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5-7-2011

# A LONG ROAD TO TRAVEL: NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PRESERVICE EDUCATORS' JOURNEYS THROUGH A GRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, A LONG ROAD TO TRAVEL: NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PRESERVICE EDUCATORS' JOURNEYS THROUGH A GRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM, by SHAWN JONES, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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## ABSTRACT

### A LONG ROAD TO TRAVEL: NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PRESERVICE EDUCATORS' JOURNEYS THROUGH A GRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

by  
Shawn Jones

The ongoing research concerning African American males enrolled in teacher education programs is essential for a number of reasons. Research specifically addressing preservice teaching, teacher education, and the African American male student is needed to promote the well-being of any school of education. According to McCray, Sindelar, Kilgore, and Neal (2002), colleges of education have addressed the issue of underrepresentation and under population of African American teachers through policy reform and financial support.

The narratives of African American male preservice teachers and their perspectives on teacher education may provide a context for other researchers seeking to understand how and why African American males move into the field of education. More importantly, one particular way to enhance and advance the cause of the African American male preservice teacher is to accept a “culturally sensitive practice” (Tillman, 2002, p. 3) and insure epistemological and research practices unfamiliar to many teachers of preservice teachers are approved and embraced.

This study is situated in a cultural, racial, and gendered point of view seeking to highlight the individual and shared experiences of three African American male preservice teachers enrolled in a graduate teacher education program. Stabilized through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), the gathering of counter-narratives provided the context to allow the research participants a vehicle to name their own reality.

A LONG ROAD TO TRAVEL: NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MALE PRESERVICE EDUCATORS' JOURNEYS THROUGH  
A GRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

by  
Shawn Jones

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in  
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in  
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Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA  
2011



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2011

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Atkinson (1991) writes, “Storytelling is a fundamental form of human communication” (p.1). It is within this context that the educative experiences of three African American males are presented. The fundamental appeal of storytelling as it relates to most learning environments is critical to understanding this research investigation. Storytelling appeals to most people, storytelling enhances the affective connections people share with a story, and many stories allow their readers a moment to ponder their experiences as they relate to the story being told (Kosa, 2008). Two very critical aspects of this research investigation are motivated through the use of storytelling as a key element to the research process. First, stories may help to identify existing problems. Second, stories help others develop the courage or more importantly, help others initiate the telling of their own stories. This research investigation seeks to uncover some possible barriers and models of success concerning the journey of African American preservice teachers and their route to certification and professional teacher status. Additionally, space is provided for both the research participants and the researcher to provide stories that help construct the journey through a graduate teacher education program.

Monumental in attainment and steeped in cultural efficacy, the voice of practicing African American male teachers has been a recent research focus (Foster, 1997; King, 1993; Lynn, 2006). Recognizing there is a process to becoming a teacher within our modern world, I sought to capture what I consider a framed moment in the lives of three African American males as they made their way through a graduate teacher education program. Providing a space to capture my research participant’s narratives is an important aspect to understanding their lived successes and failures as they navigate their way through a university based master degree teacher education program. To some degree, the possibility that competition for space and

competing versions of narratives are likely to be revealed are indicative of storytelling (Featherstone, 1989). More importantly, the voices of the participants and the action of the researcher seeking to find the shared meanings of the stories make storytelling a compelling element of this study (Featherstone, 1989). Featherstone (1989) writes, “Not only is narrative suitable for teachers’ work, teaching itself is a kind of storytelling” (p. 377). Issues of objectivity, neutrality, and positioning abound in storytelling, and as a result I am forced to consider storytelling as a research method of understanding educational forces at work inside and outside of the classroom. However, what is important is the researcher and the research participants who construct, present, and interpret the meaning of every story shared.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to highlight the experiences and perspectives of three African American preservice social studies teachers enrolled in a graduate teacher education program. The research question listed below will help frame the inquiry and position of each respondent but each answer given by the respondents will be uniquely his own. The themes emerging from the respondents’ narratives may also generate new research paths to investigate.

Specifically, using narrative inquiry as a guide, I wanted the voice of my research participants to provide context for my research investigation. Summarily, I initiated this research investigation with one research question. How do race, racism, and gender shape the lived and shared experiences of three African American male preservice social studies teachers enrolled in a graduate teaching program potentially affect their pedagogical practice in the social studies?

### **The Literature Gap**

The literature on African American male preservice social studies teachers and their experiences in teacher education programs is very limited in scope. There does exist a body of scholarship devoted to African American male teacher narratives, but even that scholarship is somewhat distorted due to the low numbers of African American male teachers (Foster, 1997). Whether interviewing veteran or neophyte teachers, Foster (1997) captures the spirit of African American teachers in their own words. Other literature presents preservice teaching as a whole, without gender identification but with cultural identification (Berry, 2005). Berry (2005) takes note of our cultural affiliations as driving forces in our teacher identifications. We are cultural beings and much of what we learn is tied to our cultural connections (Bruner, 1996).

Furthermore, additional studies have focused on the identification of factors limiting the presence of African American males in the teaching profession (Brown & Butty, 1999). Issues over the recruitment and retention of African American male teachers and the extremely low numbers of African American male teachers have forced some researchers to take notice of possible structural and educational barriers limiting the presence of African American teachers (Brown & Butty, 1999). Issues of teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and teacher success have been notably researched in recent years concerning African American teachers.

Gathered from the of Aud et al and the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010), I found some very useful statistical data concerning African Americans and higher education. Labeled as black in the year 2007-2008, the percentage distribution of graduate and first-professional students by race/ethnicity, selected student, enrollment, and institutional characteristics for a master's degree program in any educational program was 12.7% for blacks and 73.6% for whites. The information was gleaned from the National Center for Education Statistics that reported for the academic year 2007-2008, over 3 million students were enrolled in graduate or first-professional programs. Another very important piece of data emerged from the *Condition of Education 2010* produced by the National Center for Education Statistics (2010)

that over a 40 year period, the growth of African American males enrolled in postbaccalaureate programs in degree-granting institutions was slow at best. According to the research team of Aud et al (2010), the percentage of African American male enrollment was 4.4% in 1976, 4.1% in 1980, 4.1% in 1990, 6.2% in 2000, and 8.1% in 2008. In comparison, enrollment for African American women was 7.5% in 1976, 7.0% in 1980, 6.6% in 1990, 10.1% in 2000, and 13.9% in 2008. I am trying not to provide a bleak and destitute summation of the statistical data but the enrollment of African American men and women in higher education pails in comparison to European Americans. Aud et al (2010) reveal that for the same years presented above, the enrollment of European American males was 84.8%, 82.5%, 74.8%, 66.2%, and 62.8%. It may be easy to surmise that the enrollment of African Americans has slowly risen over a 30 year period and the enrollment of European American males has slowly dropped, the overall impact of these numbers has not translated into more research studies focused on African American males and higher education. I would venture to propose that future studies may want to highlight the lack of European American males enrolled in postbaccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

The culturally relevant, responsive, and engaged pedagogy of magnificent teacher-scholars has been very central to highlighting the learning dissonance experienced in some teacher education programs and teacher effectiveness in the classroom lately (Gay, 2000; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Gay (2000), hooks (1994), and Ladson-Billings (1995) deserve comment and each are given specific space in Chapter 2 of this text, but culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and engaged pedagogy are part of the definitive practice of democracy, equity, and freedom in the classroom. The historically limited presence of African American teachers as a whole permeates this issue, but offerings of hope have shed light on bringing African Americans into the teaching profession (Foster, 1990; King, 1993).

### **Theoretical Framework**



While trying to maneuver within the realm of power and entitlement within institutions of higher learning, many African Americans are perplexed with balancing their African, American, European, and other cultural influences with their scholarly activities. African American epistemologies and methodologies are at a confluence of culturally sensitive practices. African Americans must take into account the pressures of all three cultural influences on their educational lives without feeling or being forced to remove whatever individual cultural bearing or mixture may best soothe their learning interests at the moment (West, 1999).

Choosing to undertake a study based on the tenants of culture and race, the qualitative researcher must promote the benefits for all humankind (Asante, 1987). As an African American male researcher conducting research with African Americans, I am compelled to frame my inquiry using Afrocentricity (Asante, 1987). Asante (2003) writes, “Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory; it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena” (p. 2).

Another theoretical framework, one closely associated with a broadened perspective, may also be applicable. As an outgrowth of critical legal studies, critical race theory (CRT) offers a new epistemological lens for scholarship concerning people of color (Matsuda, 1995). Viewed as a social construct, race will intersect in this qualitative research study as well. There are two critical forces at work concerning the implementation of CRT as viable and necessary for this study. One force is pointed out by Carter (2003) using three essential elements of CRT in educational research. (A) CRT encourages researchers to agitate existing dominant methodologies and narratives. (B) CRT is a pulpit to baptize realities not known or understood using other methodologies. (C) CRT is based on the African ideal of Ma’at or what others know as truth and justice (Carter, 2003). The second force impacting this framework is characterized

by Tyson (2003) who states, “CRT is theoretically situated in activism” (p. 16). Therefore, the ideals and tenants of CRT are geared toward creating a more civic-minded citizenry. Critical race theory become tools to create, engage, and spark curiosity in citizens and students (Tyson, 2003). More importantly, teacher education programs, teacher educators, and preservice social studies teachers have not addressed the influence and importance of race in education.

Critical race theory is a framework for emancipation and transformation within the realm of social studies teacher education. Three themes of CRT documented by Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) state:

- Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
- Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy.
- Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law... Critical race theorists... adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
- Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society.
- Critical race theory is interdisciplinary.
- Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (p.6).

The first theme marks the ever present circumstance of many Americans. Many Americans of color continually fight the unrelenting pressure of racism in this country. The citizens of this nation who represent the racial minority who constantly seek societal equality understand the malicious intent of overt racism. The second theme addressed above seeks to confront the issue of not recognizing race as a primary factor and part of the everyday fabric of living within a

society carefully constructed through the identification of race. Gotanda (2000) calls it, “color-blind constitutionalism” (p.38). Possibly seen as a solution to racial marginalization, Gotanda (2000) uses “color-blind constitutionalism” to offset decisions made by some to counter the idea that race is not a viable consideration in the decision making process. Gotanda (2000) states:

Decisions that use color-blind nonrecognition are often regarded as superior to race-conscious ones. Proponents of nonrecognition argue that it facilitates meritocratic decision making by preventing the corrupting consideration of race. They regard race as a “political” or “special interest” consideration, detrimental to fair decision making. (p.36)

The simplicity of countering the color-blind recognition is almost overlooked. Essentially, we would have to fail to be cognizant of race in our lives and that may be impossible to do. Ultimately, accepting positions of neutrality, color-blindness, objectivity, and meritocracy would possibly exclude or suppress race as a defining factor for discovering or uncovering narratives.

All of the themes listed may help address the issue of racism itself. To help understand these themes and provide clarification, Lourde’s (1992) standard of racism is helpful. Lourde (1992) defines racism as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p.496). Many who seek to address racism as advantageous do so under the guise that racism is predicated upon institutional power and this power is generally historically held by white people. Furthermore, people of color have remained excluded from this power and subject to many forms of institutional racism (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

Using Ladson-Billings’ (1999) idea that we live in a “racialized society where whiteness is positioned as a normative *everyone* (emphasized by author) is ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition” (p.9). We may point to racism and racial classifications as motivational forces helping create or maintain a separate society. Critical race theorists seek to fight this so-called advantageous racial positioning for all parties involved.

Another thematic point listed is the use and validation of the counter-story (Stinson, 2008) as a way to express experiential knowledge as meaningful to populations and communities seeking a rightful place in society. The critical race theorist is hard pressed to find, understand, and interpret a story. The narratives of people of color become the basis of knowledge to counteract stories of the majoritarian group (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). The majoritarian group is the traditionally empowered story of European American and their impact on the overall history of American life. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) effectively use the term counter-storytelling or counter-narratives as a way to observe and take notice of the master narratives we prescribe as natural and correct because they belong to the majoritarian part of our society. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) write:

We define the counter-story as a method of telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e. those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. (p.32)

Critical race theorists may be willing to accept and realize the power of storytelling as a tool to share knowledge, construct other stories, interpret stories, and finally, share stories with an intended audience (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

Two possibly remarkable outcomes result from examining critical race theory and the social studies is outlined by critical race theorists who seek to amplify the benefits of voice and freedom to cross interdisciplinary lines and help seek an end to all forms of oppression. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) inform scholars of color to capture the voice of their communities while Tyson (2006) reminds the researcher using CRT to help emancipate the researched communities by uncovering information that may be beneficial for all parties involved.

Voice, narrative, and counter-story permeate throughout portions of this research

investigation. I came to an early conclusion that the removal of my voice, narrative, and counter-story would limit this research investigation. The decision to include versions of myself was not without difficulty. However, as a critical race theorist, the exclusion of my voice would severely limit the realities my research participants claimed for themselves, my role as researcher, and my previous experiences while enrolled in the same graduate teacher education program years ago.

### **Significance of Study**

The ongoing research concerning African American males enrolled in teacher education programs is essential for a number of reasons. Research specifically addressing preservice teaching, teacher education, and the African American male student is needed to promote the well-being of any school of education. According to McCray, Sindelar, Kilgore and Neal (2002), colleges of education have addressed the issue of underrepresentation and under population of African American teachers through policy reform and financial support. Additionally, McCray, Sindelar, Kilgore and Neal (2002) also remind the reader that one of the key missing elements is the story of the African American male preservice teacher and how the reformatory nature of colleges of education have not addressed their concerns. Preservice teachers seek to have their beliefs, perceptions, and teaching styles embraced by colleges of education.

Schools of education in many large research universities may find the information learned from this research study valuable because it points out the hidden curriculum and unseen educational barriers that limit African American men and their choice of teaching as a career path and educational major. Existing educational barricades may exist in the form of economic status, familial responsibilities, and possibly, the lack of confidence some prospective teachers may face knowing they have to take a standardized test required for graduate admissions. These

barricades are not all encompassing but highlight some potential pre-existing hindrances for many prospective African American teachers. Near the completion of their graduate program, other possible setbacks await the prospective teacher. All preservice teachers must pass a state mandated certification exam in their content area to qualify as teachers. Additionally, many prospective teachers may realize the time and effort involved in achieving their teaching dreams does not necessarily mean a financial windfall. Teacher salaries may be a reason why many African American males never consider teaching as a viable profession.

The narratives of African American male preservice teachers and their perspectives on teacher education may provide a context for other researchers seeking to understand how and why African American males move into the field of education. Preservice teachers' belief systems constructed through personal histories and narratives help to define the preservice teacher and what he or she may become as a career teacher (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991) write, "we use the term *personal histories* (emphasis added by authors) to refer to experiences that mold the educational thinking of preservice teachers; it includes the many and varied experiences they bring with them to teacher education" (p.89). Researchers, preservice teachers, and colleges of education must begin to address how the life experiences of preservice teachers can help merit a better teacher education experience for all involved.

More importantly, one particular way to enhance and advance the cause of the African American male preservice teacher is to accept "a culturally sensitive practice" (Tillman, 2002, p.3) and insure epistemological and research practices unfamiliar to many teachers of preservice teachers are approved and embraced. However, Swartz (2003) highlighted a very telling statistic concerning teacher educators and the preservice talent pool. Swartz (2003) noted that 90% of teachers in the United States are European American and the preservice teacher talent pool from which they come is sometimes 95% to 100% European American. There may be a distinctive

dissonance between the colleges of education faculty and the African American prospective teachers they teach. The college of education teacher should attempt to familiarize himself with methods and methodologies that may cater to their African American preservice teachers that may be counter to traditional epistemological and research practices that have ruled academia for years. Actions such as maintaining and enforcing cultural integrity, the use of interviews to capture the social, political, economic and educational influences that impact the lives of African Americans, using research practices to uncover unequal power relations, and positing experiential knowledge as legitimate are all culturally sensitive practices that colleges of education may consider accepting as many seek to expand their role in urban school districts and welcome more African American preservice teachers (Tillman, 2002).

This study is situated in a cultural, racial, and gendered point of view seeking to highlight the lived and shared experiences of three African American male preservice teachers enrolled in a graduate teacher education program. To capture the lived and shared experiences of these three African American males, narrative storytelling becomes a tool to promote their voices but also a tool to help others understand the role of experiential knowledge as meaningful. Reed-Danahay (1997) defined narrative storytelling as “a form of self- narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text” (p. 9). Colleges of education and their teacher education programs should try to accept the preservice teacher and their beliefs, perceptions, and prospective teaching styles as all their own. For African American preservice teachers, the use of narrative storytelling becomes a pivotal and vital tool for acceptance into the teaching profession. Once this particular mechanization is rendered silent, many African American males who thought of teaching as a career choice find another vocation. Finally, this study highlights those narrative storytelling experiences in narrative form and therefore, acknowledges perspectives that may be counter to what many consider proven epistemological and pedagogical practices given the context within the shared stories of this text.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Well documented and widely reflected upon, the numerically limited presence of African American teachers (King, 1993) and specifically, African American male teachers has been a cause for immediate concern for some time now (Jackson & Moore, 2006). The current literature is beginning to address the missing experiences of African American males in the teaching profession (Lynn, 2006). With a teaching force that has been and continues to be dominated by white, middle class, female teachers, understanding the perspective of the African American teacher is of the utmost importance (Knight, 2002). Very few studies have been conducted with African American male preservice teachers as the primary focus. Embedded within stories of teaching, the African American male preservice experience has remained a fallow and uncharted field of research. Up to this point, several areas of concern remain unaccounted. Specifically, do lived and shared experiences of African American male preservice teachers promote new ways of thinking and learning about teacher education? What do these experiences mean for other prospective African American male educators? Stated earlier, previous scholarly investigations into African American male preservice teachers are very limited in number. Further complicating these limitations is the lack of African American male researchers initiating and conducting research on African American male preservice teachers. The issue of race is a critical and necessary aspect of the inquiry but as Banks (1998) points out; the external-outsider researchers have made their mark in educational research. Concerning the external-outsider, Banks (1998) writes, "The external-outsider believes that he or she is the best and most legitimate researcher to study the subject community because he or she has a more objective view of the community than the researchers who live within it" (p.8). In essence, the studies under review are framed from a culturally acute perspective (Tillman, 2002) and are



meant to address the experiential knowledge of the participants. The studies reviewed do not specifically address the components of critical race theory but each study or case postulates the value of experiential knowledge as meaningful and necessary.

The second teaching emphasis noted in this chapter is related to the idea of non-traditional teaching certification programs available to people wanting to join the teaching profession. By non-traditional or alternative certification teaching programs, a number of programs exist in the southeast United States that rival some of the traditional college or university graduate teacher education programs. The extent of the success of these programs are not yet known and to compare them with a traditional college or university graduate teaching program may be unfair and unjust. The nature of the related literature concerning this aspect is limited to only the programs themselves. Therefore, a thorough comparison of my investigative study concerning African American males in a graduate teacher education program and those enrolled in a non-traditional teacher education programs is incomplete. The foremost barrier to any complete and current analysis is directly associated to the positioning of my research participants in their graduate program and the experiences of these individuals enrolled in traditional and non-traditional teaching programs. The nature of this research inquiry does not lend itself to a comparative study of sorts but the narrative presentation of three African American male preservice social studies teachers enrolled in a graduate teacher education program.

The last emphasis noted in this chapter is reserved for students in higher education. Current concerns of access and racism riddle higher education. Some higher education educators are pitted against each other as one side tries to provide a comprehensive theoretical definition and research application for the meaning of racism in higher education. Related literature concerning the theoretical and research viability of racism in higher education is investigated in this chapter.

### **Race and Relevant Pedagogy**

Studies specifically conducted with African male preservice social studies teachers are almost non-existent. Myriad, complex issues saturate the concerns of African American teachers, teacher education programs, and students across the country. One specific concern attached to teachers and students participating in teacher education programs is the pedagogical practice of cultural relevance. A linear approach to addressing and providing culturally relevant forms of pedagogy has been challenged lately by a number of scholar-educators (Asante, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Lee (2005) notes that the issue of providing cultural relevant pedagogical practice is deeper than simply African Americans and includes all people of color. Issues of language, class, and race are all factors according to Lee (2005) that must be addressed. Lee (2005) declares that education must move towards a more culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy. Lee (2005) writes,

Maybe these “culturally diverse” students can be taught well with instruction that is culturally responsive and perhaps they can be taught well with instruction that is not culturally responsive but which reflects high expectations, affirms their humanity, is focused on generative knowledge in academic subjects and that is enacted across school and across their educational careers in k-12 institutions (p. 113).

Two scholar-educators who advocate a culturally responsive approach to education are Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings. A careful consideration of Gay’s work with culturally responsive teaching and learning is warranted. Enacting a culturally responsive approach to teaching promotes fighting against cultural blindness and Eurocentric teaching practices and cultural values that are assumed to be the correct ways of teaching and learning (Gay, 2000).

Gay (2000) adheres to a process of teaching to and through students' intelligences, accomplishments, and individual cultural strength. To do this, Gay (2005) has proposed a method called culturally responsive teaching and has defined it as the following:

Using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches *to and through* (Italics added by original author) strengths of these students. It is culturally *validating and affirming* (p. 28).

Gay (2000) sees culturally responsive teaching as way to be comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipating in its application and practice for all students. Culturally attentive, relevant and responsive teaching is carefully crafted with all learners in mind. To properly assign the characteristics of culturally attentive, relevant and responsive teaching to African American students is beyond the scope of this text. However, it may be in the best interest of the teacher and student to attempt to understand the existence of a culturally centered praxis that may inform both parties. Gay (2000) ultimately leads one to a reasonable belief that the teacher and student are culturally connected bodies. Bruner (1996) declares, "learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources" (p.4).

Ladson-Billings (1995) provided the impetus for what many consider to be culturally relevant and responsive teaching and learning. Ladson-Billings (1995) maintained a direct and narrowly defined viewpoint concerning culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings proposed an immediate "insertion of education into the culture" and defined culturally relevant pedagogy as such:

A pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (A) students must experience academic success (B) students

must develop/maintain cultural competence (C) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).

Ladson-Billings (2005) uses the work of Haberman (1995) to illustrate the point that teacher education programs should not try to create teachers but ask prospective teachers to come into a teacher education program with something to give. Haberman (1995) asserts that prospective teachers being prepared to teach in urban environments serving poverty stricken children need to come to the teaching profession with experience, expertise, or a innate ability to care.

Both Gay and Ladson-Billings speak to educators on all levels of the educational ladder. In order for a culturally relevant and responsive practice of pedagogy or a culturally relevant curriculum to be embraced, teacher education programs must specifically incorporate these actions into their agendas. By doing so, preservice teachers may be introduced to teaching approaches and methods culturally attached to the students they may teach in the future.

Embodied in the practical use of a relevant pedagogy, Lynn's (2001) study of the teaching lives of three African American teachers and their struggle to incorporate culturally and racially sensitive pedagogy is telling for a number of reasons. One, the first person narratives of African American male teachers are used to provide a context of the teaching lives of these individuals. Two, Lynn (2001) provides reasons why African American males choose teaching as a career. Finally, Lynn's (2001) study is crafted using the methodological tool of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to describe his study participants. Much like Ladson-Billings' (2005) investigation of the African American and the academy, Lynn (2001) seeks to justify the use of culturally relevant teaching that values the cultural position of all parties involved.

Attached to the idea of providing a stage for all learners to succeed, Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, Lepage, Darling-Hammond, Duffy, and McDonald (2005) make

it abundantly clear that all learners must be taught from a position of democracy and equity. Taking into account student diversity along the lines of race, ethnicity, language and economic status, the authors present teaching vignettes that portray student-teacher relationships as complex when democracy and equity are sought. hooks (1994) uses what she calls “engaged pedagogy” to enact a more personal commitment from teachers. hooks (1994) informs her readers that teachers must have the power of self-actualization which enables and empowers their students. Once again, educators may be immediately drawn to the goal of empowering each student and allowing each student to participate in the educational process. hooks (1994) makes it plain in her support for and use of personal confessional narratives in order to help students link academic material to the productive freedom needed to teach and learn without cultural, racial, linguistic, or economic status bias.

### **Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification**

Related research suggests that non-traditionally educated teachers perform just as well as traditionally educated teachers (Mallard, 2005). Various models of alternative routes to teacher certification now exist in many states to support teacher education (Costigan, 2005). What becomes apparent in alternative routes to teacher certification is the willingness of many prospective teachers who just want to teach (Feistritzer & Haar, 2008). As early as *A Nation at Risk* (1983) many states began to overhaul their existent teacher education programs. One goal was to allow individuals, many of whom were successful private citizens, to take competency exams and if successful, these individuals could become classroom teachers. Feistritzer and Haar (2008) make note of the rapidly growing alternative routes to teacher certification in a number of states. Fast forward to present day southeast United States for example, one state university confers a master’s degree and prepares students for initial certification to students

through its Master of Arts (M.A.T.) program in social studies with initial certification sought in the fields of history, economics, political science and/or geography after the completion of 45 graduate level course work hours (Social Studies Education, 2008). In comparison, another state university in the southeast United States offers a Masters of Arts in Social Studies Education with a minimum of 36 hours of graduate course work. This program is designed for social studies educators seeking to deepen their content comprehension within a specific area. Both universities offer a Master of Education (M.Ed). Purposeful comparisons are needed to thoroughly assess the effectiveness of each program. Priorities such as graduation rates, recruitment and retention of minority students, curriculum, pedagogical, and theoretical standards need to be carefully researched for a more qualified assessment to be given of both programs at the two different state universities.

In the next section, I will consider two alternative teacher education programs leading to certification that have become well known. Once viewed as alternative routes to certification, graduate teaching programs and programs such as Teach For America and the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program have become increasingly seen as possible paths to achieve certification for prospective teachers.

### **Teach For America**

Released by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2008), recent research on Teach for America (TFA), one widely-known alternative education routes for teachers seeking certification, has been positive and reassuring to prospective teachers. Five studies reviewed by NCATE produced significant results. Four studies examining the teaching outcomes of TFA members showed students scored drastically lower on mandated exams or students showed progressively negative effects of having a TFA teacher as a

classroom instructor (Laczko-Kerr & Berlinier, 2002; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2006; Kane, Rockoff & Staiger, 2006). Only one study on the other hand showed TFA instructors as positive forces in the classroom (Drecker, Mayer & Glazerman, 2004). This review is not an indictment against TFA or similar programs but a brief examination into the research and scholarly investigations of non-traditional teacher education programs. Conversely, in early 2011, Teach For America was awarded \$100 million to help fund initiatives that supply college graduates to low income schools as classroom teachers (Atlanta Journal and Constitution, January 27, 2011). The supportive efforts of foundations such as the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, Laura and John Arnold Foundation and the Robertson Foundation help fund many prospective teachers seeking a possible alternative route to becoming classroom teachers through the help of Teach For America (Atlanta Journal and Constitution, January 27, 2011).

One study conducted by Darling-Hammond (2000) reviewed data from fifty states using surveys seeking to address “differential teacher effectiveness” (p.2). Many consider this difference and possible variance to mean there may be an issue with under-certification of classroom teachers and the capacity of teacher learning opportunities in content and pedagogy that some alternatively certified teachers bring to the classroom. Using surveys, case studies, and quantitative analysis of state achievement scores, Darling-Hammond (2000) found student achievement to be directly related to teacher quality. Darling-Hammond (2000) noted that school systems needed to pay particular attention to hiring well prepared teachers.

### **Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program**

The state of Georgia sponsors what is known as the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP). GA TAPP is for individuals who have graduated from an

accredited college or university but did not acquire the necessary teacher education requirements (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2008). The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (2005) sought to assist Georgia's pool of alternative teacher education candidates through GA TAPP to specifically analyze workforce data, recruit prospective teachers, and promote teaching as a worthy career choice. The key findings of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (2005) noted that Georgia schools hired over 10,000 new teachers. Traditional teacher education programs secured over 2,200 of those slots or 19.8%, while graduates of non-traditional education certification programs garnered over 18% of the new hire slots and 618 were GA TAPP candidates. More importantly, an overview of the requirements for acceptance into the GA TAPP are hold a Bachelor's Degree or higher from a Professional Standards Commission approved college or university; pass the GACE Basic Skills Assessment, those holding a Master's Degree or higher are exempt; all Social Studies areas teacher of record must have bachelor's degree or higher with a major in a concentration in the assigned teaching field or a passing score on the appropriate GACE Content Assessment; and a satisfactory criminal background check (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2001).

GA TAPP candidates are those people typically unemployed, career changers, dislocated workers, under-employed and individuals in need of a financial increase (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2005). Broken into two phases, the GA TAPP seeks to assist prospective teachers. In Phase I, GA TAPP students are assigned a three person support group, a plan of study is created, and the candidates' content background is assessed (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2005). In Phase II, candidates continue with their support teams; attend four seminars, successfully complete a portfolio, and attain a passing score on the GACE Content Assessment. All requirements must be achieved while the GA TAPP students are teaching full time in a school district. Citing previous research, (Darling-Hammond, 2000) under-certified teachers have direct negative effect on student achievement in the classroom.



Afolabi, Eads, Nweke, and Stephens (2008) report on the number of alternatively certified teachers that make up the teaching supply in 2004 and 2005. In 2004, the number was 18.3% while in 2005 the number jumped to 19.5 %, this marks a significant increase in the supply of teachers with teaching credentials from alternative education programs. More recently, the National Center for Alternative Certification reported data submitted from the National Center for Education Information that approximately 59,000 people were issued teaching certificates acquired through alternative routes to teacher certification in the years 2008-2009 (<http://www.teach-now.org>). Careful inquiry needs to further address this growing percentage of alternatively credentialed teachers teaching in Georgia's classrooms.

### **The Higher Education Experience**

There are numerous research investigations and published scholarly materials highlighting the plight of students of color and specifically, African Americans in higher education. However, many educational researchers remain troubled by the challenge of African American men enrolled in advanced degree programs. This is not an in-depth study particularly concerned with the overall volume of African American men currently enrolled in graduate degree programs or African American men who have graduated with advanced degrees but merely a snapshot of the latest scholarly investigation into the experiences of African American men enrolled in a particular advanced degree program. My initial research impetus is to carefully examine the experiences of African American males in an advanced degree program using critical race theory (CRT) and storytelling as a means to clarify the many and varied stories of these individuals. To help pinpoint the challenges faced by many students of color enrolled in advanced degree programs, I sought out other research investigations where the voice of the

research participants was highlighted. The voices were of other students enrolled in advanced degree programs who might not be African American but may also share a position of marginalization. Ultimately, due to my association with CRT, the studies and stories provided in this review align themselves well with CRT.

I turn to Strayhorn (2009) first because of his willingness to highlight existing research of African American male graduate students and the lack of scholarly research specifically addressing African American men enrolled in graduate school. Strayhorn (2009) posits that educational aspirations, age, and salary are all significant variables that influence the enrollment of African American males in advanced degree programs and completion of advanced degree programs. This position is supported by Strayhorn's (2009) findings that suggest African American males who attain advanced degrees are the product of parents who hold advanced degrees. Strayhorn's (2009) limitations are bound by his methodological stance. Strayhorn (2009) does not use storytelling or a critical race methodology to uncover his findings but the use of quantifiable data to support the familial relationships he describes. While Strayhorn (2009) suggests a strong relationship of success exists according to parental educational and economic success and their children, Gonzalez (2009) presents an entirely different tale with a different traditionally underrepresented research population. Gonzalez's (2009) qualitative study turned to the experiences of Latinas/os enrolled in doctoral programs. According to Gonzalez (2009), only 0.4% of the Latinas/os entire population in the United States had attained a doctorate degree. Additionally, Gonzalez (2009) reported that the Latinas/os who obtain their doctorate degree enjoy employment outside of the academy. Using a qualitative study to examine Latinas/os in doctoral and professional programs, Gonzalez (2009) sought to find the similarities and differences in systems of support and challenges for Latinas/os

enrolled in doctoral and professional programs. CRT emerged as the theoretical framework for the study because CRT situated institutional racism as a negative force in educational settings. Additionally, the use of Latina/o critical theory (LatCrit) became an enhancement for Gonzalez (2009) to address the concerns of the Latinas/os research participants. Reminiscent of CRT, LatCrit is also an analytical tool used to trouble educational settings where Latina/o students try to succeed. Gonzalez (2009) employed semi-structured interviews with 54 Latinas/os through snowball and quota sampling methods over a two year period to acquire the best available research participants. Two key findings were closely associated with the tenants of CRT. Gonzalez (2009) notes challenging dominant ideology and experiential knowledge as key themes that became prominent in his study.

Gonzalez (2009) informs the reader that the research participants' voices became the most effective tool used to counter hegemonic practices in educational settings. Ultimately, Gonzalez (2009) reveals the experiences of Latinas/os students enrolled in doctoral and professional programs is fraught with alienation and discomfort in educational settings but is offset by the familial support given to the research participants.

Poon and Hune (2009) make note of the Asian American experience for those seeking advanced degrees using counter-narratives as a guide. Poon and Hune (2009) sought to trouble existing research using the experiences of Asian Americans and existing literature on CRT to provide a counter-story to majoritarian stories usually associated with attaining an advanced degree. Poon and Hune (2009) contend that the two-fold forms of identification, the "perfect foreigner" and "model minority" work to racialize the existence of Asian Americans. However, CRT helps to challenge dominant viewpoints that support traditional ideology about race and racism. CRT works to give power to people of color and their lived experiences. Poon and Hune (2009) highlighted the experiences of Asian American doctoral students and argue that racial microaggressions permeate the experiences of Asian Americans on college campuses and

continue to support racialized actions by others towards Asian Americans in doctoral programs. Poon and Hune found that Asian American doctoral students felt most uncomfortable about the overall lack of other Asian Americans in their departments and the lack of faculty who teach in those departments. Poon and Hune studied students in an education doctoral degree.

Closely attached to my own research investigation, I note the work of Harper, Patton, and Woodson (2009), the work of Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2008), and finally, the work of Souto-Manning and Ray (2007) to give a heightened perspective of students of color and their challenges and experiences in higher education. Harper, Patton, and Woodson (2009) note the historical journey of African Americans into higher education resulting from access to historically black colleges and universities institutions of higher learning. These institutions were the early renditions of historically black colleges and universities such as Cheyney State University and Wilberforce University. From the initial growth of these universities in the mid 1800s to present day, examining policy efforts in higher education and the experiences of African Americans in higher education have been normative at best. However, the move to investigate the experience of African American students in higher education under the guise of CRT as a race based epistemology and a race based methodology has taken many scholars away from historically black colleges and universities and into predominantly European American institutions of higher learning. While Harper, Patton, and Woodson (2009) use Bell's (2005) widely embraced ideas of interest-convergence to contend that predominantly European American institutions of higher learning accept and tolerate African Americans to benefit the interest of the European American institution. Universities heavily populated with only European Americans will only be viewed in a more positive light as they diversify their student populations but will be continually questioned as they enact European American values and norms. Ultimately, the historically African American colleges and universities are almost helpless to diversify their student bodies and maintain their mission and purpose.

Acutely tied to the overall experiences of African Americans in higher education have been the experiences of African American women and their journey through higher education. One work that highlights this perspective is the Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2008). Uniquely tied to each other through their work in academia, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2008) provide snapshots of their academic experiences through the lens of CRT. CRT is used as a way to analyze, expose, and interpret the racialized and gendered narratives of Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2008).

Also related to my investigation, I sought studies that examined the racialized and gendered experiences of men and women of color enrolled in higher education programs. One research investigation specifically addressing women of color in higher education was delivered by Souto-Manning and Ray (2007) who analyzed the narratives of African American and Latina graduate students. Using the tool of critical narrative analysis, Souto-Manning and Ray (2007) attempt to contextualize the stories they construct and make meaning of their realities as women of color on a large predominantly European American southern university. Persistent issues of race and gender become intertwined as Souto-Manning and Ray (2007) shared their educative experiences with their audience. The dialogue becomes a very important piece of their research investigation because it allows the authors and readers to name their own realities as outcomes of classism, racism and sexism are visited.

The men and women identified in the literature review presented are students and faculty. The commonality between the two is the use and application of CRT, narratives, and counter-narratives as ways to analyze, expose, and interpret race and racism in higher education. The works chosen represent various tales of CRT and its connection to higher education and students of color. Whether I addressed CRT from a tribal point of view (Brayboy, 2005) or from the Asian American and Pacific Islander (Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009) point of view, CRT has a long standing identification with allowing victims of racism to voice their own reality.

CRT encourages people to express themselves through storytelling. It does not matter if the individuals have experienced racism in higher education or experience racist policies and practices in everyday life; CRT provides a context to resist oppression and marginalization.

### **Directions for Further Research**

Existing research is scant and disheartening concerning scholarly approaches to the specificity of African American male preservice social studies teachers enrolled in a post-baccalaureate teacher education program. An abundance of research exists on African American teachers (Foster, 1997), the recruitment of African American teachers (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999), and the choice to teach (King, 1993; Brown & Butty, 1999). More research must be conducted on African American male preservice teachers to gain a better understanding of why African American men enter the teaching profession and why some choose to teach social studies.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the lived experiences and educative perspectives of three African American preservice social studies teachers. Ultimately, I was interested in gathering the counter-narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) of the preservice teachers' journeys through an alternative education program. The counter-narratives are the stories of these preservice teachers whose experiences are not often made known. The counter-narrative provides a challenge to the majoritarian stories and experiences of preservice teacher education. The counter-narrative acts as a tool to challenge racial marginalization and effect racial change (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Two important methodological tools emerged that would assist me in providing the counter-narratives of my research participants. The use of critical race methodology and narrative analysis became key components in this research investigation. I am directed to the work of Solorzano and Yosso (2009), who write:

We define critical race methodology as a theoretically grounded approach that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color (p.131).

The methodological tools provided by Solorzano and Yosso (2009) allow me to move my research investigation towards a more narrative driven interpretation of race and racism and their effects on my research participants.

I also turned toward the work of Berger and Quinney (2005) who wrote, “Narrative is about stories and structure” (p. 4). As the researcher, I wanted to establish a logical connection between the past, present, and future using narrative analysis to bridge the gaps that might have existed within each of my participant’s stories (Ochs & Capps, 2001). As the researcher, I must realize there may not have been an established order to the narratives and the narratives may not have be in agreement with each other but the value and meaning of the narrative is made whole by the experiences of the participants. One of the goals of narrative analysis was to seek a balance between the storyteller and the analyzer (Berger & Quinney, 2005).

Schwandt (2001) writes:

Narrative inquiry is a broad term encompassing the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences (e.g. life histories, narrative interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies) and reporting that kind of research (p. 171).

I recognize the importance of my participants’ experiences and I acknowledge their personal narratives. My participants told their experiences and it is within this context that I give credence to their position. Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) write, “It is important to recognize that stories that people tell about their lives are never simply individual, but are told in historically specific times and settings” (p.3). As a result, the analyst must focus on the connections past, present, and future generated by the stories.

Narrative analysis is a competent toll of analysis when considering the “interpretation of other interpretations of events” (Cortazzi, 2007, p. 384). To a certain degree what becomes apparent is the use of narratives as a method of analysis when considering people and their



events of their lives over a specific time period. More importantly, Cortazzi (2007) reminds us that we cannot disassociate ourselves from the dimension of culture, the context in which the narrative happens, and the meaning.

The methodological process of critical race methodology and narrative analysis encouraged me to listen for stories delivered by research participants. Consequently, the storytelling of my participants will allow me to co-construct the narratives of my research participants. Specifically, this study will investigate the narratives of three preservice African American male teachers, the role of race, racism, and gender in an alternative teacher education program, and how lived and shared experiences in the alternative teacher education program will shape the teaching perspective and pedagogical practices of these individuals.

### **Design of Study**

Qualitative methodology will be the most useful model for data collection concerning this inquiry. Specifically, the use of narrative will primarily guide this study. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), “Because of its focus on experience and the qualities of life and education, narrative is situated in a matrix of qualitative research” (p.3). As a researcher, I will serve as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. This inquiry will be situated such that study participants will be able to include and share their voices. As a matter of authenticity, the voices of the African American male preservice teachers will hopefully shed light on how they experienced the graduate teaching program (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). To help provide an authentically cultural, gendered, and racial study, traditional Afrocentric research methodologies such as truth searching (Ukweli), knowledge construction (Kujitoo), the search for justice (Utulivu), community (Ujama), and equity (Uhaki) will be utilized (Reviere, 2001). This investigation seeks to reinforce the power of *Nommo* or the value

of the spoken word (Asante, 1987). Allowing the voice of the participants to develop, journals and interviews provide a complete and natural way for the study group participants to share their experiences.

### **Guiding Question**

There was one guiding question I considered with this research investigation. How do race, racism, and gender shape the lived and shared experiences of three African American male preservice social studies teachers enrolled in a graduate teaching program potentially affect their pedagogical practice in the social studies?

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the primary researcher in this study, I am certainly in a dual role. In this study, I am both a data collector and a data point. I have the distinction of being the principal investigator in this study but my status is also one of a limited and shared experience within this study or as Merriam (1998) described having an insider position. With this in mind, I have to be careful of a number of positional forces at work. As a doctoral student, I must be cognizant of conducting research in “my own backyard.” As an African American male, I must be attentive to the possible racially and gendered biases that may creep their way into the research.

### **Position of Researcher**

Using what Banks (1998) calls the indigenous-insider will allow me to position myself within the study and seek to gain a complete understanding of the investigation. Concerning

the indigenous-insider, Banks writes:

The individual endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it (Banks, 1998, p.8).

Of course much of this position has to be one where the participants readily dismiss any feeling about the researcher because they know the researcher is qualified to speak within their community. Noted by Johnson-Bailey (1999), racial understanding and gender alignment underscore the attachment of African Americans who interview other African Americans. Johnson-Bailey (1999) states, “Race and the knowledge of living in a race-conscious society was a factor that the participants and I shared” (p.660). Johnson-Bailey (1999) goes on to describe the awkwardness of class and color as barriers that hampered the narrative process. Johnson-Bailey (1999) writes, “The interviewing phase of qualitative research is dynamic and ever changing. No two situations or circumstances are ever alike” (p.668). As the researcher, I will attempt to understand this dual phenomena of being known yet kept at a distance.

Stabilized through the lens of CRT, my researcher position is framed using the recognition of experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities (Matsuda et al, 1993). The development of narratives and counter-narratives will emerge from my study group (Milner, 2007). Discussed earlier in this dissertation, the counter-narratives become the master narratives of my study group. More importantly, these counter-narratives become agents of searching out, unmasking, and dissecting the master narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Swartz, 1992). As noted in Solorzano and Yosso (2002), the works of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Delgado Bernal (1998) help to solidify and anchor my methodological approach. Strauss and Corbin (1990) write, “Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from

that which isn't" (p.41-42). As a possible precursor to Tillman (2002), Bernal (1998) writes, "Thus, cultural intuition is a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic" (p.567-568). Using a culturally sensitive position to my methodological approach (Tillman, 2002), my research is culturally applicable. Ultimately, I share a number of culturally distinctive markers that make my research participants and me very similar. We share the common and sensitive bond of being African American males who are social studies educators and who are dedicated to sharing our experiences throughout this research investigation.

### **Setting**

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call the research setting the place where the participant's actions, words, beliefs, and movements become meaningful to them because it provides a context to make meaning out of their life. Within the context of this study, the setting is a university campus in the United States and all other educational encounters that pertain to the experiences of the participants wherever they may be will occur on the university campus. Specifically, the social studies alternative education program consisted of 8 African American students, 4 of whom were male and 4 were female. The total number of students enrolled in the social studies alternative education program during that academic year was 41 students. Three of the African American male students volunteered to participate in this study out of the four African American male students enrolled in the social studies graduate teacher education program who were asked.

### **Selection of Participants**

Participant recruitment was a matter of asking permission. Since I am a graduate of the same program and a doctoral student within the department, seeking access to participants became a matter of convenience. I talked to all four African American students collectively and all but one agreed to voluntarily participate in this study. Upon verbal agreement, each participant and I met separately to review Internal Review Board procedures and sign up for the study. My criterion for choosing my research participants was simple at best. The research participants had to be African American, enrolled in the social studies portion of the graduate teachers education program, and voluntarily agree to participate in my research investigation. The sample of participants were readily available, thus making them accessible and each fit the criterion I requested.

### **Participants**

The participants are all African American males between the ages of 22 and 32 years of age. All of the participants have undergraduate degrees in various social science fields and all are seeking a master's degree and certification in the field of social studies education. At the beginning of the study, the participants were all in their first semester of beginning the graduate social studies teacher education program. Upon completion of the study, participants completed three semesters of the graduate teacher education program, completed student teaching and were seeking certification with one semester remaining to successfully complete the program. All three have graduated and are currently teaching.

### **Methods**

#### **Data Collection Methods**

As the researcher, I collected data through the use of audio-taped in-depth semi-structured interviews, field notes from the interview sessions, participants' journals, researcher's journals, member-checking, and complete transcriptions of interviews. The in-depth semi-structured interviews took place approximately every ninety days throughout the allotted time period permissible for this research investigation. I conducted five face to face audio-taped in-depth interviews with each of my research participants throughout this research investigation. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in July, the beginning of their first semester, August, the end of the first semester, October, the middle of their second semester, February, the middle of their third semester and May, the end of their third semester in the graduate teacher education program to gather the narratives of my research participants. I gave each research participant the use of a journal because I wanted the participants to write down anything that may have affected their existence in the graduate teacher education program and to write information down they may have been unwilling to share with me during our interview sessions. Concurrently, research participants' journals were collected at the start of every audio-taped interview session, as well. Research participants could electronically mail their journal submissions to me as well, at their leisure.

### **In-Depth Open-Ended Semi-Structured Interviews**

Much like Lynn (2001), I seek to record the lived and shared experiences of African American male teachers or in my case, African American male pre-service teachers. As the researcher, I am allowed to question what is being said and express viewpoints that may be counter to what is learned in the study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

All participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to begin the inquiry.

However, not all questions were asked at the start of the inquiry and some were asked further along in the study. One of the goals was to seek clarity. The qualitative interviewer should listen for the meaning of what the interviewee or participant is trying to say (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To highlight this perspective, I turn to Kathleen deMarrais (2004) who wrote, “Qualitative interviews rely on developing rapport with participants and discussing, in detail, aspects of the particular phenomenon being studied” (p.53).

### **Audio Recordings**

Interviews and recordings of each interview were transcribed and each participant was able to member-check their interview transcription prior to final submissions to insure information was accurately transcribed. Each interview was transcribed by a independent and professional transcriber. According to Flick (2006), “It is argued that this achieves a naturalistic recording of events or a “natural design”: interviews, everyday talk, or counseling conversations are recorded on cassettes or videotaped” (p.284). The end result is the hope to achieve a conversation that exists naturally.

### **Participants’ Journals**

Kosa (2008) writes, “Telling their stories gives students the opportunity to write down something that is meaningful and purposeful to them” (p.46). Key elements of the data collection were obtained through the use of participant journals. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), “Journals made by participants in the practical setting are another source of data in narrative inquiry” (p.5). The participants chronicled their experiences using journals as a method of reflection and observation (Lee, 2007). The journals became hand-written recorded

expressions completed without my knowledge or prompting. The participants' journals fully allowed them to be honest and critical of their own experiences while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program. The journals also provided an outlet for participants to share data about the graduate teacher education program they otherwise would not share in a interview session with the researcher. My intentions were to examine and analyze the journals as a way to question whether the lived experiences of my research participants were in anyway shared.

### **Researcher Journal**

As the principal investigator, I kept a journal of my impressions (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as a way to organize methods, procedures, and analysis. The researcher journal also paralleled the narratives of the participants of this study. One of the goals of the researcher was to articulate a lived and shared experience that resonates with the participants and the researcher. I make mention of this fact due to my experiences within the same graduate teacher education program not so long ago. I do not know if the experiences of my research participants will mirror my own, but I am in a unique position to possibly understand some of their challenges as they make their way through this program.

### **Data Analysis**

Very few scholarly inquiries exemplify perfection in form and this investigation is a unique example of this declaration. Seeking to blend the experiential and scholarly, this investigation attempts to mesh the descriptive and emergent nature of narratives and critical race theory. The descriptive nature of narrative analysis noted by Cortazzi (2007) and Schwandt, (2001) along with Bogdan and Biklen (2007) inform the researcher to make space for research



participants by giving participants an active voice in the research investigation. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) also suggest to critical race theorists to give voice to members of our communities who would not ordinarily have their perspectives known by the rest of society. By giving voice to under-represented members of our communities and more specifically, under-represented members of the educational community, a narrative analysis is needed. The idea behind giving voice to marginalized members of our communities is supported by the notion of CRT that encourages critical race theorist to give credence to experiential knowledge as meaningful knowledge. Specifically, Charmaz and Mitchell (2007) suggest an interaction between the data and the researcher. The natural progression is for the researcher to enlist an emerging approach to coding the data and resist compartmentalizing the data into pre-existing codes. My intentions are to use a narrative analysis of the data as it emerges from the narrative experiences of my research participants.

### **Writing Up the Story**

The study was written in a manner that captures the narratives of the African American male preservice social studies teachers with the distinctively shared voice of the researcher. Writing the portraits of these individuals allowed the researcher to use multiple case studies (Merriam, 1998) but in a manner that allowed the researcher not to worry about a particular case (Yin, 2003). Member checking (Lincoln, 2001) was also exercised to increase the credibility of the research study. I sat down with each research participant asking each participant to change or modify and/or make additional comments concerning their responses throughout this research investigation culminating with each research participant reading over and acknowledging all of their narrative at the end of this inquiry. The goal of the research investigation is to deliver a story that resonates with the audience. As part of this goal, my

reasonable service is to provide authentic narratives of the experiences my research participants relay to me.

### **Trustworthiness**

Using the text of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), who cite the work of Maxwell (1996) to clarify a position of trust and validity; I seek validity in the research investigation using elements of description, explanation, and interpretation (making meaning) to help validate the story with the goal of capturing authenticity. I am also sensitive to the nature of this naturalistic study. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest, the application of triangulation has been clouded lately. Therefore, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, the use of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be replaced with the standard of authenticity instead of reliability and validity associated with triangulation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Many in-depth research analyses are guided by the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since these tenants are framed using the constructs of triangulation, they will be limited in terms of outright usage from the researcher's point of view. Equally sensitive to the use of triangulation as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the use of triangulation has become a murky endeavor. I also look to the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) who state, "Do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people we study, and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we were looking at?" (p.278). The goal is to develop a portrayal of resonance (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The work must resonate with the participants of the story, the readers who will not see a reason to disbelieve the story, and the analyst, who's knowledge of the setting and self-critical position allow for the value of truth to be seen (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I am drawn to the work of Richardson (2000) who suggests a crystallization effect to help

observe the multiple ways narratives can be viewed. The crystallization process helps the researcher see the various angles, shades, and facets of the research. Richardson (2000) suggests that a deeper and complex view of validity needs to be exercised. The multiple sides of crystallization suggest that there are no single truths to be justified and publicized. The crystallization process allows for researchers to understand the multiple sides of every narrative without conjuring up the murkiness of triangulation as an overarching guide to delivering validity. Richardson (2000) writes:

“Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity” (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic (p. 934).

I also turn to Janesick (2000) who supports the interdisciplinary action of crystallization that crosses the various intersections of naturalistic inquiry. My support of Janesick (2000) may be rooted in the interdisciplinary actions of CRT but fundamentally, I believe, crystallization allows one to view the realities of one’s experiences through the multidimensionality of angles and shapes that are the characteristics of a crystal itself. According to Bloom (1996), the subjectivity related to most of our experiences and specific situations give rise to the unfinished business of our realities when we decide to use crystallization. However, the use of crystallization does not come without some reticence and apprehensiveness. Tobin and Begley (2004) remind me that the use of crystallization is not as complete as triangulation. Tobin and Begley (2004) give more credit to the more widely assumed use of triangulation due to its ability to provide a sense of completeness to research investigations not seen in the use of crystallization. Tobin and Begley’s (2004) declaration is grounded in the lack of a consensus working definition for crystallization. Consequently, I sought to refute the declaration of Tobin and Begley (2004) by looking to the work of Richards (2006). Richards (2006) validates my use of crystallization through her work

with preservice teachers and attempting to capture the preservice teachers' varied and multidimensional stories.

Ultimately, the idea behind the assumed completeness of triangulation (Tobin & Begley, 2004) was the impetus that pushed me away from triangulation and toward crystallization. I do not want the feelings associated with being finished and complete to take control of my research investigation. Due to the ongoing nature of my qualitative study, I believe crystallization offers the best tool to analyze, interpret, and expose the realities of my research participants.

I seek the effects of the democratic process, an authentic narrative, and the crystallization of the research investigation to help bring to life the shared experiences of three African American male preservice teachers enrolled in a graduate teacher education program. The removal of perceived or real oppression or marginalization within the field of education concerning African American males is the final goal.

### **Conclusion**

The experiences of the participants enrolled in this study are theirs alone. However, as the analyst, listener and writer of their experiences I must acknowledge the shared spaces we occupied throughout this journey. I acknowledge the position I am in as the researcher of this investigation. My biases were not limited nor were they hidden throughout this investigation and encounters with my research study participants. The biases either hidden or known that I am aware of burst through in the written analysis of this investigation. I do know that this research investigation is culturally grounded and because of that perspective, this research investigation is socially and historically grounded through my cultural lens. These spaces are sometimes fraught with tension and uneasiness and sometimes they are happy and joyful. I believe what matters most is our unique assessment of each encounter.

The limitations I faced may appear to be very daunting. The first limitation was relegated to the existence of my research participants. I am solely reliant on their willingness to share with me their experiences as they journeyed through the graduate teacher education program. The second limitation I faced was directly associated with my research participants. To make this research investigation viable my research participants had to be willing to allow themselves to be questioned, written about, and interpreted. As the researcher I had to be mindful of their position throughout this research investigation. Lastly, the most important limitation I faced was to allow my research participants to name their reality as their own. I cannot mold or shape their reality to fit my needs. I had to allow the narratives of my research participants to form the basis of this research investigation. However, I was also wary of my role as co-constructor of the narratives and realities of my research participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### **THREE VOICES, THREE JOURNEYS**

I officially began my study on a particularly hot and moderately humid day on the second floor classroom of a large university deep in the heart of Dixie. The first day of my study began in the month of June at the beginning of the summer semester. The research investigation would last until the following May, representing almost a year of my life and almost a year of my research participant's lives as well. The graduate teacher education program in social studies usually begins with the summer semester and ends with graduation after summer semester of the following year. The process entails enrollment in the program from a full-time perspective with students taking classes all four semesters and student-teaching in the fall and spring. The student-teaching experience is usually conducted in middle schools during the fall and high schools during the spring semester of their enrollment. However, some students are provisionally certified in a particular teaching discipline and are employed as provisionally certified teachers in local school districts and do not have to worry about teaching in middle and high school as student-teachers. Most students enrolled in the social studies graduate teacher education program have four year undergraduate degrees or graduate degrees before seeking admission into the program. I have included a program of study (Appendix) for the social studies graduate teacher education program.

More importantly, these 11 months would come to define my positionality as a researcher and the ways I would determine how best to co-construct the narratives delivered by my research participants. I set off to conduct this research partially knowing the limitations of doing research in higher education with African American males. I believe the overall environment was

conducive for this type of research investigation due to the university's recent willingness to address the plight of urban education and minority education as a whole. My own experience with the university over the years led me to conclude that I could conduct research that was racialized and to a certain extent meaningful to members of diverse communities traditionally heavily scrutinized but underrepresented as positive members of the scholarly fabric.

I was introduced to one of my future research participants by a professor I had previously known while working on my graduate coursework. I briefly acquainted myself to my future research participant, reviewed my research interest with him and asked if we could meet after class. This particular class was part of a new cohort of students seeking to become certified teachers and recipients of a master's degree in social studies education through the graduate teacher education program at this university. Invited by the professor, I mentioned above, I sat down to observe an introductory class in social studies methods.

As part of the graduate teacher education program, the social studies students have a number of required social studies courses they must successfully complete and successfully attain a minimum of 45 credit hours to receive their master's degree. Each course in the social studies graduate teacher education program is a 3 hour credit course. There are three required practicum courses all social studies graduate teacher education students must successfully complete as part of their internship requirement. The social studies teacher education students must successfully complete three in-field teaching courses. Introduction to Secondary Teaching, Principles of Social Studies Instruction, and Theory and Pedagogy of Social Studies Instruction provide the necessary social studies classes all students in the social studies graduate teacher education program must complete. Naturally, there are a number of social science electives the social studies graduate teacher education students can complete for necessary credit. Ranging from psychology to history, the social studies graduate teacher education student has a myriad of choices to consider once enrolled in the program.

I was struck by the number of African American students in the class. There were three African American women and two African American men in the class out of a total class population of eighteen. I remembered my first introductory social studies methods course in the same program and pictured the two other African American males who graduated with me and the lone African American woman who dropped out of the program that first semester. The six years between my graduation and my observance of this cohort marked a significant change for the graduate teacher education program of this university. The two African American males in this class looked nothing like each other. The lone shared characteristic of each was the use of eyeglasses and the similarity ended there. The two individuals seated in the class would eventually comprise two-thirds of my research participants. The two individuals were Xavier and Jon (pseudonyms are used for all individuals identified in this research investigation). Xavier is approximately six feet tall, about one hundred and ninety pounds with a decidedly athletic build. Xavier is bald and his complexion is of a dark hue. My immediate perception of Xavier, after observing him in class, was that he is well spoken and possessed an easy smile. Xavier was dressed in shorts, a pull-over shirt that was color coordinated to match his shorts, and his shoes are very clean. Xavier sat by himself; I note this fact because it may have future bearing on this study in the future. On the other hand, Jon appeared to be the complete opposite of Xavier. Jon is approximately five feet eight inches tall and approximately one hundred and sixty pounds. Jon is of slight of build with a low cut afro, a young looking face and a light brown complexion. Seated with a wrinkled shirt and shorts and surrounded by some European American students, Jon appeared to be very focused on the professor throughout class.

Before observing the class, I spoke with the professor of the class and he informed me that the social studies cohort was very large. In fact, the cohort was comprised of two classes and I had just observed the first class. As the first class ended and the second cohort made its way



into the classroom, I maintained my seating position and began to observe the class demographics. The second class was comprised of two African American males and only one African American female. Altogether, the entire social studies cohort included four African American males and four African American females. There were forty one students in the entire social studies cohort at the beginning of the summer semester. Three out of the four African American males in this cohort voluntarily agreed to participate in my research investigation. The last African American male to agree to participate in my research investigation was LB. LB is approximately five feet ten inches tall and one hundred and seventy-five pounds. LB is what many may consider to be a light skinned African American. Thus, Xavier is of the dark hue, in contrast, LB is to the lighter hue and Jon appears entrenched in the middle of the two. LB has very little facial hair except for the few hairs appearing out of his chin that offset his young looking face. LB wore a black kufi on his head in the classroom. I was not sure if he is a Christian, Muslim, or just wearing the kufi for fashionable reasons. LB wore jeans, pull-over shirt and brown multi-purpose shoes. LB also had a laptop computer planted in front of him and seems very uninterested in his tablemates. There was one other point I carefully note as the second class progressed, LB answered questions that are presented by the professor to the entire class and no other students raise their hands to offer an answer. Additionally, the professor responds to LB, and LB answers the questions correctly.

Over the course of this research investigation, I interviewed each research participant five times and there was a very good chance I know each research participant in a manner that may be otherwise different than normal human relationships. I interviewed each research participant in July, representing the first full interview experience during the mid-way point of their first semester enrolled in the social studies graduate teacher education program. I then interviewed my research participants at the end of August, the end point of their first semester in the graduate teacher education program. Subsequently, I interviewed each research

participant in October, February, and at the end of May to gather their narratives. After volunteering to be a part of this research investigation each research participant and I agreed to a date to conduct our first interview session. At the beginning of the first interview session with each research participant, I asked each of them to tell me about themselves. Each does so in their own manner, deciding for themselves what to divulge and what to keep for themselves.

I met with Xavier first. I was struck by how quietly Xavier entered the university's library, the meeting place for this and our subsequent interviews. Xavier's demeanor can best be described as flying under the radar. Xavier does not command immediate attention when he enters a room, yet when I first observed him enter the library I knew he had a story to tell. Xavier is not physically imposing and he does not dress in such a manner that would draw undue attention. For our first interview, Xavier was dressed in a t-shirt, jeans, and boots. One would not automatically assume Xavier to be a college graduate and aspiring teacher. Xavier, the darkest of my research participants appeared to be the most cognizant of how his skin color is perceived. Standing just over six feet, Xavier extended his hand and I take it easily as we exchange greetings and move toward a library conference room. I learned that Xavier is thirty years old, married, and has one young daughter. I also learned that Xavier is the only one of my research participants who was born and raised in the local community.

My first individual interview with Jon occurred in the early morning of July 1<sup>st</sup> on the second floor of the university's library. Dressed in a t-shirt and shorts, Jon looks every bit like a laidback undergraduate college student taking classes during the summer semester. We sat down and Jon begins to tell me about himself. Jon is thirty years old, born in the African nation of Liberia, but Jon considers a small southern town known for its baseball his home. Jon's mother is from Liberia and his father is from the United States and Jon has two older brothers. Jon tells me the story of how he was born in Liberia. Due to his mother's homesickness Jon's family moved to Liberia but in 1980 a revolution occurred in Liberia that forced the family to return to the

United States. After a brief stint in Washington D.C. the family settled in their present day small southern hometown. Jon is the only one of my research participants who is not married, does not have children of his own and Jon is provisionally certified to teach in a local school district.

After my initial observation of LB in the introductory social studies methods course, we met three days later for our first interview session. We began the interview in one of the university's meeting rooms and I soon begin to understand the confidence I observed three days prior in the social studies education classroom. Like Xavier, LB is married but LB has a son and a daughter. I began our first interview session with a simple question designed to help LB open up about himself. I simply said, "tell me about yourself," and LB responded:

*I am thirty-one years old, born in New Orleans, Louisiana and raised in Baton Rouge from the time I was two until eighteen, came to Atlanta for college. My father is a bit of a self-made doctor from West Texas, practicing anesthesiology and general pain medicine. His dad, my grandfather ran a clinic out there, a general health clinic in Odessa, Texas. He was the first black physician in that area. My mother is from Lorraine, Ohio and her fields of expertise are marketing, advertising and public relations. When I went into college initially, I came here as an undergrad at Morehouse, I entered in 1999, I mean in 1995 and I graduated in 1999. So I graduated right on time, exactly four years so I was very fortunate because I had my parents help when I was able to do that.*

I included a small portion of LB's narrative to emphasize the confidence LB exudes and to reaffirm the description of LB I included earlier. Quite confident in his daily demeanor, LB appears to be very sure of himself. Each research participant is in many ways different than the others and in some ways each is very comparable. There is one very important characteristic I have noted for each research participant and it is the hue of their skin color. I believe I am obligated to address the issue of race, not only within the African American community, but also the relevance of skin color as it pertains to educational opportunities and possibly social settings

that may affect this research investigation in some way. The identification of skin color is a socially constructed phenomena. To provide some context concerning socially constructed racial identification I want to provide some familial background information. My deceased uncle chose to live his entire adult life as a white man. As a family member I cannot begin to think how my uncle actually performed this feat. I have studied pictures of him, his two brothers and his three sisters one of which includes my mother. The physical facial structure of my family does not lend itself to what some may consider white. My family shares a facial structure that includes high cheeks, large and full lips, and wide-set nostrils indicative of many African Americans. The other major identifying characteristic common in my family is our light colored skin. In some parts of the African American community, the light skin was often more associated with being closer to white and subsequently, a ranking order became a part of the African American community. The closer one possibly was to white the more socially accepted he/she became and the darker skinned individuals who were furthest away from white were seen as a negative to both whites and many in the African American community. The immediate phenomena I begin to ponder are the reactions Xavier, Jon, and LB will receive in the graduate teacher education program because of their skin color. The educational settings are at times a microcosm of society at-large and the reactions of Xavier, Jon, and LB to their classmates who may judge them because of their skin color fascinates me. Blackness and the actual identification with blackness can be racially misleading and unpredictable at best (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992). Historically, the social ramifications of race division and race identification have been everything from uplifting to disastrous for members of the African diaspora in America. Whether we address the absurdity of the one-drop rule or the complexity of light-skin versus dark-skin African Americans within the given community, the concept of race socially impacts almost every aspect of the lives of African Americans (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992). This research investigation does not purport to be an inquiry into the sole matter of

race, but a search into the lived experiences of three graduate students who happen to be African American and how their race may affect their experiences in a graduate teacher education program.

My goal is to present the lived experiences of three African American males enrolled in a graduate teacher education program. More importantly, my attempt is to present their stories as they were told to me verbatim. I am reminded of the words Ladson-Billings (2005) writes:

One caution I must offer about my rendering of the participants' words is that it is important to remember that words on a page, even when they are verbatim statements, cannot fully capture the speaker's meaning and connotation (p.25).

I am most aware of the meaning my participants are trying to convey with their words and I am probably more cautious of the meaning I am co-constructing using their words. I take full responsibility for being the gatekeeper of their storied experiences. To further solidify my position as researcher, I note the words Bruner (1993) writes:

The researcher is not a neutral, objective, politically disinterested party who stands outside the text; the qualitative researcher is historically and locally situated, i.e. a human actor in a human drama; Meaning is multiple and political and every account includes politics (p.1).

A larger goal is to provide the reader with an imaginative front row seat to the scholastic failures, successes, and adjustments each research participant encountered throughout this research investigation. The stories presented here in no way represents the experiences of all African American males and their journeys toward teaching, but presents a snapshot of the individual experiences of three African American men and their attempt to become certified teachers.

## **CONNECTIONS**

After careful review of each of the five interviews and journal responses made by my research participants over the course of this research investigation, a shift in my initial assumption of how I wanted to present my research participants' experience materialized. No longer would I present a full verbatim account of my research participants' experience in the graduate teacher education program. Using a critical race methodology (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002) and a narrative analysis (Cortazzi, 2007), helped me seek a clearer understanding of my research participants' lived experiences in the graduate teacher education program. I found myself enticed by the verbatim accounts of my research participants' experiences and as a way to show and account for these experiences, I sought to use the six unifying themes of critical race theory (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993) to find the connective themes of my research participants.

I must acknowledge this shift in presenting the experiences of my research participants using critical race theory (CRT) as a way to help interpret, question, and analyze their stories. In doing so, I am reminded of a statement by Lynn and Parker (2006) who write:

Critical race studies in education could be defined as a critique of racism as a system of oppression and exploitation that explores the historic and contemporary constructions and manifestations of race in our society with particular attention to how these issues are manifested in schools (p. 282).

With the six unifying themes of CRT in mind, I set out to attempt to connect these themes with the narratives I received from my research participants. I found the best way to connect the themes of CRT with the lived experience of my research participants was through melding the themes of CRT with the themes developed from the narratives of my research participants. The basic question of how would I develop the themes my research participants divulged became a major question. Developing the themes of this research investigation was in part descriptive of the view provided by Solorzano and Yosso (2002) who provided a methodology for conducting

qualitative research using critical race theory as:

...a theoretical grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process;... (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color (p. 24).

Using the tenants of CRT described by Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) and the methodologies outlined by Solorzano and Yosso (2002) , I decided to provide themes developed by my research participants, using their narratives, to address their shared and isolated experiences. The themes developed and interpreted are not unanimously shared because each research participants' experiences in the graduate teacher education program is his own.

Used in conjunction with the six unifying themes of CRT (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993) and the foregrounding of race and racism in all aspects of this research process (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002), I have uncovered themes emerging from the narratives of my three research participants. The highlighted themes form the basis of the shared and isolated lived experiences of my three research participants.

## **MICROAGGRESSIONS**

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) using the work of Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Wills (1978), define microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and

non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders” (p.66). Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2002), also note the work of Davis (1989) who defines microaggressions as, “stunning, automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of black inferiority” (p. 1576). When united with the work of Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993), microaggressions appear to be highly tied to the idea that racism is endemic to American life. After listening to the stories presented by Xavier, Jon, and LB, I sought out the work of Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2002) and their study with African American students but I was also informed by the recent work of Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solorzano (2009) and their work with Latina/o students and microaggressions. My investigation into the microaggressions suffered by Xavier and LB will most likely parallel that of Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2002) and their investigation with African American students and their college experiences with microaggressions. The broad tensions between races and cultures of the African American community and the Latin community described in the two studies above help to solidify my association and connection to the African American experiences that were comparable to the experiences of Xavier, Jon, and LB. These racial microaggressions help to shatter the notion that racism is non-existent on college campuses. However, the microaggressions that impacted Xavier, Jon, and LB were individual acts; each relayed to me by my research participants individually and responded to by my research participants in their own manner. I am compelled to remind the reader of Lourde’s (1992) definition of racism because of its relevance within the context of this research investigation. Lourde (1992) states:

“The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 498). The narratives of Xavier and LB reveal microaggressions and I will present a portion of each research participants’ narratives to reveal these microaggressions. The reader should take notice that Jon is not part of the narratives that coincide with microaggressions due



to his lacking experiences that suggest microaggressions were identified by Jon as the narrator of his story. Jon's account of his experiences in the graduate teacher education program were not indicative of an experience where microaggressions impacted his existence while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program. Therefore, Jon's narrative remains absent and invisible from this section. I firmly believe Jon experienced microaggressions as I have defined them but he was either reluctant to share these experiences with me or just felt they were unimportant to his overall experience as a student in the graduate teacher education program. In hindsight, I do not think my research participants actually identified with the term microaggressions, but with moments of mistrust and misinformation in regard to those responsible for the acts of microaggressions.

Over the course of ten months, I interviewed each research participant five times and collected journal responses written by each research participant at the start of each interview. I share a portion of the verbatim data to collectively bind my research participants' experiences with microaggressions and responses to these experiences. However, I am also cautious as the co-constructor of my research participants' narratives. The emerging themes present themselves in a manner where careful dissection is required and I may have overlooked some themes due to my role as researcher. With the words of Ladson-Billings (2005) and Bruner (1993) in mind, I want to share a portion of the narratives of Xavier and LB that reinforce the idea that microaggressions are quite prevalent in educational settings today.

## **STUDENT VOICES AND MICROAGGRESSIONS**

### **Xavier**

The end of Xavier's first semester in the graduate teacher education program was met with happiness and a sense of relief the semester was over. When pressed about his reaction,

Xavier acknowledged that the social side of the graduate experience was totally unlike the friendly, warm, and welcoming experience of his undergraduate years. As we talked it became clear that Xavier's progressive thinking, as he described it, would not coexist peacefully with what Xavier believes is the conservative nature of many of his European American classmates. Xavier described a number of incidents that occurred in his graduate teacher education program experience. To help frame Xavier's consciousness, I will present some of these incidents. The first was a European American classmate's lesson presentation on George Washington and how Xavier thought the omission of Washington's slave ownership was not acknowledged. Additionally, the student presenter asked the class to describe Washington and none of the students in the class mentioned Washington as a slave owner. Xavier described the moment:

*When is somebody going to say George Washington was a slave owner? So finally, I said the hell with it, I raised my hand. I was nervous when I said it because I considered what the class reaction would be and I said he owned slaves. And when I said that, I sit in the front of the class where I have my back to everyone else but I could feel the heat coming from all the people. Why didn't anyone else in the class feel like it was important to name that about George Washington?*

The second occurrence was another European American classmate's lesson presentation on the widely popular book *Freakanomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* (2005) by Steven Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. A major responsibility of the students enrolled in the social studies graduate teacher education program is to present a number of lesson plans to the entire class. Typically, the professor instructs students about pedagogy, content specific lesson plans, and models developing and presenting lesson plans to the students. Subsequently, students sign up to present lesson plans on specific class meeting days and the entire class assumes the role of middle or secondary school students as their fellow student presents his or

her lesson. The lessons chosen to be presented may coincide with current events, state standards, or the textbook. Due to the flexibility offered by the professor, presenting social studies lesson plans may be an exercise in student choice. As Xavier described the incident, the bothersome point for Xavier was the class silence and the presenter's attachment to race within the presentation and the student presenters' unwillingness to address all of the negative racially driven socioeconomic points made in the lesson presentation. According to Xavier, the presenter did address some points affecting the African American community but paralleled those issues by using a picture of hooded European American males robbing an African American male dressed in a suit. I wondered out loud to Xavier about the classroom atmosphere and Xavier reminded me that the entire class was silent during the presentation. I asked Xavier if anyone in the class offered a question or a counterpoint to the presentation and Xavier recalled that the entire class remained silent. I asked Xavier about the professor in the class and Xavier acknowledged that the professor remarked that the presentation was controversial but equally bothered that the class did not challenge the student presenter. As I listened to Xavier tell this story, I noted to myself that maybe the class' silence was their way of showing their disdain for this type of lesson. Xavier informed that there was another African American male in the classroom and he said nothing. Xavier commented that a bothersome part of the class is the reaction of his classmates when his professors present and provide information on traditionally marginalized populations in the classroom and his classmates do not seem to care. Xavier comments:

*I'm thinking here we are reading all this stuff about teaching democracy, cultural diversity, and all this; are we just here to get this piece of paper and leave or are we really here to just learn these ideas and implement these ideas? Do we really believe this stuff that we are reading? And after this presentation it really made me think, I don't think so because nobody in the class was willing to raise their*

*hand, challenge it, ask questions about it or nothing. Maybe that was a way people showed they were dissatisfied or what, I don't know but I think somebody should have raised their hand.*

Possible issues of fear stemming from the anxiety associated with how to address race in the classroom seem to have silenced Xavier's class. I can understand Xavier's white classmates remaining silent as a way to show their dislike for the lesson however, I am perplexed by the silence of the African American students in the classroom. I am forced to consider the notion that maybe there are some African Americans who may still fear retribution for fighting acts of perceived racism. In our last interview, Xavier and I discussed the support systems in the graduate teacher education program and Xavier referenced some of the instances where he felt like the university was not connected to him as a student. I asked Xavier if he thought the curriculum offered in the graduate teacher education program was culturally connected to him as a student and Xavier responded:

*I mean some parts of the curriculum they tried to discuss African Americans as far as you need diversity. As far as history is concerned but after my experience in high school, I just didn't see any diversity in the teaching.*

I felt like there was more to Xavier's answer so I immediately asked Xavier if he felt comfortable bringing his cultural self to the classroom and Xavier said:

*No, not really because like I told you earlier, one day in class we were talking about George Washington and how everybody was making this comment, I was the one who said well, if he owned slaves and how sort of like I felt like my other classmates attitudes changed toward me. So in some ways I felt that, yeah, I could interject it but I was really going against the grain by saying certain things because people maybe thought he's just saying that because he's black or here goes the angry black guy again. It sort of got to the point where sometimes in*

*class I was just there and be quiet, keep my mouth closed.*

As a way to support the subtleness of microaggressions experienced by Xavier I want to relay a story Xavier expressed to me during our fourth interview. The issue of silence had become a theme throughout Xavier's narrative. As a way to show an instance of silence, isolation, microaggressions, and the dynamics of Xavier's relationship with some classmates, I wanted to include this event. A very enlightening exchange between Xavier and his classmates exemplifies the experiences of Xavier in the graduate teacher education program, Xavier says:

*I was standing out in the Arts talking to a security guard and we were talking and getting ready to go to class and two of my classmates walked in and I tried to get their attention to speak or whatever. I know he [Xavier's classmate] had to see me because when you walk in the place you cannot miss me. It was sort of like they were trying to keep their heads turned.*

As I stated earlier, Xavier is rather tall and to miss him would have been out of the ordinary. One of the more telling events shared by Xavier really emphasized his experience with microaggressions in the graduate teacher education program. I asked Xavier one of my research questions I had at the onset of this research investigation. I asked Xavier if he thought race, racism, and gender may have affected his experiences in the graduate teacher education program and Xavier replied:

*I mean definitely racism because you know, you go in there and the program talks about diversity this and that but the number of black people in the program is very small, very low. You sort of feel like as a black person that it's better just to, if you try to project your voice, interject certain ideas or theories that go counter to what some people believe, people start looking at you like you are an outsider. For instance, they just had a few students looking into the program and I decided to stay around and introduce myself and when I got there, there were about fifty*

*people and I saw only one black male and I was the other black male in the room so there was only two of us. I'm like here we are talking about diversity, this is social studies and trying to get more diversity into the field and out of fifty candidates approximately coming into this program I only see one black male.*

I immediately asked Xavier to elaborate on this issue and Xavier said:

*Yes, racism and gender because I think as a black male sometimes to fit in you have to put on a smile, bend over backwards, you have to make people feel safe around you. Because people may feel threatened by you physically and because I was black I just had a different culture, different lifestyle. For example, some of my cohorts [fellow students in the graduate teacher education program] this summer, I felt offended by this, thought that in broad daylight they felt like they had to walk to the train station in a group because they were fearful of riding the mass transit system. I did not have that feeling. You know cause the day it was brought up in the classroom and I felt that let's get to the root of it. What is your fear? Is it your fear that you feel like being in an urban area is unsafe or is it your fear that you see all these brown and black faces around you and now you are scared? And if I feel that way about the people on mass transit, you know if I wasn't in this program you would feel the same way about me walking down the street. So I never felt connected to my cohorts in any way.*

The images of African American men disseminated by the media in the United States often associates African American men especially darker skin men with images of negative identification for many whites. I cannot begin to address why a number of whites may be fearful of dark skin African American men but the stereotypical images of African American men as shiftless, hyper-sexual beings, and criminals has permeated American society. Historically, if the media has portrayed these images and found time to provide support of these images through

artistic and print canvases then I can reasonably understand the fear of many whites. As a result of this onslaught of stereotypical false images, I can even understand the trepidation shared by Xavier's classmates.

## LB

While Xavier experienced microaggressions that appeared overt, LB's experience with microaggressions were explicitly subtle and not easily identified by LB. As part of the graduate teacher education, students have to present a number of group and individual educational presentations focusing on lesson development and teaching. It is here where LB first described an instance of microaggression while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program. I asked LB about his group presentation experience and LB said:

*My group experience was both fun and it was frustrating. I think it was practical because I know there will be times, especially now with special ed calling for collaboration between different teachers. Teachers will have to teach instead of one teacher per class, it may have to be two or three, and one is not necessarily a student teacher. So I understand that it's a co-equal collaboration that is at the heart of many classrooms right now. So I thought this is great, this is practical. But there were two of the group members whom I couldn't hear that well because when we would meet, they just didn't speak loud enough no matter how many times I told them to speak up. It was sort of like telling my seven year old son, if you don't speak up, nobody's gonna hear you.*

The subtleties associated with microaggressions are in fact overt after careful analysis. The blatant disregard for LB's participation with the group was indeed an intentional act of microaggression directed towards LB. Not only was it intentional, the group's microaggressive act of not speaking up after being asked to do was characteristic of LB's group members to

disassociate themselves from his contribution. I get the sense that these were not unconscious acts that extend white dominance but intentional acts to show the superiority of LB's white group members. The other event was connected to LB's student-teacher experience in the graduate teacher education program. The microaggression experienced by LB was not directed toward him knowingly or unknowingly by European American classmates but by his mentor teachers at the high school where LB had to conduct his student-teacher practicum. The microaggressions were displayed by Xavier's two African American female classroom mentor teachers whom Xavier theorized had low expectations for most of the African American males they had encountered. As part of the student-teaching practicum, LB's mentor teachers had to communicate with LB's university professor about how well LB was doing in the classroom. After receiving a negative report from his mentor teachers and expressing some of his concerns to me, I asked LB about this experience. I asked LB if his mentor teachers were African American women and LB said:

*She's an African American female and I believe in her 60's or 50's and the collaborative teacher is also African American in her 60's. Both of them single and they're grandmothers.*

I asked LB if thought his mentor and collaborative teachers' personal lives had crossed a line where their personal beliefs about African American males may have crossed over into the classroom and LB said:

*At first I did not think so. Towards the end I began to see it more clearly and that was I thought so.*

I asked LB if there were times where their beliefs were exemplified and could LB point it out and LB said:

*I had to put it together over a long length of time. It took a while to begin to see the pattern and it was never a thing of hatred. There was never even a hint that*



*they hated me per se, it was just that they did not, the perception was that they did not expect much of African American men. In addition to not expecting much, they didn't look for someone to be twice as good as everyone else as if to compensate. There was a clear difference, too, between the mentor teacher and then the collaborative teacher that worked with her. The mentor teacher had less of it because she saw a pattern of young black men under-performing and over-talking. She also saw a flip side which is a pattern of young black men being quiet but over-performing whereas some of the Hispanic students, the ones who performed well also spoke up in class.*

I am reminded of the definition of microaggressions offered by Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Wills (1978) as an exchange of put downs experienced by blacks perpetrated by offenders. The definition itself does not classify the offenders as white or any other race for that matter, the definition is solely concerned with how others “put down” blacks. LB’s practicum teachers were two African American women who perpetrated “put downs” upon him in subtle and stunning ways.

Both Xavier and LB suffered through what may be consider microaggressions while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program. While there were limited instances where these microaggressions were evident to each research participant, the individual identification and responses to these microaggressions by Xavier and LB were uniquely their own.

## **AVOIDANCE**

Avoidance became an emerging theme that connected the narratives of Jon and LB. I use the term avoidance because it presents a helpful picture of the oppositional forces at work in the

graduate teacher education program. As much as we may identify with the microaggressions experienced by Xavier and LB, the lack of identifying with tensions caused by the issues of race and racism permeate the narratives of Jon and LB. A central tenant of CRT is the idea that critical race theorists express skepticism toward dominant claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993). I question what appears to be the colorblind stance taken by Jon and LB in portions of their narratives, not because they did not know their actions are in part racialized, but because they did not seem to readily accept the racialized or racist overtones within their experiences. The critical race methodology applied to understanding a portion of Jon's and LB's narratives is narrowly pointed toward Solorzano and Yosso's (2002) ascertainment that this research focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. The unifying themes of CRT (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993) and the methodology used to transform and provide alternatives (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002) that help to understand the experiences of students of color are enacted here. To highlight the areas of avoidance especially on the parts of Jon and LB, I present their narratives for the reader to interpret on his/her own. However, as the researcher, I am aware of my position as I also try to interpret the narratives of Xavier, Jon, and LB. The issue of avoidance became evidently clear as a theme woven into the narratives of Jon and LB but I also had to consider my own version of avoidance. I kept avoiding my interpretation of my research participants' narratives as a matter for the reader to interpret. Consequently, I came to the conclusion that avoiding my own interpretation would limit this research investigation. Not only did the themes of CRT help understand the experiences of my research participants, I also applied the themes of CRT to help me interpret my own connection to the narratives I was responsible for co-constructing.

Again, I refer the reader back to an earlier portion of this text where I mention the students in the graduate teacher education program have to make group and individual lesson

plan presentations in their social studies methods courses. I asked a series of questions to Jon about his presentations, specifically, I asked Jon about presenting material in a social studies education course and a Black Nationalism course he was taking as part of the graduate teacher education course offerings. I asked Jon if he would limit how he would present information and why and Jon said:

*Yeah, I think it would. You don't want to cause any unnecessary tension I guess. In the Black Nationalism class there are like six students in there so you can talk about, we all talk. Farrakhan [Nation of Islam leader] or Malcolm X, just different things I guess would be called controversial concerning race in that class. I think I would be more comfortable discussing it in a smaller environment where the class is actually black nationalism than kind of bringing it up in an education class where it's like twenty people in there.*

As a researcher, I do not know if all the students in the Black Nationalism class are students of color or the class demographics but I do know that there are students of color in Jon's social studies education courses as well as European American students and the demographics may lead to some apprehensiveness on Jon's part. I then asked Jon about implementing ideas from his Black Nationalism class into his graduate teacher education presentations and Jon said:

*Not really. Not when it comes to like Louis Farrakhan. I don't think I'll introduce Louis Farrakhan in that middle school. I just wouldn't for some reason. I really don't know why, I'll probably have to think on that. I don't know if it would be more, I don't know if I would offend people basically. I guess I could do like an overview of Malcolm X but I don't know if I will go into like the nitty-gritty of some of the things he said and what the nation was saying. Nation of Islam was saying because I don't want to basically offend some people. I wouldn't want to make them feel uncomfortable and in turn that would make me feel uncomfortable*

*and kind of be like a dead silence type thing. Like if you ask a question it would kind of be like, you know, and I don't want them to think well I don't want to disagree with that because he might think I'm being racist or get the wrong idea of what I'm saying type thing.*

During the second week of August, Jon and I sat down for our second interview and I ask Jon about the title of Dr. L's class (pseudonym for one of the professors in the graduate teacher education program) and Jon said:

*It's basically reading a lot of articles and we're discussing like racial issues, gender issues, homophobia, things like that and reading various articles on how to deal with that in the classroom. Some of the articles I didn't really, one of them I really didn't care for dealing with race because there's only two blacks in there, me another guy so we're the only two in there and it's kind of like it was called misbehavior and misinterpretation. It was basically if a white teacher goes to an urban school and we figured urban is the code word for black, I think we can all agree on that. So if the students are misbehaving or just misinterpretation by the teacher. In the very beginning of the article they had this one girl where she gave an attitude to the teacher and it reminded me of disrespectful and the author was kind of like, well it could be the way the culture is. My view is disrespect is disrespect. If a white student would have been disrespectful to a teacher she would have corrected that student and said you're not supposed to be disrespectful to the teacher. But you shouldn't let it slide because it's a black student and say, oh, they're black, you expect that from them. You know what I'm saying? Because I look at it, they're going to take that behavior to a job and a job is not going to put up with that. Whereas you correct the white student, they're like okay, I'm not supposed to behave like that. So he's going to carry that on to*

*his job and not be respectful toward the boss. And if it's a black student you're just like, oh, it's just their culture. They're going to take that outside to their job, most likely they'll get fired and I pointed out that in my household talking that way to the teacher would be disrespectful; I'm going to get in trouble. So I pointed out it might not be a race thing but a generational thing whereas back to the 40's and 50's black parents wouldn't put up with disrespect to the teacher. So that was my whole thing with it.*

I then asked Jon how the white students in his class were taking the articles and Jon said:

*They seem to be tolerant towards it but I'm thinking they're pretty okay with it. The one, I'm in the cohort with, one part of me is thinking, you know, for example, a lot of them were open minded concerning the homophobia article but I'm thinking, hey, what if you had a gay kid, would he be tolerant towards that, what they're saying or are they tolerant towards the race ones but what if your son or daughter came up with a person of another race would you still be tolerant or are just saying that?*

I immediately asked Jon if he was bringing these issues up in class or if he was keeping these issues to himself and Jon responded:

*Keeping them to myself for now.*

I then asked Jon why and Jon said:

*I don't know. It might be kind of too, I don't know.*

I then asked Jon if this is part of the social studies to address these issues and Jon said:

*Yeah, I was thinking about saying it and I was like, I just don't want to stir the pot too much.*

As we moved through the conversation, I asked Jon if he felt any racism directed toward him in class or out and with professors and other students and Jon said:

*No.*

I then asked Jon if he identified racism in the lesson presentations and descriptions given by other students in general during his experiences in the graduate teacher education program and Jon said:

*No, not at the university.*

I should note that the *Freakanomics* lesson plan described in Xavier's narrative was witnessed by Jon first-hand. During the summer semester, Xavier and Jon were classmates during which most of the microaggressions described by Xavier were witnessed by Jon. Jon's possible reluctance to identify or describe any acts of subtle or overt racism enacted by his classmates or others is truly Jon's prerogative. However, to possibly deny some of the actions by his fellow students as not racially motivated stands in sharp contrast to the experiences of Xavier and LB.

Moving through our third interview, I asked Jon about his experiences in the graduate teacher education program and how it has impacted Jon's teaching practice so far and Jon replied:

*Well, bringing up concern, bringing up issues of race. I'm more open minded to that now, not as hesitant. But then again, it could be because I mainly teach my social studies class, it's black and Hispanics so maybe if it was an all-white school, maybe I might be a bit hesitant to discuss issues. I'll still discuss them but I don't know if I'd go into more depth. First of all, I don't want to offend the students and I don't want the parents, they could be racist and why are you teaching my kids.*

In February, I interviewed Jon for the fourth time and in doing so, I began to focus some of my questions on race and gender and how they may have impacted Jon in the graduate teacher education program. I asked Jon how he thought race, racism, and gender has shaped his experiences in the graduate teacher education program and Jon said:

*I really can't see actually in the program race or gender shaping it in the program. I can see it at work, it can possibly shape it at work more than in the program.*

I then asked Jon about racism, specifically asking Jon if he had experienced racism in the graduate teacher education program and Jon said:

*I just go to my classes and leave basically. I'm like that at work. You know, you do small talk and so on and so forth and you really don't get too in-depth with people, so not that I've seen.*

Jon's answer to the above question was a fitting end and an introduction into all the participants theme of avoidance.

The theme of avoidance was one I was very careful to include. I questioned whether there were instances of overt racism or microaggressions in the experiences of Jon that he was not exposing for some type of fear or backlash associated with being a participant in this investigation. I wondered if there were experiences associated with racism that either one of my participants refused to share due to their embarrassment. Specifically, after I read Jon's narrative, I began to think that Jon would not identify events considered to be motivated by racism. Jon would just ignore the possibilities that racism is part of the everyday social existence of his classmates and himself and continue on with his life.

## **LB**

I included portions of LB's narrative as a connection to the emergent theme of avoidance because it surfaces in a manner unlike Jon's narrative and is more easily recognizable as part of LB's experience in the graduate teacher education program. Having previously written about LB's group experience, I questioned LB during our second interview as a way to help summarize

some of his experiences in the graduate teacher education program. I asked LB if there were any tensions within his group because I learned he was a Muslim and the only black male and LB said:

*I have to say that honestly within these six weeks, I haven't felt any tension from anybody due to that. Even when Dr. K [pseudonym for a professor in the graduate teacher education program] asked if I was a member of the Nation of Islam, which I usually refer to as nothing of Islam in order to clarify really, for clarification just to not lie to people. Even then there was no tension and that was from the most direct questioning I had aside from one time I had to pray in the classroom due to the time constraints while there was a break going on... So to make a long story short, no tension was brought to the table now, and if so, I have a good idea as to where it will come from later. Being the only black man in the group, there was no tension brought here whatsoever because in all honesty, it seems like the Caucasians are more militant than I am.*

Later in the same interview, I asked a two part question. First, I asked LB if he had come across any instances in Dr. L's class and Dr. K's class of any classmates presenting something along racial lines that seemed very hegemonic in its presentation. I then asked LB if he noticed any presentations that were opposite of his views on social justice and his emancipator approach to education and LB said:

*I have not. We have gone over the different ideas that people have, the different orientations where people are going to say this is the way it's always been, what they call perennialism and existentialism, same as what you went through before. So we understand that mindset exists but nobody has that mindset yet. As a matter of fact, I haven't heard anybody that has spoken in favor of the hegemony to be honest. Everybody has been against the hegemony when they addressed it at all.*



LB sat down for our third interview in October and after questioning LB on his practicum experiences, I asked LB if he has observed any outwardly racist acts committed by his classmates and LB said:

*I haven't seen any outward manifestations of racism and racist beliefs. I haven't even seen a willingness on the part of anyone to take certain stereotypes for granted. Nobody wants to give credence to any ideas of white supremacy or black inferiority for that matter. So the class is not really drawn along racial lines although race and culture are common topics of discussion. There hasn't been drawn racial lines.*

LB and I scheduled our fourth interview for February and we met in one of the university's meeting rooms. After asking LB about his middle school practicum, high school practicum, and teaching lessons on his own, I asked LB if what he was receiving in the graduate teacher education program compared to what he was doing in his high school practicum classroom concerning cultural relevancy and LB replied:

*I'm not sure I can be culturally relevant with them because really, they don't bring that culture to the school, don't bring it to the classroom much. They don't bring a whole lot of it to their relationships with the teachers. They could but I just don't see them do that.*

I immediately asked LB if it was a colorblind atmosphere, is it just the standard to teach the information, facilitate the information and then just move on and LB said:

*Okay, in terms of teaching a lesson itself not so much the personal interaction. Okay, in that case that's what I'm trying to get. I don't know how to make it completely relevant to everybody in the class but I understand that that is what needs to be done because I'm sure that's why they just zone out sometimes when this is being taught and that's why I'm trying to get through the very initial parts*

*of the beginning of America which is the beginning of the semester.*

Critical race theory's skepticism toward neutrality and colorblindness speaks to the clarity of Jon's and LB's narratives. The narratives of Jon and LB point to an avoidance of race, gender, and culture as products of their experiences in the graduate teacher education program. Their narratives allow us to gain a better understanding of the workings of CRT and how CRT can be enacted to challenge issues of avoidance in the graduate teacher education program and the experiences of Jon and LB. I have found instances where the narratives of Xavier, LB, and Jon help to assess and analyze the issues of race and racism using the themes of CRT as a guide. Themes of microaggressions and avoidance laced throughout the narratives of my research participants helped uncharacteristically label their experiences as negative experiences in the graduate teacher education program. However, the reality of their experiences and narratives have ultimately determined what I uncovered and what emerged as a relevant assessment and analysis of their journey through a graduate teacher education program.

## **PEDAGOGY**

...an analysis of racial, ethnic and gender subordination in education that relies mostly on the perceptions, experiences, and counterhegemonic practices of educators of color. This approach necessarily leads to an articulation and broad interpretation of emancipator pedagogical strategies and techniques that are proved to be successful with racially and culturally subordinated students (Lynn, 1999, p. 615).

Lynn's (1999) definition of critical race pedagogy helps the critical race theorist acknowledge and identify racism as an integral and ubiquitous characteristic of American life. As part of this association, I pose the narratives of my research participants concerning the pedagogical practice

of their teaching experiences as part of the racial fabric of American life. In doing so, I wanted to point the reader back to the five elements of a critical race methodology that foregrounds race and racism, challenges traditional research frameworks, acts as liberatory and transformative actions focusing on racialized and classed experiences, and using an interdisciplinary approach to understand students of color (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). This research investigation is not an exhaustive inquiry into the lives of my research participants but a brief encounter into a part of their lived experiences as student-teachers trying to fulfill a component of their graduate teacher education program. Within this context of teaching, issues of how to teach were illuminated by the experiences of my research participants. Subsequently, the teaching conducted by research participants becomes political in action (Tyson, 2006). Additionally, perhaps without knowledge of their position, my research participants hope to enact some type of critical race pedagogy when they themselves become classroom teachers. The reader is left to realize that the possible pedagogy hoped for by the research participants is one that seeks to challenge dominant claims of colorblindness, neutrality, and objectivity. Additionally, many of the state standards required to be met by the research participants during their teaching practicum experiences are colorblind, neutral, and objective (Lynn and Jennings, 2009). The critical race methodology (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002) applied to my research participants narratives about their pedagogy can be all-inclusive because all five elements of a critical race methodology are observed within the narratives of the research participants.

### **Xavier**

During our second interview, Xavier and I took some time to talk about his middle school practicum. I focused a small portion of the interview on the university learning environment experience and the middle school classroom teaching environment. I specifically wanted to

know how Xavier planned to interject issues of diversity into the mandated curriculum and Xavier said:

*I want to be the one who is able to present a counter-narrative but I see the difficulty in that because the teacher I am working with now; she tries to present that counter-narrative but then again she is also under pressure. They want us to do a chapter a week and they want to keep the standards.*

When I pointed out the many contested points of teaching from a humanistic and caring perspective that are not necessarily matched in the curriculum, Xavier responded:

*I want to do the human teaching but then again I'm thinking how can I do that without it becoming a conflict with my colleagues or the department head. I think just teaching the standards and doing that to keep my job but I don't think I am going to enjoy my job and I don't think the students will really benefit from that style of teaching as much as if I try to do the human teaching.*

During the first week of February, Xavier and I sat down for our fourth interview and we had an interesting talk about Xavier's middle school and high school teaching practicum experiences. I presented my last question about his middle school practicum experience by asking Xavier if he believed his middle school teaching experience was his way of teaching from a colorblind perspective or if his teaching was colored in some racially motivated way and if that was important to him. Xavier said:

*Yes because even with my white students, I make sure to spend special attention with them because I know the feeling of being the only person of color in the classroom and I know how sometimes you can feel isolated or by yourself. So when I was going around I made sure to pay close attention to their need because I know how it is to be the only black person in the class. I can imagine how they may be feeling to be the only white person in the class. So I try to always be*

*attuned to what they need and what they want.*

My last interview with Xavier was very specific to issues relating to his experiences in the teacher education program, his high school practicum and issues of race, racism and gender. I asked Xavier how being an African American helped or hindered him during his experiences in the graduate teacher education program and Xavier reported:

*It helped me because I was able to build a rapport with my students. I mean my last day at [high school practicum location] my first two blocks threw me a party. The students would come up, see me in the hallway and be like what's up Mr. X, this and that. So I believe as an African American male and what I went through in school with teachers sometimes having a very arrogant, pompous, and negative attitude towards me that I try to open up, have discussions with my students, talk about things to them and just try to create a classroom environment where they felt welcome, that they felt safe and secure in. Where it might have hindered me is that sometimes I had issues with the curriculum. I struggled with this whole notion that I thought, well, it's so much about paper and pen; you know, are they taking notes, are they doing this and that. And it seems like what I was doing to encourage more discussion and have the students talk about issues, family and what is going on at home. It hindered me because I spent class time talking about that, whatever assignment I had for that day, that came second what they were discussing about their fathers and their issues about manhood, about what is a man, that took precedence over any type of lesson I was teaching because as an African American I felt that was important but it hindered me in the classroom. It was like this is your lesson plan you have to do two chapters a week. I did not teach after school, I was not able to do that. So it was positive the way I was able to connect with the students but it hindered me as far as the requirements that*

*well, you need to cover this and that. I did not care too much about what I covered. Yes, that is important but it was more important for me to deal with those pressing issues or what the students were feeling at the time.*

Hearing this assessment from Xavier, I wanted to visit the issue of his teaching perspective and pedagogical practice and how his experiences in the graduate teacher education program would affect both. Consequently, I asked Xavier how his teaching perspective and pedagogical practice has been changed due to his experiences in the graduate teacher education program and Xavier replied:

*I think from what I have experienced, I think I will always know that teaching is more than just kind of out of the book, trying to get knowledge; that you have to bring some type of compassion, some type of love, care, not so much I love this subject but you have to have some type of compassion, care and love for a student. That will definitely shape how I teach and my pedagogy because if I gave out a test and the majority of the class failed that test, first, I am not going to look to the students and feel like there is something wrong with them. I am going to look at myself and say maybe I did not teach it in the correct manner. Maybe I did not cover this material, maybe I need to change my teaching style or the way I teach. This experience let me know that people are positive and upbeat and it made me interact with the students because I noticed when I was at some of the schools a lot of the teachers do not. It's an antagonistic attitude between the teacher and the student and now I am at the point where I'm totally against that. I want to be able to teach in a positive, loving, caring and compassionate way when I might not be able to get through an entire book in one semester the way they want me to but I am trying to teach students a deeper lesson about life, how to interact with each other and how we can learn to respect each other. To me, that*

*is the most important lesson.*

Xavier's pedagogical perspective is clearly one where he envisions himself as part of the instructional lessons he shares with his own classroom. I think the emancipatory element of critical race pedagogy espoused by Lynn (1999) and manifested through Xavier's classroom intentions are noble and appreciated by his students. I think Xavier is challenged by constraints many teachers of color have to evade as part of their teaching duties. The objective formality of teaching does not register with Xavier. The humanistic side of incorporating group ideals and subjective assessments to classroom lessons resonates with Xavier and in particular, teachers of color.

### **Jon**

I am including Jon's narrative concerning the pedagogical aspect of this research investigation. However, the difference between Jon's responses to my questions and Xavier's responses are striking. The responses made by each of my research participants are their own. I value their responses, but it should be noted that Jon's responses are significantly different than both Xavier's and LB's, as well. During our second interview, Jon and I had a chance to talk about his pedagogical practice. I wanted to know more about the idea of Jon using a culturally relevant practice or pedagogy and if he was seeing it, experiencing it, or doing it himself in the graduate teacher education program and Jon said:

*A little bit of an idea and mainly in my education classes.*

I noted Jon's apprehension in his voice and reaction to my question and the short answer Jon delivered. I stated to Jon that culturally, you encompass so many different ideals and racially because it is socially constructed, your response to being a African American man in this program and how you think about those experiences may be different. I asked Jon if there was

anything overt or covert that was happening this past summer concerning his graduate teacher education program as culturally relevant and Jon replied:

*Nothing I can think of offhand. I guess I'll say in my Black Nationalism class, I guess you can get to speak out more freely on issues concerning race than any other class.*

Jon and I sat down for our fourth interview in February and I began to ask Jon questions that were focused on his pedagogical practice. I asked Jon how had his experience in the graduate teacher education program has shaped his pedagogical practice and Jon said:

*Yeah, it's trying to engage them more, get their attention more and also try to get their feedback instead of just saying this is how I'm gonna do it, because some of the teachers try to do that a lot. So be more dictatorial, kind of be more...*

I said student centered and Jon said:

*Yeah, student centered... So just trying to relate things more to them where they can have a better grasp, understand it. Because if they can't relate it to themselves, they're not going to, they're like, why am I learning this?*

Jon and I continued discussing the aspects of his cultural position in the classroom as a teacher and I asked Jon how he was implementing culturally responsive and culturally accepting curriculum or teaching methods in his own classroom with his students and Jon said:

*See, I guess mine is kind of different because I teach black and Hispanic students so I guess I'm trying to defend, like sometimes because they're like thinking all, every single white person is racist. I'm like, some are, a lot more in the past but you know basically saying there's some good people out there, there's some bad people out there and you just can't judge from past experiences people. You've got to get to know that person. Because I think a lot of them, especially I have a couple of students, every time I mention they say American, I'm like, well, you're*



*an American too, you were born here. And they really mean white. That's what they mean. I'm like, well, just say white person. No one's gonna get offended because you're an American too. I think they feel like a disconnect towards America and I was surprised to see that at such young of an age, you know, sixth, seventh, eighth grade. Usually when they're older, maybe eleventh, twelfth grade, on up, instead of so young feeling such a disconnect from the country right now. I guess we don't push civics like we had when we went to school like the junior scholastics and things like that. They really don't have that in middle school anymore. I don't know if they're hearing that from their parents, I'm not really sure where they're getting it from.*

Jon's classroom appears to be one where he is stating it is fine to consider race in the environment of the classroom but does not do the same when he answers my questions about race. I have no problem with Jon wanting his class to freely discuss race without consequences but I do not think Jon was as forthcoming to me about issues of race. From Jon's assessment of his students shared in his narrative, I believe the students are in need of critical race pedagogy but I am not aware of Jon teaching from this perspective possibly due to his reluctance to respond to racialized experiences in the graduate teacher education program. It is interesting to note that the students do not associate themselves as American but a racial classification. Jon could use critical race pedagogy to assist his pedagogical practice from an emancipating perspective and teach students who feel racially and culturally subordinated.

## **LB**

My first experience learning how LB thought about how his teaching would work with the curriculum came early in our relationship. I asked LB during our first interview how he

planned to blend his teaching ideas with the standardized curriculum and LB said:

*I would start off by basing it around the curriculum so that the curriculum would be the baseline for the content and then I would supplement that with what makes it relevant with the visuals and supplement that say even articles from of course English language articles from newspapers that are abroad or it's a history course then English translations of some of the reports of things that happen abroad. So, in other words, I would have to base it on the curriculum until I learn better how to do so through experience. But I could use it as a base and build from there.*

I listened to LB go on about the political problems facing schools in America and his opinions about fixing the problems. I listened carefully for LB's answers to focus on the shaping of his pedagogical practice but that never seemed to happen and I figured it would be best to move on and come back to LB's pedagogical practice later. Later I in the interview, I asked LB if he felt culturally connected to the graduate teacher education program and if he could transfer this learning to the students in his practicum experience and LB replied:

*I'm not sure that I can be culturally relevant with them because really they don't bring that cultural [culture] to the school, don't bring it to the classroom much. They don't bring a whole lot of it to their relationships with the teachers. They could but I just don't see them do it.*

I immediately asked LB if it was a colorblind atmosphere, is it just the standards to teach the information, facilitate the information and then just move on and LB said:

*Okay, in terms of teaching a lesson itself, not so much the personal interaction. Okay, in that case that's what I'm trying to get. I don't know how to make it completely relevant to everybody in the class but I understand that that is what needs to be done because I'm sure that's why they just zone out sometimes when*

*this is being taught, and that's why I'm trying to get through the very initial parts of the beginning of America which is the beginning of the semester.*

Unlike the narratives of Xavier and Jon during their fifth interviews with me, LB's interview focused more on his high school practicum experiences because of the negative events that surrounded his student-teaching experience. However, LB and I did get a chance to discuss his pedagogical perspective and how the graduate teacher education program had impacted his position. I asked LB how the graduate teaching education program had shaped his teaching perspective and pedagogical practice and LB said:

*Before I got into this program, my idea and my mental picture of myself as a teacher was, well, my perspective was harder on students that showed little motivation. So consequently, if I had just been told to take some tests in order to prove that I know history and then given a license based on my results of the test and then told to start teaching, I would have asked for help from veteran teachers to learn certain things and I would have taken the job seriously still.*

Once again, LB did not seem to answer the question or maybe I did not phrase the question correctly but in the midst of the interview I let LB finish his response and moved on to my other research questions. I asked LB how the curriculum offered in the social studies portion of the graduate teacher education program culturally connected to him as a social studies student and budding teacher and LB said:

*Simply put, it is the most culturally relevant. It did address that and I can say that it did a good job of connecting to everybody by refusing to leave anyone out.*

LB either does not answer my questions or provides an answer that does not qualify as a valid response to the question. LB moves the focus off of himself as lacking critical race pedagogy or culturally responsive pedagogy by placing the impetus on the students who do not come to school with a cultural bearing. I do not believe this is true. As an experienced classroom

teacher, many of my students brought their cultural identities to the classroom daily. Again, I point out an action displayed by one of my research participants where their reluctance to share their possible faults is detrimental to this investigation. The idea of being seen as a teacher who lacks the ability to competently teach or a teacher who does not accept blame for the shortcomings of their class possibly lead LB to not answer the questions. Consequently, I do not believe the students my research participants teach are in need of critical race pedagogy but my research participants themselves need to be enlightened concerning this teaching practice.

Critical race pedagogy identifies race as endemic to American life, tries to recognize the power structure of schooling, sees the importance of self-reflection, and finally, critical race pedagogy tries to emphasize teaching and learning as liberatory (Lynn and Jennings, 2005). My goal is to allow the reader to interpret a portion of the narratives delivered by my research participants who either knowingly or unknowingly espoused a critical race pedagogy while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program. I must also acknowledge my perspective in this investigation. I must reflect upon my critical race perspectives as I attempt to deliver the voices of my research participants as meaningful and resonating.

### **“SPOKESPERSON PRESSURE”**

A unique and totally surprising theme emerged solely from Xavier’s and LB’s narrative throughout this research investigation. In interviews with Xavier he addressed the collective responsibility he felt as he attempted to achieve, succeed, and prosper in education. Xavier noted that his responsibility was not an individual experience but the experience of others. During our second interview Xavier and I had the following question and answer session. I asked Xavier if he felt like he was representing the entire African American race while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program and Xavier said:

*You are not only representing yourself you are representing other black people.*

*Also, you are representing a race so you have got the burden of the race on your shoulders and you don't want it to look like oh well, they just got him in the class because they needed a black face in here.*

I believe there are two equal forces at work concerning Xavier's experiences while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program. The first is Xavier's personal journey through the graduate teacher education program which appears to be a proud achievement. The second force appears to be the maladjusted and misplaced burden of the racial transparency or invisibility of Xavier himself as he journeys through the graduate teacher education program. Xavier's journey through the graduate teacher education program is fraught with negative racialized occurrences. Xavier could not just go to class and enjoy himself or enjoy the company of his classmates without the burden of being a man of color and a prospective teacher of color defining his existence. The narratives of Jon do not reveal events or situations that coincide or share a similarity with Xavier or LB concerning spokesperson pressure and hence, they have been left out of this section.

Steele and Aronson (1995) accurately define not only Xavier's narrative, but define what many others experience while enrolled in higher education as "spokesperson pressure" which is part of a stereotypical threat. Steele and Aronson (1995) state the definition of stereotype threat as:

...a social-psychological predicament that can arise from widely known negative stereotypes about one's group... the existence of such a stereotype means that anything one does or any of one's features that conform to it make the stereotypes more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one's own eyes. We call this predicament stereotype threat and argue that it is experienced, essentially, as a self-evaluative threat (p.797).

Additionally, the words of Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) support the above perspective by

writing:

We argue specifically that stereotype threat can affect the high-stakes game of college academic achievement in particular. The prospect of conforming to a negative stereotype about African Americans might be enough to undermine an African American college student's performance and achievement and thereby negatively contribute to the collegiate racial climate at his or her institution of higher learning (p. 62).

I provide portions of Xavier's narrative to not only support the work of Steele and Aronson (1995) and but more specifically, the work of Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) to solidify the definition of stereotype threat. Xavier's experience in the graduate teacher education also reinforce the tenant that critical race theory insist on recognizing the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993).

One of the questions I asked Xavier about his comfort level bringing his cultural self to the classroom and I want to refer back to the narrative provided by Xavier concerning the story of George Washington. Xavier's narrative begins to emanate a sense of anger as he describes how others would incorrectly label him for speaking out in matters that needed clarification from an African American perspective. The attempt to silence Xavier does seem to bother him but only from the perspective that it will only make class worse if he ventures to offer an assessment of Washington and his practice of slave ownership. Xavier and I immediately began talking about forms of racism he may be experiencing in the graduate teacher education program and how race, racism, and gender may have affected his experiences in the graduate teacher education program. Some of Xavier's earlier statements really address the fine points of stereotype threat as a reality for Xavier. I point the reader back to Xavier's comments about riding mass transit as a prime example of stereotype threat experienced by Xavier. The events of Xavier's experiences in the graduate teacher education program are complex and varied while

fulfilling various themes flushed out in his narrative. Xavier went on to describe an event where he was asked to talk about the graduate teacher education program to a group of incoming students who were scheduled to begin the program. I asked Xavier what he said to the group and Xavier said:

*I talked a little bit about financial aid, I told them my name and I told them about some of the difficulties you may have for the classes. But my other classmates talked about we are such a family here and we feel like family and this and that. I could not sit up there and lie and say that we are a family. I just told them my name and about ways to get financial aid, you have to be positive about it and have a nice attitude. But as far as me sitting up there saying we are such a family, we call each other; there were some of the classmates saying that. That was not my experience so I felt like an oddball standing up there because I was the only black person standing up there. Again, I was asked to come back and talk to some more to students and I declined. I said there is no way. I just did not want to be put back in that position again. I just did not feel like it was genuine.*

Furthermore, I asked Xavier if this is more a feeling of detachment based on his feelings toward his cohorts or a feeling of detachment with the professors in the program and Xavier said:

*I think it was mostly a feeling of detachment with my fellow cohorts. The professors in the program for the most part I have had a positive experience with them. I had a great experience with my professors but my experience with my cohorts was horrible. For the most part of it, it was not a positive experience because my views and my perspective, I always felt like an outsider.*

I can also provide context to Xavier's narrative about feeling like an outsider. As a graduate of the same graduate teacher education program I took notice to the feelings of being an outsider expressed by Xavier. I always felt like the Afrocentric lessons I wanted to present and the

African American perspectives I wanted to share with my classmates and professors would not be fully understood or genuinely accepted so I kept my mouth shut. As a result, I fulfilled the requirements of the class from a culturally dysfunctional position. It is this same culturally marginalized position that I continually fight. The number of African American males attempting to acquire doctorates in social studies education is small and because there are so few African American males that share my current position I too remain silenced. One of the more important pieces of Xavier's narrative is his refusal to speak to prospective students because of his unwillingness to share with them his personal account and how much it differs from the one other student's expressed in this meeting. I can only imagine the possible outcome if Xavier had presented an honest assessment of his classmates and the graduate teacher education program from his point of view.

Additionally, I have included LB's journal responses more so than any other research participant because LB wrote information in his journal that seemed to contradict what we talked about during our interview sessions. LB's journal responses were quite informative and really addressed the issues of his experiences as a African American male in the graduate teacher education program. I include LB's second journal observation that he made during the fall semester as evidence that spokesperson pressure was not just Xavier's alone. LB writes:

*We are now coming up on the last week before we begin our Practicum One for the fall semester. I have been assigned to teach at B. Middle School for which I actually volunteered during the summer. My suspicion is that I was even asked to teach there not because I'm black but because I'm a no non-sense black male. I am actually the only African American to be sent there for the practicum. Dr. L even said to me that she wanted me there because of my strong male presence. She never said it was my black male presence but my suspicion is that she knows what many of our people know; that our children are suffering from a lack of*



*fathers and father figures. I know and this is why I stay in touch with my son as often as I can and visit him frequently in my home state. I look forward to teaching and yet I feel nervous because it may be like going into childhood, during which my life was rife with problems of my classmates who suffered from absent or even dead fathers. Also, I feel nervous about the practicum because of the stories of how other student teachers have failed and had to restart the graduate teacher education program later on because of absences, illnesses, or even a lack of proper dress. It appears that despite the need for teachers, there is also a need to weed out student teachers. My hope is that there is no pressure on anyone to weed out specifically black students.*

LB's words present an innate fear associated with being a student-teacher of color and fearing the unknown of the practicum experience. LB has worries associated about dress, illness, and absences as he tries to understand if there is a weeding out process of student-teachers of color who exhibit these actions.

As part of a critical race methodology (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002), the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color become magnified through the lens of a primary source. Portions of Xavier's narrative not only provide the reader with evidentiary support of Steele and Aronson's (1995) stereotype threat but also support the claim made by Solorarzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) that stereotype threats affect the achievement of students of color in higher education.

### **Emerging Conclusion**

The emerging themes of microaggressions, avoidance, pedagogy, and spokesperson pressure under the guise of stereotype threat all reflect a part of the common elements of critical race theory. The emerging themes listed above through the narratives of Xavier, Jon, and LB support the ideas that racism is endemic to American life, challenge dominant claims of

colorblindness, neutrality, objectivity and meritocracy, and finally, respect the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993). A critical race methodology used in conjunction with the tenants of critical race theory solidifies the narratives of Xavier, Jon, and LB as actions that foreground race, challenge traditional research paradigms to explain experiences of students of color, becomes a transformative tool to fight racial, gender, and class subordination, and is focused on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. The ultimate goal is an attempt to connect the theoretical and methodological actions of CRT with the narratives of my research participants. In doing so, the emerging themes of my research participants help call into question the experiences of my research participants as common experiences shared by all students enrolled in the social studies graduate teacher education program.

The themes of microaggressions, avoidance, pedagogy, and stereotype threat are part of my research participants' realities. I hope that I have provided a space for my research participants' voices to be heard and interpreted. However, as I share that goal I must also state my position as I acknowledged these emerging themes within the narratives. I felt compelled to share with the reader these themes because I have also experienced hurt, silence, and marginalization associated with each theme.

### **My Research Question (Un) Answered**

I began this quest to attempt to understand the challenges, discontent, discomfort, and successes of three African American males enrolled in a graduate teacher education program. When I was in my research participants' shoes some time ago as an African American male enrolled in the same graduate teacher education program, I wondered then as I do now how would I become changed by this experience? I entered my doctoral program with a research

agenda fraught with obstacles I could see and some that were hidden (Milner, 2007 ) awaiting my foray into conducting qualitative research. One major hurdle that I never knew would be cleared were the possible answers to my initial research question as I commenced my research.

I chose to present the research question as I have in chapter 1 of this dissertation and provide the narratives delivered by my research participants as a means of providing a meaningful answer to my research question. Each participants' narrative is uniquely their own and to some extent it may seem like their response does not answer the research question but each narrative is authentically the research participants' attempt to answer the questions in their own words.

### **Research Question Answered (?)**

**How do race, racism, and gender shape the lived and shared experiences of three African American male preservice social studies teachers enrolled in a graduate teaching program potentially affect their pedagogical practice in the social studies?**

Early on it became apparent that my research participants would have a hard time answering this question or at least they would have to wait until they were actually teaching a social studies course in a real classroom to fully attempt to address this question. Consequently, what became clear was their role in the classroom became three markedly different experiences about becoming a certified social studies teacher. Each participant had varying versions of an attempt to answer my research questions through personal experiences. Xavier wrote,

*I want to teach in a manner that is centered on the interests and needs of the student. This required the introduction of relevant topics, being creative with my lesson plans, and being concerned not with my student's educational development but also with their development as citizens and human beings. In short, I want to be a teacher who has a great command of the content knowledge yet who factors in the students social*

*development. I think this perspective would lay the foundation for me becoming an excellent social studies teacher.*

Xavier's description above was part of his teaching philosophy, a program requirement detailed in each student's portfolio given to me by each research participant. Ideally, the social studies teachers' content delivery is varied through form and function, years of experiential knowledge, and a general understanding of the curriculum required by each school system.

Xavier's attention to the content and social development of his prospective students should not be undervalued. The challenge undertaken by Xavier would be quite oppositional to the work presented by Gay (2004) who posits that the social studies is skeptically embraced by students of color because of the conceptions of citizenship, equality, and the essentials of democracy in the social studies are brutally disputed on a daily basis. Gay (2004, pp.77) writes "Competent social studies teachers demonstrate the capacity to think critically, deconstruct knowledge, analyze social realities, and engage in transformative actions for themselves and their students."

Xavier's words coincide nicely with Gay's but without the measured experience and success of Gay's teaching history. The excitement of wanting to be a transformative teacher is etched in the meaning of Xavier's goal to be a successful social studies teacher. Scholarship abounds in the area of teacher education and by no means does this research investigation delve into that subject matter but I cannot help but support Adler (2008) when she decries that the education and preparation of good teachers is of the highest importance. The central question becomes how Xavier's teachers in the graduate teacher education program help him become the teacher he describes? That question may have gone unanswered as Xavier exited the graduate teacher education program but Xavier's experiences describe an experience in the program uniquely all his own and to a certain degree sad and hurtful. The feelings of being an outsider, unable to justifiably share his versions of history, or express to prospective students his reality have left Xavier somewhat bitter and resentful. Suffering the most from the challenges offered by his

cohorts in the graduate teacher education program, Xavier's narrative speaks volumes about the dream of becoming a valiant and respectable social studies teacher. The emergence of discontent, discomfort, and isolation that appear throughout Xavier's narrative are in stark contrast to the teacher Xavier wants to be and the student living through this graduate teacher education program experience.

Considering both Jon and LB, I found no instances where their experiences would help both answer my research question. Both research participants either evaded the question as best as possible offering very little to help me assess their experiences or just did not provide a narrative that can reasonably answer this question with a high degree of certainty on their part as research participants and mine as the researcher.

Concerning the matter of pedagogical practice, Xavier eloquently answered the question in a manner that I had not expected from him. Xavier said,

*I think from what I have experienced, I think I will always know that teaching is more than just kind of out of the book, trying to get knowledge that you have to bring some type of compassion, some type of love, care, not so much I love this subject but you have to have some type of compassion, care and love for a student.*

Clearly, Xavier felt the detached approach of teaching associated with just delivering the content and teaching to the whole student is far from his idea of being pedagogically cogent in the field of social studies. I posed the same question to Jon and LB and I have included their responses as well. Jon said,

*Yeah, it's trying to engage them more, get their attention more and also try to get their feedback instead of just saying this is how I'm going to do it because some of the teachers try to do that a lot, to be student centered.*

LB responded,

*Having taken these graduate teacher education courses in pedagogy when I finally*

*started to student teach it gave me a bigger concern for what some of the unmotivated students or what struggling students actually go through and ask them what is it that distracts you from doing this work.*

Each research participant made the case that the student is at the center of their pedagogical concerns. Therefore, the pedagogical stance embraced by each research participant is a student-centered pedagogy that speaks to the overall well-being of each student these prospective teachers encounter in the teaching profession. I cannot be certain about the various forms of pedagogy my research participants learned but their narratives speak to an exposure to possible pedagogy designed to enrich students. Again, I cannot be certain if this was the result of being enrolled in the graduate teacher education program, the research participants' classroom experiences, or their prior knowledge. The remarkable aspect of this question was the answers each research participant rendered. I had no prior sense that the prospective pedagogical practice would focus on the students and that each research participant would be emphatic in this assessment of a pedagogical practice after spending time in the graduate teacher education program. Yilmaz (2008) provides an interesting assessment of students as learners in the field of social studies. The assertion is students must actively construct meaning and understanding that may be wholly dependent upon the social studies teachers instructional practices.

Furthermore, Maclellan and Soden (2004) posit that the student-centered approach to learning is not stagnate but individuals actively seek meaning to construct their understanding. With this in mind, the goal of each research participant to provide an environment that may broaden their students ability to develop deep levels of understanding built upon the tenant that learners bring beliefs, skills, and knowledge to the classroom (Yilmaz, 2008). One of the interesting components of this research study was the realization and the finding that my research participants chose to lead student-centered pedagogical classrooms but without specifically naming this teaching practice. Each research participant described the best approach that could

work for them in the classroom but also decided how the graduate teacher education program possibly instilled in each research participant the idea that student-centered pedagogical instructional approaches worked best. Gomez (2008) openly critiques the student-centered pedagogical approach. As one who marginalizes the student-centered pedagogy, Gomez (2008) views each participant, the student and teacher as having power over each other and each serves the learning capacity of the other. However, Gomez (2008) also cites the student-centered approach as a remedy for knocking other forms of teacher practice as outdated and unuseful. Finally, the case may be made to investigate the pedagogical approach of the research participants once they become teachers in the field. The student-centered approach is aligned with the research participants' ideas of instructional practice and not ideas formatted around the constructivist approach to meaningful learning (Gilis, Clement, Laga, and Pauwels, 2008).

I think the approach Xavier wants to use in his classrooms is more akin to his African American cultural being. On the other hand, I do not think Jon and to a lesser degree LB will make the connection to their cultural selves as one that may be shown in the classroom. I think Jon will continue to relegate himself to a position of colorblindness and not accept the racialized occurrences prevalent in many classrooms today. My position runs counter to Jon expressing a reason to give the student-centered classroom a chance because Jon is so reluctant to address issues of race in his pedagogical practice. Additionally, LB will continue to place the blame on the students but I am encouraged to see that he may be willing as he states in his narrative to ask the students what it is he may practice that will help the students succeed.

Lastly, my research participants provided striking narratives to help address the research question's focus on race, racism, and gender. Much of their narratives become points of contention with other significant characteristics of this study. For example, I posed this research question to Xavier and his narrative not only answered the question but became an electrifying point to consider concerning the microaggressions he experienced that I described in Chapter 4.

Xavier said,

*I mean definitely racism because you know, you go in there and the program talks about diversity this and that but the number of black people in the program is very small, very low. You sort of feel like as a black person that it's better just to, if you try to project your voice, interject certain ideas or theories that go counter to what some people believe, people start looking at you like you are an outsider.*

I then asked Xavier to elaborate on this issue and Xavier said:

*Yes, racism and gender because I think as a black male sometimes to fit in you have to put on a smile, bend over backwards, you have to make people feel safe around you.*

I asked Jon the same research question but I received a totally different answer. Jon said,

*I really can't see actually in the program race or gender shaping it in the program. I can see it at work, it can possibly shape it at work more than in the program.*

Furthermore, I asked LB the same research question and an emerging quality to this research became easily identifiable. My research participants, while experiencing the same program. Each had wide ranging different personal experiences and different reactions to the same common actions and events. LB responded,

*I haven't seen any outward manifestations of racism and racist beliefs. I haven't even seen willingness on the part of anyone to take certain stereotypes for granted by the Caucasians and vice versa.*

## **Outlook**

I know we as humans experience various outlooks on the same events and the narratives of Xavier, Jon, and LB make this abundantly clear. I consider the assessments offered by Xavier, Jon, and LB to be so widely disconnected that I wondered if they were students in the same



graduate teacher education program during the same time. The microaggressions and spokesperson pressures that characterize a portion of Xavier's narrative are not a common thread binding Jon or LB. The silence associated with reactions to racist behaviors experienced by Xavier is averted by LB to a small degree while Jon does not identify with any of these actions and remains veiled from these actions. Jon becomes part of the graduate teacher education program but not wholly in the graduate teacher education program.

### **A Critical Race Assessment**

Using the narratives of my research participants, I sought to identify how the six themes of CRT manifest themselves through the experiences of three African American males and their journey through a social studies graduate teacher education program. I am cognizant of the limits of my research investigation and to a certain extent the narratives offered by my research participants. However, the shared or individual experiences defined by my research participants are valued because the narratives themselves offer a rich and particular version of a very social and educational phenomena (DeFina, 2009). To help assess the narratives of my research participants, the six unifying themes of CRT (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993) were individually highlighted and the narratives of the research participants were extracted and published to help the reader further understand how CRT provides a cogent analysis of the experiences of the research participants. Recall, the six unifying themes of CRT are:

1. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
2. Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy.
3. Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law... Critical race theorists... adopt a stance that presumes that

- racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
4. Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin analyzing law and society.
  5. Critical race theory is interdisciplinary.
  6. Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993, p.6).

I find it necessary to list each individual CRT theme and consequently provide the research participant narrative to demonstrate how their experience coincided or did not with the theme. My goal was to provide the research participant narrative that best matches the CRT theme highlighted. As a note to the reader, I cannot change how the content or context of the research participants' narratives were delivered but as the co-constructor and presenter of these narratives I must warn the reader that as a critical race theorist I must adhere to what Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) address as naming one's own reality. Therefore, it is within this context that I offer my assessments concerning my research participants' narratives to help remove the somewhat confining and limiting action of analysis. I offer this assessment of my research as the instrument that provides voice to my research participants. However, I challenge the reader to read, analyze, interpret, and construct for themselves their own portrait of my research participants. Ultimately, I wrestled with a very important decision concerning the narratives of my research participants. I realized I had to provide the context of how the narratives seen here came into existence. Lastly, the reader should be aware that the theme, "CRT is interdisciplinary" was not found within the narratives of my research participants and not addressed in this assessment. I must caution the reader about the CRT assessments provided in the text. I will provide the narratives of Xavier, Jon and LB where applicable, but the reader should know that all of the themes of CRT were not

addressed and my research participants did not always provide a narrative that coincides with the CRT theme.

### **1. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.**

In one of our earlier interviews I asked Xavier about some of his classroom experiences in the summer semester. One of the more perplexing issues Xavier commented on was the historical heritage of African Americans in this country that many of his European American classmates do not know about or their unwillingness to learn about these individuals. To reinforce his point, Xavier commented on an exercise required of his entire class. Apparently, the class was grouped for some instructional lesson and Xavier's professor presented Xavier's group with a picture of a mulatto individual who appeared to be of a very light skin complexion seated with dark skin African Americans in 1840's New Orleans, Louisiana. Xavier explained to me that he was bothered by the ignorance the white members of his group displayed while trying to get a better understanding of the picture. Xavier explained to me that he had a difficult time understanding how his classmates did not know the mulatto individual was also a slave. Totally flustered, Xavier responds:

*I'm sitting there thinking, my God, these people are going to be teaching history and social studies and they don't understand the racial implications and it made me think. As black people, we are forced to learn the history of white people, we've got to know it to make it through but white people, they don't need to know anything about us and its sad.*

In the middle of the fall semester, Xavier and I discussed how not only the fall semester was going but I wanted to learn if there were issues that were identified in the summer semester that reemerged in the fall. The poignant action of silence once again reared itself and began to take control of Xavier's class. The required education course has become an unlikely place for relief concerning the silence of Xavier's classmates. With the addition of two other African

American students now in Xavier's class, the class had five African American students and this addition changed the entire class dynamics. Xavier pointed out that even the professor mentioned the class silence concerning issues of race. According to Xavier:

*It seems the white students are not saying the black students are taking over but it seems like they are not really discussing. I think its unwillingness, maybe fear, and maybe I think sometimes it's just they disagree with what's being said but they don't know how to present it in a way where they do not seem like, well, if I say this they are going to think that I'm racist.*

An essential component of my data collection was the collection of my research participants' journals they kept during the entire inquiry. As part of that data, I am including what LB wrote to sum up his fall experience. In a response dated December 25<sup>th</sup> LB wrote:

*Its unseasonably warm here on the Gulf coast and tomorrow morning it should be in the seventies before the sun even comes up. I mention this because it was this abnormal climate change that made me think of what control black folks do NOT have over the world and even our own lives. Of course, that brainstorm led me to reflect more in this free time of mine on the subject of this study; being a black male in the graduate teacher education program. This last semester ended with the same lessons as the previous semester. The first is that white supremacy lives on in the minds of more non-whites than it does in whites. Whites may continue to take for granted white privilege but many of them are too ashamed to entertain ideas of white supremacy while many of us of color still do.*

Tate (1999) asks, "Is it possible to have racial progress in a society where racism is endemic" (p. 257)? I carefully reviewed this question and applied it to the narratives of my research participants. I must inform the reader that Jon's narrative does not support an approach where I can effectively review the first theme of CRT and connect it anywhere to his narrative.

To help me answer Tate's (1999) question I sought out the seminal work of Scheurich and Young (1997). In this limited work I cannot fully address the issues of race and racism in society or in the field of education. I am seeking to confine the broad ideals of race and specifically racism to the narratives constructed by my research participants and my role as co-constructor of the research participants' realities using CRT. The work of Scheurich and Young (1997) helps me broadly connect the issue of racism and my research participants' narratives. My continuous goal was to render a co-constructed narrative that allowed my research participants to name their own reality. However, my own biases were evident as I provided my co-construction and analysis of the research participants' narratives. I have to acknowledge my very own voice as a means to help interpret the experiences of my research participants. As a critical race theorist my viewpoints about race and racism become identifiable in this research investigation. In doing so, my viewpoints about race and racism as a critical race theorist become apparent.

Scheurich and Young (1997) offer five categories of racism that may or may not help position the narratives of my research participants within the first tenant of CRT. The forms of racism described by Scheurich and Young (1997) that Xavier experienced evaded LB and Jon who were not necessarily victimized by these forms of racism, but all three of their narratives offer a candid look into their racialized experiences in the graduate teacher education program. The categories of racism include overt and covert racism, institutional and societal racism, and civilizational racism (Scheurich and Young, 1997). If one were to reference the narratives of Xavier and LB concerning the first theme of CRT then instances of overt and covert racism are made clear. Scheurich and Young (1997) note that racism is,

*A public, conscious, and intended act by a person or persons from one race with the intent of doing damage to a person or persons of another race chiefly because of the race of the second person or persons (p. 5).*

Hidden from my initial investigation of racism and its impact on my research participants' experiences in the graduate teacher education program, covert racism was not as visibly clear as overt racism. Scheurich and Young define covert racism as, "The only real difference between overt and covert racism is that the latter is not explicitly public" (p. 5). Acts of covert racism are more readily apparent in the narrative of LB than Xavier. Conversely, the absence of Jon's narrative was apparent once again. I do believe Jon knows racism is part of the fabric of American life he just does not identify with racism, refuses to acknowledge racism, and reluctantly accepts racism was endemic to his experiences in the graduate teacher education program. In response, overt acts of racism are more readily attached to the narrative of Xavier and as whole each act of racism is seen more along the lines of microaggressions and stereotype threats.

## **2. Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy.**

In our last interview, Xavier and I sat down and discussed a myriad of topics concerning his journey through the graduate teacher education program. One question I posed to Xavier was how his teaching perspective and pedagogical practice had been changed due to his experiences in the graduate teacher education program and when I reviewed Xavier's narrative about teaching and how he would teach with more compassion and a love ethic became identifiable. Xavier's reliance on a teaching perspective that sought to enhance student respect for each other and life's deeper meaning became evident. I included this portion of Xavier's narrative that I feel best represents Matsuda's et al (1993) second concept of CRT. I believe Xavier's goal to teach with love and compassion totally displaces the inherent neutrality and objectivity in some pedagogical forms of teaching. To coincide with Xavier's narrative, I include a portion of LB's narrative that also supports critical race theory's objection to neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy. However, the inclusion of LB's narrative provides a duality

concerning the second point of CRT. Upon careful review of LB's narrative, the duality provided by LB caught me by surprise but it also addresses some interesting points concerning the professors in the graduate teacher education program. I learned from LB and Jon that the professors in the program were liberal minded individuals. According to LB, he viewed the professors as militant while Jon viewed the professors as too liberal in their teaching personas. Additionally, LB's narrative provides the middle ground between Xavier's far more aggressive narratives toward the second CRT theme and Jon's personal narrative that is more accepting of a colorblind and neutral existence in the graduate teacher education program.

LB and I sat down for our third interview in October and I started the interview by asking LB about the racial differences he had observed in the graduate teacher education program. I asked LB what his classmates were saying in class, were they apprehensive, scared, or just ignorant about what to expect and if there was a cultural or language barrier and LB said:

*The first difference would be very obvious was that the teachers were more curious to know about these differences than many African American students were eager to talk about and it's not that the African American students were not eager, it's just that the teachers were more eager. The second difference that you'll notice that was obvious to me was that the white professors are more condemnatory of the old standards which did not include Africa and Asia period, especially Africa in their curriculum. And they are phasing the changes that have been made to put more of Africa into the curriculum at the grade school level and they are condemnatory of what is still missing and what is lacking. And they are telling us they are pushing for more color to be added into the history curriculum if you will and telling us to add more color into it than what is already in the curriculum. Whereas the African American students are not really pushing for this but they will answer questions that are asked. African American students are*

*not quiet and mild, they're not afraid to answer questions but it does seem like they'd just rather not bring up the subject. So it's the white teachers who are bringing up the subject and even white students who are addressing it.*

LB provides a very telling narrative. I was surprised by LB's description of the African American students remaining silent but the white professors expressing skepticism towards the colorblind curriculum. I think LB's assessment of his professor's militant teaching style provides the necessary context to label LB's professors. I think the professor's teaching styles are uniquely tied to what may be missing in their classrooms in the graduate teacher education program. The missing element in the classrooms of these professors may be the voice of the prospective African American teacher who does not accept a master script definitively attached to Eurocentric ideals of teaching and learning.

I believe Jon's existence in the graduate teacher education program was an attempt by Jon to be as colorblind and neutral as possible. I provide a portion of Jon's narrative to support this concept. While Xavier and LB were more easily identifiable as having a racial existence in the graduate teacher education program, Jon's narrative provided me almost a contradiction in terms. I began to wonder how an African American male would not have a racial experience while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program? However, in lieu of answering the question incorrectly, I allowed Jon's voice to describe his experience and accept his reality.

Jon and I met for our second interview in August and I began to ask Jon questions about issues of racism and his experience in the graduate teacher education program. Jon responded:

*Not that I've noticed. I basically just go to my classes and go home and do my work. People are real friendly, at least the ones I've come across, my cohort, my other two classes, seem very open-minded, the people I've dealt with. My Black Nationalism teacher mentioned some things that went on a couple of years ago*



*where people spray painted some stuff a few years back, but no, not that I've seen. I haven't seen that here but I've only been here for a semester, so it might change, I don't know. A lot of people seem to be very liberal, a lot of the professors anyway, which I'm kind of a liberal guy but sometimes I think they're kind of too liberal.*

In our third interview I asked Jon about his experiences with his classmates and the material being presented by the professors in the social studies portion of the graduate teacher education program. One of the issues was an article presented in class that addressed race as a primary topic and I asked Jon how he felt about the article and if he was bringing the issue of race up in class and Jon responded:

*Keeping them to myself for now.*

I asked Jon why he was not bringing these issues up in class and Jon said:

*I don't know. It might be kind of too, I don't know.*

I asked Jon if this is part of the social studies to address these issues and Jon said:

*Yeah, I was thinking about saying it and I was like, I just don't want to stir the pot too much.*

I then asked Jon if the pot was being stirred in class and Jon said:

*Not really, it's pretty civil in there. Sometimes the other black student in there he just says things just to play the devil's advocate, just to kind of mix up the pot but I guess if we delved more into it, a little bit more honest, I don't think people are actually bringing up certain things.*

In February, Jon and I conducted our fourth interview and for some reason Jon brings up the same article that prompted much of the discussion I included above. I informed Jon that I had not read the article and but I wanted him to summarize the article for me. Jon did so and his major point was the behavior of minority students is tied to his or her cultural being. Jon did not

agree with that assumption and in doing so I asked Jon if behavior was colorblind and Jon said:

*Yes.*

Immediately after Jon gave this response I asked Jon if he thought race, racism and gender had shaped his experience in the graduate teacher education program and Jon believes that race, racism, and gender have no place in the graduate teacher education program. I then asked Jon what about racism, do you experience any racism and Jon's claim to just go home was a complete indication of his refusal to acknowledge or identify with racism while a student in the graduate teacher education program.

Long ago DuBois (1903) asserted to the world the idea of double consciousness to many African Americans. The second component of CRT may be a direct manifestation of African Americans seeing themselves through the lens of two identities. In educational settings, not only does the idea of double consciousness become apparent, but it is more obviously so for some. Many African Americans see themselves as part of the educational setting but do not see themselves in the educational setting. The African American in many educational settings has been neutralized and responded to in a colorblind manner. Lacking in the scholarly research are responses to this neutralization and colorblindness African Americans often experience. In its place, one generally sees many of the components that traditionally and temporarily make up a scholarly study concerning CRT and students of color. Counter-storytelling, microaggressions, and at times, stereotype threats are reasonable attempts by current researchers to challenge various aspects of the African American racialized educational settings. Conversely, research designed to specifically highlight African American male narratives that pinpoint issues of racial neutralization and colorblindness in educational settings are missing. As a result, my intentions were to connect the narratives with some of the scholarly materials that highlight neutrality and colorblindness. Ultimately, the research participants' narratives of this study may or may not reflect their experiences with racism but their realities may or may not reflect their fight

to counter racism and the idea that racism has been neutralized and made invisible (Gotanda, 1995).

I posed Jon's series of narratives to give the reader a greater sense of Jon's reality while a student in the graduate teacher education program. A clear distinction exists between Xavier, LB, and Jon and their fight to address neutrality, colorblindness, and objectivity from the perspective of CRT. I suggest that Jon avoids issues of race altogether so his narrative poses an opposite viewpoint to Xavier's more aggressive racialized reality.

I assessed the narratives of Xavier, LB, and Jon and was reminded of Gotanda's (1995) colorblind association and interpretive power the Constitution has over many Americans. Using Gotanda's (1995) formal-race operation which describes socially constructed ideals of race as "black and white are seen as neutral, apolitical descriptions, reflecting merely "skin color" or region of ancestral origin" (p. 257). Furthermore, Gotanda (1995) writes, "This "unconnectedness" is the defining characteristic of formal-race and no other usage of "race" incorporates the concept" (p. 257). A careful review of Jon's narrative supports the writings of Gotanda (1995). Gotanda (1995) continues, "Formal-race unconnectedness is linked to a particular conceptualization of racism. Race, as formal-race, is seen as an attribute of individuality unrelated to social relations" (p. 265). It is my belief that Jon uses a colorblind approach to the totality of his experiences in the graduate teacher education program. Jon presents himself as a very unconnected to the circumstances and phenomena of being an African American male in the graduate teacher education program. Jon neutralizes himself and renders his experiences as colorblind when he experiences events that are singular in nature and unattached to his well-being in the graduate teacher education program.

### **3. Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law... Critical race theorists adopt a stance that presumes that**

**racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.**

**4. Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression.**

I included both of these themes of CRT because they are uniquely intertwined and my research participants' narratives reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing both themes together. I must also add that some of the narratives were addressed earlier in this research investigation. The narratives reflect altogether themes that can be addressed in a number of ways and to simply assign these narratives to one form of analysis or assessment would be limiting. Xavier and I talked about a classmate's presentation of George Washington during our second interview and how Washington's slave ownership should have been included as part of the lesson plan presentation. We continued talking about Xavier's classroom experiences and I asked about how his professors were introducing this type of material in class and how his classmates were responding to the professors and Xavier responded by sharing with me his apprehension towards his fellow prospective social studies teachers. Xavier felt that some his classmates were not genuinely interested in the idea of democracy but seemed more interested in graduation than asking questions. As part of our last interview, I asked Xavier to respond to the impact of race, racism, and gender had on his experiences while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program. Xavier answered my initial question and I asked Xavier to elaborate. From a critical race theorist perspective Xavier exemplifies a belief that racism has contributed to the advantage of European Americans in the United States. Additionally, the contemporary advantage of European Americans as part of Xavier's experience in the graduate teacher education program was evident in what appears to be an adversarial manner. I do not believe Xavier viewed European Americans in his graduate teacher education program as enemies but their actions marginalized his existence and silenced his voice throughout his enrollment in the graduate teacher education program. As a result, Xavier did not have a positive experience while enrolled

in the graduate teacher education program.

As part of the data collection of this research inquiry I collected my research participants' journals and in doing so I want to include a journal response submitted by LB between our second and third interview sessions. LB wrote:

*This week we discussed cultural differences between black students and many of their European-American teachers in our 7540 class. What stood out to me was how many of the white students in class understood that differences existed but not what they were. They actually seemed eager to know what they were before we begin our practicum in two weeks from today. But the discussion turned to the class articles' lack of coverage of other cultural differences of other ethnic groups. This was when it dawned on me that in the graduate teacher education program [social studies], I know of no students from other backgrounds, not even Hispanic. No classmate has been Asian, Polynesian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, or even continent born African. Every classmate from one of those backgrounds is in another subject of the graduate teacher education program, like math or the sciences. It made me wonder if the stereotypes of non-Americans gravitating to math and sciences are stereotypes based in truths or are they truths because they are believed by non-Americans themselves to begin with.*

Xavier and LB have again formed the narratives that are addressed in this inquiry. Jon's narrative is void of stories that connect him to many of the tenants of CRT or facets of race and racism that are more easily attached to both Xavier and LB. In regard to CRT tenants number three and four, I believe racism is the adhesive that binds these two concepts. The manifestation of racism and its elimination were made apparent in the counter-storytelling of Xavier and LB as part of their experiences and existence in the graduate teacher education program. In that regard, the counter-stories of Xavier and LB can be questioned by the reader but more importantly, the existence of

racism must be analyzed more carefully in the context of this inquiry. I am formally choosing racism instead of the ideal of race because racism is an actual phenomenon many people experience. I take into account how people experience racism and those who have not. In the context of this inquiry, I do believe Xavier experienced racism and to a certain extent LB did as well. However, I do believe that some have never experienced racism and there are individuals much like Jon who may have experienced racism but do not give credence to being the victim of racist acts. As a result, I do not address the social construct of race by itself, but the resulting outcome of some act or action of dominance by one group of people over another. Therefore, the racism that permeates the counter-story of Xavier and at times LB was the othering and marginalization that impacted the experiences of Xavier and LB in the graduate teacher education program (Lynn & Parker, 2006). I am reminded of the overt and covert forms of racism that pervade the text and their racial connections to group advantage and disadvantages of racist behaviors (Scheurich & Young, 1997). The intention of critical race theorists and scholars is to eliminate racism (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Finally, institutional racism Scheurich & Young (1993) define to mean known or unknown actions by dominant institutions hurt members of other races. Upon further review, the institutional forces at work in educational settings either seen or unseen are representative of one of our most recognized spaces (Gillborn, 2006). CRT helps to locate and identify certain institutional racist forces in educational settings that are at work when dominant legal claims are lacking (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Pellar, & Thomas, 1995). As DeCuir and Dixson (2004) note the insidious ways racism pervades our educational settings we are assisted in fighting this form of racism through the use of counter-stories that can help shine a more discerning light on racism.

I believe it is interesting to note how Xavier did not provide a narrative that associated his professors as representative of institutional racism. I am reminded of Xavier's experiences in the

graduate teacher education program as microaggressions and overt acts of racism perpetrated by a select few individuals in the program who did not necessarily represent the university as an actual employee. However, the professors in the graduate teacher education program do represent minority groups and individually may have experienced institutional racism in some capacity.

Conversely, the journal account provided by LB about his upcoming practicum highlight an action one might consider to be institutional racism. The placement of LB in a middle school because he is African American and the students of the school are predominately African American might be viewed as an act of institutional racism perpetrated by Dr. L even though I do not believe her actions can be identified as such. I believe it is to their credit these professors are liberal and seen as militant by their students as fighters of marginalization and silence. Additionally, the unknown actions of institutional racism are prevalent in the graduate teacher education program. The lesson plans presented by some students act as examples of some students in the graduate teacher education program who do represent institutional racism at work in classrooms.

##### **5. Critical race theory insists on a recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin analyzing law and society.**

Xavier's narrative helps address another point in this inquiry. However, Xavier's counter-story highlights his experience in the graduate teacher education program. Much like the narratives all of my research participants provided, the stories are conveyed to me as counter-stories and the narratives of Xavier and LB acknowledge their experiences and my recognition of their journey through the graduate teacher education program. In one of our earlier interviews, Xavier and I discussed the role many African American men may have felt in higher education and I asked Xavier if he felt like he was representing the entire African American race

while enrolled in the graduate teacher education program and Xavier responded in a manner I quickly associated with the pressures of being the only voice of the African American community in many educational settings. I highlighted this action to be the spokesperson pressure attached to Xavier's narrative. Many African American men in higher education are familiar with this action and can readily agree with Xavier's assessment. In our last interview together, Xavier and I also discussed his feelings of detachment based on his feelings towards his cohorts or if he had a detachment with his professors in the program and Xavier acknowledged his detachment was totally dependent on the actions of his classmates. As I stated earlier, Xavier did not believe his professors were the problem and his feelings of being an outsider were associated with his differing viewpoints not shared by his classmates.

During our second interview LB and I began to discuss the changes he would want to occur in the graduate teacher education program and LB said:

*Yes, I want to teach people what America, I want to teach children what America really needs and I make no bones about this. It's been said in class, I've said this in class and so have some others; American values, they consist of good and bad values like everyone's but I want to tell kids that the America we know is here today because of its insistence and its success at getting something for nothing. Getting labor for nothing, getting land for nothing, I want a lot of Caucasian students to understand how they've been victimized by white supremacist teachings.*

In earlier sections I have referenced the importance of narratives and specifically, the narratives of African American male preservice teachers. One sharp and piercing characteristic of CRT is its reliance on storytelling to accurately address the experiences of people of color. In the context of this work, the narratives of Xavier, LB and Jon form what many may consider to be counter-stories that help crystalize the ways in which race and racism may be working



institutionally and socially during my research participants' journeys through the graduate teacher education program (Scheurich and Young, 1997, Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Baszile, 2008). To review, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) simply define counter-story as "A method of telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told. The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 32). As Baszile (2008) noted, qualitative investigations concerning preservice teachers of color have been limited and shortsighted. Following Solorzano and Yosso's (2002) lead, Xavier more than LB and Jon presented a counter-story exposing effects of racial privilege he encountered during his existence in the graduate teacher education program.

In my assessment using the premise of CRT as a guide, both LB and Jon are color-blind and neutral concerning their existence and experiences in the program when compared to Xavier. However, this assessment does not and should not limit their story in any way. I have come to the realization that Jon's narrative is not a counter-story as defined by Solorzano and Yosso (2002). To that extent, I am compelled to offer the counter-stories of Xavier and in a limited sense LB's counter-story to help expose issues of race and racism in the graduate teacher education program. I agree with Solorzano and Yosso (2002) when they contend that counter-storytelling is steeped in "real life experiences and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations" (p. 36).

### **Jon (Again)**

I carefully reviewed Jon's narratives and was rather despondent with the lack of information that might help support the stories and counter-stories of Xavier and LB. However, Jon's narrative provided a different perspective to the racialized existence and experiences of Xavier and LB. I pointed out Jon's neutralized and color-blind existence in the graduate teacher

education program and I concluded the following. Jon's narrative supports the claim that I have inserted throughout this investigation. Jon was simply naming his reality and his reality was one where counter-stories did not apply, his experiential knowledge did not lend itself to representing many experiences of people of color, and his experiences did not lend themselves to eliminating racial oppression. I hope the reader acknowledges Jon's invisibility concerning this text but also understands Jon's visible experiences as his own and respects his reality. I must provide an analysis of Jon's experience. I acknowledge Jon's visible experiences as his own but I cannot seem to understand how Jon successfully existed in this environment. Jon did not tell me stories of how he negotiated his refusal to accept racism as part of the graduate teacher education program but I am inclined to believe Jon's refusal may have been a coping mechanism designed to allow Jon to complete his necessary requirements without being interconnected or interdependent upon people or matters associated with the graduate teacher education program. I cannot pinpoint Jon's refusal to accept his racialized reality and in doing so I have to acknowledge Jon's teaching position. Jon is a provisionally certified special education teacher and maybe this existence weighed heavily on Jon's experiences within and outside of the graduate teacher education program. I have to accept the fact that I did not question his role as a provisionally certified teacher as much as I did his role as student enrolled in the graduate teacher education program. I believe this missing element may have contributed to my overall analysis of Jon. In the final analysis, Jon reminds me of the house slave who declares he is sick only after hearing of his master's sickness.

### **A Racial Conclusion**

This research investigation is not an in-depth investigation into the matters of race and racism but I must acknowledge the existence of these factors as influential characteristics that

help define this research inquiry. With that in mind, I must situate this research investigation in its proper place as one that is hampered to some degree by the unwillingness to speak out against race and racism and one that is uplifted by the use of voice as a way to fight against marginalization. However, I also know the power of voice and Land (2005) helps to reiterate this when he writes, “Narratives provide the necessary background for understanding, feeling, and interpretation” (pp.107).

Using voice to fight all forms racism itself or rendering one powerless to fight racism because of self-silencing as a result of the group dynamics of the graduate teacher education program, my research participants reacted to racist actions, events, and sayings in their individual ways. I want to further the conversation on race and its effects in education using my research study as a guide to address voice and race in educational research. Macedo (1994) informs us that voice is different and to a certain degree voice is historical because African Americans have suffered through acts of marginalization and discrimination. A pervading belief in a “culture of silence” became the end result and a false sense of commonality when in truth it fostered cultural differences among African Americans. My singular attraction to voice in this research investigation is its very strong attachment to providing the researcher and participant with a way to define our own reality. The shared experience of the setting and educational experiences are linked by our voices. This attachment to and acceptance of voice assists me to challenge traditional and hegemonic viewpoints associated with the scholarly investigations of the educational experiences of African American men.

One study I point out is Milner’s (2010) use of racialized narratives to help alleviate pressure associated with resistance and separation among students where race and racism are involved in teacher education courses. Conditionally, Milner’s (2010) work also acknowledges the use of student narratives enrolled in teacher education programs but Milner deviates from the usual course and focuses his presence as an African American male teacher educator. Why is

this important? If we view the work of Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005) and take a brief inquiry into the history of racism in higher education in the United States and the exclusion of various minority groups, all have suffered from being excluded from the schooling experience. Starting in 1967, the percentage of African American students enrolled in degree granting institutions rose from 13.0% to 30.5% in the year 2000 (Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot, 2005). We see significant gains for African Americans in higher education. Yet one may use my research investigation as a microscopic example, it is clear that many issues still affect the African American community especially African American men enrolled in programs of higher education.

While voice became such a significant characteristic of this research inquiry, so did the attempt to understand race and all its various implications for teacher education. To some extent, I tried not to let race become the guiding principal of this research inquiry, but there were times when I could not avoid the perception or reality of race as a factor that possibly controlled the actions of my research participants and myself. I tried to let the work of Lieberman, Stevenson, and Reynolds (1989) influence me when they proposed that race as a concept is no longer supported by the majority of anthropologists. Then I am shaken back to reality when I am forced to answer the question posed by Jones (2005) who asks “what is race?” and by his own confession Jones does not understand what race is, and I am at times similarly perplexed by this question. Jones (2005) posits that race has no biological basis but if race were to be removed than the oppressions associated with race would be limitless. We see race as a socio-cultural and historical reality, one where economic and political power sometimes define the concept of race outside of a scientific reality where the idea of race is a reality (Jones, 2005). To remain neutral at this point for me would be to cower or hide behind the tenants of critical race theory I support. As a critical race theorist it is hard for me not to assume the advantages of race could be hidden in our realities and left unchecked could obstruct challenges to ahistorical and neutral views on

race.

Finally, connecting race to the final research question, I use Laird and Niskode-Dossett 's (2010) studies of the effects of interactions on student perceptions of the campus environment and how this effect varies by race/ethnicity and gender. The definition of campus environment uses various definitions, but for my own research investigation, Laird and Niskode-Dossett 's (2010) approach the campus environment means a student's perceptions of relationships with others and how the attending university supports curricula and non-curricular activities. The most prominent data offered by Laird and Niskode-Dossett (2010) was attributed to African American students who rated instructional support as high but supportive relationships as low. These findings help to support and highlight the racial overtones associated with avoidance and microaggressions my research participants witnessed and felt.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Who Cares? What Have We Learned?**

The current scholarship on incorporating and developing narratives of preservice African American male social studies teachers enrolled in a graduate teacher education program is almost non-existent. The narratives of the three research participants are uniquely their own and very dissimilar. Their stories suggest that the notion that the African American experience in higher education is one and the same for all should be reconsidered. From the narratives, the following major themes emerged and have to be accounted for:

1. The existence of microaggressions and how they are perceived by the research participants.
2. The characteristic of avoidance and how two out of the three research participants avoided the issue of race and racism as a permeating force in the graduate teacher education program.
3. Each research participants' idea about pedagogy and how the graduate teacher education program may have changed their pedagogical practice in their teaching futures.
4. The spokesperson pressure to live up to unlikely expectations or live down to a societal expectation and how this affected the research participants.
5. The final emergent theme was identified through the various divergent responses each research participant gave as a result of their experience in the graduate teacher education program. Each research participant experienced the same graduate teacher education program in three very different ways.

## **Implications**

The results of this study help to acknowledge some of the existing concerns in graduate teacher education programs. Common implications arise for teacher education programs, prospective African American male social studies teachers, and others involved in the field of educational research. I also want to address possible policy decisions that may be enacted in response to the narratives and emergent themes expressed by my research participants. The bulleted points listed represent implications for teacher education programs, preservice African American male teachers, and educational research. The bulleted points are derived from the research participants' narratives. Careful review of the narratives is required to help the reader interpret for themselves the meaning and understanding of each bulleted point.

### **Implications for Practice: Teacher Education Programs**

Teacher education programs would be wise to conduct an extensive interview process of prospective students interested in joining their graduate teacher education programs. I think if faculty had the allotted time to interview candidates such as Xavier, Jon, and LB the admittance of students not interested in fostering a community atmosphere could be addressed. I also think issues of race and racism might be identified as faculty might be able exclude those students who are overt and covert racist. I also believe that faculty might be able to stifle the silence that disparage their classrooms by getting to know their students better.

Teacher education programs should foster a working relationship with the middle and high schools they assign prospective teachers to as a way to allow prospective teachers to get a feel for their practicum environment and try to get a better understanding of what is expected of

the student-teacher once out in the field. Listening to LB provide a tale of fear based on his upcoming practicum assignment should help teacher educators identify some of the pressures associated with being assigned to certain schools. Additionally, teacher educators should be wary of placing prospective student-teachers in middle or high schools based on race. This can be seen as institutional racism and these racist actions may limit the potential of the student-teacher.

- Require instructional planning and implementation of cultural competency teaching methods for university faculty to assist in teaching students of color.
- Require faculty attendance in classes designed to further understanding of overt, covert, and institutional forms of racism that may hinder learning for students of color.
- Require university faculty or field placement coordinators to interview middle and high school teachers who plan to mentor the graduate teacher education students.

### **Implications for Practice: Preservice African American Male Social Studies Teachers**

The preservice African American male social studies teacher must feel like his voice is one to be reckoned with in the classroom environment. The preservice African American male social studies teacher cannot allow others to speak for him or her and their voices cannot be silenced by others who mutes the preservice African American male social studies teacher's voice through actions the preservice African American male social studies teacher does not recognize. Microaggressions along with overt and institutional racism all seem to wreak havoc on the success of the preservice African American male social studies teacher.

Preservice African American social studies teachers should take an active role in learning



pedagogical practices that do not limit their ability to connect to themselves culturally and may make it easier for them to teach students of color in their classrooms. However, for many preservice teachers to learn culturally relevant pedagogies or critical race pedagogies these pedagogies must be enacted in the classroom by willing faculty who believe these practices work.

The preservice African American social studies teacher must be presented with activities that foster a communal sense of success. These communal activities should not be limited to the classroom group work assigned by faculty but practicum experiences where students of color feel a bond with other student-teachers of color from their graduate teacher education program.

- Require faculty solely responsible for the teaching of students in graduate teacher education programs to be well versed in and teach from culturally relevant pedagogies and practices that best support students of color.
- Faculty responsible for the teaching of students enrolled in graduate teacher education programs must be willing to allow preservice students to feel empowered to respond to racist presentations without threat of repercussions.
- Preservice social studies teachers must take an active role in their educational journey. Classes and practicum experiences must be made meaningful by the African American male preservice social studies teacher. The African American male preservice social studies teacher must be willing to fight racist behavior whenever and wherever it appears.

### **Implications for Practice: Involvement in Educational Research**

Educational research tied to the experiences of prospective African American male social studies teachers is very limited at this very moment. I will not go so far as to declare this work to

be groundbreaking but I have found no other work that specifically investigates the experiences of three African American males who sought to complete a master's degree and become teacher certified. The educational research defined in this research investigation is not part of the stories of success and resiliency one might expect but of anguish and disappointment. A further investigation into the teaching lives of Xavier, Jon, and LB at some point in the future might make this current research investigation a story of success and resiliency. Lastly, all future educational research tied to the experiences of preservice African American male social studies teachers seems totally dependent on more individuals willing to enter the teaching profession. There has to be a push by lawmakers, social studies administrators, teacher educators, and current in-field teachers to promote the teaching profession as a possible career choice for many African American males.

- University administrators must be willing to end overt, covert, and institutional racism as it currently appears on university campuses across the country.
- University administrators must have meaningful consequences for faculty and students who participate in racist activities that marginalize and silence all students.
- Researchers of color must be willing to trouble the existing underrepresentation of all students of color in higher education. Researchers of color must also challenge current colorblind educational policies, microaggressions, and stereotype threats ubiquitous to many college and university campuses.

### **Conclusion**

I would be remiss if I did not address race in some context. I do recognize the value of

race and the social and theoretical construction it provides for inquiry and analysis. I am also wary of the way race is individually perceived. Race is part of one's ability to name their own reality. The specter in which race permeates most societal structures requires one to only act when one knows the outcome of their participation. In many matters of race, limited action and uncertain outcomes limit our involvement. In broad terms, the issue of race cannot be confined to this text. I am cognizant of the role culture and learning may play in this investigation but I cannot presently delve into the multiple intersections of culture, learning, race and schooling that my research participants may have crossed to deliver their narratives and counter-stories (Nasir & Hand, 2006). The social construction of race has always been a social experience. I do not believe that race may be continually seen as an irrelevant condition in America (Hall, 2005) but a condition that is illuminated more frequently through narratives and counter-stories about race in our institutions. Tate (1999) presents a challenge for educational researchers using the tenants of CRT to highlight race and education. Tate (1999) recognizes the use of a correlation of interpretation and this perspective allows the critical race theorist to attempt to view race as a connecting phenomenon to other viewpoints and positions. Past and not so distant contexts of race and education are viewed as integrated parts that allow the critical race theorists to interpret the multiple sides that race and education can impact on other human endeavors.

The data collected during this qualitative study and my firsthand knowledge of being an African American male social studies teacher who matriculated through this same graduate teacher education program years earlier helped me come to the conclusion that there is a need to understand the underrepresentation of African American males in education. This researcher highlights a few of the existing challenges educators face specifically, African American male prospective social studies teachers, and those who engage in educational research endeavors.

I refuse to draw firm conclusions about any of my research participants' lives and learning because they are on-going. I only hope that I delivered their narratives in a manner that

will allow their voices to be heard. My intentions were to bring their narratives to life by not hanging the organic nature of their actions, feelings, and thoughts through the written word.

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