staff.

In my journey of school redesign, James Hamilton embarked upon a collective understanding of the essential elements necessary for James Hamilton to become a highly effective school. These essential elements include

- Believe that students can exceed at high levels;
- Establish high expectations for students and staff;
- Ensure decision-making occurs collaboratively.

Moreover, teachers accept their role in the success or failure of students. Staff and faculty are dedicated to promoting and ensuring equity occurs throughout the school for the most disadvantaged students.

As I fought to dismantle ineffective systems and structures in the school, I also had to rebuild them to benefit students and improve the culture and climate in the school. I found ways to celebrate and recognize students each week for exemplifying our core

behaviors. Teachers were required to find the good in what students are doing to reinforce positive behaviors.

Similarly, I focused my efforts on building stronger relationships with teachers, while increasing my celebrations and recognitions of teachers for their hard efforts to improve for the benefit of students. Accordingly, teachers are celebrated in weekly drawings. Each Monday during our school-wide morning meetings, we honor the teacher of the week. Teachers are frequently recognized and receive a values pin for demonstrating our district's shared core values: collaboration, equity, accountability, integrity, students first, and fun.

As educators, we are each responsible for ensuring that the equitable treatment of all students, especially Black males, will be present throughout the school. Oftentimes, this is not the case. Teachers and staff frequently exhibit fear of such students they teach. In doing so, we begin to see all that is wrong with these students and not their potential. So, our level of care towards them must be different. If we take the time to learn about each student, their history, their culture, and their likes and dislikes rather than fear them, we will be able to engage students in learning.

Chapter Six. Overcoming Internalized Racism

Master Gardener's Narrative

Internalized racism appears in the allegory when inanimate flowers express their feelings about their treatment. The pink seeds (Black male students) would one day bloom into flowers and resent the differential treatment they received. The pink flowers (Black male students) would know that they were different and how ill-equipped they were to survive. The red flowers (White students) might look upon the pink flowers (Black male students) with disdain and pity, as did the gardener (educators).

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this chapter's self-narrative, "Overcoming Internalized Racism," are provided below:

1. In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the internalized level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

2. What actions did I as a school leader implement to address racism at the internalized level to promote the success of Black male students, leading to their success in school?

Self-Narrative: Overcoming Internalized Racism

I grew up in Richland, Heights, commonly referred to as the north side of town, and attended many schools within the Oakland Springs School District. As a child, my

father and mother wed and divorced prior to my first birthday. Although I lived with my mother until the age of 12, I spent many weekends visiting my father and his family, often bouncing between different economic worlds of poverty and a middle-income household. My mother was a stay-at-home worker, and my father was a yardmaster for the railroad, where he had worked since my birth.

Living with my mother, I recall living in poverty as a child on welfare and receiving government assistance. I remember the many moments I had to purchase food with food stamps at the grocery store and ride on the city bus, the only form of transportation available to us. On numerous occasions, I felt the embarrassment of walking to the corner store, when friends were around, to buy candy with food stamps. It was quite demoralizing that my brothers and I were frequently laughed at and teased because we were poor, lacking many of the resources others had. I recall moments when my shoes had holes in them from normal wear and tear, but I had no other choice but to wear them to school. The taunting of classmates left a memorable impression in my mind of the reality of poverty and the struggle of financial hardships.

As a child, I attended a neighborhood school in the north side of town, grossly populated by African American students who also lived in poverty and middle-income households. As a young student in my elementary years, I encountered numerous challenges with socialization and understanding the new environment of school—going to school being my first time away from home. For example, on the first day of school, my mother said her goodbyes to my older brother and me and proceeded to leave the school. I remember how nervous and scared I felt when she left me, how upset I felt to be around so many unrecognizable faces, and how traumatized I was to be stuck in such a

large building. Without an understanding of time, I thought I would be there forever. As the morning progressed, my nervous and upset stomach eventually led me to "throw up" in the girl's restroom during our tour of the school. With tears flowing, I was sent to the nurse's office. My mother arrived shortly thereafter, and my first day of school had ended. Believing that incident to be the start of never returning to school again, I unknowingly had to repeat the same traumatizing events of going to school day after day, but my educational experiences worsened before they got better.

I fought often and was sent home with a suspension each time. So eventually, teachers saw that I was so far behind in learning that I needed to repeat the first grade. Eventually it really bothered me that I struggled to acclimate to school. Not only did I hate being laughed at and teased by kids who went on to the next grade, but also I hated being retained to repeat first grade. As an adult, I believe schools should be safe spaces for students, but I did not experience that when I was a child. School was a lonely place to be when you feel like you have no one to relate to. I remember going home and crying. I could not understand why I had to be in school. I was used to being home with my mom. I did not trust people because my childhood experiences were not conducive to feeling safe and secure.

While retained in the first grade, teachers determined that I qualified for special education; thus with my mother's permission, I received an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and was taught in a self-contained classroom for reading and writing instruction. The pain of repeating first grade left a traumatic stain on my later years as a student. I was embarrassed to repeat first grade and even more distraught when I entered a specialized classroom for students with a perceived learning disability as a special

education student. I became afraid to be singled out as the child who was held back, while others advanced to the second grade. I was teased by numerous students because they were unaware of the reason I was held back. With a perceived learning disability, I felt like my ability to learn and be in control of what I learned was out of my reach and not a decision I could make. Nevertheless, after a year of being in special education, I showed teachers that I was capable of learning and no longer qualified as possessing a learning disability.

Institutional racism was the differential exposure I experienced as a student to receive special education services. Over time, I sat quietly in class; I listened to learn. If I did not know a concept or skill being taught, I spent endless hours studying to gain a sense of understanding and appear to be a proficient learner. I simply ingested information. In doing so, I would stay hidden and rarely did I stand out among other students.

My goal and intentions were clearly set: "Never would I repeat another grade level or cause embarrassment to myself as I did in having to repeat the first grade." At a young age, I was forced to deal with rumors that hovered around me. I recall overhearing conversations by adults as they wondered if I had the ability and potential to learn like "normal" kids. Little did the adults and teachers in my life know that I possessed a strong will and desire to achieve success. I was very fortunate in that I caught up quickly with learning, so that after the first year of receiving special education services, I no longer qualified academically.

Growing up in Richland offered many benefits and challenges that can be viewed differently, depending upon the lens with which one perceives life. In the 1980s, I was a

product of school busing to integrate schools. The busing policy began, following a court consent decree that racial segregation was harmful to the educational attainment rights of students. As I transitioned from the neighborhood school I had attended for 4 years, from the fifth grade on until I graduated from high school, I was part of a movement to integrate schools where students from diverse neighborhoods attended schools in neighborhoods that were less diverse. I was able to see a world beyond what I saw each day in my neighborhood. I attended a school where the building facility was well kept, and teachers desired to teach and build great relationships with students. I attended after-school programs like *Odyssey of the Minds,* which helped me to think more critically about my environment and world, and sparked a greater interest in my wanting to learn mathematics and science. At this phase in my life, I recognized a greater quality in the education I received due to school busing mandates and my first encounter with students of different ethnicities. Moreover, for the first time in my school experiences, I was perceived as being gifted.

From the age of 12 years and on, when I began living with my father, my educational experiences began to take root in my life. During these years, I learned about the significance of being a responsible and disciplined citizen as well as the economic contributions I was able to make in society. A few years later, at the age of 16, I lost my paternal grandmother; and a month following her death, I was pregnant. The news came as a shock to so many close friends and family members who knew me as a dedicated honor student and athlete. At 17, I had my first child. Despite having made such a difficult decision to remain a teen parent, I strived to provide a better life for my daughter and complete high school. I was determined that the struggles I experienced as a child

would not occur for my daughter. After a year, I graduated a semester early from high school and enrolled at the Community College of Richland, with the help and support of many people I met, in addition to a host of remedial courses throughout my educational experiences.

As a first-generation college student, I received little guidance regarding what college life would be like from my familial "social capital" group. When I initially began to pursue an associate's degree, few examples in my circle of influence possessed a college degree. Simply matriculating successfully through each grade level leading to high school graduation represented a long-standing tradition for my family. Thus, navigating through enrollment and admissions, registration for courses, and applying for financial aid were foreign experiences to my family; thus I was left to enter the journey alone. I received support through the community partners who helped me complete my financial aid application. My high school guidance counselor supported my enrollment in courses, following my college entrance examination at the institution. This same counselor also helped me apply for financial aid scholarships and donations from various community organizations, all of which contributed to my ability to enroll in and graduate from college.

As a child, I daydreamed that one day I would be a teacher. As I pretended to teach my small classroom of students (teddy bears), I realized their success resulted in how prepared I was to teach. Every day I would role play my dream: I would line up the group of teddy bears, sit them in rows, and place before them their own handmade, personalized, and invented assignments. As a young child, I was unaware that my dream of being an educator would one day become a reality. In hindsight, I realize that my

dream was nearly deferred due to the racialized educational experiences I encountered and had to fight and triumph over. The generational battles my immediate family fought to be educated did not lead them to persevere beyond high school to obtain a college degree.

I understand the hardships and trauma of my students and how their experiences can impact their ability to thrive and survive throughout their educational journey. I often think back to my childhood—whether the educators at that time really paid attention and acted on my behalf. I wondered if they really cared to dismantle systems that caused me more harm within the school system rather than quickly identifying me as needing special education services or their speedy response to suspend me. We must examine the systemic and institutional structures in our schools that might re-victimize the vulnerable. This re-victimization process occurs if we fail to address institutional and personally mediated racism, which potentially occurs in schools. Students should not have to internalize systemic injustices mediated by adults towards them, to believe that they are bad, troubled, or something is wrong with them. Such incidents of racism have been my experiences in my journey as a student, as a teacher, as I worked to become an administrator, and as a school leader in efforts to promote equity for all students, particularly Black boys.

As an educator, I am aware that my lived experiences are often a reflection of the families I serve and the societal issues students face daily. I understand the range of challenges many schools encounter to eliminate the achievement gap between higher and lower performing students, closing the achievement gap amongst students of color, and finding new ways to ensure that all students receive an equal and equitable education

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despite their geographic location in our nation, or the economic experiences students might undergo.

Early in my educational journey as a teacher, I realized that I had the potential to change the trajectory of school failure for all students, including Black male students. As I reflect on how I became the school leader at JHE, I began to recall my initial interview with the JHE community:

Late one evening, I received a phone call from a potential supervisor of the network of schools in Richland, informing me of the community's desire to interview me for an administrator position, open at the school. I was somewhat familiar with the school and its location, so I ecstatically agreed to the interview day and time. I shared the news with my family, who was also excited. It was as if the sun shined brighter that spring, the birds chirped a lot louder, and newness filled the air. The day of the interview came, and I was surrounded by staff, diverse parents, and interpreters. While looking across the room at each interviewer, I answered the questions asked.

I made it through the first step in the process. I completed the second step with an instructional walkthrough at another school and debriefed what I observed. The third step was a community forum with an audience of staff, students, and parents, as I introduced myself to the community and presented my vision for the school. I recall a promise I made that day to a parent who asked, "Will you make sure my child has homework every night? The Somali mother then asked, "How will you make sure my child is learning in class?" I emphatically stated, "I will do all that it takes to make sure that your children have homework each night and learning is occurring in the classroom."

Many of the students at JHE live in households led by single mothers or single fathers. Students might enter the school having experienced numerous traumas that could impede their ability to learn and grow academically. One of our goals as a school is to ensure the school environment and atmosphere is conducive to learning, provide families with essential resources they need for their household, and support students social and emotionally. Although I could not comprehend the conditions of the school as an outsider, I had an understanding that the school was not rated "effective" the year prior. Yet it was the promise to the Somali mother and other parents in the auditorium that fueled my urgency to lead the school.

Gratefully, the community selected me as their school leader for the upcoming school year. I remember having a choice between two schools I interviewed for at the time. In my final interview with the superintendent, I selected JHE as a "better fit," even though full disclosure regarding the school's professional and student culture was not revealed. The superintendent confirmed my assignment. I was excited when my dream finally became a reality!

Although we have come so far from when I started as school leader, we have not yet arrived at a place where I have peace and assurance knowing that I do not have to work as hard as I did when I first started. Strategically, I set out to change the existing paradigm when I became a school leader 5 years ago, taking over the most underperforming school in the district, which is now being marveled at by many as an "Effective," "Green" rating, and "Shining Stars" school. Just recently, out of the 54 schools across our state, we received the distinction of being an "Excellent School" for the second consecutive year. The recognition is only awarded to schools where 75% or

more students qualify as being at-risk and achieve superior standards of academic excellence, meet and maintain high educational goals, and demonstrate high growth. Although not publicly shared, our success can largely be attributed to a heightened focus on increasing the achievement of Black male students.

But I still worry about being good enough:

Maybe that leader was right. Maybe, I really cannot do this job. If not me, then who can do it? Many seek to lead and become school leaders. But who really wants to do this job and do it right? This work is more than the monthly paycheck that keeps me going. It is the faces of students who look up to me, and the community of parents who need me.

Then again, maybe he was wrong, because I have been successful.

Regardless, my journey in education has been filled with countering the perceptions others have of me.

I fought not internalize a deficit-perspective of myself. I learned how to speak positive words of affirmations that I can do this work of leading a school successfully. I prayed a lot. I maintained my belief and commitment to students. I refused to take the personal attacks on my character personally. My goal was to do what was best for students. But leading others is difficult, and what is even more debilitating is knowing that there are not any safe spaces to retreat to. As a leader, I am always on center stage, always trouble-shooting, always putting out fires.

Although conflict is inevitable, a large part of my job is resolving issues created by others. In doing so, I listen to the experiences of others involved in the conflict. Everyone has a story. A version of what they believe is the crux of the conflict. By

understanding where the conflict stems from, I am able to relate to the source of the conflict and support others to come to an agreeable resolution. Sometimes conflict arises because of racial differences and differences in our lived experiences. When I foresee the level of conflict is due to racial differences based upon the lived experiences of students and teachers or teachers and school leaders, I make more thoughtful and strategic decisions on how to resolve the issues. In order not to be the cause of conflict regarding racial differences, I have learned over time to avoid such conversations and guard my every move, my every thought, carefully selecting the words I say. With everyone watching me. I know they are watching and waiting to confirm that their own biases and stereotypes of me are true.

I loved being an athlete, a competitor, a "baller." I grew up tough and found my outlet in playing basketball, day and night, on the basketball court at the neighborhood school or riding the city bus to a neighborhood recreation center to play basketball against the boys. I developed a reputation; in middle school, I was given a nickname of my own—"Dunker." I could not dunk worth a darn, but I was taller than most, so I proudly accepted this nickname.

The game I once loved playing has changed in my adult life. The game I am now playing can be likened to a boxing match. I spend my time taking blows, massive hits that are meant to harm me:

One to the face (you can't do this)

To the stomach (you're unworthy)

The arm (you're not strong enough)

The legs (go sit down somewhere)

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But I am struggling to get up in the morning. I get this way sometimes when I believe that a strong disdain for me is present at the school. Beyond wrestling through traffic for an hour and half, I arrive to work, enter the building, and begin sensing that all is not right. The discontentment I feel takes me back to when my journey began, when I learned how to fight and how my fight in life has prepared me for the leading.

Knowingly, I fought against *IT and his friends.*

Unknowingly, the battle scars damaged me

from within.

I've been internally wounded

by racism's impact.

Healing is needed,

No longer silent to the pain that's been inflicted upon me.

There are days when I just want to give up, throw in the towel, and concede to defeat. The accusations of creating a "hostile" work environment in the school that I turned around hurts me. It hurts me to know that some individuals could allow such unfounded comments to flow from their mouths and speak for many staff in the building. I liken this situation to the impact of being privileged: allowed to say what you want, while I must safely guard my communication to ensure everything that I say and write cannot be perceived against me negatively. For 5 years, I learned to guard my words and monitor my actions, because someone is always looking for a reason to find fault with my leadership style, my actions, my words, and my mannerisms. Although they are waiting to confirm their belief of me as a mean, aggressive, uncaring, and hostile leader, I have tried my hardest not to succumb to the stereotype held of Black women of the "angry

black woman." I am a Black woman who is very clear in my tone, direct when I communicate to others, but warm in my love for them. I hold people accountable for their actions and their inability to maintain a positive school culture.

I have committed my life to this work, yet my name is ridiculed in the media, my personality and character demoralized to the point of being fired, I am sure. So, I beg an answer to the question, "Why would I risk all that I have done to redesign my school just to tear it up with my own hands? Only a fool would build a house and destroy it." Because I am known for my honesty and integrity, I guarantee that I would not lead in such a naïve way. But these racial microaggressions just happen. I must continually adjust to the slights of aggression that come my way—the undergirding punches and insults that attack the essence of my position. As someone pointed out, the only way my distractors choose to communicate with me is through email. I would like to respond,

"I'm sorry!

Come again?

How can your privileges make demands on my Brown skin?

Last I checked, I was the leader of this school, or so I thought.

Then I remembered, "Yep, you're more protected than I." I must watch what I say, once again.

The unkind words received and the challenges I had to overcome in life, from early academic failure and being identified as a special education student to an unwed teenage mother, told that I cannot lead, challenged with turning around the most underperforming school in the district, all the while navigating beyond the smiles to my face, laughs behind my back, whispers changing to silence when I enter the room. "Why

am I the target?" I ask myself. "Have I not already been through enough in my life?—no

spouse to shield my experiences, not a significant other around to confide in. I have

myself, my God, some family, and a few good friends to confide in."

How do I not internalize this pain? I let each blow roll off like water, actually,

more like sweat pouring down from my face, like a hard work out at the gym.

You said,

You did,

You made,

Why this change?

Why not this change right here?

But you did this….and I didn't like….

I understand what it means to be an underdog, when the cards are stacked up

against you and you must fight against the negative thoughts and images you have of

yourself and the images others have of you too. It is like being a superhero: holding a

shield up to protect me against insults, allowing them to bounce off me while wearing a

helmet to protect my head from thinking negative thoughts.

I am constantly praying that this job does not change me or break my spirit. I

begin to recall my days of playing basketball, the time when someone intentionally and

aggressively fouled me—the other team's player—throwing the ball at me in anger. I

stared her down, running towards her, ready to unleash a blow ("Watch who in the hell

you're hitting. I am far from a punk. Don't try me").

I stop suddenly, remembering that was in my past. Reflecting upon the reason I

am the leader at JHE, I am profoundly aware that my reason for my doing this work is for

the benefit of my students. Suddenly, I decide to no longer internalize or silence my pain:

I can clearly see that

IT and his Friends didn't get the victory.

I learned that the essence of my pain was silence.

My once silent voice, has been found.

Summary

As I grow older in both age and experience, the same fighter that resided in me

since childhood and throughout my life still resides in me today. More tempered as I

mature, I am learning to no longer silence my voice but continue to treat each person I

embrace with love and respect, even when I am not treated with the same grace. Yet,

discussing the biases of others who refuse to acknowledge their own challenges with race

and racism causes me to retreat and never want to discuss equity again.

The treatment of Black boys as the least preferred seed, receiving differential

treatment by the gardener, is the similar treatment Black educators and school leaders

experience when we are underrepresented in our nation's schools and potentially, in any

institution in America. The internalized struggle to constantly prove that we fit in,

showing others our greatness, is when racial battle fatigue sets in. We eventually

succumb to fighting, never wanting to fight again.

The least preferred seeds (often underrepresented populations of people who

deviate from the normal group) reflect on the treatment they receive and wonder what is

wrong with them. This internalized pain in believing something is different about them as

compared to the normalized group becomes a struggle for them. "What is wrong with me?" the least preferred seed asks. "Did I do something wrong—why am I not liked? Why am I not promoted? Why am I easily fired? Why am I always in conflict with the normal?"

I struggled at times letting go of the negative experiences I have endured in my tenure as a school leader and during my journey into administration. When I think about the impact my school had to endure to change the deficit paradigm that poor students and students of color, especially Black male students, are unable to learn, I am ecstatic with our progress. But I had to learn to keep students in my vision when I was close to quitting. I learned not to internalize the pain of my experiences, but rather provide students with the best leader they deserved, a leader who did not give in to her internalized pain and exposure to racism. In fact, I am comforted by stance, as I stand on the shoulders of those who served before me as change agents for our most vulnerable students. The vulnerable students I support are students who can learn and achieve greatness. The work is not easy; it is very challenging, but I have the best students, who possess brilliant minds and aspirations to learn.

The Finale: Reimagining the Gardener's Tale

The master gardener saw firsthand the preferential treatment the red flower seeds (White students) received by the gardener in their well-crafted and nurturing flower box. The red flower seeds (White students) were immersed in rich, nutritious, and fertile soil, as they sat gracefully in an "effective" rated garden (school). However, the pink flower seeds (Black male students) received irreverent treatment by the gardener in an

"underperforming" garden (school), dwindling in growth while planted in poor, rocky soil.

The red flower seeds (White students) sprang up quickly, with flourishing flowers towering tall. The vivid beauty of the red flowers (White students) validated the gardener's belief, knowing all too well that the red flowers (White students) would thrive. Sadly, the pink flower seeds (Black male students) grew to become flowers that only grew mid-height, forever shackled in the flower box comprised of poor rocky soil, whereas the red flowers (White students) yielded different results.

Far fewer seeds sprouted up for the pink flowers (Black male students). The strongest of the seeds produced only a few flowers that grew beyond mid-height, with the weakest among them unable to thrive; and so, they eventually died.

Gracefully, the red flowers (White students) would thrive enough to join the gardener's prized bouquet of flowers (graduate and attend their preferred college or be employed in the most desirable job of choice). Proudly, the red flowers (White students), overlooking the tops of the pink flowers (Black male students), wondered what was wrong with the pink flowers (Black male students).

The pink flowers (Black male students), looking up at the red flowers (White students) and the gardener (educators), tearfully wondered what was wrong with them—the pink flowers (Black male students). How they yearned to grow as tall as the red flowers (White students). They could not understand why their growth was just mid-height. They recalled seeing these same dismal results occur for the flowers that came before them. They internalized their stature and began to wilt away in defeat.

Both flowers (Black male students and the White students) were given a flower garden (school/classroom) to grow in, with similar highly qualified gardeners (educators). However, the red flowers (White students) still thrived due to the preferential treatment of being liked by their gardener (educator).

All of this changed the day the master gardener arrived. Committed to making a difference, acting on the power to control resources and pitying the differential treatment of the once scrawny pink flowers (Black male students), the master gardener sought to make a difference and change the failing conditions in the flower box. The master gardener, empathetic to the needs of the pink flowers (Black male students) and dismayed by their treatment and dismal, inequitable growth, inquired about solutions to change the conditions of the soil. The master gardener planned and planned, designing a better solution. To the master gardener's amazement, a timely solution did arrive. By gradually amending the soil—a process of removing the rocky, malnourishing soil—while simultaneously giving the pink flower seeds (Black male students) what they needed, the seeds began to thrive and survive with such a simple solution. (However, implementation of the solution was a different story.) The master gardener made intentional efforts to counter the historic regeneration of differential treatment the pink flowers (Black male students) received from many other gardeners.

In time, the pink flowers (Black male students) blossomed, showing doubters their fullest potential. "We are gorgeous and brilliant!" they shouted. Then the master gardener and all who watched their growth transpire yelled out in a voice of triumph, "We knew that you could thrive all along!"

No longer bound by the dismal fate of failure in their once gloomy flower box, the pink flowers (Black male students) had their dreams restored to choose the path that hope and hard work would grant them. The finale: "Reimaging A Gardener's Tale" narrative provides a different lens with which to view the allegory "A Gardener's Tale," in conjunction with a synopsis of "A Master Gardener's Narrative for School Change," which synthesizes how I, the master gardener, implemented school change in a once chronically underperforming school and my experiences with racism.

Chapter Seven. Themes, Findings, Implications,

and Recommendations

This autoethnographic research approach of self-narratives used throughout this doctoral research project informs how I reflected upon past experiences and captured present experiences, while navigating through the three levels of racism as a school leader. The emerging themes and findings discussed in this chapter answer the supporting research questions and capture my experiences at each level of racism. The central meaning of this research project is posed in the central research question. At the conclusion of this chapter, I present implications, recommendations for future research, and summarize my experiences as the "master gardener," promoting equity for all students, especially Black male students.

The purpose of this study was to come to a deeper understanding of my lived experiences as the researcher, who is an elementary school leader at a once failing school, implementing practices to change the trajectory of school failure for Black male students. More specifically, this study sought to understand the essence of my lived experiences as a school leader, written in three self-narratives using an autoethnographic methodology. To better understand my experiences as a school leader, Jones's (2000) conceptual framework, three levels of racism, in conjunction with "A Gardener's Tale," was used to examine and deconstruct how I changed the course trajectory of school failure for Black male students, while promoting equity for them in school.

The research problem identified in this study suggests that racism is one of the factors that contributes to the dilemma of Black male students' underachievement in school. According to Gordon et al. (2000), the trajectory of school failure for most Black students reflects racism in our society that shows up in education. The failure to discuss race, racism, power, and the manifestations of each is potentially destructive and furthers the silencing of voices of those marginalized by the effects of racism (Howard, 2008).

Moreover, taken together, Jones's (2000) three levels of racism and the allegory, "A Gardener's Tale," served as the conceptual framework to abstractly provide insight into the potential of race-based inequities in education. Critical race theory (CRT) informed the lens in which I have come to understand the existence of race and racism in education (Howard, 2008; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Lynn & Parker, 2006) and better understand the impact racism has on education, while exploring ways to improve the academic outcomes for Black male students. Similarly, Jones's conceptual framework allowed me to deconstruct and construct (a) the manifestation of ways racism might occur throughout the educational system, (b) the influence racism might have on the achievement of African American males and school leaders in school, and (c) the impact racism has on African American males' ability to successfully navigate through school and enter college, in addition to the potential challenges African American school leaders embrace to help them enter and remain in the college-going population. The supporting research questions that framed and guided this doctoral research project with regard to the three levels of racism include

Institutionalized Level:

1. In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black male students?

2. What are the obstacles school leaders must overcome to support the academic success of Black male students?

Personally Mediated Level:

1. In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the personally mediated level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

2. What actions did I as a school leader take to build relationships with teachers and Black male students, contributing to their success in school?

Internalized Level:

1. In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the internalized level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

2. What actions did I as a school leader implement to address racism at the internalized level to promote the success of Black male students, leading to their success in school?

My literature review drew upon Jones's conceptual framework "A Gardener's Tale," which abstractly provided insight into the potential of race-based inequities in education. Through a review of the literature, examples of student voices were shared to represent the challenges Black males experience in public schools throughout the United

States. As the literature review concluded, an interrogation of school policies and procedures to address institutionalized racism occurred, with the intent to define the need to create equity-minded and race-conscious teachers and the need for culturally relevant pedagogy. Programs and initiatives that support and develop positive Black male identities were highlighted as examples of interventions and approaches presently enacted to remedy the educational disparities that exist for Black males in American society. The literature review ended with the allegory "A Gardener's Tale*"* meeting the allegory, "Roses Growing in Concrete" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) to emphasize approaches educators and researchers can embrace to increase the academic achievement of Black males in K-12 public education.

Whereas there are many alternative and traditional approaches of inquiry, autoethnography provided an in-depth understanding and explanation related to my experiences as a school leader. Autoethnography as a qualitative research approach involves exploring my own personal experiences and relating those experiences to broader issues in the community through literature. Chang (2008) also described autoethnography as a "combination of cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details" (p. 46). The goal of this research study was to determine how school leaders can become "active" agents of school change to promote the success of Black male students.

Data Sources and Data Collection Process

In this research study, I used internal and external data sources related to my leadership role. Internal data sources I collected related to my personal memory data included the chronicling of and reflecting on my past experiences and the recalling and gathering of present self-observation and self-reflection data through self-reflexive

journaling. The collection of external data sources included textual artifacts, personally produced documents, and official public documents referencing the researcher. Data collection was categorized, using the research questions and the conceptual framework, to include the experiences of the researcher at the three levels of racism (institutional level, personally-mediated level, and the internalized level). Three self-narratives, created to highlight my experiences as a school leader navigating through the three levels of racism, are highlighted in this study as

- Chapter 4: "Fighting Against Institutionalized Racism"

- Chapter 5: "Combating Personally Mediated Racism"

- Chapter 6: "Overcoming Internalized Racism"

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chang (2008) defined data analysis as the researcher's staying close to the data whereas interpretation involves the researcher's finding cultural meaning beyond the data to make sense of the data. I began the data analysis process with my being immersed in the data through writing, reading and rereading self-observations, and reviewing self-reflective data. New data were added to the chronicling events of my autobiographical timeline to understand how I experienced past and present events, leading to my understanding and interpretation of the data. I continued the data analysis with identifying cultural themes or codes in the data that were significant to the research study (Chang, 2008). After themes were developed, I utilized the three levels of racism: "A Gardener's Tale" conceptual framework to evaluate how, if at all, each level of racism occurred and was represented textually and structurally in the data. The cultural themes that resonated in the narratives are listed Figure 7.1.
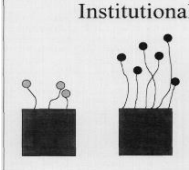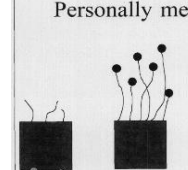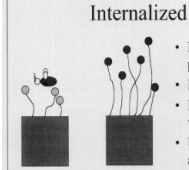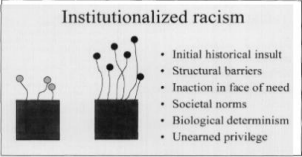
Institutionalized-Racism	Personally Mediated	Internalized Racism

Themes represented in the data
 	
School redesign
  o Transformational
  o Instructional schedules
  o Parent and community engagement
Strong vision
  o Vision of success
  o Values
  o Goals
Dismantling systemic and oppressive structures:
  o Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)
  o Academics/social emotional supports
  o Discipline and behavior Suspensions (in/out)
  o Special education and the identification process
  o Gifted and talented
Teaching and learning
  o Standards
  o Student data
  o Curriculum
  o Instruction
  o Planning
	Themes represented in the data
	
	School culture
	  Adult culture
	  o Leadership
	  o Feedback
	  o Relationships
	  Student culture
	  o Engagement
	  o Learning
	  o Behavior
	Cultural mismatch
	  o School leader and teachers
	  o Teachers and students
	  o Developing relationships
	Hiring and retaining teachers:
	  o Attracting
	  o Coaching and mentoring
	  o Training
		Themes represented in the data
		
		Voiceless
		Fear (feelings)
		  o Unsafe
		  o Unprotected
		Teacher biases and perceptions
		  o Punitive
		  o Fear
		  o Misinterpreting actions
		Racial microaggressions
		Communication
		  o Unclear
		  o Negative
		  o Infrequent
		Racial battle fatigue
		  o Fighting
		  o Tired
		  o Ready to quit
		Strong values
		  o Beliefs
		  o Passionate
		White allies
		Mentoring programs and partnerships
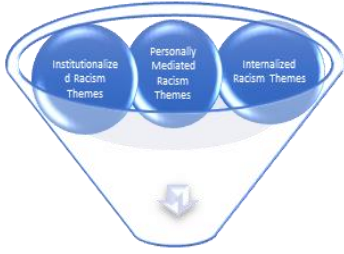
Figure 7.1. Cultural themes that emerged from each self-narrative.

The cultural themes were filtered through each research question, addressing my experiences at each level or racism. After filtering the cultural themes through the research questions, clusters of themes were identified. After themes were identified, exceptional occurrences that appeared in the data were analyzed to look for inclusions and omissions. The resulting phenomena were situated as the emerging themes regarding how I, as the researcher, navigated through each level of racism (see Figure 7.2 and 7.3).

Institutionalized Racism	Personally Mediated	Internalized Racism
In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black male students?	In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the personally mediated level to positively impact the success of Black male students?	In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the internalized level to positively impact the success of Black male students?

Figure 7.2. Depiction of each theme to be filtered through the research questions to arrive at emerging themes.

Emerging Theme One School redesign	Emerging Theme One Adult and student culture	Emerging Theme One Silencing my voice
Finding: Strong vision	**Finding:** Fear	**Finding:** White allies
Question 2: What are the obstacles school leaders must overcome to support the academic success of Black male students?	**Question 2:** What actions did I as a school leader take to build relationships with teachers and Black male students, contributing to their success in school?	**Question 2:** What actions did I as a school leader implement to address racism at the internalized level to promote the success of Black male students, leading to their success in school?
Emerging Theme Two Dismantle systems and structures	**Emerging Theme Two** Address the cultural mismatch	**Cultural meaning** of courageous conversations about race and racism

Figure 7.3. The emerging themes with accompanying findings.

Emerging Themes

Following the development of the self-narratives, I began the data analysis

process by using the general inductive approach of closely reading, rereading, and coding

the data derived from the self-narratives, adding to these narratives if data were missing. I

continued the coding process until no additional themes emerged from the data. I then

categorized the clusters of related information from the self-narratives (data units) and

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grouped them together by cultural themes. The clusters of cultural themes were filtered to include only themes related to the research questions (see Figure 7.3). Once filtered by the research questions, the cultural themes were defined as the emerging themes that I experienced as I navigated through the three levels of racism to promote equity for Black male students. Emerging themes were also found to expose the influence I had toward improved outcomes for Black male students, as described in each textual description. I categorized the *collective* themes to represent the findings and define the central research question, "What are the experiences of a school leader to promote equity, excellence, and success for Black male students in an elementary school?" as well as highlight strategies schools and school leaders can embrace to promote equity for Black males (see Figure 7.3). The three prominent themes related to the initial research questions that emerged at each level of racism concerning my experiences as school leader include (a) school redesign, (b) school culture, and (c) silencing my voice. Two additional themes related to the second research questions emerged as follows: (a) dismantle systems and structures, and (b) cultural mismatch.

This section begins with a definition of institutionalized racism, the first level of racism, followed by the first of two supporting research questions, and in turn, the emerging themes and subsequent findings. This process is then repeated to include the second research question, an emerging theme, and a brief statement on the impact and results for Black male students at the school.

<center>**Institutionalized Racism**</center>

Definition of Institutionalized Racism

  Institutionalized racism, referred to in this study as the first level of racism, is defined as being "normative" and "legalized," often manifested to some as an inherited disadvantaged, whereas others benefit from "differential access to goods, services, and opportunities of society" (Jones, 2002, p. 1212), as characterized by race. Institutionalized racism is observed as "inaction in the face of need . . . [and is] manifested in conditions of access to power" (Jones, 2000, p. 1212).

First Supporting Research Question

  The first research question in this study that specifically addressed institutionalized racism is, "In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black male students?" This first level of racism was discussed in the form of a self-narrative in Chapter 4: "Fighting Against Institutionalized Racism."

Emerging Theme: School Redesign (School Turnaround)

  School turnaround, as defined in the Mass Insight report, "is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that (a) produces significant gains in achievement within 2 years and (b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organization" (as cited in Baker, Hupfeld, Teske, & Hill, 2013, p. 3). School redesign, also referred to as school turnaround, can be a very politicized undertaking, often not assessed through a racialized lens to enact school change. Unfortunately, students who experience school redesign are frequently identified as students in poverty and students of color. Baker et al. (2013) found that the vast

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majority of schools in redesign served 71% or higher of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Descriptors regarding the race and ethnicity of students were absent in their report. As the authors noted, turning around a chronically underperforming school is challenging: "It is widely held in the education profession that turning a chronically low-performing school into a high-performing school is the most difficult of all tasks" (p. 3) Many school leaders have tried to implement a wide array of strategies, initiatives, and programs to turnaround a school, however, few have succeeded. As identified under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the types of school turnaround models for schools and districts (not part of state mandated interventions, based upon S.B. 163) include

- School closure model

- Restart/reorganization (charter, public or private contracting third party, or innovation)

- Turnaround model:

  o Replacing the school leaders and at least half of the staff;

  o Revising instructional program;

  o Expanding learning time;

  o Implementing operating flexibility.

- Transformational model

  o Replace the school leader;

  o Strengthen instructional program, provide extended learning opportunity, etc. (Baker et al., 2013, p. 3)

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Of these models, JHE underwent the transformational model of redesign, wherein I replaced the previous leadership team and strengthened the instructional programs in the school. My role as the transformational leader to redesign JHE required a tremendous amount of talent and fortitude. According to Echols (2006), "transformational leadership is the ability to articulate a vision, inspire futuristic thinking and high cognitive planning among diverse people for an overall strong school culture" (p. 3). Such were the leadership moves made in my efforts to redesign the lowest-performing school in the district and maintain our effective school ratings over the course of 2 years.

Second Supporting Research Question

The second supporting research question that framed this study's examination of institutionalized racism is, "What are the obstacles school leaders must overcome to support the academic success of Black male students?" The theme that emerged from the self-narrative for this level of racism is discussed below.

Emerging Theme: Dismantling Systems and Structures

School leaders and educators must be willing to dismantle systems and structures that are not meeting the needs of students. In my case, entire systems and structures throughout the school were not operating efficiently. This led to a diagnostic review to determine which systems or structures were not fully functioning. The School Evaluation (SE) or diagnostic review was the gateway into our classification as redesign.

In December 2015, the school's evaluation was initiated. Our results were higher than those of the other schools who were also in redesign. With improvements to the district's process regarding underperforming schools, we at James Hamilton were fighting against the clock of looming school closure, based upon the district's new School

Design Plan, a process to support, intervene, and close underperforming schools. I sat at the decision-making table in the district to refine the compact plan, using my participation to stay informed on the policy. In doing so, I was able to challenge those district processes that were going beyond the policy to enforce a third SE upon us. In time, by my being attuned to the policy and our school's achieving the highest criteria rated in the SE, as well as our demonstrating high growth on the state assessment, we were no longer considered for school closure.

In all that I believed was wrong with the SE, I had to own the data and accept responsibility for the culture and climate of the school. The process was painful, that of owning challenges and issues I did not create and experiencing the backlash as a leader. I appreciated having the power to dismantle ineffective systems that were detrimental to students. I was even more grateful that I had the wisdom to improve upon systems that were beneficial to students. Undergoing the SE process came with funding and resources that I needed to turn the school around. In all, more than a million dollars supported the efforts in the 3-year time span in which we received funding.

Nationwide each year, school leaders assess the school's performance from the prior year to develop a school plan of improvement, also known as a Traditional School Design Plan (TSDP), a requirement of the state that captures the school's performance data. Schools in the initial stages of redesign in Richland, Heights experience a school evaluation. As schools create their TSDP, school leaders conduct a "root cause" analysis to identify key indicators they can improve upon that school year, which varies to include a focus on instruction, coaching and observation, student data, behavior, and school culture. In my district, following a school evaluation, schools in turnaround receive

support from the initial TSDP through to its completion, required by the state, which results in a root cause analysis being conducted and the development of trend statements created. The noteworthy trend statements revealed a need to prioritize teaching, learning, and instruction as a focus, in addition to school culture.

The priority performance challenges led to actionable steps being implemented and carefully monitored throughout the redesign process. In order to achieve our TSDP goals, federal funds given to the state are allocated to schools in redesign. The redesign funds or School Redesign Funds (SRF) are provided to schools for 3 years only, and schools must apply to receive any sustaining funds for years four and five. Without the funding resources we received with the state and district's budget assistance, we would not have had the resources to make the changes possible to improve our school's performance and redesign the school for James Hamilton's most recent School Report Card (SRC) report.

Our current SRC confirms how close we are to becoming a highly rated "advanced" school—only 14% away and close in changing students' status in achieving grade-level proficiency. It is noteworthy that our data mostly measure students' status in achieving high growth on state assessments and their ability to read on grade level. Our school also demonstrated high gains on the SRC for closing the achievement gap of our diverse students: students of color, students with disabilities, students in poverty, and students who speak a second language. Yet equity is measured by the achievement and performance of students of color, students with disability, students in poverty, and our English Language Learners.

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Institutionalized Racism Finding: Strong Vision of Success

As I began to develop my vision of success for JHE, I pulled out my copy of the book *Focus* by Schmoker (2011). In my first experience with turning around a school, I had become familiar with this book. Schmoker emphasized that schools must understand what is essential to leading schools. Oftentimes educators fail to clarify or reinforce priorities as passionately as we should. When new programs and initiatives emerge, we quickly shift our focus to doing what is "new" rather than maintaining our vision and continuing with the powerful actions to drive change. Schmoker suggested that we remain "committed and focused to do what we know are best practices; . . . on some level schools know 'what is essential'" (p. 15). As a leader, I kept the simple, simple.

Earlier, as a new leader resident in my leadership development cohort, funded through the Wallace grant, we read four relevant texts that also helped shape my vision for school success. Collins's (2001) work, *Good to Great,* highlighted the essence of profound insight. This author recreated a rendition of Isaiah Berlin's parable of the hedgehog and the fox, likening them to leaders driving organizational change. In the parable, the hedgehog maintained a simplistic process to protect himself from the fox's crafty advances by rolling up into a perfect ball each time the fox tried to attack him. As Collins noted, "Hedgehogs are not stupid. They are simpletons. They see what is essential and ignore the rest" (Collins, 2001, p. 91). The hedgehog did not try to do too much or too little; he kept his approach simple, because it worked for him (Collins, 2001). My approach to school change was not crafty nor was it cumbersome. It was focused and maintained a strong vision for success. This vision was centered on the success of my Black male students and the success of all students.

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With a focus to create a strong vision for equity, my district is embarking upon some robust initiatives, similar to those of a school district that conducted the Bailey Report (2016) to promote equity throughout the institution. One such initiative is a qualitative research study comprised of focus group interviews to examine the experiences of African American educators (teachers and leaders) and students in the Oakland Springs School District. The qualitative research study, conducted by Dr. Sharon Bailey, acknowledged the presence of institutionalized racism throughout the district, as evident both in the persistent disparities of academic achievement and performance outcomes of African American students and in the creation of a "hostile work environment" for African American educators. Due to fear of my identity being revealed in my role as a school leader, and the potential backlash I would experience, I opted out of participating in a similar study. By not participating, I elected to remain silent about my experiences, which further silenced my voice in the district.

Since the Bailey Report, the school district mentioned in the report has worked to give voice to African American students, educators, and community members by creating the African American Equity Task Force (AAETF) and a group of Black educators (BEs) to monitor equity initiatives in our district. As a member of AAETF team, I and the others are responsible for seeing that the five recommendations derived from the Bailey Report are implemented or refined throughout the school district to ensure that (a) the opportunity and achievement gaps of African American and Latino students are eliminated, (b) the voices of educators are heard, and (c) equity is exemplified in systems and structures throughout the district. These five recommendations address the following:

1. District and school structures to promote equity;

2. Culturally responsive instruction, engagement and communication;

3. Targeted supports for students;

4. Community and family resources;

5. Equitable employment practices and work environments. (African American Equity Task Force Guidelines, 2017, p. 1)

As members of the Black Educators' (BE) team, we are frequently asked about potential next steps the Equity Team should embrace to lead change and promote equitable practices throughout the district. I am concerned that the initiatives created are not fully grounded in research and best practices for students. We are seeking to do many things simultaneously, but the elements of true change are missing. Moreover, more questions remain: What will equity look like for people of color across the institution? How) will we know when we have arrived at a point where systems are functioning equitably? I believe I have a solution, which begins with gaining insight into the systems and structures that have consistently failed students of color, students with disabilities, and students who are underachieving although gifted with potential. The data to establish goals and implementation benchmarks are not communicated throughout the district. Essential questions I have remain unanswered: (a) How many students are being suspended and (b) which schools have the highest suspension rates of Black male students? The data remain hidden and not communicated throughout the system.

Increased Outcomes for Black Male Students at the Institutionalized Racism Level

Based on the self-narrative, the impact of dismantling systems and structures to promote equity for Black male students at the institutionalized level of racism resulted in the following increased outcomes for Black male students:.

- Fewer Black males were identified as needing an Individualized Learning Plan that qualified them for special education services.

- Throughout the school, 10% of the student population were identified for gifted and talented services or considered to be high-achieving students, with more Black male students being in these consideration groups

- The number of Black male suspensions and behavioral referrals to the office were reduced. Less than 10 students overall were suspended throughout the school year. Less than 5 Black male students received disciplinary referrals to the office.

- Black male students are now engaged in the classroom and are learning; thus more Black males are achieving higher proficiency rates on formative, district, and state assessments.

The impact of dismantling systems and structures to promote equity for Black male students also improved the conditions for all students. Our most recent recognitions include

- Recognized by the State of Heights in 2018 as an Excellent School (1 of 54 schools statewide). Excellent School schools are recognized for achieving high growth, with 70% or more of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch;

- Rated "Effective" on the District's School Report Card (SRC), achieving 139 points of 212 possible points, equating to a 65.57% rating of "Green" or "Effective," which is 14% away from the highest rating of "Advanced" or "Distinguished";

- Improved the achievement of students on CMAS (Colorado Measures of Academic Success), with 45% of students proficient in reading and math in Grades 4 and 5; 75% of ELA students are on track to exit services;

- Recognized by the State of Heights in 2017 as Excellent School (1 of 50 schools statewide);

- Recognized in 2017 as a Shining Star Case Study School by the Oakland Springs School District;

- Successfully turned around of the lowest performing in 3 years. In 2016, James Hamilton was rated "Effective" James Hamilton was once rated a poor performing school 3 years ago;

- Achieved high growth in 2016 for Literacy, 76 Median Growth Percentile (MGP); Math, 86 MGP; and ACCESS, 60 MGP.

Personally Mediated Racism

Definition of Personally Mediated Racism

Personally mediated racism, the second level of racism, is defined in broad terms by Jones (2000) as prejudice and discrimination. Personally mediated racism refers to the "intentional or unintentional acts of omission or commission" (Jones, 2000, p. 1213) whereby prejudice presents "differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and

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intentions of others" (Jones, 2000, p. 1212), whereas discrimination is the "differential actions toward others according to their race" (Jones, 2000, p. 1213).

First Supporting Research Question

The first of two supporting research questions that addresses the concept of personally mediated racism in the self-narrative is, "In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the institutional level to positively impact the academic success of Black males?" This second level of racism was discussed in the in Chapter 5: "Combatting Personally Mediated Racism."

Emerging Theme of Adult and Student Culture

In order to change the adult culture, I wrestled through many challenges to address racism at this level. Upon reflection, this process to change the beliefs of staff toward students and the views of staff towards me, as their leader, is an ongoing challenge. Leading the equity work to promote better outcomes for students, especially Black male students, took a lot of collaboration on my part: the hiring of more diverse teachers and staff who held beliefs similar to mine. To my advantage, I understood the permanence of race and racism to be pervasive, systemic, and deeply engrained in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). I had exposure to research that influenced decisions I made regarding the best approaches to intervene on behalf of my Black male students. I also wanted something better for students who reflected my life growing up. I wanted them to have opportunities to an education, which became my lift out of poverty (Anderson, 1988). So, I fought and battled against the many forms of racism and attacks that pressed upon me throughout my tenure as a school leader. I was

determined to improve the conditions of the school for all students, especially my Black male students.

Adult culture. My school has embraced a lot of the work to improve the school culture for adults and students. This includes how students are perceived as learners. We are seen by others in the district and at the state level as a "successful redesign school." The data that we received in my first year as a school leader supported how I made strategic decisions to improve the school culture.

My efforts to rebuild the teaching staff in my third year drastically improved our performance from when the first school evaluation was conducted to achieve a "meets" rating in 2015. Prior to my start as a school leader, I was a member of a district's leadership cohort for aspiring school leaders, known as new leader residents. In the cohort, we read and learned about the different dynamics and aspects that are essential to becoming a school leader. One such book was by Lenconi (2002), *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team,* which was a fable about the challenges within dysfunctional teams and how to maneuver beyond the varying issues that arise. In my leadership cohort group, I was mesmerized and dumbfounded by the examples that were presented in the book. I had no idea that such a culture could exist in a school. As I read this book as part of my development as a leader, I soon came to the realization that such experiences do occur, oftentimes at the expense of students. Later, I saw this to be true when I began as the school leader, evident in the dysfunctional teaming I witnessed. I learned about strategic leadership and how to intervene through the stories Lenconi shared regarding executive leadership. As such, I became aware of the downward spirals teams can embrace, and I

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am always watchful to guard against the influence of negativity spreading throughout the school.

I am also mindful of the occurrences that take place in our student culture. When I began as a leader, the student culture was a challenge. I noticed the following:

The school does not recognize and celebrate students' academic performance. When asked about the ways in which the school celebrated students' academic achievement, leaders, teachers, and students stated that there are no school-wide celebrations for academic achievement, such as an honor roll assembly.

Student culture. We established a trajectory to change our student and adult culture, as evidenced in our SE, in order to strategically address the needs of students. We continue to struggle in aspects of personally mediated relationships among teachers and students, leaders and teachers, and in some cases, leaders and students. Some of these aspects related to student culture include

- The school holds high expectations for academic learning. Students, teachers, and parents described the school as consistently holding high expectations for academic learning across grade levels. When asked what their teachers expected of them, students cited rigor and perseverance as key concepts. For example, students reported being expected to keep trying even when a test is difficult, and that teachers push them to increase the rigor of their responses by adding more details or evidence.

- Parents observed that students are consistently pushed to demonstrate scholarly behaviors, listing "turn in homework daily," "come to school ready to learn" and "ask good questions in class" as examples.

- The school provides a safe environment to support students' learning. Leaders, teachers, parents, and students concurred that the school consistently provides a safe learning environment for both students and staff.

- When asked about safety among peers, students expressed feeling safe with their classmates; the school leaders and teachers are immediately responsive to any issues that arise. They described students being sent to the office to meet with the school leader or receiving other immediate consequences following unsafe behaviors.

- Students reported that occasionally bullying happens, but that teachers and leaders always address the issue. Students cited multiple examples of bullying prevention as part of the school curriculum, including discussions during all-school morning meetings and assigned essays in writing class.

Improvements in student culture did not occur immediately. Over 2,000 office referrals, classroom think sheets, and refocuses were given to students in my second year. The year prior, even more were given to students. My office was filled with students who lost recess or were sent out of the classroom for their behavior. I began to understand that the all too familiar pattern of school failure was also occurring for my Black male students, and the issues were not their fault.

Change was not always fast in terms of maintaining consistent structures and supports to intervene with challenging student behaviors. My leadership team constituted a crucial component in ensuring systems were operationalized throughout the building. I monitored the effectiveness of systems and teachers adhering to my expectations. Teachers and staff who needed additional training received it throughout the school year.

We, as school leaders, made efforts to support teachers, even when they remained in conflict with some of our students and did not display the skill set to redirect student behaviors.

Second Supporting Research Question

The second research question that guided the exploration of personally mediated racism is, "What actions did I, as a school leader do, to build relationships with teachers and Black male students, contributing to their success in school?" The second theme that emerged from the self-narrative on this second level of racism is discussed below.

Second Emerging Theme: Addressing the Cultural Mismatch

As an elementary school leader, I represent 14% of all leaders in the district, whereas the population of White teachers in the district makes up 72% percent of the teaching staff. In my first year as the school leader, I did not have staff members who shared my racial identity beyond the two employees I hired. Thus, an extreme cultural mismatch existed for me and for students. Many of the conflicts emphasized in the self-narratives were relative to the incongruent identities shared by me as the school leader and the teachers. Over the years, I have been able to hire a diverse group of teachers and support staff who reflect the identity of students and are compassionate about improving student outcomes far beyond "saving" students, but rather maintaining a critical belief that all students can learn and achieve academic success. As such, Delpit (2006) suggested that we strive to make our teaching force share the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of our increasingly diverse student, parent, and community backgrounds, in order to provide insight into the populations we serve. A large majority of staff with differing identities than students possess a strong regard for ensuring high expectations of

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students. According to research identified in the literature review, the belief that the students we serve are "other people's children" magnifies low expectations (Delpit, 2006).

The fight is intensive when leading a school in redesign. I was not only fighting against institutionalized systems that perpetuates advantages for some and disadvantages for others. But I also had to learn how to navigate through personally mediated racism and the challenges people created, including how students were disciplined. On many occasions, teachers and I differed in our approaches to resolve student conflicts, based upon our different racialized understandings regarding what worked best for students. I maintained the essential understanding to uplift positive stereotypes and avoid the threat of succumbing to negative stereotypes in my initial approaches to turnaround the school. In time, staff came to trust my expertise and judgements, both on how best to intervene to support students and on their ability to teach diverse students. As I intervened with behaviors, the respect students had for me became the voice of reason that students listened to.

Personally Mediated Racism Finding: Fear

Ferguson's (2001) research findings serve to challenge our ability as educators to eradicate forms of institutionalized racism in schools, when racism in society cannot be eliminated. In the same way, I make a similar proclamation regarding my ability to address personally mediated racism in relation to the fear of students in schools. In recent national news, residents poured through the streets in Sacramento chanting the name "Stephon Clark," the newest killing of a young Black man at the hands of police. The situation unfolded on the night of March 19th as officers pursued Clark as a result of a

phone call regarding a person breaking into cars. In a matter of seconds, Clark was shot

dead in his grandmother's backyard. Feared (and imagined) to be holding a gun, he was

simply holding a cell phone. Without an opportunity to share his story—explain who he

was and his purpose for being in the neighborhood—his two children will never be given

the opportunity to see their father alive again (Park, 2018). Sadly, African American men

and boys are apprehended and punished for misbehavior and delinquent acts that are

often overlooked in others (Ferguson, 2001; Milner, 2007a). Delpit (2006) advised that to

successfully educate all children, we must remove blinders built by stereotypes,

ignorance, biased research, and racism. Thus, the fear of Black males in society shows up

in the classroom. In an exercise to capture the hopes and fears of teachers, I gathered a

few of their statements I had heard over the years:

- I am fearful of the emotional, irrational melt downs and temper
  tantrums that appear to come out of nowhere;

- I am fearful of students' ignoring my directions, prompts, and routines,
  and challenging my authority;

- I am fearful that I am not fully supporting my student's needs;

- I am afraid of one student and when he is in my room without support,
  due to his blow out and violence;

- I am fearful that if I tell a certain kid to move seats, that student will
  freak out and disrupt the rest of the class;

- I am fearful I am unable to keep everyone safe, with escalating
  behaviors and not enough staff to cover multiple blow outs at once.

Such fears of teachers concerning their students represent some common fears school leaders have when leading a school. Dayanna Volitich, a Florida middle school teacher, hosted a white supremacist podcast, citing numerous times anti-Semitic, white superiority, and racial biology beliefs rhetoric of white supremacist theory. One recorded guest shared, "I do hear from teachers all the time that are closet Red Ice (White supremacist) listeners that support what we do." Dalichov replied, "Well I am absolutely one of them, then" (Willingham, 2018). I and other Black school leaders know racism is present in schools, thus we fear hiring teachers, placing them in front of students, then discovering these teachers are unwilling to do what is best for students.

Personally Mediated Racism: Increased Outcomes for Black Male Students

When I began as the leader, the students who were frequently in trouble and in my office for class disruptions and those in conflict with teachers were typically my Black and Hispanic male students and a handful of girls. Many of them struggled to read or they lacked engagement in the classroom, because instruction was not rigorously challenging them to think. Nearly, a third of the students needed intensive interventions in literacy and math instruction to get them on grade level.

Many of the experiences emphasized in the research literature were similar to the experiences of Black male students at JHE. For example, I do not see Black male students as a threat. I wanted to understand the reasoning of their actions, aggressions, or when they became upset. When my students were upset, I would have them write out their thoughts and frustrations. Then, I would have them share what had made them mad or upset and why they chose to act in a certain way.

I recall one time when a student yelled out loud in class to his teacher, "I f---ing hate you!" The teacher calmly called the office, wrote a referral of the incident, and informed the office that the student was being sent down with the referral. The student arrived at my office with a look of frustration and anger. I gave him a sheet of paper and a pencil. He intuitively understood what he was to do. He spent time writing out what occurred. When he was calm, he asked if he could go back to class. I looked at him, down at the referral, and back at him and said, "Do you really think you are going to class after what you said?" (although I said this with a smile and warmness). He knew that he went overboard with what he said. He shook his head and hung it low and said, "No." Although he knew he had messed up, he also knew that after we spoke about his actions, I would not be mad at him long. He understood the error of his ways and knew that the next best approach would be to respond differently by communicating his frustrations. His teacher was even more concerned and checked on him throughout the day, talking with him about his actions and the best way to resolve his issue in the future. Little did we know that this same student did not feel well.

The love and care for students does not go away when they make a wrong decision. Educators must remain calm in times of conflict with students. We are teaching students how to respond to conflict in our response and treatment of them when they make mistakes throughout the day. Empowering Black male students to communicate and voice their concerns and frustrations, along with coaching them to try different approaches to solve their problems, is more restorative to change behaviors than suspending them. This same student is now empowered to support younger students with reading throughout the school day.

By the end of my fourth year, less than 10 students were suspended from school and less than 5, the following school year. My leadership team has been asked why we do not suspend students like that—students who are disruptive, yell out, are upset and defiant. Our response is that a suspension will not help them learn how to manage their frustrations, behaviors, and accept responsibility for their consequences. As a team, we intervene to address the behavior, providing restorative consequences in the school, supporting students to critically think about their behaviors, and offering alternative solutions to resolve their next conflict. The behavior system we provide teachers with does not change.

Unfortunately, addressing the fear of students will not change without frequent opportunities for teachers to learn about the unique needs of students. Providing teachers with professional development to learn about and meet the needs of Black male students and other populations of students of color is challenging in our failure to engage in courageous conversations about race. The challenges become rooted in blaming students for not "acting" right. By not suspending students, restorative practices were developed and implemented to increase the skillsets students needed to independently monitor and track their behaviors. More and more students, especially Black male students, are achieving proficiency.

Internalized Racism

Definition of Internalized Racism

Internalized racism, the third level of racism, refers to the acceptance of negative messages about one's abilities and intrinsic worth "by members of the stigmatized [race]"

(Jones, 2000, p. 1213). Internalized racism reflects the acceptance of self-devaluation, rejection of ancestral culture, and a resignation of hopelessness and helplessness.

First Supporting Research Question

The first research question that supported the concept of internalized racism in the self-narrative is, "In what ways, if at all, did I as a school leader experience and navigate racism at the internalized level to positively impact the success of Black males?" This third level of racism was discussed in Chapter 6.

First Emerging Theme: Silencing of Voice

When I initially began developing my doctoral research project plan, I wanted to avoid sharing my leadership experiences in regards to denying that such racialized experiences ever occurred for me as a leader, similar to the voices of students in the literature review. Unfortunately, my attempt to hide my experiences in counter narratives only magnified my experiences in the text. Fine (1987) conducted an ethnographic research study on the impact of silencing in an underperforming public school. The term "dropping out" to students was taboo for her to use in the presence of students. At the time of her study, the mere mention of "dropping out" was feared to spark thoughts in students to drop out. Fine also discovered that teachers were selective in not naming inequities in the classroom: "Most educators at the school seemed to survive by not naming or analyzing social problems" (p. 161), which only silenced the voices of teachers and students did not resolve their fear of students nor did it add to their understanding of students.

Likewise, Howard (2008) asserted that "our failure to engage in this most important dialogue about race, racism, power and all of their manifestations, significantly

limits the manner in which various individuals can talk about their experiences in these United States" (p. 960). On the other hand, my willingness to share my experiences in navigating through the three levels of racism in this doctoral research project has become an awakening of my voice that was once marginalized by social structures and my profession, including my racialized and gendered identity.

Recently, senior executives invited me and other leaders of color into a meeting to discuss a new incident in which another school leader publicly resigned his position, with 16 years of service to students, amid a host of frustrations and racial tensions he experienced while leading a predominately Black high school. The senior executives appeared to be unaware of the stresses we as leaders of color experience in our role, because we typically lead underperforming schools, mostly comprised of students of color, with a large majority of White teachers. We were very transparent in sharing some of our challenges. Such experiences included (a) experiencing feelings of hostility by others when making decisions, (b) getting a backlash when holding staff accountable, (c) being treated as if we are dumb, and (d) having to fight against the "angry Black woman" identity. Spataro (2005) maintained that the U.S. workforce is changing and that regardless of one's belief about diversity, the workforce must begin to embrace these changes. I believe that my district and other districts can benefit by assessing the differences that exist when the dynamics of the education population in a school district or school are vastly different than that of the population of students served. Howard (2008) contended that "our failure to honestly and critically examine race and all of its manifestations in many ways has only led to further tension, discrimination, and hostility along racial lines" (p. 960).

Second Supporting Research Question

The second research question that guided the exploration and analysis of personally mediated racism in the self-narrative is, "What actions did I as a school leader implement to address racism at the internalized level to promote the success of Black male students, leading to their success in school?" An analysis of the finding that emerged from the self-narrative on this third level of racism is provided below.

Internalized Racism Finding: White Allies

Encountering racism as a school leader is not a new phenomenon. Echols (2006) researched the challenges faced by Black American school leaders and noted that issues centered around race and racism as a critical factor in their experiences and in those of others they researched. When first hired in the role of leader, racial microaggressions and racial assaults were common occurrences from teachers and supervisors I worked with. I realized early in my journey that I needed "White allies" to navigate safe passageways throughout my journey. I could not fight the journey alone. White allies became my voice when I was too afraid to say the things I so desperately wanted to say. I knew when to use my voice and when to remain silent. Bowman and Smith (2002) referred to this as possessing a dual racial consciousness (2002). Similarly, Du Bois (1903), over a century ago, considered this phenomenon to be "double consciousness" (p. 3). When the majority of the school's teaching culture differs from that of the student population, my White allies have supported me in the face of challenging staff, helped me to monitor my actions, and provided me with feedback when I may have overstepped, causing a disruption to the school culture.

My White allies were also advocates for students and believed that students could achieve at high levels. My White allies were teachers who were comfortable having difficult conversations with me about race and racism. They were staff members who saw the disadvantages our students brought with them to school; yet rather than lowering their expectations, they maintained high standards for students to achieve. My White allies maintained a positive school culture in the midst of rising conflict and refused to join forces with others who looked to harm me in the process of leading. My White allies understood when I dismantled systems that kept our Black male students at a disadvantage. Although the fight was challenging, I could have honest conversations with my White allies about some of my experiences, and they encouraged me to keep going, keep fighting, and never give up. My Black teachers were just as supportive and powerful in our efforts to do what is best for students. Together with my White allies and Black teachers, we comprised a community of educators who strove to go above and beyond, for the benefit of all students.

Internalized Racism: Increased Outcomes for Black Male Students

In terms of improved outcomes, Black male students

- Have increased access to outside programs and agencies;
- Are engaged in different mentoring groups;
- Have access to an adult in the building with whom they have a strong connection.

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Implications

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Although not heavily emphasized in the self-narratives, the intentional focus of our school was to provide mentoring support for our Black male students through school-

based partnerships with universities, not-for-profit agencies, and community organizations. As a school, we can now begin to develop more strategic initiatives and actions to increase the success of Black male students in school. Such initiatives will embrace the notation of success other school programs have manifested in working with Black male students in schools, focusing primarily on middle and high school students.

As for school districts, the reimagining of school redesign to become a more global process across schools and school districts is a crucial first step toward promoting equity for all students, especially Black male students. Also needed is the implementation of a redesign approach similar to the transformational redesign my school underwent. Such approach requires districts and schools to implement a laser-like focus on their most marginalized populations, oftentimes Black male students, to assess and dismantle systems that have oppressed them and rebuild such systems so that Black male students and other marginalized students can safely navigate through the educational pipeline on toward college or career. Rebuilding systems to secure their transition will benefit not only Black male students but also society at large. Their safe passage requires that we (a) reflect on their academic achievement and performance data; (b) analyze, assess, and determine which systems continue to fail them; and (c) become open and courageous to dismantle them, thereby closing the academic gaps among our students. Prioritization of new initiatives, training, and programs to increase our ability to become more racially aware, more racially competent, are needed in the action steps to address racial discrimination and the stream of inequities created when marginalized voices are silenced in education.

Recommendations

Two essential recommendations to promote equity in schools require a multi-faceted approach. The first recommendation is prioritized for school and district leaders to analyze performance and achievement data of students. The second recommendation requires school leaders and district leaders to begin to engage in courageous conversations regarding race and racism and how related travesties appear in schools.

To promote equity in schools requires school leaders and district leaders to focus on three areas:

1. Develop a clear and strong vision for leading equity work in schools;

2. Be willing to assess systems and structures in schools that produce inequities for students of color and be willing to dismantle those processes;

3. Give voice to marginalized people of color to share their truth concerning their experiences in school.

Reimagining a school in redesign—doing what is in the best interest for students—requires that school leaders look closely at students' school performance data, student achievement data, and behavioral data beyond suspensions and expulsions, as well as teacher performance data (each serving as a unit of analysis). In looking at the unit of analysis data, school leaders should conduct a root cause analysis by asking a series of five "why questions." The why questions are posed to go deeper into the "root" of the data and determine potential solutions and successful implementation across effective schools that address disproportionality in the data concerning specific groups of students. Common items to look for with regard to disparities and disproportionality include

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- Which students are enrolled in honor or advanced courses?

- Which students are identified as gifted or talented?

- Which students are commonly disciplined or suspended from school?

- Which students do teachers commonly need support with, behaviorally or academically?

- Which student population(s) struggle or underperform in a given content or subject area?

In all that we are doing right for our students educationally, many of the schools across the nation fail to account for equity measures in their school improvement plans. Nor are schools mandated to address the academic gaps of students by gender or ethnicity. I propose that school leaders in all schools be required to emphasize and address inequities in their schools, with a particular focus on gender and ethnicity. Additionally, school leaders can begin to rebuild systems and structures that align with supporting the needs of Black and Latino males.

Leaders at the district level must address a similar process to assess data across departments and systems throughout the district. Senior executives can increase the process by which equity is promoted and developed by requiring a thorough analysis or diagnostic review of the institution or of various departments within.

As I learned in this research study, changing systems and structures alone will not equate with deep changes in school and district processes. More must be done at the personally mediated and internalized levels. Thus, the second recommendation requires educators to engage in courageous conversations (see Figure 7.4) about race and racism throughout educational settings in the United States. Many educators are unwilling to do

so, based upon our level of comfortability concerning the topic. Moreover, in our efforts to dismantle oppressive systems and structures in education, we must begin to have courageous conversations about race to ensure dismantled systems remain changed.

Central Research Question Revisited

In the preceding three chapters, the supporting research questions related to each of the three levels of racism have constituted the specific focus in terms of analysis. In this concluding chapter, it is important to revisit the following central research question that has guided this study overall: "What are the experiences of a school leader to promote equity, excellence, and success for Black male students in an elementary school?" Reflective of the racialized experiences found in the literature review concerning Black male students and my experiences as a school leader, the diagram in Figure 7.4 visually addresses this central research question.

Figure 7.4. A logic diagram that depicts a pink flower as portrayed through the researcher's cultural understanding of the study.

The center of the pink flower in the Figure 7.4 diagram reflects the need for educators to engage in more courageous conversations about race in education. The petals represent the emerging themes derived from this autoethnographic research study. Courageous conversations (Singleton, 2015) about race and racism allow those who are marginalized—often marginalized in society—to share their experiences in education. The voices of those marginalized allow others to understand how the system promotes or hinders equity initiatives in schools and districts.

Ultimately, courageous conversations provide avenues for educators to better understand the experiences of marginalized populations and the social and cultural capital students bring with them to school. By not addressing race and racism in schools, we promote a color-blind paradigm that fails to account for the assets of diverse perspectives students bring with them to school. Stoll (2014) studied the attitudes of teachers toward race and schooling and found ways in which teachers navigate race and racism (Stoll, 2014). Sadly, teachers would rather not address issues of race and racism in school. The visual model for cultural understanding (see Figure 7.4) emphasizes my overall understanding of each narrative in addressing the recommendations that districts, schools, and educators should implement to promote racial equity in schools, especially regarding Black male students.

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Summary

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As a doctoral student, I read Jones's (2000) work on the three levels of racism in conjunction with "A Gardener's Tale," which conceptually links what I know to be true in education concerning Black male students and disparities that shape institutions in society. Like any masterful educator, I am a "master gardener." I share my story in efforts

that others can better understand the conundrum of complexities that exist in education concerning race and racism. A strength of mine from training in the doctoral program has been my resolve to understand the complexities of race and racism and the occurrences of such incidents in society and in education. In all that we are doing correctly to acknowledge the presence of racism in my school district, create more equitable systems and structures, and hire more diverse teachers, more must be done to ensure equitable practices exist for all students and staff. For example, establishing a clear and strong vision that ensures diversity and equity professional development occur and become a focal point at the personally mediated level of racism is essential. Doing so will proactively address and reduce tensions or possible clashes among students and teachers, as well as develop approaches to engage Black male adults and students and support initiatives to reduce harsh disciplinary practices on students in school.

Simply fighting or wanting to give up in this journey to lead a school throughout redesign, or even simply leading in a school, is an emotional battle (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Many educators seek the leadership role without realizing the many sacrifices required to do this work. School leadership is more than a paycheck, more than a passion; it is life. You go through ups and downs, challenges with students and personnel; and you learn to love them and yourself throughout the many trials and tribulations. You learn to forgive, you learn to lighten up, you also learn how to have fun. Many of my days have been filled with laughter and celebrations. Nevertheless, battling against race and racism and not having a voice to speak my truth have exhausted me. Smith (2004) coined the phrase "racial battle fatigue" regarding the experiences of Black men as they encounter extreme environmental stresses, gendered racism, and blocked

opportunities in society (Smith, Allen, Danley, 2007; Smith et al., 2011). I argue that similar battles with race and racism might have caused me to become fatigued (Smith et al., 2011). I believe that my racial fatigue is not mine alone. As such, recommendations for future research are proposed.

Recommendations for Future Research

From this doctoral research project, I am aware that dismantling systems and structures to promote equity is much easier to address than is changing the biases, perceptions, and fears others might unconsciously have in the absence of courageous conversations about race, racial identity, racism, privilege, and historical and present incidents of racism. Stronger efforts are necessary to engage educators to become more culturally and racially aware of others in the education field, as a way to mediate and reduce potential conflicts among human interactions at the personally mediated level of racism. As such, I propose that further qualitative research is needed to understand the experiences of school leaders of color as they navigate through the different levels of racism in schools. More research of this nature is necessary to build and maintain a pipeline of educators of color who remain in the field and are resilient when leading in schools.

Conclusion

This doctoral research project discusses the status of Black males in education, provides explanations on the educational disparities that exist for Black male students, and defines possible strategies to remedy the persistent and chronic problem of Black male underachievement in schools. To better understand the educational disparities, Jones's (2002) conceptual framework, three levels of racism: "A Gardener's Tale," has

been used to deconstruct the ways racism may possibly occur within the educational system. The central research question for this doctoral research praxis project seeks to understand the conditions necessary in public education to promote equity for Black male students in schools, as shared through my autoethnographic experiences as the school leader, navigating through the three levels of racism. Three themes emerged from the self-narratives of my experiences: (a) dismantling and rebuilding systems and structures, (b) school culture, and (c) silencing my voice.

The changes made to redesign JHE did not occur easily. Concerted efforts were made to understand content standards, curriculum, instruction, instructional practices, students' needs, suitable interventions, and approaches to motivate each stakeholder within a school, as well as policies at the federal, district, and state level. Additionally, one might argue that school change occurred because I am a Black school leader. I emphatically argue that school leaders, regardless of race, can demonstrate significant gains in the achievement and performance of Black male students when committed to doing what is best for students. This rang true in my first assistant principal assignment, when the school I co-led was successfully redesigned through the leadership expertise of a White male school leader. As a White male, he was able to demonstrate progress based upon his skillset as a leader working with diverse populations of students. On the contrary, school leaders of color are often placed in schools needing to be redesigned or turned around, and many are not provided with the opportunity to lead in non-diverse schools. This perpetuates the belief that school leaders of color can only lead in schools comprised mostly of students of color or students in poverty, whereas the range of skillsets school leaders embrace can be utilized in various school settings.

While honoring traditional research processes, as stated in Chapter 3, my overall efforts were to maintain confidentiality regarding the research location and research subjects, and hide revealing sources of data (or artifacts). Throughout this research process, I found myself identifying and exposing race and racism in education, but also protecting institutionalized racism and persons who perpetuate personally mediated racism. In my stance to avoid exposing individuals throughout the narrative, I ultimately found myself protecting *IT* and his friends. Throughout my research, I realized that I did not confront direct acts of racism for many different reasons: ensuring learning continued for students, preventing students from being harmed by the actions of others, eliminating opportunities for the destruction of the school culture, and safe guarding innocent staff from being weighed down by negativity. In my protection of *IT* and his friends, I am also mindful of having to protect my own children as well as protect myself against loss of current and future employment. Therefore, the tension that exists for school leaders is our need to keep the innocent safe and maintain the warm-welcoming school culture we ascribe to communicate to the community. In all that I did to promote equity for Black male students, this included protecting them from a hostile school climate.

A dilemma with conducting autoethnographic research as a school leader regarding race and racism in education, became a significant challenge to endure when developing characters, a plot, and story line that could potentially lead to the revealing of confidential information in the data collected throughout my lived experiences in education. As such, I embraced the notion to identify as the main character. As the protagonist, I expressed my fight against racism, with the antagonist being *IT,* and *IT and his Friend*s. The personal interpretations of my experiences were validated through a

confirmation check with key individuals on the leadership team who read through the self-narrative examples and confirmed the evidence shared, as indicated on two SRCs that capture our initial and final SRC summary with narrative examples of school change.

Finally, in my fight against racism, I found that it was much more challenging to win the fight against personally mediated racism when confronting one's conscious and/or unconscious beliefs, biases, preferential and differential treatment of others, and the occurrence of such behaviors when interacting with others. At the personally mediated level, the cost of trying to help others become more racially aware of their own biases, fear, beliefs, and practices became a much harder tension to resolve to increase educators' understanding.

In our present climate in the United States, racial tensions are heightened due to the fragility of people seeing Blacks as dangerous (e.g., Starbucks requiring every employee to undergo bias training following the arrest of two innocent Black men, and the unwarranted fear of the Starbucks employee, who called the police and had them arrested). From the National Football League's (NFL) enforcing a policy that players can no longer kneel during the singing of our national anthem (as they once kneeled to give awareness to social injustices occurring in the killing of Blacks and Latinos by police) to the frequent Twitter "tweets" of President Trump (many depict some of the President's tweets as racist, uncaring, and unconcerned for justice towards people of color in America), the many occurrences appearing in the headlines serve to provoke others to overtly communicate their racist ideologies and beliefs in the media.

In the final analysis, my success to turnaround JHE cannot be attributed to my racial identity as a Black female leader. Instead, as a leader, I had to use what I knew

about leading a school as an instructional leader: (a) knowledge of "best practices" in relation to teaching, (b) a strong understanding of content standards, (c) how to drive the teaching of critical thinking among students while implementing rigorous instruction, (d) an awareness of curriculum, (e) the ability to grow students through data analysis and aligned intervention supports, (f) provision of impactful feedback to teachers to grow their level of effectiveness with students, and (g) a strong command to relate to and establish a culture of high expectations for the JHE community of students and teachers, while navigating through challenging situations. The work of leading a school requires the school leader to balance leading, motivating others, and holding all stakeholders accountable to expectations, while finessing through the roles of being both an instructional leader and a manager of systems. One of the most challenging positions that could ever exist is that of leading a school through change to become a success.

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