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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, BLACK STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, ELITE PRIVATE BOARDING SCHOOLS, by TAMEKA R. JACKSON, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

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ABSTRACT

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, BLACK STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, ELITE PRIVATE BOARDING SCHOOLS

by

Tameka R. Jackson

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of economically disadvantaged, Black students attending predominantly White, elite private boarding schools. Data were collected utilizing semi-structured interviews with 9 participants, with each interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. The recursive method of data collection and analysis was informed by six steps outlined by Creswell (1998), as well as Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methods (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Findings revealed 9 themes associated with participants' experiences: classroom experiences, value of Black peer networks, caught between two worlds, racial perceptions, desire to connect with people of all races, socioeconomic challenges, living away from home challenges, impact of peers on level of success, and significance of relationships with Black faculty. Practice and research implications for Black students attending private school, as well as for private school faculty and administrators, are discussed.

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, BLACK STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, ELITE PRIVATE BOARDING SCHOOLS

by
Tameka R. Jackson

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy
in
Counseling Psychology
in
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in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia
2010

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CHAPTER 1

PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF LOW INCOME, BLACK STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, ELITE PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS

A growing number of high school students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds are being admitted to and attending predominately White, elite, independent[1] high schools (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Jones-Wilson, Arnaz, &Asbury; Griffin, 2000). Strong evidence exists that students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds benefit academically from attending these private schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). However, as chronicled in Ronald Suskind's (1998) book: *A Hope in the Unseen,* there is some evidence that students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds often encounter psychosocial challenges in transitioning to these institutions. Studies have found that African American and Black[2] students at predominantly White, independent schools often experience marginalization; feel unrepresented in the school culture, including the curriculum; and feel alienated from their Black peers outside of the independent school context (Ascher, 1986; Cookson & Persell, 1991; Cooper & Datnow, 2000; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Decuir-Gunby, 2007; Herr, 1999; Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Proweller, 1999). These challenges may impact self esteem, stress levels, self efficacy, and aspects of identity development, as well as students' academic functioning and social adjustment (Arrington, Hall & Stevenson, 2003; Cooper & Datnow, 2000; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Spencer, Kim, & Marshall, 1987).

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[1] The terms independent school and private school are used interchangeably in this work, and no distinction is intended.

[2] The terms *Black* and *African American* are used interchangeably here, with no distinction intended. For the purpose of this work, however, the term *Black* will be used, as it is carries a broader connotation based on the inclusion of students of color who do not consider themselves "Americans".

Despite the given challenges, many Black students still demonstrate resilience and academic success in these environments (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Griffin, 2000; Ratteway, 1990).

Black Students and Public Schools

Numerous studies and national reports have documented the continuous decline of public education, particularly in inner city communities (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Slaughter & Schneider, 1986; Smarick, 2008). Despite the progress and enormous promise of Brown versus the Board of Education (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954) the struggle for educational equality has not yet been realized, particularly for ethnic minorities living in poor urban communities (Gardner & Talbet-Johnson, 2001). Children from poor families are more likely to attend schools that have fewer resources and less experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1996). In many inner city communities, Blacks constitute a major percentage of the resident population. Studies have shown that students in inner city schools tend to perform less well than their peers from more affluent schools on academic measures, such as statewide achievement tests (e.g., ACT and SAT) (Hurd, 2000; Roach, 2001; Rothstein, 2004). These students poor performance on academic measures can cause some to raise questions about the quality of education in urban schools, while others place blame on the students. Whether educators blame the educational system or the students, the fact remains that great disparities exist between the performances of those in urban communities, versus those in more affluent communities (Gardner & Miranda, 2001). Black students in poor school districts face challenges that place them at increased risk for academic failure. Some of these challenges include poverty, racism, less experienced teachers, underfunded schools,

lack of community resources, and lack of parental involvement (Bennett & LeCompte, 1998; Rothstein, 2004, Neckerman, 2007). The combined impact of these challenges has caused many Black parents in inner cities to seek alternative educational opportunities for their children. Many Black parents are choosing to send their children to private schools for a more rigorous education because of their dissatisfaction with the public school system (Freedman, 2004; McKinnon, 2003).

Black parents are drawn to independent schools because they seek an environment that offers small student-teacher ratio, a sense of caring, and a perceived high quality education. For many Black parents, the perceptions of independent schools are quite favorable based on the offering of superior resources, individualized attention, enhanced nurturing, and a somewhat better shield from negative peer pressure, drugs, and danger (Torry, 1992, as cited in Jones-Wilson et al., 1992). Three studies (Cooper & Datnow, 2000) in the Washington metropolitan area confirmed these results by identifying the following top five reasons parents in the area rejected public schools, (a) perceived lack of discipline, (b) poor curriculum standards, (c) large schools/over-crowding, (d) teachers' lack of interest, and (e) difficulty getting good teachers.

Moreover, Black parents are selecting private schools based on a desire for their children to benefit from the cultural capital provided within integrated environments. Numerous studies over the last seven years have shown that Black students in private schools have higher standardized test scores and higher college enrollment rates than their peers in public schools (Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Schneider & Shouse, 1992; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). The level of educational motivation that private and public school students bring to the classroom in their respective settings may account for some

of the difference in academic performance. Cookson and Persell (1991) suggest that many within the Black community see education as a realistic "channel of attainment". Many Black parents are convinced that self reliance and ambition, coupled with the cultural capital benefits afforded through an elite private school education, will offer their children greater financial success, than relying on the relatively more limited resources of public schools (Ottley, 2005).

History of Independent Schools

To understand the prevailing culture within elite private schools, it is necessary to review the fundamentals upon which these schools were established. The elite private school movement in the United States has its origin in New England. The most elite independent boarding and day schools were established between 1833 and 1906 to educate boys only. These schools became known as the "select 16" (Cookson & Persell, 1991). When they were founded, the fundamental belief system within these schools was strongly aligned with deeply held republican virtues, namely individualism and meritocracy. Accordingly, personal virtue, as opposed to communal interests and public service was revered (Saveth, 1988). The mission of these schools was to prepare primarily White males for college and to facilitate entry into a "well educated and cultivated" elite that would carryout the core values set by the founding fathers and would lead the United States to a high standing and distinct position in the world. Their roster of distinguished graduates (i.e., Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and George H. W. Bush) continues to contribute to the schools' aura of privilege.

Attendance at a private school has long been believed to place children on a path toward wealth, status, and power. "Prep schools, especially the select sixteen, contribute

disproportionately to those who enter the most highly respected colleges, acquire high earning jobs, become chief executive officers, serve on corporate boards, and become directors of foundations and corporations" (Saveth, 1988, p. 373). Although originally developed for upper class White males, these schools have since opened their doors to females and increasing numbers of ethnic minorities.

Independent Schools and Blacks

Historically, the alternatives to public education for Black students have been extremely restricted. Prior to the 1960s, Black students were prohibited from attending some of the nation's most elite independent schools. In response to the political climate, including the civil rights movement of the 1960's, Dartmouth College and the Rockefeller foundation developed A Better Chance (ABC) (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988) program, with the mission to increase the number of academically talented minority students who could benefit from the advantage of a quality education in one of the select sixteen, independent schools. Over the next several years, 100 more preparatory schools had opened their doors to Black and other ethnic minority students for the first time (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991).

Today, many independent schools have realized that the demographic changes within the U.S. population have made it critical for the student body to be more representative of society. With the diversification of the workforce and globalization shifts, it is essential that students are able to work within a multi-racial and multi-ethnic population. As such, many of these schools have created outreach offices to specifically recruit students of color. Additionally, scholarships and financial aid packages have been

earmarked for ethnic minority students (Speede-Franklin, 1988; Datnow & Cooper, 2000).

Based on the increased recruitment efforts targeting students of color, as well as Black parents recognizing the social and economic advantages associated with an independent school education, it may be expected that numbers of Black students would be high. On the contrary, based on data from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), enrollment of students of color in independent schools has not changed in the past 16 years. In 1992 the percentage of Black students in independent schools was 5.3%. By 2008, the number had only increased to 5.9%. While there may be several possible explanations for the low numbers of Black students in independent schools, one explanation that has not been explored extensively at the micro level involves the subjective, lived experiences amongst these students in independent schools.

The Black Experience in Independent Schools

Despite the increased recruitment efforts for minority students and the educational benefits associated with a private school education, research has shown that Black students find it difficult to feel comfortable in predominantly White, elite independent schools (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988; Cookson & Persell, 1991; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991). Within the literature, experts have coined terms and expressions such as “other,” “racelessness,” “outsider within,” and “the burden of acting White” to illustrate what Black students often endure as students within these settings (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Fordham, 1991; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). A number of qualitative studies have found that Black students and their families often feel like

outsiders, as they are alienated from the cultures of these schools (Ottley, 2007; Schneider & Shouse, 1992).

Thompson and Schultz (2003) indentified several specific psychological challenges faced by many students from minority and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who attend predominantly White, elite private schools. One challenge concerns the experience of being racially visible and socially invisible. While everyone in the predominantly White setting is clearly aware of whom the "kids of color" are, a number of people in the school community are only interested in these students insofar as they adhere to White cultural norms. Many Whites in these settings are not interested in knowing about the "total life" of a child of color. The communities and cultures of students of color are often not acknowledged or celebrated in the same way as those which adhere to the traditional Eurocentric norms prevalent within these environments. While many students of color become important to the community as a symbol of the school's commitment to diversity, these students often feel personally neglected and devalued. Schools often demand that students of color respect the values of the school without reciprocity in valuing the cultures of students of color (Ottley, 2007; Smith, 2008).

Another challenge noted by Thompson & Shultz (2003), is the burden of explaining oneself to White people. Often times, students of color are asked to educate White students. They are often asked to be culturally representatives for their race and many times carry the additional burden of explaining to White students and faculty the importance of race consciousness in this country. In this same vein, economically disadvantaged, students of color often experience the burden of being grateful for the

opportunity to attend a prestigious private school (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). It can be incredibly painful for students of color to be constantly reminded about "what an opportunity this is" when they feel socially isolated or misunderstood in this setting. Rarely are students affirmed by faculty for taking the risk to come to a school which presents several psychosocial challenges.

The psychosocial challenges which have been cited in the literature may negatively affect academic and social functioning (Gray-Little & Carsels, 1997; Schneider & Shouse, 1992; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988; Spencer, Kim, & Marshall, 1987). Additionally, the impact of these challenges may contribute to acculturative stress. In this context, acculturation refers to the modification of the culture of economically disadvantaged, minority students as a result of contact with the elite, predominant White culture which exists within many of these schools. Acculturative stress can refer to general psychological distress and decline in the psychological and social functioning of students, as expressed in anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, helplessness, irritability, eating disorders, identity confusion, and reduced motivation (Tartakovsky, 2007).

The psychological challenges experienced by students of color in these settings relates to the intersection of race and social class in elite private schools. Both race and class are salient factors in defining institutional cultures and students' social and educational experiences. Racial differences are reinforced by class divisions; the powerful, often subtle interaction of race and class operate to maintain a society that is highly stratified. This is particularly apparent in schools of the White power elite. Thus, it is critical to explore how issues of race and social class influence Blacks adolescents' sense of identity within the school context. Despite the interrelatedness of race and class,

a paucity of research considers the impact of class on Black experiences within these environments (e.g. De-Cuir-Gunby, 2007; Ginwright, 2000; Ogbu, 2003). Pettigrew (1981) persuasively argued that an interactive model of race and class has more explanatory power than traditional race and class models of inequity. He wrote:

> Race and social class increasingly interact to produce critical effects that cannot be explained by simply combining the main effects of the two factors. This is not to assert, of course, that there are no important direct effects, but to advance the hypothesis that an increasing number of important outcomes require an interactive perspective. For instance, the model contends that the total condition of being black and poor is greater than the sum of its two racial and class parts. (p.245)

Pettigrew further suggested that the interaction of being both Black and poor produces more disadvantages than would either aspect alone. The scope of this writing and existing research does not consider what it is like to be Black and non upper class in an upper class, predominantly White environment, such as a prep school. Being a Black person in an upper class academic institution is a unique experience. Black prep school students have the opportunity to observe and, to some degree, become part of a class that is generally closed to outsiders. Yet, because they are Black and often economically disadvantaged, they are often not fully accepted or they have difficulty "fitting into" upper-class White culture (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991). No matter what their instrumental achievements, Black students often remain "outsiders within" (Collins, 1986).

Double Marginalization

The “outsider” status within the academic environment often extends into other arenas. Many Black students in these institutions have reported feeling “doubly marginalized”, as they often find themselves caught between two cultures: the school’s culture and the culture in which they were raised (Cookson & Persell, 1991; Datnow & Cooper, 2000; Scneider & Shouse, 1992). Cookson & Persell (1991) suggested that this marginalization may cause emotional and practical difficulties for some young Black prep school students. Attending an elite, private school often forges distance between Black students and their parents and friends, and may block them from fully participating in the lives and lifestyles of their parents and peers (Ascher, 1986; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991). In a study by Zweigenhaft & Domhoff (1991), the authors found that Black prep students in elite schools became aware of how much they had changed when they went home. Some recounted painful experiences and hostility from their friends back home that demonstrated the gap between the two worlds in which they found themselves. Whether or not they experienced hostility back home, as time passed the students found that they had fewer things in common with their old friends, and they found themselves feeling lonely when they did go home.

Given their doubly marginalized status, the normal pressures on young adolescents to fit in with their peers are heightened for economically disadvantaged, Black students. Students struggle with the questions of “acting White” when they adopt the culture and values dominant at the institution in which they spend the majority of their time. They face being considered “wanna-bes” by their peers if they develop relationships with classmates outside of their race (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ottley, 2007). Moreover, Black students face being called “sellouts” by family members and

friends if they fail to maintain close ties with the youth in their neighborhoods. The social pressures and associated acculturative stress (Datnow & Cooper, 1998) may impact Black students' social and academic functioning.

The struggle for these students caught between two worlds is expressed by Neira (1998):

> When trying to live in two worlds, one is in peril of not belonging to either of them. One is left in a state of confusion…Being put in the position of changing one's character every morning and every afternoon to adapt to two different worlds endangers one's identity. (Neira, 1998, p. 337)

In response to the cultural dissonance which accompanies double marginalization, Blacks often implement strategies to accomplish self-transformations in transitions between two different worlds. Hemmings (1998) labeled these strategies as (a) self-negation (negation of physical and symbolic ties with other relatives and other Blacks); (b) self-fragmentation (feeling most comfortable amongst other Blacks, but rejecting some aspects of Black cultural identity in interactions with the majority culture); and (c) self-synthesis (synthesis of multiple selves, including ethnicity, gender, and social class, into a harmonious whole).

Impact of Structural Components on Outsider Status

One structural aspect which promotes the "outsider status" for Black students is evident in how the schools facilitate racial integration. Feagin (1996) suggested that racial integration at predominantly White institutions is less about a bi-directional acculturation process; instead it is achieved through a one way assimilation process. This process contributes to marginalization and devalues the cultural experiences that ethnic

minority students bring to the school. Bringing Black students into historically White schools has usually meant an aggressive emphasis on fitting them into White social and cultural molds. This one way assimilative process requires that Black students adopt White views, norms, and practices, at the expense of celebrating their own cultural uniqueness. It is perpetuated through the maintenance of Euro-centrically based curricula, a lack of racial and ethnic diversity at the administrative and faculty levels, and social practices which align with White, upper class cultures.

Another cultural aspect which exists within many private school settings is the notion of colorblindness. Many teachers in these schools continue to adhere to this notion and therefore view all children as the same, despite racial differences. Faculty in independent schools often conspire consciously or subconsciously to maintain the status quo in their classrooms despite the presence of Black students. This phenomenon has been referred to as dysconcious racism (Ladson-Billings, 1994); defined as “an uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (King, 1991, p. 133).

Recent findings (Ottley, 2005) with private school teachers revealed an interest in treating all students equally, and not focusing on racial and cultural diversity. This belief that race should not be considered when planning curriculum or in interactions with students of color has resulted in an absence of a racial perspective in school contexts. While this approach is often viewed as equitable, it is potentially damaging and tends to trivialize diversity as being something that is just "skin deep," thereby sending the message to students that since "we are more alike than different" there is no need to discuss race and diversity (Arrington, Hall & Stevenson, 2003). These messages

perpetuate the "myth of sameness" (Hardy, 1989), which discourages a critique of how race may impact who is deemed to be successful in school, how school may be experienced differently by students based on their community membership, and what members of the entire school community may learn about people different from themselves. The myth of sameness invalidates the unique experiences of students of color whose ethnic identity places them outside of the mainstream. Further, it prevents the stories and voices of Black students from being integrated into the curriculum in a meaningful way and devalues the contributions of diverse perspectives.

Failure to attend to racial differences is often preserved within a “culture of niceness”. In a study about Blacks and private school experiences, Ottley (2005) described this system as a veneer that maintains the status quo by masking issues of difference within the school. This biased cultural system keeps the students and adults in the school from engaging in difficult conversations, based on the appearance that everyone is “nice” at the school. The culture of niceness can lead to a bubble syndrome, a lack of exposure to realities of the societal ills, diverse students, and experiences that exist outside the immediate walls of the school’s community. The bubble syndrome allows negative stereotypes to go unchallenged and increases the challenges for Black students whose realities lie outside the bubble of the school. The culture of niceness, compounded with the bubble syndrome, minimizes the significance of race and creates a silence on issues which are pertinent to the lived experiences of Black students in these environments. Silence in regard to race and racism does not prevent Black students from experiencing racism, but instead makes it more challenging for those students to

effectively cope, as they will not have the resources to draw upon when needed (Castro Atwater, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Neville, 2000).

Stress and Private Schools

Adolescence is a developmental period when children may be particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of stress (Colten & Gore, 1991). Stress is a clear risk factor for mental health disorders, which have been estimated to affect approximately one in five children ages 9 to 17 years (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). For students in academically rigorous environments, like elite private schools, the potential for stress can increase significantly and impact academic motivation and performance (Suldo, Shaunessey, & Hardesty, 2008). Much of the research in this area has examined the stress associated with high academic demands, but has not looked at how race-related or social class-related pressures impacts the existing stress.

In recent years, there has been an abundance of research that examines the effects of social class and race, particularly racism on Blacks (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Most of the work in this area, however, examines the impact of race-related stressors on Black's health status (Fang & Myers, 2001; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997). Overwhelmingly, results from this body of work have suggested a link between greater perceived racism (a type of race-related stress) and lower negative health symptoms (e.g., Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002).

Findings from the emerging body of research on college racial climates have suggested that Black college students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs), often experience additional stress related to being a racial minority in a predominantly

White setting (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, Thomas, 1999) and that this additional stress affects their adjustment process (Edmunds, 1984; Henderson, 1988; Prillerman, Myers, & Smedley, 1989). Findings from a comparative study of students attending historically Black colleges and universities and predominantly White colleges and universities, indicate that beyond individual characteristics such as intelligence, academic preparation, and intensity of personal ambition, more contextual factors such as quality of life at the institution, race relations on campus, and relationships with faculty and friends significantly impact Black students' academic achievement (Allen, 1992; Fisher & Hartmann, 1995; Carter, 2007).

Although much of this research has focused on college and university settings, researchers have begun to explore the effect of race-related stress on the adjustment of Black students in independent secondary schools. Recent research conducted by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) found that 75% of Black students had to make special efforts to fit into their private school communities, 82% had negative experiences at their schools based on race, and 62% thought that they did not belong in their school (Arrington et. al, 2003). These numbers speak to the impact of racial climate within these environments upon Black students' psychosocial experiences. The normative stressors which accompany adolescence are significantly increased for students of color in elite private school settings given additional factor of race and social class related stress. It is important to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of these students in order to improve the climates of these schools and to provide adequate services to address such stressors

Private Boarding School Experience

The boarding school experience can present challenges for all students, regardless of race or ethnicity. A person who leaves home to reside in a new place for educational reasons experiences an interruption of daily life and encounters a completely new environment. Accompanying this experience is often the loss of the familiar and distancing from the support normally provided by family, friends, and the community. Students must adjust and conform to a completely new lifestyle, develop new relationships, learn new rules and regulations, and pursue new academic subjects (Fisher, Frazer, & Murray, 1984; Fisher, Frazer, & Murray, 1986). The combination of these factors can contribute to enormous pressure for adolescents, given less direct access to support from parents and family. This experience requires that students take responsibility for a greater proportion of their daily decisions. The "school experience" for a boarding student does not end at the traditional time of three o'clock in the afternoon. Instead, "school life" is extended twenty-four hours per day as school rules and routines remain in effect. Students are not only coping with adjustment to a new school, but also must learn to be more self reliant and independent (Fisher, Frazer, Murray, 1984).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, only 4% of student in private boarding schools are Black. As such, the social costs of attending predominantly White, elite private boarding schools are substantial for Black students (Alexander-Snow, 1999; Datnow & Cooper, 1996; Oliver, 1995). While the process of isolating students from their natural environments may make the socialization process to boarding school easier, it can also increase the level of vulnerability for students, especially for students whose cultural identities lie outside of the schools' cultural norms (Oliver, 1995). Many

students have reported feeling caught between two cultures and as a result, doubly marginalized. This can often lead to feelings of alienation from both the culture of the school and that of the students' own family and friends. Black student's weaker social relationships with teachers at elite White boarding schools, compared to those of their White counterparts, suggests a lack of connection that can negatively impact academic performance and motivation (Alexander-Snow, 1999).

Coupled with race, socioeconomic status is another factor which can contribute to the "normal" pressures associated with the boarding school experience and can further alienate students within this environment. Much of the data on Blacks in private schooling focuses on day schools, as opposed to an exclusive look on boarding school experiences. Given the collective nature of Black culture and the significance of the community on youth development, being isolated from these support systems may bring about unique challenges for Black students. These challenges need to be understood so that private schools can examine the extent to which the needs of these students are being met. Additionally, identifying the needs of this population, based on race and class, can assist with the development of services which can maximize academic and social functioning.

Future Research

It is clear that Black students face a unique set of challenges within elite, predominantly White independent schools. Much of the research, however, speaks about the given experiences in a homogenized manner. In other words, differences based on socioeconomic backgrounds, family background and type of independent school are not always accounted for within the literature. While current research has investigated race-

related experiences of Black students, the intersection of race and class has not been discussed as extensively. There is little research which explores the differences between challenges faced by Black students from affluent families versus those from economically disadvantaged families. While similar philosophies may exist within day and boarding schools, the actual experiences of Black students may vary, based on this context.

Another gap in the current literature is evidenced through the primary focus of students attending private day schools, rather than private boarding schools. Research is needed to explore the specific challenges that may accompany the private boarding school experience for economically disadvantaged Black students in order to develop strategies for maximizing success, emotional well being and inclusion. These environments are limited in terms of the usual sources of support available to Black students via the community, peers, parents, and extended family. Such research may help schools identify which aspects enhance and/or hinder the development of students whose cultural identities lie outside of the majority.

Another area that has not been fully explored concerns the variables which contribute to coping and adjustment for students in these settings. Despite the challenges which exist for many Black students in elite private schools, many students demonstrate resilience and high academic success (Cooper & Datnow, 2000; Schneider, B. & Shouse, R. 1992; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). Research that addresses contributing variables can be especially useful for recruitment efforts, increasing the attrition rates for Black students in these settings, and providing guidance for private schools on how to maximize Black student academic and social success.

Finally, qualitative data on this topic is limited and the current knowledge on this issue relies more heavily on quantitative statistics and the use of forced choice questions. While numerical data is useful, there is a need to understand the experience more thoroughly through rich descriptions, from the voices of those experiencing the phenomenon. Although independent schools have reached out to recruit students of color that does not guarantee that those students will be accepted into the well-established communities of privilege that exist in elite private schools. It is not enough to aggressively recruit students of color alone. Rather, elite private schools must work earnestly to understand the unique needs of Black students and make these students feel like true members of the community, rather than outsiders within.

Given that much of the data on this topic is somewhat outdated and limited in its focus, there is a need for current, in-depth exploration of students' experiences.

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CHAPTER 2

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, BLACK STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, ELITE PRIVATE BOARDING SCHOOLS

Black parents have historically been public school advocates but many now many feel that the quality of education at public schools, particularly in inner city communities, has significantly declined (Slaughter & Schneider, 1986). This decline has been reflected in numerous studies and national reports (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Slaughter & Schneider, 1986; Smarick, 2008) and has influenced a number of Black parents, specifically in urban centers, to seek alternatives to public school education. Historically, the alternatives to public education for Black students have been extremely restricted. Prior to the 1960s, Black students were prohibited from attending some of the nation's most elite independent schools. Today, however, an increasing number of Black parents are taking advantage of private school education. Many attend parochial schools, private day schools, and an increasing number of Black students are enrolling in predominantly White, elite, independent boarding schools. These schools offer several advantages, including higher teacher expectations, resources, achievement and college attendance rates (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Decuir-Gunby, 2007; Ottley, 2007;) and in many cases a shield from drugs, danger, and negative influences which exist within many inner city communities (Torry, 1992). The evidence to indicate that students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds benefit academically from attending these private schools is strong (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). While the ethnic composition of elite boarding

schools has become more diverse in recent decades than in the past, it is still considerably less diverse than the public school population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), nationally there are only 4% percent of Black students within boarding schools.

Despite the benefits associated with private school education and the increased recruitment efforts of students of color, research has shown that predominantly White, elite, independent schools are often places where Black students find it difficult to feel comfortable (Cookson & Persell, 1991; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991). Within the literature, experts have coined terms and expressions such as "other", "racelessness", "outsider within", and "the burden of acting White" to illustrate what Black students must endure as students within these settings (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Fordham, 1985). A number of qualitative studies have explained that Black students and their families often feel like outsiders, as they are alienated from the cultures of these schools (Ottley, 2007; Schneider & Shouse, 1992).

As chronicled in Ronald Suskind's (1998) book: *A Hope in the Unseen,* there is some evidence that students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds often encounter psychosocial challenges in transitioning to these institutions. Studies have found that Black students at predominantly White, independent schools often experience marginalization, feel unrepresented in the school culture, including the curriculum, and feel alienated from their Black peers outside of the independent school context (Ascher, 1986; Cookson& Persell, 1991; Cooper & Datnow, 2000; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Decuir-Gunby, 2007; Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Proweller, 1999). The implications of these challenges may impact self esteem, stress levels, self efficacy, and aspects of

identity development, which in turn may affect students' academic functioning and social adjustment (Arrington, Hall & Stevenson, 2003; Cooper & Datnow, 2000; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Spencer, Kim, & Marshall, 1987).

Differences in race and social class impact the experiences of Black students in independent schools. A recent study identified the following psychosocial challenges faced by many students from minority and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who attend predominantly White, elite private schools: (1) social loneliness, (2) racial visibility and social invisibility, (3) class and cultural discomfort among White parents and administrators, (4) the burden of explaining oneself to White people, (5) completing studies at a demanding school with minimal parent participation, and (6) the burden of having to feel grateful all the time (Thompson & Shultz, 2003). The impact of the identified challenges may contribute to acculturative stress and potentially negatively affect academic and social functioning (Gray-Little & Carsels, 1997; Schneider & Shouse, 1992; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988; Spencer et. al., 1987).

Although these psychosocial challenges exist for students of color in both private day and boarding schools, the boarding school experience presents additional challenges, such as distance from family, friends, and community and loss of the familiar. Navigating the adjustment to a predominantly White, affluent environment, with reduced direct familial support can be extremely challenging for an economically disadvantaged, adolescent of color. In examining the experience of African American students in private schools, Luis Ottley (2007) described the culture of private schools as not inclusive of African American students. He noted that African American students often may be under prepared and unaware of how to negotiate the cultural boundaries between the home and

school environments. Further, Datnow & Cooper (1997) found that Black students at boarding schools claimed they had difficulty maintaining their friendships with African American students from their neighborhoods because of spending so much time at school and being influenced by the cultural norms of their new environment.

There has been little research which looks at the intersection of race and class for Black students attending predominantly White, elite private schools. Much of the existing literature discusses the Black experience in a homogenized manner, without an intentional analysis of how social class mitigates the experience. Given the paucity of research in this area and the uniqueness of this experience, there is a need to better understand the boarding school experience for economically disadvantaged, Black students, in order to adequately serve the needs of this population.

For Black students, the social costs of attending predominantly White, elite private boarding schools have been substantial (Datnow & Cooper, 1997). While the process of isolating students from their natural environments may make the socialization process to boarding school easier, it can also increase the level of vulnerability for students, especially for students whose cultural identities lie outside of the schools' cultural norms. Many students have reported feeling caught between two cultures and as a result, doubly marginalized. This can often lead alienation from both the culture of the school and that of the students' own family and friends. Alexander-Snow (1999) found that Black students at elite White boarding schools had weaker social relationship with teachers, compared to those of their White counterparts and suggested that this lack of connection can negatively impact academic performance and motivation. The quality of Black students' relationships with peers, faculty and administrators tends to be almost as

important as individual effort to their achievement (Thompson & Shultz, 2003; Datnow & Cooper, 2000; Watson & Kuh, 1996).

The uniqueness of the boarding school experience has not been explored for low income, Black students in these environments. Understanding the specific challenges for these students can assist in the development of services that promote Black student adjustment and success in predominantly White settings. This study has the potential to add to the knowledge base of effective strategies that lead to a school environment that is healthy and supportive of all members.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the proposed study is to explore the lived experience of economically disadvantaged, Black students attending predominantly White, elite, private boarding high schools, through a phenomenological inquiry. Because social adjustment and interpersonal climate seem to be central factors to Black students' satisfaction and success within predominantly White, elite private schools, there is a need to better understand the psychosocial experiences to develop effective interventions to address the specific needs of this population. The following overarching question will guide this research: What are the psychosocial experiences of economically disadvantaged, Black students who attend predominantly White, elite, private, boarding schools?

Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of economically disadvantaged, Black students at predominantly White elite private boarding high schools. Qualitative methodology allows participants to choose aspects of

their experience on which to comment so that it is possible to obtain anticipated, as well as unanticipated data about their experience (Manning, 1992). Qualitative methodology is especially valuable with participants who have historically had limited power and influence, such as people of color and those with limited income (Smith, Savage, & Fabian, 2002), as it allows the researcher to hear participants from their own perspective. One distinct advantage of qualitative methodology is that it allows for a detailed, multifaceted exploration of a phenomenon, grounded in the world-view, vocabulary, and context-specific experiences of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This research approach is well suited for exploratory investigations of phenomena that are not yet clearly defined within the literature (Creswell, 2007), as it allows for in-depth exploration of experiences and perspectives. Due to the unique experiences of low income, Black students at private boarding schools, as well as the limited amount of research on their experiences in the literature, it is essential that their voices be heard and understood. Therefore, a psychological phenomenological approach was used to determine what the experience means for this group of people who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological approach allows for an understanding of the meaning of a phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it, giving careful attention to uncovering the shared understanding of a phenomenon across individuals (Creswell, 2007).

Participants

Participants included nine economically disadvantaged, Black students who were currently attending a predominantly White, elite, private, boarding high school. Students ranged in age from 15 to 18, and included four males and five females. With regard to

academic classification, two students were seniors, three juniors, and four sophomores. Seven of the participants were raised in households with an annual income of less than $30,000 and two were raised in households with annual incomes between $30,000 and $60,000. Table 1 presents participants' demographic information. The table contains participant pseudonyms[3], classification at time of interview, annual household income, percentage of Black students at given school, and the annual tuition of the given schools.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Classification	Household Income	Percentage of Black Students	Annual Tuition
Asha	Sophomore	>$30,000	6%	$41,000
David	Senior	>$30,000	16%	$25,000
Lamar	Sophomore	>$30,000	10%	$41,600
Makayla	Senior	$30,000-$60,000	6%	$41,000
Paul	Sophomore	>$30,000	4%	$39,100
Regina	Junior	$30,000-$60,000	8%	$35,500
Terrance	Sophomore	>$30,000	7%	$39,495
Tasha	Junior	>$30,000	7%	$41,000
Yvonne	Junior	>$30,000	4%	$39,000

The number of participants is consistent with Dukes' (1984) recommendation that phenomenological studies include interviews with 3 to 10 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. A small sample size was also selected because the emphasis in qualitative research is on achieving an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences rather generalizing results to the general population (Creswell, 2007). Further, the data reached theoretical saturation by participant number

[3] For the purpose of ensuring confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for all participants mentioned in this article.

nine, which meant that no new or relevant data was emerging and that the relationships among the categories were well established and validated (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The participants attended 8 different schools within the US, 5 were located in the north eastern region, 2 in the south eastern region, and 1 on the west coast. All of the schools are members of The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS) and the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). NAIS member schools are nonprofit, tax-exempt, and maintain fiscal independence from government and church entities. Although obvious size and architectural differences exist across schools, all of the campuses are physically beautiful, with well manicured grounds, buildings in excellent repair, including superb athletic and fine arts facilities, high tech libraries, and many even offer facilities such as horse riding. The schools range in size from 180 to 930 students. The average tuition cost for boarding students at the schools is approximately $38,000 per year. The percentage of Black students at these schools ranges from 2% to 15%, with an average of 7%.

All participants were recruited through New Jersey SEEDS (Scholars, Educators, Excellence, Dedication, and Success), a state-wide, non-profit organization which prepares and places students who are academically talented, yet financially limited, into private schools within the United States. NJ SEEDS defines financially limited students as those coming from households with a combined income of less than $60,000 per year. For the purpose of recruiting, a number of purposeful sampling techniques were employed. Creswell (1998) suggested “criterion” sampling as a purposeful sampling strategy for quality assurance when all the participants experience the phenomena.

Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002).

To be eligible for the study, all participants met the following criteria: (a) self-identified as Black and/or African American, (b) currently enrolled in a predominantly White, elite, private boarding school, (c) raised in household with a combined income of less than $60,000 per year, and (d) be an alumni of New Jersey SEEDS. Participants were recruited using network sampling, which involves "identifying participants or cases of interests from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (Merriam, 1998, p. 63). The staff at NJ SEEDS oversaw the recruitment process and primarily used network sampling (i.e., chain or snowball), which involves the identification of participants through people who know others who have experienced the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). In order to increase diversity within the sample, maximum variation sampling techniques were also used. Within the sample, participants included males and females, a range of geographically diverse private boarding schools, and a variety of academic classification levels. Maximum variation is particularly useful to facilitate diversity in studies with small sample sizes (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006).

Procedure

As an initial point of contact, a letter explaining the purpose of the research, description of the study, request for participation, and the primary researcher's contact information, was sent out to the parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of potential participants. Upon parental approval and receipt of parental consent forms, the child was contacted by the primary researcher to secure assent and to schedule an interview time. Prior to the interview, all participants completed a demographic form. The interview format was semi

structured, with broad, open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their own personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994). For example, the interviews typically began with the following query: “Tell me what it is like to be a Black student at this school?” Broad questions were followed by probing questions in order to elicit more information. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed for data analysis. Interviews were conducted until the data reached the point of theoretical saturation (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) and no new concepts, categories, or relationships were emerging from the data.

Interviews took place between August 2009 and November 2009. In January 2010, the primary researcher conducted member checks by reviewing the main themes and sub themes with the participants. The primary researcher asked participants to review the documents and provide feedback indicating if the transcripts and major and minor themes documented represented their experiences. All participants responded and expressed that the information in the documents accurately reflected their experiences. Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe member checks as the “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) in a study. With the lens focused on the participant, the researcher was systematically able to check the data and the narrative account.

Follow-up questioning was used to increase the richness of the data and address any areas which were unclear (Patton, 2002). At the completion of the data coding, an audit trial was conducted to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. This involved the documentation of the inquiry process through journaling, keeping a research log of all activities, developing a data collection chronology, and clearly recording data analysis procedures and results. An external audit examined this documentation as a means to establish credibility (Cresswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Sources

Demographic information. Participants completed a demographic form containing questions that examine their experiences and perceptions at a White, elite private boarding school (Appendix A). Additionally, the demographic form included questions regarding participants' age, academic classification, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic level, grade point average, and assessment of emotional functioning.

Semi structured interview. Creswell (2007) suggested in-depth individual interviews as a primary data source in phenomenological research. Semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) were conducted by the primary researcher and lasted between 60 minutes and 80 minutes. Interview questions were selected based on a thorough analysis of the current literature in this area (e.g., Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Slaughter & Johnson, 1988) and reviewed by individuals who have experience within this phenomenon, including a boarding school alum, a staff member from NJ SEEDS, a private school instructor, and a professor who conducted research in this area. The predominant themes which emerged during the literature review were used to construct questions on the phenomenon. The topic areas of the interview include (1) experience based on race and class, (2) social adjustment (3) academic adjustment (4) sources of support (5) advice for future students, (6) emotional challenges, (7) institutional climate, and (8) meaning of experience. With the exception of one interview, which was conducted face to face, all were conducted over the phone.

Researcher as instrument. The primary researcher acknowledged that she is an informant in this study and as such, her lived experiences and worldview influence the

research process (Creswell, 1998). Most salient are her identities as a Black individual and a former employee of New Jersey SEEDS for two years. As a former employee of SEEDS, the primary researcher worked very closely with students attending private high schools and indirectly observed some of the challenges which accompanied their experiences. Additionally, she functioned as a source of support for families whose children were attending boarding schools. This experience facilitated her understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and enhanced her ability to establish trusting relationships with the participants in this study. The primary researcher served as the sole interviewer to maximize consistency throughout the interview process. Moreover, her status as a Black interviewer may have eliminated any interviewer effects that could be due to race, as some participants may have felt more open to expressing their authentic voices when speaking with a researcher of a shared race (Seidman, 2006). Because the majority of the interviews were conducted via phone, the primary researcher was transparent in sharing her racial identity with the participants prior to the start of the interview.

Research team. A racially diverse research team was used to minimize the effect of the primary researcher's biases on the research process. In addition to the primary researcher, the research team consisted of one clinical psychology doctoral student who is a White female and one doctoral level school psychologist who is a Black female. All researchers have completed course work and have had experience in qualitative methods and analysis. Research team meetings encompassed interview data review and provision of feedback relative to the interviewing, methodology, and data analysis processes. Peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to continuously discuss and

challenge researchers' biases during the research process. The research team met bi-weekly by phone and also maintained communication via electronic mail. Finally, the research advisor, Counseling Psychology Professor, with over 15 years of multicultural research experience, reviewed the analysis throughout the process, providing feedback.

Reflexive journal. As researcher bias is a concern with this study, the reflexive journal (Creswell, 2007) served as a means to preserve the voice of the participants and minimize the influence of research bias on data collection. The primary researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process in order to facilitate the disclosure of researcher bias and ensure validity of the data by examining the extent of the primary researcher's biases on the results of the study (Denzin, 1997). After each interview, the primary researcher recorded her thoughts, feelings, and reactions. To assess the degree to which the researcher's biases influence the outcome of the study, the journal was discussed within the research team.

Audit Trail. The audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the inception of the research project to the development and report of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An external auditor, a Black, female Counseling Psychology doctoral student who conducts research in child development, was used to examine the raw data, data analysis, process notes, and reflective journal, in order to enhance credibility and establish greater validity of the findings.

Data Analysis

The data collection and analysis process was recursive in nature in order to strengthen verification procedures in the study. Therefore, data analysis occurred throughout data collection process in order to continuously revisit previous coding

decisions to ensure that the codes found were representative of the data, as a whole .This process included seven steps (Creswell, 1998). Step one included the research team bracketing their assumptions about the phenomenon of economically disadvantaged, Black students' experience in White elite private boarding schools. In step two, the primary researcher interviewed the participants and transcribed and verified each interview.

In the third phase, the research team used phenomenological techniques (Creswell) to analyze the data. The three researchers followed steps in order to move from a broad to a more specific understanding of the data required by a phenomenological approach: a) horizontalization (listing of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping participant statements about the phenomenon); b) meaning units (developing categories by combining statements giving the "texture" of the phenomenon); and c) structural description (collapsing the horizontalization and meaning units into the essence of the phenomenon experienced) (Creswell, 1998).

Within step four, the research team continuously compared the data to identify new themes and subthemes which did not clearly fit under previously identified domains (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and documented the final themes and subthemes for the participants within a codebook. The codebook contained a description/definition of each code and was repeatedly revised based on the recursive nature of the data analysis. The research team replicated steps one through four for each of the remaining participants. At the conclusion of the data collection with the participants, the research team generated a list of questions to confirm and verify emerging themes. Step five consisted of member checks with each participant to verify the accuracy of the major themes and sub themes,

as well as to clarify information that may have been unclear. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the results.

In step six, the research team collapsed the themes of the participants' interviews to identify themes across participants. Based on consensual qualitative research methods, (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), a cross analysis was used to characterize themes/categories based on the frequency with which appear across the data. Those categories that apply to all or all but one of the participants are considered *general*, those that apply to more than half and up to the cutoff for general are *typical*, and those that apply to at least two and up to the typical cutoff are *variant*. These labels will be used to describe the findings within this study. The final step consisted of an audit of the data collection (e.g., raw data, data analysis, data reconstruction, email correspondence, and reflexive journal).

Establishing Inter Coder Agreement and applying the coding system. The clinical psychology doctoral student and the primary researcher separately coded two participant's interviews and then discussed coding discrepancies to establish consensus of coding results, with a goal of 90% ICA (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986). The coders reached 76% ICA on the first attempt and continued the ICA process until reaching 90% ICA which occurred on participant 5's interview. After each ICA check, the coders discussed code definitions and discrepancies in applying the codes to the data. As a result, the primary researcher revised the codebook three times prior to obtaining 90% ICA. All nine interviews were then coded using the codebook established at the 90% ICA level.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which one can have confidence in the findings of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several techniques were used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. As previously addressed, researcher bias was addressed through bracketing, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing. Member checking provided an opportunity for participants to comment on the researchers' interpretation of the data and ensure that participants' voices were represented authentically. Through the use of a research team for data analysis, multiple analyst triangulation (Patton, 2002) was achieved. Credibility was also achieved through the use of an audit trail of the data collection and analysis and process documents. Finally, rich, thick descriptions were used to present the themes of this study. The intent of this type of description allows readers to feel as though they are hearing the authentic voices of the participants.

Results

Findings from data analysis revealed nine major themes which captured participant's experiences: Classroom experiences, value of Black peer networks, caught between two worlds, racial perceptions, desire for diverse connections, socioeconomic challenges, living away from home challenges, impact of peers on level of success, and significance of relationships with Black faculty. Additionally, nine sub themes were identified (See Table 2).

Classroom Experiences

The first theme *"classroom experiences"* describes participants' experiences, feelings, and/or beliefs related to race representation and discussion in the classroom. Participants also identified two sub themes:

Limited representation of Black culture in the curriculum and *Discomfort around discussion of race in classroom.*

Limited representation of Blacks in the curriculum. It was typical for participants to indicate that there is limited emphasis around Black issues within the curriculum. Although the majority of participants acknowledged this limitation, the participants perceived the importance of inclusion differently. When asked whether it was important to have Blacks represented in the curriculum, Asha responded:

> No not really because if I felt inclined to read books by Black authors I could probably find a book from the library. I understand it's different when you have a whole class reading something by a Black author but it doesn't really bother me. I don't find any importance in that.

Terrance shared a similar perspective regarding the lack of importance:

> It's not important to me at all because I don't think a Black author is any different from a White author. I think that they could convey the same message but it might just be a little bit different. But I don't think it's that big of a deal for me.

Table 2
Themes, Subthemes, Frequency and Their Defining Characteristics

Themes and Subthemes	*Frequency*	*Definition*
Classroom experiences	General	Participants' experiences, feelings, and/or beliefs related to race in the classroom.
Subthemes		
1. Limited representation of Black culture in classroom	Typical	
2. Discomfort around discussion of race in classroom	Typical	

3. Comfort around discussion of of race in classroom	Variant	
Value of Black Peer Networks	General	Formal and informal Black peer networks which provide primary source of support for adjustment within a predominantly White environment.
Caught Between Two Worlds	General	The challenge of negotiating identity within two contrasting cultures.
Racial Perceptions	General	Participants perception and/or impact of the school's racial climate.
Subthemes		
1. Colorblindness: We're all the same	Typical	
2. Myth of colorblindness	Variant	
3. Racial discrimination	Typical	
4. Pressure to excel	Typical	
Desire for Diverse Connections	General	Participant's desire to establish relationships with diverse group of students.
Socioeconomic Challenges	Typical	Refers to the impact of socioeconomic challenges experienced by participants.
Living Away From Home Challenges	General	Refers to specific challenges experienced by participants related to living away from home.
Subthemes		
1. Increased independence	General	
2. Bubble syndrome	Typical	

Impact of Peers on Level of Success	Typical	The positive impact of having highly motivated peers on participants' level of success within the school.
Significance of Relationships With Black Faculty	Typical	Refers to the importance of and support received within relationships with Black faculty members.

While a number of participants shared the perspective that including Blacks in the curriculum was not important, David shared a different view. He expressed disappointment with the limited information covered on Blacks within his history text. He stated:

> So, history for my senior year was weird because of how they portrayed African Americans in the book, which I know wasn't true based on outside research that I've done. So it's not so much the teacher's fault, but more it's how the writers of the text books treat certain issues. I don't want to say that the writers of the text books make things up, but they put their own interpretation on it...To be honest, I kind of felt it wasn't fair at all… It was unfair 'cause African Americans weren't really mentioned in the book… a lot of justice wasn't done to them…Our book was just about the traditional African Americans…like we read all about Martin Luther King, but it didn't really teach about Malcolm X or Marcus Garvey or other people who were prominent within the African American community at certain times…It was just like people who I knew about I couldn't understand why they weren't in this book. I couldn't understand why they weren't in this book. And I'm not saying that the book said that someone else did it when it was really black people, but I just felt like some credit wasn't given where it was due.

Discomfort around topic of race in classroom. Due to the hypervisibility which accompanies the Black experience within a predominantly White environment, participants acknowledged feeling uncomfortable when race was brought up in the classroom, Makayla recalled how she felt, as the only black student in the class when issues related to slavery and the civil rights movement were brought up in class. She states:

> I want to say that the only time I ever felt awkward in class was when I had history, American history last year I was the only Black kid in class and most of my other friends were too. I felt a little awkward when we started talking about slavery and then we talked about civil rights and things like that. It didn't make me feel awkward but it just made me feel a little uncomfortable because like it's like you have two different kinds of views in the room and like students definitely couldn't relate to a lot of the things that I felt about like about slavery and about civil rights movement because they're not Black. I mean so I mean I obviously felt like I couldn't relate to anyone in the class.

Three participants discussed moments in class where the N word was used, based on its inclusion within an assigned reading for English class. These participants noted feeling uncomfortable, but felt like there was no place to give voice to the discomfort in the class. Common across all three experiences is that the teacher did not discuss implications of the word or acknowledge the potential impact. Paul reflects on his experience when the teacher said the word aloud in class while reading a passage from the assigned reading. He stated:

> It happened to me in Sophomore year, and I read it for reading assignment for homework and I knew that everyday in class, we went over the reading that we did for homework and sometimes the teacher read some of the passages out loud. So, I went to the class already thinking whether or not he would say the word. So, I realized that as we were reading we were skipping over cuss words that were in the passage… I was paying attention and once we got to the part where it contained the n-word, he just said it like no problem or anything. And that was just kinda weird to me because he skipped over all of these other words but just said that one with no problem…At that moment, I did look up when he said that because I was just surprised that he did say it. And, I looked around and I realized that about 3 or 4 other people were just like staring at me. But, it was really awkward. And I didn't know how to respond to that...He never really addressed it so it just stayed at this whole awkward moment.

Tasha recalled an experience from English class where she limited her response to questions about a Black character's experience in a novel, based on a perception that her life experiences had no place in the class discussion. She stated:

> So it was kind of weird answering those questions, because, of course, we're only supposed to see it from the perspective of the book. But, like you have experience, and my experience is just being born Black. It colors a lot of things. Like I didn't live, I didn't grow up in a predominantly White area…When it comes about race it feels weird at first, but of course, I have thoughts in the back of my mind that I keep closed, because it's just like those thoughts are from

> experience. And when you bring it to the table, it just makes it, I don't know, the conversation colorful.

Value of Black Peer Networks

All of the students identified Black peer group networks, both formal and informal, as one of the most important factors in helping them cope in the predominantly White environments of their schools. They indicated that these spaces provided comfort and connection, which was not as easily accessible in other spaces. Tasha shared that she sought support and guidance from Black peer rather than a White faculty member, while transitioning to the school, based on a feeling of familiarity and comfort in discussing racial issues. In the following passage, she acknowledged that it was easier to open up to a Black peer about her problems, rather than her White dorm parent, based on the perception that the White person would not be able to relate and would feel uncomfortable at the mention of race. She stated:

> The thing is, the first thing a Black student will do is go to a Black faculty person or a student. Most likely a student. And they'll be like "What did you do last year when it came to so and so? When it came to adjusting at school? …And it's kind of the thing I did last year, when I had problems I would go to one of my friends and we were both actually freshmen. My teacher found this weird…She said, "Well, why didn't you go to your dorm parent?" I said "I felt comfortable." "Why?" she said, "Because she was right there," and she was like "What about her?" "I met her first" Like I didn't want to say "She's Black, she can relate. We can talk about certain things about Black people and make jokes about race that you can't because you'll feel uncomfortable. We don't want you to feel

> uncomfortable, so we're being really nice. Just like, those things as…You don't want to seek help from a White person first, because it's like you're the problem. Obviously you're the problem, because you are Black and not like me, you are the problem. So I want to talk to someone who makes me feel comfortable. Like I sat in my friend's room and we did homework awhile together and we both actually got comfortable.

More formal peer networks were also discussed, including cultural organizations and mentorship programs for Black students. Tasha also acknowledged that within the Black Student Union meetings she feels free to be herself and values this time with her Black peers. She shared:

> And when we're sitting there, and we are all doing the same thing, speaking the say way, understanding each other. Just finally, let loose and get to kick back for awhile. It feels really good and you don't want that to go, you just want that meeting to last forever.

Terrance also recalled the impact of his experience in an all Black cultural organization on campus:

> It was the time when we could relax and talk about our classes and what we did in class and talk about the teachers and talk about sports or whatever we wanted to talk about. And we didn't have to worry about if we sounded educated enough or something or if we said something wrong, no one's gonna be correcting us.... And it just helped us to be ourselves and do what we wanna do.

It is important to note that Terrance's recollection was related to his experience at a previous boarding school, with similar demographics to his current school. He expressed disappointment that his current school does not allow all Black support groups, based on a desire to remain inclusive of all groups.

Caught Between Two Worlds

The interviews revealed that all of the participants struggled with the challenge of navigating between two very different worlds, based on the private school culture and that of their respective hometowns. Often times this process resulted in participants feeling as though they have two separate identities, and that they were constantly shifting depending on which world they were in. For instance, Makayla indicated:

> I mean like I have to change when I go home, like not change as in the way I talk and I don't change the way I act but just like it's, it's, it's hard to explain but you almost have two different identities…it's just you have to carry yourself differently because all of a sudden you're in two different environments and like two different kinds of dynamics and you just have to learn how to deal with both of them. And it's just hard to remain constant in both of them like there's really no way. You would just have to realize how to act as a student at school and then like then how to act at home because it's just like obviously different because it's different people and stuff like that so like it's just hard.

A number of participants acknowledged the complexity inherent in the struggle to remain true to themselves in this process, despite the perceived changes their hometown peers have witnessed in them. For example, Lamar stated:

> If I talk at home the way I talk here, a lot of my friends would be like you're changing… like I don't want to, the thing is I don't want to change. I just want to better myself in a sense. I still want to be the same person just a little bit smarter. I don't really like anyone telling me that I talk different or I'm changing I don't think I am, at least I hope I'm not. I'm just getting a better education.

Tasha spoke to the double consciousness which accompanies the process of navigating two worlds, she stated:

> And it's kind of hard, because you don't know which way to take it, but then at the same time, I don't come from their world, I come from a different world and that's the other world. Not the world I'm in right now. And it's like going back to where I came from, it's not the same. Like no one treats you differently, it's just like, "Wow, you can tell she's been to some places."

Racial Perceptions

This theme highlights the participants' beliefs related to the school's racial climate. Three subthemes were identified: colorblindness, racial discrimination, and pressure to excel.

Colorblindness: We're all the same. Participants indicated that they do not see color and believe that all students are the same. They acknowledged that this value is shared by the school's administration. For instance, Lamar stated:

> I don't, we don't really look around and see color at all…that's just how this school is in particular.

Terrance endorsed a similar perspective in the following statement:

> …from what I view, there's not a difference in the people here because no one looks at you because of your race and like, I think that you...Um, I don't think being a black student makes a big difference.

Myth of colorblindess. A variant view was held by other students. David spoke of the personal implications for him based on the school's color blind mentality. He stated:

> I don't want to come out and say that they are in denial of racial issues, but that's kind of what it is. For some of them, I think they have some odd misconception that everything is okay, racially in America; and it's not like that. A lot of people, and me included, go through, you know…like daily stuff…like in the school, there was some, like not a whole lot, but I would say like a small amount of racial tension. And it's hard to talk to people who grew up in like an all white, all Caucasian area. And then they are Caucasian themselves. Like it's hard for them to understand someone like me.

Racial discrimination. Although many students subscribed to colorblind beliefs, participants also provided evidence of overt racial discrimination. Regina recalled a painful account of discrimination, which was collectively felt by all the Blacks at her school:

> A kid wrote down a letter referring to all the Black kids and said we will lynch you or something of that sort we're gonna lynch you because you don't belong here...a letter, it was a piece of paper that was dropped off um near one of the boys dorms...and so all the black kids were affected.

Paul shared an incident where a faculty member discriminated against a group of Black students, by not allowing the Black students to sit with one another at semi-formal dinner. He stated:

> …and the teacher there had to disband our table and he tried to talk to us about why we shouldn't be doing that. And that was really, it was really like, I mean, how could I say it? It was really wrong of him to do something like that because the school is like 70% white and then like 25% Asian and then 5% black. And they're always like, like every single meal there are tables which are full of one race, like all-white tables, or like all-Korean tables. And since we decided to have a table like once every, I don't know, every two months, we didn't do it that often. He said that there was a problem and decided to disband our table…he had us to separate to other students

When asked how he felt, he stated:

> It was really frustrating for me because to see a teacher do something like that. I mean, after a while, after talking with him about it, he started to agree with us because what we were saying was like true. And I guess he felt was he was doing was wrong.

Although this participant noted that the teacher agreed with the Black students discontent around his actions, he indicated that the Black students have never had an "all Black table" again.

Pressure to excel. It was typical for participants to acknowledge feeling pressure to excel based on their racial identification as a Black person. Regina stated:

> I felt the pressure, I think part of the pressure I felt was that I had to do well because there weren't many Black kids in the school and some believe that Black kids aren't necessarily smart or have nothing to do in a private school besides athletic… so I felt the pressure to like excel in academics or try to be better than just an athlete.

Other participants characterized the pressure in terms of power. For instance, Tasha stated:

> But it can also be that moment when you need to be tough or need to be different from anyone else. It's like a self-confident thing. Of course, when you come here, it's like you feel over power - you feel in a position of power. I don't know why that feeling comes about. Because it's also like, being that it's so rare to see one Black student in a classroom, it's like you have to make a difference, because you automatically stand out already because of your color.

Desire for Diverse Connections

All of the participants expressed a desire to establish connections with people from a diverse backgrounds. Many acknowledged this opportunity as a unique factor of the boarding school experience and described this as an expectation of this experience, prior to attending. Tasha discussed the importance of connecting with different types of people, after having limited exposure to different races in her all Black community. When asked if connecting with a diverse peer group was an expectation, she stated:

> Yeah, and that's what I'm here for…That's what I'm here for, because it's a boarding school. Like I didn't come from an all Black area to come to another all Black area. I'm supposed to be here to mix in, understand me. That's part of the learning experience…

Regina acknowledged the value of connecting with other ethnicities, for a Black student coming from a predominantly Black environment. For instance, she stated:

> ...it gives an opportunity to a person who is Black and has not been outside of their environment. I think it's important for them to get to know other people and get to see how life is outside the box, outside their usual box and see different types of words other people use, different ways of thinking...

Socioeconomic Challenges

Financial challenges manifested in multiple ways. Financial challenges encompassed limitations placed upon participation in specific activities, attempts to hide one's financial status in an effort to blend in, and feeling a lack of support based on the perception that others would not be able to understand. Yvonne discussed how she felt challenged by her financial status, as it limits her involvement with team sports. She stated:

> I feel challenged all the time like through team sports. They're always like you should order this and order that and it's like because they have the money for it, it's no problem and it's frustrating for me because they take a lot of things for granted and so it makes me feel like they don't understand what it's like to not have that much, to not spend as freely as they want… Yeah, I have. I had to turn some things down and I wouldn't say it was because I had no money.

When asked if David had supportive spaces to process the emotional impact of his financial challenges, he responded:

> To be one hundred percent truthful, I don't really think there were cause I'm not really one to go ahead and tell everyone like all the issues that I have, but there were a lot of people there who couldn't identify with being worried about money cause they had it…especially like the teachers and stuff like that.

Living Away From Home Challenges

All participants spoke to the challenges which accompany the experience of living away from home. In particular, two sub themes emerged within this category: *Increased independence* and *the bubble syndrome.*

Increased independence*:* All participants acknowledged that they were expected to hold themselves accountable, since their families were not nearby to keep them on track. Makayla reflected on how she has had to become more responsible because she is living away from her family. She stated:

> I've learned a lot here. I've learned how I've definitely gotten more independent because as opposed to like being at home where my mom would probably be like yelling at me to do homework and stuff. There's really no one here who gets on you about doing work. I mean there are house counselors and there are teachers here and they all care about your welfare and you doing your work but they're not always on you. They leave it to you because it's really your responsibility to do your English paper or study for the test you might have tomorrow. So I've definitely become more responsible and more um independent here.

Bubble syndrome. One of the boarding school challenges which has been cited in the literature (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Ottley, 2005) is a concept referred to as the bubble syndrome. The bubble syndrome is characterized by a sheltered, closed experience with little racial and class diversity. Makayla described her experience within the "bubble."

> Well the thing is the bubble can be a challenge depending on the kind of person that you are. Like the bubble can keep you in if you let it like you can make a bunch of excuses like to not really get out of the school community when you have the chance. But I, I always, I always, take little side trips like there's a little town close by…a little tiny town right next to our town called Lawrenceville and it's like all Dominican and like in comparison it's just a very poor town. And um I actually take the bus to Lawrenceville every few weeks to get my hair done and that's kind of like, that's a way to get out. Because it's a totally different cultural experience than my school.

Impact of Peers on Level of Success

All of the participants discussed factors which have played a role in their level of success. Students expressed the impact of being surrounded by other motivated and bright students on their own success. For instance, participant Makayla stated:

> Like everyone here is really unique and they're strong minded and a lot of people just aren't influenced by others and everybody wants to succeed and they're motivated. And being surrounded by those kind of people make you. It just molds you a lot differently I know I have turned out a lot differently than I would have if I went to my local public school where like it wasn't hard for me to get A's and

> where not everyone around me was motivated. So I was one of the smart ones and then when you get here… and you notice that you're not one of the smart people anymore because everybody here is like the cream of the crop.

Paul also spoke to the impact of having others around who are driven and able to push themselves. He acknowledged how this dynamic pervades the boarding school environment and helps him to work harder and harder. He stated:

> Well with my grades and with my classes, I think that it's the people around me who have been pushing me, it's me not wanting to let my family down at home. Also, just the environment down here; the people around me are pushing themselves. So I push myself. Also it's the environment and the attitude that there is going into doing this. The environment makes you want to push yourself, makes you want to work hard so you don't let anybody down so that you can feel good about yourself once the day is over and you can think that you're worked the hardest you could that day. You put all you can into it.

Significance of Relationships with Black Faculty

Participants acknowledged the significance of receiving support from Black faculty members. Additionally, participants also acknowledged the need for increased diversity amongst the faculty, in light of limited faculty of color. David reflected on encouraging feedback and an offer of support that he received as a first year student from a Black faculty member:

> He was like if there is anyone you need to talk to… like he would make it known that race is not something that should ever hold you back from getting an education and he was like if there is anyone you need to talk to, he said you can

> go ahead and do that through him. But before him, it was another person we had and she was a middle aged white woman, not that there is anything wrong with that, but at the same time, how much can a middle age white woman understand a black kid coming from the inner city.

Tasha shared a significant experience where a Black dorm parent extended an offer of support, for her and other Black students, to feel free to "take out the garbage" or process challenges related to their experiences as Black students. She stated:

> And then there's also, when she tells us, she says, "You know, um, when you feel like you need to take out the garbage, you can come over here and gladly do it. You'll feel like home. There are Black people here waiting for you and you can take out the garbage. So it's just like every faculty mind you is that way, but it's different to a Black person when a Black family actually opens their home to you as well.

Discussion

The results of this exploratory study provide important insight into the experiences of low income, Black students at predominantly White elite private boarding high schools and make several contributions to the literature. First, this is one of the few studies to specifically explore the experiences of low income Black students in boarding school settings. Secondly, it extends the broader elite private school research by using qualitative methodology to provide rich, thick descriptions of these students' psychosocial experiences. Third, given that the bulk of research on this area is between ten and twenty

years old, the findings provide updated information that both confirms existing information, as well as provides new insights into this phenomenon.

The findings confirm that low income Black students have distinctly different experiences from their White counterparts. An interesting twist, however, was that although differences based on race were embedded within the participant's accounts, the majority held tightly to the perception that all students were the same at their respective schools and that their experiences were no different from White students. A possible explanation for this discrepancy may be a result of the colorblind culture which pervades many of these environments. While there is much research to support the existence of colorblind ideologies within predominantly White educational settings, this study revealed that some Black students have bought into this ideology themselves. As a result, it may make it difficult for Black students to find language to describe experiences which fall outside the colorblind spectrum, thereby making it challenging to identify times when racial differences may be a factor in their experiences. Several of the participants subscribed to the belief that everyone was the same at their schools, despite providing contradictory evidence to suggest otherwise.

Consistent with existing literature (Smith, 2008), the colorblind ideology was also present as students discussed the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy in the curriculum. While many acknowledged the absence of culturally relevant material, the students' response to the absence suggested that there was not a need for it in the curriculum. For example, when asked if it was important to have Black culture represented in the curriculum, one participant stated:

> No not really because if I felt inclined to read books by Black authors I could probably find a book from the library on my own. Like I understand it's different because you have a whole class reading something by a Black author but it doesn't really bother me. I don't find any importance in that.

Often times, participants supported the exclusion of culturally relevant pedagogy out of a desire for Whites to feel comfortable in the classroom. Support of the exclusion may have also resulted from a conditioned belief that Black culture is inferior based on its long standing absence from traditional textbooks which are consistently used in educational systems.

In cases where race was brought up in classroom discussions, the majority of participants noted that they felt uncomfortable and preferred that the topic of race be kept out of the classroom. This discomfort resulted from the hypervisibility felt by these students in all White classrooms, but may have been further impacted by the instructor's approach to racial material. One third of the participants noted that the "N" word was used in assigned readings and consequently read aloud in class by the instructor. In every case, the students confirmed that the teacher read the word in a matter of fact manner and did not speak to the implications of the word or consider the potential emotional impact for Black students based on the centuries of prejudice, discrimination, and pain loaded within that word. Participants acknowledged having reactions to hearing the word in class, but did not feel comfortable giving voice to their feelings within the classroom.

Despite the adherence to color blind ideologies, participants still revealed examples of overt racial discrimination. Two examples include disbanding of an all Black lunch table by a faculty member and receipt of a threatening letter stating that Blacks

were unwelcome at the school. Interestingly, these participants often characterized these instances as exceptions, appeared resistant to label incidents as "racist", or indicated little to no emotional impact. Factors contributing to these reactions may include the impact of the color blind climate, need to protect oneself from acknowledging racism to preserve a sense of safety, or efforts to maintain social desirability as strong and resilient.

Due to their hypervisibility, participants also acknowledged feeling pressure to excel in an effort to avoid negative stereotypes. The experience of being Black in an environment dominated by Whites created a driving force to continuously perform in ways that defied negative racial stereotypes. This phenomenon has been labeled as *stereotype threat* by Claude Steel (1997). It is the crippling burden of knowing or feeling that the eyes of all members of the White community are on one because one is Black. This heightened awareness of impression management poses additional challenges within an already academically intense environment.

The experience of feeling othered in and out of the classroom speaks to the need and value of having Black peer networks. Consistent with the literature (Datnow & Cooper, 1997), these findings revealed that formal and informal peer networks of Black students in independent schools support these students' academic success, create opportunities for them to reaffirm their racial identities, and facilitate their adjustment to settings that are otherwise difficult for Blacks to fit into. The findings suggest that these networks provide Black students with a space where they feel comfortable being themselves and out of the spotlight which often calls for impression management. These networks took shape in multiple forms, including one on one conversations, Black

cultural organizations, the Black lunch table, or through mentorship programs between upper-class Black students and underclass students.

Related to Black peer networks, the findings also revealed the importance of relationships with Black faculty members. Limited research examines the role of Black faculty in the lives of Black students in predominantly White private schools. This gap is most likely due to the limited number of Black faculty within predominantly White private boarding schools. These findings suggest that Black faculty play a critical role in providing role modeling, mentoring, and meaningful connection and affirming racial identity. Several of the participants noted the value of having a Black person, in a position of power, to turn to for support in navigating through an environment where most cannot relate to their unique racial experiences. It appeared that simply knowing that there was a Black faculty to turn to, provided a sense of comfort and assurance, even in cases where students may not have formed close relationships with them.

One of the challenges expressed by all of the participants related to the navigation process between two very different worlds; i.e., hometown culture and that of the boarding school. This phenomenon of being trapped between worlds has been cited extensively with the literature (Cookson & Persell, 1991; Decuir-Gunby, 2007; Ottley, 2005; Smith, 2008). At times, participants noted that they felt as though they had to maintain two separate identities to fit into each world. Consistent with the literature, the most common shift occurred in relation to language usage (Datnow & Cooper, 2000). The constant management and monitoring of one's speech can be emotionally taxing and burdensome, particularly for adolescents who are striving for a sense of acceptance within both environments. Participants discussed being accused of "acting White" upon

returning to their hometowns and often making necessary adjustments to their speech to fit in. Likewise, participants discussed the tendency to withhold Black vernacular from predominantly White spaces. Interestingly, participants indicated greater concern for being accepted within the private school setting than within their hometowns, as evidenced by greater impression management within those spaces. Several participants implied more favorable perceptions of the culture within the private school setting in comparison to that of their hometown, often ascribing negative perceptions to people from their hometowns, such as "narrow minded," “ghetto,” and “shallow."

In an effort to adjust to the culture within boarding schools, a goal cited by all participants, was a desire to connect with people of all races. It appeared that this goal held critical value, given that the majority of participants came into these experiences from predominantly Black environments and had had little, if any significant relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. There appeared to be a conscious balance between maintaining ties with Black peers at school, while expanding social interactions to encompass other cultural groups as well. Some participants even acknowledged that they limited time spent with Black peers, as a means of fostering growth by increasing their cultural exposure to those outside of their race.

A unique factor of the boarding school experience, cited within the literature (Decuir-Gunby, 2007; Ottley, 2005**),** is the bubble syndrome. The bubble refers to a closed system, which shelters its inhabitants from the realities of everyday life, including cultural differences which lie outside of White norms and perpetuates the myth of sameness (Ottley, 2005). Several participants described their experience as "living in a bubble". The danger of the bubble syndrome is that it perpetuates the notions of

colorblindness in that Whites do not have to think about those who do not look like them (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). In a similar vein, the bubble also makes it challenging for students of color to negotiate their racial identity, since notions of race are downplayed or ignored within the system in order to perpetuate Eurocentric ideals as the norm.

Another area impacted by the bubble syndrome relates to socioeconomic status. Existing research acknowledges that socioeconomic status may pose additional challenges (Cookson & Persell, 1991; Datnow & Cooper, 2000; Horvat & Antonio, 1999) but does not describe how these challenges are manifested. Several participants indicated that they attempted to conceal their financial status, based on a desire to be like everyone else and avoid negative judgment. Many times this meant making up excuses for why there were not able to participate in extra curricula activities (i.e. I am too tired, I am not interested, etc). Several participants acknowledged that their financial status placed great limitations on their experience and at times played a greater role than race in their experiences.

The constant impression management based on racial and class differences can pose great emotional challenges, especially for Black students living away from their familiar support systems, including family, community, and church. Despite these apparent challenges, these students indicated that they see themselves as being successful within their respective schools. In addition to family support and meaningful relationships with faculty, all of the participants acknowledged the impact of being surrounded by hard working, bright peers. The participants spoke volumes about the positive, reciprocal impact of being in an environment where people were excited about learning and able to push themselves to the fullest.

In light of the expressed challenges which accompany these students' experiences, the opportunities for advancement and growth were noted by all participants. In fact, all of the participants indicated that they would recommend their school to other Black students from similar backgrounds. When asked about their advice to prospective Black students, participants stressed the importance in maintaining a level of openness, taking advantage of as many opportunities as possible, and being true to oneself.

Recommendations and Implications

These findings reveal that although low income Black students have the ability for academic success within predominantly White, elite private boarding school environments, they may still encounter many obstacles concerning race and class in this context. There is a need for better mechanisms for Black students to take advantage of opportunities at independent schools and maintain their connection to the Black community, while challenging racial and class norms.

These schools need to make a concerted effort to include culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum and create social contexts that are conducive to learning for all racial and class groups. By engaging in such practices, the schools would become more inclusive and be able to move beyond color blind ideologies. In order to develop a more racially inclusive curriculum, it is imperative that teachers receive training on White privilege, tools for cultural empowerment, and learn about the unique experiences of students of color within these settings (Rasheed & Ancis, 2005). There is also a need for independent schools to hire more Black teachers. One participant acknowledged that having Black teachers was not important for her because she has only had one other

Black teacher in her life, in kindergarten. A continued lack of Black teachers often perpetuates a mindset among students that that is the way things are supposed to be and prevents them from expecting anything different. There are multiple benefits associated with having more Black teachers, including helping Black students feel more comfortable in their surroundings and providing role modeling and mentoring (Milner, 2006).

Given the emotional impact of the many obstacles faced by Black students in the independent school context and the tendency to internalize and withhold these feelings, it may be useful to employ psychologists to provide therapeutic services, including individual and group therapy. These type of interventions can help to normalize students' experience and provide validation, cultural affirmation, empowerment, and support. The opportunity to have a space to simply give voice to one's experience can be a powerful and useful intervention.

Finally, there needs to be greater efforts to encourage formal Black peer networking. One suggestion may be to incorporate Big Brother/Big Sister programs, connecting Black underclass students with Black upperclass students. This concept could also expand to facilitate the involvement of current Black students with Black alumni. Maintaining a connection with Black alumni would provide Black students with role models, networking, and mentoring opportunities. By connecting Black students with Black alumni, they will not only gain assistance in navigating the independent school environment, but beyond into college and professional environments as well.

Limitations and Future Research

Study findings must be examined in light of several limitations. While this study's results provide important information on the experience of low income, Black students in

predominantly White elite private boarding schools, caution should be taken in generalizing these findings to other Black students experiences in private schools. While the data is thorough and in-depth, only a convenient sample of Black students were interviewed for this study. All individuals who participated in this study were from a low socioeconomic background; therefore, it is unclear as to whether the findings of this study would have significant meaning for Blacks outside of this economic class.

A second limitation was the unknown influence of response bias. The fact that the PI was a former employee of the agency through which participants were recruited, may have affected the content shared. Specifically, participants may have been motivated to share content perceived as more socially desirable and downplay challenges. A third limitation may relate to the method by which interviews were conducted. Close to 80% of the interviews were conducted by phone, due to geographic location of PI and participants. While attempts were made to build rapport, this format makes it difficult to assess the degree to which participates were fully engaged and present.

Further research might include a comparison of current boarding school students and boarding school alumni who are 5-10 years out from the experience. Such a study would highlight differences in perception of the experience or underscore changes which have been implemented within the private schools. In a similar vein, a longitudinal study of low income, Black students experiences could yield new insights and provide information about potential changes in perception during boarding school and at two later points (i.e. 2nd year college and two years post college graduation). Given the potential impact of the bubble syndrome, it would be informative to see how participants view their experiences once outside of the bubble. Given the salience of race on these students

experiences, another area for future research could be an exploration of the role of racial identity development on the experiences of Black students in this context. A final direction for future research might include a comparison of the experiences of similar students attending private day schools, to explore similarities and differences which occur across experiences.

Conclusion

Research has just begun to examine the experiences of low income, Black students attending predominantly White, elite private boarding schools. The information provided by the individual interviews may have merely scratched the surface of the experiences of these participants. However, the present study begins the groundwork for clinical and research endeavors specifically within boarding school environments. It is hoped that the information obtained through this exploratory study will serve as an impetus for more in depth studies of this population, and will assist in the creation of support services and programs to meet these students' needs effectively.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. DOB: _____ Place of Birth: _____

2. Please provide racial/ ethnic group(s) with which you most identify:

3. Please circle your family's annual household income:

   a. Less than 30,000 per year

   b. 30,000 – 60,000 per year

   c. Over 60,000 per year

4. Please provide name of current school: _____

5. Please circle your current classification:

   a. Freshman

   b. Sophomore

   c. Junior

   d. Senior

6. Current GPA: _____

7. List any extra curricula activities with which you are involved:

8. Please circle the number that best corresponds with your level of satisfaction at your present school (1 being lowest, 6 being highest): 1 2 3 4 5 6

9. To what extent to feel accepted at your school (1- being lowest, 6 being highest):

   1 2 3 4 5 6

10. Is there anything you would change about your school

11. Why did you choose a boarding school?

12. Have you ever felt social isolated at school? Y N

13. Have you ever experienced/witnessed discrimination at your school?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Introduction

- Tell me about yourself

  a. How long have you been attending a private boarding high school

  b. Where did you go to school before attending your current school

  c. Why did your parents/ you decide to apply/enroll to this school

School Satisfaction

- Do you like your current school? Why? Why not?

  a. What are some of the positive aspects of your experience here (*w/ students and teachers*)

  b. What are some of the negative aspects of your experience here (*w/ students and teachers*)

  c. Do you ever feel like an outsider?

  d. Tell me about your expectations prior to starting this school?

  e. How do your actual experiences compare to your initial expectations?

Experience Based on Race

- Do you have any thoughts on what it is like to be Black at your school?

  a. Do people have stereotypes about Black/Black students at your school?

  b. Have you been asked to speak for or represent your race?

  c. Have you ever witnessed acts of discrimination at your school? Ever been a victim of discrimination at your school?

d. Is having Black students in your class important to you? Are issues related to race openly discussed within your school? How?

f. To what extent do you feel comfortable voicing concerns about race?

Experience Based on Socioeconomic Status

- To what extent does your family's income level impact your experience at your school?

  a. Which factor, race or class, plays a bigger role in your experience at your school? How?

  b. What does it mean to be financially limited at your school?

Racial Climate

- Describe the racial climate at your school

  a. How many faculty of color are present in your school?

  b. How important is it to you that the school have faculty of color?

  c. How are student grievances regarding racial discrimination, perceptions of discrimination or policies regarding race handled?

  d. How are Blacks discussed/represented in the curriculum?

  e. What systems of support are available for students of color? How important is it to have support systems?

  f. Are expressions of cultural solidarity embraced by school?

Social/ Academic Adjustment

- Describe your adjustment process (academic and social), as you transitioned from public school to private school.

- Tell me about the coping resources you have utilized within your experience at this school.
- What factors have been most helpful for you in making the adjustment to your school.
- Discuss your social life at school? At home? Differences between the two?
- Have you ever felt socially isolated on campus or within your classes? Provide examples.
- Do you feel you were adequately prepared for the social adjustment to private school? What do you wish you knew then, that you know now?
- Describe differences/similarities between culture at school. Culture of your hometown.
- Discuss your comfort level within each cultural setting (school, home)
- Describe any challenges you've experienced in navigating between two worlds (home community and that of the school).

Words of Wisdom

- Would you recommend your school to Black families? Why? Or Why not?
- What advice would you give to a Black student who is coming to this school?
- What advice would you give your school to make life better for all its students?
- How can SEEDS be helpful to you while in school?

Support

- How are students supported at your school?
- What support mechanisms does your school have for Blacks? Financially limited?
- Describe your parents' level of involvement within the school.

- To what extent does SEEDS offer support during your experience in school?
- What do you attribute to your success within your school?

Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience at your school that I haven't asked you?