2016

The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination Of Existing And Emerging Implications For African American Students In Rural High Schools In Mississippi

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THE ACTING WHITE PHENOMENON: AN EXAMINATION OF EXISTING AND EMERGING IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN MISSISSIPPI

A Dissertation presented in fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education

The University of Mississippi

by

EARL W. RICHARD

August 2016
ABSTRACT

This study, *The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi*, examines the impact the *Acting White Phenomenon* has on the academic and social development of African American adolescents in rural schools of Mississippi. This study uses various analytical methods and presents research conclusions, discussions and implications to guide future work in minimizing the effect and maximize the benefits to African American adolescents in rural high schools in Mississippi.

Studying African American seniors in rural high schools in multiple locations, this mixed methods study gathers both quantitative and qualitative data in an effort to answer two research questions: (1) In what ways, if any, does the *Acting White Phenomenon* exist among African American senior students in rural high schools in Mississippi? (2) How do African American senior students experience in the *Acting White Phenomenon* in rural schools in Mississippi?

The study demonstrated how African American students in this study are resilient and resourceful, finding means by which to address, deter, redirect, or ignore those accusing them of *Acting White* and continue their academic pursuits. The study also demonstrated how detrimental the *Acting White Phenomenon* can be to one’s mental and emotional well-being. Thus, educators must be more deliberate in how to address the *Acting White Phenomenon* with students, teachers, administrators, school boards, and community stakeholders.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents, Mr. Charlie and Mrs. Hazel Richard, who instilled in me the desire to learn and to always seek understanding of the world around me and the things in it, always striving to better myself and help those whose lives I might touch.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all those people without whose help I could not have made it through this dissertation. To my children and other family members who always believed in me as I forged on and to my friends from all around the country who called with words of encouragement, often times giving me that unsolicited ray of sunshine that brightened my spirit just when I needed it the most, I say thank you. I would also like to give a special acknowledgement to a special person, Dr. RoSusan D. Bartee, my advisor and my friend, whose encouragement and guidance made this study possible. I would like to also acknowledge my dissertation committee members, Dr. Susan McClelland, Dr. Ryan Niemeyer, and Dr. Larry Hanshaw as well as a former member, Dr. Lori Wolff, for their willingness to read, support, and help me through this experience.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a small town in Mississippi in the sixties and looking at the lives of African Americans born and reared in this area, I was not filled with optimism about what the future held for me and most African Americans in this town. When I attended school, I found that I had a penchant for learning and loved to read. I viewed reading as my way to explore the world, especially since I knew of only a handful of African Americans who had ever traveled other than to visit relatives in other cities. I read everything I could find to read. My quest for books to read eventually caused me to go to the city library. This library was not very large, but it looked gigantic to a boy only in junior high school.

I will always remember going into that library for the very first time. There were three White people looking at books on the shelves and two older White women at a large desk at the front of the room sitting and talking. When the women noticed me walking through the door they immediately came to their feet. One of the ladies approached me and said “Where you going?” I told her I was going to the library. She told me I could not be in there because I did not have a library card. I told her I could read the books there until I got a card. She told me I could not get a card and I asked why. She told me that coloreds could not use the library, and I asked why. She asked me if I was talking back to her and I said no, and told her all I wanted was to read some books. She said, “Coloreds don’t read.”
The other older Caucasian lady came to where we were standing and talking. This lady wanted to know why I was there, and I told her I wanted to read some books and get a library card. I told her that I had a card for the school library, but had read most of the books there except for the encyclopedias and dictionaries. This second lady told me to come go with her. She took me to a counter, reached under it and handed me a piece of paper. She told me to fill it out and get my mother to sign it. This was the application for a library card; the same card the first lady told me I could not get. After talking to the first Caucasian lady, I wondered if reading at the library was only for the White people. The next day, at school, I was talking about what had happened and other African American students were making fun of me for going to the library and asking me why I was *Acting White* trying to go to the public library. Throughout my junior high and high school years, many other students would accuse me of *Acting White* when I would complete my homework and/or receive my test grades particularly since I had high scores. It bothered me that they thought I was *Acting White*, but I did not let it stop me from getting my lessons or good grades.

My son, too, fell victim to being accused of *Acting White* in junior high school. African American children in his classes would accuse him of *Acting White* because of his good grades and participation in science club, playing chess, and other activities. The taunting continued and was so severe that after receiving a perfect score on a particularly difficult science test, some of the students picked my son up and threw him out of the second floor window of the science classroom when the teacher was out of the room. Luckily, the new greenhouse had been erected and intercepted his fall thereby preventing him from receiving serious injuries. Thus for me and my family, the *Acting White Phenomenon* is personal as these narratives present experiences reflecting its multifaceted dimensions of *Acting White*. 
Statement of the Problem

Ogbu (2003), in his book, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*, addressed the sense of identity that a group acquires and how that sense affects the behavior of its members. The book focuses on the Shaker Heights School District in Shaker Heights, Ohio, an affluent public school system where African American and White families reside and have roughly the same income and status levels. Although these racially diverse families have similar economic backgrounds, the African American students in the school district scored lower than their White counterparts. The following findings (Table 1) are identified for students in the Shaker Heights school district:
Table 1: Differences in Test Scores by Race in Shaker Heights School District (1992 – 1996)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race and Ethnicity</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Math (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Math (98%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reading (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reading (99%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Writing (74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Writing (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Science (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Science 94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Math (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Math (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Reading (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Reading (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Writing (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Writing (93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Science (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Science (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>SAT (485-Verbal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>SAT (600-Verbal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>SAT (471-Math)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>SAT (598-Math)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ohio Achievement Assessment (OAA) – The findings for the subject areas for grades 4 and 8 are based upon the Ohio Achievement Assessment. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) – The findings for grades 11 and 12 are based upon the Scholarship Aptitude Test.
Ogbu (2003) provides data from various sources including the students themselves, which lead the researchers to conclude that African American students in the Shaker Heights school system did not work as hard as they should or could. The researchers assigned the term Academic Disengagement to the African American students’ voluntary removal of their effort needed to be successful in the Shaker Heights school district (Ogbu, 2003). The students admitted they chose not to put forth the effort to be academically successful beyond a point. This academic disengagement was apparent from elementary through high school.

African American students at all grade levels admitted to knowing it took hard work, doing homework, and studying hard to be successful at Shaker Heights, but most resigned themselves to what Ogbu characterized as low-effort syndrome (Ogbu, 2003). Low effort syndrome was defined as a voluntary choice to put minimal effort into doing homework, studying, or working hard in order to be academically successful (Ogbu, 2003). When asked about low-effort, one student told researchers that he would do just enough work to maintain a 3.0 G.P.A. but nothing over that average. Although this student put forth only the effort needed to maintain what he considered a sufficient grade point average, he thought other Black students made excuses for not doing the work, but in reality, they did not want to do the work needed to succeed.

Many African American students in the Shaker Heights schools at all grade levels, too, were content to be part of what was termed the norm of minimum effort (Ogbu, 2003). Ogbo defined this norm of minimum effort as students, many of whom were academically capable students, giving only the effort needed to maintain a self-imposed academic level for various reasons. Giving only a minimum of effort appeared to have become a part of the school culture for African American students in the Shaker Heights school system. According to Ogbo, one
African American high school male student mentioned previously was a prime example of this norm of minimum effort. He had a self-imposed limit of a 3.0 grade point average and refused to put forth the effort to perform higher although he admitted he was capable of doing the work. Hard work and increased effort would lead to higher grades and that would be outside the norm of minimum effort and contribute to the Acting White Phenomenon.

Most of the African American students participating in the Shaker Heights school district study felt that Black people do not take honors and AP classes. Many of these students told researchers that taking those courses is something White people do. Another reason African American students gave to researchers was that Blacks are ghetto people and are not supposed to get good grades. It was determined that the students giving this reason believed their roots were in the ghetto and a ghetto lifestyle did not include academic engagement. The reason getting a large share of the responses was fear of being teased by other African American students who accuse them of Acting White. Whether questioning a lifestyle, ghetto, or trying to justify not putting forth the necessary effort to be successful, all of the reasons given by African American students in the study have the potential for being means to avoid the sting of the Acting White Phenomenon.

Mocombe (2011) hypothesized that some African American students intentionally underachieve in school in general, and on standardized tests in particular, for fear of being stereotyped by their African American peers. This fear of loss of racial identity permeates the research and its examination of the implications of the Acting White Phenomenon on the cognitive and non-cognitive behavior of African American students. Mocombe theorized that the achievement gap between African Americans and Whites was attributable to a post-industrial social structure of class inequality arising from a mismatch in linguistic social function. Schools
also have been shown to perpetuate and reinforce the Acting White Phenomenon. Spencer (2001), in a deficit oriented perspective, saw American schools as being set up and their structure based upon the experiences of Whites and middle income people serving as the norm. Non-majority children were seen as deviating from this norm. A deficit oriented perspective focuses on the negative aspects of a given situation or group of people. Using the Eurocentric norms schools view education objectives, as they relate to non-majority students, become a matter of what they cannot do rather than what they can do.

Based upon a study on individuals’ perceptions and meaning of the Acting White Phenomenon, it was concluded that the burden of Acting White did exist, particularly among the African American students in this study (Geoff, Martin, & Thomas, 2007). Several of the students indicated they masked their academic abilities because of the phenomenon. The data from this study was unique in that it also included the teachers, all of whom reported that they had not heard of the term, “The Burden of Acting White.” However, when these teachers were questioned about overhearing one African American student accusing another African American student of Acting White, because of their grades, dress, or language, the teachers all reported they had heard such things (Geoff et al.). Learning what the Acting White Phenomenon is and remaining vigilant to the many ways it manifests itself, and how it inflicts damage on African American students trying to be successful must be addressed to help these students and others to succeed.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed method study is to examine whether or not African American students in rural Mississippi high schools experience the Acting White Phenomenon. The study
particularly considers the implications of the *Acting White Phenomenon* for those students who have experienced the phenomenon.

**Research Questions**

1. In what ways, if any, does the *Acting White Phenomenon* exist among African American senior students in rural high schools in Mississippi?

2. How do African American senior students experience in the *Acting White Phenomenon* in rural schools in Mississippi?

**Research Hypotheses**

Hypothesis One states there is no significant relationship between whether African American students said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White* and school.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ item score by whether students said yes or no.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ item score by School.

Hypothesis Four: For School One there is no significant difference in mean a AWEQ item score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*.

Hypothesis Five: For School Two there is no significant difference in mean a AWEQ item score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*.

Hypothesis Six: For School Three there is no significant difference in mean a AWEQ item score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. 
Hypothesis Seven: There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ bother score by whether students said yes or no.

Hypothesis Eight: There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ bother score by School.

Hypothesis Nine: For School One there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ bother score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White.

Hypothesis Ten: For School two there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ bother score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White.

Hypothesis Eleven: For School Three there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ bother score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White.

Hypothesis Twelve: For those African American students who said yes to being accused of Acting White, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ item score by school.

Hypothesis Thirteen: For those African American students who said yes to being accused of Acting White, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ bother score by school.

Hypothesis Fourteen: For those African American students who said no to being accused of Acting White, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ item score by school.

Hypothesis Fifteen: For those African American students who said no to being accused of Acting White, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ bother score by school.

**Significance of Study**

Most of the literature on the Acting White Phenomenon has focused mainly on urban and metropolitan schools and their students. This mixed methods study replicates a study by Neal-Barnett, Standulis, Singer, Murray, and Demmings (2009), but focuses on African American
students in rural settings and is of significance to school administrators, teachers, parents, and counselors, whether or not associated with schools. Parents of current students, community leaders and citizens frequently express their interest in the future of students in schools and their desire to do things necessary to improve the level of academic performance. This study serves as a data source for beginning some of the discussions necessary to create the resources to benefit the African American students in our schools. This study also provides data that can be used in developing those processes and procedures to eradicate the barriers to greater academic and social interactions for more African American students. Additionally, Henfield (2012) in reference to placement in gifted and advanced placement classes, said that there are many African American students, highly capable of being successful in higher level classes. This perspective is of particular interest if systemic and interpersonal barriers are acknowledged and eradicated. This study discloses the impact of one of those barriers, the Acting White Phenomenon and can serve as a focus point for beginning the discussions needed to begin the change. This study further provides significance to anyone interested in reducing or eliminating obstacles to the academic achievement of African American students in rural schools. In effect, the data could lead to the development of programs and plans for reducing or eliminating the overall implications of Acting White Phenomenon and its impact on African American students. Additionally, this study addresses the socioeconomic status of the participants where other studies have addressed the socioeconomic status of a neighborhood or school district.

**Limitations of the Study**

1. Determining the criteria that lead to the students being accused of Acting White. Once the existence of the phenomenon is documented one problem could be getting accurate data
on what the accused students were doing immediately before the accusation that may have contributed to the accusation being hurled.

2. This study may not generalize to other rural high schools Mississippi with the same or different demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The study also may not generalize to schools outside Mississippi having the same or different demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The study may generalize to schools in Mississippi with similar demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

3. Widely differing socio-economic status of subjects, because of the location of their school, could affect the attitudes of the African American students and their exposure to the Acting White Phenomenon. The northeast region of Mississippi and the coastal area are considered more affluent areas compared to the delta region of Mississippi. The Mississippi Department of Education provides figures indicating the dollar amount spent per student for all schools in Mississippi and The Mississippi Economic Development Council provides figures to substantiate the earning potential for each region of Mississippi.

4. Using rural Mississippi high schools with majority African American student populations may bias the data thereby not generalizing to other Mississippi rural high schools with lesser populations of African American students.

5. The ability of the student participants to develop a perspective on the Acting White Phenomenon. Some students have had difficulty understanding what Acting White actually is which caused them difficulty recalling events leading up to the accusation.

6. Limiting the accusation to school related events can limit the students to believe the researcher is seeking information based solely on events happening at school. The Acting
White Phenomenon occurs in activities and events of the student’s life away from the school.

7. The availability of student test data for review could be a limitation to answering the research questions. Many administrators and school districts closely guard individual student data for fear of violation of privacy issues.

8. The degree to which students will respond to the questions could skew data. Some students may hesitate to answer some questions honestly fearing their answers may be read by someone who could impact their life in some way. Some students may also not trust the researcher or anyone asking for information.

9. The reliability of self-reported Grade Point Averages (GPA) by student participants could skew data. Some students do not know their current GPA and may simply give a number to complete their answer.

Research Definitions

1. Acting White Phenomenon – a phenomenon embedded in the racial/ethnic identity. It is the most negative accusation an African American adolescent can receive from another African American. It is humiliating and challenges one’s racial identity as if to say you are not Black enough. It has nothing to do with wanting to be White and everything to do with what it means to be Black (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009).

2. AWEQ – Acting White Experiences Questionnaire - a copyrighted instrument developed to gather information on the Acting White Phenomenon (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009).
3. **Oppositional Group Formation** – one caste or race developing an attitude against another caste or race when perceived that they have been kept in a lower caste on purpose by the perceived higher caste or race (Wilson, 2003).

4. **Low-Effort Syndrome** – a voluntary choice to put minimal effort into doing homework, studying, or working hard in order to be academically successful (Ogbu, 2003).

5. **Norm of Minimum Effort** – students, many of whom were academically capable students, giving only the effort needed to maintain a self-imposed academic level for various reasons (Ogbu, 2003).

6. **Academic Disengagement** – a refusal to voluntarily and actively participate in one’s education due to a belief that the education system will dictate their success or failure due to their race (Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2003).

7. **Rural School** – Rural schools fall into one of three categories
   
a. **Fringe** - Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster

b. **Distant** - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster

c. **Remote** - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster
Summary of Chapter I

The Acting White Phenomenon impacts both cognitive and non-cognitive challenges involving African American students in rural Mississippi schools. This research study examines the experiences generated by the Acting White Phenomenon and how those experiences affect African American students in rural high schools in Mississippi both academically and socially. The study also examines the impact of the Acting White Phenomenon on the academic achievement of African American students in the rural schools studied. Research has shown that African American students do not fit the norm upon which school curricula are framed (Spencer, 2001). Whether being underrepresented in higher level academic classes or socially disengaged, this study looks at how African American students fall victim to the negative effects of the Acting White Phenomenon which impacts these students in both the cognitive and non-cognitive domains generating non-productive and destructive behaviors both academically and socially. Several perspectives on the Acting White Phenomenon follow in this mixed methods study. The process of collecting data for this report and the data interpretation with its results will present a view of the Acting White Phenomenon in rural high schools in Mississippi.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two presents the Acting White Phenomenon from different viewpoints. These viewpoints were derived by many researchers conducting studies using different variables of the Acting White Phenomenon. This chapter contains a historical background of the Acting White Phenomenon and gives a look at the believed origin of the term Acting White. The historical perspective continues with mid-twentieth century studies and then gives a socio-historical analysis of Acting White Phenomenon (Clark, 1939; Ogbu, 1986, 2003). This chapter also contains information on racial identity, mislabeling of the Acting White Phenomenon, and the educational contexts of the Acting White Phenomenon and its effects on academic achievement (Abagond, 2009; Ford et al. 2009; Murray et al. 2012; Tyson et al. 2009; Wilson, 2003). The latter parts of this chapter present the social stratification and economic issues associated with the Acting White Phenomenon (Goff et al., 2007; Neal-Barnett, 2009; Pluvious, 2006; Tyson, 2011). The Acting White Phenomenon is an issue that involves complex interactions and interplay of culture, environment, and academic expectations.

Socio-historical Perspectives of the Acting White Phenomenon

Many contemporary studies have focused on the Acting White Phenomenon and attribute the term Acting White to the late Dr. John Ogbu, noted researcher and anthropologist at Berkley. His use of the term however, was not the beginning for the term Acting White. For some
historical perspective Christie (2010), reminds us that the phrase *Acting White* was used in 1852 by Harriet Beecher Stowe in her book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was a book about a slave in 1850s America who was about to be given his freedom when his master dies. Tom is then sold to a cruel slave owner, but the boat ride to his new owner Tom saves the life of a young White girl. The girl’s father is so grateful that he buys Tom who then has life easy until he is involved in a plot to get another slave and her son to the North. Tom is beaten but refuses to tell what he knows and dies before the kind slave owner can buy him back. Harriet Beecher Stowe intended Uncle Tom to be perceived as a slave who fought for his beliefs and refused to be exploited. She wanted her character to be perceived as a noble hero worthy of praise (Christie, 2010). Stowe’s book however, relates how other slaves saw Uncle Tom as wanting to be like White folk because he could read and write. In Tom’s era many Blacks saw Tom as being too subservient and too willing to please Whites. This stereotype, a Black man who seeks favor from Whites by *Acting White* was considered a sellout and said to be *Acting White*. Christie (2010) said Harriet Beecher Stowe began a war of words in America about what it meant to be *Acting White* while one was Black, whether free or enslaved. This turmoil still rages well past the turn of the twenty-first century. This war was between Blacks and Whites, and between Blacks and fellow members of their own race to define what it meant to be Black in the United States at the midpoint of the nineteenth century (Christie, 2010). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* intended to give readers a glimpse into the life of a noble man who did much to help others, but it generated unintended impressions of Tom based upon impressions by Whites and Blacks of his time. Tom’s actions were perceived as *Acting White* by many Whites and Blacks of his era and presented a dichotomy of thought regarding literacy and academic achievement that still exists today.
Doll Studies

Positive aspirations, being good, pretty, smart in school and many other human characteristics have been associated with being White. At the same time being negative, bad, ugly and unintelligent in school were associated with being Black. Many Blacks did not believe anything good was associated with being a Black person in America and if one did these things or possessed these characteristic, one was considered to be Acting White, and looked down upon by their peers.

In 1939, Dr. Kenneth Clark and his wife, Dr. Mamie Clark, conducted what was to become known as the famous Doll Study. This Doll Study was of notice, particularly because what it meant to be Black in America had still not been determined. In an effort to gather information on what it meant to be Black in America, Drs. Clark asked Black children between the ages of six and nine a series of questions. The children had to answer by choosing between a Black doll and a White doll. The dolls were the same except for the color of their skin. Some of the questions were: (1) Show me the doll that you like best; (2) Show me the doll that is the nice doll; (3) Show me the doll that looks bad; (4) Give me the doll that looks like you.

The results of Dr. Clarks’ study showed that the Black children chose to play with the White doll more than the Black doll. The children chose the White doll as the pretty doll and the Black doll as the ugly doll. When asked to fill in a human figure with the color of their own skin the children chose a color that was lighter than their actual skin color. The most disturbing result for the researchers and many people who read the study was that when asked to ‘give me the doll that looks like you’, many of the Black children said the White doll looked like them, others just began to cry or would run away rather then pick the doll that looked like them. The test was repeated in 1950 and forty-four percent of the children chose the White doll as the one that
looked like them (Abagond, 2009). In the landmark civil rights case, *Brown v Board of Education*, his study of Black children in Clarendon County, South Carolina became part of the decision. In the South Carolina study, Black children were asked the same questions and sixty-three percent chose the White doll as the nice one. These results showed the court that Black children had internalized racism and had been stigmatized by segregation. This stigmatization as to what it means to be Black in America continues to perpetuate the Acting White Phenomenon.

In 2005, the Doll Study was repeated in Harlem. In this study seventy-one percent of the Black children chose the White doll as the nice one (Abagond, 2009). In 2009, after President Barack Obama had been elected, Good Morning America asked the same questions to children in Norfolk, Virginia. In this study eighty-eight percent of the children chose the Black doll as the one that looked most like them (Abagond, 2009). The Good Morning America doll test was the first to show a majority of Black children selecting a Black doll for the question “which doll is the nice doll.” The Doll Studies gave evidence that African American children in America had a racial identity problem and identified good characteristics as being White characteristics and bad characteristics as being Black. Subsequent Doll Studies mirrored the earlier Doll Studies with the resulting data suggesting that African American children, even in Harlem, continued to have difficulty defining what it meant to them to be Black in America.

**Socio-historical Analysis of the Acting White Phenomenon**

According to Murray et al. (2012), the Acting White Phenomenon is one of the most negative accusations an African American adolescent can receive from another. Research suggests that receiving the accusation may create distress for some African American adolescents. The accusation involves one African American student accusing another African American student of Acting White merely because the accused student received a good grade in a
class, on a report, or on the state mandated high stakes tests. The accusation is also levied against African American students because of the way the student talks, the clothes he or she wears, or the sports or extracurricular activities in which they participate. Thus, African American students face complex choices when considering almost every aspect of their life if they want to avoid falling prey to The Acting White Phenomenon.

Racial Identity and Individual Mislabeling

Being Black in America

What does it mean to be Black in America? There are various meanings. From the athletic arena to the academic context, African Americans are daily faced with this question regarding racial identity. What does it mean if someone accuses another African American of Acting White? Overwhelmingly, the literature addresses racial identity when studying the Acting White Phenomenon (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009; Pluviose, 2006; Tyson et al., 2005). Fordham & Ogbu (1986) argued that “Blacks, given their racial marginalization within the socioeconomic social structure of American capitalist society, developed an oppositional social ‘identity-in-differential’ that defined ‘certain activities, events, symbols, and meanings as not appropriate for them because those behaviors, events, symbols, and meanings are characteristic of White America’(Fordham & Ogbu as cited in Mocombe, 2011, p. 85).” Some studies suggest that accusing an African American of Acting White challenges his or her definition of what it means to be Black (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009; Henfield, 2012; Murray et al., 2012). Neal-Barnett et al. 2009, stated “When the accusation is made, what is being said is that your definition of being Black does not meet my definition of being Black. Indeed, your definition is wrong (Neal-Barnett et al. as cited in Pluviose, 2006, p.8).” Other studies addressing the Acting White
Phenomenon as insulting an African American because he or she is Black include (Christie, 2010; Henfield, 2012; and Neal-Barnett et al., 2009). In describing the Acting White Phenomenon, Christie, (2010), commented “It is a racist slur that dates back to the days of slavery and Reconstruction, and is one that is still uttered widely and openly today; the charge that any African American who is successful, well mannered, or well educated is supposedly “Acting White.” Some studies of The Acting White Phenomenon revealed the belief that African Americans are unintelligent, inarticulate, or not well informed (Brinson, 2002; Ogbu, 2003). The Shaker Height study, Ogbu (2003, p. 85), revealed that “For some people, the internalization of the beliefs that Blacks are not as intelligent as Whites translated into another belief, namely, that White students, not Blacks, were the ones who did well academically.” Studies addressing the Acting White Phenomenon as a challenge to one’s racial identity have been undertaken using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method designs to achieve various results. In a study by Neal-Barnett et al. (2009, p.102), “A series of studies are presented that explore both qualitative and quantitative approaches to assessing the Acting White accusation wherein the qualitative data and findings guide the formation of a quantitative assessment of the Acting White accusation experience.”

The Acting White Phenomenon Mislabeled

Dr. John Ogbu, known as one of the most influential thinkers on public policy, espoused the belief that the Acting White Phenomenon was mislabeled (Wilson, 2003). He believed African American students needed to learn that studying hard is not acting White. Ogbu was aware that there was no scholarly agreement on why African American students IQ’s are lower than that of White students. He also knew that African American students, as a subgroup, lagged behind that of White students on NCLB (No Child Left Behind) mandated achievement tests and
all other achievement measures. He was aware of many urban explanations for these lower 
scores, including the *Acting White Phenomenon*. Wilson (2003) offered other urban explanations 
for low academic achievement including African American students coming from homes with no 
books, lack of food in the homes, no father in the home, parents who do not care about or value 
education, fear, drug infested neighborhoods, high rates of teen pregnancy, and high incidence of 
incarceration of African American youth.

Mocombe (2011) hypothesized that African American students intentionally 
underachieve in school in general and on standardized tests in particular for fear of being 
stereotyped as *Acting White* by their African American peers. This fear of loss of racial identity 
permeates the research. Mocombe (2011) reported that “Regardless of the mixed and conflicting 
results reported in the social science literature, however, the hypothesis that the experience of 
being ridiculed because of high achievement as the locus of causality for Black 
underachievement and the Black-White achievement has become a dominant theme in American 
School systems (Mocombe, 2011, p. 89).” This line of thought mimics that of Ogbu in that this 
research refers to the oppositional social identity-in-differential that defines certain activities, 
events, and symbols. Mccombe (2011) concludes that African American adolescents do poorly in 
school in general and do poorly on standardized tests in particular, because of poor status group 
or Black underclass status.

Brinson (2002) believed the *Acting White Phenomenon* was mislabeled and dangerous. 
She admitted the *Acting White Phenomenon* prevented many African American students from 
performing well in school. In her study the African American students did not want to be known 
as *Acting White*. According to Brinson (2002), “The presumption that White students are 
naturally smart or smarter than Black students is absolutely ludicrous (Brinson, 2002, p. 33).”
Brinson used narrative research to draw her conclusions. Brinson wanted to know what it means when young African Americans say Oprah Winfrey *Acts White*.

When Diane Sawyer was discussed with these same African American adolescents they had no problem with how she talked or with her success. Brinson (2002) sought to find out why two women who are articulate, intelligent, well informed, and successful are perceived so differently by the same students. The hypothetical question was posed, if Oprah were inarticulate, unintelligent, and uninformed would she be perceived as acting Black. According to Brinson (2003), “Blackness does not mean ‘lack of’ intelligence and articulation (Brinson, 2002, p. 33).” Brinson concluded that student surroundings and experiences determined who they were and that the labeling of *Acting White* was a personality thing (Brinson, 2002). There exists doubt that the *Acting White Phenomenon* is the reason for the lack of academic success of some African American adolescents particularly when not studying hard, uncaring parents, lack of adequate nourishment, and the misconception that race influences intelligence may be greater influences on academic achievement for African American students.

**Oppositional Group Formation**

Ogbu (2003) advanced the theory of lower caste oppositional group formation due to being kept in a lower-caste position by society. Lower caste oppositional group formation is defined as being kept in a lower caste status causes those kept in the lower caste to be opposed to the group keeping them in the lower caste. African American students contribute to this caste perpetuation by insulting other African American students thereby challenging their racial identity. Ogbu’s study determined that parent involvement played a pivotal role in how their children developed by helping to eliminate racial internalization. Racial internalization in this case is when the African American students incorporated into their minds the beliefs of White
society about African Americans. Ogbu (2009) explained this thusly, If they know that they cannot turn to the dominant culture for help or support, they become more dependent upon and supportive of other members of their group. As they experience this fictive kinship, they also experience oppositional collective identity in which they reject behaviors and activities that represent the dominant, oppressor group. This pattern has been labeled ‘fear of Acting White’.

African Americans are classified as an involuntary minority by. Consequently, these students thought they were not as smart as White students because that is what White society had taught them. When these students were accused of Acting White, they would choose to be cool rather than continue the behavior which preceded them being labeled as Acting White. This cool behavior caused them not to learn how to study and other negative qualities that caused them to perform less well than their White counterparts.

**Educational Contexts and Academic Achievement**

**K – 12 Settings**

Who is responsible for the continuation of the Acting White Phenomenon? Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2009) conducted a study investigating the achievement gap and factors of how family and school affect African American achievement. Many of the students demonstrated what was termed an attitude-behavior discrepancy and face negative peer pressure associated with the Acting White Phenomenon. The study presented data on two main education issues relative to African American students. One issue was the lower academic performance of African American students relative to White students. The second issue was African American students being underrepresented in gifted education. The researchers concluded that all students live in a culture of negative peer pressure. They also concluded African American students face a
type peer pressure that is unique in many ways due to the *Acting White Phenomenon*.

The *Acting White Phenomenon* has been shown by many studies to be a contributing factor in African American students’ lack of academic and social success in school. Grantham, and Biddle (2014) conducted a study on bullying where one of the forms of bullying was the *Acting White Phenomenon*. This study refers to the *Acting White Phenomenon* as a form of racialized bullying. The study also examined bystander teachers whose inaction related to race-based bullying can perpetuate under-representation of African American students and encourage up-stander attitudes and actions to meet the needs of African American students in gifted programs and advanced classes (Grantham et al., 2014). Bystander teacher is defined as a teacher who observes an incident of racial bullying and does nothing to address the issue. These teachers gave several reasons for their inaction. One reason given was self-preservation, defined as natural instincts or learned dispositions to remove oneself from harm or situate oneself to seek or sustain benefits in the midst of a crisis (Grantham et al., 2014). These bystander teachers saw one African American student accuse another of *Acting White* and did nothing because they were afraid that if they addressed the issue the accusing student would accuse them of being racist. The inaction of these teachers had a direct effect on the perpetuation of the *Acting White Phenomenon* thereby affecting the accused students who proceeded to put forth a lower amount of effort. Because of the low effort, these African American students did not meet the level needed to be considered for the gifted programs or to gain admittance into advanced classes (Grantham et al., 2014). The teachers gave other reasons for not intervening, all of which had the same net effort of perpetuating the *Acting White Phenomenon* and affecting the number of African American students in gifted programs and advanced classes.
Without teachers standing up and proactively responding to race-based bullying that African American students experience in school, the problem will continue and African American students will continue to underachieve and continue work being done in the urban setting getting farther and farther behind academically. Socially, the outcome of consistent underachievement could bring these students dangerously close to becoming a permanent under-class of citizens. Without the academic and social skills needed to fully participate in the American economy, this group could become totally disheartened and dejected and give up on life and society. This group would not be able to participate in the American society as working, contributing, productive citizens and thereby become an economic drain on society in.

According to Tyson (2011) the *Acting White Phenomenon* is a humiliating insult which challenges an African American student’s racial identity and insults African American males’ definition of what it means to be a man. These insults continue unabated in our schools year after year. Schools have a role in alleviating and correcting the damage inflicted by the *Acting White Phenomenon*. The research suggests things schools can do to begin to correct these issues. Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) found a new twist with their study. The students in this study were high achievers and Tyson et al. (2005) found parents would veto their children’s participation in gifted programs, because of the perception of snobbery. White parents as well as African American parents were shown to veto participation. This was not expected in a study addressing an issue that negatively impacts student achievement.

Fordham (1988) used ethnographic observation to create what she called the “burden of acting White” rather than identifying the phenomenon as simply “*Acting White*.” She believes it is a matter of consciousness rather than a matter of behavior. According to Fordham the burden of “*Acting White*” is imposed on African American students within White dominated institution
in which African American culture is marginalized and stigmatized and an alienating racialized performance is the price of academic success. Fordham concludes from her work that to be academically successful is akin to sitting in the front of the bus; it is a racially subversive act to some Whites more unsettling than resentful capitulation to some Whites’ anticipation of failure by the African American students.

Goff, Martin, and Thomas (2007) conducted a phenomenological qualitative design study in Norman, OK, designed to seek individuals’ perceptions and meaning of the Acting White Phenomenon. The study indicated that the burden of Acting White did exist and all African American students in this study had experienced the burden. Several students indicated they masked their academic abilities because of the phenomenon. This study also included the teachers. None of the teachers had heard of the term “the burden of Acting White.” However, when asked if they had ever overheard one African American student telling another that they were Acting White because of their grades, dress, or language the teachers reported they had observed such incidents.

Tyson (2011) conducted a study tracking African American students who do not see a relationship between race and academic achievement. She also studied those students who do see a relationship and how they learned about the relationship. In the study Tyson addresses the Acting White Phenomenon and what schools do or do not do to lessen or strengthen the phenomenon. Dr. Tyson concluded that African American students are tracked, but not into gifted, honors, or advanced placement courses during the same time White students were overrepresented in the same classes. Another conclusion from this study is that the Acting White Phenomenon is a humiliating insult that challenges an African American student’s racial identity and insults African American males’ definition of what it means to be a man. The research
suggests things schools can do to begin to correct these issues. Tyson et al. (2005) obtained similar data, but with a new twist. The students in this school were high achievers and Tyson et al. (2005) found parents would veto their children’s participation in gifted programs because of the perception of snobbery. White parents as well as African American parents were shown to veto participation.

**Higher Education**

Spencer (2001) performed a phenomenological study trying to explain the achievement gap between White and African American students. According to Spencer there is and has been a long standing explanation that African American students would do better if they adopted a Eurocentric cultural values system. This theory depends on a deficit-oriented perspective that denies African American students their racial identity. Several African American students in this study performed contrary to the traditionally offered *Acting White Phenomenon* and were high achievers. The mediating factor here appeared to be the influence of an Afrocentric culture. This study points to the need to institute better teaching strategies for African American students and minority youth in general to overcome the *Acting White Phenomenon*.

Once students experience the *Acting White Phenomenon* in Junior High and High School, does the experience and resulting reaction follow them into postsecondary education? Some studies addressed this question and also once in college will African American students continue to experience the *Acting White Phenomenon*? Woldoff, Wiggins, and Washington (2011) reported “The accusation that African American students are *Acting White* has been studied as a label that some Blacks use against others as an insult, suggesting a weaker racial identity” (p. 1065). Interestingly, most research has forwarded the ‘*Acting-White* hypothesis’ to understand the labels that younger Black students place on their peers who perform well in school (Fordham
& Ogby, 1986). In the context of university settings, some research shows that Black students are supportive of their Black peers who ‘Act White’ as long as these high achievers are well rounded socially and use their status and leadership roles to advocate for Black students (Harper, 2010; Harper & Quaye 2007).

Another theme involved understanding of African American students’ adjustment to college. Woldoff, Wiggins, and Washington (2011) studying students in a predominantly White institution in West Virginia conducted this study and collected data from African American students on attitudes towards Whites and Blacks and geographic area in which they lived prior to coming to the college. When the accusation is made in this context it is usually an out-of-state student making the accusation against a native West Virginia African American student. The study concluded that in this college environment the Acting White Phenomenon did exist. Although the phenomenon existed on the college campus research indicates that African American students are supportive of their African American peers who Act White as long as these high achievers are well rounded socially and use their status and leadership roles to advocate for African American students.

Social Stratification and Economic Attainment

Native born and Non-native born

Madyun, Lee, and Jumale (2010) conducted a study to investigate whether the Acting White Phenomenon existed among newly-immigrated African American adolescents and if so how the accusation effected their academic performance and/or self-identity. The mixed-methods approach was conducted in a predominantly Somali African K-12 (71.5%). The rest of students enrolled in the school are U.S. born. The students here were highly successful and the successful
students here were the popular students. This is in contrast to the other studies included in this literature review. The study indicated that the academic oriented school climate shared at the study school contributed to the atmosphere of popularity of high-achieving students. The study concluded that the Acting White Phenomenon was not likely to be found among African immigrants because of the larger outgoing social ties with networks of high-achieving Somali working class students. The Somali African Americans reflected their opportunities to express a healthy achievement-ideology.

The Acting White Phenomenon was shown to prevent many African American students from performing well in school (Brinson, 2002). These African American students did not want to be known as Acting White (Brinson, 2002). Ogbu (2003) theorized that lower caste oppositional group formation, due to being kept in a lower-caste position by society, had much to do with African American students not wanting to be accused of Acting White. These students mistakenly believe that White students are naturally smarter than African American students. They believe that White students naturally speak English better and that White students naturally have higher IQ’s than African American students thus in many ways the White students are perceived as being better than the African American students (Ogbu, 2003).

Some researchers believe that the Acting White Phenomenon is imposed upon African American students within White dominated institutions in which African American culture is marginalized and stigmatized, and alienating performance based on race is the price of academic success (Fordham, 1988). Fordham (1988) stated that for some African American students being academically successful is akin to sitting in the front of the bus. In other words, being academically successful may be a risky venture for these students. For some Whites, academic success for African American students is a racially subversive act more unsettling than resentful
capitulation to their anticipation of failure of those African American students (Fordham, 1988).

**Socioeconomic Status**

Some students need more than others in order to realize high levels of academic success. Traditional education systems have failed to address the holistic education and needs of African American Students in order to achieve. Academic success for many African American students is more than just wanting to get good grades. Environmental factors impact many urban African American students to the point where academic success if difficult at best. News and Views (1997) listed several environmental factors impacting African American students’ ability to succeed academically. These environmental factors included trying to get to school from neighborhoods in which many of them lived and not having adequate clothes to wear. News and Views (1997) reported that other environmental factors affecting academic achievement were failure to have basic needs like food to eat, adequate housing, and lower socio-economic levels, all impediments to learning for many African American students. Wilson (2003) cited lack of direct involvement in their child’s education as another environmental reason for low academic attainment.

**Environmental Impact**

Several studies by Cook and Ludwig (1997), Pluvious (2006), and Neal-Barnett et al., (2009) discuss the Acting White Phenomenon from the perspective of rejection of cultural identity. The Cook and Ludwig (1997) study points to the mode of success offered by most American schools. According to this article, African American students dis-identify with achievement produced by what they call the assimilationist offer made by schools to African American students. Cook and Ludwig (1997) reported that schools tell African American students they can be valued and rewarded in school, but you must first master the culture and
ways of the America mainstream, which is not acceptable. Neal-Barnett et al. (2009) quantitative study went further and identified themes by African American students, parents, and White adolescents that would define "Acting White." This study reported that valuing academic success plays a less important role than social activities in receiving and then reacting to the accusation of "Acting White." The potential loss of cultural identity by "Acting White" causes the African American students to rebel against anything that would define them as "Acting White."

Pluvious (2006) used the "Acting White" Experiences Scale to gather data and concluded that, although many African American students can laugh off and forget the accusation immediately, many others cannot. According to Pluvious (2006) these accusations, although laughed off, have psychological effects that can follow a student into higher education. This effect comes at a time when a student is supposed to be solidifying his or her identity. The study concluded that although some African American students spend some time in the "Acting White" trap, the social, peer, speech, and academic climate of higher education can cause this time to be short and the African American students go on to be successful.

An editor executive article appeared in the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education which addressed the racial identity theme. This article discusses the "Acting White Phenomenon" from the perspective of many Whites who give no credence to the effect of the "Acting White Phenomenon." This study cited work by Fordham, Ogbu, Cook, and Ludwig. However, the article views their works as doing a good job of destroying young African American students. The narrative study concluded that White kids who study hard and do well are nerds or dweebs, and African American Students who do the same are ‘"Acting White’’. This study also concludes that some African American students unable to overcome the effects of the "Acting White" Phenomenon adopt the tactic of harassing fellow African American students who take their studies seriously,
because to them any attempt to acquire knowledge is *Acting White*.

Being accused of *Acting White* challenges one’s racial identity and may contribute to psychological effects that can follow a student into higher education. This idea appeared several times in other studies of the *Acting White Phenomenon*. Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings, and Stadulis (2012) sought to evaluate the relationship between the *Acting White* accusation, racial identity, and anxiety. The study found that 96 percent of the adolescents in this study had experienced the *Acting White Phenomenon*. The effect of the accusation was measured in terms of stress level and what was defined as bother. Forty percent of the participants reported they were not bothered by the accusation. The researchers believed this may be underreported. The study suggested the accusation can be detrimental to many African American youth. The study concluded that although the specific details of bother are unclear, anxiety is a clearly associated with bother.

Malik Henfield (2012) conducted another study addressing psychological issues and the *Acting White Phenomenon*. This study focused on the factors that help and hinder the academic achievement of African American students. The cumulative effect of being African American and male in educational settings and how these risks are associated with mental health and academic performance were studied. The *Acting White Phenomenon* is a stressful act and other research has shown it to produce anxiety and elevated stress levels. Henfield (2012) used the data collected to formulate what he labeled the 10 non-negotiables in dealing with African American male students. He suggests that these non-negotiables can be used to create a counseling program to benefit African American students handle the stress associated with the *Acting White Phenomenon* and increase their level of academic achievement.
Summary of Chapter II

Most of the data from the studies reviewed have been collected in large metropolitan, urban, or suburban areas. The Acting White Phenomenon presents many issues and perspectives worthy of consideration in the quest to improve African American students’ levels of academic success. The history of the Acting White Phenomenon is shown to predate our modern research studies on the subject, having been mentioned in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, in 1852. The Doll Studies of Dr. Brown and others demonstrated some of the perceptions African American children harbor about who they are and what it means to be Black in America. These studies give clear evidence as to the impact of a negative self-image and how important it is to put forth the processes and procedures necessary to improve the image and achievement levels of these African American children. The difficulty in establishing a positive self-image was demonstrated in these doll studies. These issues and perspectives brought forth in the doll studies helped researchers understand what these children needed to gain a better, more positive self-identity. The Acting White Phenomenon has been called a curious, and humiliating insult to African Americans. This slur has been shown to manifest itself in African American children from the early formative years well into college, sometimes with dire effects and the implications are far-reaching. For African American children, whether native born or not, the Acting White Phenomenon and the fear of Acting White has been shown to impact their lives in socioeconomic issues, K-12 educational settings, institutions of higher learning, and psychological issues. The challenge is to find ways to counter the negative effects of the Acting White Phenomenon to improve the level of academic achievement and the lives and self-image of these African American children.
This study gathers data on African American students of three distinct rural high schools in Mississippi. This data and subsequent analysis will provide insight into the existence of the *Acting White Phenomenon* in rural high schools in Mississippi, its effects on those students who fall victim to the accusation, and provide a basis for developing techniques, programs, and methods to address the negative effects of the *Acting White Phenomenon* on the students in this study. Addressing the negative effects of the *Acting White Phenomenon* will lead to an improved self-image for African American students in those schools. The improved self-image will translate into positive gains for the students in both academic and social outcomes.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter III provides a description of the methods and procedures used to conduct the study, *The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi*. The research questions guiding this study and the hypotheses generated are listed and discussed in Chapter III. The procedures for data collection and the sample instrument, the AWEQ, are discussed in this section. Using the AWEQ, the study extracts quantitative data to address the research question, “In what ways, if any, does the *Acting White Phenomenon* exist among African American senior students in rural high schools in Mississippi. The study sample is discussed in Chapter III. To fulfill the qualitative aspect of this study and to address the second research question, “How do African American senior students experience the *Acting White Phenomenon* in rural high schools in Mississippi?”, the study uses three focus groups to explore the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of African American high school students composing the study sample. Included in Chapter III is a discussion of the data analysis for the qualitative data. Chapter III presents the data collected and the statistical analysis of the quantitative data used in this study, *The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi*.
Research Questions

The primary questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. In what ways, if any, does the Acting White Phenomenon exist among African American senior students in rural high schools in Mississippi?

2. How do African American senior students experience the Acting White Phenomenon in rural schools in Mississippi?

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no relationship between in the number of African American students who said yes and those who said no to being accused of Acting White by school.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ item score by whether students said yes or no.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ item score by School.

Hypothesis Four: For School One there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ item score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White.

Hypothesis Five: For School Two there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ item score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White.

Hypothesis Six: For School Three there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ item score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White.

Hypothesis Seven: There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ bother score by whether students said yes or no.
Hypothesis Eight: There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ bother score by School.

Hypothesis Nine: For School One there is no significant difference in mean a AWEQ bother score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of acting White.

Hypothesis Ten: For School Two there is no significant difference in mean a AWEQ bother score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White.

Hypothesis Eleven: For School Three there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ bother score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White.

Hypothesis Twelve: For those African American students who said yes to being accused of Acting White, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ item score by school.

Hypothesis Thirteen: For those African American students who said yes to being accused of Acting White, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ bother score by school.

Hypothesis Fourteen: For those African American students who said no to being accused of Acting White, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ item score by school.

Hypothesis Fifteen – A: For those African American students who said no to being accused of Acting White, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ bother score by school.

Research Design

This study, The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi, is designed as a qualitative-quantitative exploratory mixed-methods study. For the quantitative portion, a questionnaire using specific discussion questions is the method used to collect data from a
sample that has been selected to represent a population to which the findings of the data analysis can be generalized (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). According to Creswell (2012), a mixed methods design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and “mixing” both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study to understand a research problem. The mixed methods study is also conducted when one type of research, qualitative or quantitative, is not enough to address a research problem or answer the research questions (Creswell, 2012).

Questionnaires are printed forms that ask the same questions of all individuals in the sample and for which respondents record their answers in verbal form (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Both qualitative and quantitative research make use of questionnaires for data collection. For the purpose of this study the Acting White Experiences Questionnaire (AWEQ) will be used. The qualitative part of this study endeavors to seek out the social experiences of the participants which may or may not lead to them being accused of Acting White.

For the qualitative portion, small focus groups were used to gather more in-depth qualitative data. Seven open-ended questions were used in the focus group sessions. All participants being administered the AWEQ were told about the focus groups and allowed to volunteer for the focus groups. According to Gay, Airasian, & Mills (2006), this combination provides data that converges toward a better-informed interpretation of what is actually happening in a given situation. This type study provides a more comprehensive account than qualitative or quantitative alone.

Population, Sample, and Participants in the Research Study

The target population for this research study consists of African American high school seniors in three rural high schools in Mississippi. The three rural high schools chosen have
African American student populations above eighty percent (80%). To further narrow the focus, the researcher decided that only African American students who were seniors would be studied. The three schools chosen are located in different geographic areas of the state of Mississippi. This was planned to ascertain whether geographic location may be a factor affecting the existence of the *Acting White Phenomenon*. Following in Table 2 are the chosen individual study schools and their demographic characteristics:

Table 2: Student Population and Sample Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Geographic Area</th>
<th>School Rating</th>
<th>Total Student Population</th>
<th>Total African American Students</th>
<th>African American Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School One</td>
<td>West Central MS</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Two</td>
<td>NE Mississippi</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Three</td>
<td>North Delta MS</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants are conveniently selected from the population given their racial status and willingness to participate in the study. The sample was purposely selected because of their grade level and the longer opportunity to have been exposed to the *Acting White Phenomenon* if it is present in the sample schools. Participants have been queried on site and questionnaires handed out by the researcher to each participating student then collected by the researcher.

The total aggregate population of the African American seniors in the three selected schools is 315. The targeted number of participants in this study was 215 and the number of confirmed participants to complete the questionnaire was 154. The Survey System, established by Creative Research Systems, was used for the power analysis to determine the sample size. The Survey System was chosen as the best survey software of 2014 by the American Marketing Association, American Association for Public Opinion Research, Advanced Research Services,
and Journal of the Society for Human Resource Management. For the qualitative portion data collection, the total number of participants in the focus groups was 48.

**Protocol and Instrument in the Research Study**

For the quantitative portion of the study, the instrument administered is the *Acting White* Experiences Questionnaire© (AWEQ) (Appendix B). The AWEQ was developed, validated, and copyrighted by Dr. Angela Neal-Barnett, Professor of Psychology at Kent State University and Director of the Program for Research on Anxiety Disorders among African Americans (PRADAA) (Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings, & Stadulis, 2012). The AWEQ is used as a measure of the indirect accusation of *Acting White*. The AWEQ has 39 items that assess the extent to which different aspects of the *Acting White Phenomenon* are experienced by adolescent youth and the extent to which the adolescents are bothered by each aspect of the accusation. The AWEQ© was pilot tested multiple times before initial administration. It has been validated through several research studies conducted in different school districts in the Northeastern corridor and a Midwestern state. Several of the studies were funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation and a Faculty Fellowship award from the Kent State University Applied Psychology Center (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009, p. 102).

To answer the AWEQ questions, the participants are asked to respond to each item using a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from, “never” (1) to “almost all of the time” (6) in relation to the frequency of experiencing an accusation aspect. Using the AWEQ adolescent participants also report the extent to which they are bothered by aspects of the accusation using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from, “didn’t bother me at all” (1) to bothered me a “whole lot” (5).
For the qualitative portion of the study, thirty-minute focus group sessions are used to gather data from the adolescent participants on whether the *Acting White Phenomenon* exists. Participants are asked a series of questions including whether they have ever heard the term *Acting 'White*, what the term means, and if they have ever been accused of *Acting White*. Participants are also asked for examples of behavior, beliefs, attitudes, and incidents they believe lead to the *Acting White* accusation to be used (Appendix A). The questions the adolescent participants are asked are open-ended questions. The advantage of the open ended questions is that they allow participants to answer in their own words. Open ended questions allow for richer data with more depth.

**Researcher as Instrument**

According to Patton (2002), within qualitative research, the researcher is considered the instrument. Patton (2002) says that the credibility of qualitative methods, therefore, hinges, to a great extent, on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork – as well as things going on in a person’s life that might prove a distraction. Independence and neutrality are serious issues, because neutrality is not an easily attainable stance. Qualitative inquiry depends on, uses, and enhances the researcher’s direct experiences in the world and insights about those experiences (Patton, 2002). This includes learning through empathy (Patton, 2002). In other words, the researcher should have an understanding of what their participants are feeling or mean.

The researcher, related well to the participants in this study. Being an African American male and, for most of his academic life, he was accused of *Acting White* for various reasons. He was, therefore, able to empathize with the participants in this study. His story, partially recounted
earlier in Chapter I, was similar to many of the participants in this study. He played in the band instead of playing football or basketball. He played chess instead of checkers. He listened to many types of music and not just Rhythm and Blues and pop music. He tried hard to get A’s in all his classes. He empathized for the students around him who did not get good grades, and picked on him or made fun of him. He studied anyway. He even transferred high schools when permitted to so that he could take courses not offered at the all African American school, and if he were to be taunted it would be by White students, not other students of his own race. These experiences caused the researcher to be aware of personal biases during the collection of data for this study:

1. Participants responding that they adjust their academic performance from fear of being accused of Acting White being judged harshly.
2. Participants saying that they were proud that other African American students accused them of Acting White.
3. African American students admitting that they accused other African American students of acting White.
4. African American students thinking that accusing other students was fun or funny.
5. Using their good grades to make other African American students feel inferior.
6. Lack of empathy for participants’ fellow students who succumb to the Acting White Phenomenon.

Procedures for Data Collection

Before data collection for this study began, approval was received from my dissertation committee, and from The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board. Approval was
secured from Dr. Angela Neals-Barnett, developer of the AWEQ, to use the copyrighted instrument in my research study. I talked by phone and visited with the superintendent of each school district to obtain permission to conduct research in their district. I met with the administrators of the study schools to obtain the best and most efficient manner of administering the instruments.

The instrument was administered to all participants at each of the study schools by this researcher in the presence of one or more of the schools’ representatives. Following the collection of all questionnaires, the participants selected for the focus groups met with the researcher in a location selected by the building principal. The sessions were recorded based upon a set of designated research questions.

The quantitative data was analyzed using several statistical methods listed below in order to determine whether or not there is a statistically significant difference for the variables addressed in each research hypothesis. Qualitative data results are presented in a data analysis of each qualitative question discussed in the focus groups. The responses from the focus groups were transcribed then reviewed by three different individuals to be coded into various categories according to words used by the students, common actions, activities, concepts, processes, opinions, etc. These categories were reduced in number by combining responses with like relevance. The resulting categories will become the themes addressed in the data findings.

Data Analyses

It is important to understand why the AWEQ items are designed as they are. Each item on the AWEQ has three contexts included. The first context asks whether the adolescent has had the listed experience during their lifetime. The second context asks whether the experience
occurred in the past year and the third context will ask how bothered the adolescent was by the experience. The life alternatives and year were chosen to ascertain the proximity of the accusation. The bother context reflects psychological distress as a result of being accused of acting White.

The study participants are asked to respond to each of the 39 items on the AWEQ using a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from “never” (1) to “almost all of the time” (6) in relation to the frequency of experiencing the accusation. Two scores are computed from the participants’ answers to the AWEQ. The Item Experience score reflects the total number of items a participant experienced. For example, if a participant says they were accused of listening to White music, dressing preppy, and talking proper, their Item Experience score will be three (3). This score reflects the different variations the individual participant has experienced the Acting White Phenomenon. The second score computed will be the Frequency score. The Frequency score reflects the mean level of frequency a participant endorses. For example, if a participant responded to being accused of dressing preppy ‘most of the time’ (score 5), listening to White music ‘once in a while’ (score 2), and talking proper ‘once in a while’ (score 2), their Frequency score will be 3. Each item is scored 1 through 6. The total score divided by the frequency of the accusation yields reveals the average frequency the participants are accused of acting White.

When using the AWEQ, it is suggested that the year and life alternatives are helpful in determining the proximity of the accusation for further reference and maybe future analyses. One of the contexts for items on the AWEQ addresses how much the Acting White Phenomenon bothered African American adolescents when they fell victim to the accusation. The copyrighted instrument refers to this context simply as the bother context. The bother context reflects the psychological distress experienced from the accusation.
For the qualitative data analysis, three separate individuals reviewed the focus group recordings. Each individual coded all information from the three focus group recordings. After listening to the recordings and reading the reports, I developed a listing of all the different coded ideas presented by the focus group participants. Where multiple participants gave the same response, that response was listed only once. I spoke with each of the individuals who listened to the focus group recordings and compiled the data. These individuals compared their written data with that of the other two in order to determine if they missed anything or if the others had added information based on other factors, (i.e. determining meaning to a student’s unfinished sentence).

Two-Way Chi Square

The chi – square test was used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the expected frequencies of an issue and the observed frequencies in one or more categories. The analysis also told if the number of individuals that fall into each category differ significantly from the number one would expect. Chi-square addressed whether the difference between the expected frequency and the observed frequency was a real difference or due to sampling error. Chi square was also used to test correlations between categorical variables. For purposes of this study, the two-way chi square analysis was used to determine if there is a relationship between the number of African American students who said yes to being accused of Acting White and the number of African American students answering no to being accused of Acting White, as stated in hypothesis one of this study.

One – Way ANOVA

Some hypotheses in this study required comparing data from all three study sites. For these analyses a one-way ANOVA, will be used. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to determine whether there are any significant difference between the means of three or
more independent groups. In this case the three rural high schools used in this study. However, in these analyses only one independent variable is considered. For hypothesis two and its sub hypotheses, the mean AWEQ score is the dependent variable and either the school or how the students answering yes or no to having been accused of *Acting White* will be the independent variable. For Hypotheses Three and Four the school being compared is the independent variable and the mean AWEQ score is the dependent variable.

**Independent t-Test**

Several hypotheses required the use of the Independent t-test for analysis. An independent t-test was used to test the null hypothesis for statistical differences between the means of two groups.

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups, originally called “focus interviews” or “group depth interviews” are useful in understanding how or why people hold certain beliefs about a topic or program of interest. Focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic (Gibbs, 1997). Focus groups will be used in this study to gather data for the qualitative section of this mixed method study. Gibbs (1997) reported the benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people’s shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation. Gibbs (1997) stated that focus groups are under-used in social research, although they have a long history in marked research. Gibbs (1997) also reported that focus groups enable the researcher to gain larger amounts of information in a shorter period of time.

For this study, one focus group was formed at each of the study schools. Wanting as many varied opinions as possible, each focus group consisted of sixteen (16) participants, each
being composed of equal numbers of males and females. These participants were chosen at will from all the participants responding to the AWEQ©. The purpose of the focus group was explained to the entire sample after they completed their AWEQ©. The members of the focus group were chosen from all the participants expressing a desire to be a part of the focus group.

**Summary of Chapter III**

Chapter Three sets forth and defines the components that are essential to conduct this research study. Information about the Qual – Quan design is framed and demonstrates the benefits of this type of research study design. Chapter Three discusses the type and location of schools from which the study sample is selected and the participants who comprise the sample. The schools with varying socioeconomic levels as well as academic levels of achievement as determined by the State of Mississippi Department of Education, have been identified. A description of the sample instrument, the AWEQ, a copyrighted data collection instrument used to gather data on the *Acting White Phenomenon* is discussed at length. Specific method of data collection and analysis is presented so one understands that the study is seeking to answer the research questions and address the hypotheses given in the study. Thus, all the components discussed in Chapter Three are essential for the study to collect meaningful data to address this mixed method study, *The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural High Schools in Mississippi.*
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In Chapter IV, the qualitative and quantitative research findings of an investigation into the Acting White Phenomenon conducted in three rural high schools in Mississippi are reported. The primary questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. In what ways, if any, does the Acting White Phenomenon exist among African American senior students in rural high schools in Mississippi?

2. How do African American senior students experience the Acting White Phenomenon in rural schools in Mississippi?

In order to collect the data needed to answer the two research questions, a total of 154 African American high school seniors responded to 39 questions on an evaluative instrument known as the AWEQ®. Additionally, a total of 48 African American high school students, from rural high schools in Mississippi, responded to seven (7) questions in a focus group. The focus group was used to ascertain more in-depth information about the qualitative experiences. The mixed-method approach provided the means to be able to ascertain comprehensive data about the holistic experiences of African American high school senior students in rural schools in Mississippi.

Highlights from Quantitative Perspective

The AWEQ® instrument is designed to collect data addressing different contexts involving the Acting White Phenomenon. The first context is whether the adolescent encountered
the listed experience during their lifetime. The second context is how bothered the adolescent was by the experience of the Acting White Phenomenon. Odd numbered questions were answered using a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from “never” (1) to “almost all the time” (6) in relation to the frequency with which the African American adolescents experience the accusation aspect. Even numbered questions were answered using a five-point Likert type scale ranging from “didn’t bother me at all” (1) to “bothered me a whole lot” (5). As stated earlier in this study, these questions assess the extent to which different aspects of the Acting White Phenomenon are experienced by adolescent African-American youth. These questions are the odd number questions on the AWEQ and referred to in this section as the item variable. The AWEQ also assesses the extent to which the adolescents responding are bothered by each aspect of the accusation. These questions are the even number questions on the AWEQ and referred to in this section as the bother variable.

More specifically, in reviewing the existing literature on the Acting White Phenomenon, the researcher speculated as to what the outcomes of the data collected with the AWEQ would be and how the measured variables would relate to each other. Hence, fifteen hypotheses were developed. The test statistic for hypotheses one, a chi-square analysis, was run and the results reported below. However, when preparing to run the test statistic for the remaining hypotheses, no one score existed to summarize all 39 items. In order to be able to run the statistical analysis, separate scores needed to be obtained. An item score and a bother score needed to be computed separately and analyses run separately. This determination led to the development of 15 separate hypotheses.
Highlights from Qualitative Perspective

The qualitative aspect of this study relied upon extracting responses from the participants that might give some deeper insight into their exposure to the *Acting White Phenomenon*. The researcher explored the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon, the meaning of the phenomenon, the reasons for the phenomenon, their opinions about the phenomenon, and what they perceived as motivations for the continued existence of the *Acting White Phenomenon*. The categories of response data from the three individuals who listened to the focus group recordings were reviewed by four different individuals who reduced the amount of data by grouping multiple categories with similar expressions or ideas. Once they finished, the researcher reviewed their listings and compared their groupings with his own groupings of data. These groupings were used to develop the data into themes for this study. After coding the data, themes were generated as a framework for understanding more deeply, experiences of the African American students and the *Acting White Phenomenon*. The study sought additional insight into the *Acting White Phenomenon* and the impact on the lives of African American students in rural Mississippi high schools.

Quantitative Data Findings on the Acting White Phenomenon

Item Score

In order to get a true picture of what the data is telling us, hypotheses two through six refer only to the item scores collected on AWEQ. The 19 odd-numbered questions, representing the different aspects of the *Acting White Phenomenon* experienced by adolescent African-American youth, are the items being assessed and are summed to give us the item score used to address hypotheses two through six.
Bother Score

The second context in which data was collected is how bothered the adolescent was by the experience. The Bother Score is a summation of the 19 even numbered items on the AWEQ. The bother score is used to address hypotheses seven through eleven.

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis One states, there is no significant relationship between whether African American students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White and school. Table 3 shows the number of respondents answering yes and no by school to having been accused of Acting White.

Table 3. Students Accused of Acting White by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A review of Table 3 reveals that 152 students answered all 39 questions on the AWEQ. Of the 152 participants answering either yes or no to having been accused of Acting White, 64 respondents (42%), answered yes that they had been accused of Acting White and 88 participants (58%), responded no that they had never been accused of Acting White. Using a two-way Chi square test, the result was $X^2 (2, N = 152) = 1.773, p = .412$. Since the $X^2$ p-value of .412 is greater than $p = .05$, there is not sufficient evidence of a relationship, by the school attended, between the African American students answering yes and those answering no to being accused of Acting White. Essentially, being accused of Acting White affected the students at all schools.
the same with no frequencies greater than what would be expected by chance. Therefore, we must fail to reject Hypothesis One.

**Hypothesis Two**

Hypothesis Two states, there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Item Score by whether students said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. In order to test this hypothesis and independent t-test was used. $t (145) = 5.760$, $p=.000$ (equal variances assumed); $t (98.08) = 5.405$, $p = .000$ (equal variances not assumed). Significant differences in AWEQ Item Score means were found for students in all schools who answered either yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. Levene’s Test, $(F (145, 98.08) = 5.685$, $p = .018$). Even though the variances were not equal, the ratio of largest to smallest group (i.e., 86/61) was <1.5 (Stevens, 1996), suggests that even though variances for the two groups are not equal, you have, therefore, not violated the assumption of equal variances since the ratio of group sizes does not exceed 1.5.

**Hypothesis Three**

Hypothesis Three states, there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Item Score by School. The one-way ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis. $(F (2,144) = .991$, $p = .374$). The results were not significant. There is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Item Score by school for students answering yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. Levene’s Test of homogeneity of variances was not significant $(F (2, 144) = 2.720$, $p = .069$).

**Hypothesis Four**

Hypothesis Four states, for School One, there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Item Score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. $t (58) = 3.069$, $p=.003$ (equal variances assumed); $t (50.222) = 3.015$, $p = .004$ (equal variances not assumed). A significant difference between means was found $(M_1 = 43.68; M_2 = 32.75)$ for
students at School One for the comparison of mean AWEQ Item Scores for students saying yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. Levene’s Test (F (58, 50.222) = .686, p = .411) was not significant.

**Hypothesis Five**

Hypothesis Five states, for School Two there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Item Scores for students who said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*.  

\[ t (49) = 2.782, p = .008 \] (equal variances assumed);  
\[ t (31.071) = 2.667, p = .012 \] (equal variances not assumed).

There was a significant difference found in the comparison of means between AWEQ Item Scores for students saying yes or no at School Two with regard to being accused of *Acting White*. Levene’s Test of equality of variances was not significant, (F (49, 31.071) = .489, p = .488).

**Hypothesis Six**

Hypothesis Six states, for School Three, there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Item Score for students who said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*.  

\[ t (34) = 4.065 \] (equal variances assumed),  
\[ p = .000 \];  
\[ t (17.250) = 3.587, p = .002 \] (equal variances not assumed).

There was a significant difference in the means for AWEQ Item Scores at School Three for students saying yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. Levene’s Test for the equality of variances was found to be significant (F (34, 17.250) = 11.459, p = .002). However, the ratio of largest to smallest groups (21/15) = 1.4, (Stevens, 1996) indicating that the group variances do not invalidate the t-test results due to differences in variances or group size.

**Hypothesis Seven**

Hypothesis Seven states, there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Bother Score by whether students said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*.  

\[ t (140) = 2.986, p = .003 \] (equal variances assumed);  
\[ t (76.991) = 2.683, p = .009 \] (equal variances not assumed). There is a
significant difference in the mean AWEQ Bother Score for all three schools for students answering yes or no to being accused of Acting White. Levene’s Test of equality of variances, \( F(140, 76.991) = 12.765, p = .000 \). However, the ratio of the largest/smallest groups (83/59) was 1.41. This means that the differences in variances and group size do not invalidate the t-test results (Stevens, 1996).

**Hypothesis Eight**

Hypothesis Eight states, there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Bother Score by School. \( F(2, 139) = 2.130, p = .123 \). There was no significant difference in means for AWEQ Bother Scores for students at any school regarding being upset or bothered by other students whether or not they were accused of Acting White. Levene’s Test of equality of variances was significant, \( F(2,139) = 4.406, p = .014 \). However, the ratio of largest/smallest group (60/34) was 1.76. Since the comparison of means was not significant, the result of Levene’s Test does not change the conclusion that the schools were not significantly different from each other.

**Hypothesis Nine**

Hypothesis Nine states, for School One there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Bother Scores by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White. \( t(58) = 1.347, p = .183 \) (equal variances assumed); \( t(36.168) = 1.287, p = .206 \) (Equal variances not assumed). There is no significant difference in mean Bother Scores for students answering yes or no to being accused of Acting White at School One. Levenes Test for equality of variances was significant \( F(58, 36.168) = 5.373, p = .024 \). However, the ratio of largest/smallest group (32/28) = 1.14, indicated that the difference in variances did not invalidate the t-test results, (Stevens, 1996).
Hypothesis Ten

Hypothesis Ten states, for School Two there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Bother Scores by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White. \( t (46) = 2.322, p = .025 \) (equal variances assumed); \( t (24.005) = 2.070, p = .049 \). There is a significant difference in mean Bother Score for students saying yes or no to being accused of Acting White at School Two. Levene’s Test of equality of variances was found to be significant \( (F (46, 24.005) = 5.188, p= .027) \) indicating that the students were in different groups with significantly different variances. Additionally, the ratio of largest/smallest groups \( (31/17) = 1.82 \), indicated that the t-test of means, though significant, cannot be trusted for School Two.

Hypothesis Eleven

Hypothesis Eleven states, for School Three there is no significant difference in mean AWEQ Bother Score by whether the students said yes or no to being accused of Acting White. \( t (32) = 2.821, p = .008 \) (equal variances assumed); \( t (14.079) = 2.394, p = .031 \) (equal variances not assumed). There is a significant difference in mean Bother Score for students saying yes or no to being accused of Acting White at School Three. Levene’s Test of equality of variances was found to be significant \( (F (32, 14.079) = 10.303, p = .003) \). This means that the students answering no were a different group of student from those answering yes to whether they were bothered by having been accused of Acting White. The ratio of groups largest/smallest \( (20/14) \) was 1.4, indicating that even though Levene’s Test showed the groups variances to be significantly different, the group ratio results do not invalidate the t-test results (Stevens, 1996). However, the t-test results cannot be trusted since the variances were significantly different.
Hypothesis Twelve

Hypothesis Twelve states, for those African American students who said yes to being accused of *Acting White*, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ Item Score by school. The comparison of means AWEQ Item Scores for students answering yes to being accused of *Acting White* was found to be not significant ($F (2, 58) = .557, p = .576$). Levene’s test of equality of variances indicated that the variances were not significantly different for AWEQ Item Scores ($F (2, 58) = 2.578, p = .085$).

Hypothesis Thirteen

Hypothesis Thirteen states, for those African American students who said yes to being accused of *Acting White*, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ Bother Score by school. The comparison of mean AWEQ Bother Scores by school was found to be not significant for students answering yes to being accused of *Acting White* ($F (2, 56) = .419, p = .660$). Levene’s Test for the equality of variances was found to be not significant for variances between the group scores ($F (2, 56) = 2.059, p = .137$).

Hypothesis Fourteen

Hypothesis Fourteen states, for those African American students who said no to being accused of *Acting White*, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ Item Score by school. The results for the comparison of mean AWEQ Item Scores by school was found to be not significant ($F (2, 83) = 2.278, p = .109$). Levene’s Test for equality of variances was found to be significantly different for variances in the three groupings of scores ($F (2, 83) = 4.971, p = .009$). This indicates the comparison of means result for students who said no to being accused of *Acting White* cannot be trusted.
Hypothesis Fifteen

Hypothesis Fifteen states, for those African American students who said no to being accused of *Acting White*, there is no significant difference in the mean AWEQ Bother Score by school. A comparison of mean AWEQ Bother Scores for students saying no to being accused of *Acting White* was found to be not significant (F (2, 80) = 2.993, p = 0.56). Levene’s Test for equality of variances was found to be significant (F (2, 80) = 6.951, p = .002). This result indicates that the comparison of means is not to be trusted. Moreover, the ratio of largest/smallest group (32/20) = 1.6 exceeds the guidelines for accepting the results of the ANOVA test of means (the results cannot be trusted).

Focus groups were used formed at each of the three schools used in this study. Each focus group consisted of sixteen (16) seniors who had completed the AWEQ. The researcher led the discussion in each focus group at each school. Leading the discussions allowed him to form ideas about what some threads might be for the direction the data analysis should take. Each discussion was recorded so that no responses would be missed. The researcher did not listen to the recordings until all three focus groups had been recorded. During the time between the first and the third focus group he referred to his notes on each focus group and the thoughts he had during and immediately following each focus group. Before the transcriptionist finished her notes, the researcher had eight threads that were fairly broad and could be developed in several ways. There was a mental dilemma as to whether he wanted to use broad categories covering all seven of the discussion questions or if it would be best to develop threads and themes for each discussion question. In the end it was decided to do each discussion question separately.

Once the transcriptionist completed transcribing the recordings the pages were read. That information was related to the broad categories already created by the researcher. Five people
committed to reviewing the transcribed information, but because of the lateness of the transcription two of the people could no longer participate. The three ladies were charged with reading the material and grouping all responses into categories with like characteristics. For example, one student might talk about driving a specific car because he could not afford a more expensive model. Someone else might talk about wearing a certain athletic shoe because he did not have enough money to purchase the pair he really wanted. These could be considered as a thread about cars and another thread about athletic shoes, or they could both be lumped under one heading of economics of high school seniors. These three ladies narrowed the responses by question because it was easiest for them. They worked independently in three different cities, neither knew the other. These ladies narrowed forty-eight responses to each question into fewer categories. Reviewer one condensed her responses to each questions into 13, 12, 3, 13, 12, 14, and 8 categories respectively. Reviewer two had 14, 12, 4, 12, 13, 13, and 10 categories. Reviewer three had 16, 15, 4, 14, 16, 16, and 11 categories. Reviewer three had difficulty finding like ideas in the responses. As one of the judges, I found five (5) categories for all questions except question three: how did it make you feel when you were accused of Acting White? I produced three (3) categories compared to four (4) by the three judges. Our reviews were consistent?

Qualitative Data Findings on the Acting White Phenomenon

Focus Group Question #1: Hearing Acting White

The first question for the focus group is as follows: Have you ever heard the term Acting White? If you have heard of Acting White when did you hear it and where were you when you heard it? Forty-eight (48) members of the three (3) focus groups gave 19 different responses to
this question, with “no” being one of the responses. The responses revealed that 87.5% of the participants had heard the term *Acting White*. In response, with regards to the “where” part of this question, the focus group participants’ responses revealed that not only had they heard the term *Acting White*, they had heard it throughout different times in their lives in different places.

In School as a Public Context

Most of the participants revealed that they had heard the term *Acting White* while at school, in different settings. The findings reveal that overwhelmingly most participants had heard the term *Acting White*, and they had heard the term when the accusation was made in the hallways at school. The hallways, however, were not the only places at school where the accusation was made. Some participants from each focus group said they had heard the *Acting White* accusation being made in the high school cafeteria during lunch, but not during the morning hours of breakfast. At all three study schools, participants in the focus groups agreed that hearing the term *Acting White* was a common thing. At School One, February 9, 2015, one male said, “You know how it is when Black folks get together. It just happens. Most of the time it don’t mean nothing”.

At School Two, one student responded. “I hear *Acting White* everywhere in school and often,” (Female Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). Her response prompted others to agree that they heard the term *Acting White* often at their school. Other participants said they heard the term everywhere and every day in their school. Several participants said they had heard the term at school the previous year, but had not heard it this current academic year. Some participants said they had heard the term used on social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram).
Out of School as a Private Context

When students are away from the school they are on their own clock. This is their own individual, private time. Whether they are in the mall, at the movie, or at the market with family, their time is theirs to do with as they will. Even in these places they are not able to avoid the Acting White Phenomenon. The accusation may or may not be hurled at them, but it invades their private space. The findings reveal that the focus group participants had heard the term Acting White out of school as well as in school. Outside of school the participants reported they had heard of Acting White at home, at work, on social media, and in nature. When asked what they meant by nature, they responded, “You know when you just out with your friends walking around, playing ball, or just hanging out” (Male Student, School One, February 9, 2016). One young lady (School One, February 9, 2015) said she had only heard the term Acting White on television. Another individual said she had only heard it at work. The student whom she heard say it did not attend her school. One young man (School Two, March 16, 2015) said he had heard it not only at his current school, but at his old school he attended in Chicago, Illinois, before they moved to Mississippi.

The statements in the focus group revealed that participants interpreted the “when” in various ways. Some defined “when” as a time event and responded in the use of “yesterday”, “often”, “last year”, and “every day”. Others defined “when” as an event, and responded in the use of “while eating”, “while I was talking”, and “while I was changing classes”. What the findings reveal is that the majority of African American students in the study high schools had heard the term Acting White before participating in this study, and hearing it was not relegated to the hallways of the schools or the activities of the schools, whether on or off the school campus.
Focus Group Question #2: Accused of Acting White

The second focus group question is as follows: Have you ever been accused of Acting White? Conversations and discussions within the focus groups revealed the 55% of the focus group participants had been accused of Acting White. Similar to focus group question #1, the “where” and “when” of this question revealed various responses. This aspect of the study sought findings that would indicate whether the participants in the focus groups had themselves been accused of Acting White.

In School as a Public Context

The Acting White Phenomenon appears to be an ever present entity in the very public venue called the school. Here students have no choice as to whether or not to come. The school is a public enterprise and the law requires the students to be here, usually five days each week. Some students dread coming to having to be in school because they have been a victim of the Acting White Phenomenon or have watched others fall prey to the Acting White accusation. All of the focus group participants who had been accused of Acting White (55%), said they were at school when the Acting White accusation was made. What this finding demonstrates is that the opportunity presents itself more readily in the school setting. Students in all three focus groups agreed that many times they were accused because they were in a place where there were many other students who did not do the things they did or share their values, at school. Being accused of Acting White was primarily because of the way they talked and there were plenty of other students around to hear them talk. Their friends and some other people accuse them of Acting White saying that “they talk proper and needed to stop Acting White” (Female & Male, March 20, 2015).
At Work as a Public-Private Context

Several of the participants had jobs after school and on the weekend. One would think that there would be some protection in the public places where they work, but such is not the case. These students have their private space invaded in the very public places where they work, by students from school launching the Acting White accusation at them. Sometimes their personal space is invaded when someone else falls victim of Acting White Phenomenon in the public venue where they work. Two of the participants reported they were accused of Acting White while at work. One participant said her accusers attended the same school she attended and the other participant said her accusers attended a different school. The “when” portion of this question was again interpreted in various ways. Some participants using the timeline pattern of thought defined “when” as every day, yesterday, almost every day, and often. Others defined the “when” as an event using the following terms, while speaking properly, while I was cheering, when I was listening to music, and when I was in different places with friends. What the findings revealed here was the varying thought patterns of the students driving their interpretations and understanding of the terms “where” and “when”. The findings revealed a similar exposure to being accused of Acting White within all three schools participating in this study. A majority of the students, at some time in their academic lives had been accused of Acting White. The places and activities where they were accused were also similar. What was different was that the rate of being victimized by the Acting White accusation was far lower outside of school and school functions. This finding was expected and the actual focus group conversations bore this out.

Focus Group Question #3: Feelings About Acting White

The third focus group question is as follows: How did it make you feel? Forty percent (40%) of the focus group participants gave various responses indicating that being accused of
Acting White had no impact on their feelings. A few participants said it did not make them feel bad at all, because they considered the people saying it to be haters. One participant stated, “I just go on like always” (Female, School Two, March 16, 2015). Another participant said, “It did not change the way I felt after I heard it” (Female, School Three, March 20, 2015). One young man said, “I didn’t care about it” and his friend said, “I really don’t pay it any attention” (Male, School Three, March 20, 2015). Several participants, male and female said, it doesn’t bother me much, yet I know it belittles my race (Male and Female, March 16, 2015). Further discussion revealed that these participants appeared to be more bothered than their original statements suggested. This finding established an emerging and notable theme.

Feelings: Indifferent

While discussing how they felt about being accused of Acting White or how they felt about accusing someone else of Acting White, an air of indifference manifested itself at each of the study schools. Comments of not caring about what others said or how another student felt when they accused them of Acting White were very common. Many of them were very unsympathetic about what happened to the feelings of their fellow students. Were these students actually bothered by being accused of Acting White? These participants wondered if they should be bothered more by being accused of Acting White or if they were really bothered and just did not want to admit that they were bothered by the accusation. They also wondered that if they really were not bothered by being accused of Acting White, what that said about them as African Americans. This finding was a surprise to the researcher. An in-depth discussion at such a deep conscious level was not anticipated. The students began to question themselves and the other participants in the focus group about whether or not their original responses were indeed accurate. The participants showed themselves open to self-scrutiny and scrutiny by others
without becoming offended. They concluded that they needed to give the subject further thought. One young man said, “Being accused of Acting White didn’t make me feel bad, I’m part White, so that doesn’t offend me, because it’s just part of me” (Male Student, School Three, March 20, 2015).

Feelings: Good

Feeling good about one’s self is a very positive thing. Being joyful or pleasantly excited about an accomplishment is an emotional state to which all students should aspire. Students in each of the study schools expressed feeling good about the Acting White accusation. Some said they felt good about being accused of Acting White. Others expressed feelings of joy when they accused others of Acting White. Several participants said being accused of Acting White made them feel good. When asked why they responded, “because most White people are rich and that’s how I want to be” (Male Student, School Three, March 20, 2015). Another said, “It made me feel good. It made me feel like I’m doing something right” (Female Student, School Three, March 20, 2015). Several young ladies (Female Students, School Two, March 16, 2015) said it made them feel good, because the people accusing them think White people are smarter than Black people. If the accusers told them they were Acting White, their perception was that they were smarter than the other students accusing them or in their school. When they were accused of Acting White, several female participants said they felt great (Female Students, School Three, March 20, 2015). When asked why, one student said, “It made me feel more educated, like I was doing something with my life and being productive” (Female Students, School Three, March 20, 2015).
Feelings: Bad

Feeling bad about the *Acting White Phenomenon* was noted at each of the study schools. The reason some of the students felt bad were quite different. Some students felt bad because they were accused of *Acting White* or they had seen someone else get accused of *Acting White*. Other students, be it very few, felt bad because they had accused someone else of *Acting White*. Participants who admitted that the accusation had some impact on them conveyed various thoughts on how the accusation affected them. One participant said, “being accused of *Acting White* made me feel like I was trying to fit in, which definitely wasn’t the case” (Male Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). His response initiated a conversation for others who said that was kind of how they felt. These students only wanted to do well, get good grades, and have a chance at college and a better standard of living later on. Yet, when confronted and accused of *Acting White*, they questioned whether or not they really were trying to fit in, although their high school was greater than 80% African American. The question then is, with whom were they trying to fit in?

One young man (Male Student, School Two, March 16, 2015) who had not talked much stood up and said, “When they told me I was *Acting White* it made me feel like an outcast. Other Black students were telling me that I was *Acting White* and everything I did I thought I was being Black. The young man wondered why or what did they see that made them accuse him of *Acting White*? The majority of the students in the focus groups said the people accusing them of *Acting White* said it was “because of how they talked, accusing them of talking proper and acting like White folks”. One participant (Female Student, School Two, March 16, 2016) said, being accused of *Acting White* made her feel like the accusers felt that Black people talk ghetto and White people talk proper, so if Black people talk proper they have to be *Acting White*. Another
participant chimed in saying that “it bothers me, because Black people can’t be proper without being insulted by being called Acting White” (Female Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). Other participants began talking about how they felt insulted. They said “calling us some other race was an insult, like Blacks don’t know how to act except improper” (Male and Female Students, Schools Two and Three; March 16, 2015, March 20, 2015). The participants talked about how “some Blacks and White people think about young Black people, feeling that young Black people are all gangbangers or killers and we can’t be good or smart unless we’re Acting White” (Male and Female Students, Schools Two and Three, March 16, March 20, 2015). Many of the participants said it’s like young Black people are supposed to be negative and aggressive and can’t be proper. They said, other Black people and White people expect us to play too much and not be serious, so when we are seen doing good things, getting good grades, earning awards, we can’t be doing it because we are just being ourselves, we must be Acting White, and that hurt (Female Student, School One, February 9, 2016, Female Students, School Three, March 20, 2016).

Forty percent (40%) of the respondents said being accused of Acting White did not bother them or make them feel bad in any. They gave various reasons for this including the accusers being haters. Thirty percent (30%) said being accused of Acting White did not bother them, but it did make them question why they were not bothered or if they were bothered and for some unknown reason did not want to admit that they were bothered. Twenty percent (20%) said they did not think about it because it didn’t change their life or how they felt. Ten (10%) admitted that being accused of Acting White made them feel good. They viewed being accused of Acting White validation that they were doing something right, or good, were educated, or that they really were a step ahead of others at school.
Focus Group Question #4: Meaning of Acting White

The fourth focus group question is as follows: Do you know what Acting White means? If so, please define.

Student Perceptions

Students responding had many ideas that defined what Acting White is to them. Two of the definitions came from participants who admitted they did not know what Acting White meant. One of these participants said that they did not know what Acting White means, but to his peers it means to act as if I grew up with a wealthy family and know how to properly talk in a conversation (Male Student, School Three, March 20, 2015). The other negative perspective response simply said, “there is no such thing as Acting White”. Many definitions of Acting White centered on being preppy or proper. For many of these participants Acting White means others have to dress a certain way, (i.e. Abercrombie & Fitch and Polo), do well in school, and/or participate in certain organizations and sports. If a Black student is in drama or plays golf or tennis, they are Acting White. One female participant said, “Because everybody knows Black people get in the choir and play football and basketball” (School Three, March 20, 2015). Some participants said, “Acting White depicts a country, preppy, or proper tone in your voice, and your actions seem abnormal to common African Americans standards” (Male and Female Students, School Two, March 16, 2015). Other participants said “Acting White means being well mannered, acting proper, and being classy is one way of Acting White” (School Three, March 20, 2015). These same participants also said another way of Acting White would be to “act like a stereotype Caucasian, wearing plaid shirts and work boots, going hunting, shooting guns, playing in the mud, drinking beer, and dipping Copenhagen”. Some other definitions of Acting White also revolved around dress, (i.e. Polo and Hilfiger instead of Nike and Girbaud). Dancing funny
was another focal point of each focus group. The consensus was if you dance funny, you were considered to be *Acting White*.

Students defining what *Acting White* meant gave an assortment of meanings. Twenty-four percent (24%) defined *Acting White* as being preppy. Twenty-eight percent (28%) defined *Acting White* using other words generally thought of asbring related to being preppy including, how you talk, being proper, intelligent, being nerdy, and getting good grades. Twenty percent (20%) defined *Acting White* using adjectives such as involved, intelligent, successful, better, and positive. Being wealthy, able to cover up wrong doings, and being slow to anger, were each used to define *Acting White* by four percent (4%) of the respondents. The final definition of *Acting White* was doing the things White people do, which was given by sixteen percent (16) of the students responding.

**Student Attitude**

Attitude defined *Acting White* for some participants. For these participants, acting like one is better than other people is considered *Acting White*. Talking softly and proper was a focal point for several of the participants. For other participants, the phenomenon of *Acting White* centered on academics. These participants believed that if a student was considered a nerd, and got good grades, or was considered very intelligent, positive, and productive they were *Acting White*. One discussion actually centered on Whites being slow to anger, and how that behavior was more characteristic of *Acting White*. In other words, if a Black person did not get angry fast they were *Acting White*. A group of young ladies was convinced that if one acted in a particular way when he or she was around Blacks and then started acting very proper and quiet around Whites, then that individual was considered as not being himself or herself and *Acting White*. One of the more interesting definitions of *Acting White* too, centered on a criminal element. This
participant said that “when Black people did crazy things, they got caught because they didn’t know how to do it and get away with it” (Male, School One, February 9, 2015). This student believes that when comes down to crime, “White people know how to cover it up, not snitch on each other, and not get caught” (Male Student, School One, February 9, 2015). He said, “when White people do crazy things, even like killing people, they know how to cover it up and seldom get caught, so Black people need to learn how to start Acting White when they do crazy things” (Male Student, School One, February 9, 2015).

Fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents defined Acting White in terms of intelligence, using the terms preppy, proper, intelligent, good grades, and nerdy. Twenty percent (20%) defined Acting White as a function of prestige using terms as successful, positive, and involved. Twenty percent (20%) defined Acting White as doing things White folk do, like hunting, fishing, using smokeless tobacco, etc. Four percent (4%) defined Acting White as economic, being wealthy, and four percent (4%) defined Acting White as emotional, being slow to anger. The finding here was that no participant defined Acting White as an accusation of Acting White by another student.

Focus Group Question #5: Examples of Acting White

The fifth focus group question is as follows: Please provide some examples of the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that were occurring that prompted the Acting White accusation.

Public-Private Communication Patterns

Part of students making the most of their high school experience it being able to converse with their counterparts both in school and away from school. Part of the students’ conversations was centered on them hanging out and talking with friends when they were at home, in the park, or just hanging out with friends and being accused of Acting White by someone in the group.
because of the way they pronounced a word, said a particular thing, or played a particular song. the students also talked about the same thing happening at school when all they were doing was trying to communicate with some of their friends. In some instances, these friends were White. The Acting White Phenomenon invaded their private space and they were only trying to have a conversation with friends. In discussing what was happening when they or someone else was accused of Acting White, focus group participants’ discussions first response was that “they were speaking proper when they were accused of Acting White or someone they saw get accused of Acting White was talking proper” (Male and Female Students, Schools One, Two, and Three, February 9, 2015; March 16, 2015; March 20, 2015). Some participants even discussed how the person accusing them got angry at them because the accused were using proper grammar. One young lady said she was just talking with her friend and he said, ‘oh my Jesus, listen at you’ and then said she was Acting White (Female Student, School Three, March 20, 2015). The general attitude was that whether you were one-on-one, in a group, doing a report, or out with friends, if you talked proper, more than likely someone was going to tell you that the individual was Acting White. These participants also believed that if individuals went too far the other way and sounded too “country” they would also be accused of Acting White.

A major discussion for participants also centered on changing how individuals normally talked with other Black people when they were around White people. All participants agreed that if individuals did this they are going to be accused of Acting White because that was not the real person. These same participants also believed Acting White was also used when one stops hanging out with one’s Black friends only to fit in and be accepted by Whites (Male and Female Students, Schools One, Two, and Three, February 9, 2015; March 16, 2015; and March 20, 2015). School activities were another source of the Acting White accusation. Many students who
are cheerleaders, golfers, baseball players, or tennis players are often accused of *Acting White*. Students often associated being happy or cheery, being confident, talking softly, getting good grades, and refusing to participate in conversations or talk about other people negatively as *Acting White*.

Students gave examples of what their beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and events were occurring that prompted the *Acting White* accusation to be made. Twelve and a half percent (12.5%) said the person was just smart, quiet, being cheery and happy, and talking with sense. Six and one-fourth percent (6.25%) said the person being accused of *Acting White* was acting stuck up; like they were better than the other people around them. Twelve and a half percent (12.5%) of the students said the person making the accusation had an attitude or was angry when they made the accusation. Thirty-one and one-fourth percent (31.25%) said the accusation was made during a social setting. These settings included announcing the homecoming court, and the newly selected cheerleaders, when some African American students were talking with their White friends, while together at parties, and at school functions when some students could not dance as well as others. Thirty-seven and a half percent (37.5%) made reference to situations involving only talking and being together saying the *Acting White* accusation was made during casual conversations with friends, while some friends were playing together, when some students were talking about a pair of pants they wore one day, and when a new African American student came into their school and he had a heavy southern accent.

**Public Communication Patterns**

The African American students in this study spoke of being in different settings and having the *Acting White Phenomenon* occur. The students were at various public functions sponsored by the school and sometimes by parent groups supporting some student organization
or team. The *Acting White Phenomenon* made itself known at these events proving that it could arise at any place at any time and be a disruptive force, negatively affecting the student accused of *Acting White* and oft times those close to that student.

The section sought to find what the students perceived was happening that prompted someone to make the *Acting White* accusation. For the focus group respondents thirty-one and a fourth percent (31.25%) said the accusation was made because of the way the accused person was talking. How one speaks was by far the largest trigger of the *Acting White* accusation. Twelve and one half percent (12.5%) indicated that the person making the accusation was angry when they made the accusation. Why they were angry was not always known, but many of the respondents agreed that the person was angry because the accused was speaking in a proper manner or the accused had received a higher grade on some measure of academic performance. Twenty-five percent (25%) believed the accusation was made because of a social event. The respondents referenced being selected as a member of the homecoming court, being selected as a cheerleader, joking around or playing, Blacks befriending White students, and Blacks not having the dancing skills as other Blacks. Twelve and one half percent (12.5%) said the person being accused was being cheery and happy. The conversation centered on Black students not showing certain emotions at school and not being cheery and friendly the majority of the time at school. Twelve and one half percent (12.5%) said the person being accused was acting very educated when they were accused of *Acting White*. Sometimes the accused was only answering a difficult question the teacher had asked him or her. The respondents indicated that six and one fourth percent (6.25%) of the time the accused student was acting very stuck up, as if they considered themselves better than others around them.
**Focus Group Question #6: Accusing Others of Acting White**

The sixth focus group question is as follows: Have you ever accused someone of *Acting White*? If you have, when did you do this and where were you when you did it? For the focus groups in this study, fifty-six and one fourth percent (56.25%) of the participants admitted to having accused another student of *Acting White*. The majority said they accused someone of *Acting White* while at school. One young lady said she did it at her cousin’s house one night around seven or eight o’clock. She said her cousin was “getting on my nerves acting so proper” (Female Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). Only one participant said he “accused someone of *Acting White* on the school bus” (Male Student, School One, February 9, 2015).

**In School as a Public Context**

The context here relates to where the students admitted they were then they accused someone of *Acting White*. Schools by their very design are public entities, meaning they exist and are open to or serve all the people of a given area. The students accusing other students of *Acting White* did harm to these students in a public venue, the school they attended for the purpose of learning. Where and when they accused another person of *Acting White* was again open to interpretation of what “where” and “when” meant to the individual participants. Several participants said they had accused others from time to time. Some participants said they had accused others of *Acting White* a few times (Male and Female Students, Schools One, Two, and Three, February 9, 2015; March 16, 2015; March 20, 2015). When asked how they defined a “few times”, one participant said, “three of four times a week” (Male Student, School Three, March 20, 2015). The others who said they had done it a few times concurred with the aforementioned frequency. Other participants said they had accused others when they were at
dances and the other person didn’t dance as well as they danced (Male and Female students, Schools One, Two, and Three, February 9, 2015; March 16, 2015; March 20, 2015). Another place the participants accused others of Acting White was “in class after making oral presentations” (Male and Female Students, Schools One and Three, February 9, 2015 and March 20, 2015). I asked these students what the teachers said to them when they accused students of Acting White? Every student who responded said the teachers said or did nothing.

**In School as a Personal Context**

Schools are not designed to be places where students go in order to insult and emotionally hurt other students. They are designed for learning to take place. Although students are required to go there usually five days a week they expect to get something from school that will benefit them physically, emotionally, and academically. For African American students, when the Acting White Phenomenon occurs learning is disrupted and the personal nature of their expectations is damaged and learning oft times suffers as a result of the Acting White accusation being made. In this context, schools become places that the students making the Acting White accusation use for their personal attacks on each other. Additionally, a couple of young ladies said they did it with another who they considered to be acting stuck up, as if they were better than others (Female Students, Schools One and Three, February 9, 2015; March 20, 2015). The majority of those admitting to accusing someone of Acting White said they did it to just be joking and did not think it hurt anybody (Schools One, Two, and Three, February 9, 2015, March 16, 2015, March 20, 2015). One participant said they did it when a boy at school got an A in his physics class (Female, March 20, 2015). She said “others teased him all the time about being in the physics class, but he was good natured and it didn’t bother him” (March 20, 2015). There
was one participant (Female, March 20, 2015) who said, “I accused someone of Acting White as payback, retaliation, because they had done it to me”.

The respondents’ discussions in both sessions led to the finding that some of them consider the term “when” as a place, while others defined “when” as a time event or reason. Fifty-six and one fourth percent (56.25%) of the respondents defined “when” as a time event or reason. The respondents who defined “when” as a time event or reason, defined “when” using the time references as “from time-to-time”, “a few days ago”, and “8 o’clock”. Forty-three and three fourth percent (43.75%) of the respondents defined “when” as a place. These respondents used the terms as “when I was in school”, “when I was on the bus”, and “when I was at my cousin’s house”.

**Focus Group Question #7: Post-Feelings from Accusing Others of Acting White**

The seventh focus group question is as follows: How did accusing someone of Acting White make you feel? Fifth-six and one fourth percent (56.25%) of the participants admitted to having accused someone else of Acting White. Of those admitting to making the Acting White accusation, Forty-seven and four tenths percent (47.4%) of those students offered no response as to how they felt when they accused another student of Acting White. Five and three tenths percent (5.3%) said they felt a little odd, because it sounded mean after they did it. Five and three tenths percent (5.3%) said they felt like they were being honest with the person they accused, because the person was not being honest with themselves by talking differently or acting differently when they were around certain people. Twenty-six and one tenth percent (26.1%) responded that they felt rather indifferent giving responses such as: “I was playing so I did not feel bad” (Male Student, School Three, March 20, 2015); “Telling them they were Acting White didn’t make me feel any kind of way” (Male Student, School Two, March 16, 2015); “It was a
joke or it was funny to me” (Male Student, School Three, March 20, 2015); “It didn’t make me feel any kind of way because I was joking; and I be playing like when they do something strange I say they are Acting White (Female Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). Five and three tenths percent (5.3%) or participants responded that accusing someone of Acting White didn’t make them feel any kind of way because Acting White is a problem for other Black students, because they know blacks feel mocked sometimes. Five and three tenths percent (5.3%) of the participants said they felt good when they accused someone of Acting White. This response was totally unexpected and took the researcher by surprise. The last response caused the researcher great concern. One young lady (Female Student, School Three, March 20, 2015) boldly stood up and said, “Telling them they was Acting White made me feel powerful.”

**Accuser Denial**

The responses and discussions of this question were very poignant. Many of the participants responded as if it had no impact on how they normally felt about anything. Comments were made like I felt okay, I felt the same as I always feel, or it didn’t make me feel any kind of way (Schools One, Two, and Three, February 9, 2015; March 16, 2015; March 20, 2015). One participant (Male student, School Two, March 16, 2015) said “Accusing them makes me feel no different than before the statement was made.” Another participant said, “I didn’t care about it. It didn’t make me feel anything” (Female student, March 20, 2015). One participant (Male student, March 9, 2015) had what appeared to be an odd twist on his answer. He said, “it didn’t make me feel no way at all. It should have been a compliment. It means they have manners.”
Accuser Justification

The responses in this section led to the finding that these respondents felt the need to justify what they had done by accusing someone of Acting White. Why did they feel the need to justify having done what they did? A few participants said things like, “it was a joke or funny to me, or I said it in a playful way so I didn’t feel really bad (School One, February 9, 2015, School Two, March 16, 2015, and School Three, March 20, 2015). Another participant said, “I be playing, like when they do something strange I say it” (Female Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). One participant (Male Student, School Three, March 20, 2015) said, “I didn’t feel bad, because the guy didn’t take it the wrong way. This is a predominantly Black school so he wouldn’t. This is a strong class and they don’t let much get to them” (Male Student, March 20, 2015). One participant (Male Student, School Two, March 16, 2015) said, “I did it to my girlfriend and her friends. I felt like they were not being honest with themselves. She was acting funny in front of the other race, so I told her she was Acting White” (March 16, 2015). One young lady (School Two, March 16, 2015) said, “After I said it I felt a little odd, because it sounded mean.” She did not comment as to whether there were any conciliatory actions. There was no finding of any student in any of the three focus groups admitting that accusing another African American student of Acting White was an insulting and hurtful thing to do to one of their classmates. Instead each one gave a small justification for what they had done. This appears to be a small attempt at making something they feel is bad to be lesser of an attack on another student.

Summary of Chapter IV

Chapter IV presented findings responding to the two overarching research questions. From a quantitative perspective, Chapter IV includes an explanation of each statistical analysis
used and why the method was used. Both parametric and non-parametric methods were used to obtain valid results for all hypotheses. From a qualitative perspective, the data and data analysis provide insight into the existence of the *Acting White Phenomenon* in rural high schools in Mississippi and the impact on those students who fall victim to the accusation. The themes are:

- **Hearing Acting White**
  - In-School – As a Public Context
  - Out of School – As a Private Context
- **Accused of Acting White**
  - At work as a Public – Private Context
- **Feelings About Acting White**
  - Indifferent Feelings
  - Good Feelings
  - Bad Feelings
- **Meaning of Acting White**
  - Student Perceptions
  - Student Attitudes
- **Examples of Acting White**
  - Public-Private Communication Patterns
  - Public Communication Patterns
- **Accusing Others of Acting White**
  - In School as a Public Context
- **Post-Feelings from Accusing Others of Acting White**
  - Accuser Denial
Accuser Justification

Knowledge gained from the quantitative and qualitative findings are critical toward understanding the phenomenon of *Acting White* and how this knowledge can be translated into positive gains for African American students in academic and social outcomes.
CHAPTER V

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides an insight about the research conclusions, discussion, and implications of the study, *The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi*, and will seek to answer the research questions driving this study. Research conclusions expound upon what we learn from the research and this study. The research discussion examines the research findings, particularly as they relate to literature trends presented in this chapter. Research implications are provided on the following: 1) what this study means for African American high school students in rural high schools in Mississippi; 2) what this study means for high schools; and 3) what does this study mean for education’s stakeholders. Chapter V offers critical perspectives from the resulting conclusions, discussions, and implications on the *Acting White Phenomenon* and how schools and stakeholders alike must be prepared to address the impact on academic and social success.

Research Conclusions

This study, *The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi*, is guided by two research questions:
1. In what ways, if any, does the *Acting White Phenomenon* exist among African American senior students in rural high schools in Mississippi?

2. How do African American senior students experience the *Acting White Phenomenon* in rural schools in Mississippi?

This study examined the experiences, feelings, and level of bother of 154 African American senior students in three rural high schools in Mississippi as they relate to the *Acting White Phenomenon*. Quantitative data was collected using the AWEQ and fifteen hypotheses were identified. Qualitative data was collected using a focus group protocol and themes were developed.

**Research Conclusions: Quantitative Data**

Data was analyzed comparing all students in the study by whether they said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*, comparing all students to each other using the mean Item Score for all respondents, comparing all schools to each other using the calculated mean Item Score for each school, comparing mean Item Scores for each individual school by students, comparing all students in the study by mean Bother Score, comparing each individual school by the mean bother score of its respondents, comparing all schools to each other using the calculated mean bother score for each school and whether the students said yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*.

This study revealed that the *Acting White Phenomenon* does exist in rural high schools of Mississippi. The data tells us that fewer students at these schools had been accused of *Acting White* than had not been accused. Forty-two percent (42%) had been accused, versus fifty-eight percent (58%) who had not been accused of *Acting White*. Although there was a difference in the number of students having been accused and not accused of *Acting White*, there was not enough
difference to establish a significant relationship between whether African American students answered yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*.

A mean item score was calculated for all student participants who completed the AWEQ and answered yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. It was hypothesized that there was no significant difference in the mean AWEQ item score by whether students answered yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. The data was for the total number of students in the study and revealed that there was a significant difference in the mean item scores of the students who answered yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*. Students who had been accused of *Acting White* had significantly higher item scores because of the frequency with which they were accused. For those students answering no to having been accused of *Acting White* the Likert-Scale answers did not apply; consequently, their scores were lower. What this means is that students having been accused of *Acting White* face this accusation with some regularity and must deal with (1) how it makes them feel (2) why they were accused; and (3) if it matters to them.

This study found that when all three schools were compared to each other using the mean Item Score for their school, there is no significant difference in how the schools scored (F (2,144) = .991, p = .374). The results were not significant. What this means is that all the schools were relatively the same on their overall mean item score. When the students mean Item Scores for each respective school were compared for that school alone by whether the students answered yes or no to having been accused of *Acting White*, each individual school demonstrated a significant difference in mean item score; School One t (58) = 3.069, p=.003 (equal variances assumed); t (50.222) = 3.015, p = .004 (equal variances not assumed); School Two t (49) = 2.782, p = .008 (equal variances assumed); t (31.071) = 2.667, p = .012 (equal variances not assumed); and School Three. t (34) = 4.065 (equal variances assumed), p = .000; t (17.250) =
Again, the students answering yes to having been accused of *Acting White* had significantly higher scores resulting in an overall significant difference. When the mean Bother Score for all students was tested, there was a significant difference in the mean bother score by whether a student answered yes or no to having been accused of *Acting White*. The students having been accused of *Acting White* always have higher Bother Scores, because for the students not being accused, there is no reason to feel bothered.

When all schools are compared using the school’s mean bother score by school, there was no significant difference in the schools (F(2, 139) = 2.130, p = .123). The numbers balance out more in the total sample and provide a more even distribution of scores.

When each individual school was evaluated according to the mean bother score and whether students answered yes or no to being accused of *Acting White*, School One revealed no significant difference by whether students answered yes or no to having being accused of *Acting White*, t (58) = 1.347, p = .183 (equal variances assumed); t (36.168) = 1.287, p = .206 (Equal variances not assumed). However, in this same evaluation of the data School Two and School Three demonstrated significant difference in mean Bother Scores by whether the students answered yes or no to having been accused of *Acting White*; School Two t (46) = 2.322, p = .025 (equal variances assumed); t (24.005) = 2.070, p = .049 equal variances not assumed), and School Three t (32) = 2.821, p = .008 (equal variances assumed); t (14.079) = 2.394, p = .031 (equal variances not assumed). What this indicates is that School One had students who were accused of *Acting White*, but for some reason the accusation did not bother them enough to rate their level of bother high enough to make a significant difference.

When evaluating the mean Item Score of all students at all schools who said yes to being accused of *Acting White*, the data revealed that there was no significant difference in mean item
scores by school (F (2, 58) = .557, p = .576). This indicates that when the mean item scores of all the students who had been accused of *Acting White* were compared the scores were relatively close. The same applied to a comparison of the mean bother score of all students who answered yes to having been accused of *Acting White*. The analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in mean Bother Scores by school (F (2, 56) = .419, p = .660). The mean item scores of all students who answered no to having been accused of *Acting White* were compared by school. The analysis demonstrated that there was no significant difference in mean Item Score by school (F (2, 83) = 2.278, p = .109). This could indicate that since these students had never been accused of *Acting White*, their scores on the Likert-type scoring scale would be very consistent.

The final analysis evaluated whether there was a significant difference in the mean Bother Score by school for all students who answered no to having been accused of *Acting White*. Students who answered no to having been accused of *Acting White* should have had no reason to feel bothered. The result bore this out, (F (2, 80) = 2.993, p = 0.56), there was no significant difference in mean Bother Score by school for those students answering no to being accused of *Acting White*.

**Research Conclusions: Qualitative Data**

The students in this study demonstrated a deep concern for why other students would accuse them of *Acting White* when all they wanted to do were the things that could lead them to successful careers and futures. Extensive discussions took place in each of the focus groups about just what does it mean to Act White or to Act Black. These students discussed how most students, both Black and White, just want to go to school, get their lesson, get good grades, stay out of trouble, and have some fun. They couldn’t understand what makes some other students
want to be so mean and nasty that they would insult them by, as one student said “calling me out of my name; saying I’m Acting White” (Female, School Two, March 16, 2015).

The students in this study revealed much information or interest to this study. The places in which they heard the Acting White accusation varied. The school hallway appeared to be the most noticeable place to hear the accusation, but the classroom, the cafeteria and after school activities were all fair game on school property. Away from school, students heard the Acting White accusation while at work, at the movies, walking around with friends, on social media, and on television. Several students said “it seems like we hear it everywhere” (Female Students, School Two and Three, March 16, 2015; March 20, 2015)

How students perceive things was apparent during the data collection. Listening to the students talk after the administration of the AWEQ, one hears lots of misinformation that for the students is factual. When asked when did you hear the Acting White accusation or when were you accused of Acting White, the researcher’s expected responses were not the responses of the students. The researcher expected to hear yesterday, last night, last week, or some other time related response. Some students responded in this manner, but the majority responded with a positional answer such as, when I was at the mall, when I was in class, when I was in the cafeteria.

Some of the most meaningful data came from conversations when discussing teachers not doing or saying anything when they saw and heard students accuse them of Acting White. “I don’t understand why they don’t say something” said a young lady (Female Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). “If the teachers would say something it might stop some of it.” Several students commented about how they sometimes think somebody is going to ‘get to fighting’, because you get tired of being called out of your name all the time (Female Students, School One
and Two, February 9, 2015; March 16, 2015). I heard the comment, “I don’t understand why they be so mad with me. All I did was get my lesson and do my presentation, and they were yelling at me and telling me they don’t know why I got to be Acting White all the time” (Female Student, School Three, March 20, 2015). School Two and School Three had extended conversations about how mad some of the students get at them for getting good grades.

When asked “how did it make you feel when you accused someone else of Acting White,” most of the comments were harmless. The students said things like it felt okay, or I didn’t think about it, it was just an expression with no meaning. One student (Male Student, School Two, March 16, 2015) said, “I didn’t feel bad because it’s just a fact to some people, like my cousin. She puts on and tries to change her voice in front of White people, and that’s why I tell her she’s Acting White.” However, there were two unexpected and disturbing comments that came from this question. One student (Female Student, School Three, March 20, 2015) answered, “It made me feel good when I accused them of Acting White. I brought him down a little. I loved it.” As troubling as that comment was, the most disturbing response came from another young lady at the same school. This student (Female Student, School Three, March 20, 2015) said “When I accused her of Acting White I felt powerful. I felt powerful because I made her feel real bad. She had no business getting on my nerves trying to talk all proper and stuff.”

Research Discussion

Through the use of an evaluative instrument named the AWEQ©, quantitative data was obtained on 39 parameters. The overarching question driving this research study was: In what ways, if any, does the Acting White Phenomenon exist among African American senior students in rural high schools in Mississippi? Most of the existing literature on the Acting White
Phenomenon was produced by studies that were conducted in large metropolitan, urban, or suburban areas. The sample for this study was African American students from rural high schools in Mississippi. Although the sample for this study was from geographic areas directly opposite for the majority of subject in the existing literature, there were similarities.

When looking at the data for responses to the AWEQ, forty-two percent (42%) of the respondents said they had been accused of Acting White. While this number is not statistically significant, it does show that the Acting White Phenomenon is present in the rural high schools of Mississippi. This study found that the percentages of African American students in rural high schools in Mississippi having heard of the Acting White Phenomenon were consistent with those of student studies conducted in large urban, suburban, and metropolitan schools. One note of interest is that while the percent of students who had heard of the Acting White Phenomenon was consistent with their urban counterparts, the rate at which African American students in rural high schools in Mississippi experienced the Acting White Phenomenon was less than the rates experienced in studies conducted in large urban, suburban, and metropolitan schools. Now that the Acting White Phenomenon has been shown to be present in the rural high schools of Mississippi, how does the emerging data relate to the existing data in the literature? Through the discussion identified in the evidentiary concluding phrases of defining race through human characteristics, deconstructing the Acting White Phenomenon through historical context, and deterring educational achievement through hostile communication, these perspectives were more clearly understood.

**Defining Race Through Human Characteristics**

Many human characteristics have been associated with racial groups for which these groups become defined. Being good, pretty, having positive aspirations, being smart, and
speaking proper have all been linked to being White. In the Doll study conducted in 1939 by Dr. Kenneth Clark and his wife, Dr. Mamie Clark, Black children were given dolls to play with. The dolls were identical in every way except one was White and one was Black. When the doctors ask the children to show them the pretty doll, the majority of the Black children chose the white doll (Abagond, 2009). Abagon (2009) said, “The most disturbing result for the researchers and many people who read the doll study was that when asked to ‘give me the doll that looks like you’ many of the Black children said the white doll looked like them. Others just began to cry or run away rather than pick the doll that looked like them.” Just as certain characteristics have been associated with being White, other characteristics have been associated with being Black. Just as there were and are characterizations of Whites, there are characterizations for being Black. Characterizations of being ugly, bad, unintelligent in school, lazy, and being negative with no aspirations are all characteristics that have been associated with being Black (Abagond, 2009).

Through discussions in focus groups this study reaffirms many of those assumptions exists in the rural high schools of Mississippi. Regardless of what was being asked for with the sample instrument, the AWEQ, or what was being discussed in the focus groups in this study, how one speaks always surfaced. Casual talking or speaking publicly and using proper grammar, appears to be a common means by which African American students determine the level of intelligence of another student. However incorrect, African American students in all three of the schools in this study used how a student spoke as defining how smart that individual was. Also incorrectly, students delivered the accusation of Acting White against that individual for speaking properly.
This study found many instances where African American students perpetuated this myth. How one speaks was by far the largest trigger of the *Acting White* accusation with thirty-one and one fourth percent (31.4%) of the participants responding that the *Acting White* accusation was made because of the way a person talked. Some students (Male and Female Students and Schools One, Two, and Three, February 9, 2015; March 16, 2015; and March 20, 2015) said that the person making the accusation was angry at the other student for speaking proper.

The themes relating to this concluding evidentiary phrase, Defining Race Through Human Characteristics, are as follows:

- **Feelings About Acting White**
  - Indifferent Feelings
  - Good Feelings
  - Bad Feelings

- **Meaning of Acting White**
  - Student Perceptions
  - Student Attitudes

- **Post-Feelings from Accusing Others of Acting White**
  - Accuser Denial
  - Accuser Justification

Like the themes above, Abagon (2009) stated that many Blacks did not believe anything good was associated with being Black in America. The Clark Doll study revealed that Black children had a distorted self-image because of the characteristics generally associated with them (Abagon, 2009). Overwhelmingly, the literature addresses racial identity when studying the *Acting White*
Phenomenon (Neal-Bennett et al., 2009; Pluvious, 2006; Tyson et al., 2005. Some studies of The Acting White Phenomenon revealed the belief that African Americans are unintelligent, inarticulate, or not well informed (Brinson, 2002; Ogby, 2003). This study collected qualitative data from African American students in rural high schools in Mississippi that reaffirmed that those beliefs still exist in rural high schools in Mississippi. Students in this study knew that some African Americans students with whom they attended school, felt that Blacks were not as intelligent as Whites. They also conveyed their perceptions that these people lashed out at African American students who were getting good grades and participating in school activities.

Many of the African American students in this study knew some of the other students in their school held these beliefs and perception about Blacks. However, these students continued to feel good about themselves and what they were doing in school. Several of the students answered that the Acting White accusation did not bother them because they knew what their academic success would mean to their future. Some even said they felt good when they were accused of Acting White because, to them, it meant that they were being associated with the characteristics associated with being white, and that meant they must be doing something good. Most of these students denied that the accusation bothered them and exhibited strong individual racial identity, but they also tried to justify why they are still being accused of Acting White.

Deconstructing the Acting White Phenomenon Through Historical Context

Murry et al. (2012) demonstrated the Acting White Phenomenon is one of the most negative accusations an African American adolescent can receive from another. The deconstructing of the Acting White Phenomenon through historical lens allows us to understand how the research suggests that receiving the accusation may create distress for some African American adolescents. This study found that African American students in rural high schools in
Mississippi likewise experience elevated stress levels by being accused of Acting White. One participant, said, “Being accused of Acting White made me feel like I was trying to fit in” (Male Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). His statement initiated a very in-depth discussion where it was revealed that many of the other students felt as he did. These students and others in the focus groups only wanted to get good grades, do well, and create a means that would lead to them going to college. A successful and productive future was all they wanted, and the Acting White accusation caused them much anguish about what they always thought was what they should be doing.

Another young man said, “Trying to fit in is definitely not the case for what I was doing” (Male Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). This study revealed findings of racial identity confusion existing at all of the study schools. Overwhelmingly, the literature addresses racial identity when studying the Acting White Phenomenon (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009; Pluviose, 2006; Tyson et al., 2005). This study revealed African American students trying to do the things they believed were the right things to do, and being insulted for doing those things by being accused of Acting White. A male respondent stated the following, “When they told me I was Acting White it made me feel like an outcast. Everything I did I thought was the things Black people did” (Male Student, School Two, March 16, 2015). This young man and others, male and female, at all three study schools wondered why or what did the other people see that made them accuse him of Acting White.

Racial identity confusion in the literature is demonstrated quite poignantly by Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark’s Doll Studies. Children in their study were asked a series of questions and had to answer by choosing between a black doll and a white. The dolls were alike in every way except the color of their skin. The results were a clear indication of the racial
identity confusion existing within the children. The most disturbing result of their study for the researchers and for many people who read the study was that when asked to ‘give me the doll that looks like you’, many of the Black children said the white doll looked like them, others just began to cry or would runaway rather than pick the doll that looked like them. This test has been repeated many times since Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark’s study and the results have consistently been the same.

During the focus group discussions, this study found that the participants had great difficulty determining what it meant to be Black in America. The themes used to relate to this concluding evidentiary phase, Deconstructing the Acting White Phenomenon Through Historical Context, are as follows:

- **Hearing Acting White**
  - In-School – As a Public Context
  - Out of School – As a Private Context

- **Accusing Others of Acting White**
  - In School as a Public Context
  - At Work as a Public-Private Context

The Acting White Phenomenon has impacted the lives of Black people since Blacks first appeared in America in both public and private arenas. The event was not always known as the Acting White Phenomenon. At one time in early American history, Blacks would speak about a Black man who seeks favor from Whites. This man was called a sellout (Christie, 2010). Studies focusing on the Acting White Phenomenon generally attribute the term to Dr. John Ogbu, noted researcher and anthropologist at Berkley (Christie, 2010). However, the term Acting White
predates Dr. Ogbu’s use of the phrase. The term Acting White was first used in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book Uncle Tom’s Cabin in 1852.

According to Murray et al. (2012), research suggests that receiving the Acting White accusation may create distress for some African American adolescents. Some studies suggest that accusing an African American of Acting White challenges his or her definition of what it means to be black (Meal-Barnett et al., 2009; Henfield, 2012, Murry at al., 2012). This study found that African American Students heard the term Acting White in many places, but overwhelmingly these students heard the term in their high school. Students in this study usually first heard the Acting White accusation while in school. School, a very public place for such a personal attack, resulted in students feeling violated and wondering what they had done to provoke such a hurtful verbal attack. What is interesting is that many times the attack was done by someone who is not a personal friend or acquaintance.

During our focus group discussions students admitted that when they were first accused of Acting White they were not sure who the person was addressing or what their initial feelings were. Over time these students were again accused of Acting White. These subsequent times generated varying emotions and even anger. Because the school is a public venue, the students are not immediately sure how to react to the accusation. Because this unwarranted attack came without provocation; many times from someone out to deter the accused student from being successful; the students admitted they expected the teachers to intervene and stop this from happening.

Grantham and Biddle (2014) conducted a study on bullying where one of the forms of bullying was the Acting White Phenomenon. The Acting White Phenomenon is referred to as racialized bullying. Grantham and Biddle (2014) found that one impediment to addressing the
Acting White Phenomenon was the bystander teacher. A bystander teacher is a teacher who witnesses a student being assaulted by the Acting White accusation and does nothing to intervene. Likewise, this study, The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi, produced the exact finding. When asked what the teacher who witnessed the Acting White accusation did upon witnessing the assault, all of the students in this study said the same thing. They said the teachers did not say anything to the student making the accusation. Students in this study wondered why the teachers never defended or protected them. Several of the students in this study felt that if the teachers intervened that the Acting White accusation would not be as prevalent in their school.

**Deterring Educational Achievement Through Hostile Communication**

The Acting White Phenomenon has been shown by many studies to be a contributing factor in African American students’ lack of academic and social success in school. The lack of academic and social success for adolescents deters their efforts for educational achievement. Grantham and Biddle (2014) conducted a study on bullying where the Acting White Phenomenon was one of the forms of bullying. The Grantham and Biddle (2014) study examined bystander teachers, teachers who observed incidents of bullying by students accusing other students of Acting White. In all the incidents in the study, the bystander teacher did nothing. Such apathetic responses serve to communicate a negative message about the value of these students.

In the study’s focus group discussions, students discussed being accused of Acting White in the classroom while making presentations or immediately afterward. The researcher asked each group what the teacher said or did. In each focus group, the answer was the same. Each focus group said the teachers neither did or said anything to the accuser. Who is responsible for
the continuation of the *Acting White* Phenomenon? Ogby (2003) determined that African American students contribute to the oppositional group formation caste by insulting other African American students, thereby challenging their racial identity. This study’s participants said they blame the teachers, because they think if the teachers said something about it, the other students might not do it again or at least not do it as much. From discussions had at the three study schools and the existing literature, this researcher believes the answer to that question will need much more study. However, two young ladies did say they had made the accusation in the past, but it sounded mean after they said it so they were trying to stop.

This study mirrored much of the findings of the existing literature. However, this study produced smaller percentages of students making the *Acting White* accusation. Smaller percentages of students adversely affected by the *Acting White Phenomenon* were found with this study. One concept absent from this study was that none of the participants admitted that they were so bothered by the accusation that they stopped studying, stopped participating in their activities, stopped using proper grammar, or failed a class in order to avoid being accused of *Acting White*.

The concluding evidentiary phrase Deterring Educational Achievement Through Hostile Communication, had the following themes:

- Accused of *Acting White*
  - At work as a Public – Private Context
  - In School as a personal Context

- Examples of *Acting White*
  - Public-Private Communication Patterns
  - Public Communication Patterns
A News and Views study (1997) addressed the holistic education and needs of African American students in order to achieve. How those needs get communicated to and experienced by African American students is important. In addressing the *Acting White Phenomenon* with inner city adolescents, News and Views (1997) sited environmental factors which also contributed to the impact of the *Acting White* accusation. Having to work because there is no food in the house to eat and then having someone accuse one of *Acting White* when that student scores well on an academic challenge the next day is an affront to that student’s racial and cultural identity. The potential loss of those identities often causes inner city adolescents to rebel against anything that would define them as *Acting White* (Neals-Barnett et al., 2009).

This study, *The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi*, found that the students had not as of yet rebelled against those accusing them of *Acting White*. They do, however, find themselves becoming increasingly aggravated by repeated accusations by the same students. Some of the students in this study resent being at work and having students harass them in a public place by invading their private space. The focus group participants concluded that all they want to do is do their school work, get their lessons, get good grades, go to their after school jobs, and move on into the next phase of their lives. Hopefully this can occur without the distractors who have repeatedly tried to derail their schooling by accusing them of *Acting White*. Irrespective of the communication pattern presented, African American students in the rural high schools of Mississippi are managing to keep their heads up and focus on the end game. This more positive approach serves as a mechanism to handle the pressures of perceived success if they continue to do the things that are causing them to be accused of *Acting White*.

Additionally, following below in Table 4 are the intersections of the themes:
### Table 4: Intersections of the themes

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<th>Hearing AW</th>
<th>Accused of AW</th>
<th>Feelings about AW</th>
<th>Meaning of AW</th>
<th>Examples of AW</th>
<th>Accusing Others of AW</th>
<th>Post-feelings from Accusing Others of AW</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Accused of AW</td>
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<td>Feelings About AW</td>
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<td>Accusing Others of AW</td>
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<td>Post-feelings from Accusing Others of AW</td>
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Note: Acting White is abbreviated in Table 4 as AW.

The qualitative research data and data analysis provided insight into the existence of the Acting White Phenomenon in rural high schools in Mississippi. The impact that the Acting White Phenomenon had on the African American students who fall victim to its accusation was categorized into seven themes listed in Table 4 above. The qualitative data cannot be viewed as
existing only in one plane. There is overlap among most of the themes. The X identifies the areas of overlap. For example, the first theme in the left column is hearing Acting White. The majority of students participating in this study had heard of Acting White, but the majority had never been accused of Acting White thus, no indicator mark is placed under Accused of Acting White heading in column two. Following that theme across Table 4, the reader can ascertain from the data that the majority of students having heard of Acting White had some understanding of the meaning of Acting White and could give examples of Acting White. The X’s give the areas of overlap for the majority of students participating in this research study.

Research Implications

Implications for African American High School Students

The results of this study have implications for African American high school students in rural high schools in Mississippi. The Acting White Phenomenon impacts cognitive and non-cognitive realms, creating challenges for African American students in rural high schools in Mississippi. The experiences of coming face to face with the Acting White Phenomenon affect African American students in many unexpected ways. Nationwide, in previous studies, the Acting White Phenomenon has been shown to negatively impact the academic achievement of African American students. This finding holds true for African American students in the rural high schools of Mississippi. This study found no students who had failed a class rather than be accused of Acting White, but I did have conversation with many intelligent and well-spoken young African American men and women, some of whom expressed a growing concern about what might happen at their schools if someone doesn’t do something about students accusing other students of Acting White. Some students pretended that being accused didn’t bother them,
but one could see it in their faces and hear it in their voices. Several of these young men and women admitted privately that they have gone in the bathroom and cried, wondering what they did wrong, or what they had done to deserve being insulted like that. They are right; they don’t deserve to be the victim of one of the must insulting and degrading insults to their racial identity that can be hurled at another human. These are the existing implications for the African American students in rural high schools in Mississippi. Emerging implications are that with each year the possibility exists and grows that the verbal accusations may become more aggressive. The African American students need and deserve a means of addressing this attack on their right to have a rewarding and safe high school experience.

Implications for High Schools

High schools should be a safe haven for those who must be there, the students. The school environment, its culture, its policies, and procedures should all be focused on providing the instruments and equipment necessary for the students to be happy, healthy, and productive, without fear. The results of this study find that our rural high schools are failing to provide this safe place for many of our students, those students are the African American student attending those schools. On the surface, schools can show their policies and procedures to address fire, storm, active and inactive shooters, but they are missing the mark when it comes to some students being able to threaten, insult, and damage other students’ ability to be as successful as they can and should be. The African American student who lashes out at another African American student because they get good grades or speak proper English is unfortunately considered to be Acting White. It is inconceivable that a teacher would stand idly by and observe one student insult and belittle another student by challenging their racial identity, by accusing that student of Acting White and not speak a work. The implications here are that our schools
must begin to address this issue because any teacher who does not speak out against the
occurrences of the Acting White Phenomenon is considered a bystander teacher. Schools and
school boards must begin to examine all aspects of education that negatively impact the African
American student.

Implications for Public School Stakeholders

In communities all across the nation, stakeholders have demanded to have a greater voice
in what happens inside the walls of the schools in the communities in which they live. Schools’
stakeholders are not only the students and the parents of those students, but the faculty,
administration, businesses that support the schools, and anyone genuinely concerned about what
goes on in the schools of their district. A high school is a community within a community. It is a
family and all the children of that family should be afforded the best that can be offered to them.
The stakeholders beam with pride when the school band or athletic teams have their successes.
These stakeholders must become interested in all the students in the school having academic
success as well.

The Acting White Phenomenon directly impacts the academic achievement of African
American students each time the accusation is hurled at another African American student. The
students in this study do their best pretending that the accusation does not bother them, but for
the majority of them the Acting White accusation hurts. Stakeholders must make their voices
known to the school board and administrators who allow teachers and students to perpetuate the
debilitating insult. Stakeholders must realize that all students must be given every change to
succeed. Dr. Martin Luther King once said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent
about the things that matter.” Stakeholders cannot remain silent about the Acting White
Phenomenon.
Implications for Addressing the Acting White Phenomenon

Studies by Dr. Angela Neal-Barnett and Dr. Malik S. Hensfield and others have eluded to the stress placed upon African American adolescents by the Acting White Phenomenon. The deleterious effects of the Acting White Phenomenon are evident in much of the current literature. Whether this stress is derived from the accusation insulting the African American student’s racial identity, or a direct assault to disrupt his academic career, the effects are obvious from the results of this study. What can be done to address the negative and destructive impact of the Acting White Phenomenon?

1. This study revealed that most of the Acting White accusations occur at school. The issue must be brought to the attention of the school boards that control our schools. They cannot address issues of which they have no knowledge.

2. Once school boards are aware of the Acting White Phenomenon and its destructive effects, policies must be written to set a positive direction for the district in order to improve the academic and social lives of the African American students of their district.

3. Training must occur for all members of a school’s staff. The principals must be made to understand that no segment of their student body can afford to be stymied in their efforts to achieve at the highest levels possible at their schools due to the Acting White Phenomenon.

4. Procedures must be put in place that address how an incident of the Acting White accusation is to be addressed. The procedure must address the accuser, the accused, the teachers if they are an observer, and the counselor.
5. The counselors must be on the front line to meet the needs of the African American
   students in addressing issues related to racial identity, academic bullying the Acting
   White accusation.

6. Stakeholders must be a part of this effort to minimize the destructive effects of the Acting
   White Phenomenon on what has been called a vulnerable student population.

7. Parents must play a pivotal role in neutralizing the effects of the Acting White
   Phenomenon.

**Implications for Future Studies**

This study was conducted in three schools with a student population all greater than 80%
African American. This researcher wonders what the data would reveal if this study was
conducted in rural schools with an African American student population of less than 50%. Would these African American students experience the Acting White Phenomenon? If so would their rate of experiencing the phenomenon approach the frequency of the current study or the frequency in previous studies. How would these students experience the phenomenon?

One wonders what could be learned if this study was conducted in some of the more
prestigious schools in the state of Mississippi. Future study on this topic could provide valuable
information for forming a more complete picture of how the socio-economic status of the
African American students affects student reaction, response, level of bother by the Acting White
Phenomenon, academic achievement and social status.

An issue not addressed in this study was whether White students ever accused the African
American students of Acting White, and if so what precipitated the accusation and what the
White student meant by the accusation and hoped to attain.
Finally given that expectations by parents and teachers impact student outcomes, how would the Acting White Phenomenon be experienced by students who have clearly experienced either high or low expectations by teachers and parents? Would they have responded differently if expectations had been one of the controlling variables?

**Concluding Statements**

This study, *The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural Schools in Mississippi*, examined the existing and emerging trends, educational and social, of African American students in rural high schools of Mississippi that may be affected by the *Acting White Phenomenon*. The findings of the study demonstrated that the *Acting White Phenomenon* does exist in the rural high schools of Mississippi. Findings also show that African American students being accused of *Acting White* is not a new occurrence. As the concluding evidentiary phrases of defining race through human characteristics, deconstructing the *Acting White Phenomenon* through historical context, and deterring educational achievement through hostile communication have indicated. The study demonstrated that the African American students in this study are resilient and resourceful, finding means by which to address, deter, redirect, or ignore those accusing them of *Acting White* and continue their academic pursuits.

This study also demonstrated how detrimental the *Acting White Phenomenon* can be to one’s mental and emotional well-being. This is based on two responses given when the students were asked, how did it make you feel when you accused someone else of *Acting White*? One participant said it made her feel really good when she accused the other person of *Acting White*. She said it made her feel good because she put him down a little and yes it felt good. The most
disturbing response during the entire study came from another young lady (Female Student, School Three, March 20, 2015). This response was totally unexpected and took the researcher by surprise. A female student took us totally by surprise with her statement and the manner in which she made it. With a loud and sassy voice, she looked at me and forcefully, when I told them they were Acting White it made me feel powerful (Female Student, School Three, March 20, 2015).

She said that when she told the girl that she was Acting White it made the girl feel bad; really bad and she liked the way it made her feel. This young African American high school female has already learned the power the Acting White Phenomenon has to hurt and damage another individual. Having in the past been accused herself, this young lady, once a victim, now the accuser, has let the Acting White Phenomenon make her bitter and revengeful at a very young age and she has learned the power the Acting White Phenomenon has to damage the academic and social aspirations of African American students.

All of us must be more deliberate in how we address the Acting White Phenomenon with our other students, our teachers, our administrators, our school boards, and our community stakeholders.
LIST OF REFERENCES
REFERENCES


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

AWEQ Adolescence Experiences Scale

Please think carefully about your life as you answer the questions below. For each question, read the question and then answer for what your ENTIRE LIFE (from when you were a child to now) has been like. Circle the number that best describes the events in YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, using these rules. Also circle a number following that best answers the question, HOW DISTRESSED WERE YOU?

Circle 1= If the event has NEVER happened to you  AND:
Circle 2= If the event happened ONCE IN A WHILE (less than 10% of the time)
Circle 3= If the event happened SOMETIMES (10-25% of the time)
Circle 4= If the event happened A LOT (26-49% of the time)
Circle 5= If the event happened MOST OF THE TIME (50-70% of the time)
Circle 6= If the event happened ALMOST ALL OF THE TIME (more than 70% of the time)

AND:

Circle 1= The event DIDN’T bother me AT ALL
Circle 2= The event bothered me A BIT
Circle 3= The event bothered me SOMEWHAT
Circle 4= The event bothered me A LOT
Circle 5= The event bothered me A WHOLE LOT.

A. The kids around me say I talk proper.
   1. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   2. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5

B. The kids around me say I dress preppy.
   3. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   4. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5

C. People around me say I listen to White music.
   5. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   6. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
D. The kids around me say I’m full of myself or bigheaded.
   7. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   8. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
E. The people around me say because I’m in honors courses, I don’t act my race.
   9. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   10. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
F. People say my extracurricular activities are not black activities.
   11. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   12. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
G. Because of my friends, my peers don’t think I’m black enough.
   13. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   14. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
H. Kids around me look at me differently because I want to make something of myself.
   15. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   16. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
I. Kids around me respect me because I get good grades.
   17. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   18. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
J. I get talked about because I go to class every day.
   19. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   20. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
K. Kids around me look at me differently because I want to go to college.
   21. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   22. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
L. My peers say I study too much and that I am always in the library.
   23. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   24. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
M. Kids around me talk bad about me because I get good grades.
   25. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   26. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
N. Because my mom/dad make a lot of money it is harder for people to see me as Black.
   27. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
   28. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5
O. Because I sit at the lunch table with different races, my peers criticize me.

29. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
30. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5

P. People don’t consider my hobbies Black hobbies.

31. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
32. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5

Q. My peers criticize me because I try to use big words.

33. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
34. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5

R. Kids around me talk about me because I take pride in myself.

35. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
36. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5

S. People consider my hobbies Black hobbies.

37. How many times IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? 1 2 3 4 5 6
38. How BOTHERED were you by this? 1 2 3 4 5

39. Have you ever been accused of acting White? 1=Yes, 2=No

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APPENDIX B
APPENDIX B

Focus Group Research Questions

Focus Group Research Questions

1. Have you ever heard the term Acting White? Where and when?

2. Have you ever been accused of Acting White? Where and When?

3. How did it make you feel?

4. Do you know what Acting White means? If so Define.

5. Please provide some examples of the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that were occurring that prompted the Acting White accusation.

6. Have you ever accused someone of Acting White? Where and when?

7. How did accusing someone of Acting White make you feel?
APPENDIX C
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Survey Research Design Study

Title: The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural High Schools in Mississippi

Investigator
Earl W. Richard, (Student)
Leadership and Counselor Education
School of Education
122 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7636

Advisor
RoSusan D. Bartee, Ph.D.
Professor and Program Coordinator
Leadership and Counselor Education
School of Education
133 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7636

Description
I will examine whether or not African American students in rural high schools in Mississippi experience the Acting White Phenomenon. This mixed-methods study particularly considers the implications of the Acting White Phenomenon for academic and social outcomes, gender, geographic location, and socioeconomic status of African American students. In order for me to collect the needed information I will ask you to complete a questionnaire. I will first give you a questionnaire. The questionnaire is the AWEQ, the Acting White Experiences Questionnaire. This questionnaire has 39 statements, each followed by a question asking how many times the item happened and how bothered you were when the event occurred. I will give each of you a copy of the AWEQ and explain how to complete the questionnaire then ask you to respond to each statement. It usually takes about one hour to complete both questionnaires. You may ask any question you want about the research study. Some of you will get an opportunity to participate in the second part of the study which is a focus group where we will discuss seven items. I will lead the discussion and responses will be recorded for transcription without names.
Risks and Benefits
You will be completing questionnaires. You may feel uncomfortable or feel a little anxiety, just remember this is not a test. The questionnaires do not count against you in any way. I do not think there are any other risks. I will talk with you about my study and questionnaires before you complete the two questionnaires we will use.

Costs and Payments
The questionnaires will take about one hour to finish. There are no other costs for helping us with this study. Snacks will be provided at the administration of the questionnaires.

Confidentiality
I will not put your name on any of your questionnaires. The only information that will be on your test materials will be your gender (whether you are male or female) and your age. Therefore, we do not believe that you can be identified from any of your questionnaires.

Right to Withdraw
You do not have to take part in this study. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell Earl Richard or Dr. RoSusan Bartee, faculty advisor in person, by letter, or by telephone at the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education, 133 Guyton Hall, The University of Mississippi, University MS 38677, or 915-7636. Whether or not you choose to participate or to withdraw will not affect your standing with public rural school district in Mississippi, the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education, or The University of Mississippi, and it will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are entitled. Inducements, if any, will be prorated based on [the amount of time you spent in the study.]

The researchers may terminate your participation in the study without regard to your consent and for any reason, such as protecting your safety and protecting the integrity of the research data. If the researcher terminates your participation, any inducements to participate will be prorated based on the amount of time you spent in the study.

IRB Approval
This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information. I have been given a copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
Signature of Participant  Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian  Date  Signature of Investigator  Date

[Remove if no minors are involved.]

NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS: DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM
IF THE IRB APPROVAL STAMP ON THE FIRST PAGE HAS EXPIRED
APPENDIX D

Hypothesis Results
## Hypotheses Results

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123
VITA

EARL W. RICHARD
oxfordrattler@hotmail.com
Marital Status: Married
Children: 3
EDUCATION
The University of Mississippi
Ph. D. Education Leadership Expected 2016
Dissertation: “The Acting White Phenomenon: An Examination of Existing and Emerging Implications for African American Students in Rural High Schools in Mississippi”

The University of Mississippi 1997
M. Ed./Educational Leadership
Graduated 4.0 GPA
Presented Paper on Zero-Based Budgeting for Student Success
The University of Mississippi 1975
B.A. Microbiology/Virology
Areas of Concentration: Incidence of Salmonella in the local food supply of Oxford, MS
Misdiagnosis of infestations by Digenea Trematodes
Minor: Chemistry
Minor: Geology
AWARDS
Chancellor’s List

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Graduate Assistant – The University of Mississippi 2012 - 2014
Served as University Intern Mentor to Masters level students completing their 400-hour internship

Administrator – New Albany High School 2011

Director: School for Career and Technical Education 2005 - 2010
Succeed in having Vocational Center classified as a true Career School by implementing curriculum changes for seven (7) programs.
Implemented first high school engineering program in Mississippi
Wrote successful proposal to NASA for implementing the only HUNCH Program in North Mississippi (HUNCH – High Schools Uniting with NASA to Create Hardware)

Administrator – New Albany High School 2000 - 2005

RELATED EXPERIENCE
Mississippi School Boards Association, Clinton, MS
Training Facilitator 1988 – 2012
Conduct workshops on all issues of school board responsibilities mandated by Federal and State law, and state and federal policy.
Proof and modify training manuals and materials for Mississippi School Boards Association
President 1998-1999

Millsaps College Principal’s Institute 2003
Certification: Learning and Leadership
Team Building/Leadership
Skills in Adult Relationships in the School Context and Capacity
Studies in Collegiality

National School Boards Association, Arlington, VA
Committee Member 2000 – 2002
Served as member of “NSBA Brain Trust”: developed the first National Code of Ethics for School Board Members across the United States.

Lecturer: Idaho School Boards Association 1998

Oxford School Board 1987- 2012
Member 15 years, President – 8 years

Federal Relations Network
Member 8 years: lobby Congress for education issues involving all aspects from certification to funding

LANGUAGES
English – Native Language

MEMBERSHIPS
American Association of School Administrators
American Education Research Association

Other Positions
Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality
Environmental Scientist 1974 – 2000

Present workshops and training to various local, and state employees regarding federal and state environmental regulations and laboratory procedures.

Hobbies: Currently avid kite enthusiast
Past: aerobatics enthusiast