

Institute for Clinical Social Work

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL EFFECTS OF NOT FEELING  
BLACK ENOUGH

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## ABSTRACT

The subjects of this study were African-Americans, raised in a middle class culture, with middle-class preferences for education, grooming, dress, entertainment, recreation, and the use of Standard English., they were educated with non-middle class, urban, African-Americans who criticized them for their middle class cultural orientation. In search of a more Afro-centric ethnic identity and to gain the social acceptance of their urban peers, they attempted to adopt urban cultural characteristics, including manner of speech, grooming, dress, entertainment, and even criminal behavior. Generally, these tactics were not successful and the subjects became objects of social rejection

These psychological assaults hindered normal healthy development of an identity, and limited their choices in social relationships and other self-actualizing activities during their grade school years. Although some subjects had positive post-secondary experiences, all are haunted by bitter memories of adolescent encounters with urban Blacks. Those memories affect their sense of well being as well in their social relationships with African-Americans of both genders.

Data were collected during 20 individual and two focus group interviews. The methodology used was primarily Denzin's model of qualitative research with the emphasis on "thick descriptions" of the subjects' experiences. The focus of the interviews was on the nature and circumstances of the criticism, coping mechanisms employed by the subjects, and the impact of the criticism on the mental health and behaviors of the subjects, both at the time—during adolescence—and subsequently.

For LeGronde, Jason, and Steffanie

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Last but not least, I would extend my gratitude to my subjects for openly and honestly sharing their heartfelt and painful experiences. It is my hope that their revelations will give helping professions the tools to prevent or ease the painful social interactions that affected their lives.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“You ain’t Black enough!” That accusation, coming from others of their race, haunts some middle-class African-Americans often into their adulthood. The purpose of this study is to document and examine the psychological and sociological effects of the accusation and explore its implications for social work clinical practice. The subjects of this study are African-Americans who were raised in a middle-class White environment or attended a predominantly middle-class White school environment, and because of their adherence to the values of their community, were criticized by their ethnic age peers. The study will follow Denzin’s interpretative interaction method in gathering, recording, and analyzing qualitative research data. According to Denzin’s model, every researcher brings preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied. The researcher should relate to the subject of her study by telling her own story and stating the reason that she has chosen the research project. Fairness dictates that these reasons be stated clearly at the outset rather than hidden behind guise of objectivity. “Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and the self of the researcher. The events and troubles that are written about are ones that the researcher has already experienced or witnessed firsthand” (Denzin, 1989, p. 12).

Accordingly, this study will begin with an account of my own experiences of being challenged to conform to the expectations of my ethnic peers. These experiences allowed me to identify with my subjects who were also criticized by members of their own ethnic group. In developing this study, I will relate my personal experiences, discuss other influences that stirred my interest in this topic and describe applicable theories of ethnic identity development along with their shortcomings in explaining the experiences of the subjects of this research. The accusation of “not being Black enough” touched me as a parent, a clinician, and as an African-American person. Based on my own personal experience, I believe that this accusation evokes a great deal of stress and insecurity in individuals who are the objects of this criticism.

Denzin notes that every researcher brings preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied. The issue I have chosen to write about touches me, personally, as well as the lives of many African-Americans. Originally, I believe it was my son and a few clients who stirred my interest in this topic. After a closer examination, I recalled my own experiences of being judged by others of my ethnic background. What follows is an account of those experiences.

### Researcher’s Perspective

My first professional employment after graduating with a Bachelor of Science Degree was as an entry-level social worker at an agency that supervised foster care and adopted children. The agency employed 34 social workers; six were African-American. I was placed in a unit with five White social workers and was proud of my job.

I clearly remember events that made me feel that I did not fit fully with the African-American co-workers or with the White co-workers. For example, one day I went to the room where all workers congregated for a coffee break. Being the first to enter the room, I sat at a long table as I waited for my co-workers to join me. Two African-American clerical workers and two African-American social workers entered the room and informed me that, “*We* don’t sit at that table. The social workers sit there and *we* sit over here.” I felt disappointed and confused. They knew that I was a social worker. I wondered why social workers did not sit together. A few minutes later, the other social workers entered the room. The White social workers sat at the long table; I sat with the African-American social workers and African-American clerical staff. Although I wanted to be seen as a social worker, I did not have the courage to speak up. I did not want to make enemies of my African-American peers. This was my first day on the job and I wanted to become better acquainted with my surroundings before asserting myself.

The next day I went on break with the White people from my unit and sat at the social workers’ table. I enjoyed the atmosphere. We discussed political and social issues, as well as developments in their casework. I felt welcomed by the social workers and wondered why the other African-American social workers weren’t there. I wondered what they knew that I didn’t know. I feared I was being viewed by the African-American social workers as a traitor or an “Aunt Thomasina.” Because of these concerns, I felt ambivalent about being in the company of White workers. At the same time, I was determined not to allow others to dictate my behavior.

Sometimes I chose to sit at the small table. I now wonder if it was truly by choice. I enjoyed conversing with my African-American co-workers. We discussed men (all the

African-Americans were females), family life, and racism. It was clear to them that the White staff was not to be trusted, not because of anything that had occurred in the agency, but because of what *could* occur. The African-Americans were responding to the history of racism and felt they were protecting themselves from abuse by keeping their distance.

During my first days at the agency, co-workers from my unit were in the field and I was left alone during the lunch hour. I noticed several African-Americans going to lunch together. They waved a friendly goodbye to me as they left the office. Upon their return, I was at the same place and again, they greeted me. When the workers from my unit came in from their fieldwork, they asked what I did for lunch. I told them that I don't like to eat alone so I had not eaten lunch. The next day, the workers from my unit came back to the office to go to lunch with me. I felt grateful and quickly bonded with them.

As I became more familiar with the agency and began to feel comfortable, I interacted with both African-Americans and the White social workers. I sat at the White social workers' table during the break, but would lunch with both groups. I was the only person who moved between the two groups. As the African-Americans became comfortable with me, they questioned my relationship with the White social workers. They could not give me any reason to not trust the White workers, other than the color of their skin.

Later I participated in social events with both groups after working hours. I went to the homes of the African-American workers where we played cards and shared family stories. Their mistrust of White workers never waned. They cautioned me to keep my eyes open because it could come any day. "It" was the betrayal of which I was being

warned. Socializing with the White co-workers consisted of visiting each other's homes for dinners and parties with our spouses. We shared family history and current marital issues. I gained first-hand experience and knowledge about activities that were new to me, such as overnight camping and boat trips. We debated political issues, social reform, and women's rights. We openly discussed financial issues, encouraged each other to invest in property, helped each other move into our first homes, and gave advice and support related to fertility and pregnancy issues. I felt close to several members of that group and remained friends with them for almost 20 years.

To encourage the other African-Americans social workers to become actively engaged with their White co-workers, I shared information about agency resources that could help them better serve our clients. I wanted them to know what they could gain by interacting with their White colleagues. African-Americans used what I had told them to accuse White co-workers of withholding information from them and said I had provided the proof they needed to confirm their distrust of Whites.

On one occasion, I gave a party and invited all my friends and co-workers, African-Americans and Whites. One of my African-American guests approached me and asked why I had "all these White people" at my house. I told him, "They are my friends and were invited." He said, "Baby, you are not Black enough." I responded, "You don't define my Blackness." I thought I had dismissed the incident, but his remarks stayed with me for years. I later realized that I wanted African-Americans to approve of my relationship with White people. Other African-American friends attending the party, both in and out of the agency, also questioned my relationship with White people. One friend, who often shared personal stories with her White co-worker, said that she would never

invite them into her home. Even my friend, who dated a White man, questioned my motive for inviting Whites to my party. Despite these comments, the party was a success. Everyone intermingled, conversed, ate, danced together and admitted they had enjoyed themselves. However, the attitude of other African-Americans stuck with me. I felt caught between the two groups.

In spite of the success of the event, I was left with confusing thoughts. I wondered why I was different. Why didn't I behave like other African-Americans and keep White people at a distance? Maybe it was because nothing bad had ever happened to me as a result of my relationship with Whites. That is not to say that I had not experienced or perceived racism. There were jobs for which I was qualified and not selected. I remember many times the retail clerks would overlook me and attempt to serve a White customer before me. In spite of these incidents, I had no need to hold all White people responsible for them.

On the outside, I looked like a woman going my own way; internally, I was in emotional pain. There must have been a small part of me that thought the African-American workers were correct in their assessments and that, eventually, White co-workers would eventually reject me. If that happened I feared not having anyone for support me. As I worried about my image with African-Americans, I continued to enjoy relationships with my White peers.

There came a time when the pressure was more internal than external. My African-American co-workers no longer questioned my behavior; they appeared to accept my dual relationships. Nevertheless, I questioned my own motives. I had to justify to myself my desire to socialize with White people. Although my behavior was natural, I felt self-

conscious. Conflicting images invaded my thoughts. On the one hand, there was the visible separation of the agency workers. On the other, I had examples of integrated activities of my family members. I looked at my siblings and their involvement with White people. My oldest sister had been living in Europe for 12 years. Prior to that, she attended a college that was approximately 15 % African-American. She was the only African-American member of the school newspaper staff and often brought White staff members home to work on the paper and for dinner. My middle sister brought White friends home and visited their homes. Growing up, my mother forbade us to use racial slurs against Blacks or Whites. She often said, "People are people, White people are no better or worse, they are just people." Neither of my parents said very much about racism except. "You are just as good as Whites; always look them in the eye when you talk to them; never hang your head because they will think you are ashamed. You have nothing to be ashamed about." This was the way I understood and justified my relationships with White people.

In discussing this issue with various African-American friends (not co-workers), they all conceded that my approach to the race issue was fine. They admitted that they, too, enjoyed socializing with my friends who happened to be White. They applauded me for taking the stance that I did and encouraged me to keep being the person that I am. Eventually, they accepted me for who I am and stopped trying to change me. However, these talks did not change their own attitudes or behaviors toward Whites. One co-worker told me I was naive and that life would teach me what they had not been able to teach me about Whites.

I suppressed any outward manifestations that such criticisms bothered me. After a couple of years no one verbally criticized my behavior, but occasionally I found myself wondering what others thought about my relationship with White people. My behavior has not changed as I continue to socialize with and befriend Whites. I refused to allow my ethnic peers to dictate my behavior.

The other reasons I found myself interested in this phenomenon had to do with my children and clients. My interest intensified after learning that my son also felt uncertainties about his ethnic identity when he was confronted by other African-American youth. He was accused of acting, dressing, and talking White. My 10-year-old daughter also had similar experiences. One day, she came home from school upset because a teacher asked her to get on the bus. I asked why the teacher asked her the question since she was walked to and from school. She explained that the teacher thought she was one of “them, a deseg kid.” (Deseg, a colloquialism for a public school desegregation program, is the label given to children who were bussed to suburban schools from the inner city.) My daughter was visibly upset by the mistake. I explained that she was one of “them;” we just happen to live in a different area, but she was African-American, just as they were. I later realized why my daughter was upset. She did not want to be mistaken for a child from the city. I had learned from White counselors that White teachers misunderstood and therefore mistreated African-American students who had been bussed in from the city. I believed my daughter had observed this mistreatment and feared she would be treated like the inner city students.

Another experience that influenced my interest in this study involved my clinical practice. A young client expressed dire concerns about her ethnic identity. She voiced

apprehension about “not being Black enough.” She felt different from other African-Americans and was labeled a “county brownie” who was trying to be White. Another youth from my practice struggling with this issue stated that he did not fit in with other Blacks. He said he knew he wasn’t White, but he didn’t feel Black either. He didn’t know where he belonged. He was embarrassed to admit that he felt more comfortable with White peers from his neighborhood than the Black students who were bussed to his school from the inner city. This was an unacceptable feeling that caused him to feel ashamed. These expressions of concern were typical of those described by several young clients.

In summary, my own experiences related to conflicts about ethnic identity provides me, the researcher, with the background necessary to conduct the interpretative analysis described in Denzin’s qualitative research model. I discovered that my personal experience with this issue is paralleled in many ways to those of the subjects of this study.

### History of the Problem

This phenomenon is not a new issue for society in United States. W. E. B. DuBois, an African-American born in 1868, addressed this problem in his early adolescence after being reared in a community where there were no other Black families. Until adolescence he was not race conscious. He felt accepted by his community as a part of the human race. He interacted freely with his neighbors, attending school and social events including dinning at the homes of his peers. Little attention was paid to his ethnic difference until adolescence. At that time he became aware that he was no longer included in social

gatherings, as the festivities became gender mixed. It was at this point that he became aware of the struggle African-Americans experienced while trying to balance being “Black” on one hand and “American” on the other (Manning, 1993). In the search for his racial identity he went south to attend a Black college.

In his book, *Souls of the Black Folk* (1903), DuBois wrote about the difficulty Black people experienced in America. One of the coping mechanisms African-Americans developed was to wear a mask while interacting with the White majority. Blacks felt they had to hide their true feelings and present a face that was expected of them to the White public in order to survive. Only in their own community could they feel safe being themselves. DuBois (1903) referred to this phenomenon as having to wear a dual mask. African-Americans were expected to assimilate to the culture of mainstream society, but were not allowed full participation in that society. They were expected to be peripheral participants.

Since the African-American community is not a homogeneous population, there is not just one way to understand African-Americans or to represent or explain all African-Americans' points of views. Although African-Americans tend to have certain characteristics in common, such as physical features, there is considerable cultural diversity in the African-American community. There are strong forces within the African-American community that attempt to preserve ethnic identity as a way to combat oppressive forces. Some African-Americans believe that the way to fight racism is to maintain a united front. For some this means that African-Americans should live close together in adjoining neighborhoods, act alike, dress alike, think alike and talk alike. This belief system does not allow room for individuality and growth.

As in any society, African-Americans are stratified. Stratification can be found in relation to class status, education, religion, and politics. Conflicts arise when the goal of a unified front does allow for differences due to normal stratification. Stereotypical, but invalid views of what it means to be Black have caused internal conflicts among middle-class African-Americans who seek an ethnic identity within a class structure that is not considered Black by other segments of the African-American community. As in all groups, class divisions have had impact on segments of the African-American people. This is especially true of the middle-class African-Americans.

These ambivalent feelings about one's ethnic identity stimulated my desire to understand the psychological and social impact of the ethnic peer criticism, "You are not Black enough," of middle-class African-American youth. I wanted to know how this rejection affected one's self-esteem, ethnic identity, and social interactions. Also, I wanted to explore the clinical social work implications when treating African-Americans who have complaints related to social class and/or ethnic identity. My interest was intensified when I realized that these racial identity theories did not address the subjects of this study. These theories tend to describe Blacks beginning from a point of self hatred and moving through several stages as they become more aware of their Black heritage. They are able to disregard negative input from the larger society, and take in positive input from role models within their group.

The participants in this study do not conform to that those theoretical models. Some of them tend to have middle-class values and positive self-images until they come to contact with members of their own ethnic group who denigrate those values and adhere to different values that define their ethnic identity. This peer criticism, rather than

negative input from the larger (White) society, was the cause of the identity crisis and negative feelings of the subjects of this study. Therefore, from theoretical and practical viewpoints, this is a problem worthy of investigation.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine if criticism of suburban-ethnic orientation directed at middle-class African-Americans by members of their own ethnic group has implications for clinical social work practice. Specifically, this research has attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How are middle-class African-Americans, raised in predominantly White suburbs, affected by the criticism of their language and values by urban peers?
2. How does the criticism influence the self-experience and social functioning of the objects of that criticism?
3. What, if any, are the implications of this criticism for clinical social work practice?
4. Is the phenomenon of “same-race” criticism of the study’s subjects and the effects of that criticism accounted for in theories of Black identity development?
5. If the phenomenon of “same-race” criticism of the subject population of African-Americans and its effects is not accounted for in theories of Black identity development, what are the implications of the findings of this study for identity development theory?

### Relevance to the Field

The relevance of this issue lies in the internal conflict that these young people encounter. During adolescence it is crucial to fit in and gain the approval of one's group. Minority students who acculturate to the values and customs of the larger society are likely to be ostracized by members of their own group who make it a point to denigrate those same values and attitudes. (Values include the speech, how one speaks. Suburban Blacks tend to speak like their suburban White neighbors.) Not feeling "Black enough" or to be rejected by one's own group causes internal strife. One part of the self is in direct conflict with other parts, this stems from the reality of the world in which the young person lives. Intellectually, the youth knows his ethnic identity but external forces are giving him messages to the contrary. The youth becomes confused; he knows that he is Black but feels confused by the mixed messages coming from the inner city African-Americans. This situation can be seen in other minority groups whether it's based on ethnicity, sexual or religious orientation. Other minorities have reported having their identity dictated to them by some one else.

The problem stated above has its roots in two historical forces. The first issue is the effort of African-Americans to establish a racial/ethnic identity separate from so-called mainstream or middle-class values. The movement was prompted by White racism—prevalent before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s—that deprived African-Americans of the economic wherewithal and/or social access necessary to move into the middle-class or to have realistic aspirations consistent with the values commonly associated with the middle-class. *A Raisin in the Sun* is a literary example of the conflict middle-class African-American families experienced buying a home in a middle-class

White neighborhood in the 1950s. The second root of the problem is the increased upward mobility, social and economic stratification, and access to middle-class society that occurred during and after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This mobility allowed some African-Americans to embrace and accept White middle-class values and incorporate them into their identities. These two historical forces flowed through African-American society with conflicting ideals, values, and definitions of what it means to be African-American or Black. When the youthful adherents of these different concepts of “Blackness” met in forcibly integrated White suburban, middle-class schools during the period of 1960s through the 1990s, cultural conflict between middle-class, suburban African-American and lower-class urban African-American dwellers was experienced by both groups.

Adolescence is the time for identity formation and a contentious period under the best of conditions. Add to this, two starkly conflicting identity models, heavily overlaid with racism, against a backdrop of media stereotypes that portray the worst aspects of African-American society as the norm and you have a recipe for internal stress and social dysfunction. For many middle-class African-Americans this conflict prevents the formation of a comfortable ethnic identity that can accommodate both their racial heritage and cultural choices that may be objectionable to other members of their race.

The historical forces and resulting issues discussed above are relevant to social work in that they influence clinical aspects of , racial/ethnic identity, and cultural and class dissimilarities among African-Americans. These issues are also relevant for updating ethnic identity formation theory.

### Assumptions

1. Identity consolidation takes place in Adolescent and can be a painful and conflicted process.
2. Peer groups and friendship are important aspects of consolidation in identity formation.
3. We learn to accept ourselves through the acceptance of others. Peers and friendships are important part of this process because they provide mirroring to consolidate and identity. Self and others are mutually constructed; one needs a significant other in terms of peers, friends or ideas to consolidate a sense of self.
4. Participants will provide complete and truthful responses during the interview. The methodology will capture and articulate the powerful effects of same-race criticism on identity formation, social relationship, and self-concept.

### Delimitations

This study is delimited by the following parameters:

1. The sample used in this study is small and therefore may not accurately represent the middle-class African-American population. The sample consists of twenty subjects interviewed individually and two focus groups of six and eight subjects each.
2. The results of this study represent the opinions of the respondents during the year 2007 and 2008 when the data were collected.
3. The respondents were all middle-class African-Americans raised in suburbs of metropolitan cities. Their experiences may not be representative of other

segments of the African-American community who have been the subjects of similar criticism.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This paper is concerned, in part, with identity theory as it applies to middle-class African-Americans. Therefore, this review of the literature will survey general identity theory, ethnic/racial identity theory, the actual forces or forces that are believed to shape the identity of middle-class African-Americans, and the relevance of the applicable theories in explaining the experiences of the subjects in this study.

Since the focus of this study is on the middle-class African-American, it would be instructive to have a working definition of the term “middle-class.” Although there is no concrete agreement on a precise definition of the term, there are areas of general agreement on this concept. Sociologists theorize that middle-class may constitute anywhere from 45 % to 49 % of households. A college education—and frequently post-graduate work—indicates middle-class status. Household income for this class can range from the vicinity of \$50,000 to above \$100,000 (Internet). However income is not an absolute indicator; variables such as the number of wage earners and family members can influence class status. Overall, a middle-class family has some degree of economic security and occupational mobility. Their speech is characterized by Standard English, variety, and length. They tend to value cleanliness and order and can afford a comfortable mainstream lifestyle (Gilbert, 2002). At the high end, occupations in this

class are those of white collar professional, writers, teachers, journalists, editors, people who tend to conceptualize, create, and direct. At the lower end are lower-level white-collar workers, technicians, and semi-professionals (2002). Reference to middle-class in this paper will assume the characteristics of Gilbert's definition.

### General Identity Development Theory

The central process addressed in this paper is identity development. Our identity defines who we are as individuals and group members as well as how we deal with our past, present, and future environment (Garza & Herringer, 1986; Winsell, 1971). Identity is a matter of the significance of an experience to an individual and how that experience is internalized (Kegan, 1982). According to Marcia (1980), identity refers to an existential position, an inner organization of needs, a self-structure, abilities, beliefs, and self-perception as well as to a sociopolitical stance. Identity is a balance between what is considered to be "self" and "other" (Kroger, 1989). Adams, (1992) wrote, "Identity is conceptualized as an internalized self-selected regulatory system that represents an organized and integrated psychic structure that requires the developmental distinction between the inner self and outer social world" (p.1).

Identity is derived from influences of significant others. Researchers such as Blos (1962), Erickson (1959), Waterman (1982), and Palombo (1991) emphasize the significance of a secure environment, a loving family, supportive friends and protective community for identity development. It is based on how an individual interacts with their own group and with other groups. Although the quantity and the quality of interactions

may differ in the various cultures, all children take in certain sequential experiences in order to develop a healthy identity (Erikson, 1959, 1968).

In identity development, one's belief system is shaped by experiences that are common to others of the same gender, education level, religion, socioeconomic status, family structure, geographical involvement and institutional affiliation. It is these everyday experiences determine the values, norms, beliefs and morals that become fundamental components of social identity (Davis & Gandy, 1999).

Another leg of identity is acculturation, which explores the changes in attitudes, values, and behavior that make subjective culture a consequence of contact between distinct cultures. Acculturation is the process of cultural change set in motion by the meeting of two autonomous cultural systems, resulting in an increase of similarity of each to the other (Barfield, 1977). It deals with changes in cultural attitudes, values and behaviors that result from contact between two distinct cultures; these changes tend to impact individual identity, rather than the group (Phinney, 1980).

In summary, identity is an individual's body of emotions and beliefs, developed through social contacts, that provide the individual a basis for giving meaning to experiences and defining his place with respect to himself and with external publics. That outlook may change over time as the individual's experiences expand.

### Infant Identity Development Theory

Identity is being shaped from the time the child is born and is stabilized during late adolescence and young adulthood (Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1959). The infant's crying and the mother's ability to soothe the infant by satisfying his needs produces a state of

pleasant quiescence in the infant. The mother's unavailability, physically or emotionally causes tension in the infant (unavailability includes incorrect responses to the infant). Gratification as well as frustration that the infant experiences play an important role in development. It leads to the institution of the reality principle and the development of the ego (Jacobson, E. & Kernberg, O. 1983). The emotional tone of the mother's response brings about a relationship of a particular quality between the infant and the mother, which contributes to personality formation. According to Jacobson & Kernberg, (1983) it is at the beginning of the second year of life that ego capacity emerges, which exerts a decisive influence on the child's movement toward identity formation. Under favorable conditions the child can strive to be like the admired object. The child later is able to distinguish between his own realistic and wishful self-images, which are reinforced by competition with peers. The child also discovers the anatomical differences between the sexes, which also contribute to identity formation by reinforcing the ideal of membership in a gender group (1983).

Separation-individuation consists of four developmental sub-phases in the infant and toddler. Mahler posits that a newborn is unable to differentiate itself from its surroundings. During this autistic phase, internal and external states are fused; the mother-infant dyad acts as a unit. In the second phase, the infant becomes vaguely aware of the mother, but views her as an extension of the self. The infant behaves as though he and the mother are an omnipotent system (Newman, 1990). Mahler's separation-individuation phase begins with the intrapsychic differentiation between self and other as the child begins to see himself as a separate person from the mother (Blos, 1962).

With increased locomotion skills, the infant moves into practicing phase. With rapid maturation of ego functioning, the child's identity begins. In rapprochement sub-phase, beginning around 16 to 24 months, the mother is experienced as a separate person (Hamilton, 1988). Along with this recognition comes intrapsychic loss (the loss of himself and the mother as one). The child delightfully explores his environment but frustration accompanies the child's ecstatic experiences. Still the child engages in contradictory behavior as he experiences the "come here, go away" pattern. The child will attempt to recapture the mother by wooing her (being close to her, feeling as though he owns her) as before the separation and individuation. Yet, at the same time, he resists any attempt to restrict his newly achieved autonomy. Mahler recognizes this affective turning point as "the rapprochement crisis" (Blos, 1962). The child has to surrender his infantile grandiosity, as he is no longer able to take the mother's availability for granted (Newman, 1990).

### Child Identity Development Theory

According to Erikson, children need positive cognitive and social experiences to develop a healthy personality (Erikson, 1959, 1968). During the third year of the child's life, the sub-phase of libidinal object constancy brings relief. The child achieves individuality and a degree of object constancy with the resolution of splitting and the attainment of a positive self. Object constancy is the ability to hold a steady image of the object, especially the mother even in her absence (Hamilton, 1988). Object constancy involves the integration of the "good" and "bad" mother. (Prior to this the child experienced the mother as two separate entities: the good mother was always available

while the bad mother was not easily summoned on demand.) The mother is accepted as a separate person. Providing a good enough “holding environment” allows the child to internalize soothing and self-regulating functions that were previously provided by the mother (Winnicott, 1986). This “good enough” holding environment is the basis for the child’s identity until adolescence. Blos (1962) compared the infant’s hatching from the symbiotic membrane to the adolescent shedding family dependencies. These internalized self-object functions that have sustained him through phallic and latency periods are now being loosened in adolescence.

### Adolescent Identity Development Theory

Although identity development is a life-long process, it reaches its greatest intensity during adolescence (Chickering, & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1959). During adolescence the young person is expected to achieve independence from family, adjust to sexual maturation, establish cooperative and workable relationships with peers without being dominated by them, and prepare for a meaningful vocation (Mussen, Congen, & Kagan, 1956). Although this is a difficult period, identity formation is an essential task for adolescents if they are to establish a coherent sense of individuality (Plummer, 1995).

Erikson devised an eight-stage identity developmental formation theory. The fifth stage concerns the formation of identity vs. role confusion. Identity versus role confusion is a personality development stage occurring during puberty that includes psycho-social issues. During this period the adolescents are in crisis and are seeking to understand and establish themselves in life. Erikson (1959) and Blos (1962) view identity formation and

development in a social context (that is, in a community where decisions are expected from available choices).

Before the 1800s, the concept of adolescence culture was not recognized as a distinct phase of development. Adolescents were simply expected to adopt their parents' values. At that time the greatest influence came from families, not peers. Most young people, having few choices, did not struggle with identity issues. They simply followed the occupation of their family. It was after the industrial revolution, which expanded the opportunities for an identity separate from family, that adolescence was recognized as a separate developmental phase (*World Book* over the Internet, 2008). At this time it was recognized that young people between the ages of 11 and 20 were not children, but were not emotionally mature enough to be considered adults.

The attention from one's peer group and their views on what is and is not acceptable are of paramount importance to the adolescent (Smart & Smart, 1973). Youth often assume an identity that is acceptable to a peer group; the presence in their lives of multiple, significant peer groups complicates formation of this self identity. Adolescents conform to the values, customs and fads of peer culture, a culture that has little tolerance for differences, physical or ideological, and can be highly critical of variations from peer norms. Peer relationships have high priority over parental relationships (Smart & Smart, 1973). With physical, cognitive, and emotional changes occurring so rapidly one can understand the confusion that surrounds the adolescent (Smart & Smart, 1973; Mussen, Conger, Kagan, 1956).

What is noteworthy about these theories is the emphasis on peer relationships as they affect identity formation. Essentially, in adolescence the influence of parents tends

to wane and the influence of peers tends to grow as an element in the formation of identity. Identity is developed initially through emulating the roles and values of the parents. It is only in adolescence, when the individual becomes selective in choosing values in accordance with their interests and talents, that the variety of possible identities expands substantially and the input of various peer groups compounds the problem of choosing a viable identity. It seems logical that all significant peer groups are relevant to any theory of identity formation and that the more different and significant peer groups there are in the life of an adolescent, the more confusing the search for a functional identity.

Blos (1962) argues that the individual must separate from caregivers and disengage emotionally to allow ego maturation and identity development to occur. The adolescent will be influenced by family, school, and peer groups, as well as the parents' own identity in developing an identity. In an effort to complete their transition into adulthood, and as an attempt to solidify their identity, adolescents often de-idealize established role models, such as parents and family, and take on new ones. They question rules, morals, relationships, behaviors, and other ideals perceived to be part of their community, while attempting to integrate those various elements into a coherent adult code of behavior (Ward, 1990). In many instances, this process causes conflict.

It is believed that the conflict between parents and adolescents is necessary for psychological differentiation to transpire. Letting go of parents' values is stressful for both the parents and the adolescent. The adolescent becomes rebellious and oppositional in trying to establish his own individuality. Finding new identifications, loyalties, and

intimacies outside the family structure is a step toward an evolving self (Blos, 1962). If the resolution is successful, the other gains are:

1. Stable and firm self and object boundaries,
2. the superego loses some of its power and rigidity, and
3. greater constancy of mood and self-esteem. (The concept of self-esteem will be discussed later.)

General identity formation theories (presented by Blos, 1962; Chickering 1969; Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1980; and Phinney, 1988) stress the importance of peer relationships in adolescent identity development. Many peer social interactions that shape adolescent identity take place at school. School is where students spend a great deal of time together and are strongly influenced by each other. Sociologists tell us that, in many groups, those who do not fall within the expected “norm” will be criticized for being different. “Social groups often penalize individuals who deviate from accepted norms, even when deviation is relatively minor” (Berheim, 1994).

Adolescents observe each other and are likely to imitate those individuals who are popular or respected. Esteemed individuals usually receive better treatment and are likely to command influence over others. Popular students are the ones who set the norms; students who are concerned about the opinions of others will not only support the esteemed students but also emulate their behavior. When popularity is sufficiently important, as it is with adolescents, many will conform to a single standard of behavior (Berheim 1994). They willingly suppresses individuality and they conform to the social norm. They recognize that even small departures can seriously impair their popularity and acceptance. This attention from one’s peer group and its views on what is and is not

acceptable are of paramount importance to the adolescent (Smart & Smart, 1973).

Adolescents conform to the values, customs and fads of peer culture, a culture that has little tolerance for differences, physical or ideological, and can be highly critical of variations from peer norms.

“Identity [formation] involves conflict and has its own developmental period during adolescence and youth, when biological endowment and intellectual processes must eventually meet societal expectation of a suitable display of adult functioning” (Kroger, 1989, p.14). The uncertainty and conflict that accompanies the separation from parents and the adjustment to peers takes a psychic toll; adolescence and the entry into adulthood can create fear, panic, isolation, loneliness, and depression. Erikson (1963) calls this a “crisis” period, a crucial turning point that is essential preparation for successful entry into adulthood. “The balance achieved during the identity conflict of adolescence will affect all developmental stages encountered during adult life” (p. 45).

From the viewpoint of this study, it is noteworthy that all identity development theories discussed above emphasize peer relationships as they affect identity formation. It seems logical that input of any substantial nature, for all significant peer groups is relevant to any credible theory of identity formation.

### Racial/Ethnic Identity Theories

In as so far as possible, it is necessary to clarify the terms race and “ethnicity” since they are key concepts in this study and the terms are frequently used interchangeably and incorrectly. Before the Renaissance, “race” was not a term used to describe human beings as a way of categorization. The term was first coined during the era of European

imperialism. When Europeans discovered people from different parts of the world they theorized about the physical, social and cultural differences among various human groups (Smedley, 1999). According to the medieval myth, humanity descended from Shem, Ham and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. The theory was that the descendants of Ham were cursed by being Black. Others contributed skin color as a product of environmental conditions. During ancient civilization when the lighter skin Egyptians were in power they called the darker group the evil race of Ish. When the darker skin was in power they called the lighter skin group the pale degraded race of Arvad. Later civilization from Rome to China tended to invest much more importance in familiar or tribal affiliation than with physical appearance (2009).

Originally race referred to biological characteristics and physical appearance and embraced a number of ethnic groups within a racial category (Appiah & Gutman, 1996). By definition, race was once thought of as is a sub-group of people possessing a definite combination of physical characteristics of genetic origin, the combination of which, to varying degrees, distinguishes one sub-group from other sub-groups of mankind (Casa, 1984; and Betancourt, Hector & Lopez, Steven, 1993). Helms (1990) defined racial identity as one's perception that a common racial heritage is shared with a particular group.

Charles Darwin and anthropologists of his day refuted the idea that race was a subspecies and believed humans to be related to each other. Current thinking defies the notion that race is genetically definable. All human beings contain 99 % of the same genetic material, leaving race biologically indefinable.

According to Wimmer (2008), in distinguishing race from ethnicity, race is associated with African-Americans, while ethnicity commonly refers to the less consequential distinctions among the dominant White group based on different European countries of origin,” (p. 974). Phinney (1990) posits that there is no widely agreed-on definition of ethnic identity. Yet, treating race differently from ethnicity disregards the fact that one and the same group of individuals might be treated as a race at one point and placed in the category of ethnicity at another time depending on the time in history (Wimmer, 2008). No doubt this can be attributed in part, to considerable confusion regarding the terms race and ethnicity. According to Webster (1982), ethnic is derived from the Greek *ethnikos*, which means nation or gentile (Altman, 1995). The concept of ethnicity is related to the Greek concept of *ethnos*, which refers to the people of a nation or tribe, and *ethnikos*, which stands for nation. The word ethnicity was used to denote pagan/heathen until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Mufwene, 2008).

Webster (1982) confused race and ethnicity by defining the latter term as relating to a large group of people classed according to *race* national, tribal and religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background, thereby mixing genetic inheritance and acquired customs into one classification. Their usage is frequently vague or interchangeable, or they are used to define each other. For example, Helms (1990) defined racial identity as one’s *perception* that he shares a common racial heritage with a particular group. Other writers (Betancourt, Hector & Lopez, Steven, 1993) state that ethnicity pertains to race or large groups of people classified according to common traits or customs. They also state that culture is closely intertwined with concepts such as race, ethnicity, and social class, has caused confusion. Phinney & Rotherham (1987) used the term “ethnic group” to

refer to a minority group within a larger group. According to Looney (1988) one's racial identity consists of a person's awareness, values, attitudes, and beliefs about being a member of a particular racial group. The researcher contends that Looney is describing one's ethnic characteristics, not race. Ethnicity refers to a group with a shared feeling of peoplehood (Gordon, 1964). So as we can see distinguishing the difference between race which doesn't really exist and ethnicity brings a plethora of issues.

Wimmer (2008) offers four different variations of ethnic groupings: political salience of ethnic boundaries, social closure and exclusion along ethnic lines, cultural differentiation between groups and stability over time. Depending on the period in history individuals might be treated as part of a race, and a part of an ethnic group at another time. For example, some use race and ethnicity interchangeably: race is associated with African-Americans while ethnicity is often referred to White European groups. Again, this depends on the time in history. Ethnicity is an anthropological term to refer to a people who share the same language and culture. The term "ethnicity" became more popular after World War II and was used as a substitute for the term "tribe." In many instances race is considered as fixed, imposed and exclusionary, whereas, ethnicity is viewed as fluid, self-ascribed and voluntary. (However, this would not be true for groups that experience degrees of forced segregation and exclusion.)

Given this muddled terminology, some clarification is in order before discussing theories related to them. Phinney (1996) provides that clarity: ethnicity has to do with a group classification of individuals who share a unique social and cultural heritage (customs, language, religion and so on) passed on from generation to generation.

Phinney identified aspects of ethnicity as:

1. cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors that distinguish ethnic group;
2. ethnic identity that is held by the group members; and
3. experiences such as powerlessness, discrimination, and prejudice that are often associated with minority status.

This characterization refers to the culture (as opposed to the genetic endowment) of the group of people and is the definition used in this paper. Race or genetic endowment, on the other hand, is a sub-group of people possessing a combination of genetic characteristics that distinguishes them from other sub-groups of mankind (Casa, 1984; Betancourt, Hector & Lopez, Steven (1993). Note that the genetic differences are so miniscule that little attention will be given to the term race and the term ethnicity, that is more descriptive of the culture and behavior of the people will be used.

Unlike biologists and physical anthropologists, linguists have hardly questioned race, as a biologically defined notion. For most social scientists race is treated as a social construct. Anthropologists and biologists reject the biological significance of phenotypes such as complexion, eye color or nose, lips, hair texture, or body shape.

With ethnicity clarified and race indefinable we may now proceed to the consideration of ethnic (cultural) identity, which one can and does influence. For the purpose of this paper we will operationally define ethnic identity as culture that one adopts or continues.

Discussing ethnic identity formation of African-Americans, Bowles (1988) interjects the development of the African-American child into Mahler's developmental process discussed above. He states that the infant takes in from the mother not only her

feelings about herself but also her Blackness. He acknowledges a correlation between the mother's sense of self and the child's later capacity to see himself as a Black person.

Bowles believes that inclusion of skin color acceptance lays the groundwork for positive ethnic affirmation. Not only is the child experiencing object constancy by age three but is also able to recognize differences in people, including skin color. With mastery of separation-individuation, the child develops a sense of ethnicity based on experiences with the family and socialization with the external world.

Bowles (1988) posits that the child enters a second phase of ethnic development between the ages of three and five. In this phase, with the help of his parents, the child accepts himself positively as a person of color. Good mothering can provide a positive ethnic groundwork by attunement to the child's experiences pertaining to race. Bowles believes that through transmuted internalization, the child learns self-soothing mechanisms from the parents. This internalized self-soothing extends through adolescence. The child is able to effectively use his internalized sense of ethnic self in dealing with racial issues. If the parents have not conveyed a positive sense of ethnic self-acceptance, the child, particularly in situations where he is one of a few among the dominant group, is likely to feel insecure or may indulge in a wish to become part of the dominant group by denying his own ethnicity.

### Cultural Boundaries through Language

For African-Americans, cultural boundaries changed drastically in the 1960s and language became one of the markers of that change. During and after the decade of the 1960s, civil rights laws made possible diverse lifestyles for middle class African-

Americans. Wimmer (2008) asserts that cultural boundaries are not static; they expand or contract to meet societal needs. As laws expanded the horizons of African-Americans, they moved from the inner city to the suburbs for the same reason White families did—for more space, less crowded schools, more trees and grass and a better class of neighbors (Billingsley, 1968). Children growing up in the suburbs took on the culture of their immediate community, which differed markedly from that of their urban brothers (Altman, 1995). In the suburbs, education was a priority; recreational options were bountiful. Children played on little league teams and took lessons in dance, music, swimming, and tennis. Often, these youths grew up with little or no intimate knowledge of life in the ghetto or contact with its inhabitants.

Language, ethnicity and culture are all intertwined. One's cultural and ethnicity may dictate the way one speaks. The language one speaks is determined by his social environment, not by his race. An African-American child growing up in a community inhabited by mostly Europeans will speak like the neighbors (Mufwene, 2008).

Linguists have claimed that a child normally acquires the language of their social environment, regardless of race. A Japanese child of Japanese parents, growing up in a socially integrated neighborhood in the United States will speak American English of the same nature as the non-Japanese neighbors and the African-American child growing up in a predominantly White neighborhood will speak White middle-class English rather than African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). (Mufwene, 2008, p. 111)

Code-switching is a term in linguistics referring to using more than one language or variety in conversation. Code-switching is considered to be a normal and natural product of a speaker interacting with two or more language cultures. Code-switching helps an ethnic minority group retain a sense of culture in much the same way slang is used (that is, to give a group of people a sense of identity and to distinguish themselves from the

larger society). Language is power. The language that a professional uses is different from that of a layman. In order to communicate they need the ability to code-switch. The doctor must curtail his use of professional jargon in order to communicate with his patients. Speaking the layperson's language rather than his professional jargon is an example of code-switching. African-Americans, with one cultural foot in the ghetto and the other cultural foot in the middle class, used code-switching with varying degrees of success to maintain their bona fides in both of these cultures. Examples will be seen later in this study.

### From Racial Identity to Ethnic Identity

Theories of racial identity were developed in response to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the social changes that occurred during that era. Charles Thomas formulated the first Black identity theory in 1968, and was later followed by William Cross in 1971, with his own version of Negro-to-Black conversion. Helms (1990), Thomas (1971), Jackson (1976), and Parham (1989), to name a few, also developed Black identity theories, which focus on the attitudes that Blacks have about their own racial identity.

Cross' nigrescence model will serve to illustrate the theoretical construct of ethnic development. "Nigrescence" is a French word meaning the process of becoming Black. It outlines a process of Black identity formation that explains changes that transformed self-hating Negroes into committed and self-accepting Blacks. Transformation includes four stages: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. The stages have different emotional, behavioral, and cognitive expressions that bring about

changes in one's identity. Each stage of identity is tenuous until the person becomes settled and comfortable with their new identity. The social identity theory that deals with ethnic identity differ from intrapsychic identity theories described by Blos (1962) and Erikson (1963) was discussed above. Social theory has more to do with political issues whereas Blos and Erikson described interpersonal growth.

*Pre-encounter* describes a state in which the person is pro-White, valuing White society more than Black society and culture. In the Pre-encounter stage the individual seeks aggressively to assimilate and/or integrate into mainstream White culture to escape from what he perceives as the stigma of being Black. The minority individual in this phase of development also accepts the negative view of his own group. This stage can be compared to identity foreclosure described by Marcia (1980).

The term *foreclosure* refers to a person who had never experienced a crisis, but is committed to particular goals, values or beliefs. Since the individuals have not gone through their own crisis, these persons in this status usually have taken on the goals, beliefs and values of their parents or significant others. Phinney (1989) asserts that adolescents from families that stress ethnic pride will likely adopt a positive attitude toward their own group.

Pre-encounter attitudes are related to high levels of anxiety (Carter, 1991; Parham & Helms, 1985a), low self-regard, low self-esteem, and high self-actualization tendencies (Munford, 1994; Parham & Helms, 1985a; Pyant & Yanico, 1991). Thus, although a person with high levels of Pre-encounter attitudes may have a poor self-image and low self-regard, he or she may be able to move towards actualizing a realistic racial group or other collective identity, but not without psychological cost.

*Encounter* is a stage in which the person is jarred by a racial experience, which shakes his worldview on Blackness. No longer is White society idealized based on its Whiteness alone; the person is confused and angry as he becomes more immersed in this new awareness. Encounter begins the process of adopting a Black perspective, and can be characterized by feelings of euphoria as well as a sense of confusion regarding one's Black identity. A plethora of mixed feelings leaves the individual overwhelmed as feelings are being sorted out while simultaneously being submerged in this new awareness. Phinney (1990) described this stage as the person's involvement in seeking and exploring to understand the meaning of ethnicity for oneself. Atkinson (1983) noted that the person is challenging and questioning old attitudes.

*Immersion-Emersion* denotes a beginning of the new identity. The person has a high level of Black awareness, to the point of denigrating White people and mainstream culture. As the person's emotions begin to level off, he feels a greater sense of control. The Immersion status is a highly emotionally charged period of transition involving an attempt to replace the old identity with the new one. Marcia (1988) compares immersion to the period of exploration or moratorium; the person is actively seeking answers among alternatives. The earlier phase of this stage depicts someone who has most recently discovered his Blackness (Cross, 1991). The individual withdraws psychologically and physically into Blackness (that is, Black culture). A Black reference group orientation and a Black ascribed identity dominate the person's personality. Generalized anger at White people and at other Blacks who have not given up the old identity is typical of this phase. The person begins to idealize and romanticize Blackness and devalues everything thought to be of White heritage. Emotionally the person experiences euphoria, rage,

creative energy, high-risk taking, and a strong sense of connection with Black life and culture (Cross, 1978).

Since the new Black identity is something yet to be achieved, the Immersion person is generally anxious about how to demonstrate to others that he is becoming the right kind of Black person (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991). Demonstrating and proving one's level of Blackness requires an audience and a set of group standards to which one can conform. During this stage the person usually becomes highly involved in group activities and organizations. In general the Immersion stage is associated with positive feelings Blacks have toward their identity and culture while experiencing intense negative feelings toward Whites and White culture. The psychosocial research findings are quite consistent on this point. This status is clearly emotionally volatile and distressing.

The final stage of identity development is *Internalization*. This is the stage for resolution of conflicts; it connects the new and old worldviews. The African-American reaches a high degree of comfort with Blackness and makes a point of being visible and recognized as an African-American. The person has internalized a new integrated worldview concerning his ethnic identity and continues to be socially active. Moreover, anti-White feelings decline and White friendships can be negotiated. At this stage, the individual further appropriates the new identity and resolves conflicts with the former one. A calm, secure demeanor replaces tension, emotionality, and defensiveness. Phinney (1989) agrees that the optimum identity is achieved, which is characterized by clear, confident acceptance of oneself as a member of a minority group. This does not mean that racial antagonism deteriorates; instead, it is now channeled into more

controlled and productive ways toward "systems" of oppression and injustice rather than toward individuals. The person also experiences a deep connection with and acceptance of the Black community (Cross, 1991).

In the internalization phase the person adopts a pluralistic viewpoint regarding ethnic identity. One's sense of being Black is now balanced with other aspects of self, such as gender identity, spiritual identity, and professional identity. Other identities are important aspects of the self, but the person's sense of Blackness frames his value system, personal social network, daily interactions, and personal conduct (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991). Munford (1994) found internalization status to be related to high self-esteem and low depression. Cross et al. (in press) suggest that internalization is associated with a strong Black cultural orientation, a commitment to a pluralistic society and a desire to protect Black culture. The individual becomes more psychologically integrated, less fragmented, and more able to handle other aspects of life (e.g., work, relationships, and a positive identification with other Black people (Martin, 2001).

#### Social Forces that Shaped African-American Ethnic Identity Choices and Crisis

Cross' Nigrescence model is typical of ethnic identification developmental theories that came into vogue in the 1960s and later. Essentially it is general identification development theory, overlaid with minority status and skin color components. Such theories describe the transformation of African-Americans from "self-hating Negroes" to "self-loving Blacks" who have successfully integrated into their identities the unique aspects of Black culture and the advantageous aspects of mainstream (White) culture. The problem with these models is that they do not capture significant complexities of

cultural choices available to the African-American community and their attendant conflicts. To fully understand those choices and the identity crises they provoke, it is necessary to review conditions in the African-American community before and after the onset of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Prior to the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, racial discrimination in employment and housing confined the majority of city-dwelling African-Americans to racial ghettos, regardless of socio-economic circumstances. Often professional, paraprofessional, working class, and the poor lived in the same or adjoining neighborhoods (Lewin, 1991). Due to this enforced proximity and their exclusion from activities and opportunities available to White citizens, many African-Americans shared, or were intimately familiar with many elements of a common African-American culture. The result was that the racial (genetic) and ethnic (cultural) identities of African-Americans were perceived as inseparable to many in the African-American and White communities. African-Americans were viewed as a homogenous group, not only by Whites but also by many African-Americans themselves (Dansby, 1980).

Both the perception and any reality of homogeneity were swept away by two social forces of the 1960s and 1970s: the Civil Rights Movement and the spread of the Black Power/Black Pride ideology. Passage of civil rights legislation allowed African-Americans to partake of cultural opportunities that were the birthright of all Americans, but that were previously characteristic of White lifestyles, solely because racial discrimination limited those opportunities to White Americans. Legislation opened doors to new opportunities in education, employment, recreation, housing, and other areas and,

in general, created possibilities for significant cultural diversity among African-Americans (Adelman, 2004). In fact, this was the objective of the civil rights movement.

These opportunities impacted the homogeneity of the African-American community in many ways. Although variables such as religion, gender, region and social class impact relationships within the African-American population, social class carries the most weight (Banks, 1988). Wilson (1978) argues that class is the chief factor that stratifies African-Americans and causes division among them. Middle and working class African-Americans having the means to move into better neighborhoods fled inner cities, separating themselves from the poor and making cultural divisions not only possible, but also more visible (Wilson, 1978). The common bonds that held the traditional Black community together became increasingly loose as entrance into middle class society became more available to African-Americans (Jewel, 1985). With the departure of the relatively affluent, Black ghettos changed. They were left to the poor who had few resources, inadequate schooling, and limited job opportunities. Altman (1995) states that this trend resulted in less motivation for those left behind to pursue education, thereby widening the gap between middle class African-Americans and those of lower socio-economic status.

During the 1960s and 1970s, African-Americans struggled to redefine their identities within the context of expanding opportunities, complicated by racial unrest, the Vietnam War, and political scandals. In the African-American community, actions were taken to make manifest the “fictive kinship” —a relationship between persons who are not related by blood or marriage but who are bonded strongly in a social or economic relationship (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). This is demonstrated by African-American use

of such terms as “brother,” “sister,” “blood,” “my people” (Folb, 1980). Fictive kinship means a great deal to Black people. They regard it as the ideal by which members of the group are judged; it is also the medium through which Blacks distinguish “real” from “spurious” members (Williams, 1981, cited by Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The influence of fictive kinship shows up in students who need to constantly reassure one another of loyalty and identity. This group defines which behaviors and attitudes are designated “White.” A sense of collective identity binds this group together (1986). Black individuals who attempt to behave like White Americans or to cross cultural boundaries will face opposition from their peers.

In the 1960s a new breed of youth emerged from the Black ghetto with self-determination and demands for liberation (Barnes, 1980). They gave rise to the Black Power/Black Pride movement that, for a time, became the glue that bound together a people being torn apart by diverse opportunities. The attitude known as “Black Pride” was captured in James Brown’s hit recording, “Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” (Dansby, 1980). The Black Pride movement was conceptualized and implemented for the purpose of promoting social changes and instilling racial pride. The term “Black,” a replacement for “Negro” or “colored,” symbolized unity within the race as more and more found the term “Black” to be acceptable (Barnes, E. J. 1980; Blauner, 1989). Later the term “African-American” became more popular. This new self-reference which encouraged African-Americans to develop racial pride, helped to reclaim their history and to create their own sense of community (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967).

However, the twin blessings of new pride and new opportunities brought with them new problems. African-Americans who left the Black ghetto found themselves in the

difficult position of trying to keep elements of their Black cultural heritage, while taking advantage of the opportunities that participation in a (White) mainstream, middle class, culture offered. Maintaining Black culture and not falling prey to White culture was high on their priority list (Blauner, 1989). There was an inherent conflict in this position as noted by McDermott, (2001). This need to maintain a separate Black identity while participating in a (White) middle class culture marks the beginning of the identity crisis that is the subject of this paper.

Black Pride/Black Power also had a dark side. Non-middle class elements in the African-American community, especially among the poor, wanted to distance themselves from White culture and the White people who had oppressed them for so long. They sought an identity that was distinctly “Afro-centric” and hostile to traditional White middle class values. “Compelled by segregation, discrimination, poverty and ignorance to remain on the periphery of White society and die within the subculture of the ghettos, the Black masses had to disassociate themselves from the White society” (Essien-Udom, 1962 p. 9). They wanted an identity characterized by unique symbols of their African heritage. In its most visible manifestations this search for identity took the form of wearing African dress and hairstyles (e.g., the afro and “cornrows”). They also embraced music and other art forms that were expressions of African-American origins and experiences. They studied Swahili and attempted to legitimize non-standard English speech characterized by a Black dialect known as Ebonics (Appiah, K. & Gutman, A. 1996; Smitherman, G. McGinnis, J. 1980).

Some adopted religions that were not traditionally European. The Nation of Islam, led by Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, encouraged Blacks to regain their dignity and

recover an unashamed sense of identity (Blauner, 1989). The movement appealed particularly to lower socio-economic status Blacks in need of inspirational leadership. One of the aspirations of the Muslims was to reverse the attitude of African-Americans yearning to be White or to emulate White and the need to be accepted by Whites. Muslims strove to instill dignity and build self-esteem in the African-American by encouraging racial pride and being economically self-sustaining (Essoem-Udom, 1962).

With all the changes and movement brought about by the Civil Rights Movement and other social changes, Cross' identity development model was no longer relevant to many African-American parents. Many of those parents had already undergone the conversion from Negro to Black and are now raising their children with a new consciousness of their Blackness (Cross, 1980). So, as one group of African-Americans went generally toward mainstream, middle class culture, the other—the poor and disenfranchised—were drawn to the pole of “Afro-centrism.” These two movements were setting the stage for a clash of cultures and an identity crisis for middle class African-Americans.

#### Middle Class African-American Identity Dilemma

With new opportunities available, middle class African-Americans began to participate in the broader society (Anderson, 1999). However they were not interested in being assimilated by mainstream culture. Ethnic identity was and is salient to them even as their social status improves. Theodorson (1969) defined assimilation as a one-way process in which an individual or group takes over the culture and identity of another. Usually the larger group survives and the smaller group becomes extinct. Rather than

assimilating, middle class African-Americans became bi-cultural, living in two cultures, sharing the same values, attitudes, beliefs, tastes, artifacts as well as being influenced by the social expectations that prevail in both the dominant and minority culture (Chimezie, 1985). Distinctive elements of this dual culture include hair grooming, dialect, family structure, and parenting style. A bi-cultural person can be selective or inclusive in his choices of activities. For example, a person who listens only to Black music but only reads White literature is considered to be selective. A person who speaks Black dialect and Standard English is considered inclusive (1985).

The combination of a desire for a better life than the ghetto offered and a desire to be connected to one's racial and ethnic roots caused African-Americans considerable mental agony, even before the tumultuous decade of the 1960s. As DuBois (1906, p. 5) noted at the beginning of the century:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, who dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder,' (1903, p. 5).

More recently, Chimezie (1985) put the problem another way:

If being American means among other things sharing the values, beliefs, tastes and prejudices of the dominant White group, then to be a Black person and an American is to embrace two antithetical identities. This duality is real and has been recognized by scholars (p. 224).

However, choosing between the two cultures has never been easy. “Some Blacks incur castigation from their peers for showing interest in White music. Some Blacks feel conflicted due to their interest in White culture” (Chimezie, 1985, p. 225). Bi-culturalism has created an identity problem for the middle class Black because some members desire allegiance to two mutually antagonistic cultures: middle class culture, symbolic of White

America, and their Afro-centric racial-ethnic heritage, that is sometimes hostile to White middle-class values. It is this desire for dual allegiance that is at the center of the identity crisis of the African-American middle class.

The magnitude of this problem is significant since over one-third of African-Americans have attained middle class status. There is a growing division between middle class African-Americans and the African-American underclass. Middle class African-Americans wish to distinguish themselves from negative stereotypes that plague those of lower socioeconomic status. They rally against the stereotype of poor Blacks because they see this as a denial of their status; they are neither working class nor poor (Lacy, 2000). Some people may assume that every Black person has the same values, experiences and expectations, and that their responses to issues will flow along the same lines. They do not. Class works in the Black community in much the same way as it does everywhere else (Jordan, 2001).

The new African-American middle-class is not, in all cases, attempting to assimilate into the mainstream culture; racial identity is salient to them even as their social status improves. Assimilation is being defined as a one-way process in which an individual or group takes over the culture and identity of another, usually larger group and becomes a part of that group (Theodorson, 1969). They become bi-cultural; they are willing to adopt cultural behaviors from the larger society that serve them without completely abandoning their own culture. They take on those behaviors that improve their life chances and reduce stress (Wilson, 1978).

The attempt to straddle these two cultures is frequently unsuccessful. Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) suggest that middle-class African-Americans tend to be more

detached from traditional African-American culture as they interact with Whites and other non-African-American groups. This is often the perception among militant elements in the African-American community and that perception has been costly. Successful African-Americans received abuse from militant Blacks and from other African-Americans who felt betrayed and abandoned by the middle class. Young African-American professionals were (and are) the objects of criticism from Black activists who often charged that the middle-class had “forgotten where they came from.” McClain (1996), a successful African-American journalist, was plagued with criticism for being middle class: Leanita McClain (1988) explained how successful middle-class Blacks are tormented by other Blacks.

A considerable number of folks [were] left behind in the old country commonly called the ghetto, and the militants we left behind in their antiquated ideology can't berate middle-class Blacks enough for forgetting where we came from. We have forsaken the revolution; we are told that we have sold out” (p. 13).

There is nothing new or uniquely American about successful Blacks receiving abuse from Black militants. “Many of the Blacks abandoned me because they thought I abandoned them. . . . In as much as we all suffer for those left behind, we all gain for everyone who conquers the hurdle” (Lacy, 2004, p.7).

Reginald McKnight (1993), reared in a middle class suburban neighborhood, wrote that the meaning of “Black” is always a matter of context. “I was hard pressed to find a genuine place for myself. . . . I had no group with whom I felt completely at peace or for whom I held unbending antipathy, no permanent correspondences based on culture, color, class, race, sex, or gender.” He found it no surprise that, “some Blacks resent certain other Blacks who seem willing to accept Eurocentrism, either in part or wholesale, given our history of having it shoved down our gullets” (p. 105). However the abuse of

successful African-Americans does not end with adults. The “sins” of parental success are often visited upon their children, with tragic consequences.

### Being Black, Acting White.

African-American adolescents of lower socio-economic status, aware of their systematic exclusion from the advantages of American citizenship, became angry and rejected activities associated with White values (Austen-Smith & Fryer, 2004). For example, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) reported that Black adolescents who did not feel supported by the educational system, formed an oppositional social identity as a way of protecting their identity from the psychological abuse of racism, and to maintain boundaries between them and White Americans. They developed symbols, activities, and behaviors that ran counter to White society (Tatum, 1997), leading to a devaluation of academic achievement. This process of racial socialization shielded them from negative racial messages and psychological insults from the larger society (Miller, 1999; Stevenson, 1994).

Children of the inner city and suburbs were reared in their respective worlds with little intimate contact with each other. This changed when suburban schools came under court orders to desegregate and Black children of the ghetto culture were bussed to White middle class schools. The clash of cultures was on, as was the fight for the “authentic” Black identity.

As noted earlier in this paper, adolescence is a difficult time for any child. However while most young adults are in the midst of a struggle for a sense of identity,

the minority youth has an additional burden of developing a racial ethnic identity associated with minority status (Plummer, 1995).

As for minority peer relationships, researchers like Phinney (1990) and Arce (1981) believe that it is important for minorities to identify with others within their group who share similar origins, traditions, and values. They theorize that this identification is vital for the development of positive personal identity. When suburban middle class African-Americans came into contact with their urban brothers, who conformed to the stereotypical Black images in the media, they discovered that they had an identity crisis. They could not claim membership in the White culture that they grew up in or in the Black fictive kinship represented by the color of their skins. Their desire to be accepted by other African-Americans who are not achievement oriented and of their middle class culture may be fraught with identity confusion. While some African-Americans experience discomfort in both worlds, it is imperative that they reconcile this issue or they will be tormented by feelings of abandonment, guilt, and rejection.

Fictive kinship symbols became one of the tools of acceptance or rejection. Suburban African-Americans were unable to claim membership in the fictive kinship described by Fordham and Ogbu, (1986) and mentioned earlier in this review. The kinship was the mechanism by which adolescents constantly reassured one another of loyalty and identity. This group defined which behaviors and attitudes were designated White. Children of middle class African-Americans who cross—or were perceived to have crossed—cultural boundaries to “dress or act White” face retaliation from their race and age peers in the form of the devastating accusations, “You tryin’ to act White,” or

“You ain’t Black enough.” This complicated the already difficult process of adolescent identity development.

Ethnic identity theories are based on the assumption that Blacks received only positive or no input from the Black community. They do not allow for negative input and its possible effects on identity development. Also, with few exceptions, the models of identity formation are relatively static, based predominately on Black reference to a White racist view. More fluid development models emerged during the last generation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Cross’ model of nigrescence, discussed above, is one example. In summary, literature on identity formation contains—and omits—points that are pertinent to this study.

The idea of “acting White” was first introduced in the 1970s at a discussion group including Black and White students. The African-American students described acting White as being formal and lacking soul (Bergin, D. & Cooks, H. 2002). Behaviors considered to be White could include listening to music by White artists, working hard to get good grades, putting on airs, dressing preppie, working up to your potential, being neat, dating White, and having White friends (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Speaking Standard English is also a marker for acting White. In a study conducted by Bergin and Cooks (2002), suburban students accused of imitating White behavior were considered sellouts by other African-Americans. Other researchers (Essien-Udom, 1962; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986) found that many inner city students are angry and frustrated with middle class African-Americans and feel betrayed by them because of the latter students’ close association with White students. Some adolescents, in response to the accusation of “acting white” try to behave the way they think is expected of them by their peer group

(Bergins & Cooks, 2002; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Tatum, 1997). Some of these individuals changed the way they talked to sound Black (code-switching), curtailed their interest in certain social activities and sacrificed their academic achievement in order to obtain the approval of their ethnic peers.

Many will experience affective dissonance. DeVos (1967) ascribes this condition to individuals who believe they are betraying their group and feel stress over this. Often these are young people who grew up in the suburbs and feel estranged from their inner city peers. The psychological stresses these individuals feel are twofold; not only do they feel alienated from their peers but also are unsure if White America will accept them either. Phinney (1990) and Acre (1981) state that it is important for minorities to identify with others who share similar origins, traditions, and values, vital for the development of positive personal identity and feelings of self-esteem. Self-doubt and low self-esteem may result from criticism of betraying one's group.

In a similar study, Ogbu & Fordham (1986) found Black children who admitted to experiencing difficulty in coping with the burden of "acting White." Some capitulated by not performing to the best of their ability academically. The fear of being labeled as a "braniac" can lead to social isolation. As they developed a sense of collective identity, they became apprehensive about appearing smart to their peers. Ogbu pointed out the fears of Black males being labeled a "pervert braniac." This label threatens their masculinity and brings about homophobia. The burden of acting White becomes more cumbersome as students face pressures from Black peers to conform and doubts from White peers about their ability to perform. Ogbu found that students who come from

low-income families and who did not believe their family was able to afford college were more likely to reject White behaviors.

In summary, African-American middle class adolescents find themselves in a no-man's-land between the middle class culture that they know intimately, and the Black ghetto culture into which they seek acceptance. It is the psychological impact of this dilemma and the social effects that are the subject of this paper.

### Self-Esteem and Minority Status

Racial identity is one of the most heavily researched aspects of African-Americans' psychological lives. It is associated with self-esteem and academic performance. Some theorists believed that strong identification with their racial group can place African-Americans at risk of adverse effects associated with the stigma attached to being Black. Others believed that having a strong identification with being Black is a protective factor against racism.

Since many theories of racial/ethnic identification development pertaining to African-Americans contain an element of self-hate, no discussion of identity formation for this group would be complete without addressing the concept of self-esteem. Social theorists generally agree on the description of self-esteem. Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) ascribe self-esteem to a person who considers himself of worth and has an appreciation of his merits. Self-esteem is often thought of as the extent to which an individual considers himself or herself worthy and adequate as a social being. Self-esteem determines how much libidinal (positive) energy an individual can invest in himself (Edgcomb, 2000). According to Erikson (1963, p. 235), "...self-esteem grows to

be a conviction that one is learning effective steps toward a tangible future, and is developing into a defined self within a social reality.” Social scientists tend to share the belief that all human beings desire to protect and enhance their feelings of self regard or self-esteem (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989). Theorists generally agree on the definition of self-esteem, but according to Phinney (1991), there is little agreement on the various elements of self-esteem and how they interact.

Self-esteem begins building in childhood. Greenspan (1997) states that a child’s perception of self-esteem is rooted in relationships that support initiative and the ability to solve problems. In order to develop positive self-esteem, children must have the opportunity to find solutions, to take risks, and even to fail at attempted tasks.

With regard to theories of self-esteem development in African-Americans, there is substantial disagreement. Much attention has been devoted to the relevance of race to self-esteem. An unresolved and longstanding debate continues over the relationship between self-esteem and racial identity for minority groups, African-Americans in particular. One school of thought assumes that because African-Americans are a low-status group in American society, they view themselves through the negative lens of the larger (White) society and, therefore, are presumed to have low self-esteem (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989; Cooley, 1902; Clark, K. 1965; Frazier, E. F., 1957; Prohansky and Newton, 1968).

In his social looking-glass theory Cooley (1902) proposed that one’s identity is formed by the way one sees himself through the eyes of significant others. He suggests that the looking glass is composed of the White racist society, which reflects that African-Americans are inferior. It is then assumed that African-Americans internalize

this racist attitude toward themselves (Baldwin, 1979), resulting in low self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, and basic identity conflict.

Erikson (1966) suggested that all minority groups possess some feelings of self-hatred, which are enforced by the withholding of opportunities and experiences that are only afforded the dominant culture. When the oppressed minority is prevented from emulating the ideals of the dominant culture, it is likely to fuse the negative images presented to them by the dominant culture with its own negative self-image. Hatred for one's group translates into hatred for one's self, thereby producing low self-esteem.

On the other side of this debate, many writers refute the notion that African-Americans have low self-esteem. Crocker and Major (1989) believe that members of the low status group are able to maintain high self-esteem because they measure themselves against other members in their group, not the larger society who had negative images of them. Gegas & Schwalbe (1983) concur that one's self-evaluation is influenced by how one is appraised by significant others and how that appraisal is perceived. "Knowledge of [negative] stereotypes is different from acceptance of them... There appears to be a strong tendency of individuals to think well of their own group" (Phinney, 1991, p. 198). This debate highlights the fact that there is no agreement as to how an individual determines which social groups are significant in the formation of self-esteem or their relative degrees of influence in self-esteem development.

A number of studies have been conducted seeking the linkage between racial identity and self-esteem. Key components of ethnic identity are self-identification as a group member; attitudes and evaluations relative to one's group; attitudes about oneself as a group member; extent of ethnic knowledge and commitment; and ethnic behaviors

and practices. Individuals who readily identify with their group and acknowledge that ethnicity is salient are likely to have high ethnic identity (Phinney, 1991). According to Erikson (1968), ethnic identity is not salient until adolescence. However, for those individuals who do not believe that ethnicity is salient, there would be no reason to assume that low self-esteem is caused of her/his ethnicity. For example, third generation White Americans who have assimilated do not associate self-esteem with ethnicity. Self-identification is imperative before assuming that ethnicity influences self-esteem. Over time, with some, there may be a decline in ethnic behavior and practices yet a commitment to the group remains high (1991).

Other writers believe that a strong identification with one's ethnic group provides a buffer against racism. This latter notion did not have a strong footing until well after the 60's. Self-esteem and ethnic identity has drawn the most attention with little consensus among researchers as to what impact ethnicity has on self-esteem. Many of the writings stress the importance of ethnic identity as a factor in self-esteem yet empirical research on the subject is inconclusive. A few studies reported a positive correlation of self-esteem with ethnic identity whereas others found no relationship between self-esteem and ethnic identity (1991). In conclusion there is no reason to believe that African-Americans experience low self-esteem differently than any other group of Americans.

Indeed, the influence of reference groups, as they affect a person's self-concept, depends upon one's stage of development (Smart & Smart, 1973), or the history of a group in a given social setting, as conditions change. Further, the influence of race and ethnicity in shaping self-concept can depend on the individual's attitude toward those

elements in his background. Self-identification is imperative before assuming that ethnicity influences self-esteem.

Two essential conclusions that pertain to this study can be drawn from the references cited above. One: there is no agreement on a universal self-esteem construct. Two: there is no agreement on how race influences self-esteem or identity development among African-Americans.

However, it is socialization within a cultural context that shapes identity. In the literature, the term racial socialization is used frequently. Analysis of this term indicates that the writers mean ethnic socialization, as defined in this paper. The following examples will clarify this point. All of the native racial groups in Rwanda are of the Black race. However, the socialization of individuals takes place within the context of tribal culture. It is therefore ethnic (not racial) socialization. This ethnic socialization takes place within the ethnic context of tribes such as the Hutu and Tutsi (Wimmer, 2008). Socialization does not take place within the larger racial context of Black Africans. Another example would be the gypsies. They have banded together over centuries. Their closed boundaries have allowed them to prevent cultural erosion. Although they may be looked upon as White, their cultural differences set them apart.

Ethnic socialization is the process of integrating a person of a given ethnicity into the tribal, religious, linguistic, class, and in some cases, national or cultural community specific to that group. It fosters ethnic identity and involves two sets of view points; one which influences how one views and understands members of the dominant or non-dominant group and the second involves one's view of his or her own group. It is the membership in the in-group that instills a sense of belonging in the individual that leads

to a positive identity (Allen, 2001). While ethnic socialization is an important factor in the development of ethnic identity, socialization is influenced by the racial identity of the family. Thus ethnic socialization and ethnic identity are inextricably bound (Plummer, 1995; Spence, Markstrom, & Adams, 1990).

Language, ethnicity, and culture, are intertwined. One's culture and ethnicity may dictate the way one speaks. The language one speaks is determined by one's social environment, not by his race. An African-American child growing up in a community inhabited by mostly Europeans will speak like the neighbors (Mufwene, 2008).

Under these circumstances one would expect a suburban child to speak similar to the neighbors regardless of ethnicity, just as one would expect an inner city child to speak similar to the neighbors. In other words, the way one speaks is not based on ethnicity but on culture. Each group speaks the language of its community. The inner city child often only has access to one language—AAVE. Speaking AAVE is a natural for children of the inner city to preserve their ethnic and class identity. The problem comes from a lack of acculturation. The inner city child who cannot speak Standard English will be in jeopardy of his education when raised in the suburb. The African-American child raised in White suburb, speaking Standard English, who cannot code-switch and speak AAVE, is shunned by the inner city contemporaries. But the pendulum swings both ways. Some inner city children have difficulty switching language to identify with suburban children similar to the suburban children's difficulty in code-switching to speak like inner city children. It is the different cultures and the relative abilities of members of these two groups to code-switch that is the cause of the conflicts that will be explored in depth in this paper.

Identity theories pertaining to African-Americans are generally divided into two camps. One holds that African-Americans draw their self-esteem from the racist views of White society. The other holds that Blacks draw their self-esteem from how they are viewed by a homogeneous Black community. These theories are further divided into those having a dynamic view of the identity development of African-Americans, and those having a static view of this development. The static view is that the primary reference point for the development of African-American identity derives from negative input from the White community (Cooley & Mead, 1902). The dynamic identity development theorists state that the primary reference point for Blacks is the positive feedback from the African-American community and its impact on identity development within that community. Neither of these theoretical camps take into consideration the impact of negative feedback from the African-American community and its impact on the identity development of middle class African-Americans, who are the subjects of this study. This negative input from the African-American community is a critical element in this study. Further, the absence of a theory to address this phenomenon is a handicap to clinicians who have patients affected by it. Hence, what is missing from the body of social work theory is an articulated ethnic identity theory for middle class, suburban, African-Americans reared in a predominately White environment, with identity conflicts due to negative inputs coming from the African-American community. Without such a theory, treatment lacks appropriate theoretical foundations and boundaries.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study designed to explore the clinical significance of the accusation and feeling that one (as a middle class African-American) is not “Black enough” (that is, does not conform to the cultural norms of his ethnic group and, hence, cannot claim identity as a member of that group).

Strauss & Corbin (1990) point out three major components of qualitative research that include gathering data, analytic interpretation to arrive at findings, and written and verbal reports. Other instruments used in this method of research can include books, videotapes, documents, interviews, and observations.

Qualitative research lends itself to a deep involvement in issues of gender, culture and marginalized groups, and is emotional and practical (Strauss et al. 1963).

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not use statistics in producing results, although it can be combined with quantitative research in explaining results. This method of research is also known as the flexible method which describes or uncovers meaning using unstructured observation or verbal data. In a flexible method of research the emphasis is on the discovery of new phenomena. Here, the subject’s own voice and experience is heard and gives meaning to the experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative scientists posit that individual observers create meanings that they assign to sensory experiences to the degree that there is no knowledge of reality separable from the knower. Observations cannot be understood part from the contexts in which they occur and the meanings that affect observations thus operate on both an individual and a cultural level (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994 p. 15).

The research design for this study is described by Denzin in his book, *Interpretive Interactionism* (1989). The following terms from the book will be helpful in understanding this model:

1. Interpretive: explaining the meaning of or confirming meaning
2. Interpreter: one who interprets or translates meaning for others
3. Interaction: a term that describes action between individuals. For human beings, interaction is symbolic, involving the use of language and gives rise to the term symbolic interaction.
4. Problematic interaction relates to interactional sequences that give primary meaning to the subjects' lives. Such experiences alter how individuals define themselves and their relations with others. In these moments, individuals reveal their personal character.
5. Interpretive interactionism describes the point of view that confers meaning on problematic symbolic interaction.
6. Epiphany describes the moment of problematic experience that illuminates personal character and often signifies a turning point in a person's life. There are four types—major, minor, illuminative, and relived.
7. Ethnography is the study of lived experiences, involving description and interpretation.
8. Thick description gives the context of an act, states the intentions and meanings that organize the action.
9. Thin description simply reports the facts independent of intentions or the circumstances that surround action.

In the Denzin model, the researcher listens to and records the subject's story. It is through thick and detailed descriptions of the subject's experience that the story unfolds. Thick descriptions allow the researcher to apply one's own personal experiences in interpreting the information provided by the interviewee. The researcher is attempting to understand the meanings of a person's life experiences. Only through thick description can a deep authentic understanding emerge. Thick description takes the reader to the heart of the experience. It allows the reader to vicariously share the experience of the storyteller. A thick description recounts in detail, the context, emotion, and social relationships that connect people to one another. Not only does it evoke the emotions and feelings of the speaker, but also establishes the significance of the experience.

Interpretive interaction is used when the researcher wants to examine the relationship between personal troubles and public responses. Denzin states that the knowledge gained through this approach can be used to evaluate and create programs that can deal with "real life" problems. Interpretive interactionism attempts to capture the voices, emotions and actions of those being studied. People are constantly making judgments and interpretations about their own behavior and experiences as well as those of others. Using Denzin's approach, the main focus of this study is to capture the experiences that radically altered and shaped the meanings that the subjects give to themselves and their life experience (Denzin, 1989). With this understanding comes the opportunity for improvement in dealing with the issues in order to be more effective. It provides an opportunity to present "alternative moral points of view from which the problem can be interpreted and assessed" (Denzin, 1989).

This method of information gathering captures transformational experiences, experiences that lead to a turning point, an epiphany. “The epiphany occurs in those problematic interactional situations, where the subject confronts and experiences a crisis” (Denzin, p. 17). Denzin described four forms of epiphanies:

1. the major epiphany, an experience that has a vital impact on a person’s life and changes it forever;
2. the cumulative epiphany that is the result of an experience that occurs over and over in the person’s life;
3. the illuminative epiphany occurs when underlying tensions and problems are revealed, and finally;
4. the relived epiphany in which the person goes repeatedly through a major turning point moment in his or her life.

The researcher locates the epiphany in an interactional situation where personal troubles become public issues. The researcher, seeking out persons whose troubles have become public, works back from the public to the private. “Interpretive studies, with their focus on the epiphany, attempt to uncover this complex interrelationship between the universal and the singular, between the private troubles and the public issues in a person’s life” (Denzin, 1989, p. 19).

Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and the self of the researcher. The events and troubles that are written about are ones that the writer has already experienced or witnessed firsthand (Denzin, 1989, p.12).

Denzin believes that only those who have been thoroughly immersed in the phenomenon being studied can give meaningful interpretation to its human experience. The interpreter does not separate himself. Instead he participates in the social world of

those being studied. One's own experiences will dictate how others are understood. The researcher's own personal accounts can be used as a springboard for entering the world of others. Plummer (1965) posits that the personal questions can have a dual impact: on the researcher's life and the researched person's life.

According to Denzin, interpretation can be made through emotional and cognitive understanding. Deep, authentic understanding can come through emotional interpretation. Cognitive interpretation gives the essential information of the phenomenon. Denzin points out that the "why" questions are replaced with the "how" questions. Interpretive interactionism views every human situation as novel, emergent, and complex, with conflicting meanings and interpretations.

The subjects of this qualitative research project are African-Americans who grew up in middle class suburban communities where they were the racial minority or who attended school in a primarily White environment. They also accepted mainstream middle class culture as their norm. However, when they came into contact with inner city African-American students who were bussed to suburban schools, they became unsure of their ethnic identity in relation to the bussed students who had embraced other cultural norms. The middle class African-American students became a minority within a minority. They began to question their relationships with White students and African-American students, as well as their middle class values. This research will investigate the effects that the African-Americans experienced after having their values and identity challenged.

Through thick description, I will examine the life experience of my subjects. Such descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences that can create

truth-like statements that can be substantiated. A thick description may focus on an individual, situation or relationship. A good thick description inserts the observer's interpretations into the experiences that are being recorded and will give slight attention to key details (Denzin, 1989).

Denzin (1989) suggests that information can be gained from the person being studied through open-ended interviewing. The interviewer may have on hand a general list of questions. The researcher must keep in mind that the phrasing and the order of the questions are important in getting the information being sought.

Denzin notes that interpretation is the process by which the subject's knowledge of himself is expanded by translating the unfamiliar into the familiar. Interpretations are used to expose, clarify, question, support, contradict, remind, explain, and connect. The meaning of an event or an experience is processed through interpretation. Meaning involves the interaction between a person, an object, event or process and the action taken toward that object, event or process (Denzin, p. 32 1989). The researcher attempts to understand personal troubles of individuals and connect those troubles to public issues.

Denzin delineated six phases for the interpretive process, the first being framing the process. This involves the researcher as well as the subject who has had difficulty in the area being studied. The researcher makes his own experience part of the research and is aware of his own experiences with regard to ethnic identity.

The second phase, deconstruction, involves defining, observing and analyzing the phenomenon. An examination of past studies with an underlying theoretical model of human behavior is required. Preconceptions and biases are recognized. Denzin describes the relationship between the researcher and those being researched as being in the

hermeneutic circle by placing the researcher and the subject in the center of the research process. A double-hermeneutic circle or interpretive circle is implied. The subject who tells a self-experience story is at the center of the life. Although the researcher has had experiences of ethnic criticism, those experiences were not the same as those of the subjects. Though there may be similarities among experiences, each person's story is unique.

The third phase involves capturing and locating the situation being examined and uncovering and dissecting each part by locating key parts of the person's experience or self-story. During this phase, the researcher illuminates the epiphany that has occurred.

Bracketing or reduction is the fourth phase during which the researcher attempts to isolate the key or essential features of the processes under examination. "The goal is to find the same recurring form of conduct, experience, and meaning in all of them" (Denzin, p. 60, 1989).

The fifth phase, construction, describes the researcher's attempt to interpret the event or process studied by securing multiple cases and histories of the phenomenon being studied.

The sixth and final phase is contextualization. Contextualization takes what has been discovered and places that information in the social world where it occurs. It is presented with words and emotions of the persons being studied.

### Study Design

This is a qualitative research study using Denzin's interpretative interaction method. Denzin's approach provides a basis for examining the individual and collective self-

narratives of a small sample of middle class African-Americans who were criticized by their racial and age peers because of their middle class values. Through Denzin's process, the researcher attempted to identify attitudes and emotions of the subjects that have implications for clinical social work.

### Sample Design

Subjects were recruited through word-of-mouth starting with African-Americans whom the researcher knew had had the requisite experience and were able to recommend other subjects with similar experiences. Neither current nor former patients were included in this study. Initial contact was made by telephoning prospective subjects.

The criteria for selection of subjects for this study were:

1. They were volunteers.
2. They were from middle class homes or from working class homes that supported certain middle class values, such as speaking Standard English and/or valuing education.
3. All were African-Americans.
4. All had experienced criticism for their cultural orientation or skin color by other African-Americans.

The subjects in this study experienced identity conflict and alienation when they came in contact with other African-Americans at school during their middle or high school years. Most often the impact of these experiences reached full force during adolescence. The subjects of this study will meet the criteria.

This study consists of 20 subjects; 15 were interviewed for two one-hour sessions. The other five were interviewed for one hour. Ten subjects were interviewed by phone; seven were interviewed in person in the researcher's office, and three subjects were interviewed in their homes. Seven subjects were male; thirteen were female. The

subjects ranged from 24 to 46 years of age. Twelve subjects were reared in the St. Louis area, two in Florida, and one each in Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Scottsdale, Chicago, Washington, D. C., and Germany. Sixteen subjects were from families in which at least one parent had finished four years of college. All but four subjects came from two-parent families.

Subjects were selected on the basis that they identified themselves as products of middle class or working class families. With one exception, they attended private or public suburban schools where White students were in the majority. One subject was bussed to a suburban school. Four subjects were from working-class, blue-collar families that lived in middle class or working class suburban neighborhoods.

The following is a summary of the 20 subjects interviewed for this research project:

1. Aiesha is a 32-year-old married corporate attorney who resides in Los Angeles. She attended Stanford University as an undergraduate student and received her law degree from Harvard. She is the older of two children of middle class parents who are both college educated. Because of her father's job, the family moved several times before settling in an exclusive community in Arizona. Aiesha lived in several other areas where she was in the minority in her school and community. Although Aiesha had attended schools that were primarily White all of her life, she never felt accepted by White or Black students.

2. Allison, 31, is a single, female attorney in a large Los Angeles firm. She attended undergraduate school at Stanford University and received her law degree from Harvard University. Allison, the daughter of two educators, is the older of two children. She grew up in a St. Louis suburban community and attended elite private schools that

were predominantly White. Allison came in contact with other Blacks through her church affiliation, but chose to remain in the background for fear of being seen as different.

3. Bernard, a 29-year-old, single male is a native of St. Louis who attended suburban public schools. Bernard is a graduate of DePauw University. He is the only child of two entrepreneurs who lived in a solid middle class suburban neighborhood where the majority was White. He experienced rejection and ridicule from the Black students who accused him of talking White. The criticism began in junior high and continued through high school.

4. Brenda is a 33-year-old attorney who works for a large, prestigious law firm in New York City. She received her law degree from Harvard University. Both of her parents are educated professionals. She is the younger of two children. She grew up in a suburb of Washington, D.C. and lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. As a child in elementary school, Brenda was the only African-American in her elementary school. She was comfortable in that environment since that was the environment she knew. As she approached adolescence, she remembers few problems with her ethnic identity. Occasionally, Black girls at her school would accuse her of putting on airs and acting and talking White.

5. Carol is a 30-year-old medical student who was reared in Florida. She earned her undergraduate degree from Emory University. She lived on the extreme boundary of one of the oldest Black municipalities in the country but attended school with middle class White children. Carol is the younger of two children. She expected to get her M.D. Degree in May of 2008 from a prestigious medical school.

6. David is 31 years old, single, and presently unemployed. He graduated from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, and received a master's degree in Business Administration from Harvard University. He grew up in St. Louis in a working class family that valued education. David was raised by his single mother and greatly influenced by his older brother. He is the younger of two boys.

7. Earl is 32 years old, married with two children. He is making the Navy his career. Earl grew up in a predominantly White suburb of St. Louis. He was raised by a single mother who was an elementary school teacher. He is the older of two children. There were few Black children in his middle and high schools until they were bussed in due to the desegregation program. He believed that the Blacks who came to his school ridiculed him because he demonstrated middle class (White) values.

8. Holly is a 29-year-old single mother attending junior college. She is the youngest of three children. Both of her parents are college educated. Holly grew up in a St. Louis suburban community. After attending a predominantly White private school for two years she transferred to a suburban public school. That school was predominantly White with many Black students bussed in from the city. Those bussed students did not readily accept her.

9. James, 33, was born and reared in St. Louis, Missouri. He is married and the father of three children. James has a bachelor's degree from Valparaiso University and a Master of Social Work degree from Washington University. He is the only son of two educators and lived in a predominantly White neighborhood.

10. Jennifer is a 24-year-old nursing student with a bachelor's degree from a small university outside of St. Louis. She is the younger of two children. Her father is a career

officer in the Army; her mother is a budget analyst for the military. The family lived in Germany for 17 years. Jennifer grew up in a diverse population with different “races” and cultures. Problems around her ethnic identity did not surface until she attended college in St. Louis.

11. Justin, 31, a single lawyer, came from a two-parent household in Atlanta, Georgia. He attended Emory University undergraduate school and American University for his law degree. His elementary and high school education consisted of predominantly Black experiences. Although he was reared in a Black environment Justin never felt comfortable with the clothing, music, and speech patterns that were stereotypically Black. He rebelled against the urban students’ definition of Blackness.

12. Karen is a 31-year-old marketing manager for a media company. She received her bachelor’s degree from Emory University and her master’s degree from Northwestern University. Karen is the younger of two children in a single parent home. Her mother earned a master’s degree in Business Administration and moved frequently as her career opportunities improved.

13. Kathy is a 35-year-old married woman and mother of two children. She earned a certificate as a medical technician and works for a large insurance company. Kathy attended private school for four years before transferring to a public school in sixth grade. The transition was difficult for her. She was criticized by her racial peers.

14. Kelly is a 37-year-old wife and mother of three children. She graduated from Washington University with a bachelor’s degree and is pursuing a career as an occupational therapist in a large hospital. Her elementary education began in the public school system. She transferred to a private school in the third grade where she remained

for four years. When Kelly returned to public school in the seventh grade, Black peers pointed out that she was different.

15. Lola, at 32, is a single woman who grew up in the suburbs of Pittsburgh. She received her bachelor's degree from University of Virginia. She is the younger of two children. She attended a dual program at Harvard and Northwestern where she earned two master's degrees. In Pittsburgh she attended a "racially" integrated elementary school where she felt accepted by her peers—Black and White. In high school she attended a prestigious, predominantly White private boarding school in Connecticut. Some African-American female students at this school were from urban communities and perceived Lola as different from them. They accused her of talking and acting White.

16. Michael is a 35-year-old single father who owns a lawn care service. He is the youngest child in a family of five siblings. Michael grew up in a suburb of St. Louis with few Blacks. White public school students did not accept Michael during his early years. Black students from the inner city were bussed to his school when he was in the third grade. They thought he was different and did not readily accept him. At times Mike had to fight, physically, to earn acceptance from his peers.

17. Michelle is a 40-year-old, single mother and supervisor at a magazine distribution company. She was the fourth child of a blue-collar family that lived in a suburb of St. Louis. She described her early school years as extremely difficult. She went to school where there were few Blacks. Others Blacks came to her school when she was in the sixth grade. They criticized the way she spoke.

18. Sandra is 37 years old and single. She is the older of two children. Her parents, blue-collar workers, divorced when she was 7 years old. Her education began in private

school. When she transferred to public school, she entered a magnet program, which emphasized mathematics and science. She enjoyed her educational experiences until middle school. At that point, she entered a general education program of a public school in the suburbs. She was bussed to school with other Black students who were a part of the desegregation program. Criticism from and rejection by her Black peers began at that time.

19. Sange, 34 and single, grew up in Florida. He was reared in a two-parent family. He is the sixth child of seven children. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School. Sange is a freelance writer for several newspapers. He lived in a predominantly White environment and attended predominantly White schools. He was one of the few Blacks in accelerated academic classes. This separation from his racial peers added to the problem of not fitting in with them.

20. Veronica is a 46-year-old certified nursing assistant at a children's hospital. She is the oldest of five children. Both of her parents were blue-collar workers who were able to buy a house in a White, blue-collar suburban subdivision. They were the only Black family in their neighborhood.

In summary, all of the subjects of this study are volunteers who subscribed to middle class cultural norms and were criticized by Black inner city peers as not being "authentically Black" because of their middle class cultural orientation.

### Instrumentation

To capture relevant data, the researcher prepared seven open-ended questions (See Appendix C) designed to explore the subjects' experiences during their secondary school

years. The questions covered family background, neighborhood and school demographics, negative experiences related to ethnicity, coping mechanisms employed by the subjects, and current and future concerns related to ethnic identity. The researcher asked these questions one at a time and used the interviewees' responses to pose probing questions designed to fully explore each characteristic or experience. Additional questions were generated as the interviews progressed based on the subjects' responses.

### Treatment of Subjects

The proposal for this study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board, Institute for Clinical Social Work, Chicago, Illinois. A letter was sent to all subjects informing them of the purpose of the research and guaranteeing the confidentiality of their responses. Treatment of subjects complied with the provisions of the student manual regarding involvement of students in research projects.

### Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through 20 individual interviews and two focus groups. The focus groups consisted of eight and six college students from two universities in metropolitan St. Louis.

### Individual Interviews

The researcher met each subject in the researcher's office or in the subjects' homes, whichever was convenient for the subjects. Most subjects participated in two individual one-to-two-hour interviews. These interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The

researcher also took notes for clarity during the interviewing process. A second one-hour interview was held with the subjects to verify the accuracy of transcriptions and to clarify outstanding issues.

The subjects were deeply engaged in the topic. For most of them, this was the first time they had talked about this topic and most had a cathartic experience. They felt grateful having an opportunity to express their feelings. They experienced a wide range of emotions, from anger to sadness to shame. Two of the subjects found the interview to be a turning point for them. They saw how devastating the impact of the criticism from their racial peers was on them and felt freed after talking about their experience. The subjects picked their own fictitious names. For two of the female subjects, it was important for them to pick names that sounded Black.

#### Focus Group Interviews

The researcher contacted two local universities with stringent admissions requirements to find students who might fit the research profile. The universities arranged for the researcher to meet with two student groups whose purpose was to address African-American issues. The first university had a population of 3,422 students of which 188 were African-Americans. This included night students who were enrolled predominantly in the advanced courses. Group A, the group from this university, consisted of eight African-American females and one White female.

The population of the second university was 2,969, with an African-American population of 990. Students from this university were designated Group B. This group consisted of four African-American males and two African-American females. In each

group, the African-American students related experiences of being criticized by African-American peers for their speech patterns and values.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS I

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine if criticism of cultural orientation directed at middle-class African-Americans by members of their own race has implications for clinical social work practice.

In this paper, the researcher elected to report nine interviews in depth, which is consistent with Denzin's research methodology. Interpretative interactionism requires the thick description necessary to capture the context of an act, as well as the intentions and meanings of acts perceived by the observer. In addition, this section includes the summaries of interviews with eleven subjects, summaries of focus group interviews, and the researcher's summary of the information provided in these interviews.

#### Detailed Narratives

Below are detailed narratives of nine subjects. Two sets of siblings were interviewed from two different families: Kelly and her sister Kathy, and Michael and his two sisters, Michelle and Veronica. These narratives will illuminate the similarities in the incidents experienced by the siblings. In fact all the subjects kept their experience a secret, including friends and families. Their hidden experience was laced with a big dose of impacted shame.

### It's a Family Affair

Kelly and Kathy are the oldest of three children whose parents divorced when Kelly was ten and Kathy was seven. Their mother holds a bachelor's degree from Washington University and their father worked for the U. S. Post Office, which afforded the family a middle class lifestyle. Although they lived in a Black community in the suburbs, Kelly and Kathy attended a private school where there were few Black children during their four years of elementary schooling. There was one Black student in Kelly's class and none in Kathy's. While in private school, both girls noticed that their speech patterns had been influenced by the school environment. They began to speak like their school peers. They learned the rules and behavioral expectations of their school. Later they transferred to public school; this proved to be a challenge for them.

Kelly is 37 years old, married with three children, ages 19, 8 and 4. She described her middle school years as confusing. Problems started for her after returning to public school for the eighth grade after 4 years in a private school. Kelly described the differences between her public and private school experiences. In private school, she noticed students often enforced the rules of fairness; if needed, the teacher was around to support them. In the public school, students made and enforced their own rules without the intervention. The teacher was there if conflicts became physical.

In private school, Kelly wanted to be like her classmates. She wanted to wear her hair like them. She complained until her mother let her wear her hair down. "I had long

hair but it didn't flow like theirs; it wasn't the same. When I was in high school and was around the Black students, I wanted to identify with them. I always wanted to identify with the kids I was with, whoever that was," explained Kelly.

Black students told Kelly that she was different. They noted that her speech was different from theirs. In an effort to fit in, she tried to change her speech pattern to "sound Black," but her peer group continued to reject and tease her about her speech, dress, and slender physique. They called her "No. 2 pencil" because she was thin and "Oreo" (Black on the outside, White on the inside) because her speech pattern resembled that of middle class White students. Kelly described her experiences as follows:

I got a complex about being skinny after being teased so much. It is negative to be skinny and be Black in the same sentence. I fit in good with the Whites. I was always supers mall and I didn't like it. I saw the difference in the way I was built and the way the other Blacks were built. Everybody else had breasts, hips and butt. I didn't have anything. The other Black girls had curves. I had my mom take me to the doctor to help me put on weight. With the White kids, skinny was good but not so with Blacks; it was bad.

Her attempts to be accepted by many of the Black students failed and Kelly remained on the outside of the social group. Even in high school, Black urban students continued to tease her and remind her that she was not "Black enough."

To avoid further criticism, Kelly refused to be placed in accelerated classes. She said, "My teacher recommended me for honor classes, but I refused. I didn't want any part of that. I was already skinny." If she had enrolled in accelerated classes, she would have been labeled smart and a nerd. It would be another excuse for others to belittle and isolate her. Black students already ostracized her by calling her "White girl," "Number 2," and other unflattering names. When Kelly's mother tried to force her to participate in accelerated classes, Kelly threatened to get "Fs." They compromised; Kelly would not

go into accelerated classes but she agreed not get to any grade under “B,” and she kept her promise.

Kelly had a best friend whom she had known since the first grade. When Kelly returned to public school in the eighth grade, she and her friend became close again. “It was like we had never been apart. I was so glad to see her that I just latched on to her. I found myself dependent on her throughout high school,” she explained. She felt simultaneously envious and proud of her friend. The friend carried herself with confidence and knew that she could take care of herself in the presence of other Blacks.

Kelly felt that she and her friend complemented each other. Kelly was shy and introverted; her friend was assertive and extroverted. Sometimes her friend protected her from the onslaught of her peers. Her friend was able to code switch and got along with both White and Black students. Kelly asked her friend to teach her how to speak like Black students. Kelly practiced but was unsuccessful. She was never able to speak with the urban Black dialect. Other Black students continued to call her a “wannabe.” (referring to a Black person who wants to be White). They did not accept her attempts to sound Black as authentic.

Kelly remembers hating high school. She felt that she had no one to go to for advice. She said, “My dad had the street smarts, but he was not in the home. My mom didn’t have any street smarts. So I couldn’t depend on her. My mom would not have been able to survive in public school if she hadn’t had so many sisters to protect her. I wasn’t going to listen to her. She was a nerd and a pretty girl in high school.” Kelly felt that her mother was pretty and smart but helpless when it came to taking care of herself. Kelly’s mom was one of nine girls. Kelly believed that her siblings would protect her

mom if necessary. “Plus they grew up in the city and knew the ropes.” Yet at the same time, she noted that her “mom did not act like a city girl. At times she seemed fragile and helpless.” Her mother was similar to Kelly, thin and smart.

Kelly had a boyfriend in her senior year. Kelly’s girlfriend was so protective of her that she set limits with the boyfriend to prevent him from taking advantage of Kelly. Unfortunately, due to some personal problems, the friend quit school during the first semester of their senior year. This was a monumental blow to Kelly. She remembers crying and begging her friend not to leave her. When the friend withdrew, Kelly felt abandoned and believed that she could not make it in the school without her. To compensate for the loss of her friend, Kelly befriended two other students who were also misfits. They were unpopular misfits in accelerated classes, without friends except for Kelly. Although Kelly spent time with them, she did not feel connected to them and they could not help each other with the peer rejections.

With no one else to rely on, Kelly became closer to her boyfriend and soon became pregnant. She was able to hide the pregnancy throughout most of the school year. Although the boyfriend was not supportive of her, his family and her parents were. Her boyfriend told her that she would become one of those women who had a lot of babies and lived on welfare. Kelly was enraged at the statement and terminated their relationship. Kelly summed up her high school experiences as follows:

I didn’t really enjoy high school. I just felt the whole time I was being judged. I know every teenager believes he is being judged. Everybody goes through their own stuff. That’s the hardest time because it’s when you are trying to figure out what you want to do or who you want to be like or just your identity. I just felt like I couldn’t identify with anyone. I remember the loneliness and the isolation. As I looked back, I realized that high school was not a good experience for me. I actually hated it. I would never want to repeat that experience again, never!

Kelly did not believe that her sister Kathy had ever experienced being rejected and ridiculed by her ethnic peers. They never discussed it and her sister never complained so Kelly assumed that her sister was getting along fine, although they both went to the private school for the same amount of time and both were transferred to public school.

Kelly's daughter, Samantha, attended a high school where the Blacks were clearly the minority. Samantha was able to have Black and White friends at her school, but was often criticized by Black students for her association with White students. Just like her mother, she was told that she sounded too much like a White girl. When Samantha tried out for cheerleading, Black students criticized her because they believed that cheerleading was a White domain. Whites didn't want her because they had their quota. The school had a history of allowing only one Black girl per team to participate. Getting on the team proved to be a struggle for Samantha. She went to her mother for support. Kelly discussed the matter with school officials, but it was not until Kelly threatened a lawsuit that the coach allowed Samantha on the team.

Some Blacks students were supportive of Samantha while the conflict was in process. They did not agree with the White staff keeping her off the team, but once Samantha was accepted on the team, Black students did not understand why she would want to participate in a White activity. Samantha persisted despite the lack understanding from the Black students.

Kelly earned a bachelor of arts degree from Washington University in St. Louis. Her experience at Washington University was quite different from high school. No one criticized her for being herself. She felt accepted by both White and Black students. She never felt different from her peers at the university.

Kelly is an occupational therapist, happily married to an architect, and has two more children. She is the only Black in her department at a large local hospital. She feels comfortable in her work environment and has a good White friend with whom she socializes during and after work. They visit each other's home frequently. She has several African-American friends as well. Kelly states that she is comfortable with her ethnic identity now.

The turning point for Kelly came when she became pregnant and was demeaned by her boyfriend. She wanted to fight back. She didn't want her child to be ashamed of her. She didn't like what she saw in herself. Kelly wanted a good life for herself and child. She no longer tried to prove her Blackness or hide behind a boyfriend who used and abuse her. She realized that she had relied on her best friend to take care of her and when her friend left school, Kelly depended on her boyfriend to take over where her girlfriend left off. Instead he became emotionally abusive. However, Kelly is a survivor and vowed not let that happen again. She had a cumulative epiphany that changed her life. After years of neglect and abuse, she was able to make the necessary changes to add meaning to her life.

Kathy is 34 married with two children, age 12 and seven. She is a medical technician residing in the suburbs of St. Louis in a predominantly White environment. Her children are among the minority in their school.

Kathy attended kindergarten in a public school and transferred to a private school in the first grade where she attended for four years. She was the only Black in her first grade class. She believes that her problems started when she re-entered public school and Black students noticed that her speech was different from theirs. They accused her of

“talking White.” They questioned and belittled her and snickered when she spoke in class. Often Kathy did not understand the slang used by the other Black students. When she asked for clarification, they would laugh rather than answer her questions. She tried to sound Black and act Black but was unsuccessful. She did not fit in and felt there was something wrong with her. She had no friends in fifth and sixth grades and felt very lonely.

Kathy’s junior high experience was somewhat better. She made friends with two other girls who were also ostracized. They were unable to help each other with the feelings of alienation, but they stuck together, sitting together at lunch and at every other opportunity. They remained friends throughout her secondary school experience and into their adult years. Even with these friends, Kathy still feels the pain from the rejection of the majority Black students.

Kathy’s grades suffered in high school when class participation became important. Although her test scores and class work were fine, she refused to talk in class for fear of being ridiculed. When students scoffed at the way she talked, teachers did not reproach them. Kathy took their silence as giving students permission to ridicule her. She believed that teachers, too, thought she “talked White.” Not speaking in class was her best defense. She was always hiding from her Black classmates. White students were friendly with her in class, but they did not socialize with her outside of school.

With the exception of the band—in which her mother forced her to participate—Kathy did not involve herself in extracurricular activities for fear of being ridiculed. Kathy wanted to be a cheerleader, but again was afraid to try out for fear of being ridiculed. No other Black student showed interest in the cheerleader’s squad. She

remembers being lonely in high school. Her senior year became so unbearable that she missed more than thirty days from school. She would leave the home, wait to see her mother leave for work, then double back and remain at home the rest of the day. Her mother found out when she received Kathy's report card. Kathy told her that she didn't like school but would not tell her the real reason for her truancy.

The feelings of alienation and rejection continued throughout Kathy's educational experience. Her mother wanted to send her to a Black university in Atlanta. Kathy refused without telling her mother the truth about why she did not want to attend a Black school. (Kelly does not believe that her mother knew the kind of turmoil she experienced in high school.) Kathy did agree to attend the community college in St. Louis, which turned out to be a continuation of her high school experience. Again, Black students questioned her about her speech pattern. She became fearful of speaking aloud. She lived in fear instructors would call on her. When the pressure became unbearable, she ended her community college experience and eventually enrolled in a program to be a medical record technician. Kathy now works for an insurance company and is one of three other Black employees who have similar backgrounds and sound very much alike. She is very comfortable on her job. She socializes with both Black and White co-workers.

At the beginning of the interview, Kathy said she did not know any Black people who "talked White." She asked her co-workers if she talked White and was relieved when they told her that she did not. (This was interesting because as we talked she gave me many examples of being ridiculed for the way she spoke.)

Kathy lives in suburban St. Louis in an area where there are very few Blacks. Her children are seven and 12 and play well with their White neighbors. Kathy worries about

her girls being ostracized by Black children. She fears they will repeat her experiences. She asks them frequently if they are teased about the way that they speak. She was worried that her girls would encounter the same torment that she experienced. They told her that they were not teased and felt comfortable at school. I asked Kathy how she would protect her children. She answered that she did not know what to say to them. She just hopes that they do not have the same experience that she did. She remembers overhearing her daughter ask her stepfather if she sounded White. He told her yes. Kathy said that made her stomach hurt as she thought, "Here we go again."

Kathy gave a party for her daughter, Della's twelfth birthday. She invited a long-time acquaintance, who also had a 12-year-old daughter. The friend's daughter was uncomfortable with the number of White children at the party and asked Della why so many White kids were there. Della replied, "These are my neighbors and kids I go to school with. These are the children I play with and eat lunch with everyday." The friend wanted to go home and said she would never come back to a party that had so many White children.

The child's mother, Kathy's friend, questioned Kathy about moving into a neighborhood that had so many Whites. Kathy's explanation that she purchased a house at a good price in an exceptional school district was not sufficient for the friend. The friend responded that she would not have moved into such an area because it would make her children too White. This was a hurtful response for Kathy because she had known this woman a long time. She had hoped her friend would sanction her choice of to live in this neighborhood and would explain this to her daughter.

The interview for this research was clearly difficult for Kathy. She sighed and clutched her stomach at various points during the interview. It was clear from her facial expressions and the constant sighing that she was uncomfortable. She admitted that she had not thought about this problem for herself in a long time. The interview resurfaced many painful memories. Occasionally, she thinks about her children having such experiences but does not think about herself. She wished people would let people be who they want to be, especially when it does not hurting anyone. “Why do Blacks demand that I change before they accept me?” She confessed that this interview made her stomach hurt. She was glad when it was completed. I reminded her that there would be a second interview. She sighed and rolled her eyes.

During the second interview, Kathy was asked if she shared any her racial criticism incidents with her sister Kelly. She said no, because her sister would not understand. Kathy believed that her sister did not experience this kind of criticism.

When Kathy’s husband told her daughter that she sounded White, Kathy became very much aware of what could be an ongoing problem for her daughters. Although she wants to protect her daughters, Kelly does not want her daughters to feel alone with this issue. This issue still remains a struggle for her. Kathy is able to compartmentalize her feelings to the point that she did not instantly recall having had the experience of being told she talked White. At times she is able to push these experiences out of her consciousness and deny that they ever happened to her. This was a cumulative epiphany for her.

### An Elephant in the Room

Michael, Veronica, and Michelle are siblings who reported experiences similar to those of Kathy and Kelly regarding being ridiculed and rejected by Black students in their school. They were three children in a sibship of five. They never shared their experiences with anyone before these interviews, not even among themselves. Each felt the other had escaped these experiences. There was no one with whom they could share their experiences. They felt they should handle the problem themselves. Veronica and Michelle reported that they believed the criticism that they were not Black enough and needed to learn how to be “Blacker.” Michael denied internalizing the criticism.

The family moved into their predominantly White neighborhood when Veronica was 7 years old. Michelle was 1 year old and Michael had not been born. Developing relationships with age peers in the neighborhood and in school was difficult for all of them at first. Each reported being rejected and called racially derogatory names by Whites before making friends and feeling accepted in their school environment. Later, Black inner city students were bussed to their school. These students also rejected them and called them names. They never felt accepted by the bussed Black students.

Veronica is the oldest of the three children. She was in the first grade when the family moved to a subdivision where there were no other Black families. Interacting with White people was completely new to Veronica. She was afraid of the unknown of living around people of a different color. After much criticism and rejection by them, Veronica believed that something was wrong with her. She very much wanted to identify with her neighbors. “I didn’t want to be Black anymore because they called me names. They

called me ‘nigger’ all the time. They treated Blacks like they were bad people.” She was ashamed of her hair and wished she had hair like theirs.

Not only were they the sole Black family in their subdivision, Veronica was the only Black student in her school. She remembered being afraid all the time in school and would often wet her pants while in class. She took candy to school to give the children in hopes of getting them to like her. The first few years in elementary school were hard. By the time she was in the third or fourth grade she had worked out most of the difficulties between herself and other students.

Later new challenges presented themselves and she hated school. She remembers fighting throughout her entire school career. She explained further:

When I went to high school, I met Black students who would call me ‘Oreo’ and ‘White kid.’ The bussing system had started when I got to high school. At first, I was glad to see them, but we couldn’t relate to each other. They used to laugh at me and laugh at the way I dressed. They would laugh at the way I spoke. They would just laugh at me for no reason. I was unable to befriend the Blacks that came to my school. They told me that I was a White girl dressed in nigger skin. They called me names and made fun of the way I talked. I didn’t talk like them. I didn’t act like them. They talked differently. They were just different. I remembered when the Whites called me nigger now the Blacks called me a nigger. I didn’t know who I was.

Veronica felt confused about her identity; she did not know if she should be Black or White. To ward off ridicule (like Kathy), she spoke very little. Black students misinterpreted her silence; they believed that her silence was a way of rejecting them. Actually, her silence was fear. “It shouldn’t matter. They had already rejected me,” she explained. “I didn’t mix with the Blacks well because of my body language and the way I spoke. They said that I was a White girl with Black skin on the outside. Why are people so mean?” Veronica wondered. She was picked on less after she started playing sports.

She did not cultivate friends but the environment sometimes felt less hostile. She described her feelings:

I wasn't able to blend in. They would laugh and joke and I didn't know what they were laughing about so I just looked at them. I didn't get what was funny. I thought that I didn't have a sense of humor. I thought something was wrong with me. They were laughing and I just looked at them wondering what were they laughing about? I used to look at them and say 'wow I wished I could be like that.' I wish I could be like them. I wished I had friends to laugh with. Something is wrong with me.

Veronica felt that she was broken, but did not know how to fix herself. She remembered having a lot of self-hatred. Her sadness and shame were palpable during part of the interview. In time, she developed friendships with White friends, but the more White friends she had, the more Blacks rejected her. Her best White friend dropped their friendship in high school. Like her, Veronica believed that her White friend wanted closeness with those of her own race. Veronica understood that her friend "wanted to be with her White friends and I wanted to be with Black friends." She remembered two Black girls who were nice to her and would speak to her but they weren't really friends. "I even tried to learn to talk Black. Maybe I didn't sound Black or maybe they didn't care. It just didn't do any good," said Veronica.

School was not the only source of racial criticism. Veronica related this personal experience:

When I was 15 years old, I went out of town to visit my great-aunt for the summer. John, my brother, and I went to stay at my great-aunt's house. She was a mean lady. I didn't know anything about farm life. My father left Sunday and called me on that Thursday to see how things were going. I told my father that I wanted to come home. My great-aunt was mean. She made me feed the pigs, clean the house, and do other hard work that I wasn't use to doing. At home all I had to do was to clean my room and wash dishes. My great-aunt said she was going to break us because my parents were raising us like White kids. She said we talked like White kids and acted like White kids. She wanted to punish us for being who we were.

Dad came that next day to pick us up. No one knew he was coming. He was there to take us home. Great-aunt yelled at him. She was too mad. She told him he was raising us wrong; that we thought that *we were better than they are* [italics are mine]. Dad told her that he was not going to let her or anyone else mistreat us. He had a very hard life growing up. No one protected him. He was not going to let us go through the same thing that he went through as a child.

Veronica then revealed a growing awareness. “I realize that I grew up to be a big bully. I hate bullies and here I am being a bully myself. One day my son asked me why I was so angry. I have so much rage in me,” she explained. She had not realized that the anger was still in her. I recommended that Veronica keep a journal as a medium to express her feelings.

During her second interview for this study Veronica reported how important it was to have the opportunity to tell her story. Now, she asserts herself and takes risk by being around people. She speaks up rather than remaining silent. She feels that she has developed more confidence in her ethnic identity within the last four months than she has in all of her previous 46 years. She realizes that intellectually she is fine the way she is, but does need to work on her emotional control related to these experiences. She reported that she has to remind herself of that quite frequently.

Veronica recently got a new job as a certified nursing assistant in a children’s hospital. One of the women asked her why she talked like a White woman. Veronica angrily told her that she was Black and that was all that the woman needed to know. She said, at 46, she was tired of hearing that “shit.” She is not going to take it anymore. She will not allow other people criticize her for being who she is.

Veronica experienced a cumulative epiphany. She realized that the anger she carried all these years was the result of racial criticism. She is no longer willing to accept that kind of treatment from anyone. She said having the interviews with me opened her

eyes in many ways and allowed her to see what she had been afraid to see. She always believed that if she changed, Black people would like her. Now she realizes that there is nothing wrong with her. She is fine the way she is.

Michelle is a 40-year-old single mother. Her 18-year-old son grew up in the same predominantly White neighborhood as she and attends the same school as well. Michelle is Veronica's younger sister and reported fewer problems making neighborhood friends than her sister. There were several girls Michelle's age nearby. White neighbors had gotten used to the fact that a Black family lived in close proximity.

There were few Blacks at Michelle's school prior to bussing. She got along well with Blacks and Whites in her school. More Black families moved into the school district although they did not live in Michelle's immediate neighborhood. After bussing began, her situation changed. Michelle's experiences mirrored Veronica's in many ways. She reported constant rejection and ridicule by urban Blacks. Her efforts to close the gap were futile. She reports:

As far as relationships, I never felt mistreated until the eighth grade. I knew I was different. I knew my hair was different, but it didn't seem to matter. In elementary school there were only a few Blacks so we all sat together at lunch. But in junior high there were more Blacks (we had the desegregation kids) and you saw separation. The Black people stayed together and the White people stayed together. There was a time when I could be with the Black and the White people at the same time, but when the Blacks from the city came, things changed. There were no more integrated lunch tables; there were either the Black lunch tables or the White lunch tables.

Michelle wanted desperately to be accepted by her Black peers in high school.

Michelle was an attractive girl who was easily noticed by boys. When she became interested in boys, she felt that she had to make a choice along racial lines. She thought Black boys might pay attention to her if she relinquished her relationship with her White

peers. However, Black girls not only ridiculed Michelle, they ridiculed any boy who paid attention to her. The boys would flirt with her but the urban Black girls would get mad and tease the boys for talking to a White girl. “Most of the time the boys ignored them and kept walking and talking to me,” she recalled. “I wanted to be noticed, so I went Black. I dropped my White friends with the hope of gaining acceptance,” she admitted. That effort was unsuccessful. High school was a lonely, unhappy period in her life.

When Michelle went into the city to visit family members, she spoke as little as possible because when she talked, they laughed and said she talked White. Her cousin did not protect her. Her cousin would laugh too. At this point in the interview Michelle was tearful. She had hoped her cousins would protect her, not join the others. She said:

There were times that I didn't say anything at all. Then they said I was stuck up, but really I was just shy and I didn't want them to make fun of me. They would say, 'Hee, hee, you talk White. Listen to how she talks, everybody.' So I tried not to talk around them at all.

Not only did Michelle's city family members ridicule her, they did not protect her from the barbs of their city neighbors. Her family provided no respite or shelter.

Michelle was also quiet whenever possible around unfamiliar Blacks. Like her sister Veronica, they accused her of being stuck-up. She preferred that students see her as stuck-up rather than label her as being White. With the help of a friend, Michelle learned to code switch. (Code switching is a term indicating the use of more than one language in a conversation. Talking Black is synonymous to speaking Ebonics.) Code switching for Michelle meant using Ebonics in order to gain credibility with urban Black students. When talking to a White person, she spoke her natural vernacular of Standard English. She practiced using Black dialect by leaving off word endings. Michelle noted that code switching had a carryover effect into her adulthood. When she talks to African-

Americans over the phone and they eventually meet her face-to-face for the first time, is not uncommon for them to say, "I thought you were a White girl, you talk so proper." Her speech does not prevent Black men from showing interest in her. They recognized that her speech was influenced by the fact that she grew up in the suburbs in a predominantly White neighborhood and that she continues to live in such a neighborhood. Michelle is a supervisor on her job and is the only Black in her work area. She lunches with White workers. Recently, other Blacks were hired and joined her area of work. She is their superior. Michelle recalled sitting in the lunch room when several other Black workers came in and they sat at a different table. They accused her of being stuck up because she lunched with the White workers rather than changing tables to sit with them. Michelle was appalled at the accusation because she had been sitting at that particular table for years. "One of the Black women had the audacity to ask me why I talked White. White people never ask me why I talk the way I do. They don't say, 'You don't sound like other Black people.' They just accept me the way I am," she said bitterly.

Michelle admits to having few friends and only one Black friend in her present life. "Don't get me wrong," she cautioned. "I am very much in touch with my Blackness. I am aware of the racism on my job." She prefers to socialize with White co-workers from her job with whom she has become close friends.

Michelle admitted that Black people have intimidated her since the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and still do. She finds Black people "too aggressive, too rough." She doesn't know how to "play the dozen." She doesn't like it when Blacks talk about each other's mothers and families, called playing the dozen in the African-American culture. "I never thought the

way they put each other down was funny. I stay by myself because I never learned to blend in with Black people,” she said sadly.

When asked about dating, Michelle said she preferred to date Black men. Black men did not seem to have problems accepting her, only the Black women. (Michelle is very attractive and would have no problem gaining the attention of men.) Black men often flirt with her to get her attention. Michelle added, “I know it’s sad to say but I don’t feel safe with Black women. I don’t trust them.” She admitted that Black men noticed that she talked different, but she didn’t feel rebuked for being herself. She could feel their acceptance of her differences.

Michelle no longer seeks the friendship and acceptance of others based on race. In the relived epiphany, each time Michelle encounters a threatening situation, she relives the intimidation and trauma she experienced in middle school. Even now, these feelings can be triggered by an aggressive tone in a Black person’s voice.

Michael is 38-years-old and self-employed with a lawn care service. He is a single parent with a 16-year-old bi-racial son who lives with him. Michael grew up in a working class neighborhood in the suburbs; there was one other Black family in his subdivision. Michael remembers that there were few Blacks in his school and none in his kindergarten and first grade classes. His classmates taunted and teased him on a regular basis. After he learned to stand up for himself and fight back they left him alone. Subsequently, he was able to make friends with boys. Michael recalled an incident in the second grade when White boys harassed him. There was a hill on the playground. The boys would push him down the hill and each time he climbed to the top of the hill they would push him down again. Eventually, Michael climbed to the top and pushed one of his tormentors down the

hill. This automatically ended the assault. The only way he knew to take care of himself was to fight.

Michael was aware that he was treated differently by the White children and their families. He knew he was Black and they were White but did not expect to be treated differently because of it. He noted that no one warned him that he would be treated differently. He was not allowed to go into the house where White children were playing. If he needed water or bathroom privileges he had to go home, but his White friends were allowed to use each other's facilities. He asked his mother about this. His mother tried to comfort him with Bible quotes, most of which Michael did not understand. I told Michael that for the first nine years of my life, I lived in an all Black neighborhood and that I also remember having to wait outside if a playmate went inside her home for a toy or water. Michael pointed out that my situation was different from his because the White boys went inside the house but he was not allowed inside. A few years later, Michael was allowed inside some White homes but others never made the change.

Michael felt that he was different from his White playmates but he found it difficult to describe this difference. He played all day with White children with very few racial problems surfacing. He thought maybe the difference was generated by something that went on in their homes that did not happen in his home. Michael seemed frustrated as he tried to recall the feeling he experienced around this difference. He admitted that he rarely thinks about the past. This interview resurrected a lot of uncomfortable feeling. He started to look very uncomfortable as he squirmed in his seat. Michael was aware of his frustration and anger about the past.

Michael was in the third grade when Black students were bussed to his school for integration purposes. He had never been in an environment with so many Black children; he viewed them as playmates. After being around so many Whites, he was excited to have many Black children to play with. (Michael was animated as he described his excitement.) He thought they were there for him. He looked at all those children who had hair and skin like him. He decided they were his friends just by looking at them. This proved to be disheartening experience. While some did not care about the way he spoke, most ridiculed him. Black students said he talked White and called him “White boy.” To lessen the friction between him and Black students, Michael learned to code shift. He used the slang of urban Black students when he was with them, but used Standard English when conversing with Whites.

In middle school, a Black student accosted Michael for the way that he talked. The two boys settled the matter with a fistfight. Michael talked to his mother about the arguments he was getting into with Black students. His mother’s advice was to let it roll off his back but that did not work. It was only after having physical altercations that the boys stopped teasing him. “I had to defend myself all the time with Blacks and with Whites. It never seemed to stop unless we fought,” he said with frustration. Michael was one of two interviewees who acknowledged reaching out for help. He went to his mother several times as a young boy. Unfortunately, his mother did not know how to help him. Her attempt to explain the behavior of others and to give him comfort was ineffective.

Michael describes himself as a lonely child who did not enjoy school. The social challenges were too difficult and brought very little pleasure. He felt he was constantly defending his ethnicity. In high school, he began to show interest in girls. Black girls did

not return his interest; they told him he did not talk like a Black guy. Even his code switching did not always help him. Students accused him of not sounding authentic. This criticism made him leery of Black girls and he began dating White girls. He felt less judged by White girls; they never said anything to make him doubt or defend his ethnic identity.

Michael has been unable to maintain an intimate relationship with a woman for longer than 3 years. He says he always loses interest. As an adult, he dates both Black and White women. According to Michael, the more “hood” the women are, the more White he is to them. They would comment on the way he talked. He had fewer problems connecting with the White women he dated. Still, he does not allow himself to get too close to anyone. Like his sisters, he does not trust easily, Black or White.

During high school, Michael made a special effort to get to know more Black peers. He did not take a job in his neighborhood because the neighborhood was mostly White. He took a job at the skating rink that catered to a large Black population. Even this presented a challenge for him because many of the Blacks noticed that he talked differently, in spite of his efforts to talk Black. The mockery continued.

It feels like nothing has changed for Michael as an adult. He feels a need to protect himself from Blacks and Whites. He sees himself as a loner. He doesn't have friends he can trust. He feels that he has been wearing a mask since middle school. As a way of protecting himself, he does not show his true feelings around White or Black peers. When he is with Blacks who know him, everybody is “cool.” When he comes in contact with Black people who don't know him, they “trip” off the way he talks. Whites don't

comment on the way he talks but he doesn't trust them to "have his back" if he needed them. He feels that he must be vigilant when he is with either group.

Michael believes that he has to be careful about being open with male associates. Most of the men he knows do not work full-time and many live at home with their parents. When Michael started his lawn care service, his friends wanted to know why he would work so hard cutting grass. They believed cutting grass is a job beneath what a man should be doing, even though only a few of them had jobs. On occasions, Michael has hired some of his friends to work for him, Black and White. He found that both groups of men tried to sabotage his business. He does not believe that the men he knows have much ambition and they question why Michael is ambitious.

Michael bought a house in an attractive, middle class suburban neighborhood that has primarily White residents. Michael's friends have never seen his home nor has he told them that he bought a home. Most of them do not know where he lives. He is concerned that out of jealousy, they will try to put him down or may stop "hanging" with him altogether.

Michael admitted that his son is going through some of the same issues with race identity that he experienced. He believes that his son is good in sports and hopes that his success in sports would take some of the pressure off him. He knows that his son will have to work it out as best as he can. Michael said that he cannot really help his son; he doesn't know how. He believes that his son will have to figure things out for himself.

When I asked Michael how his siblings handled the Black and White identity issues, he answered that they never had the problems he did. He never shared those problems with anyone. His mother knew about his many fights, but he didn't share the

details of the criticism he received from the Black students. According to Michael, he does not have friends, but several acquaintances. He is unable to trust people. I told Michael that he sounded sad and asked if that was that what he was feeling? He said, “Yes and really lonely.” He said:

I don't believe that they will be there for me. I resent how I got treated in high school and in middle school. When I saw all those Black children come to my school, I thought I would have lots of friends with whom I could play. The Blacks treated me worse than the Whites. I don't know. Maybe, I say that because the Blacks hurt worse than the Whites or maybe because it seems like it never ends.

Michael feels that he relives his experience repeatedly. Even with the new people he meets, it feels like more of the same. He is friendly to people, and needs to be because of his business, but he does not trust them nor does he allow himself to get close to them. Michael experienced relived epiphany.

None of the members of either family had shared their experience with the other siblings or parents, even after the interviews and so much pain had been revealed. Each sibling remained silent about this topic. They did not share their experience prior to or after the interviews. Kathy and Kelly confessed to have a close relationship and have spent time together frequently, but independently, they opted not to discuss their ordeal.

Another interesting point is that all five of these subjects have children. All five of them lived in an environment where their children are clearly in the minority and are likely to repeat their parent's experience. Kelly was the only parent who reported talking with her daughter about being rejected by other Blacks. She told her to ignore them because they were jealous. She explained that she went through the same thing in high school. Kelly is also the only one in this group who attended a prestigious college. She

also appears to be the only one who is comfortable with her ethnic identity. Unlike the others, she is able to maintain Black and White friends.

Kathy is concerned that her children will repeat her experience; however she does not know what to say to them to help them. She worries about it all the time, and continues not to share her feelings with other family members or friends. Kathy seemed to be shrouded in shame and unable to move from that spot.

Veronica, Michael, and Michelle did not disclose their ordeal with their children or each other; although they are sure their children had or are having similar experiences with their Black peers. Each one of the siblings was sure that they were the only one in the family who had this experience. They have no explanation as to why they were the one being picked on by the Blacks. For each, this experience was fraught with anger and shame, but it was the shame that prompted them to keep their secret to themselves. They bought into the notion that they were damaged.

When Veronica's daughter approached her about being ridiculed by African-American students, Veronica advised her to ignore them and to keep being herself. Michelle and Michael never discussed the issue with their sons. They don't have answers for them. They explained that the boys would have to work it through the best way they can. "It is something one has to do for himself," explained Michael.

### *Getting with the Right Brothers*

Earl is 33 years old and making the Navy his career. He has been married 4 years and has two young boys. Earl's parents were divorced when he was in elementary

school. His mother has a bachelor's degree and teaches elementary school. He has a sister two years his junior.

Earl attended school in the suburbs of St. Louis. There was only one other Black family in his immediate neighborhood. His school was a part of the desegregation program that bussed in inner city Black students. Prior to the desegregation program, Earl was comfortable in school with his peers. The newcomers to his school perceived him as a "county dude." He was told that he was an "Oreo," not a real "brother." After being ridiculed by Blacks from the inner city, Earl decided to make a change to become "Blacker." He believed that the inner city boys represented true Blackness. "It's almost like you had to prove your Blackness, like your Blackness was always in question. You had to be rough enough and tough enough to be considered an African-American," he said. He decided to use the Blacks in his school as role models on how to be Black. He selected boys to emulate who he felt were "hard," good rappers, sold drugs and had the respect of the other Black males in his school. Earl wanted to shed the label of "county brownie" or "county dude." He wanted to be seen as a brother who could "get down." He believed that the city students knew more than anyone what it meant to be Black. Their neighbors were Black; they attended Black churches; they knew the latest fashion and rap songs. They were the coolest.

Earl recalls that the inner city nerds got the protection of the other inner city kids, but not the county nerds. If a county kid wanted to avoid being picked on by the city kid, he had to be "down with them." The city kids stuck up for their own; the county Black was not one of theirs unless he passed the test. To ensure that he would pass the test, Earl chose to emulate the hardcore Blacks. One hardcore Black kid who was selling drugs

killed himself playing Russian roulette. Earl was sorry the boy died, but he was impressed by how the boy lived on the edge of life.

If he could get in with the “right brothers” he would be accepted as a true Black brother, be invited to the rights parties, and hang with the popular crowd. He would be cool. As a male, one way to get respect is to be a good athlete. Earl was good at basketball. “I did whatever I needed to do to be with the in-crowd. I was not opposed to cutting class or skipping school or letting my grades drop,” he stated, “but there was a price to pay.” One of his city friends talked him in to signing up for a pottery class. They decided that it was an easy “A” and would be good for their GPA (grade point average). After enrolling in the class Earl and his friend decided pottery was “White folk’s stuff” and that they would not participate. At the same time basketball tryouts were going on. Earl had made all the cuts and was a shoo-in for making the team. After several weeks, the coach informed Earl that he had made the team, but was ineligible to play on the team because he had gotten an “F” in pottery. It was the school’s policy. Earl was extremely disappointed and hurt. Basketball was his life. He needed basketball to ensure his popularity and acceptance with the city students. In addition, Earl absolutely loved playing the game. As Earl related his experience, he sounded 15 or 16 years old. He recounted the pain as well as the experience. He whined as he explained his disappointment in not making the team. “Nothing,” he said, “nothing was more important than playing basketball.” We both acknowledged the pain that this caused him.

Against his mother’s warnings, Earl liked going into the inner city to visit friends he had met in school. His mother was concerned that he would not know how to take care of himself in the rough part of the city since he did not grow up in that environment.

After promising his mother he would not go into the city, he went. He felt that his mother was too protective and that he could take care of himself. He did not want to tell her the truth because she would worry. Once on the way to a friend's house in the city, Earl was robbed at gunpoint. He remembered the fear clearly. He instantly heard his mother's warnings. Looking at the gun, he feared for his life. Earl told his robber that he was only 17; he lived at home with his mother and was still getting an allowance. He only had a dollar on him. The robber checked Earl's wallet and said if he had found more money in the wallet he would have shot him for lying. This was the last straw for Earl. He thought he was going to die. He was not willing to give his life trying to prove that he was Black.

This incident caused Earl to take a look at his life and behavior. He gradually began to pull away from his city friends. He realized his life was worth more. Earl became home bound, spending less time with inner city friends and more time building up his grades and taking more interest in school activities. He didn't drop his city friends, but he mostly spent time with them at school rather than the inner city. He told them that his mother had him on lock down.

Earl loved to paint and play video games. He had been afraid his friends from the city would find out about his hobbies and ridicule him. (At this time video games were not popular in the Black community.) He stopped painting altogether and only played video games when he felt it was safe. Earl confessed although his urban friends never came into his house, he was afraid that they might and would "see my stuff." He was not willing to take a chance on being discovered with paint supplies or video games. Although it's been over 15 years, he has not been able to resume his hobby of painting.

He thinks and talks about it a great deal but has not been able to allow himself to do it. At the urging of his wife, he bought paint supplies but that is as far as he has been able to go with it. He does not understand why he is unable resume painting or why the urge to paint continues to nag him. It reminds him of the sacrifices he made in trying to prove he was Black.

Earl realizes he does not need to prove his Blackness to anyone. His identity is intact. He knows who he is and doesn't have to pretend to be somebody he's not. He feels free. Earl associates with a variety of people. He likes having choices and not narrowing his vision to be what others say he ought to be. He enjoys going to better restaurants, playing sports and video games, and being a father to his two sons. Earl gave up his hobbies because the city kids believed that only nerdy kids played video games and painted. If they had known that he liked painting, they would have thought of him as some "artsy-smartsy nerd." He is disappointed that he almost died and missed a whole season of basketball, a game he is really passionate about, before he turned his life around. He had to hit rock bottom before he could make the necessary changes.

Although Earl never discussed his dilemma with either of his parents, he thought his mother sensed that he was going through something, but she didn't know how to help him. He added:

My mother knew what I was going through on some level, but didn't have a clue as to how to help me. As a teenager it was more important to be cool with my friends than with my mom. Therefore I did not heed her warning when she told me not to go into certain parts of the city. I thought my parents were stupid and not cool. I don't think parents know how much pain kids go through. My mother came from a different era. Back then Blacks stuck together. Now Black kids are picking on other Black kids because of their neighbors. Back in my mother's day your neighbor was Black. How could she truly understand what I was going through?

Earl knew other guys from the suburbs who were going through some difficult times with this issue. They never talked about it and he didn't feel he could help them. "Some of the other guys got their asses kicked. They were outcasts to people of their own race. In a school where there's racism with Whites and rejection and ridicule from the Blacks, you had nobody," Earl explained. He never shared his problems with his sister because he believed that she would not understand. He felt the Black girls had it easier than the Black boys.

He finds his military life so different and conducive to the kind of lifestyle he wants to live. Diversity is encouraged. Earl enjoys learning about other cultures. It is the opposite of what high school was like for him.

Earl enjoys being a father and is determined to help his boys deal with these issues. He does not feel angry about the past. He will use his experiences to help his boys. He married a White woman. He knows that his boys will have to deal with some identity issues. He believes that by being in the Navy where diversity is just a part of the lifestyle, his boys will have fewer problems than he did.

Having his life threatened at gunpoint was a major epiphany for Earl. He turned his life around. The ghetto lifestyle was not what he wanted for himself. He feels that he came through this ordeal a stronger person.

### Being a Chameleon

Lola is a 28-year-old female who graduated from Harvard's dual master's degree Management Program that included two years at Harvard and one year at Northwestern

University in Chicago. She received her undergraduate degree from a university in Virginia.

Lola and her brother were raised by their middle class parents in the suburbs of Pittsburgh. There were not many other Black families in her neighborhood. Although she was born in that neighborhood her preschool years were spent in a day care facility managed by an African-American woman who had several other African-American children in her program. Lola began to mingle with White children after starting school. She attended the same private school from kindergarten to the eighth grade. This had been a positive experience for her. She estimated about one-third of the school's students were African-American. She does not recall having any identity problems around her ethnicity. Socially, her life was well integrated with Black and White peers from her school environment.

When Lola was nine or ten years old, her mother joined the Jack and Jill organization. (Jack and Jill is an organization that gives Black children who reside in suburban communities an opportunity to interact with other Black children in order to secure their ethnic identity.) Her mother had warned her that these were Black people who had done well financially and who might not accept them.

The Jack and Jill organization was hard for Lola. She never found her place among the members of that group. She was shy and was unable to make friends. She doesn't know if she was uncomfortable because the group did not accept her or because she was too shy to interact with them successfully, or because of her mother's warning of being rejected. Some of their activities were foreign to her and made her uncomfortable, such as horseback riding. Eventually, they terminated their membership.

In the ninth grade, Lola went to a prestigious boarding school in Connecticut. She met several other African-American girls from urban communities who were there on scholarships because of their academic abilities. Lola was aware that she was different from the other girls. She did not enjoy rap or some of the other music that was popular with the African-American girls. They questioned her and ridiculed her about the way she talked and accused her of talking White. “They believed that there was a particular way for Blacks to talk,” said Lola.

Lola had befriended Asian and Caucasian girls when she entered the school in the ninth grade. In the tenth grade she decided to terminate her friendship with these girls and associate herself solely with the African-Americans because of the criticism from the African-American girls. Regardless of her efforts, she was not able to feel acceptance from the Black students. Being on the outside of the African-America group was too difficult for her. In the eleventh grade she returned to her original friends, who accepted her back. She decided that it was not worth giving up so much to fit into a group that was not working for her anyway. Her ethnic identity did not come into question until she went to this school with girls from a background different from hers. In elementary school, she knew that she was Black, and the White kids knew that she was Black. She was angry at having to prove who she was to other Black girls.

Lola understood that many of the Black students had been reared in all-Black communities. Their experiences were quite different from hers. She was upset that they could not accept her differences as a Black person. For better or worse, these girls had been her family for the past four years. Leaving them to attend college was traumatic for her, as she once again found herself in a hostile environment in college.

Lola attended a large university in Virginia that had a population of almost 20 % minority. Her problems with ethnic identity seemed to worsen in this environment. On the day she moved into the dorm, she knew she had made a mistake. This was not the school for her. Later she made several unsuccessful attempts to transfer.

Again, Lola was an outcast. Her values and worldview were different from those of other Black female students. According to Lola, the women at her school were more interested in getting married and having families than in their educational pursuits. “They were not career-minded and did not show interest outside their immediate environment.”

Lola knew that she was different from these girls. Like her previous African-American classmates, they had little tolerance for differences. The girls accused her of not being Black. They ridiculed her way of dressing and talking, and her values. “I dressed different. I was a hip dresser and they dressed more preppy. The Blacks on campus were much more fashionable. They wore Timberland boots and I wore hiking boots. I never paid attention to my hair, the Blacks did,” said Lola. She described how she would pull her hair to the back of her neck and wear it in a ponytail. She wore no make-up to class. Lola reported that she dressed comfortably, like the White girls. Appearance was very important to the Black women in college. Many of the girls got up much earlier in order to have time to put on their make-up. When they went to class, their hair, make-up and dress were impeccable.

The university had an honor system and often charged students with violating the honor code. The majority of the students being charged were African-Americans. Lola decided to become a member of the committee in hopes of ensuring that the minority

students understood their rights. The African-American students accused her of acting White by sitting on the committee. They did not accept her reason for joining as a positive move for African-Americans. They accused her of being a traitor for joining the Whites. They believed the best way to protect themselves was to leave White folks alone and to stick with their own.

This rejection and constant criticism had a devastating effect on Lola. She felt like a chameleon, constantly changing herself to gain the approval of peers. She learned that Black people were expected to behave in certain ways. She noticed how extremely segregated her school was as she interacted with other ethnic peers.

They purposely segregated themselves. They asked me, ‘Why are you involved in White groups?’ They actually told me that I talked too proper and because I got involved with non-Black students clubs that I wasn’t Black enough. This rejection brought on the return of the pain I experienced in high school, when I tried desperately to prove that I was Black. I eventually realized that what I was experiencing was class difference. I learned that there are different levels of Blackness.

Lola was isolated from her Black peers. They would not accept her. They wanted to dictate how she should dress, talk, and act, in order for her to be accepted. They called her “crackerish” and “White girl.” She was astonished at their directness. “They actually called me that to my face, can you believe it? The high school girls talked about me but they weren’t as direct as these girls,” exclaimed Lola. She remembered changing herself while in high school in hopes of gaining approval. Those changes did not gain her acceptance. She was not willing to try to change again in undergraduate school. It was not until attending Harvard that she found acceptance by her ethnic peers.

Lola tried to console herself by comparing her wide range of experiences with those of the girls who were ridiculing her. She appreciated that she had traveled parts of the

world and had other experiences that the other girls did not have. “I was cocky because I came from one of the better high schools in the country. How dare they put me down, telling me that I am not Black enough! How dare them!”

Lola eventually stopped trying to fit in and did what she thought was right for herself. The girls eventually tolerated Lola’s differences. They did not understand her, but stopped trying to change her. Likewise, Lola stopped trying change herself to please them. Although she was never close to the girls, they got along.

Lola’s experiences in graduate school at Harvard and Northwestern were different. She was able to associate with Black people, establish herself in the Black community, and join Black clubs such as the Black Management Association in business school. By this time, Lola felt like she was wearing a mask as she waited for the criticism of her ethnic peers. “Sometimes I felt fearful going to meetings.” Her concern was that people might ask “Why is she here? She’s not one of us.” Whether it happened or not was irrelevant because she was constantly looking for it. She did not know who she was or where she belonged. She was aware of not trusting anyone including herself. “In graduate school, I...got involved with the Black executive board of the Black Management Association. I tried to establish myself in the Black community. I wanted to look like ‘I am down.’ Now, that I am in graduate school, I want to be around Black people, but I still feel like an outsider.”

Rejection began at such a crucial time in Lola’s development that its affect scarred her adulthood. It affected her ability to trust and relate to males and females. She believes that all relationships lead to rejection and abandonment. Lola remembers feeling lonely during most of her years after elementary school. She never allowed anyone to get

close to her. She maintains a social relationship with several girls whom she met later, but does not allow herself to get close to them nor does she allow them to get to know her.

Lola never discussed this issue with anyone since she believed the problem was within her. She did not want others to know her flaws. She has had two serious intimate relationships that failed due to her fears of rejection and abandonment. She has moved several times as an adult in hopes of finding a place where she can feel at peace with herself. She admitted that she gets restless if she stays in one city too long. Lola went to therapy to work on this issue, but after having made a good connection, the therapist moved. This was another abandonment for her. She was not able to trust the new therapist and discontinued treatment. She is considering contacting another therapist.

Lola experienced an accumulative epiphany. For several years, she experienced rejection and criticism of her ethnic identity. Blacks from a different background wanted to discount her experiences and tell her that she was not Black because her conduct and values did not represent Black people. Lola eventually stopped trying to please others and began to focus on a self-definition.

### A Tug of War

James, a 33-year-old consultant with a Master's Degree in Social Work, was reared in a subdivision outside of St. Louis City in Missouri. There were three other Black families in his subdivision. He is the only child of two educators. His father has a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and his mother holds a Master's Degree in Education. James began his education in the Catholic school system, although his family is not Catholic. He

remembers being automatically placed in a lower academic level at an early age. His teacher stated that she believed that Black children are incapable of learning at the same rate as White children. His father had to intervene with the assistance of a priest to have his son place at the correct academic level. Later his Ohio test scores ranked him in the 90<sup>th</sup>-plus percentile in every subject except mathematics, in which he scored in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile.

Until high school, James had always been in a predominantly White environment where he was comfortable. At his father's request James agreed to go to another high school where the population was approximately 50 % Black. After being around Whites, being around so many Blacks was an adjustment for him. He recalled that on his first day of school, several students passed him in the hall and said, "Hey, what's up?" James responded, "How are you?" That was a clue to the other students that he did not fit in. This was the beginning. They accused him of speaking too proper. They labeled him "Oreo" and a "sellout." He realized how much he did not know about the Black community. He did not know the slang, the dress, how to talk to girls, or rap music. "From a cultural perspective I was a blank slate," he explained.

James' grades suffered as he attempted to manage a social setting that he didn't understand. Inner city Black students asked him why he talked "proper." He had never heard that term before. Being a good athlete allowed James to use his talent to gain recognition and respect from his peers. Not only was this an avenue to the in-crowd, it was also a way to exact his revenge on his Black classmates. It worked according to his plan. In his second year he began to play football and was a star athlete in his junior

year. His athletic skills gained him popularity and respect; yet he never felt accepted. His internal struggle of finding his place remained unchanged.

James maintained contact with his White friends whom he had known most of his life even after changing schools. His friends did not understand the turmoil he was experiencing in relating to the Black students. In fact they didn't understand why he even wanted to relate to the Blacks at all. "You are not like them, you are one of us," they explained. He reported, "It was like this bidding war that the African-Americans wanted me to act this way and the White folks on the other side wanted me to be that way." He admitted to wanting to please everyone and this tug of war caused him anxiety.

The summer before his sophomore year, he played on a baseball team with some White friends. He had so much anger from having to dance between being who he was and trying to fit an image that the Blacks wanted him to fit. He was also angry when he was around his White friends who attended the elite private high schools. He believed that they didn't understand his struggle nor did they care. "I hated my friends with a passion. I hated them because of how easy I thought their life was. They didn't have to worry about the culture issues." James recalled a time when he was with a White friend at the mall. His friend said to him, "Man, this is tough. I am the only White guy here." James reminded his friend about how often he was in a similar situation where he was the only Black guy around. His friend responded, "That's different."

James related a story about his father: His father took a position in a midsize city in Iowa as a high school principal. He agreed to live in an area where there were very few Blacks. This area was implementing a housing plan called "construction immigration." The plan called for 300 Black families over the next ten years to be integrated into the

area. They were the first family to come under the plan. James and his mother were to come later; they remained in St. Louis while the father settled into his new environment. There was a big article with pictures in the local paper about the family moving into the area. Soon afterward, a cross was burned in the yard across from his father's office. The police brushed it off as "kids blowing off steam." Next they broke into his father's apartment and vandalized it. Again the police responded to this as another random act of kids blowing off steam. Persons unknown left a note under the hood of his car saying, "Start your car, nigger." Once again, the police called it a meaningless, random act.

Threatening notes were sent to James and his mother in St. Louis. His father had protected the family by not sharing with them the turmoil he was experiencing in Iowa. Therefore, James and his mother did not understand why they were getting such vicious letters that; by the way, they did not share with the father, in order not to worry him. When the Ku Klux Klan made death threats to his father, the Department of Justice became involved. Eventually the family appeared on Oprah, CNN, Donahue, and Good Morning, America to tell their story. The family was interviewed on 20/20 with Barbara Walters. She asked, "James, how does it feel to be a Black pioneer?" He answered, "It sucks. This is 1991 and I had not expected to repeat my grandfather's experiences of racism." His grandfather had told him about the racism he experienced as a young boy. "Everyone was telling me how diverse this country is and how things had changed, yet I still have to answer these kinds of questions. I remember this producer coming up to me after the show and saying, 'Congratulations. You're the first man that could shut up Barbara Walters.'" James continued, "All this was going on in my senior year. I had no one to talk to about it. I sat in the cafeteria and listened to others talk about what girl they

are dating and what they are going to do on the weekend while I'm going through all this. We try to identify ourselves and try to be Black, but are not always sure about how to be a Black man."

James dealt with this difficulty alone. After discovering what his family was experiencing, he felt overloaded; but he did not share his internal mayhem with anyone. He felt alone as he listened to the other students talk about their normal adolescent adventures.

His father was in Iowa being rejected by the Whites for who he was and here he was in St. Louis, being rejected by the Black for who he is. He remembered being so very angry. It seems even today he still carries this burden alone. His White friends did not understand his feelings about straddling two worlds. They simply wanted to pull him to their side. He was Black! He felt caught in the crossfire. After discovering the overt racism that his family was experiencing, he realized that they all were carrying a heavy burden. Everybody was trying to protect everybody. Each family member was under such pressure to carry burden alone that the experience left James feeling alone and lonely.

James recounted the following story about his childhood friend Joey, an African-American, adopted by White parents.

Joey was a great looking kid and a great athlete. He got into a lot of fights. He talked about how his parents didn't understand what he was going through. He was often made fun of by Black people because he didn't understand Black life. He was ridiculed whenever he went to the mall. He went from being this preppie wild child and loving anything that was rock and roll to rap music. He went to a private integrated high school but dropped out, moved to the city and joined a gang. He was determined to be accepted by the African-Americans. James ran into Joey at a party. He was the center of attention as he talked about his life in the gang. Everyone was enthralled as he related his movement within the gang. Privately, James asked Joey what was really going on. He said, "I don't know if it's growing

up with White parents or what, but I'm just a confused man. It's like I don't fit. And now I'm so deep into this gang shit I don't know which way to go." James asked if he could help him but Joey hugged him and said, "No."

A month later, Joey tried to get out of the gang and was killed by the gang members. His parents were afraid to have a funeral for him. They were afraid the gang members would come after them. His grave was unmarked for several years. James visits Joey's grave site every year.

There was deep pain in James' voice as he related the story of his friend. He admitted that he was angry at the loss of his friend. It was an unnecessary loss. Joey joined the gang as a way of being accepted by his ethnic peers, and ironically it was those very same peers who killed him.

James believed being a good athlete helped him get through the tough times at school. He believes his good looks and even temperament also contributed to his being able to find a place among his peers. Dating was hard. "I always had anxiety about being judged and I was scared that if I dated somebody Black I might end up becoming emotionally vulnerable to her. I would end up getting hurt by being labeled a sellout or by being told you're not like other Black guys I have dated." Although James had some positive experiences with Black girls, he did not allow himself to get close to women for fear that they would judge him. "They didn't judge me today, but they might tomorrow. To be honest with you, that wasn't only in my dating circle. That kind of became my life. I will let people in, but I will not let people in too far. It is difficult being that emotionally vulnerable to people," he added. "I am completely fine with sitting back and helping people, but as it relates to opening myself up to any kind of scrutiny or anything

like that, that can be incredibly difficult.” His isolation was palpable, clearly a defensive burden for him.

James married a Black woman who had two boys. He admitted that his wife did not demand much of him emotionally. The boys are 13 and 9 years old and, recently, James and his wife had a daughter. The family lives in the suburbs. The make-up of the neighborhood is similar to the one James grew up in, with very few Blacks. James further explained:

I’m sure my boys will have or are having similar experiences with ethnic identity. They are used to living and attending school in a virtually White environment. I took my boys to the city to get their hair cut. My 9-year-old son said to me, ‘Dad when Black people talk I don’t know what to say. I don’t know what they are asking about.’ My kids have to go to the slang dictionary to look up words. I want them to go to a more integrated school environment so they won’t feel so isolated from the Black culture.

James has never discussed his concerns with his wife. These feelings are always with him, but they remain internal. He sometimes thinks about the boys: “It is so devastating to have gone through such a horrific experience, to have children and watch them go through it and not know how to help them. Not only does one relive it through their children, but as a parent one feels helpless. Not being able to protect their children from the emotional onslaught of shame, isolation, and rejection.

James is a consultant by profession. He often talks with his clients by telephone, but becomes apprehensive when he’s in situations where he’s around Black people. “I think to myself, ‘What if I say the wrong thing or sound too White?’” It is a constant fear that is always with me.” Yet, for business purposes, James has found it to be rewarding to be able to relate so well to his White clients. “It’s a mixed blessing because, financially, it pays dividends, but culturally it is a struggle.”

James received a bachelor's degree from Valparaiso University, a Masters Degree in Social Work from Washington University, and a Master's Degree in Industrial Labor from the University of Illinois. He works as a registered persuader with the Department of Labor. James is good at what he does; he has never lost a case. He plans to eventually become a coaching and development manager.

James is aware that he carries the scars from racism perpetrated by racist White folks, but he also carries scars from judgmental African-Americans with whom he came in contact. James experienced cumulative epiphany. For years, he carried the stigma of not being Black enough, perpetrated by his ethnic peers. He feels angry and hurt about the criticism that has had such a profound effect on him for over half of his life. He still carries the scars and is not always comfortable in his own skin around other Blacks.

#### A Fish Out of Water

Sandra grew up in the city of St. Louis in an all-Black area. She was the older of two children. Her blue-collar parents divorced when she was 7 years old. Her education began in private school. When she transferred to public school, she entered the magnet program with an emphasis on mathematics and science. The school was well integrated racially, but she was in the gifted program that had few Blacks. Sandra recalled befriending a White girl in her class. She proudly announced that her best friend was White. She thought this would win her the approval of her teacher, but she did not gain points from the Black students. Instead she was scorned and put down by them.

The rejection from the Black students started when she was in middle school.

Sandra was aware that she did not fit in with the other Black students. She remembers feeling alone.

The Black kids teased me about being an “Oreo,” Black on the outside and White on the inside. I remember in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades the Black kids asked me, ‘Why are you always talking White? Why do you hang out with the White kids?’ I was part of the gifted program and the majority of my classmates were White. I was simply interacting with my classmates.

Sandra believed her experience in the magnet program gave her an edge over many of the Black students. “We did lots of things that were not common to the inner city Black experience. We went on lots of field trips. So, I had a frame of reference for things we discussed in class.” She was accused of acting White when she answered questions that the others couldn’t answer. “You’re like them; you are not like us,” they told her. She made enemies of her classmates when she put forth an effort to please her teachers. She wanted to make her teachers proud of her. Black students resented her for the attention she received from the teachers.

It was most difficult for Sandra when students were in unsupervised situations, especially on the bus ride to and from a suburban school. The bus was like an exclusive Black community. She found herself the butt of jokes. Because of her light complexion, she was called “yellow banana.” They called her Rudolph because her nose turned red in the cold. This was so hurtful that it affected her academically. She allowed her grades to slip in hopes of gaining the approval of her Black peers. “It was so important to me to find a place to fit in. When that didn’t work, I tried to fit in with the White kids,” she explained. “I didn’t really listen to their music, but I wrote KISS and INCX and Blue Oyster Cult and other logos on my notebook in an attempt to look like the other kids.”

She was angry with the Black students for making her feel like an alien. So, she focused her attention on White students.

Eventually, she made a conscious effort to fit in and be accepted by the Black students. “I started using more slang. It wasn’t anything that would occur to me to do naturally. I would emulate what I saw: the language, the way people rolled their neck, walking outside in house shoes, wearing your clothes a certain way, wearing cut out jeans, or wearing black lip liner around my mouth with red lipstick, and wearing ethnic hairdos.”

Sandra felt like a misfit. She could not keep up with fashion because her parents could not afford it “There were all these things about my physical self that were different. I was light complexioned, didn’t wear traditional Black hairstyles, spoke differently, and was smart. I felt like a fish out of water.” She remembers being extremely lonely and depressed. “I spent hours laying in bed listening to music alone, fantasizing.”

With hopes of improving her relationships, Sandra went to summer school. She wanted to be acquainted with the high school layout before school started in the fall. She met two older Black girls who were juniors. They befriended her for the next two years. “When school started in the fall, we were labeled the “city kids.” We were already expected to behave in a stereotypical way,” she noted. “I found favor with some of the White kids because I knew how to navigate in their world a little better than many of the Blacks. I was drawing on those experiences I had learned previously. I could interact with them, but I knew the connection wasn’t real. You could be within the group, but not be truly connected. I felt like an outsider in the group.”

Sandra's two upper class friends were helpful to her. They bonded well. "We had this self-righteous complex to make ourselves feel good. We looked down our noses at the fast tail girls so that we could feel good about ourselves. Sandra became popular in school with both Whites and Blacks. (She was popular, but not close to anyone.) After her friends graduated, Sandra had to redefine how she was going to make it. The intense loneliness returned. She was around people who were friendly, but she really didn't feel connected. She spent a lot of time with four or five of her teachers and even the principal. She often ate lunch with them. She felt the enjoyment and acceptance were mutual.

Sandra became an ambassador for the underdog.

I started doing things that I considered to be outside of the box to demonstrate that if I was going to be different. I was going to be very different and you're going to notice me. I was going to advocate for everybody. I went to the homecoming dance with a White boy who was physically disabled. He had a lot of challenges, including his speech and his gait. He may have had cerebral palsy. One of his knees was really bent and he couldn't expand it. He had a noticeable limp, which made it difficult for him to run. He would often drool because he had a difficult time with the motor functioning of his mouth. He was very silly just like the rest of the students, and one would have to be patient when listening to him. I asked him to the dance. I did it because I wanted to prove to people how good I am as a person. I had a good time with him, but I couldn't help but feel I would have rather been there with someone who was a really cool person.

Sandra dated the quarterback of the football team. "I was the envy of all the girls." She did not feel close to him; he was just for show. She explained, "We wrote notes and sat together at school, but I didn't know how to be with him. I didn't know how to just enjoy him. It was more of a status thing for me. I think I ended up ruining that."

Sandra was unable to participate in many after school activities because she lived too far from the school and didn't have transportation. She did all she could to be seen at school. She was in one school play. She would like to have participated in another but, again, transportation was a problem.

“Spirit Woman” was a title given to a female who has shown the most school spirit. Sandra would do outrageous things. The school colors were red and white. She would come to the games with a white wig and red clothes, looking ridiculous. She was quite a spectacle. She was certainly noticed by the other students. This went on for 2 years. In her senior year, Sandra was nominated to be Spirit Woman. The staff decided to have co-Spirit Women, Sandra and a White student. Sandra was highly visible in the school during regular school hours, but the White girl was able to attend the games and be in the Pep Club after school too. In the past, Spirit Woman was always part of the Pep Club. Sandra couldn’t participate in the Pep Club because she lived in the city and could not get transportation. Also, she was unable to attend all the games for the same reason.

When the staff opted to select co-spirit women, Black students thought it was racial and complained. They were angry. They didn’t understand why there were two Spirit Women when in the past there had been only one. The staff felt it was fair because both girls had been very visible and put forth a lot of effort to boost school spirit. They wanted to acknowledge Sandra’s efforts, even though she did not attend all the games and was not in the Pep Club. So, they decided to have two Spirit Women. At the time Sandra, did not understand why the decision was made to have two Spirit Women. She and her Black classmates felt she should have been the sole Spirit Woman. Black students were angry because Sandra had to share the spotlight. Years later she understood that by being a co-Spirit woman the staff found a way to acknowledge for her efforts.

Throughout high school, Sandra tried hard to prove to herself that she was a worthwhile person. All of her behavior was geared toward that goal. Keeping herself visible through Spirit Woman, championing “underdogs,” working for the approval of

her teachers, were ways she was able to be visible. She missed a lot of days from school, more than 30 days in one semester. Her grades suffered. Sandra learned not to be authentic. She said:

I have dual language. I know now how to code switch. I think the main thing is the level of authenticity when connecting with people. Doing that taught me how to hide. I learned that who I am in my core was not good enough. I learned to be whatever people needed me to be, which was a never-ending story. You're always changing yourself. You never measure up. Consequently, it affected my relationship with men. It affected my weight. I gained a significant amount of weight. I needed the weight to protect me and to keep people away.

Adaptation became more important than being authentic. At this point, she valued acceptance of others more than self-acceptance. If her true self was not good enough, she would become whomever she thought she needed to be to gain acceptance.

College was no better for Sandra. She put forth little effort to be scholarly, and used that time to party in an attempt to connect with people. She was successful in partying, but unsuccessful in connecting. After the first year, she stopped trying to connect with the mainstream. She remembered, "I always seem to find the underdog so that I could feel better about myself. I had plenty of misfit friends. It was a survival technique. If you connected with the underdog you always look better. When I look back, I have a lot of shame and pain about lowering my standards way back in middle school and high school to try to fit in. Now, I don't have the discipline to commit to study."

During her second interview, she made more discoveries:

I am really surprised that just talking about this, I am seeing myself in a different way than I have. It just revealed to me how long I can stay stuck, just arrested, if you will, in certain places. I realize, now, that I have spent so much time guarding my heart and guarding myself that I would only let people in so far. Now, I know how to be more vulnerable. I can't guarantee that I won't get hurt, but I am not necessarily afraid of the pain. This was therapeutic. It helped initially to get me

clear or at least increase my awareness. Talking about this has opened my eyes even further. Since our last interview I decided to go back to school. I have already started some inquiries and will enroll in the fall.

Sandra never talked about these problems with anyone. She never brought it up in therapy, because she never realized how much of an effect the criticism had on her. She said, “After all these years, I am still battling obesity and trying to find a place to fit in.” She is successful in her job as a community educator. She feels successful in hiding her feelings and confusion around her anger about her ethnic identity, but “success” comes at a great cost.

In retrospect, Sandra used these interviews to come to a different interpretation of some of her experiences. She no longer lets others define her. She realizes that she gave up too much of herself and was not able to appreciate her self-worth. One of her present goals is to become more authentic. It was through the relived epiphany that Sandra took a different path to redefine herself.

### Summaries of Individual Interviews

The following is a brief summary of the reports from the other subjects:

1. Aiesha. She attended predominantly White schools growing up. Although she did well academically, she did not feel comfortable socially. Her relationship with the White students was marginal. Although she interacted with them, she never felt truly accepted by them. Most of her contact with Blacks came through her church, an hour's drive from her home. Aiesha did not participate in the youth activities of the church because of the distance. Therefore she did not get to know the Black youths well. “Back then, I spoke like a White girl and I didn't feel very comfortable in that environment. I

felt so isolated,” she explained. She felt rejected by both White and Black students in her school. By her senior year, there were more Black students who had been bussed to her school. They told her she talked White and was not Black enough. “I always asked them what barometer were they using when they defined me as not being Black enough? For me, being with those urban Black students was a history of persecution; it was being called all sorts of names.”

2. Allison attended a prestigious private school in St. Louis that was predominantly White. Her contact with African-Americans was through her church affiliation, but she chose to remain in the background for fear of being seen as different. Her desire to be around more Blacks came during her adolescence, when she became interested in dating Black males. There were very few choices of Black males in her school and none who interested her, but outside her school environment, she was uncomfortable meeting other Blacks. Her Black peers were friendly toward her, but never got to really know her, because Allison was uncomfortable being her true self. She remained in the background, yet she wanted to fit in and have a normal adolescent experience. To protect herself from criticism, she hid her true personality.

In college, Allison met other Black students like herself and became comfortable in her environment. Many of the students at Stanford not only sounded like her but also had similar background experiences. In this environment, she felt validated as an African-American. She needed this different context in which she could find her self.

3. Bernard, single, male, and native of St. Louis, who attended suburban public schools. He is the only child of two entrepreneurs who lived in a middle class suburban neighborhood where the majority of his neighbors were White. His earliest memory of

racial unrest occurred in the first grade when a White student called him a nigger. Bernard didn't know what a nigger was, but he knew it wasn't good. So, he called the White boy a nigger and the two of them commenced to fight. He did not experience rejection and ridicule from the Black students until junior high school when they accused him of "talking White." His only defense for these accusations was to fight. Bernard often got into physical altercations with inner city Black students who taunted him on a regular basis. His parents supported him in trying to remedy the conflict, but were unsuccessful. The school administrators seemed unwilling or unable to come to his aid. They did not understand the gist of the conflict. His parents moved him to another school. Although the environment was similar, he knew a lot of the students and was able to get along with them better. He performed better academically and had fewer fights because he already knew many of the students.

Bernard was an academically talented student. However, being smart was "uncool." He did not work to excel academically for fear of rejection by his ethnic peers. Bernard had musical talent and played several instruments. The African-American students called him a "sell out" and a "county brownie," or accused him of thinking that he was better than everyone else. He stopped playing the instruments and quit the choir. "Choir was uncool. I wanted to play tennis, but I thought that was uncool too, so I didn't," he said.

Bernard had White friends. He got along well with them. They pointed out how different he was. The White students would say to him, "Oh, you're not like them."

I said, "What do you mean, *them*?"

They said, "You're different."

“I knew they meant that I was not Black, either. It seemed like I didn’t fit in anywhere.”

“I didn’t trust anybody back then. I was suspicious of everybody. Now, I am starting to develop who I really am.”

Bernard attended DePauw University and joined an integrated fraternity. He was angry most of the time. His anger was directed at anyone he thought would cross him. He felt that he had to constantly watch his back. This rejection interfered with his ability to feel safe.

Like Earl, Bernard surrendered his talents in an attempt to fit in. He gave up music and did not go forward with his interest in tennis in order to gain approval.

One night after this interview, I saw Bernard on stage at a comedy club. It was amateur night. After he finished his act on stage, the African-American master of ceremony said, “We can see he’s one of those county brothers. Let’s give the brother a hand for trying.” I was appalled at the insult from a total stranger. I noticed Bernard did not react to the comment.

4. Brenda remembered few problems with ethnic identity during her adolescent years. However, there were times Black girls would give her the message that she was “not Black enough.” It was not until she was in junior high that she came in contact with a lot of Black students. She was in Advance Placement classes where there were very few Blacks. It was during lunch period when other students called her names or said she was not really Black. “I do remember my father would sort of insist that I would invite one Black girl in my class to my birthday parties. He would point out the importance of having Black friends. There was only one girl to choose from in elementary school and

we aren't really friends. She was a tomboy," Brenda explained. In high school it was difficult for her to have Black friends when they were ridiculing her because of her speech.

Brenda does not believe the criticism from the Black students got to her. She seemed defensive during the interview.

In AP classes, they called me Oreo and said things like 'You're not Black enough, you're not really Black. You're a White girl with black skin. You're just an Oreo.' I haven't been traumatized by it or anything. I think they were just girls. I think it was a little embarrassing, but I guess at that age, everybody wants to be cool you know? I guess it was considered not cool to talk with the correct grammar. I guess everybody wants to just sort of fit in.

Her defense was not to take the criticism seriously. She blew it off as teasing remarks. She seemed in denial of the impact the mockery had on her. She would laugh when the girls made their remarks as though they were all in it together.

Brenda began to really feel comfortable with her ethnic identity when she went to college and met other Blacks like herself. She went to a very good university where she found students, Black and White, who accepted her for who she is and how she is. It reminded her of her participation in the Inroads program during high school. Inroads encouraged a professional demeanor, punctuality, and Standard English. This organization validated her values.

The criticism she experienced seemed to be behind her. As an adult she feels more in control of her environment. Because of her lifestyle, social life, and work environment, she does not come in contact with Blacks who are different from her on a social or economic level. Her friends and acquaintances do not question her for being the way she is.

5. Carol attended private elementary and high schools that were predominantly White. She recalls being called a “nigger” by a White girl in the second grade. Like Bernard, she didn’t know what it meant, but she knew it wasn’t good. Her parents’ message to her was to work hard and rise above the ignorance of others. Her parents guarded her closely and monitored her playmates.

Although Carol lived in a Black neighborhood, the school she attended was populated with students from wealthy families. “When I got to high school, I didn’t want to tell people where I lived because I didn’t want them to think that I was a thug.” She remembers one White family who wanted “their wild and crazy daughter to hang out with me” since Carol did not fit the stereotypical image they had of Black people. The parents felt that Carol would be a positive influence on their daughter.

Carol became more confident with her ethnic identity through her church involvement and being a part of Jack and Jill, a national organization made up of middle class Blacks. In addition, her previous school experiences made it easier for her to navigate in the White world. In medical school, an African-American classmate informed her that she needed to learn to speak Ebonics if she planned to work with Black patients. The classmate told Carol that she spoke too much like White people and Black patients would appreciate her ability to speak Ebonics. “This classmate’s opinion,” said Carol, “did not represent all Black people.”

6. David was academically gifted, but remembers being harassed by one of his White teachers. She wanted to put David in his place because he was “too good.” At the encouragement of one of the other teachers, David’s mother transferred him to a private school in the seventh grade. In high school, David was searching for his manhood. He

was discovering girls and becoming aware of socio-economic differences. David's effort to solidify his ethnic identity was complicated by being surrounded by the upper class peers who were clearly on a different socio-economic level. For David, the conflict was more a class issue than strictly racial. He continued to feel this difference in college.

David was aware that the problems he encountered had more to do with class than race. He noticed differences even in his elementary school years. Over the years he learned to make choices that satisfied him. He indulged in any music or reading material that interested him. At the same time, being able to express himself in a variety of venues caused him to stand out as "different." Having to explain or defend himself has frustrated him over the years.

David has an older brother who has always been supportive of him. His brother helped him to stay focused, guided him, and helped him understand what the internal conflicts he was experiencing. With the support of his brother, David was one to march to his own drum.

7. Holly experienced culture shock when she transferred to a public school in the third grade and encountered African-American students who lived in the city. The African-Americans she had known in the suburbs were more like her. The Black students from the city did not receive her well. They noticed differences in her speech, dress, and behavior. They called her "White girl" and teased her about the way she talked. She never felt completely comfortable in the Black environment. She felt she was expected to fit someone else's image of what it means to be Black. She did try to be "Black." She changed her hairstyle and wore clothing that was more popular with the Blacks, but they continued to tease her about the way she talked.

She felt out of step with the Black students. Her efforts to connect with them proved futile. She remembers feeling depressed and unhappy. Eventually, Holly felt she had given up too much of herself to gain so little. She did not feel accepted by Black students. She returned to the music she enjoyed, which happens to be traditionally enjoyed by many White students. She decided to relinquish her desire to be accepted by Blacks and befriended White students who appreciated her for who she is. Dating Black men proved difficult for her. She felt that they demanded too much of a change for her. She could not be herself.

Holly had a strong need to be accepted. In December, she met a White man over the Internet. He visited her in the U.S. in February; she visited him in England in March. In April, when I called Holly clarify information from her interviews, she informed me that she and her child would be moving to England the following week to live her new boyfriend. Under the England law, she will be unable to work for one year. During that period, she will be totally dependent on this man. Holly was desperate to find an environment in which she could be comfortable in her own skin.

8. Jennifer grew up in a military family in Germany. Her environment was racially and culturally diverse. She had not encountered the phrase “not Black enough” until she enrolled in a small university in St. Louis. One of her classmates told her that she was “the Whitest Black person” she had ever known. Fellow students criticized her for the way she talked, her ideas, values, and for not wearing ethnic hairstyles and “dressing White.”

Because of her fair skin, Whites were also confused about her ethnic identity. They wanted to know if one of her parents was German or if she was bi-racial. A White male

classmate said that she was more White than Black; therefore, she shouldn't care what the Blacks say about her. She found herself angry at both "races." "This was quite a change for me, because, in the military, kids moved around so much and learn to adjust to different cultures, unlike Black urban kids who attend predominantly Black schools or Black suburban kids who attend predominantly White schools," Jennifer explained. Jennifer lived most of her life outside of U.S. and viewed the American community differently. Her perspective would be somewhat different because of the environment that she grew up in. She has a broader perspective. She could see the distinctiveness of the difference and felt left out. Jennifer is quite sensitive to difference due to her military background.

9. Justin has always questioned his Blackness. Even though he was reared in a Black environment, he was never able to fit in by wearing certain clothes, enjoying certain music, and talking the talk that was stereotypically Black. "Diversity for me is not just color, race, ethnicity, and that sort of thing. It is the diversity of the individual being able to have free choices in whatever they choose to enjoy. I never bought into the idea that the Black experience was just one experience," he explained. There was a disparity in the educational system. He noted that in academically accelerated programs, Blacks were always under-represented. It was usually him and one or two other Blacks among many Whites.

Justin didn't recall being accused of not being Black enough before college, but he did feel different. He was very individualistic and intellectual. He would be considered a person who was outside of the box, who marched to his own drumbeat. As an example, Justin is the kind of person who would not only go roller skating with his Black friends,

but would enjoy ice skating with his White friends. He developed choices for himself. He was a maverick, seeking various opportunities for himself. He chose to attend a prestigious school in the South. His friends wondered why he chose a White college and accused him of not being “down for the cause” and being a sellout because he went to a predominantly White college. Blacks wanted to dictate to Justin how to be Black, but he rebelled. He had a broader horizon and always wanted to expand the field of choices available to him. He experienced internal conflict and confusion around his Black identity. He wanted the freedom of dating outside of his race. He wanted to pick women whom he believed had a similar outlook on life. If the woman was Black, which was fine; if she was not Black and he found her interesting, he wanted the freedom to date her, too. He did not want to limit his choices in women by skin color. He is still struggling with the issue of dating women who are not Black and his feeling of not being Black enough. He refused to be held back by fears of criticism. He made choices according to his own interest, but because others would criticize, him he wasn't totally comfortable with consequences of his choices.

10. Karen had always lived in a predominately White environment because her mother insisted on placing her in the best school in the area. Because of her mother's upward mobility in employment, the family moved a lot. Her mother encouraged her to be inclusive, giving her permission to have White friends. Because Karen always lived in a predominantly White environment, she did not have many Blacks friends. In the earlier grades, she made friends with children who made her feel comfortable, regardless of their skin color.

The criticism she remembers most came from her extended family members who had always resided in Black neighborhoods. Although they didn't tease her often, when they did, she internalized it and held onto the discomfort. As a young child, she remembers being told by her relatives that she talked White. She went to her grandmother for confirmation and her grandmother told her that she couldn't help talking the way she did. Karen was disappointed by that response. She hoped her grandmother would have denied that she talked "White." Later, she was criticized for not being able to dance. Karen also recalls wearing a tee shirt with INXF on the front of it. Her cousin, who was ten years older, was familiar with the group. He said he had gone to one of their concerts and enjoyed it. This confirmed for Karen that she was okay.

Karen had very few Black friends in high school. She got along well with the White students and was very comfortable in her relationship with them. Karen knew that her cousins liked her, but they would point out how different she was from them. Karen took ballet, gymnastics and played the saxophone. Her cousins played basketball and ran track. Although there was very little teasing from the Black students, her ethnic identification was still a struggle for her.

Karen participated in activities valued by her community. For example, children in her community listened to a lot of White artists who sang pop and rock. Later, when she was around Blacks, she tried to hide her music taste. Karen noticed that she felt on the outside of the Black community when she got to high school. The children being bussed to suburban schools outnumbered the Blacks who lived in the community. Karen tried to fit in with urban Blacks by imitating their behavior. Although she got along with the Black students, she was a loner. As a way of dealing with the loneliness and isolation, she

befriended new Black students who came to her school. One of the girls she befriended was very similar to her. They remained friends for years.

As Karen described her high school experience, I imagined her as a social butterfly. She described herself as high-spirited and quite sociable. She elected herself the welcoming committee person for Black newcomers to her school. Her differences would be minimized if she befriends those students. One of the newcomers was a Black girl from urban Chicago. Moving into that environment was a culture shock for the newcomer. She and Karen became good friends. The new friend could relate easier to the other Blacks and quickly became popular. Since Karen was her friend she felt protected by this girl. Karen noted that she had always been comfortable in her predominately White school environments; she would have liked to have the experience of going to school with more Blacks.

11. Sange found that admission into accelerated classes “separated” him from the African-American students in his high school. He resented it when White adults or students would say he was different from other Blacks, indicating that he was White in behavior. Sange remembered that one of his friends made a conscious decision to become Black according to the standards of others. The boy was from a middle class family with highly educated parents. He let his grades drop and played the role of a thug in an attempt to fit in. Though he was extremely bright, he never went to college. Friends and family were disappointed by his choice of lifestyle.

Sange believed that Black children decide before seventh and eighth grades how they are going to deal with rejection and criticism from their ethnic peers. “It is something one has to do for himself or herself. Each individual has to decide what it

means to be Black and act accordingly,” he explained. He recalls being in high school and wanting to date a Black girl. The girl said she could not hang out with him because one of her friends said he was too White. Sange said, “I get angry whenever Black people tell me they can’t relate to Black people who speak a certain way or act a certain way. I don’t believe that.”

### Summaries of Focus Group Interviews

In addition to individual interviews, the researcher conducted interviews with two focus groups. The results of those interviews are summarized below.

#### *Group A*

There were eight participants in the group, seven Black women and one White woman. The White woman was a member of the Black Collegian Association and decided to attend the focus group. She felt connected with the minority women on campus and often identified with their experiences. Each focus group member was able to discuss their experience of being rejected by their ethnic group when express their individuality. All except the White subject had experienced being told that they sounded too White. One of the subjects reported that it did not bother her to be told that she talked or acted White. This criticism was just something she accepted because she has always felt different from her peers. She claimed that she let it run off of her like water runs off the back of a duck. As this person talked of a specific time when a Black person tried to belittle her for the way that she talked her voice became tensed. It was clear from her tone that the criticism had disturbed her. Group members confronted her in a teasing manner, noting that she was showing anger when she earlier claimed that the criticism

did not bother her. Laughingly, she admitted that she did not like the being criticized about the way she talked and it had made her angry.

One of the subjects reluctantly stated that she felt many of her friends were jealous. She was the first in her family to go to college. She always knew she wanted to go, but did not receive encouragement from her mother or other family members. Her teachers supported her desire to attend college. However, her family was concerned that college might change her. In fact, several of the subjects were warned that they might return from college thinking that they were better than their family or friends. Other members of the group shared similar experiences as well. Their families and friends feared that they would not be able to relate to the subjects when they returned from college. They feared the subjects would lose their Blackness. They all laughed.

The one White member of the group admitted that she was the first member of her family to go to college. Her grandfather, who could neither read nor write, felt she was wasting her time with school and wanted to know why she just didn't get a job. This was clearly a class distinction. The grandfather was a part of the working class who believed the best way for his granddaughter to take care of herself was to simply get a job. The granddaughter believed that college would lead her to a better way of life than the one her grandfather represented. She wanted to be a lawyer. Her mother disapproved of this career choice. She felt that her daughter was putting herself at risk by working around criminals as a lawyer. The mother was unaware that there were different types of lawyers. The White student was experiencing similar criticism from her family and friends. They thought that going to college would put her on a different socio-economic level and they

would no longer be able to relate to her. The group members all acknowledged that they were talking more about class than racial issues.

Several subjects confessed they did not always understand slang used in the Black community. This caused them to feel disconnected from inner city Black students. One woman reported that her daughters feel frustrated when their father calls. The father grew up in the inner city. The parents divorced when the girl were small. The girls are not around him much, but he has been having more contact with them recently. The girls are nine and 11 years old and feel frustrated when they can't understand their father. He uses slang unfamiliar to his daughters, who are being raised in the suburbs. The girls complained of feeling frustrated and confused when they speak with the father. The mother gets angry with the father for not being able to speak Standard English to his daughter so that they could communicate. According to the mother, the girls have not experienced criticism or rejection from their peers at their school. Her daughters' school does participate in the desegregation program. (It is possible that the children are not experiencing any problems around their identity at their school or, like many of my subjects, have not shared this with their mother.)

### *Group B*

A second focus group was interviewed at a smaller university in St. Louis. This group was composed of six African-America students. Four were educated in the suburban schools in the St. Louis area. Two were bussed to suburban schools as part of a desegregation program. Each member of the group described an experience that was similar to the other Black subjects' experiences.

Peter related his experience of growing up in the suburbs. There were only two African-American families in Peter's subdivision and very few Black children attending his elementary school. He felt his adjustment in school was good. He played with the children in his neighborhood and his school. It was not until he entered middle school that he came in contact with many more African-American students. Most African-Americans children were part of the desegregation program. The African-American students who resided in the inner city thought they were different from those who lived in the suburbs. The inner city students referred to Peter as a "wannabe" because of the way he spoke. He laughed at their criticism and laughed at himself. He did not take their criticism seriously. He was able to befriend inner city students by laughing at their antics and criticism rather than becoming angry or hurt. He was quite a jokester and was liked by most of his peers. He used his humor to deflect criticism and was accepted by urban students. Being a good athlete also played a major role in his acceptance. It was important to Peter that inner city students knew that he was not a "punk" and he would not hesitate to defend himself physically if he felt a need. He often invited inner city boys to his home.

Peter believed that his attitude toward inner city students helped him make an amiable adjustment to his ethnic peers. He remembered talking with other suburban students who had more difficulty with adjustment and acceptance from inner city students. He wanted to reach out to them, but did not know how to help. He believed each of them had to find ways to work it out themselves. He often felt sorry for others when observing them being harassed by urban students. Peter turned the anger around by

redirecting their teasing and joining the laughing. His sense of humor was a clever adaptation to deflect the criticism

One of the female participants who participated in the desegregation program also witnessed Black suburban children being ridiculed for their speech. She explained that inner city students believed that all Blacks should talk, act, and dress alike. Anyone of the same ethnic background who appeared different was seen as being disloyal to the Black ethnic culture. She recalled feeling sorry for children who were criticized for being themselves. She denied participating in the criticism, but did not give verbal support to the victims. "You are either with us or against us. There's no middle ground." was the attitude of the urban children, she explained.

A third subject recalled being mocked for her speech pattern. Her mother advised her to ignore the critics and attributed their criticism to jealousy. This seemed to work for the subject. Eventually, the criticism stopped and the subject got along well enough with her peers. Like Peter she, did not appear to internalize the criticism and was able to move past it.

Another male subject lived in the inner city and was bussed to the suburban schools with his peers. He always felt he was different because of his intellect. He remembered reading novels at age five. His father pushed his academic skills. This caused him to stand out among his peers. This subject was very intellectual as he explained the theory behind this phenomenon. He believed that inner city students were not able to assimilate with the masses. This caused them to feel like outsiders. In order not to be underdogs, they found others to replace them. They condemned suburban students in an attempt to place them on a lower rung of society. He felt that this was the

way city students made sure their defects were outside of themselves and the responsibility of someone else. This young adult denied being affected by the condemnation of others. He believes that he adjusted in a way that protected him from verbal attacks.

All subjects from each group admitted to having had first-hand experiences with this phenomenon. Some felt ridiculed and rejected and had to find ways of getting past the criticism. Others observed suburban Blacks being criticized by the inner city students. There were 34 students involved in the interviews who witnessed this rejection. All of the subjects felt unable to help their classmates who were being ridiculed. Each felt that the individuals being criticized needed to find ways to protect themselves. None of the subjects talked about the experience, even with follow victims.

#### Summary of Subjects

In summary, all of the subjects, middle class African-Americans, tended to have the following experiences in common:

- They were criticized by their urban peers for not being authentically Black by the standards of the inner city.
- All attempted to employ some form of coping mechanism. Some attempted to conform to the inner standards of being black through behavior, dress, speech or other activity.
- In the process of coping, all suppressed their true selves short or extended periods of time, all were ultimately unsuccessful in conforming, though some enjoyed a measure of temporary success through participation in sports or fisticuffs.

- All bear lasting psychic scars that negatively influence their post adolescent relationships with both White and Black colleagues, friends, and objects of romantic interest.
- All did not perceive that there was support to help them during or after their initial period of difficulty.
- All who are parents feel helpless to support their children in similar situations.
- Identity theory does not account for the effects of the same-race criticism that cause these difficulties.

It is clear that if the problems described in this paper are prevalent in the general population of middle class African-Americans, they have both theoretical and clinical significance for the social work profession.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS II

#### You Can't Go Home Again

The criticism that these subjects have experienced centered mostly on their speech. Different ways of speaking can mark important differences in communities throughout the world. The way one speaks denotes distinctive differences in class, ethnicity, nationality, and religion worldwide. Not everyone in the United Kingdom speaks the same English. Just as in England, in America the way one speaks marks class distinction. People in the middle-class often speak Standard English. This tends not to be true for people below the middle-class independent of their ethnic group. This phenomenon does not just affect African-Americans. The way one speaks is greatly influenced by one's class status. Although this is a worldwide phenomenon this dissertation will focus on African-Americans in the United States.

George Bernard Shaw (1907) is the author of the play *Pygmalion* that was later written into the musical, *My Fair Lady*. It depicts the influence of speech patterns and the distinctions speech patterns make between lower and upper class status. Professor Higgins, the most renowned instructor in phonetics of his time, believed that he could change a person's class status by changing their speech pattern. He believed that one's speech pattern is linked to one's social class and that one's speech pattern can be changed. On a bet, he took Eliza Doolittle, a woman whose speech pattern identified her to be of the lower class. He vowed to teach her to speak like a duchess in six months.

Eliza was an uneducated woman who sold flowers for a living. To improve her life chances, she wanted to learn to speak well enough to get a job in a flower shop that catered to the upper class. Learning to speak “proper” English would create many opportunities that would improve her life chances not only through employment but also through the people she would be privileged to meet. Not only did Eliza learn to speak differently, she was also introduced to upper class behavior and values. By changing her speech pattern and behavior she was able to mingle socially with the upper class without detection.

Like Eliza Doolittle, many of the Black subjects had similar experiences. She did fit in with her peers because the changes in her speech pattern. The Black subjects were told that they did not have a place among their ethnic peers who resided within the inner city. They too believed that their differences separated them. Mufwene (2008) contends that the typical assertion is that the language one speaks is determined by their social environment, not by race. He further states:

For instance, an African-American child who has been raised in a European-American family or has grown up in a predominantly European American middle-class neighborhood speaks like this population in which there is regular interaction, despite the racial differences that distinguish them. Cases have been also reported of European-Americans socializing the most with African-Americans and speaking like the latter (2008, p.93).

The way one speaks is an important distinction even within one’s family. A mother from Focus Group A described the difficulty her girls had in understanding their father when he called them. The parents had been divorced and separated for several years. The father had lost contact with the girls. When he came back into their lives, the girls, not having grown up with this dialect, felt confused when speaking to him. The mother was angry with the father when she realized this difference in speech created feelings of

alienation within the girls. They were further frustrated by not being able to understand their father. During his absence, the girls learned to identify with the language spoken in their community.

Another example of how language creates distance was Veronica's experience of being sent to live with her aunt for the summer. The aunt did not like the way the Veronica and her siblings talked. The aunt believed that the children thought they were better than she. She believed her nephew was raising the children to act White. Her solution was to beat "it" out of them. James' stepsons had a similar experienced when they went into the city to get their haircut. They found that inner city language was a barrier for them. They told their father that they did not understand the Black men in the barbershop. James had to interpret for them. The language difference can follow one home and have a profound effect. These participants have discovered how race determines who they will interact with in society and therefore which other speakers will be identified with" (Mufwene, 2008, p. 94).

Shaw pointed out how different speech patterns and words used to communicate in different class settings can be confusing. At one point in the play, Eliza described her aunt's behavior to an upper class crowd at a party. They were befuddled by her use of language and found it totally unintelligible. The use of speech affected her peer's perceptions of her and consequently Eliza was no longer accepted by her peers. Speech patterns and language out of context can be confusing. Also, the way one speaks gives insight into one's values and class status.

Speech is a marker for social and economic status. Speech marks boundaries between people (Wimmer, 2008). In America, what is framed, as racial difference is

actually ethnic difference. Ethnicity is defined by culturally, not genetically. The subjects in this research experienced criticism for the way they spoke; they were told that they speak too proper. Speaking proper is speaking correct English, that is, speaking White. Years after the incidents the criticism continued to be a source of anger and contempt for these subjects.

Language being transferred along racial lines depends on socialization structure. Although it is typical for people of similar background, ethnicity, and race to have similar speech patterns, these factors do not determine how one will speak. Class and socialization are the two factors that will influence language. This is true around the world as this study demonstrates.

#### The Media Has Its Say

Poverty, lack of education, and crime are often associated with lower economic status. This is seen frequently in newspapers, on television, and in the movies. According to the Bureau of the Census, 1994, 99% of household in the United States have at least one television set. Black children watch on the average six hours of television a day (Perkins, 1996). All too often Blacks are portrayed negatively. This gives the media an opportunity to influence its viewers. Some people accept what they see on television as a true portrait of Black America, including some middle-class Blacks interviewed for this study. This notion was supported by the study of White college students who had unflattering views of Black women after viewing them in music videos designed to be sexually titillating (O'Connor, Brooks-Gunn & Graber 2000).

One of the focus group's subjects who grew up in a middle-class, predominantly White suburban neighborhood, and entertained similar negative views of the Black lifestyle. The Blacks he saw on television or in the movies were often poor, gang bangers, dope pushers, and athletes coming from single parent homes. As a child, when he went into the city where the majority of Blacks lived, he saw middle class homes as well as lower middle-class homes. It appeared to him that there were few middle-class homes and the majority of the lower class homes were in disrepair. Therefore, from the media, he associated the homes in disrepair and unlawful behavior as representing Black culture.

When he went into his own suburban neighborhood, which was mostly White, the houses were well kept and attractive. This represented a White environment to him and the city homes represented a Black environment. From this he deduced that Blacks were poor criminals who like to fight and use dope. He believed that his family and friends were an anomaly. It is not unreasonable to believe that many inner city Blacks also came to the same conclusion for the same reasons. It would be easy to understand why this young man would have low self-esteem believing that Blacks were criminals, gang bangers and the dregs of society. The media played a major role in the formation of this perception. Perhaps, being Black for this young man created some incompatible feelings about him. He attempted to imitate White-like behavior and spoke of his shame. Erickson (1968) believes that the development of identity is not only located in the core of the individual but in the core or one's communal culture. Likewise, Erickson understands the role of the environment in the formation of one's personality. He speaks to both culture and personal identification.

Young African-Americans who grew up in the suburbs, away from the general population of Black people, are seeking a Black identity that would have meaning for them. In order to become Black, Earl chose those who he thought were the “hardest Blacks” at his school to emulate. “You had to be rough and tough to be African-American.” He considered selling drugs to prove that he wasn’t weak and that he, too, could be hard. “That was what it took in the eyes of the people who were from the city who were living a different lifestyle that wasn’t the so-called “proper White lifestyle,” Earl explained. “The media perpetuates the stereotypes, but the urban Blacks also believe they define Blackness and the suburban Blacks buy into their definition,” said Earl. “I did. I believed that the city Blacks were the authentic Black. They were what being Black was about.” David said, “When I looked for examples of Blackness, I turned on the television to see what the Blacks are wearing, like Air Jordan.

Although Justin has felt different since junior high, the question of his Blackness came to the forefront when he got to college. He found many of his ethnic peers struggling with their ethnic identity. He wondered if it stemmed from being smart. “We had the ‘Cosby Show’ back then and that helped to confirm that it was okay to be Black middle class, intelligent, and driven by education. ‘Different World,’ another television program, did a lot to help solidify our own images of Black people. The images of successful Black people help me reconcile some of the tensions I was having in my own life”, he recalled.

For some, the media was the predominant source of information that influenced the subjects’ perceptions of Black culture. They looked for validation of their identity externally. That was disastrous because the external messages did not match the internal

message about who the person was. The African-Americans are not alone with this phenomenon. The Native-Americans have often been stripped of their culture and assigned stereotypical behaviors. The subjects in this study found the media to be a powerful tool that can either empower people to greatness or box them into self-destructiveness. Therefore, one must not downplay the social emotional, psychological and cultural messages people get from their interaction with the media.

### Getting It from the Whites

Many participants in this study were reared or educated in an environment where they were a small minority within the student body. Some subjects reported that they were members of the only Black family in their neighborhood and were often in verbal and physical conflicts with their White neighbors. Michael is a case in point. He was the only Black student in his kindergarten and first grade classes and was often taunted by his White peers, but after he defended himself physically the harassment ceased. "Being around Whites all the time, I thought I was pretty much like them, just Black. I didn't know color made a difference. Nobody in my house warned me that this would happen." Another subject, Bernard added, "It was the first time I had heard the word 'nigger.' I didn't know what it meant but I knew it wasn't good; so I beat him up. I thought we were all the same. I was just a different color. There was only one or two of us in the class." Veronica reported her White neighbors verbally abused her. She said, "They called me nigger all the time. I wanted to be White. I pretended I had long hair. Some of the White parents told their children not to play with me." Aiesha complained that her

White classmates were indifferent toward her. Their relationship ranged from rude to politeness but never did she feel apart of the group.

Eventually, the African-Americans subjects were able to form friendships with their White neighbors. Not all subjects experienced physical conflict with their White peers; some felt accepted as they grew up in their neighborhoods. This was the only environment they knew and adjusted well to it.

With anger, Jennifer recalled a White classmate saying that he didn't understand why she was offended by the racist remarks. She was barely Black herself. She looked and sounded more White than Black. When she protested, he did not understand why she was loyal to the Blacks. Jennifer had grown up in the military environment where people accepted differences and learned from each other due to those differences. Leaving that environment to go to college proved to be quite a culture shock to her. She believed both Blacks and Whites had a narrow worldview.

James is a poignant example of effects of the racism and prejudice experienced from Blacks and Whites. He transferred to a school that was 50 per cent Black. He had never gone to school with so many Black students before. He tried to develop relationships with Black students and maintain the relationships he had with White students he had befriended earlier. The Blacks criticized his "proper" way of speaking. This made him very uncomfortable. He could not rely on his White friends for support he needed it. He lived in a confused state. His friends told him not to worry about what the Blacks say to him because he was one of them. They wanted him to know that he was totally accepted by them. At the same time that the White friends were rejecting his ethnicity, the Blacks were telling him that he wasn't Black enough. To add to his

difficulties, there was no one for him to turn to when White racists were threatening the family. There was no one for him to turn to for help. The scars of not feeling safe, not being able to trust others remains with him today.

Black students have been found to believe that their White teachers have low estimates of their ability and worth (Brown, 1968, Davidson & Lang, 1960). It has also been well documented that White teachers expect less of lower-class children than they do of middle-class children (Becker, 1952; Deutch, 1963 p. 175). This attitude of the teachers may account for oppositional stance that is equated with many of the inner city Black students. Many of the suburban students who were interviewed were in the accelerated classes and may have escaped the stereotypical treatment given to other Black students. Those who were not in the accelerated classes reported experiencing neglect and low expectations from their white teachers. After a time, the suburban Black child felt accepted by their white peers and teachers. They were able to blend into the established culture of the school community. In summary, all of the study's subjects experienced rejection from Whites on some level and to varying degrees.

#### Getting it from the Blacks

The most devastating criticism of the subjects came from Blacks—devastating because it came from members of their own race and it threatened the core of their identity. This criticism usually became most intense in middle school. “When the Black kids came in from the city it was an adjustment for me because I was not used to being involved with so many Black kids. Some of the Black students put me down for the way that I talked,” stated Veronica. “Again I had to prove that I could take care of myself. I

get a lot of hatred from them because I'm different," explained Michael. The criticism continued into his adulthood when Michael started a lawn service. "They accused me of being a 'nigger' doing a White man's thing. Some passed judgment on me for cutting grass for a living."

Jennifer related the following: "They were told that they were not Black enough. I was told that I wouldn't fit in anywhere because I was too light skinned and talked too proper. I was angry at both "races." They said I wouldn't fit in because I didn't wear brand names or speak ghetto". Brenda said, "Sometimes the Blacks would tease me and say I talked proper. That didn't bother me much." Sandra explained, "The Blacks kids put me down for being light complexioned. They called me yellow banana". Blacks put Bernard down for having dark skin. He looked too dark and talked too White. Lola related, "The more I was around Blacks, the less Black I became." Aiesha remembers being angry. The Whites were cordial but she knew she didn't fit in. The Blacks were rude and crude. She didn't fit in with them either. "How could people who look like you reject you?" she complained.

### Stuck Out Like a Sore Thumb

Most of the participants agreed that the criticism from the African-Americans started as early as elementary school and continued in middle and high schools. In elementary school, the criticism was easier to ignore than later in school. Children from several elementary schools were often combined in junior high, allowing a significant increase in the number of Black children attending one school.

Sandra lived in the city but was a part of the desegregation program and attended suburban schools. Prior to that, she attended a private school or magnet program. Sandra remembers, “On the bus I rode to school we were in an exclusive Black community. The kids would say, ‘You are White, you sound like them. You are not like us.’” Sandra was intellectually gifted and had always been placed in the accelerated classes that were predominantly White. She believed that this caused her to stick out like a sore thumb; she yearned to be in classes with the Black students.

According to Aiesha, “Blacks have a lot of ways of defining themselves, such as speech patterns, pop culture, dress and their mentality about humor. If you don’t fit their pattern then you are not Black.” Lola was told that she “was not Black enough; she was not urban enough.” Suburban children did not use the same slang nor did they buy the brand name clothing that was popular with inner city students. For example, Lola stated that Black children often wore Lee jeans, but Whites wore Levis. Even when the students wore the same brands they wore the items in different ways. Black and White students may purchase a pair of Reboks but the urban Black students do not lace their shoes up all the way. This is to highlight their uniqueness and ethnic boundaries.

Kelly remembers, as a young child, feeling like something was wrong with her. She wanted to look like her classmates but she couldn’t because most of them were White. “I used to put scarves on my hair and pretend that I had long hair. My hair was long, but it didn’t flow the way White girls’ hair did.” She wanted to blend in with her classmates. Kelly admitted that when she went to the White school she wanted to identify with the White students and when she attended school with Blacks she wanted to identify with the Black students.

Lola explained, “The more Blacks I was around the less Black I became. My Blackness was never in question until I started being around other Black students. Whites knew I was Black and accepted it.” Michelle recalled being mocked as an adult by coworkers for the way she talked. “It’s only the Blacks. White people never say you don’t talk like Black people.”

These experiences caused intense conflict and confusion in the subjects because they were eager to be accepted. They had strong feelings of not fitting in and being different. The school environment often posed formidable challenges for these subjects. Ethnic criticism had its greatest influence during junior high and high school years. This was at a time when the desire for acceptance is high on youths’ priority list. “Problems didn’t start for me until I got to junior high. That’s when more Black people came to my school. I remember two Black girls making fun of the way I talked saying, ‘You’re not Black enough’. Senior high was worse for me,” stated Veronica. The Black students who came to her school told her that she was a White girl with a Black body. “When I got into high school I was rejected by the Blacks and the Whites.” The White girls that Veronica had befriended dropped her and formed closer ties with some of their White friends. I didn’t have a problem with my ethnic identity until I got in college in the St. Louis,” declared Jennifer. “I was an army brat and I didn’t have problems until I came back to the states”.

Leanita McClain, age 32, was a middle-class African-American who committed suicide after bout of depression and dealing with the issues of identity and acceptance (Page, 1986). She was aware that her success as an African-American journalist came at a price of alienation. As a successful Black professional her philosophy was “none of us

are free until all are free. Yet Black professionals, themselves, were the objects of Black criticism who charged that they had forgotten where they were from. In protest, Leanita responded, “I am tired of being patted on the head by Whites hands and slapped in the face by Black hands for my success” (McClain, 1986 p. 12).

Leanita McClain (1988) explained how successful middle-class Blacks are tormented by other Blacks. “A considerable number of folks [were] left behind in the old country commonly called the ghetto, and the militants we left behind in their antiquated ideology can’t berate middle-class Blacks enough for forgetting where we came from. We have forsaken the revolution; we are told that we have sold out.” (p. 13). There is nothing new or uniquely American about successful Blacks receiving abuse from Black militants. (p.2)

#### *Alone in Their Journey*

The subjects were reluctant to discuss racial criticism by their Black peers with parents, siblings, or other family members. When they did, parents were not very helpful in their responses. The subjects were told to ignore the criticisms because the other children were jealous. Even when they told their parents, I suggest the shame that they experienced prevented them from talking about it in great detail. The demands for loyalty and solidarity put tremendous pressure on them. Interviews were conducted with siblings in two separate families. In the family with a sibship of three, none of the siblings shared their experience with the others. Each believed that they alone had this negative experience with other Blacks. There were similar results in the sibship of two. Neither sister shared this conflict with the other or with their parents, not even in their adult years.

During their interviews, each sibling reported being the sole object of this kind of abuse from their ethnic peers and that their sibling had it easier. Even after the interviews, none of the siblings discussed the interview or their past experience with the issue. The isolation was profound.

These subjects felt alone and unsupported. The suburban children did not rely on each other for support, not even within families. "I didn't bring it to mom and dad. It's one of those things you have to deal with on your own," said Sange. He felt parents could neither understand his plight nor aid him in it. Earl didn't believe that his mother would understand what he was going through and would not know how to help him if she did. Further, he would not have accepted any advice she offered.

Holly didn't have anyone to talk to about what was going on. "I believed that my mom knew that something was wrong but never asked about it nor did I bring it up to her." Holly's White friends did not understand what she was going through. One of James' White friends told him how difficult it was being the only White guy around. When James reminded him how often he (James) was in the same situation as the only Black guy in their group, his friend said, "That was different." Not only did they misunderstand his dilemma they did not understand why he wanted to identify with Blacks. They believed that he was more like them. James felt that his parents were going through enough and he did not want to burden them with his problems. He wanted to spare his parents additional pain and problems, so he remained silent. He felt alone and lonely. Kelly believed her mother wouldn't know what to do anyway; so, why bother her. Sandra said she knew her mother was too busy trying to hold the family together financially and that she (Sandra) needed to figure it out for herself. Michelle, Veronica,

Kathy, and Kelly all believed the accusations and were filled with shame about their rejections. They couldn't tell anyone because they thought something was wrong with them. They had accepted the belief that they were misfits.

David was aware that he felt and was viewed as being different at a young age. He enjoyed reading and had a diverse taste in music. His mother placed him in a private school in hopes that it would be a better fit. However, he was aware of the differences between his classmates and himself, but believed those differences had to do with class rather than ethnicity. It was just as difficult for him to feel part of his peer group in the private school as it was to be accepted by Black students in the public school. Although an outsider, David he continued to march to his own drumbeat.

Several of the subjects made unsuccessful attempts to accommodate their critics, some with disastrous results. Earl reached turning point when was robbed at gunpoint en route to visit friends in the inner city. This ended his need for validation with the inner city blacks. This incident highlighted his negative views about Blacks and gave him a sense of urgency to remove himself from this environment. Sange friend came from a stable middle-class family. In his effort of being accepted by other African-American cost him his educational goals. He dropped out of high school in his junior year. Kathy found it too difficult to continue in the community college because of the ridicule she endured. She had to find an alternative plan for her vocation.

### I Talk the Way I Talk

These subjects escaped from a language community that would challenge their way of speaking. Brenda met a coworker who was from a lower economical class who

admitted that she was struggling to learn to speak Standard English like Brenda as well as adhere to the middle-class values. She was pleased to hear this after being criticized for the same values this woman wanted to attain.

Linguists have claimed that a child normally acquires the language of their social environment, regardless of race. . . . A Japanese child of Japanese parents, growing up in as socially integrated neighborhood in the United States will speak American English of the same nature as the non-Japanese neighbors, and the African-American child growing up in a predominantly White neighborhood will speak White middle-class English rather than African-American Vernacular English. (Mufwene, 2008, p. 111)

Under these circumstances, one would expect a suburban child to speak similar to his /her neighbors regardless of race just as one would expect an inner city child to speak similar to the neighbors. In other words, the way one speaks is not based on ethnicity, but on culture. As Brenda's co-worker worked to join the middle-class environment, she found that she needed to change and take on the values and behavior of the environment in which she was employed.

Language marks boundaries—class, ethnicity and religious boundaries. Many inner city children have access to one language-African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). Speaking AAVE is natural for the inner city child to preserve their ethnic and social identity. The problem comes from a lack of acculturation. The African-American child raised in White suburb speaking, Standard English who cannot code switch and speak AAVE, is shunned by his inner city contemporaries. The urban students have difficulty switching language to identify with the suburban student similar to the suburban child's difficulty in code switching to speak like the inner city student. There are limits to code switching. The way one speaks is established early on which makes

code switching becomes incredible difficult. This creates a problem for urban as well suburban-raised children.

There were a number of subjects who attended prestigious colleges and found a community of African-Americans who supported their way of speaking and their middle class values.

Brenda explained how she handled the criticism:

I remember one girl putting me down for the way I talked and everyone around would laugh. I would laugh too and pretend it didn't bother me. Sometimes I would go over to the table where she was sitting in the cafeteria and say 'Hi' as a way of proving that her criticism did not bother me. They were calling me Oreos and other names like that. I thought if I said 'Hi' to them it would please them and make things better for me.

Many of the subjects felt they were between the two different worlds. Their task of feeling at ease with themselves was more difficult. Some still complained of being harassed by Blacks who speak differently from them. The others found mixed results. It had to do with how they negotiated cultural boundaries.

### Fight the Good Fight

Many of the subjects confessed to that they succumbed to the pressure of their inner city ethnic peers. They attempted to abandon their middle-class lifestyle in order to imitate the behavior of their inner city peers as a way of gaining acceptance. The difficulty was that they were unable to fully shed their middle class values.

Since adolescence is a crucial time for identity development, peer acceptance is crucial. They were continually accused of talking White or acting White. These students stated that they felt devastated by the rejection. They were called names: "wannabees," "Oreos," "White girls," "county brownies," and the like. Blacks who lived in a

predominantly Black environment often criticized suburban middle class Black students because of their middle-class values.

The subjects found their own ways to protect themselves from the onslaught issued by the Black students. Different strategies in handling the criticism were employed. Girls tend to be passive using their social skill whereas the boys were physically aggressively (Kroger, 1989). Some took a hyperactive stance and were willing to fight if they thought it was necessary, while other were more pragmatic. Some developed an iconoclastic attitude of expected stereotypical behavior.

Karen and Sandra used their social skills to gain acceptance. Karen became the self-selected welcoming committee to the new students. Sandra made being different and noticeable an asset to gain acceptance. She was determined not to be ignored or let the other put her in a box by claiming she was an Oreo.

Some of the female subjects reported becoming promiscuous as a way to exercise power. Some tried to assimilate and some didn't. Some subjects claimed that they were able to brush off the criticism and felt little of its impact. Some subjects were confused by the accusation of not being Black enough and did not understand its meaning.

Brenda was active and Allison was passive in dealing with the criticism. "It was the first time I had heard that. I didn't know what they were talking about," explain Kathy. "I was told that I talk like I was White. I didn't realize that there was a way to talk White. I speak correct English because my mom taught me," said Bernard. Sange noted his experience, "In elementary you are cognizant of race, but it doesn't play a role in the way it does as you get older. You start hearing 'White boy' and 'You speak differently.' I got it from White adults, too. They would say, 'You are different from the other Blacks.'"

As James became comfortable with his ethnic peers, his White friends pointed out that he was acting different. "I felt like I was in a bidding war. The Blacks wanted me to act a certain way and the Whites complained if I didn't act the way they wanted me to." They accused him of trying hard to be Black. "You are not Black. You are one of us," he was told. In college James talked about his cultural experiences to his friend who had similar experiences. "We tried to identify ourselves, trying to be Black men, but not always sure about how to be just a man." James felt the pressure of wanting to stand out ethnically and be himself. He also felt the pressure of learning what it means to be a Black man. He did not share his concerns with anyone except his friend who was also dealing with the same issue and who had little insight to offer. Kelly had a similar experience in not knowing how to be a female when her physique was attacked. She was called "Number 2 pencil." She believed that she no curves like the other Black women.

The issue of their ethnic identity and their gender identity were intertwined. The subjects interviewed felt unsure on both fronts. All adolescents have similar experiences of getting through turmoil but it is compounded for some African-Americans when it is intertwined with ethnic identity. One subject did not have the physiology associated with Black females which consequently, aided to the disconnection with her ethnic identity. The subject evolved emotionally and in now able to embrace her physiology.

Eric, James, Bernard, and Brenda gained some acceptance through playing sports. They were gifted both academically and athletically. Being an athlete was acceptable in all schools; it helped them to break through some of the barriers. James said, "My only escape was athletics. Athletics became my baseline. When people made fun of me about the way I spoke or about the way I hung out with White people, I would say, "I will see

you on the football team”. Carol was involved in Jack and Jill of America, a middle-class, Black national organization, designed to unite suburban African-American children and help them affirm their ethnic identity.

According to Gemelli (1996),

As children begin to spend less time with their family, their peer group becomes a major source for maintenance of their self-esteem and continue development. The peer group is where they receive important feedback about their attempts at mastery in the classroom and playground environments (p.426).

Children’s personality is showing signs of their adult behavior (1996). These subjects were so afraid of the ridicule from their ethnic peers, their voices were stifled. They experienced so much shame and guilt that dating became more difficult for them. Aiesha admitted that the anger still lingers towards those Blacks who ridiculed and rejected during high school.

It was like I was invisible. Years later, one of the girls who rejected me in high school came to my wedding with an invited guest. She did not recognize me. I couldn’t believe it. She had called me an ‘Oreo’ and ‘White girl’ and a ‘wannabe,’ and then she showed up at my wedding as though nothing ever happened. It was like she never saw me. I was invisible to her.

Holly felt that nothing she did appeased the inner city Black students who were labeling her. She didn’t know how to change the way she talked. She always felt like she had to hide her true self. “It didn’t matter what I did, it never felt good enough,” she declared. Allison found it difficult to relate to Black peers who did not attend her school. “I was a shy person when I was around other Blacks,” she explained. She was afraid to be noticed; that people would see that she was different from them. She didn’t want people to see that she was different from them. Kathy also felt her best strategy for survival was not to be noticed; that if she didn’t speak in public she wouldn’t be criticized. She often wished she could disappear. To accomplish this, she missed over 30 days of school in her

senior year. Kelly feared the criticism of her ethnic peers so much that she sought the protection of her best friend who seemed better equipped to handle Black students and their criticism. Her world fell apart when her friend left school prematurely.

These subjects felt invisible but they also employed invisibility as a defense technique. In some ways it backfired on them because they had difficulty recovering. Kathy still carries the burden of having to defend herself about the way she talks.

Some subjects decided not to participate in school activities such as cheerleading, band, or school newspaper. Those activities represented White behavior. "I wanted to go out for cheerleading, but I didn't want to do anything that made me stand out," explained Kathy. Who you ate lunch with was important. "I ate by myself," said Veronica and Michelle. Holly remembered, "I felt forced to eat with the White kids because the Blacks didn't accept me. Don't get me wrong, the White kids were my friends, but it's just that I didn't have a choice with whom I ate with."

Sange and James both had friends who decided to forgo their middle-class life style during adolescence in order to get recognition from the Blacks. Their friends associated with the urban Blacks who were involve in a rough lifestyle. "I needed to fit in. That was so important to me to find a place to fit in. I remember trying to fit in with the White kids. I started writing the Rolling Stones on my notebook. I didn't listen to them but I wanted to have something to connect to them," explained Sandra. Children feel that they have power through identification with those who they perceive as being powerful.

Peter, from one of the focus groups, Sange and Earl had found ways to find acceptance from the urban Blacks. They saw other Blacks students still struggling to gain acceptance. They knew other Blacks were having a difficult time but they did not know

how to help them so they said nothing. "I felt sorry for the brothers. I knew they were getting their butts kicked from the city boys but I couldn't help them," explained Peter. It was like every man for himself. Both Peter and Earl were trying to stay afloat. So they never approached the subject with anyone.

These participants gave up so much of themselves in hopes of gaining acceptance from the Black students. They were willing to abandon who they were and their values and take on the behaviors of others to gain approval. Smart & Smart (1973) pointed out the importance of a peer group during adolescence. It is crucial to adolescent development that they gain acceptance from their peer group. They conform to the values and customs and fads of their peer culture; a peer group that has tolerance for differences. Adolescents are preparing to leave their parents emotionally as they prepare to enter the adult world. The peer group is a bridge to the adult world. When their efforts to gain entry into the peer group of the Black students are thwarted they are confused as devastated.

David and Justin were two participants who marched to their own drumbeat. They refused to be pigeonhole. They were individualist and did not allow others to dictate their behavior. "Essentially, adolescence is the transition to individuation" (Chambers, 1995). Justin always felt that he was different from his other Black peers. Unlike many of his peers Justin enjoyed a diverse selection in music as well as other activities that may not have been popular in the Black community. On the outside he looked quite adaptive but internally he was lonely and angry. "Functioning in this mode can frequently lead to academic, vocational, and social success but over time the person increasingly experiences himself as bored, going through the motions, detached, and lacking

spontaneity” (Bollas, 1987) All of these subjects are doing well in their selective vocation. They internalized their pain as they try to work through it.

### Dating and Trust

At least nine of the participants expressed concern about dating. Their apprehension stretched into their adult years. Some speak of the ambivalence they continue to feel when meeting other African-Americans. They live with the fear of rejection and criticism. For some, even building a platonic relationship with African-Americans is threatening.

Sange was in the eighth grade when a female classmate told him that he acted and sounded too White. Her friends thought so too. He was disappointed and hurt by the criticism from this girl. This caused him to fear rejection from other Black girls who captured his interest. He was ambivalent when it came to dating Black women. James had a similar experience. Although he had been comfortable dating White women, he could not bring himself to marry a White woman. He was wary of closeness. He compromised by marrying a Black woman who doesn't need much closeness or intimacy from him.

Sandra also discussed her difficulty in maintaining close relationships, particularly with men. She became promiscuous in hopes of attracting men, but discovered it wasn't enough to hold them. All of her relationships ended in less than a year. Although she wanted closeness it was hard for her to tolerate the closeness she longed for. She found it difficult to be close to anyone male or female, Black or White.

Bernard, Sange, James and Michael recalled being uncomfortable when women asked why they did not sound like other Black men. This criticism has affected their ability to be comfortable with Black women. Michael confessed that he has not been able to maintain a relationship with a woman that lasted more than 3 years. Bernard had problems similar to Sandra with promiscuity. Michelle noted that not only was her relationship with Black men affected by the ridicule, but also her relationship with Black women. She does not trust any Black people easily. Veronica feels similar to Michelle, but would add that she is distrustful of all people, Black and White. Kathy noted how she sometimes gets butterflies in her stomach when she comes in contact with Black people she doesn't know.

Aiesha reported that there was no one for her to date at her high school; there were few Black males. Holly believed that the White males were more available and accepting of her than the African-Americans. Jennifer also found White men more accessible, and it was more difficult for her to relate to Black men. The Black male's attitudes about women and relationships were different from hers. When Black men complimented her their remarks were often references to her anatomy, which was offensive to her.

Holly found dating Black men difficult. "They didn't find me attractive. I was very skinny. I was 5'8" and 120 pounds. I didn't have the bumps in the right places, so to speak. I wasn't curvy like the Black girls." Like Kelly, Holly did not believe her boy Lola, too, found dating difficult. Because of the constant criticism she experienced she doesn't trust Blacks easily. She finds it hard to maintain long-term relationships with Black men or women. She becomes restless when they get too close. Allison wanted to

date Black males but there were too few in her school. Consequently she missed out on dating in high school and had difficulty in trying to figure out “the guy-girl thing.”

Holly noted, “They call me the skinny Black chick who talked funny. I was just different from them. “There’s nothing worse than your own race rejecting you. I still harbor pain and resentment.” Holly is aware that she still harbors anger and resentment. She is not able to forgive the Blacks for the rejection and pain they caused her. “My wounds are deep,” she added. “Rejection seemed even harder when it comes from a boy.”

Holly is afraid of dating a Black man, even now. She fears he would expect her to change the way she talks, the music she likes or the way she dresses. She recalls how hurt she was not having a group to identify with. “I wanted to identify with my Black friends but I couldn’t. I was too different.” She remembers being lonely in high school and added “I am lonely now. There is nothing worse than your own race rejecting you. The heart of my experience is feeling like you are not perfectly accepted in the White environment for lack of a better word and you are not perfectly accepted in the Black environment for lack of a better word.”

It is during adolescence that we see an interest in sexual be it heterosexual or homosexual love. “The consolidation of heterosexual love involves the ability to shift from the early adolescent overvaluation of the self to a genuine interest in the identity of another. Sexual identity is stabilized into an irreversible pattern (Blos, 1962).

Bernard believed that being mocked for his dark skin tone in addition to being scorned for his middle class behaviors (which includes his speech pattern) impacted his choice in women. Bernard prefers dark complex White women with dark hair (such as Italian) or light complexioned Black women. He admitted that this may be a

subconscious way of working through his feelings of rejection. Black people criticized him for being dark complexioned and talking White.

Aiesha related a story about an incident with her boyfriend at Stanford:

While at Stanford University I met my first boyfriend, Benny [fictitious name]. He grew up in the inner city. While he was on his winter break Benny went to a laundromat in his neighborhood. A man came in with a gun to rob the patrons. When Benny saw what was happening, he hid his wallet in the dryer. I asked him why was he willing to take a chance on his life for money? Benny got upset with me for asking this question. He said it was all the money he had was in his wallet. He could not afford to lose it. I said the money was not worth his life. He got angry with me. He said, 'You can get more. You came from a rich family. You don't know what it's like to be Black.' I said it had nothing to do with being Black. It had more to do with honoring your life. You valued money over your life. He got so angry with me for not understanding his dilemma. He said, 'If you were truly Black you would understand.' He associated Blackness with poverty. That bothered me for a long time. I wondered what it was I didn't understand. He shook my confidence in my ethnic identity, as did the kids in high school.

He was angry about the privileges of wealthy people. Some subjects were more fortunate in their relationships even though they continued to endure racial criticism.

Aiesha she married a Black classmate who grew up in the inner city in Los Angeles. He is accepting of her and her past experiences. His friends often teased her about talking and acting White. They questioned her about having so many books in her home and wondered if she read them all. The difference was she knew that they liked her. She teased them back for their differences. Aiesha explained, "I am so different now. I have confidence that comes with acceptance because I have had the experience of positive support. That took a lot of undoing; years of self-esteem had to be built back up".

These participants gave up so much of themselves in hopes of gaining acceptance from the Black students. They were willing to abandoned who they were and their values and take on the behaviors of others to gain approval. Smart & Smart (1973) pointed out the importance of a peer group during adolescence. It is crucial to adolescent

development that they gain acceptance from their peer group. They conform to the values and customs and fads of their peer culture; a peer group that has tolerance for differences. Adolescents are preparing to leave their parents emotionally as they prepare to enter the adult world. The peer group is a bridge to the adult world. When their efforts to gain entry into the peer group of the Black students are thwarted, they are confused as devastated.

The earliest stage of identity crisis is the need for trust in oneself and others. The second stage embodies the need for free will. The adolescent looks for opportunities to make free choices in available avenues. The greatest defeat would be to act shamelessly in the eyes of his peers. The adolescent is eager to be confirmed by teachers, and affirmed peers and to be inspired by worthwhile ways of life (Erikson, 1968). Instead, many of these subjects felt alienated by others in the ethnic group. Alienation is present when the self is deeply divided because of the hostility of the dominant group (in this case the dominant group are the urban students) forces itself to see the self as defective and insignificant (McGary, 1997).

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Sandra also discussed her difficulty in maintaining close relationships, particularly with men. She became promiscuous in hopes of attracting men, but discovered it wasn't enough to hold them. All of her relationships ended in less than a year. Although she wanted closeness it was hard for her to tolerate the closeness she longed for. In general, she found it difficult to be close to anyone male or female, Black or White. Having grown up in a hostile environment and not getting the affirmation she needed, Sandra continues to distrust her environment. This makes it difficult for her to sustain a relationship with others.

Bernard, Sange, James and Michael all recalled being uncomfortable when women asked why they did not sound like other Black men. These questions and the subsequent criticism have affected their ability to be comfortable with Black women. Michael confessed that he has not been able to maintain a relationship with a woman that lasted more than three years. Bernard had problems similar as Sandra with promiscuity. Michelle noted that not only was her relationship with Black men affected by the ridicule, but also her relationship with Black women. She does not trust any Black people easily. Veronica feels similar to Michelle, but would add that she is distrustful of all people, Black and White. These subjects, like Sange, exhibit the same concern.

Holly also found dating Black men difficult. "They didn't find me attractive. I was very skinny. I was 5'8" and 120 pounds. I didn't have the bumps in the right places, so to

speak. I wasn't curvy like other Black girls." "They called me the skinny Black chick who talked funny. I was just different from them," noted Holly. "There's nothing worse than your own race rejecting you. I still harbor pain and resentment." She is not able to forgive the Blacks for the rejection and pain they caused her. "My wounds are deep," she added. "Rejection seemed even harder when it comes from a boy."

Holly is afraid of dating a Black man, even now. She fears he would expect her to change the way she talks, the music she likes or the way she dresses. She recalls how hurt she was not having a group to identify with. "I wanted to identify with my Black friends but I couldn't. I was too different." She remembers being lonely in high school and added "I am still lonely now."

Because of the constant criticism she experienced, Lola, too, doesn't trust Blacks easily. She finds it hard to maintain long-term relationships with Black men or women. She becomes restless when they get too close. Allison wanted to date Black males but there were too few in her school. Consequently, she missed out on dating in high school and had difficulty in trying to figure out "the guy-girl thing."

Mike, Sandra, Veronica, Michelle, Holly, Lola are suspicious about their relationship with other Blacks. It becomes even more apparent when they are with the opposite sex. They are cautious in being open with them. They fear the being ridicule by other Black people. These concerns did not vanish with end of high school and for many, they still linger.

#### Isolation and Separation

As Brenda stated, "I do remember two Black girls making fun of the way I talked and for being in the AP (Advance Placement) classes. They called me "Oreo," which is just really saying you are not Black enough. You're not really Black. You are a White girl in Black skin." There were usually only one or two Blacks in the classes. They were only around other Black students in elective classes such as gym, or at lunch. Sange described a diverse setting in his school, but the diversity did not include the AP classes. He never had a Black teacher in his advanced classes. Aiesha admits that she felt isolated, being one of three in a class of 420 White students. She was the only Black in her gifted classes. Brenda also felt isolated in her Advance Placement classes. There was one other African-American boy in her class.

"I was smart," said Holly, "but I didn't flaunt it. I saw how the smart kids got treated. Things were already bad enough for me." For David the ridiculing began in the sixth grade. "I think I was criticized because I was in the gifted enrichment program, probably because I was academically focused. I was nerdy. I was culturally different."

Kelly refused to participate in the accelerated program for fear of being called a nerd. She had enough trouble and rejection for the way that she talked. The teacher had a conference with Kelly's mother to encourage Kelly to participate in the accelerated program but Kelly flatly refused, stating she would make sure she gets all "F"s if she was forced. She was not ready to add nerd to her labels. She compromised with her mother by agreeing to keep a 3.5 grade point average.

Bernard explained that his neighborhood was mostly White and so was his school. He was one of two Black students in his accelerated classes. He assumed that Whites were gifted and Blacks were not and that he was an anomaly. Since his worldview and

values were more akin to those in his neighbors, he had to learn how to relate to Blacks from a different community whose perceptions were different.

All twenty of the subjects described situations in which they felt rejected by members of their own ethnicity. They described the pain and humiliation of this rejection. These participants were reared or educated in an environment where they were a small minority among White students. Sange recalled being isolated as early as eight years old. Other Blacks were telling him that he was different. "It hurt when people who look like you push you away," he reported. Indeed it hurt when one can't find a mirror of themselves. It created isolation and shame that was palpable.

When asked what it meant to be Black, Karen answered, "I had friends to tell me, 'Karen, you are not really Black, because you can't dance.' So to be Black, I needed to know how to dance." At Lola's New England boarding school she was told that she talked too proper to be Black, and did not dress or carry herself like her Black peers. "I remember the loneliness in high school and undergrad," said Lola.

All of these subjects were in the Accelerated program with separated them even more from their African-American peers. "Feelings of different-ness evoke a sense of aloneness, isolation, and abandonment for they signify absence of connection or relationship to others. They can also threaten the sense of psychological wholeness and intactness that people need" (Pinderhughes, 1988, p. 30).

### From Adolescence to Adulthood

The group that went to certain small colleges, community colleges, or trades schools met Black students who were very much like the ones who had attended their middle and high schools. They all reported a repeat of their experiences of being ridiculed for the way they talked. The feelings of rejection, ridicule and isolation never left most of these subjects and continues in their adulthood.

They continued to meet Blacks who questioned and disapproved of the way they talked. It was a continuation of their high school experience. Sometimes it was curiosity more than criticism but Kathy was not amenable to discussing her way of speaking with anyone. She did not trust them enough to open up. Veronica who as reported earlier when she started a new job there were individuals in her hospital setting who questioned the way that she spoke. In general members of this group whose Black community doesn't support their use of Standard English appears more insecure about ethnic identity and doesn't trust Blacks that they don't know. All but one in this group maintained their friendship with White peers. Everyone in this group continues to reside in a majority White environment. But they are still exposed to African-American who do not approve of the way they speak thus they remain divided. The ecology of the urban language community did not support their use of Standard English.

Aiesha summed up her perplexity with these words:

I was confused and didn't know who I was. I had extremely low self-esteem. I was rejected by the White and the Black community. These are the people who are supposed to accept you. These are the people who look like you. I am still angry about the hurtful things they said and did to me. Among my husband's friends there are constant jokes about me, but no one can tell me that I am not Black anymore. I may be uncomfortable with myself for other reasons, but never again with my ethnicity.

David expressed his anger in the following terms: “I get so mad at the Whites that I work with. They didn’t have the worry. They have always had access to money or anything that they wanted. They never had to worry about the cultural issue that I worried about. Even now I can still feel some of the uneasiness.”

Earl felt he lost a lot. He had always enjoyed painting but because he was afraid his Black peers would find out and ridicule him, he stopped painting. Years later Earl has the desire to paint, but finds it difficult to allow himself to do it.

Fifteen of the 20 discussants are aware of the lingering affects of criticism they experienced during their junior high and high school days. This group has fewer Black friends and feels comfortable with their White friends. Most of Holly’s friends are White. She never felt accepted by Black people. She felt she was too different. “It would be too much for me to try to fit in. I don’t want to turn myself inside out to change for others. I have to be accepted for who I am.”

When James comes in contact with other Black people, whether in a business or social setting, he becomes anxious. He worries that he may be confronted for the way he talks. Although this has never happened, he remains uneasy in situations holding the potential for such criticism. “Effects at the deep level cut to the inner core of the person’s life and leaves indelible marks on them” (Denzin, 1987, p. 39).

Michael, Sandra, Veronica, Michelle, Holly, James, Kathy, and Lola are suspicious about their relationships with other Blacks. It becomes even more salient when they are with the opposite sex. They are cautious of being open. They fear the being criticized by other Black people. These concerns did not vanish after high school. For many they linger to poison relationships in their adult years.

### The Joy of Being Black

The participants can be divided into two college groups: those who attended Ivy League or prestigious colleges and those who attended small colleges, community colleges, or trade schools. The subjects in the first group reported being accepted by their ethnic peers during their college experience. They met Black students who had similar experiences with ethnic identity issues. The subjects' speech, behavior, values and goals were no longer an anomaly. These Black students banded together to form a support system for each other. They joined student government groups, Black student unions, sororities, and fraternities. For the first time they were able to discuss their career goals and educational success with other Black students without of fear of criticism. After college, for the most part, their world, including their community, work place and social life includes Blacks like themselves. In these settings, their Blackness is affirmed. They rarely have social interaction with Blacks from a different socio-economic background. Therefore they are not likely to experience the criticism of the past. Aiesha explains:

When I do run into Blacks from different economic backgrounds, they are trying to be like me. Isn't that a switch? A Black woman I work with said she had to teach herself things that came natural to me, like the way I talk or to want to travel. You know, the middle-class thing.

Brenda, Cheryl and Aiesha, were in concurrence with in that all four women similar experiences and outcomes. Allison stated:

My life is different now. The Blacks I work with are like me. The Blacks I live around are like me and the Blacks I socialize with are like me. I rarely interact with Blacks who would tell me that I am not Black enough because of the way I talk, after I got to college. I honestly didn't know the joy of being a Black person until I got to college. My friends are from college and aw school and they talk like me. Nobody can tell that I'm not Black anymore.

She was able to share experiences with her peers at Stanford. Many of the students had similar experiences in their high schools. They were able to support each other and validate their ethnic identity. Although many did not talk about their past experience with African-Americans they did have an enjoyable experience. They were able to support each other and validate their ethnic identity. They felt that they belonged and were able to get the holding environment that they longed. They met people who shared their value and vision. They were ambitious and found others that mirrored their feelings. They could feel proud of who they were and their accomplishments

David said, “The thing about a historical Black college, there are so many different types of Black people there that ultimately you do end up meeting a lot of people like yourself. Sometimes it was easy to fit in. I met a lot of kids who went to prep schools.”

Brenda explained, “Things got better for me when I got to college and met Blacks that talked like me acted like me and thought like me. It was fun.” Earl no longer feels the anger from his earlier days. He learned much from his high school experience. He believed it left him a stronger person by giving him a chance to reflect on who he actually was and what he stood for. “It increased my self-awareness, because I didn’t have an identity. I was searching to find myself and through it, I did, which made me a lot stronger person. I know who I am.”

Brenda found people like herself in college and other organizations. She was less self-conscious when she was around people who talked like her:

I got more comfortable around Black people in Inroads. I remember being real comfortable with those people. They encouraged you to be professional, to be on time, to speak a certain way. I remember liking that and making good friends. It really wasn’t until I went to college and law school—law school in particular—that I felt like I started to meet Black people like myself. I hadn’t found too many in

high school. Unlike at high school, in Inroads we could talk about our future, talk about wanting to be doctors lawyers without being put down.

Attending a prestigious university seemed to have had a positive affect on these subjects. For example, Kelly and Kathy are sisters. Kathy attended a community college in the same city. Kathy met some of the same students she attended high school with. These students continued to harass her about the way she talked. When the pressure became too much; Kathy decided to quit school. On the other hand, Kelly attended a prestigious university and met other African-American students like herself. Unlike Kathy, she did not have her fellow students questioning her about the way she talked or telling her that she talked White. She was comfortable in her academic environment.

Many of the subjects were quite successful and did find a place for themselves that was consistent with their middle-class lifestyle. They escaped from a language community that would challenge their way of speaking.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### Discussion

The subjects in this study were African-Americans who valued middle-class culture and took on the behaviors of that culture. This included middle-class preferences for education, grooming, dress, entertainment, recreation, and the use of Standard English. There was a culture of the predominately White middle class; the African-American suburban students were a part of the establishment.

George Bernard Shaw's play, *Pygmalion* points out how language can divide us along class and ethnic lines. The main character in his play had some of the same issues around speech, behavior, values and aesthetics as the subjects being studied. Coming from a lower economical background Eliza was taught to speak as the upper-middle-class speaks. Once a person has accepted a particular life style then that lifestyle becomes a part of his or her identity. Speech separates the middle-class from the lower class, the educated from the uneducated. The character in the play could no longer return to her previous poor neighborhood. She was identified as an upper-class person who did not belong in her old community. The suburban African-American children identified with the lifestyle of their community which happened to be a middle-class lifestyle. This makes it difficult for them to blend in with many of the urban students. Ironically some African-Americans attended the suburban school at a young age. The longer they

remained in the suburban school system they began to identify with their suburban peers. Not only did they learn to speak similarly to the suburban students they participated in the culture in other ways.

For many suburban African-Americans their concept of “real Blackness” was obtained from the media that portrayed African-Americans as lower-class individuals with criminal tendencies and a completely different set of cultural preferences. This image was reinforced in the minds of the subjects of this study when African-American students from the inner city were bussed to middle-class suburban schools. These urban students appeared to have had a different set of values, which included their dress, preference for non-standard English, and scornful attitude about educational attainment. Essentially they were anti-establishment, anti-middle-class.

For some of these subjects growing up in a neighborhood where there were very few if any Blacks was physically and emotionally stressful for them. Some teachers questioned their differences noting that the suburban Black children talked and acted differently from the urban Black children. The suburban Blacks felt abandoned; they had no one to go to for protection from the Blacks and Whites or from the teachers who questioned their identity. Some of the subjects reported having to combat racial insults starting from kindergarten and continued throughout high school.

As most students, these students wanted very much to fit in with their peers. They wanted to feel accepted by the Black students. This proved to be most difficult. The two groups had difficulty relating to each other. The urban Blacks accused the suburban Blacks of being more White than Black because of the way they talked and their values. The subjects remembered the excruciating pain of being rejected by the White students

because of their skin color prior to the Black students coming to their school, now they were being rejected by the Black students because of their values. Some of the subjects reported that the pain of being rejected by the White students was not nearly as demoralizing as being rejected by other Blacks.

The Blacks students who were bussed in to the suburban schools outnumbered the suburban Black students. They were allowed to set the standards of what it means to be Black. The suburban student identified with the speech and values of their community. But they paid a price.

Theses subject were unable to share their pain and confusion with anyone. Some thought they were the only ones experiencing the problem with the Black students. Others felt the problems were theirs and that there was something in wrong with them. Two of the male discussants who were able to manage code-switching felt that they got along well enough with the urban students but they were aware that other African-Americans were being ostracized. They confessed that they did not know how to help them. Even within families the subjects were not able to share their dilemma. Each sibling felt that they were the only ones being subjected to the ridicule. They went to the same schools under the same circumstances but believed the other members of their family had escaped the rejection from their African-American students. It was as if there was an elephant in the room that no one would acknowledge. They internalized the problem and turned on themselves. They felt shame and anger. These feelings prevented them from reaching out to others. They remained alone with their shame.

The suburban African-Americans used various techniques in order to be accepted by the urban African-Americans. Some attempted to code-switch by imitating the speech

pattern of the urban students. For those who were unsuccessful at code-switching the ridiculing was relentless. Several of the interviewees reported getting into physical altercations with the urban students. The fighting may have resulted in a decrease of the ridiculing but it did not gain acceptance for them. Those who were good in sports, especially sports that were popular within the Black population such as basketball, football and track, gained acceptance and even respect from the African-American students. One of the subjects reported using humor to deflate the criticism and eventually gain acceptance. Another technique employed was ignoring the ridicule and continue to relate to the urban students in a positive manner. Eventually the ridiculing decreased but the subject never felt accepted by the urban Blacks. Having a dual relationship with Whites and Blacks was unacceptable to the urban Blacks. They viewed this as being disloyal. Many of the subjects reported terminating their relationship with their White friends in hopes of gaining acceptance from the Black students. When this did not work some returned to their original relationships with the White students. Many of the subjects had to leave important parts of themselves in an attempt to feel protected.

Another way of combating the mockery was to disappear. Many of the students tried to become invisible by not speaking or avoiding activities that would bring attention to themselves. They tried to disappear in the shadows, speaking only when it was necessary. Most often they felt isolated and lonely. Their isolation was compounded when they did not share their experiences with anyone to gain support.

Several of the subjects reported that dating became an issue. Several of the males reported that during junior high or high school the girls accused them of sounding White or not sounding like the other Black boys. The trepidation they experienced around dating

continued in their adult life. Depending on their environment some continue to feel apprehension around meeting new Black people on the dating scene or any other social milieu. The fear of being told that they are not Black enough can be overwhelming for them.

For some ending high school did not mean the end of their turmoil. They reported continuous harassment in their early adult years. Those who attended community colleges met with the same students who ridiculed them in high school. Some of the students unable to handle the criticism quit school to find a more acceptable environment. To some it felt as though the criticism would never end.

From adolescence to adulthood, the pain went on. One subject who is now in her middle forties reported that she was not going to allow the harassment to continue. She decided to fight back. She no longer allowed people to convince her that something is wrong with her because of the way she talks. Others reported that they still feel leery when interacting with Blacks whom they do not know. The feelings of apprehension remain with them.

After high school, those subjects who continued their education at prestigious colleges and universities found African-Americans similar to themselves, from the same cultural backgrounds. These relationships allowed them to enjoy their college years. It was there that they reached a degree of comfort with their own unique Blackness. As one participant stated she did not feel the joy of being Black until she went to college. The ones who did better by going to prestigious schools were out of the reach of African-American rejection. The students who went to prestigious colleges chose their pathway to social and economic empowerment. Finding a community that supported their values

consolidated the self-esteem and well being. They found people who like themselves from the same cultural background. They were able to validate each other. They no longer felt a need to hide who they were or how they talked or what they valued.

Although some subjects did have good experiences in their post-secondary years, all of the subjects have bitter memories of their adolescent encounters with urban Blacks that haunt them today. Those memories affect their sense of well being as well as business and social relations with African-Americans of both genders. Several of the subjects reported that they were unable to trust urban African-American men or women.

The males who received criticism from urban girls in whom they were interested in junior high and high school felt the rejection deeply. Both male and female subjects believed that the opposite sex had it easier when dealing with the urban Black students.

Shame is a powerful isolating experience isolates people causing a narcissist injury that feeds on itself. Not having their identity validated had a powerful effect. When shame and humiliation are experienced as narcissistic injuries, they produce more shame. The injured person wants to hide, feels helpless and enraged and is preoccupied with sadomasochistic fantasy (Levine, R. A. 2009).

When urban Blacks didn't understand the language of the suburban Blacks they accused them of being too "sidity" (too intellectually sophisticated). But when the suburban Blacks didn't understand the urban Blacks the urban Blacks they were told that they were too "White." Many of the subjects took pluralist stances.

The subjects of this research were mostly African-Americans who were reared in a predominantly White environment. However several lived in the inner city and attended integrated schools in the suburbs. Sandra lived in the inner city but placed in an

accelerated program that was mostly White. This separation continued until high school. Justin was an inner city student who grew up feeling different from the other Blacks in his school. He liked reading and music that was different from what the other Black students liked. This difference caused him to feel alienated. Although he continued to be different he was not completely comfortable with himself. Both Sandra and Justin were criticized for valuing their educational experience because it was different from the Black educational experience. Black children who were in the accelerated program were separated from the majority population, which included most of the Blacks. Their learning experience affected their worldview, their values and even the way they spoke.

In order to gain acceptance Earl and Sandra confessed that they were willing to perform less than their ability academically and skip classes. Holly and Lola tried desperately to change their appearance; they changed their hair style and the way they dressed. Sandra and Kathy admitted that they frequently missed school in an attempt to avoid the Black urban students who were critical of them. They felt the need to conjure up a false self in order to protect their true identity. Winnicott posits that the false self develops when a traumatic disruption has occurred. Actually the false self is the caretaker of the true self. "The threat of annihilation resulting from excessive pressure to develop according to the internal logic of another person. The dread of annihilation experienced by the true self results in a feeling of utter dependence on the false self personality organization." (Odgen, 1986, pp 143-144).

Whether in a conscious or unconscious mode, the true self employs the false self to provide protection in order to preserve its integrity. James, a highly successful entrepreneur is a good example of this when he talked about his fear of being intimate

with anyone. James admitted that he felt lucky because he chose a wife who did not demand much of him emotionally. Therefore he can remain safe in the background hiding behind his false self while going through the motion detached and lacking spontaneity (Winnicott, 1986).

Will Smith played the starring role in *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* in the television sitcom that aired in 1990 for six years. In the story line, Will's mother, fearing that Will would be negatively influenced by the criminal elements in their neighborhood sent him to live with his aunt and uncle who lived in a better neighborhood.

The Banks family resided in a mansion in Bel Air and retained a Butler from England. The Banks family consisted of Phillip, a Harvard educated attorney, his wife, Vivian, and their three children. Hillary, the oldest, is dull-witted, self-centered and snobbish. Carlton, their only son, is dogmatic and preppy; and Ashley, the youngest daughter is a nine-year-old impressionable child.

Will was a part of the hip hop generation. Hip hop was started in the Bronx in New York City in the 1970's. It is a music genre consisting of rhymes. Will was a rapper, another term for hip hop in which the performer speaks in rhyme which may or may not be set to music. It later became global as this type of music expanded its way around the world. Through rapping Will told his own story of why he left Philadelphia. This was theme song for *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*:

Now this is the story of how  
My life got flipped-turned upside down  
And I would like to take a minute  
Just sit right there  
I'll tell you how I became the prince of a town called Bel Air.

In West Philadelphia born and raised  
On the playground where I spent most of my days

Chillin' out maxing' relaxin' all cool  
 And all shootin' some b-ball outside of the school  
 When a couple of guys  
 Who were up to no good  
 Startin' making trouble in my neighborhood  
 I got in one little fight and my mom got scared  
 She said "You're movin' with your auntie and uncle in Bel Air."

I begged and pleaded with her day after day  
 But she packed my suit case and sent me on my way  
 She gave me a kiss and then she gave me my ticket.  
 I put my walkman on and said 'I might as well kick-it'

First class yo this is bad  
 Drinking orange juice out of champagne glass  
 Is this what people of Bel Air Living' like?  
 Hmmmmmm this might be alright.

But what I hear they're prissy, wine all that  
 Is Bel Air the type of place they send this cool cat?"  
 I don't think so  
 I'll see when I get there  
 I hope they're prepared for the Prince of Bel-Air.

Well the plane landed and when I came out  
 There was a dude who looked like a cop standing there with my name out  
 I ain't trying to get arrested  
 I just got here  
 I sprang with the quickness like lightening disappeared.

I whistled for a cab and when it came near  
 The license plate said fresh and it had dice in the mirror  
 If anything I can say this cab is rare  
 But I thought 'now forget it' – 'you homes to Bel Air.'

I pulled up to the house about seven or eight  
 And I yelled to the cabbie 'yo homes smell ya later'  
 I looked at my kingdom  
 I was finally there  
 To sit on my throne as the Prince of Bel-Air.

Having grown up in the inner city of Philadelphia Will arrived in Bel Air with a different set of values and behaviors. Phillip was embarrassed when Will taught Ashley

to rap, which she performed in front of his law firm associates. He believed that Will purposely embarrassed him in front of his friends and was ungrateful for the efforts he went through to bring Will to Bel Air. Will responded by stating, “I ain’t asked to come out here. Everyone’s talking about shippin’ me off, dressin’ me up and changing me into something I don’t want to be.” Phillip advised Will that he should learn to fit into the family by imitating his son, Carlton. Carlton who was a “nerd” always desired to have a brother. But Will believed that Carlton was too stiff and bourgeoisie. Will protested that he wanted to be accepted as he is. But eventually he did change; it was at his own pace.

Will was able to adjust to the lifestyle and values of this family without losing himself or the best of his values. The adjustment was not without bumps. Will often embarrassed the family with his urban ways and speech. Will gained from living with this family but he also gave. He came to the Banks family with self—confidence and a straight forward way of being. The family was able to take from him just as Phillip did when he realized that he did not have to be ashamed of his humble beginnings.

Unlike his cousin Carleton, Will was able to blend in by code-switching and learning the vernacular of his middle-class community and integrate it with his values. He became bi-cultural. Carlton spoke only Standard English. But it was Will who helped his suburban cousins to get through their adolescence years.

The family employed a butler, Geoffrey, who was an essential part of the story. The butler, coming from England, had a completely different way of speaking English. He was the wise jester. In their household there were three ways of speaking English: Standard British (the butler), Standard English (the Banks family), and Will’s non-standard English—AAVE.

Many of the research subjects, unlike Will, were not able to code-switch and find a place for themselves among their peers. Will was not burdened by shame or guilt. His core personality was solid, combining humor, intelligence and a basic good heart. The suburban subjects who also displayed a sense of humor found acceptance among the inner city Blacks. They did not allow the criticism to penetrate; they did not personalize it. Humor is a good defense against toxic shame.

Will's story pointed out that even families of good will among them are not without conflict. The subjects I interviewed felt marginalized among their peer group. The urban students had cohesion within their group as well as strict boundaries. There was no good will to be inclusive. They were able to set the standards. The reason Will and his extended family were able to make it work because it was a two-way street. Each side gained from the other. The subjects I interviewed experienced a one way street. The suburban students attempted to accept the values of the inner city but the urban students did not reciprocate unwilling to learn from them.

Some African-Americans believe because of the similarity of skin color and other physical features that all Blacks are the same, hold the same values and adhere to the same goals. Evidently this belief system is held by both urban and suburban Blacks. Many suburban students bought into the notion that they were not Black enough. They tried to behave and act like the urban students. This kind of thinking stems from the early beginnings of slavery. Slave owners attempted to dissuade the slaves from speaking their tribal languages. They were discouraged from sharing their common language or cultural experiences. But the owners were unable to prevent the bonding that occurred among the slaves. As mentioned earlier, after slavery and even until after the civil rights movements

Blacks were forced to live in similar communities. They became culturally cohesive. In earlier times they believed that they should act as one.

As the Black middle-class grew in numbers they became more visible. When they started to escape the ghetto the problems become apparent. Many of the Black middle-class moved to the suburbs, taking on the values of their community.

With bussing the middle-class Blacks and the underclass Blacks are now in the same school environment. It was not unusual for the urban students to complain about the treatment they received from their White teachers at their school. They were often misunderstood. Their body language and behaviors were misinterpreted. The suburbanites who were reared in that environment knew the expected behavior and spoke the same language as their teachers and fellow White students. Not only did they know the rules, behaviors and values they believed in them. When the urban Black students saw this they accused the suburban Blacks students of being traitors. All of the subjects reported dealing with envy and resentment from the inner city Black students. Bernard had to endure being ridiculed by the master of ceremony on amateur night when it was pointed out that he must be a county brother. Bernard was the only performer singled out with these comments by the master of ceremony. One of Carol's colleagues who was reared in the inner city told her that she needed to learn Ebonics in order to relate to Black patients.

Prior to the civil right laws African-Americans believed that being close and closed was a way of protecting themselves from their common enemy—White people. They believed that they should stick together for self-protection, and that having like minds generated power and power caused changes. It was believed that when one gained all

benefited. Segregation did not permit Blacks to live far from their core community. They were denied access to housing, education and social opportunities in most cities. After civil right laws were enacted many Blacks began to experience more economic and social freedom. They were able to expand into areas that had been closed to them. The tight knit community loosened up. Behavior that was once needed for self-preservation and for the good of the community lost its significance. The following vignette further illustrates this point. It was told by my instructor to the class while I was working on my Masters in social work:

An old story that has been passed down describes how tradition changes. On Thanksgiving Day the family was having their traditional Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings. The entire extended family was present. The 8 year-old asked Mom why did they have two hams. Mom looked puzzled and answered "I don't know." I guess because my mom always cut the ham in half and cooked them separately. She looked at her mother confused and asked her why did she do it, why did she cut the ham in half? The grandmother looking befuddled responded that she too had followed her mother's example. She then turned to her mother which was the child's great-grandmother and asked why did she cut the ham in half and cook the separately. The great-grandmother said "I had a large ham and my pan wasn't big enough so I had to cut it in half to cook it."

We often pass down behaviors that are not longer productive or useful. Old behaviors can be difficult to discard. We pass them down even when they no longer serve a useful purpose. Often times the behavior becomes more important than the purpose of the behavior. Even when the behavior falls under the category of tradition there is little examination of its present day usefulness. This behavior can be observed in many Blacks as they expect changes and changes. The more things change the more they expect things to stay the same. Because of harsh treatment from Whites many Blacks have limited their opportunities for expansion and growth. It is like a vicious circle. When Blacks fear mistreatment from Whites they draw a line and remain within their boundary. This very

boundary prevents growth. When other Blacks step outside the boundary they are accused of being a traitor, a person who has jumped ship. Yet without this movement groups like the inner city Blacks remain stagnant.

Urban students and suburban students have been subjected to behavior codes in their respective communities. After migrating to the suburbs, the urban students were expected to assimilate; to shed their previous values and take on those of their school community. To protect themselves from the rejection of their established values the urban students banded together. Often times there were more urban Black students than there were suburban Black students. They expected the suburban Black student to emulate their behavior. Again, there was little consideration of the cultural background of each group. And when the suburban Black students failed to do this adequately they were punished by being ridiculed.

These students, as all students, needed a good enough environment to continue to develop and flourish. The life of a healthy individual is characterized by fears, conflicting feelings, doubts and frustrations, as much as by positive features (Winnicott, 1986, pg 27). One of the needs of the adolescent in preparing to leave the security of their home is to have in place a safe accepting environment to complete the transition. Winnicott calls this the "holding environment." Just as the parents provided a holding environment that was safe and protective as the child is welcomed into the world, adolescents need a similar holding environment as they venture into the adult world. This is provided by extended family, peers and friends.

Twinship and partnering needs are more obvious during early school years and again during adolescence. As the child's world of self-objects widens, so does the need

for mirroring, affirmation, confirmation and guidance (Elson, 1986). Adolescents need to confirm a special place in the world for themselves as they take on new self-objects in their peers. Their self-image is affected by their relationships, expectations, failures and successes in experiences with others. It is generally agreed upon that a positive self-perception is crucial to functioning adequately and comfortable in one's surrounding. Self-worth and self-identity in the context of the environment becomes inseparable (Sotomayor, 1980).

Psychologically, the self-concept is the most vulnerable component in the transactions between minorities of color and majority populations. Negative stereotypes, for example, aim at the perpetuation of the depreciation and undermining of the self-worth. The self-concept can suffer irreparable damage if the socialization process prevents significant and familiar symbols to be present and reinforced at various levels of experience. The sense of belonging is crucial in the development of the self-concept, but becomes blurred if one's language, cultural patterns, and ethnic experiences are not reflected and supported, but rather given a negative connotation in the environment (Sotomayor, 1980, p. 51).

The subjects interviewed for this dissertation experienced rejection and criticism from their Black counterparts on every level of their development and in many ways. They did not get the support they needed as they transitioned into adulthood. Many arrived into adulthood with fears, shame and loneliness. The suburban Blacks did not find adolescents like themselves in the urban Blacks. For some suburban Blacks the treatment they received from the urban Blacks did impact their self-worth.

The impact of this rejection can reach devastating depth because of the developmental tract the adolescent is on. Adolescents may choose to support each other or to reject each other. "Adolescents help each other through regressive insecurity by forming cliques and by stereotyping themselves, in their ideals and their enemies. They

can be clannish and cruel in their exclusion of all those who are different” (Erikson 1980, pg. 26). The need for affirmation by peers and confirmation is paramount.

### Implication for Identity Theory and Social Implications

This researcher is in agreement with Wimmer (2008) and the linguists who believe that racial identity theories are in conflict; that the distinction between race and ethnicity has been confused; that there is only one race: the human race. The difference between groups of people is a result of social construction, not a biological distinction. Casting them as a biological difference ignores the issue of culture and ethnicity. Prejudice still exists. Yet conflict about differences can be viewed as a form of ethnic cleansing and ethnic battles. We don't call the Palestinian problem a racial conflict. There are similarities in the phenomenon to world wide struggles with other minorities in the world, such as the indigenous people in Australia.

What is really being discussed in this paper speaks more to class than ethnicity. I, as the researcher dropped the term race in place of ethnicity for the reasons discussed above. Race is not a good frame to sort people out because it confuses the biological with socially constructed issues. Clearly the issues in the Balkans are not racial but historical ethnic and religious differences. If we defined this phenomenon as a racial issue then we would be denying the class issues in the United States. Just as it is true with immigration issues, we are talking about class issues, ethnic issues and language issues. Haitians in the United States prefer to be recognized as Haitian. It is a way of preserving their culture. Religion, class and ethnicity are the factors that either separate or tie people together, not the indefinable term “race.”

African-American children who were bussed to suburban schools were in a foreign environment, often misunderstood and mistreated. They were not prepared for the new environment nor were the suburban teachers prepared for the urban Black. Many resisted the change and felt it was an affront to their identity and values. If the urban students felt more accepted by their White counterparts and teachers they would more likely take on the new values they are being exposed to.

Language skills are most important in gaining acceptance.

In virtually all social strata, people find the speech of others an irresistible target for criticism. If people who receive the criticism would like to change but find themselves incapable of it, the criticism merely serves to make them self-conscious and insecure” (Chambers, 1995, p. 211).

Suburban children often reported how they were criticized and ridiculed for not knowing the urban language (AAVE). It was just as difficult for the inner city child to code-switch and use Standard English. “Chambers said, “Demonstrably no language or dialect is inherently better than any other as a medium for exposition, narration, phatic communion, or any other kind of communication” (1995,. p. 213).

Urban children who were bussed to the suburbs had strong boundaries around their ethnic language community to protect them from being overwhelmed by their suburban environment. It appears that because the suburban Black students were in number, the majority, Black students from the inner-city had the power and the motivation to set the boundaries to exclude the suburban children. Only subjects that were able to attend prestigious schools found a peer group that supported their values and their way of speaking. Those who remained trapped between competing language communities continued to feel the stress and its impact even into their adulthood. People living in the same geographic region tend to drift in one direction or the other based on what the

majority does, gravitating toward similarity in pronunciation, meaning, and grammar. Ecology helps determine which pronunciation and language thrive or fade because language never stops evolving the subjects (Mufwene, 2008).

Fundamentally race is a social construct that would be better supplanted by the concept of ethnicity. This is confirmed by both linguists and sociologists. Racism is too exclusive a term. It denies that social construction, culture, ethnicity, class, religion and sexual orientation organize the differences between groups of people. Prejudices would rightly be better framed as ethnic rather than racial issues because the differences that are most salient may have less to do with the color of one's skin than the way one speaks. It is doubtful that President Obama would have been elected if he was not an eloquent master of Standard English.

The confounding of race and ethnicity has limited racial identity theory. These theories underestimate the importance of language and the way one speaks, leading this researcher think there is a serious shortcoming in the theory. In fact, current racial identity theories do not address class issues sufficiently. They presume a homogeneity that does not exist.

Many ethnic groups have similar identity problems that are language based. Spanish speaking people or Native-Americans who do not have command of Standard English are restricted economically. Native Americans are ethnically diverse based on their language differences. They preserve their ethnic identity through their native language. The deaf community preserves its unique identity through the use of sign language. Religiously observing Jews preserve their religious identity learning Hebrew and many Jews preserve their identity through Yiddish. Hutterites have preserved their ethnic and religious

traditions through clinging to a form of German that was popular in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Thus language is a preserver of culture.

### Clinical Implications

As noted above many, middle-class African-American students who are reared in a White middle-class environment have serious conflicts with urban Black students. All adolescents deal with crisis as they prepare to enter adulthood. They are learning who they are, what's important to them, separating their belief system from their parents, making career choices and preparing to leave their parents' protection and become independent. "Independence does not become absolute, and the individual seen as an autonomous unit is in fact never independent of environment, though there are ways by which in maturity may feel free and independent as much as makes for happiness and for a sense of having a personal identity" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 139). In order to make this transition and become more established in the environment outside the family constellation, adolescents have to build a support system outside of their family. They look to their peers for this support as they attempt to become independent of their parents. Unfortunately some Blacks assume that because someone has similar skin color that they will be able to relate and find acceptance. They did not consider the economic, and social, educational and cultural differences between themselves and other African-Americans.

Many of these research subjects experienced posttraumatic stress. It was clear for several of the subjects as they described their ordeal that they were reliving the pain and trauma that they experienced as adolescents. One male participant was able to admit how much pain he was in as he described his attempts to gain acceptance with the Black

students during his high school days. He admitted that it still hurts. He pointed out how lonely he felt on a daily basis. He has not yet reached a satisfactory resolution for himself. Another participant, as she talked about her experience, felt her anger return just as if it were yesterday. Others were aware they find it difficult to trust people. Several of the girls pointed out how they became promiscuous as a way to gain approval after being rejected so often. They recalled how easily they were intimidated by Black people a predicament that continues today. Several participants said that they spend most of their time with family or alone.

Teasing and criticizing converged to a form of bullying. Bullying is “to intimidate by an overbearing swaggering manner or by threats” (*Webster’s 3<sup>rd</sup> New International Dictionary*). Some of the subjects felt bullied; because of the shame of it they kept it a secret. Victims of bullying have been known to suffer long term emotional and behavioral problems. Bullying has been known to cause loneliness, depression, anxiety, and lead to low self-esteem (Ross, 1998). Many of the suburban students felt bullied because they didn’t understand how to relate to the urban students on the same level. They were a literate culture coming into contact with an oral culture who engaged others in oral and intellectual combat. Many in the oral culture are verbally as well as in their lifestyle. It is not unusual to observe members of the oral culture engaging in a tongue lashing or bragging of one’s prowess with the goal of being one-upmanship (Ong, 1987). Some refer to the bantering as playing the dozen or joanning. According to Ong (1987) “The agonistic dynamics of oral thought processes and expression have been central to the development of western culture” (pg 45). He further believes that in the oral culture the knowing and learning allows for a close empathic connection with the known,

whereas writing separates the knowing from the known and sets up a condition for objectivity.

These subjects clearly experienced a narcissistic injury. Narcissism is defined as libidinal investment of the self. Healthy narcissism involves feelings of self love. A reasonable amount of healthy narcissism allows the individual's perception of his needs to be balanced in relations to others.

Narcissism is an essential part of normal development. It begins in infancy and is experienced by the infant as a blissful state. This state is interrupted by the failure of the mother to meet the infant's needs. To repair the failure and restore the blissful state the infant creates two systems of narcissistic perfection. In one system everything is good and perfect and is experienced as belonging to the inside; at the same time everything bad is experienced as belonging to the outside. In the other system absolute power and bliss is attributed to the outside. Each of these systems has its own developmental line: the narcissistic self and the idealized parent imago. As development continues self love is projected onto others who become the self-object for the individual (Elson, 1986).

Not being affirmed and mirrored causes narcissistic injury. The infant looks to the mother for acceptance and love. She provides support as he makes his way through the trial of living. When the adolescent is ready to make another important transition his peers become similar to his caretaker in that the peer group is expected to provide the support that is needed. When this is lacking and is replaced with criticism and rejection then shame and humiliation are experienced as narcissistic injuries, and produce more shame. The injured person wants to hide, feels helpless and enraged and is preoccupied with sadomasochistic fantasy (Ross, 1998). Adolescents being told that they "talk White"

produced narcissistic injury that was experienced as a profound assault on the self.

Although this study involved middle-class African-Americans in the suburbs there are many African-Americans who reside in the inner city and who speak Standard English and received the same rejection for their way of talking.

Some suburban Blacks were able to find a language community that validated their way of speaking, and their values, which translated into valuing them as a person. Not having an empathic response from their peers prior to and during high school caused them to look for other mirroring selfobjects. They were able to find a group that provided needed twinship functions. How one speaks is deeply implicated in their identity. George Bernard Shaw pointed out how one speaks and one's social class is intertwined with one's identity. To criticize the way the person is speaking is to criticize the person and their values of who they are.

The combination of desire for a better life than the one that the ghetto offered and a desire to be connected to one's racial and ethnic roots cause African-American adolescents considerable mental agony. Stress is compounded when their contemporaries criticize their legitimate desires for a better life as racial treason. Any clinical encounters with such individuals require that the therapist be sensitive to these deep-seated feelings of rejection, mistrust, anger, humiliation and shame. They were told that they did not belong, and feel ostracized for m the group.

The issue of shame is important and its lasting effect is caught up with issues of identity. Shame carries such power that many individuals this voluntarily speak of it. By definition shame is, variously, an affect, emotion, cognition, state, or condition. Learning about the racial make-up of the school and the community of the client is essential. Some

of the issues the patient is dealing with may relate directly to feelings of shame but the patient may be unaware of the lasting influence. The participants not having their values mirrored by their peers could not spontaneously speak of the shame they experience. The effects and memories may be disavowed but still have an impact on adult relations and sense of self. The clinical encounter offers opportunity for repair. This secret needs to be brought into the light. Below is an account of such an experience:

While I was still in the midst of completing this dissertation I saw a new patient for treatment. The patient was a 42-year-old African-American female, who had been widowed four years. She has two teenage girls and was seeking parenting therapy. The patient's speech pattern was very much similar to many of the suburban subjects that I interviewed earlier for this dissertation. I inquired about her school and living community. The patient grew up in the inner city but was a part of the bussing system. She began attending suburban schools at a young age and learned to speak like the children in her school community. She was told that she spoke like a White girl when she was in elementary school. She related how painful it had been growing up and being criticized for the only way she knew how to speak. The most painful criticism came from her immediate and extended family. She felt like an outsider and those feelings remain with her today. She cried as she described how alone and lonely she felt then and continues to feel.

Like the other subjects I interviewed, this client has never talked about this issue with anyone. She was unaware that it was a problem until I asked her about her experiences growing up. She didn't recognize it as an external issue because she believed that the problems were because of her. She was unable to contextualize the problem. She

was aware of the accusation of talking White but she wasn't able to put together the origin of the criticism. She learned to speak like the language community at her school. She did not feel supported by her family. Learning from her educational community essentially estranged her from her family and she now harbors anger, self-doubt, loneliness and shame. If I had not researched this phenomenon I would not have been aware of the depth of the experience and the profound effect it has. The patient knew that something was devastatingly wrong but was unaware that the socially constructed differences about the way she spoke were the fundamental aspect of her feeling rejected. It is ironic that actually learning at school contributed to her feeling estranged from her family. Since the patient believed that the issues were internal she would not have brought it up. As her therapist I would have focused on other reasons for her anger, self-doubt, loneliness and shame, not the criticism she received for the way that she talked.

How one speaks and how others respond to one's speech is important. Researching this phenomenon has made me much more sensitive to the significance of how one speaks, and the severe consequences when they don't speak as others expect. This is not only an issue of speaking Standard English but also of being accepted for how one speaks. This rejection creates a socially structured barrier between language communities. The desire to have someone to listen to them is universal; to have someone take their information inside and then give it back. Not being heard by the language community in a way that makes you feel good produces a serious narcissistic injury. These subjects discovered the importance of being heard and validated. Their peer group in high school reflected a negative identity back to them.

Language is the foundation to understanding others, yet it is often taken for granted. How we talk is so much a part of who we are. Language has an important function in making boundaries between groups whether it is class, gender, religion, political groups, etc. When one's speech is undermined it has a devastating effect. For some of the subjects, the interview was painful. Most of the participants were eager to talk about it, they felt a sense relief of being heard and understood. Some took on the problem as their own. They were unaware of others having a similar issue. Many confessed that they always have to question themselves and be on guard when they come in contact with other Blacks. Language is a powerful medium. How we speak relates to how we view the world. It tells the world an important part of who we are. Language discourse often carries self-object functions; it anchors the sense of self.

The therapist needs to be culturally sensitive to ethnic identity and its meaning to the individual. How people define themselves and their groups often differ from how they are defined by others. "The discomfort that is experienced when ethnic identity is unclear, fragmented, ambivalent, or negative is an essential dynamic to be recognized in the therapeutic process" (Pinderhughes, 1988 p. 55). Individuals need to understand what their ethnicity means to them. It is closely related to how they feel about themselves (1988).

The state of being mentally healthy is facilitated by a positive sense of connectedness with one's own cultural group (Gary, 1978: Gomez 1982). Not only does the therapist need to be culturally sensitive but also be aware of the impact of criticism from others of their culture.

### Summary of Findings

The subjects of this study were middle-class African-Americans who were raised in a middle-class culture, with middle-class education, grooming, dress, entertainment, recreation, and the use of Standard English. During their adolescent years they were educated with non-middle class, urban, African-Americans who criticized them for their middle class cultural orientation. In search of a more Afro-centric ethnic identity and to gain the social acceptance of their urban brothers and sisters, they attempted to identify with urban culture, including manner of speech, grooming, dress, entertainment, and even criminal behavior. Generally this tactic was not successful and the middle class adolescents became the objects of ridicule and rejection, and social and academic isolation.

Further, these psychological assaults hindered normal healthy development of an identity, and limited their choices in social relationships and other self-actualizing activities during their grade school years. After high school, those subjects who continued their education at prestigious colleges and universities, found people like themselves, from the same cultural backgrounds, and enjoyed their college years. It was there that they reached a degree of comfort with their own unique Blackness. Those who attended small colleges, trade schools, and community colleges were not so fortunate. There they came in contact with the same class of people who had taunted them in adolescence. They experienced a continuation of high school ridicule and rejection for their middle class speech and behavior.

Although some subjects did have positive experiences in their post-secondary years, all of the subjects have bitter memories of their adolescent encounters with urban Blacks

that haunt them today. Those memories affect their sense of well being as well as their business and social relationships with African-Americans of both genders. Several subjects reported that they were unable to trust either African-American men or women. These deep-seated feelings of rejection and mistrust have implications for clinical social work.

### Conclusion

The findings suggest the following conclusions:

1. That criticism of cultural orientation directed at middle class, African-Americans by members of their own race has implications for clinical social work practice for the subjects of this study.
2. That criticism of cultural orientation directed at African-Americans by members of their own ethnic group may affect a considerable segment of the subject population, since the African-American middle class has grown substantially over the past 50 years.
3. That racial identity development theories do not account for the experiences of middle class, African-Americans raised in predominately White environments, which are criticized for their cultural orientation by members of their own race.

Two major findings emerged from this study. The first is that cultural orientation criticism of middle class African-American adolescents (and adults) by non-middle class members of their race negatively impact social behavior and mental health of the middle class group, particularly their identity formation. These effects begin in adolescence and continue into adult life, affecting both business and social relationships.

During adolescence the subjects reported:

1. Distrusting peers who taunted them because of their values and the adults who permitted the taunts to continue;
2. avoiding leisure and enrichment to which they were attracted in unsuccessful attempt to please their non-middle class peers (e.g., cheerleading, tennis, and painting);
3. performing below their academic ability to avoid peer criticism;
4. giving up friends—Black and White, to please their peers; and
5. apprehension about dating, if it drew peer criticism. This has led to a degree of social isolation including purposefully limiting friendships and romantic relationships. The subjects have a legacy of anger, distrust, frustration, and, in some cases, continuing low self-esteem.

These findings have significance for academic and clinical settings. First the treatment of these issues should begin where the problem originates, during adolescence and in the settings with most significance for the subjects—middle and high schools. School social workers need to sensitize all staff members to the issue of cultural harassment as it affects identity development. This sensitization should include administration, teachers, support staff. Their mortification to take an interest in this subject should be stimulated by the fact that secure identities support the mission of the school—education. Several subjects of this study reported deliberately performing below their academic capabilities to avoid peer criticism. This is a waste of brainpower in a setting designed to cultivate it. In clinical practice with middle-class African-Americans adolescent students, conflicts surrounding identity formation should be a central

consideration in any treatment plan. These same considerations apply in non-school settings where mental health professionals are treating adolescents and their family members.

As noted in the findings, subjects who attended small colleges or community colleges encountered the same criticism of their cultural orientation that they experienced in high school and middle school. At the college level, administrators, teachers, staff and helping professionals need to have the same sensitivities as those who attend to students during their adolescent and young adult years, and create environments and treatment plans to prevent and ameliorate the effects of cultural criticism.

In adulthood, the clinician is more likely to encounter the effects of cultural criticism and the resulting impaired identity development when patients visit a health care professional. This is especially true when dealing with middle-class, African-American adults who are successful professionals or entrepreneurs. However, in patients of this description, these very characteristics should serve to alert the clinician to the potential problems of the type described in this study. A few brief questions focused on the identity formation period of adolescence should uncover potential problems.

In summary, the effects of cultural harassment by inner city African-Americans of their middle-class African-Americans peers can extend from middle school through undergraduate school into middle age, and have lasting negative social effects. At each stage clinicians have a role in providing information, prevention, and treatment of the effects of cultural harassment, as described in this study.

The second major finding from this study is that theories of ethnic identity development do not account for the experiences of the subjects of this study. Most of

these theories can be organized around stages of development. As it applies to African-Americans, in the first stage the individual is self-hating and accepts the negative view of his own group (Marcia, 1980), and seeks aggressively to assimilate and/or integrate into mainstream White culture to escape from what he perceives as the stigma of being Black. Theorists see this stage as characterized by high levels of anxiety (Carter, 1991; Parham & Helms, 1985a), low self-regard, low self-esteem, and high self-actualization tendencies (Munford, 1994; Parham & Helms, 1985a; Pyant & Yanico, 1991).

During interviews the subjects did express self-hate, negative views of lower-class African-Americans, anxiety, low self-regard, and low self-esteem. However, they were more or less comfortable with their middle-class status. It was only when their urban, non-middle-class, Blacks, peers challenged their cultural orientation and ethnic identity that anxiety, depression and low self-regard became issues. Further, as a group the subjects did not have a low regard for urban, African-American, underclass culture; they thought it was “cool” and tried to emulate its manifestations.

In the second stage of identity development the person is jarred by a racial experience. He questions his (White) middle class orientation. He begins the process of adopting a Black perspective. Phinney (1990) describes this stage as the person's involvement in seeking and exploring to understand the meaning of ethnicity for oneself. Atkinson (1983) notes that the person is challenging and questioning old attitudes. This aspect of the theory accurately describes what happened to the subjects when they encountered inner city African-American peers.

Stage three, according to theory, is the beginning of the new identity. The person has a high level of Black awareness to the point of denigrating White people and

mainstream culture. As the person's emotions begin to level off he begins to feel a greater sense of control. Control was not a word that the subjects used to describe this period. Generally they felt out of control. They bounced back and forth between long-time White friends and middle class culture and the rejection of the urban African-American culture that they were trying unsuccessfully to emulate and penetrate. As Marcia (1988) notes, they were actively seeking answers among alternatives. But they did not have a generalized anger at White people. Indeed, the anger was often directed secretly and overtly at Blacks who rejected and taunted them. There was euphoria, rage, creative energy, high-risk taking, and a strong sense of connection with Black life and culture (Cross, 1978). Some even considered engaging in criminal behavior to impress their Black peers. They were anxious about how to demonstrate to others that they were becoming the right kind of Black person (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991). However, none of the subjects expressed a positive feeling toward their Black identity because their Black identity was not accepted as valid by the primary reference group, inner city Blacks. So while the subjects exhibited many aspects of the theoretical construct for this stage of development, they also had experiences that were inconsistent with the theory in a substantial way, principally animosity directed toward peers of their own race because of ridicule and rejection.

Theory states that in the final stage of ethnic identity development conflicts are resolved in a new worldview in which the African-American reaches a high degree of comfort with Blackness and makes a point of being visible and recognized as an African-American. A calm, secure demeanor replaces tension, emotionality, and defensiveness. Phinney (1989) agrees that the optimum identity is achieved, which is characterized by

clear, confident acceptance of oneself as a member of a minority group. The person also experiences a deep connection with and acceptance of the Black community (Cross, 1991).

This is not how the subjects of this study described their attitudes. The conflicts of adolescence were never resolved and some never became comfortable with themselves as Black or with Black people in general. Many have difficulty establishing long-term intimate relationships with members of their race. They are not calm, secure, well-adjusted people with deep connection with and acceptance of the Black community (Cross, 1991). They are angry, suspicious, maladjusted people who, in some instances, are still maligned by African-American coworkers for speaking Standard English and associating with White people. Contrary to the assertions by theorists (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991), the subjects' sense of Blackness does not frame their value system, personal social network, daily interactions, and personal conduct. In so far as economically possible, all have a middle class lifestyle and preferences that they enjoyed before the rejections of their adolescence. Once again, the theory does not accommodate the reality experienced by the subjects in this study.

Although theory cannot be changed on the experiences of less than 40 subjects, those experiences do suggest that in several key areas the theory may not accurately predict reality with regard to ethnic identity formation. Further research is required to make specific recommendations in that regard.

## Limitations

This study was designed and executed within the following limits:

1. The sample was small and further research is needed to confirm how widespread this problem may be for African-Americans today.
2. The research model used limited the data to a particular process of interpretation. There are other models the researcher could have selected.
3. The amount and nature of the data collected was limited by the time limits of the individual and group interviews.

## Recommendations for Clinical Practice

1. In dealing with middle class, African-Americans, who present with social problems or who have school or college-age family member with social problems, the clinician must be mindful that both parents and child may be suffering from the effects of same-race criticism for their class orientation.
2. Especially for middle class African-American patients, clinicians must develop intake and patient history procedures that are thorough enough to highlight growing out of same-race criticism in adolescence and beyond.
3. Clinicians must develop treatment regimes that both detect and treat the effects of same race criticism.
4. The social work profession must educate school social workers, guidance counselors, school administrators and teachers of adolescents so that they create environments that support the development of diverse identity options among adolescents.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The findings suggest the following recommendations for further research:

1. Using quantitative techniques, expand the research described in the problem statement of this study to determine the extent of the same-race criticism of African-Americans because of their middle class cultural orientation.
2. Conduct research among clinical social workers using qualitative and quantitative techniques to determine:
  - a. The extent of their awareness of the problem of same-race criticism of African-Americans because of their middle class cultural orientation among their client population.
  - b. How they detect and treat the problem of same-race criticism of African-Americans because of their middle class cultural orientation among their client population.
  - c. Success rates in treating the problem of same-race criticism of African-Americans because of their middle class cultural orientation among their client population.
3. Conduct qualitative and quantitative research with school social workers, guidance counselors and teachers to determine if they are aware of the problem, how to treat it, and their rate of success.

APPENDIX A  
LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant

I am a practicing clinical social worker, seeking volunteers to participate in research interviews. I would like to interview middle class African-Americans who professed to have been criticized by other African-Americans for their middle class behaviors and/or were made to feel that they did not fit in with their ethnic peers. One may also have gotten this experience of not belonging from the media or observation. Either way, the results are the same, leaving one to feel ethnic confusion.

I am conducting research on this topic because it is necessary to collect data so that clinicians can understand and properly treat patients who are troubled by these experiences. Through your participation, you can make a contribution to science and help other African-Americans like yourself. The information you provide is confidential and your identity will be protected through the use of a fictitious name.

If you are interested, please contact me at (phone number).

I look forward to hearing from you

Zenobia Edwards

APPENDIX B  
QUESTIONS ASKED THE SUBJECTS

## Questions Asked the Subjects

1. Tell me about your family background. Did you have siblings? Did you grow up in a two-parent family?
2. What is the educational level of your parents?
3. What was your neighborhood like when you grew up?
4. Where did you go to school? What was the ethnic make-up of your schools?
5. When did you have negative experience with urban Blacks?
6. How did you handle that experience? Were your efforts successful?
7. Do you know if other suburban Blacks had similar negative experiences?
8. Did you talk to anyone about this negative experience?
9. Did your siblings have similar experiences in school?
10. Do you think you have overcome the negative experience?
11. Do you think you will have to protect your children from this experience?

APPENDIX C  
SUBJECTS' BACKGROUND

Name	Background										
	M/ F	Parents In Home	Private School	Entered Public School Age	Entered Private School Grade	Blue Collar	Middle Class	Grew Up In	Grew Up In Suburbs	Grew Up In Mostly White Neighbor- hood	Parents' Education
1. Michelle	F	2	No	5	0	Yes	No	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	H.S.
2. Lola	F	2	Yes	14	8	No	Yes	Ohio	Yes	Yes	B.S.
3. Kelly	F	1	Yes	13	3	No	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	No	B.S.
4. Veronica	F	2	No	5	0	Yes	No	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	H. S.
5. Kathy	F	1	Yes	12	1	No	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	No	B.S.
6. Karen	F	1	No	5	0	No	Yes	Chicago	Yes	Yes	MA
7. Michael	M	2	No	5	0	Yes	No	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	H.S.
8. Jennifer	F	2	No	5	0	No	Yes	Germany	Yes	Yes	B.S.
9. Holly	F	2	No	9	Kg	No	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	B.S.
10. Jeremy	M	2	No	5	0	No	Yes	Atlanta	No	No	B.S.
11. Allison	F	2	Yes	0	Kg	No	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	MA
12. Brenda	F	2	No	5	0	No	Yes	Baltimore	Yes	Yes	B.S.
13. David	M	1	Yes	5	0	No	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	MA
14. Sandra	F	2	Yes	12	Kg	Yes	No	St. Louis	No	No	H.S.
15. Sange	M	2	No	5	0	No	Yes	Florida	Yes	Yes	MA
16. Aiesha	F	2	No	5	0	No	Yes	Scotts- dale	Yes	Yes	B.S.
17. James	M.	2	Yes	0	Kg	No	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	MA.
18. Carol	F	2	No	5	0	No	Yes	Florida	Yes	Yes	H.S.
19. Earl	M	1	No	5	0	No	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	MA
20. Bernie	F	1	No	5	0	Yes	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	Yes	H.S.

Name	Light Skin	Standard English	Years Private School Experience	Highest Degree	Sports	College	Leisure Activity	Associate With Whites	Suburbs	Intellectual Capacity Or Interest	Music Choice
1. Michelle	No	Yes	None	HS	No	None	None	Yes	Yes	Average	All kinds
2. Lola	Yes	Yes	4	Masters	No	Harvard	Student gov.	Yes	Yes	Advance	All kinds
3. Kelly	No	Yes	4	B.S.	No	Wash. Univ.	None	No	Yes	Refuse adv	Black
4. Veronica	No	Yes	No	H.S.	No	None	None	Yes	Yes	Average	Black
5. Kathy	Yes	Yes	4	HS	No	Trade	None	Yes	Yes	Average	Black
6. Karen	Yes	Yes	No	Masters	No	Northwest	None	Yes	Yes	Advance	White
7. Michael	No	Yes	No	H.S.	No	None	None	Yes	Yes	Average	Black
8. Jennifer	Yes	Yes	No	B.S	No	Nursing school		Yes	No	Average	All kinds
9. Holly	No	Yes	3	1yr Jr. Col.	No	Jr. College	None	Yes	Yes	Average	All kinds
10. Jeremy	No	Yes	No	B.S.	No	Emory	None	No	No	Advance	All kinds
11. Allison	Yes	Yes	12	Master	No	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	Advance	All kinds
12. Brenda	No	Yes	None	Master	Yes	Michigan	Yes	No	Yes	Advance	All kinds
13. David	No	Yes	No	Master	No	Harvard	None	No	Yes	Advance	Black
14. Sandra	Yes	Yes	3	2 yr.	No	None	Student gov.	Yes	No	Advance	All kinds
15. Sange	No	Yes	No	Masters	No	Harvard	None	No	Yes	Advance	Black
16. Aiesha	Yes	Yes	No	Law School	No	Stanford	None	Yes	Yes	Advance	All kinds
17. James	M.	2	Yes	0	Yes	None	Yes	St. Louis	Yes	Advance	MA.
18. Carol	No	Yes	No	M.D.	No	Harvard	None	No	Yes	Advance	Black
19. Earl	Yes	Yes	No	Navy	Yes	None	Painting	Yes	Yes	Advance	Black
20. Bernard	No	Yes	No	B.S	Yes	Depauw	Yes	No	Yes	Advance	Black

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